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Elaine Azalia McNeil-Girmai

Loyola Marymount University, mcneilel@hotmail.com

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

**“This is our life. We can’t drive home.” An Analysis of Culturally Relevant
Pedagogy as Perceived by Elementary Teachers, Students and Families
in an Urban Charter School**

by

Elaine A. McNeil-Girmai

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

2010

“This is our life. We can’t drive home.” An Analysis of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as

Perceived by Elementary Teachers, Students and Families

in an Urban Charter School

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By

Elaine McNeil-Girmai

Loyola Marymount University

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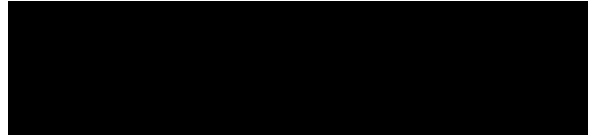
This dissertation written by Elaine McNeil-Girmai, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.



Marta P. Baltodano, Ph.D., Committee Chair



Yvette V. Lapayese, Ph.D.



Edmundo F. Litton, Ed.D.

DEDICATION

“The only tyrant I accept in this world is the 'still small voice' within me.”-Ghandi

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who helped me still the voice.

*To my LMU professors and committee, Marta, Yvette and Edmundo for challenging my thinking
beyond my own educational world.*

To those at Maple Charter School for trust and friendship.

To Melissa and Larry for fueling and extinguishing sibling rivalry.

To my mother Enid for her constant push for me to keep my “eyes on the prize”.

To my husband Namrod for his daily support during my research and writing process.

*And, to my father William for seeing me through to the end
with unconditional love and support.*

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LIST OF KEY TERMS

Classroom community. Students and teachers who make up a self-contained classroom.

Culturally relevant. Reacting to an individual based upon beliefs, perceptions, and/or identified strategies that pertain to the cultural background of that individual.

Family. Can consist of one or more adults (18 years and older) who have a consistent role in a student's life and claim responsibility for the student's well-being. This can include parents, legal guardians, and other family members in the home.

Pedagogy. Classroom and personal interactions and actions by a teacher that affect students.

School community. Compilation of participants within a school community. This includes students, families, faculty, staff, and administration.

VITA

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Brooklyn, NY 11221
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Education

- | | |
|---|---|
| Loyola Marymount University
<i>Doctorate- Educational Leadership for Social Justice</i> | Los Angeles, CA
<i>May 2010</i> |
| University of Massachusetts-Boston
<i>Masters of Elementary Education</i> | Boston, MA
<i>December 2003</i> |
| Boston College
<i>Bachelors of English and Sociology</i>
<i>Minor in Black Studies</i> | Chestnut Hill, MA
<i>May 2000</i> |

Experience

- | | |
|---|--|
| Leadership Prep Charter School
<i>Dean of Students and Families</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Manage classroom management concerns for 330 studentsCoordinate and run school wide academic and family eventsParticipate in Leadership team meetings to proactively enhance school policy and academic needsSupport classroom teachers (mainly in their first and second year) | Brooklyn, NY
<i>08/09-Present</i> |
| Children Youth and Family Collaborative
<i>Education Director</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Re-design and assist in leading training sessions to support adult mentors in helping students meet CA standardsComplete research to meet project requirements in order to meet funding requirements (Assessment, Curriculum, Management)Curriculum writer-Elementary EnrichmentConsultant and Trainer Boys Uplifted Program | Los Angeles, CA
<i>08/07-11/09</i> |
| Maple Charter School
<i>Program Coordinator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Work with school director to reorganize existing school wide systemsMentor first and second year teachersSchool test administrator (CELDT, STAR, LAS)Assist with the completion of requirements for school grants (SPARKS, Teaching American History) | Los Angeles, CA
<i>09/07-07/09</i> |
| Loyola Marymount University
<i>Statistics Teacher Assistant</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide research assistance in finding and posting related course information for professorHold office hours and individual tutoring sessions for doctoral level statistics students | Los Angeles, CA
<i>08/07-12/07</i> |

- Assisted in grading and maintaining student records for professor

New Heights Charter School

Los Angeles, CA

Second Grade Teacher

08/06-08/07

- Work to create a positive school culture in a small start up charter school
- Utilize a backwards design model to plan curriculum
- Assist gifted and learning disabled students through testing, evaluation and differentiation

Westport Heights Elementary School

Westchester, CA

K-2 Specific Learning Disabilities Teacher

08/05-08/06

- Modify and develop curriculum for special education students that is consistent with CA standards of education
- Maintain a relationship between parents and external stakeholders to meet the needs of students
- Write and maintain progress levels for I.E.P.'s

Collicot Elementary School

Milton, MA

Second Grade Teacher

09/01-06/05

- Develop and teach Math, Science, Social Studies and Language Arts
- Work with Special Education teacher to create and execute a positive inclusion model

Bell Foundation

Dorchester, MA

Educational Advisor

09/01-05/04

- Help scholars meet high academic standards by coaching and supporting adult tutors during afterschool program hours
- Provide educational guidance to the BASIC's site

Independent Consultant

Dorchester, MA

Tutoring/Organizational Coach-adolescents with ADD/ADHD

09/01-Present

- Assess and create academic goals to assist adolescents with time management and study skills
- Assess and assist students with various areas of English (writing, grammar, mechanics)

The Milton Times

Milton, MA

Published Journalist

05/99-12/99

- Interviewing town members and compiling data regarding local issues
- Writing full length articles about local events and individuals

Service Activities

Beginning Teacher and Support Assessment (BTSA)-Support Provider	2007-2009
Westport Heights Elementary School-Black History Month Co-Chairperson	2005-2006
Westport Heights Elementary School-Gifted and Talented Screening Committee	2005-2006
Collicot Elementary School-Diversity Chairperson	2003-2005
Boston College Alumni Association Awards Committee	2003-2005
Education subcommittee	
Arts and Humanities subcommittee	

Utilized Curriculums

Language Arts: Open Court 2000/2002, Voices of Love and Freedom, John Collins Writing, Text Talk, Thinking Maps, Write Time, D'Nealian Handwriting, Making Meaning, Writer's Workshop, SIPPS
Math: Math Steps, Math Every Day, Everyday Math, California Math, Continental Math League, Martina and Fizz, TERC, Investigations, Singapore Math, Touch Math
Social Studies/Science: Neighborhoods and Communities, Discovery Works, Social Studies Alive, FOSS
Character Building: Second Step, Caring Schools, Too Good for Drugs, Caring School Community, Connected and Respected, Responsive Classroom

Grants Written

Take Home Reading	2001
Across Many Cultures	2002-2004
Which came first? (Chicken Egg Incubation)	2005

Presentations

Coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum-Presentation 2007

“Beyond Small School: How do we insure Personalization for Students, Families, and Faculty?”

Even small schools have challenges developing personalization. Members of a new small charter school in South Los Angeles, will share their plan for increasing personalization. Participants will engage in the Tuning Protocol to discuss and reflect on one school's goals to deepen relationships, expand parent engagement, and balance personalization and community-building.

American Anthropological Association-CAE New Scholar Invited Poster Session 2008

“Untold Tales: An Analysis of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as Perceived by Elementary Teachers, Students, and Families in an Inner City Charter School”

The themes of Critical Race Theory developed by Solórzano and Yosso (2001) serve as the theoretical framework for the research: The unique approach to the research adds a deeper understanding of the perception and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy to the education and anthropological fields.

California Charter School Association-Presentation 2009

“A Look Back at Designing Units of Study in American History”

A consortium of Los Angeles charter schools has been utilizing knowledge gained through a Teaching American History Grant to develop K-12 American history units using Understanding by Design. The units have been refined over the past three years through Lesson Study, a collaborative professional development process for refining teacher-designed lessons. All participants will receive access to the standards-based units.

American Educational Research Association- Panel Presentation 2009

“Teaching for Social Justice: Literacies of Power, Literacies of Oppression and the Misappropriation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy”

Culturally relevant pedagogy has become an accepted practice for increasing the achievement of culturally diverse students. The critical ethnography is based on an examination of culturally relevant pedagogy, from the standpoints of teachers, students and families.

Professional Licenses

Massachusetts Elementary Education License-Professional
California Multiple Subjects Preliminary License
School Leaders Licensure Assessment (Passed 2008-Awaiting Licensure)

Professional Associations

American Educational Research Association
American Anthropological Association
Alpha Sigma Nu –Jesuit Honor Society

ABSTRACT

“This is our life. We can’t drive home.” An Analysis of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as
Perceived by Elementary Teachers, Students and Families
in an Urban Charter School

By

Elaine A. McNeil-Girmai

As schools have become more diverse ethnically and linguistically, the likelihood of cultural mismatches among students, families, and teachers has increased (Frank, 1999). Culturally relevant pedagogy has at its core the understanding that incorporating students’ culture into the practices of the school and the classroom through culturally relevant curriculum is likely to improve student cooperation, inspire a greater understanding of the educational program, and increase academic outcomes (Brown, 2004). These pedagogies have the potential to be a vital tool toward closing the achievement gap, yet the practices associated with them are in danger of meeting the same fate as multicultural education. A lack of knowledge about the theory, practice, and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy has led to ineffective attempts to meet the needs of students most at risk (White-Clark, 2005). Using the five themes of Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) as the theoretical framework, the research

examined how teachers perceive and implement culturally relevant pedagogy, and how students and their families perceive and evaluate these practices. This research conducted at a inner city, charter elementary school was grounded on Ladson-Billings' work on culturally relevant pedagogy and the three concepts of knowledge that she identified that teachers must bring to the classroom and impart to their students: a) Academic achievement, b) Cultural competence, and c) Sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The educational significance of this study resides in an analysis of its potential to influence teaching practices in many existing classroom settings that have an ethnically diverse population of students. On a micro level, through the use of catalytic validity and ongoing dialogue with the participants, the potential arose for members of the school community to have greater input in the structuring of their children's education. As members of the school community engage in future decisions regarding culturally relevant strategies, these research findings offer them an informed and critical perspective to work from.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known and significant events in our nation's contemporary history, which has shaped modern schools, is the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* class action lawsuit, brought before the U.S. District Court in 1951. The lawsuit resulted in a 1954 court decision, eventually known as *Brown I*, stating that schools that segregated black and white children were denying black children an equal and adequate education (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). In 1955, a second ruling, *Brown II*, mandated that segregated schools should be integrated with all "deliberate speed" (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). With the passing of the 50th anniversary of these landmark decisions, the attention of scholars has returned to the political and social climate surrounding the rulings.

Bell (2004) has referred to the *Brown* decision as a "magnificent mirage" claiming that the motivation behind the decision was less about creating equality in schools and more about a convergence of interests. He posits that the actual reasons behind the decisions were to elevate America's democratic image, in the midst of its Communist efforts, by supporting African Americans who had recently fought in WWII, and to assist the South which, due to its long history of segregation, was not able to fully industrialize (Bell, 1980).

Ladson-Billings (2004) cited and supported Bell but differentiated between *Brown I* and *Brown II*. In her opinion, *Brown I* was a pertinent and much needed verdict, but she claimed that the stringent implementation of *Brown II*, to integrate with all deliberate speed, undermined its potential as it did not take into consideration the depth

of racism in the country. Ladson-Billings found that one immediate effect of this embedded racism could be seen in the South where, through delays and private school loopholes, schools generally remained segregated.

Self-Segregation

The *Brown* court decisions transformed school life and created insurmountable issues including the manner in which students were taught, grouped, and assessed in schools. One consequence of this was the use of standardized assessments to measure the academic achievement of students who years earlier were attending distinct and unequal education facilities. The results of these assessments brought to light the concept of the achievement gap between the scores of white students and those of the newly integrated students of color.

This achievement gap, defined as the difference in achievement scores between culturally diverse and working class students and their white counterparts, continues to exist today (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007) and it has been aggravated by the newer self-segregation trend. This trend, which can be seen over the last eighteen years, indicates that school segregation based on race, socio-economic level and home language has steadily increased across the United States (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). Theorized causes of resegregation include altered demographics within communities, changes in local laws that effect desegregation options and increased attendance at private schools (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Researchers who have studied demographic trends in schools for the past 30 years at the *Civil Rights Project* at *UCLA* write that the most disturbing resegregation trend is the rapid increase of segregated schools in Southern

states, which the Brown decision was meant to remediate over fifty years ago (Frankenberg, et al., 2003).

Thus, 54 years later, the question remains: What have been the outcomes of desegregation and how have those outcomes impacted equal education and achievement? (Rothstein, 2004; Kozol, 2005). In an effort to answer this question, many scholars have theorized best practices to examine the needs of students of color and determine not only equal, but equitable classrooms that present academic achievement as a viable option for all students.

Multicultural Education

The term “multicultural education” was coined between 1970 and 1972 (Payne & Welsh, 2000) and generally describes programs focused on the equity of education (Banks, J. & Banks, C., 1999). Supporters of multicultural education felt that it would reduce prejudice and discrimination in society and eventually lead to a more equal distribution of power. The goal was to expand opportunities to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and groups (Banks, J. & Banks, C., 1999). As a result, the focus on equity moved beyond its initial attention to race, to include differences in socio-economic status, language, gender, and physical ability (Banks, J. & Banks, C., 1999). It was soon realized that changing only the curriculum, the faculty, or the setting were not in and of themselves powerful enough to create change at a school site. Therefore, those interested in reforming schools to meet equality standards began to look at schools as social systems which, in order to be equitable, had to be approached from multiple angles (Banks, J. & Banks, C., 1999).

Though the goal of creating equitable school systems is a noble one, the fragmentation of multicultural education impacted its ability to make transformative change for the students it was seeking to serve. Multicultural education saw equity as equality; therefore uneven results did not necessarily lead educators to reflect on and change their practices (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). Thus, pedagogically, multicultural education lost its ability to create a scenario in which diversity was acknowledged. Additionally, rather than representing culture as an important aspect in the lives of students, multicultural education only managed to superficially represent it (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter & Grant 1993; White-Clark, 2005).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In response, newer approaches focused on bringing culture into the classroom and reflecting on the importance of providing instruction that is relevant to a student's culture have emerged in the education field (Phuntsog, 1999). Culturally relevant pedagogy, also known as culturally congruent pedagogy, has at its core the understanding that incorporating a student's culture into the practices of the school, classroom, and curriculum is likely to improve student cooperation, inspire a greater understanding of the educational program, and increase academic outcomes (Brown, 2004). These pedagogies have the potential to be vital tools toward closing the achievement gap, yet the practices associated with them are in danger of meeting the same fate as multicultural education. A lack of knowledge about the theory, practice, and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy has led to ineffective attempts to meet the needs of students most at risk (White-Clark, 2005).

This dissertation will examine how culturally relevant pedagogy is implemented and carried out at an urban elementary charter school with a student population entirely made up of African American and Latino students. The intent of this research study was to analyze, from a critical perspective, both the personal and professional perceptions of teachers, as well as their culturally relevant practices. In addition, student and family perceptions and opinions of these culturally relevant practices were examined. The goal of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and to explore its transformative potential.

Problem Statement

As it has evolved, culturally relevant pedagogy has become widely accepted and is used to increase the academic achievement of culturally diverse students; yet the achievement gap continues to grow. Nationwide, between 1990 and 2007, little or no measurable change in reading and math scores has been observed between students of color and those earned by white students (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). These test results have disturbing implications and reflect a larger concern over the outcomes and conditions for students of diverse economic and racial backgrounds (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Culturally relevant pedagogy became a ready solution to this and other serious problems in education that required much greater attention (Nieto, 2003).

Teacher Education

At the university level, where prospective teachers should be learning the most effective ways to work with students of color, they are instead taught to use packaged curriculums to develop multicultural classrooms (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Furthermore, new teachers are often exposed to courses that develop a tendency to label students of color as disadvantaged (Delpit, 1996). The achievement gap, therefore, becomes associated with the students' inability to achieve, and consideration is not given to how dominant societal norms may relate to student outcomes (Delpit, 1996).

Teachers who participate in preparation programs that do not sufficiently prepare them to work with diverse student populations are at risk of not only underserving students of color but potentially undermining the transformative power of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Using the pedagogy from a position adopted by dominant groups misappropriates its use and results in both a homogenous understanding and implementation of it at the classroom level.

In response to these issues, several theorists have formulated new approaches to address diversity in schools: culturally relevant teaching. These approaches focus on teacher preparation, the implementation of practices, and the cultural synchronization of students (Gay, 2002; Irvine & Foster, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Tate, 1995). An outgrowth of multicultural education, culturally relevant teaching proposed that rather than treating culture as a deficit, it can be used, instead, to help students learn in the classroom. It was further proposed that all teachers should learn the skills needed to work with diverse student populations (Nieto, 2003). Despite the passage of time, even today, culturally relevant theories challenge the manner in which the needs of new teachers are met by teacher education programs (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Ladson-Billings, in particular, describes her work as a "pedagogy of opposition which is focused on collective empowerment" (2005). Her efforts toward opposition and

empowerment include practices that enhance student achievement, assist and affirm students in accepting their culture, and help students develop a critical perspective to challenge inequality in schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). While she has been told the practices she espouses are “just good teaching,” Ladson-Billings noted that researchers and teachers must continue to question what good teaching looks like (1995). She further proposed that teachers challenge themselves to do research in their own classroom settings, in order to analyze their own practices (1995).

This research is based on the belief that examining culturally relevant pedagogy from the standpoints of teachers, students, and families is important. Embedded in Ladson-Billings presentation of a culturally relevant pedagogy is the understanding that it has become too fully incorporated into the dominant discourse, which can be seen in its popular identification as a way to close the achievement gap. Yet, despite its popularity, the achievement gap has not closed and students from dominant groups continue to achieve while students from racial minority groups fall behind. Over time, this inability to create effective change in assessment may place culturally relevant pedagogy at risk of losing its transformative potential, like many theories that have come before it. The ongoing inability to meet the needs of students of color is an issue of social justice. A goal of this dissertation research is to not only assist the field of education in this area but also to add to the field a deeper understanding of how culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and implemented. In doing so, the potential exists to identify and rectify problems associated with culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as to restore its transformative power.

Purpose of the Study

In considering community building strategies, “The idea is to get closer to what communities do, in contrast to what communities are” (Epstein, 2001, p. 58). Yet, those who hold the most power in society have determined the expected standards for how students should develop and represent themselves (Delpit, 1996). This can be seen on a micro level in the everyday interactions within a school community. The majority of existing research on families focuses not on family input but rather on what educators should do to teach families (Andre-Bechely, 2005). Thus families, particularly of lower socio-economic status and diverse cultural backgrounds, have learned to acquiesce to teachers and schools without schools acknowledging their cultural diversity and reciprocating in kind.

This issue of power perpetuates a society-wide status quo (Delpit, 1996). Connecting to families can be difficult. Therefore, teachers and schools need to be aware of the variety of the cultures and goals represented in different families, in order to avoid alienating them (Nieto, 2000). Failure to do so is an issue of social justice which must be addressed in the field (McCaleb, 1994). Arbitrarily researching student populations based on cultural assumptions is ineffective. Delpit (1988) posited that attempting to change the homes of students to adapt to the home-life of the dominant society can be considered cultural genocide. Efforts should be made towards determining the needs and desires that correspond to the population that is being served and working collaboratively to meet them. When this is done it informs all community members and allows participants to

consider their current position as well as future decisions that will affect them from a standpoint of critical awareness.

This study analyzed aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy as seen by different participants in an urban, elementary charter school. The perceptions and approaches to implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy by teachers were examined. In addition, students and their families had an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions of schooling and culturally relevant practices. This research was conducted in an effort to understand and potentially influence a start-up charter school in South Los Angeles both in the manner in which school life meets the needs of students of color, and in the development of pathways of communication between parents, teachers, and families. The research was done with a consciousness of how it could be transformative for the participants. Additionally, attention was paid to how participants would be able to utilize the findings and take action. Therefore, the purpose of this study was multilayered. First, it investigated the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices by four urban charter school teachers, including its use, relevancy, effectiveness, and efficacy in their classrooms. Second, it examined the perceptions that teachers, students, and families have of these practices and how, if at all, there are shared commonalities. Third, the research findings were presented to the participants in order to assist them in the process of both evaluating and transforming their school site.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded in Critical Race Theory in education. The history of Critical Race Theory is important for understanding its current position within the social sciences as well as its focus and interdisciplinary methods. Critical Race Theory developed from critical legal studies and draws from a literary base in critical theory (Chapman, 2007; Lynn, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The original, critical legal scholars challenged traditional legislation and worked towards the creation of legislation that focused more on individual and group social needs (Ladson-Billings, 2000). However, Critical legal studies defined the United States as a neutral-based meritocracy and did not consider racism in its analysis (Ladson-Billings). This definition did not meet the needs of a diverse group of people of color who felt it focused too much on the division of black and white rather than the process of division (Yosso, 2005). The importance of Critical Race Theory lies in its ability to create a space in which people of color have a voice and can challenge the dominant ideology (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Rodriguez, 2006; Williams, 2004; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005; Yosso, 2005). It is also important as a means of critiquing deficit thinking in the field of education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). In looking at the development of Critical Race Theory from critical legal studies, it is helpful to refer back to Bourdieu's theories on habitus which have been cited as an example for the theory (Yosso, 2005).

Bourdieu (1989) wrote that habitus is the knowledge that individuals acquire from their home and family status, and carry with them into the world. Bourdieu's theory on habitus led to a widespread belief that there are academically ideal home experiences.

This idea seeped into the education world as the assumption that particular cultures have a “better” habitus than others, and that the “quality” of a child’s habitus may lead to higher or lower academic achievement in school (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This has resulted in a pattern of deficit thinking that pits the experiences and knowledge base of people of color against those of the white middle class (Yosso, 2005). From a Critical Race Theory perspective, efforts in schools to identify best practices for people of color based on an ideology not shared with the individuals involved is an effort to co-opt or exploit the strength of the community (Yosso, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, the five themes of Critical Race Theory developed by Solórzano and Yosso (2001) were utilized.

1. Race and racism as a central theme and its connection to other forms of subordination

Critical Race Theory starts from the understanding that racism is a natural outgrowth of a society that was originally created using concepts of white supremacy (Lynn, 2006; Yosso, 2005). From this standpoint, education was originally not meant to be a means of growth for people of color (Lynn, 2006). Therefore, Critical Race Theory allows for a view of education through a lens not traditionally used, to examine classroom practices and academic outcomes for people of color.

2. A challenge to society’s dominant ideology

The dominant ideology of society is often shared through stories. These stories are referred to as majoritan stories and are told by all members of society,

including people of color, who have heard the stories, believe them, and share them with others (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A majoritan story may speak to many aspects of society but for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that, “A majoritan story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 20). It is believed that educators may draw on these stories, further influencing the cultural deficit belief and creating an environment in which teachers may pass on these perspectives to their students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

3. A commitment to a socially just outcome

Critical Race Theory proponents believe that traditional methods of ignoring race do not lead to socially just outcomes but rather to a perpetuation of subordination (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). They interrogate teachers’ interactions, ask researchers to be self-reflective, and allow people of color to share their experiences for validation in an effort to reach socially just outcomes (Chapman, 2007; Writer & Chavez, 2001).

4. Experiential knowledge as a central knowledge base

Critical Race Theory relies heavily on the experiential knowledge of people of color (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2006). This knowledge can be manifested in several artistic forms including stories, poems, and songs. The purpose of sharing narratives is to challenge majoritan stories through counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

5. A perspective that traverses disciplines

Critical Race Theory comes from the family of critical theories which are also closely linked to social theories. Its interdisciplinary approach allows for researchers to cross the boundaries of academic subjects, make connections between events, and understand them with greater depth (Sumner, 2003). Its ability to traverse disciplines is also notable on a smaller scale in terms of looking at teaching and learning.

The use of Critical Race Theory to examine culturally relevant pedagogy is purposeful. Both multicultural education and critical legal studies have lost their ability to be transformative in today's society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). They can both be looked at from a starting point of civil rights laws. Culturally relevant pedagogy is the outcome of critical responses to multicultural education and to the inability to close the achievement gap – both of which can be traced back to legal decisions for schools made during the years of the civil rights movement. Critical Race Theory which started from critical legal studies critically views the status quo and current pedagogical reforms (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

It was imperative that Critical Race Theory be utilized and applied to this research, since race played such a prominent role in the experiences of the participants. Schools are societal structures not initially organized to support the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. The perspectives and understandings of the study participants, therefore, have all been impacted by the themes of Critical Race Theory in one way or another. The experiences of the current students and their family members (who were students at one time) have historically not been heard as they do not align with

the schooling experiences of the dominant group. Critical Race Theory relies not only on stories from people of color, but also focuses on challenging inequalities—an aspect important in my goal of providing a catalyst for transformative change at the school site.

Research Questions

This ethnography aimed to explore the understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy within an elementary urban charter school. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' understandings, perceptions, and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
2. What are students and families understandings and perceptions of the implementation and effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching practices?
3. In what ways can the culturally relevant practices at a charter school be informed by the student and families members of the school community?

Methodology

Though Solórzano & Yosso (2002) have proposed that Critical Race Methodology be used for research associated with Critical Race Theory, this study was conducted using ethnography. This decision was based on the methodological limitations of Critical Race Methodology. Critical Race Methodology begins by examining different aspects of race during the research process. The researcher then offers solutions to societal problems which focus on knowledge gained from a combination of interdisciplinary and non-traditional sources—such as people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Though these are important characteristics of the methodology, the narrow

focus that Solórzano & Yosso utilized limited their choices primarily to storytelling and counter-storytelling. This is particularly problematic because it does not allow researchers to become part of the experience being described to them; they must simply accept or reject the information as truth (Duncan, 2005). An ethnography, on the other hand, allows the researcher to employ a variety of methods in order to connect participants' personal experiences to an understanding of the school site. Using this design, along with a Critical Race Theory framework, I was able to observe, record, and evaluate data, and conduct a critical analysis of the potential misappropriation of the understandings, perception and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Traditional Ethnography

Ethnography developed from the field of anthropology during the late 1940s and early 1950s (Spindler, 1982). It is considered to be the “firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.1). Participant observers work to meaningfully understand events inclusive of their prior knowledge (Wilson, 1977). Consequently, the results are essentially an account or picture of a culture as seen through the eyes of the researcher (Wolcott, 1975).

Ethnography is found in human activity (Richardson, 2000) and through immersion, researchers are able to actively participate in the “lived reality” of their subjects (Emerson et al., 1995). In the case of educational research, presence in the field is particularly important as classroom learning cannot be meaningfully studied within laboratories (Wilson, 1977). Due to its intimate nature it is recommended that

ethnography be studied on a scale that is manageable for the researcher over an extended period of time in order to ensure that true depth is achieved (Emerson et al., 1995; Spindler, 1982; Wolcott, 1975). As ethnography is truly about experiencing the other, researchers are encouraged to either participate in a cross-cultural setting or learn about a cross-cultural study while working, in order to create interest and juxtaposition to their everyday realities (Wolcott, 1975).

Fieldwork is the traditional manner in which data is collected during an ethnographic study (Fetterman, 1998). A central element of ethnographic research is the researcher's involvement in an unknown setting (Emerson et al., 1995). Yet, in educational studies, teachers often choose the school at which they are based to complete their research. While this places teachers in a familiar setting, the choice is still appropriate. Delpit (1988) posited that true ethnographers allow the reality of other people to affect their consciousness, and teachers are in the ideal position of taking on this role, particularly in studies that involve seeking out and hearing from people of color.

The traditional methods of ethnography that are used in the field include participant observations, work with key informants, and participant interviews (Foley, 2002; Wolcott, 1975). The notes taken during observations typically include initial impressions, key incidents, and the reactions of subjects which are then used to create new knowledge (Emerson et al., 1995). Ethnographers do not go into the field knowing what they will find, but rather allow the field to reveal itself to them (Wolcott, 1975; Spindler, 1982). This, as well as the following defining elements of ethnography, separates it as a unique methodology.

Emic and Etic Perspective

The “emic” and “etic” perspectives were first developed in 1954 by an American linguist named Kenneth Pike (1967). His work was furthered by Harris (1976), an anthropologist who moved the perspectives from the analysis of language to the anthropological analysis of native informants. In current ethnographical use, the emic perspective refers to the internal aspects of a culture that hold meaning to its members as a native (Spindler, 1982). It is important to have access to this perspective as it assists in understanding the actions of and social situations surrounding participants (Fetterman, 1998). The etic perspective refers to the external aspects of a culture that hold meaning to scientific observers (Fetterman, 1998). Though some ethnographers choose to focus only on one perspective, they are both meaningful and essential for complete understanding (Fetterman, 1998). The emic perspective is needed in order to truly understand a culture, and the etic provides the opportunity to compare across cultures (Fetterman, 1998).

Holistic

Ethnography is done from a holistic standpoint (Diesing, 1971). Research done from this approach aims to present an organized account of the experiences that are characteristic of a group (Eisenhart, 2001). The holist focuses on the individual but sees the connection between individuals and larger social systems (Diesing, 1971).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity as a concept was developed by Herbert Mead’s work on the interactionist perspective and furthered by Babcock (Foley, 2002). It referred to the ability to set aside language or ideas about situations to allow for greater critical meaning

of situations and relationships (Foley, 2002). In order to be reflexive researchers have to be aware of what they are bringing to the research from their own personal histories and how it may play a role in the final findings (Simon & Dippo, 1986). Additionally, researchers must consider how they are potentially constrained by their prior knowledge as well as the institutional structures within which researchers work (Simon & Dippo, 1986). In order to remain somewhat objective, reflexivity must be present and acknowledged in ethnography (Foley, 2002).

Research Design

As schools have become more diverse ethnically and linguistically, the likelihood of cultural mismatches among students, families, and teachers has increased (Frank, 1999). This ethnography was conducted in an attempt to provide conceptual tools for understanding the many diverse standpoints in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy. The research includes a compilation of observations taken in the field; data obtained through interviews with teachers, students, and families; and data obtained through the facilitation of focus groups.

The research design incorporated a variety of methods utilized across the research timeframe. At the start of the research during the 2007-2008 academic year student participants were in third grade. Initial data were collected through both direct and informal observations of these participants and school site elements which created a primary record for the research. Daily classroom observations occurred for six weeks equaling 120 hours. Additional observations outside of the classroom occurred equaling 120 hours. These observations were completed in four hours time blocks daily. Following

observations, 21 students and 13 families attended focus group sessions. The focus groups used a pre-determined protocol that engendered semi-structured sessions which allowed participants' comments to guide the discussion. During this period, initial interviews of two third grade teachers were completed. The interviews were semi-structured and used the interview protocol. These initial interviews served as opportunities to gain an understanding of the personal and professional understandings and experiences of the teachers.

The research continued into the 2008-2009 academic year. The student participants were now in fourth grade. As data began to emerge, initial interviews of 6 students, 6 family members and 1 administrator were done. Initial interviews with two fourth grade teachers occurred as well as follow-up interviews with the two third grade teachers. The interviews provided a space in which to discuss and examine the school site, as well as the teachers' understandings and perceptions as pertained to their implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Following the interviews in order to deepen the understanding of the school site additional observations occurred. This step included direct classroom observations as well as informal observations at the site. Daily classroom observations occurred for three weeks equaling 60 hours. These observations were completed in four hours time blocks in the fourth grade classrooms. Additional informal observations occurred throughout the school year equaling approximately 250 hours.

Near the conclusion of the research time-frame the data were then confirmed or challenged through follow-up interviews with participants, and the mapping of site

elements. Initial analyses of the data (observation records, document analysis, mapping and transcriptions of focus groups and interviews) were performed. As patterns began to evolve coding commenced. Domains were created based on semantic relationships discovered within the frames of analyses. The final analysis relied on an analysis of the school as a whole, as well as its position within a larger outside system (the local and church community).

Participants

Study participants included 21 students as they moved from third to fourth grade, their families, administrator, and four teachers. The school involved in the study is Maple Charter School,¹ a kindergarten to fifth grade charter school in South Los Angeles. The school opened in 2006, and students came from neighboring public and private schools. At the start of the research study, there were 166 students enrolled; 55% were African American and 45% were Latino. When the research began in, April 2008, the student participants were in the third grade. At that time the demographic data for third grade was 61% African American and 39% Latino. Eighty-seven percent of the students in the school qualify for free or reduced lunch, but in third grade the percentage dropped slightly to 83%.

The charter school's mission statement, which emphasizes a kind and challenging learning environment, is reflected in its curriculum which includes social skill building and experiential learning opportunities. Each family is required to complete 40 volunteer

¹ The use of pseudonyms has been employed in order to protect the school and participants from potential harm.

hours per year. Approximately 65% of the parents completed these hours during the 2006–2007 academic year.

Significance of the Study

Urban communities predominantly populated by people of color have become places where research often occurs without the inclusion of the voices of the community (Irvine, 2003). In order to enrich the discussion of what constitutes effective pedagogical practices for students of color, and to avoid the potential for the appropriation of culturally relevant pedagogy resulting from the existence of either a uniformed understanding or implementation, this research was designed to include the community voices, from both students and their families.

On a macro level, this study is significant in its potential to influence teaching practices in many existing classroom settings that have an ethnically diverse population of students. Throughout the United States, projected population growth indicate that previously considered minority populations, particularly Latino and African American, are growing rapidly, while the Caucasian population is shrinking (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

On a micro level there is the potential for members of one school community to have greater importance in the structuring of the education process. One method utilized to meet this potential is catalytic validity. Catalytic validity focuses on how well the researcher takes the information gained and uses it towards change (Anderson, 1989; Sumner, 2003; Writer & Chavez, 2001). Findings are analyzed and presented to participants, so that they may evaluate the intended purpose of the research. Within this

dissertation study, catalytic validity was utilized as one way to enhance the critical awareness of participants. Findings shared in this way allow for both a reorientation of the status quo and a reenergizing of participants (Anderson, 1989; Barton, 2001). As members of the school community engage in future decisions regarding culturally relevant strategies, the research findings may offer them an informed and critical perspective from which to work.

Limitations

The number of participants in this study was limited by the class sizes and by family consent. The number of students and families that chose to participate in the study was not in the control of the researcher. However, to enhance the level of participation, time spent with the researcher was counted towards the families' 40 required volunteer hours. In total, out of 36 potential student participants, 21 participated in the research. The age and maturity levels of the student participants varied, which in some cases impacted their ability to effectively communicate their perceptions and recommendations in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has outlined an area of need in the field of education. The use of culturally relevant pedagogy and its perception through the eyes of teachers, students and families was central to this research. These are important issues because they speak to the widespread problem of lower academic achievement for students of color, the knowledge base teachers need in order to guide student achievement, and the importance of family

when considering culturally relevant pedagogy. The research is grounded in Critical Race Theory and utilized an ethnographic design.

In Chapter 2, relevant literature to this research is reviewed including the development of Critical Race Theory, as well as a deeper examination of the development of culturally relevant pedagogy from multicultural education. Prominent practices and strategies associated with culturally relevant pedagogy are outlined. Additionally, research on charter schools and family involvement is detailed.

Chapter 3 describes characteristics of ethnography and the relation of the methodology to the field of education. A detailed description of the research methods and the research design is laid out. Chapter 4 is a presentation of participant biographies. In Chapter 5, data from the research is presented and analyzed. Finally, in Chapter 6, a discussion of findings, an analysis of the data in relation to the research questions, and the recommendations and implications for pedagogical transformation is presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to fully examine how teachers, students and families interact with culturally relevant pedagogy it is imperative to fully explore the historical evolution of Critical Race Theory in education and its connection to both multicultural and culturally relevant pedagogies. In this chapter a greater understanding of the context surrounding the conception and implementation of Critical Race Theory and diverse pedagogies is explored. In addition, this chapter explores the viewpoints of culturally relevant scholars in order to define the parameters of culturally relevant pedagogy that were utilized for the dissertation research. The literature review includes an overview of recent research findings on charter schools which is essential in understanding the fundamental differences between how charter schools and public schools are established, funded and governed. Finally, family participation and involvement are explored in the chapter. As the research site is geared towards community building it is imperative to understand the traditional ways that parents and families have been involved successfully and unsuccessfully within schools.

Critical Race Theory

Historical recollections place the origins of Critical Race Theory at the feet of legal students and professors who began to question the ability of legal theories to connect race to social meaning (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Their work began in the late 1970s, just as societal changes associated with the civil rights movements were beginning to ebb (Matsuda et al., 1993). Many of these founding

scholars had positioned themselves within a leftist group that had begun to explore more progressive legal work known as critical legal studies (Matsuda et al., 1993). The work developed during the critical legal studies movement epitomized a timeframe in which the limits of legal achievements in the face of the dominant racial views in society began to be realized (Tate, 1997). The most significant outcomes were the reevaluation of legal discourse and the creation of an opportunity for academics to perpetuate traditions of pragmatism, instrumentalism, and progressive ideals (Tate, 1997).

Within this small group of scholars, criticism arose when the scholars of color, began to ask the mainly white originators to question their own race and how it may impact their interests and work (Matsuda et. al, 1993). When this did not readily occur, a small group moved away from critical legal studies and began developing unique types of erudition storytelling (Matsuda et al., 1993). This small group went on to separate from critical legal studies and develop Critical Race Theory in the late 1980's (Matsuda et al., 1993; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

Critical Race Theory has been heavily criticized since its inception (Ladson-Billings, 2005). One internal critique, which was carried over from critical legal scholarship, was the importance of making the work inclusive of the experiences of individuals dealing with racism (Yosso, 2005). This was seen in the development of Latino Critical Theory (also known as LatCrit). LatCrit evolved out of a desire for Latinos and other underrepresented groups to develop a theory that moved away from Critical Race Theory. The focus on the African American and Caucasian experience was seen as too narrow to be representative (Malavet, 2005). This concern has been central to

a variety of different social sciences, specifically those geared toward ethnic and women's studies (Yosso, 2005). Critical Race Theory's design answered this concern by focusing on counter storytelling in order to offset the effects of majoritarian stories. The counter-storytelling of Critical Race Theory, though initially focused on the dynamic between African Americans and Caucasians, has grown to include the experiences of women and other cultural groups (Yosso, 2005). In her analysis of Critical Race Theory and Lat Crit, Yosso determined that though the discussions around African American and Caucasian experiences are popular, Critical Race Theory moved the dialogue into a broader sphere. Yosso stated "...Critical Race Theory in education refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color" (p.74, 2005). These voices, through the medium of linguistic, educational, and sociological research, have shown that there is a difference between the stories of the dominant Caucasian culture and groups considered to be in the minority (Duncan, 2005).

In a 2002 reevaluation of the progress of Critical Race Theory, three major societal beliefs were identified as being at the forefront of the challenges that continue to face Critical Race theorists. These included the belief that being blind to race will eliminate race; that racism is perpetuated individually not systematically; and that focusing on race alone will alleviate oppression (Valdes et al., 2002). Additionally, in an effort to continue the momentum of the theory, there has been a proposal that it remain focused on actual community-based experiences and begin to build critical alliances (Su & Yamamoto, 2002). Anti-essentialism has been identified as a need. It represents the understanding that people of color have particular experiences which should not be co-

opted from Critical Race Theory (MacKinnon, 2002; Valdes et. al, 2002). Anti-essentialism has been challenged by a proposal that broadening the base of Critical Race Theory to break down divisions between like-minded groups is a necessity for the growth of the theory (MacKinnon in Valdes et. al, 2002).

In 1993, Matsuda et al. initially identified six themes in Critical Race Theory.

These are:

- Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is a pervasive and prominent part of American Society.
- Critical Race Theory challenges dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit.
- Critical Race Theory challenges a historicism and insists on a contextual and historical analysis of the law.
- Critical Race Theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society.
- Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary.
- Critical Race Theory works towards eliminating racism oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression and socially just outcomes.

Though these are thorough and relevant to my work I have chosen instead to use the narrower outline identified by Solórzano & Yosso's (2001) five themes. These themes, which were outlined in Chapter 1, are:

- Race and racism as a central theme and connection to other forms of subordination

- A challenge to society's dominant ideology
- A commitment to a socially just outcome
- Experiential knowledge as a central knowledge base
- A perspective that traverses disciplines

Solorzano & Yosso's themes were more appropriate to this dissertation research.

Though there was an examination of the acts and legal expectations associated with charter schools there was not an explicit focus on legal issues. Additionally, Solórzano and Yosso's focus on socially just outcomes closely aligned with the goals of the research.

Research done from a Critical Race Theory perspective begins on the premise that communities of color have importance (Yosso, 2005). "Critical Race Theory is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses" (p.70). It validates the experiences of individuals of color and, when used as an underlying framework, can be used to examine and challenge the ways in which racism affects social structures such as schools (Yosso, 2005).

Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory's use in the field of education was first introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate during a 1994 meeting of the American Educational Research Association. In 1995, they published *Toward a Critical Race Theory*, which argued that schools and school practices, like poverty and other social ills, need to address the presence and impact that institutional and structural racism hold on them

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). They likened Critical Race Theory in education to Critical Race Theory in legal studies in their similar needs to critically examine the status quo and reform acts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory is charged with the task of identifying practices that are oppressive, the lack of which has led to cultural myths and assumptions within the field of education (Writer & Chavez, 2001). Though it has been argued that Critical Race Theory's focus on race is not a viable category to explore schooling and inequality (Lynn, 2006), using Critical Race Theory as the lens with which to examine practices geared towards cultural diversity can assist in interrogating the assumptions and interactions prevalent in educational spaces (Chapman, 2007). One example of this can be found in looking at the issue of racial microaggressions in education.

Racial microaggressions as a term, was first coined by Chester M. Pierce in the 1970s (DeAngelis, 2009). The term describes the systematic acts of racism that serve to keep individuals of color marginalized and on the defensive while moving through dominant society. At that time, research on the inherent racism depicted in television commercials microaggressions were described as "the chief vehicle for pro-racist behavior" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977, p.65). Recent research has identified that racial microaggressions are ongoing in society with displays often occurring in a subtle manner and the perpetrator acting so unconsciously as to not recognize the impact of their words and/or actions as the result of their internal bias' (DeAngelis, 2009).

There are three types of racial microaggressions that have been classified (Sue et al., 2007):

1. Microassaults: actions or verbal displays that are intentionally racist
2. Microinsults: actions or verbal displays that are subtly insulting of ones racial background
3. Microinvalidations: actions or verbal displays that reduce, exclude or negate the intelligence, experiential knowledge or beliefs of people of color

In processing a verbal or nonverbal racial microaggression the victim has to consider his or her own experiences as well as the setting and social norms in determining whether the display *was* a racial micro aggression, whether the perpetrator was aware of the racial microaggression and how to react in the moment (Sue et. al, 2007). White Americans and individuals of color see and experience *two different realities* in everyday life (Sue et. al, 2007). These experiences tint their perception and lead to understanding situations from divergent points of view. As a result individuals of color often have to rely on experiential knowledge to determine the intent of a situation- while the perpetrator is mostly likely only thinking within the context of the situation at hand. White Americans also often approach individuals and situations from a *color-blind standpoint* and do not believe they have committed a racial microaggression believing that they do not have any inherent bias (Sue et. al, 2007). The subtle nature of microaggressions also leads perpetrators to often believe that the *display is harmless*-not realizing that it is the compilation of microaggressions rather than the one in isolation that is of concern (Sue et al., 2007).

In order to further understand the true impact of racial micro aggressions studies have been conducted from both the standpoint of the victim and perpetrator in order to develop a full picture of the intent and impact of racial micro aggressions in a variety of situations. These studies have resulted in important findings in considering the interactions between students of color in educational settings. Research conducted on African American students in higher education identified that racial microaggressions led to feelings of not belonging, feeling untrustworthy, pressure to be representative of all members of a racial group, and feeling stereotyped (Solorzano, Miguel, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). A heightened sensitivity to body language, facial expressions and verbal utterances leads to a sense of uncertainty which has been identified in several research studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992). The constant need to be vigilant negatively impacted on the emotional wellbeing and academic achievement of these individuals (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992).

The identification of racism as a natural outgrowth of society in America, theorized by Critical Race theorists, is corroborated by the prevalence of all three types of racial microaggressions and the silence of those victimized by it. In response to these feelings many individuals of color have established counterspaces. Similar to the counterstories used by Critical Race Theorists, “These counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained.” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 12).

Moving from racial microaggressions to other areas of education where Critical Race Theory is appropriate we come to cultural diversity. Delgado (2001) has speculated that there are two approaches within Critical Race Theory, the realist and the idealist, that apply to matters of cultural diversity. In order to truly understand the role of race in education, both of these approaches must be considered. The realist approach is concerned with the attainment of material objects resulting from race and discrimination (Delgado, 2001). However, this approach alone will not yield any significant societal change. The idealist approach is concerned with examining how race and discrimination are conceptualized, discussed and portrayed by individuals (Delgado, 2001). Yet, discussion alone will not change the realities of those who are impacted by race and discrimination.

In order to examine how utilizing one approach alone is ineffective we can look to Horace Kallen's 1956 book *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*. Here, Kallen posited that America could become a stronger nation not by being a 'melting pot,' where cultural identities are mixed together, but by preserving cultural identities and using them to create a stronger society (Ratner, 1984). This idealist approach, when looked at through a Critical Race Theory lens, is quite limited. Kallen's work failed to analyze the position of minorities within the dominant economic and political system (Ratner, 1984). It assumes that cultural groups can have equal standing in society. Because of this, the idealist approach is bound to fail as dominant members of society will only allow others to gain limited leverage (Ladson Billings, 2005). Additionally, cultural pluralism is in direct contrast to points of view in the field that argue that children are born into cultural

environments and they must acquire the elements of that culture before they can be introduced to others (Le Roux, 2001). For all of these reasons, cultural pluralism failed to come to fruition in the United States.

The following is a brief analysis of various ways that other theorists have approached the issue of cultural differences and achievement. These approaches show that while many approaches have the potential to explain achievement, none have led to any substantial change that truly corrects the issue.

Multicultural Education

Practices of multicultural education began to be used between 1970 and 1972 (Payne & Welsh, 2000). Multicultural education would serve not only to break mainstream students out of the cultural assumptions they held, but also to provide cultural relationships and connections between students that would better equip them to be citizens of a diverse world (Banks, 1993). In this way, multicultural education corresponded to a democratic desire of reaching equality and justice (Banks, 1993). The three primary foci that multicultural education took in order to meet its goals were achievement approaches, inter-group education and curriculum reform (Banks, 1993).

Achievement approaches for different cultural, linguistic and gender groups were practices theorized to increase academic achievement (Banks, 1993). These were practices that a teacher or school could adopt, including the utilization of learning styles and home languages within educational programs. Constructing a classroom or school system in this way is meant to provide positive learning experiences for students, and

also had the effect of bringing parents into the achievement conversation, as they too want to see their children succeed (Banks, 1993).

Inter-group education was the process of bringing students together through desegregation and cooperation within schools (Banks, 1993). Inter-group education was developed to assist all students in having an enhanced view of cultural groups that were not traditionally represented positively (Banks, 1993). Garcia (1994) pointed out that an underlying problem with inter-group education is that education is meant to meet individual student needs rather than teach to ethnic groups. Therefore, if the focus is constantly on shared traits, there is very little room for students to show their individuality. Garcia addressed another concern, that if the teacher is teaching about cultures, his or her own understanding will be imparted to students. This means that stereotypes and assumptions may be unknowingly perpetuated and through their own understanding of a student's culture, a teacher may enter into a learning environment with preconceived notions of the needs of the student. Darder (1991) suggested that these notions, which may be societal stereotypes and mere assumptions, if passed on, effectively undermine what may have been a powerful educational opportunity.

Curriculum reform was the most prominent focus of multicultural education (Garcia, 1994). Its focus is incorporating diverse histories, experiences, and voices into classroom learning (Banks, 1993; Garcia, 1994). At the time that multicultural education was developing, curriculums were criticized for their uneven portrayals geared towards Western European culture (Garcia, 1994). Curriculum reform is meant to move towards helping students consider diverse perspectives, and move away from the mainstream

beliefs and principles they hold (Banks, 1993). Approaches towards reforming were made through both curriculum infusion and curriculum transformation. Curriculum infusion is the incorporation of diverse histories, experiences and voices while curriculum transformation is the shift from the traditional mindset held towards these experiences (Banks, 1993). Infusion without transformation means that even if new experiences are introduced they will still be seen from a dominant standpoint which skews the vantage point for students (Banks, 1993; Darder, 1991).

Though Banks (1995) did later define five dimensions in educational practice that can serve as standards for multicultural education, he also saw that the field as a whole did not sufficiently connect theory to practice. As multicultural education is often based on social values, efforts to create equality have been criticized for not having a strong enough theoretical base (Garcia, 1994). Banks (1995) noted that in a new field this created difficulty in the ability to be seen as pervasive and substantial. Further, the majority of multicultural education efforts were geared towards curriculum; thus the larger issue of pedagogy have been overlooked (Garcia, 1994). As a result, the approaches associated with multicultural education have never dealt with the underlying problems that have led to educational inequality – namely discrimination, underachievement and segregation (Garcia, 1994).

In any society, the issue of whose values and practices should guide schooling is central (Hollins, 1996). In urban schools, this disregard is manifested in the ways in which curriculums are created and shared (Rahim, 1990). The continuing omission of environments and curriculums that reflect the diversity of cultures in our nation

communicates the message that differences are not worthy of notice (Payne & Welsh, 2000). Yet, changing this enduring precedent cannot happen from the work of students alone (Delpit, 1988). Even if students are taught explicitly how to live in a diverse world and access power, their abilities will be relegated by the larger societal system (Delpit, 1988).

Perhaps it is due to multicultural education's inability to respond to these varied challenges that led it to its current institutionalized state. Multicultural education embodies both a lack of real consideration or clarifying questions represented in the actions formulated from its institutionalized ideas (Payne & Welsh, 2000). This lack of questioning and thought has led multicultural education to a place where it can no longer be transformative.

There have been several attempts concurrent and between the development of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy that were geared to transformation in educational settings. This included the analysis of practices such as "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Funds of knowledge are examined from several different approaches all of which focus on research which evaluates the role of home in making connections for students in school.

Anti-racist education was another approach used in classrooms at the same time as Multicultural Education. While multicultural education was developed from liberal reform movements and focused on understanding racism, Antiracist education developed from the experiences of minority groups. The experiences reflected the effects of imperialism and colonialism. These divergent approaches resulted in different foci. For

Anti-Racist education this meant “raising the awareness to the fact that, as presently conceived, the educational system [was] not necessarily functioning in the best interest of racially dominated groups.”(Ng, Staten, & Scane, 1995, p.6)

There were also attempts to develop culturally relevant practices in aboriginal and indigenous populations. This included work done by Osborne (1996) that concluded that though academic outcomes were the same between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, academic identities differ. These attempts, though unique and important in their own realm, are distinct and separate elements of all of the influences that impact students’ academic experiences.

As a result, an innovative approach to educational pedagogy is required for diverse learners. An outgrowth of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy meets that need. “Culturally relevant pedagogy is founded on the notion that, rather than deficits, students’ backgrounds are assets that students can and should use in the service of their learning and that teachers of all backgrounds should develop the skills to teach diverse students effectively” (Nieto, 2003, p.1).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As research focused on culturally relevant pedagogy ensued, a strong research base developed that focuses on teachers and programs that fail to utilize practices that work for diverse student populations (Garcia, 1994). In addition several prominent culturally relevant scholars, including Gloria Ladson-Billings emerged. Ladson-Billings (1992) contributed and responded to the body of research when she created a bridge between theory and culturally relevant practices. She theorized a new approach to address diversity in

schools, namely culturally relevant pedagogy, which uses culture in the classroom to support student learning (1992).

Culturally Relevant Themes and Scholars

The most prevalent culturally relevant scholars focused their research and writings on two key areas. The first is the preparation and thus implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy by teachers. The second is the cultural synchronization of students between their home and school life.

Teacher Preparation & Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In looking at the implementation of culturally relevant practices there are several foci. A proposal has been made by Ladson-Billings, that teachers should learn the skills needed to work with diverse student populations (1998). The presentation examined how teacher education programs are preparing new teachers to enter the field. Additionally, the work challenged teachers to learn how to advance student achievement, assist and affirm students in accepting their culture, and help students develop a critical perspective to challenge inequality in schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1998). A separate focus is the understanding of how students develop an ethnic identity over time as a result of the teacher's role within the classroom (Gay, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2005). Through this lens a focus on curriculum design and the role of the teacher in a culturally relevant classroom has been strengthened over time (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) detailed how in classroom practice, formal lessons as well as the symbolic and societal curriculum can all be analyzed and then designed to ensure cultural congruence. The ability to have high academic outcomes for students of color within a framework designed for those in the dominant society

has been questioned (Tate, 1995). Tate posited that in order to achieve high academic outcomes, culturally relevant teaching and or Afrocentric practices need to be utilized. In case studies he worked on along with a teacher, he developed approaches to raise student achievement (Tate, 1995). Tate saw that utilizing real world situations to help students become aware and involved in their local community created more of an interest in the material and had real world outcomes that positively impacted the students.

Cultural Synchronization

Culturally relevant scholars have also focused on cultural synchronization. Irvine, in her personal experiences as an African American growing up in Catholic schools formed a belief that students can excel in cultural settings different than their home culture. Though she recognized that students experience dissonance between home and school, she felt this can be overcome through shared communication and goals between schools and homes (Irvine, 2003). Irvine wrote that, “The classrooms of successful teachers of minority children are pleasant, friendly, and open, not hostile and repressive.” (p. 95). Foster, who shared a similar Catholic school upbringing, echoed Irvine’s beliefs that student achievement in unfamiliar settings may still lead to paths of achievement (Irvine & Foster, 1996). Though neither her home nor school setting specifically promoted collaboration, her presence in both worlds helped her to see the importance of transferring back and forth in order to make connections to her home, local community, and the outside world.

Culturally Relevant Strategies

Ladson-Billings (1992) stated that the multicultural education goals of unity and diversity are problematic because they are not realistic societal norms. She theorized that multicultural education cannot serve the dual demands of educating students multiculturally and changing societal systems. With this cautionary understanding in mind, as well as her scholarship on Critical Race Theory in education she seems the best fit to have adapted the multicultural education paradigm into a working culturally relevant pedagogy.

Ladson-Billings' work is based on three concepts that teachers must bring to the classroom and impart to their students: a) academic achievement, b) cultural competence, and c) sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2001). She described her work as a pedagogy centered on the dual goals of opposition and empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy works to raise not only the academic achievement level of students, but also affirm their cultural identity and provide them with an awareness of the world around them and how they are able to interact within it. Additionally, culturally relevant pedagogy, rather than turning a blind eye to issues of race and culture, places them at the forefront and actively works with students to develop cultural competence.

Academic achievement is the result of a student's academic identity merged with a teacher's ability to help that student choose academia over the alternative pitfalls that surround them (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The roles that a student creates for him or herself begin early. As a result, teachers at all levels must be conscious of the cultural and societal norms that impact students, and must work to supersede the effects. To identify classrooms

that offer this opportunity for academic achievement Ladson-Billings (2001) defined five indicators of academic achievement:

1. The teacher presumes that all students are capable of being educated.
2. The teacher clearly delineates what achievement means in the context of his or her classroom.
3. The teacher knows the content, the learner, and how to teach content to the learner.
4. The teacher supports a critical consciousness toward the curriculum.
5. The teacher encourages academic achievement as a complex notion not amenable to a single static measurement.

Cultural competence. America is made up of diverse peoples resulting in cultural identities that are often broad and not well-defined. As Ladson-Billings (1994) wrote in her book, *The Dreamkeepers*, “culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p.17). For teachers then, cultural competence means not only learning about their students’ cultures, but creating an understanding of what culture means within their lives (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Though some teachers believe it is best to remain “color blind,” doing so does not support the background, understanding, or beliefs that children bring with them to school (Irvine, 1990). Ignoring race just because of its fluidity does not teach students to be critical or aware of their own identities and how they are seen in the larger world (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Four indicators of cultural competence were determined by Ladson-Billings (2001):

1. The teacher understands culture and its roles in education.

2. The teacher takes responsibility for learning about students' culture and community.
3. The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning
4. The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture

Sociopolitical consciousness requires teachers to bring social justice issues into classroom learning. This is a difficult task particularly in the age of standardized tests and scripted curriculums that mandate the time a teacher has for meaningful classroom discussions. However, it is still important for students to have opportunities to engage in learning and discussion about issues that impact the world around them if they are to place themselves within a world view context (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Ladson-Billings has defined four indicators evidenced in classrooms that are engaged in the promotion of sociopolitical consciousness:

1. The teacher knows the larger sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world.
2. The teacher has an investment in the public good.
3. The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.
4. The teacher believes that students' success has consequences for his or her own quality of life.

Family Participation and Involvement

In addition to a culturally relevant pedagogy, “appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture” (Delpit, 1998, p. 296). The dynamic between parents and schools has traditionally required parents to be accommodating to the needs of the school without schools taking families’ concerns or needs into regard (McCaleb, 1994). This tradition, takes away the opportunity to examine educational approaches from new perspectives (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Additionally, it leads educators to view the roles they hold to be separate rather than collaborative with parents (McCaleb, 1994). One role that parents are often assigned at school is “volunteer.” Volunteering is beneficial in that it allows families to see the challenges that face teachers and administrators; this often results in families having an increased level of respect for teachers and a better understanding of how schools are run (Brent, 2000).

Student achievement not only benefits the student, but also his or her family and the local community. Therefore, another approach to working collaboratively is to center the student’s success at the heart of interactions and work together from this starting place (Epstein, 1995). When this type of cooperation occurs, higher achievement can be attained (Gruenert, 2005).

Epstein, whose focus on schools, families, and communities has spanned more than twenty years, has developed six types of involvement based on “trusting and respecting,” that can be used to develop a school-wide program for partnerships (1995). The six types of involvement, as described by Epstein and Jansorn (2004) are as follows:

1. Parenting – assisting families in order to enhance student learning and assisting schools in order to have them better understand students’ family backgrounds;
2. Communicating – sharing information across school and home;
3. Volunteering – enhancing the opportunities available to volunteers and preparing teachers to work with volunteers;
4. Learning at home – designing learning projects and homework so that students can work with their families to achieve;
5. Decision making – allowing families to have a voice in the way the school is organized and run;
6. Collaborating with the community – coordinating reciprocal opportunities.

Ultimately, regardless of how the process of collaboration begins, if it is truly an effort to work together it will result in reciprocated respect and greater empowerment for members of the school community (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Schools must consider that their goals may need to be adjusted to match those of the families and not vice versa. Bringing families into the conversation about a school’s mission and practices honors the families’ beliefs and helps the entire school community to understand the importance and value of differences.

Charter Schools

Minnesota began what can be considered the charter school movement with the opening of two schools in 1991. In the last 17 years the numbers have increased significantly. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 1.1 million children in 4,046 charter schools across 40 states and the District of Columbia are now being served by charter schools (Smarick, 2008). In California, charter schools were created in 1992 with the passage of the Charter School Act that stated that charter schools could be either newly created, or developed from an existing public school (Kemerer, Sanson, & Kemerer, 2005). In order for a public school to become a charter school, at least 50 % of the faculty must sign a petition in favor of the change (Kemerer et al., 2005). This petition, which is also required of newly created charters, outlines how the school will be governed (Kemerer et al., 2005). It includes a “description of the governance system; the educational program, its goals, and measurable outcomes; student outcome assessment; employee qualifications; admission requirements; facilities; start-up costs and three-year cash flow projection; the manner in which annual financial audits will be conducted; student suspension and expulsion procedures; a dispute resolution process; and procedures to be followed if the school closes” (Kemerer et al., 2005, p. 31).

If a submitted petition leads to a charter it will be granted for up to five years (Kemerer et al., 2005). The authorizing entity takes responsibility for inspecting and monitoring the school (Kemerer et al., 2005). At any time, the authorizing entity may revoke the charter if it does not meet the legal requirements outlined in the original petition. Charter schools are held to the same constitutional and legal rights for students

as other public schools (Kemerer et al., 2005; Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). Therefore they must report information to state entities to ensure academic competency of students (Kemerer et al., 2005; Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). However, because Charter schools are not held to the state laws that generally apply to school districts they are still able to maintain a large degree of flexibility (Kemerer et al., 2005; Dunklee & Shoop, 2006).

Proponents of charter schools herald their flexibility. Flexibility allows charter schools to be simultaneously innovative and alert to the needs of students (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005). The staff and students make a deliberate choice to be part of the school which means the school's continued existence and growth relies heavily on their members continued agreement and collaboration with school practices (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005). This often translates into a higher level of communication and involvement which in other schools may not have been supported (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). This community agreement is supported by funding which is directly tied to school attendance and enrollment levels. The element of public accountability that is incorporated serves as the theoretical safety net that allows for increased amounts of autonomy and flexibility within charter schools (Finnigan, 2007).

Autonomy is a valuable commodity because it allows for the innovative practices and approaches that charters schools purport and are designed around. However, recent research has revealed that due to legitimacy and funding needs charter schools have become less autonomous than anticipated (Finnigan, 2007). Recent studies identified that the level of autonomy between charter schools is not consistent and that funding and legislation have negatively impacted the degree of autonomy possible (Finnigan, 2007).

Charter schools have also been limited by the expectations of Charter Management or Education Management Organizations often referred to as CMOs or EMOs respectively (Bloomberg, Nathan, & Berman, 2008). These organizations provide an infrastructure that supports educational and financial support for the school as it is established, grows and develops (BGA brief). CMOs accomplish this through a philanthropic non-profit approach which supports supplementing the costs per students while EMOs focus on capital markets and for-profit ventures to supplement students costs (Bloomberg et al., 2008). Charter schools that are run by EMOs are less likely to be associated with a social mission and more likely to be run in a manner that supports a business focus towards recruiting students and adapting pedagogical approaches to meet market needs (Holyoke, Henig, Brown & Kacireno-Paquet, 2007). Schools directly connected to local authorizers, community based organizations or Education Management Organization facilitates the hiring of teachers to meet the accountability needs of the school (Finnigan, 2007). Having the hiring not done in house limits the ability to create continuity of instruction between staff and administration (Finnigan, 2007).

Charter schools, depending on their dependent or independent status, may be governed by a Board of Directors and in these cases the responsibility and ultimate power in the running of the school still fall to the Charter School Board even when an EMO is in place (Bloomberg et al., 2008). Charter school board members are generally drawn from the school community due to the skills or expertise that may be able to offer to the school. However, school districts and states are able to delineate whether the inclusion of school community members is allowed. Though members of charter school governance

teams are not elected by the public, charter school governance may include provisions based on who may or may not be elected to the board. Board meetings are held to open-meeting laws (Vergari, 2007). In California, school board meetings fall under the Ralph M. Brown Act (Gov. Code, § 549501). The purpose of the Brown Act as defined by the California District Attorney in 2003 is to “facilitate public participation in local government decisions and to curb misuse of the democratic process by secret legislation by public bodies”. The Brown Act requires that meetings be held at a regular time and place and that notice of regular meeting agendas must be posted 72 hours prior to a meeting. Every agenda should have a place within it where members of the public may address the board members. Closed sessions of meetings must be indicated on the posted agenda.

The level of autonomy for charter schools also falls heavily on state assessment data which monitors the alignment between charter schools and state regulations for academic outcomes. Research that supports the academic achievement of charter school students is still rather inconclusive. There is no significant difference in standardized test scores between students in charter schools and students in traditional schools (Carnoy, Jacobson, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005). However, research has shown that even with less funding, charter schools have kept pace with traditional public schools (Kremer et al., 2005). There has been research however to determine if maintaining higher assessment data has negatively impacted on teacher autonomy. Research has shown that indeed the charter school teacher’s ability to be autonomous within their classrooms, in designing instruction more fluidly than at other schools that have more constricted expectations has

been reduced as the charter schools align with state regulations (Vergari, 2007). The pressure to succeed on assessments limits the level of autonomy a charter school has around curriculum and instruction (Finnigan, 2007).

The demographic breakdown of charter school teachers may also contribute to lower levels of autonomy in relation to student achievement. Many charter schools are freed from the guidelines and restraints of teacher's unions and districts which allows for flexibility in hiring faculty (Cannata, 2007). As a result rather than seniority based hiring many charter school leaders are able to hire teachers who believe in the mission of the school, and have similar ideologies for reaching the goal. Charter school teachers are often novice teachers whom are younger than traditional school teachers and often hold fewer degrees in advanced studies (Bomotti, Ginsberg & Cobb, 1999). The lower levels of experience impact on these teachers ability to create and maintain safe classrooms and teacher collegiality (Cannata, 2007). Additionally, if the school does not adhere to its established mission or if pre-existing procedures or policies determined by the schools founders inhibit the level of autonomy anticipated by teachers may impact on student achievement (Cannata, 2007).

Ensuring that charter school leaders are able to collaboratively involve teachers in decisions and create a professional community may support the ongoing desire for professional development by school faculty and thereby increase student achievement levels and support autonomy in the classroom (Cannata, 2007). Research on the role of charter school leaders outlines the importance of leadership skills in maintaining the academic and operational functions of the school (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). However,

charter schools leaders have lower levels of experience at their schools sites and in school administration positions as well as teaching experience than do traditional school leaders (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007).

Discrepancies that have arisen when attempting to compare research between traditional and charter schools include the size of the schools and the length of time that the charter schools have been open (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005). Additionally, certain research has shown that students who chose to leave neighborhood schools do so because they are not achieving academically only to be contradicted by conflicting research which notes that when students enroll in charter schools, those schools have often been self-selected, which positively impacts academic quality and performance (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005).

It has been found that schools that work with families and focus on culture and culturally relevant curriculums are in the best position to enhance the academic achievement of their students (Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, & Coetsee, 2005). School choice provides an opportunity for families to be more engaged in their child's schooling. Families who choose to place their children in charter schools are more likely to be involved in the education process—a situation which, in and of itself, contributes to academic achievement (Kemerer et al., 2005). Charter schools mainly acquire their student populations from neighboring traditional schools. As charter schools are most often located in lower income urban areas, they tend to have populations made up of students of color who, along with their families, do not feel they are being properly served by the traditional school. Advocates of school choice feel that it provides an

educational alternative for families, and motivates traditional schools at risk of losing their student population to be competitive in meeting the needs of students (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). As the majority of the traditional schools that are at risk serve students of color and are located in lower income urban areas, it is these areas and students that have most often seen the development of charter schools. Socio-economic and racial backgrounds within the context of a public charter schools have been analyzed to determine the impact on volunteerism, relationships, school resources, academic performance measures and school safety (Bancroft, 2009). It has been found that charter schools have higher levels of parent engagement and involvement at all grade levels than traditional schools (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). However, the issue of racial segregation as a result of school choice has also come up within these areas of research.

School choice advocates have identified charter schools and voucher programs as one way to ensure that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was maintained however questions have arisen about the potential resegregation of schools (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002). Segregation in student populations at charter schools manifests itself in a variety of ways. The focus on gender, vocation, academic proficiency, career goal and race all segregate student populations and potentially impact the diversity of academic material presented to students (Wraga, 2006). These findings have been limited by a lack of data that tracks the path of students from a district school to a charter school-which would then reveal the demographic data from place to place (Garcia, 2008). Research that has been conducted identifies that at elementary school sites African American and Caucasian students choose to attend charter schools with

substantially higher percentages of African American schools than the schools they exited; Latino students choose to attend charter schools with lower percentages of Latino students than the schools they exited (Garcia, 2008).

Those who oppose charter schools and school choice are concerned that low-income families may not have the knowledge base or resources to seek out or transport their children to the most appropriate schools (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). Further financial constraints may push schools to focus recruitment towards students who may cost less to educate through persuasive advertisements (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). Students with special education, English Learner Language or Advanced needs may require additional resources than mainstream regular education students and thus be “creamed from the crop” (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002).

Conclusion

The relevant literature explored within Chapter 2 supports the focus of the dissertation research by providing a context for the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy as well as the evolution of both charter schools and the role of families within schools. Chapter 3 clarifies the purpose of utilizing ethnography to complete the dissertation research. In addition it describes the research methods and research design that is utilized and further developed in Chapter 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Across the United States, classrooms separated by only a few miles provide students with very different educations. The rise of charter schools in the United States appears to be one of many solutions to the problem of unequal education. Though public, these schools provide a much different setting than their typical public school neighbors. This dissertation research offers a glimpse into the everyday lives and interactions of students, teachers and families at one charter school as they make use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

As schools have become more diverse both ethnically and linguistically, the likelihood of cultural mismatches among students, families, and teachers has increased (Frank, 1999). Using ethnography as the methodology, this study aims to explore the understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy within an elementary urban charter school. This methodology lends itself to the research as it works well for researchers completing their studies in small, micro-level environments (Wolcott, 1975).

Prior to collecting data, researchers must consider how their own experiences will impact their ability to collect and analyze data (Carspecken, 1996; Fetterman, 1998). But, as it is up to the researcher to present his or her knowledge gleaned from a variety of observations and interviews, the members of the setting will truly have their voices heard through this research (Emerson et al., 1995). Within this process the intent is to gain a perspective from the voices of the participants that will deepen the researcher's ability to understand the context of the research.

Methodology

This ethnography was conducted in order to assess how culturally relevant pedagogy is understood, perceived and implemented. This methodology was chosen because it allows for the compilation of participants' voices explaining interactions at the school site (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). A goal of the research was to provide a thorough evaluation and potentially a transformation at the school site based on these understandings.

There are three overarching elements on which ethnography lie. The first is the problem that surrounds ethnography: the need to understand the problem being researched, its context and how it relates to power. In this case, the students' families in relation to the students' school was explored. Families' stories of schooling create the educational habitus for their children. They relate to and reflect academic outcomes (Auerbach, 2002). At the onset of my research, I believed that if given the opportunity, families would share their understandings and suggestions for their students' education.

The second element of the ethnography is entrance into the field (Fetterman, 1998). It is very important that the research not be a statement of known facts. Therefore, it was important to me to not only examine the stance of the school but also create a holistic view of the school through the words and actions of the community members. My goal was to reveal both new knowledge and potential injustices which may hold meaning in the development of the school. Ideally, the research outcomes will hold meaning for the teachers and will allow for the critical examination of their practice. New knowledge gained may impact the process in which they interact and teach students

within their classrooms. On a broader scale, the outcomes may also contribute to change for the school as a whole, so that all students may benefit from the study regardless of grade level and beyond the school site to schools with similarly diverse student populations.

Finally, the third element is the necessity of being reflexive. Researchers must be aware of the reflexivity of their work and the manner in which their output will be reflective of them (Simon & Dippo, 1986). An area of concern within ethnography is how a researcher may impact the environment. In reality, the presence of one “outsider” does not so much change the pattern of everyday lives as it reveals the steps necessary for entrance or membership (Emerson et al., 1995). In order to do this, researchers should introduce themselves into the situation in a non-authoritarian role and, whenever possible, defer to information from participants and include their accounts within the research process (Carspecken, 1996). Observations and claims made by the researcher cannot be validated, if there exists an unequal power balance between the researcher and participants (Carspecken, 1996). Therefore, the researchers should disclose their positionality and once on site, question whether knowledge was found or produced, as well as how their presence and affiliations may have served or undermined the research (Simon & Dippo, 1986). When the research is completed it will become clear that the process of interaction and the process of writing are closely entwined (Emerson et al., 1995). The findings then, which will include information from the community, will serve as a way in which the work is socially just and valid (Carspecken, 1996).

In considering my positionality at the school site I realized that I may hold an unequal power balance with the participants since, in the past, I had served as a resource and support for them. However, I believe that any potential issues of power were negated by the knowledge that pseudonyms and confidentiality were ensured, as part of the formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent. Additionally, I believe that holding the majority of participant discussion in groups initially and then moving into individual interviews gave the participants the strength in numbers needed for them to have the confidence to be open with me throughout the research process.

In Chapter 6, the three elements of ethnography will be further explored as the research conclusions are reached.

Research Questions

Specifically, this ethnography addressed the following fundamental questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' understandings, perceptions, and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
2. What are students and families understandings and perceptions of the implementation and effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching practices?
3. In what ways can the culturally relevant practices at a charter school be informed by the student and families members of the school community?

Setting

The research took place at Maple Charter School, an elementary charter school. The school opened in September 2006 to students in kindergarten through third grade with the expectation of adding a grade per year until the school reached K-8. The school is run by the executive director who is also the school's founder. There is a four-member board of directors that meets with the executive director up to five times during the school year to analyze the school's progress in relation to policy, evaluate the school director, and to serve as the fiduciary trust for the school.

The school is located in South Los Angeles. This area was previously known as South Central Los Angeles until 2003 when the city changed the name to offset the negative stereotypes associated with the location (Ong, Firestine, Pfeiffer, Poon, & Tran, 2008). Figure 1 shows that 43% of the residents of South Los Angeles have not attained a high school diploma. The education level, lack of employment options in the area, as well as the societal discrimination, all contribute to the 30% poverty rate for residents, and a home ownership level that is below the county average (Ong et al., 2008).

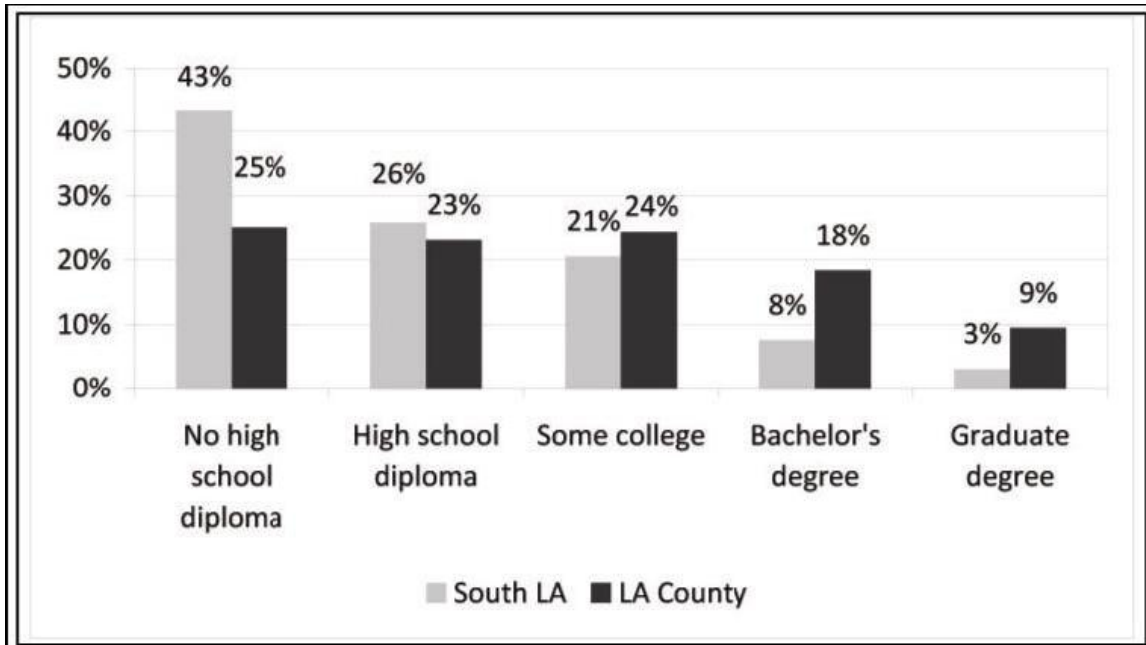


Figure 1. Educational attainment, South LA and LA County (2006). From *American Community Survey 2006 in The State of South LA* by P. Ong, T. Firestine, D. Pfeiffer, O. Poon, and L. Tran (2008), Los Angeles, CA: UCLA School of Public Affairs, p. 11.

Though the percentages of both violent crime and property crime have diminished (down to 6.3 and 26.3 per 1,000 people respectively), the rates are still higher than other areas of Los Angeles (Ong et al., 2008). In considering the setting in relation to the crime rate, it is important to note that “Higher crime rates negatively impact communities in a number of ways, some of which include increased stress and anxiety, lower housing values, weaker attachments to neighbors and the community, and depressed business development” (Ong et al., 2008, p. 24). The demographics for the region show that the neighborhoods surrounding the school site have shifted from Caucasian to African American to Latino (Ong et al., 2008). As seen in Figure 2, demographic percentages in 2006 revealed an increase of the Latino population by 15% and a decrease of the African

American population by 22%.

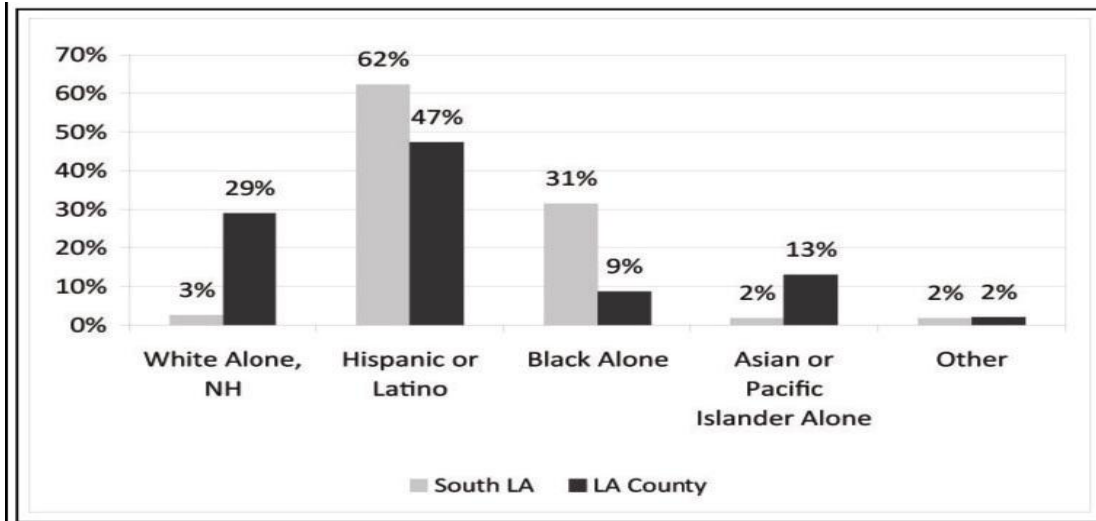


Figure 2. Race/ethnicity, South LA and LA County (2006). From *American Community Survey 2006 in The State of South LA* by P. Ong, T. Firestone, D. Pfeiffer, O. Poon, and L. Tran (2008), Los Angeles, CA: UCLA School of Public Affairs, p. 5.

A 2008 report from the UCLA School of Public Affairs found that 16 of the 51 charter elementary schools in Los Angeles are located in South Los Angeles (Ong et al., 2008). Despite the neighborhood demographic changes, the report found that these schools tend to have a higher ratio of African American (60%) to Latino students (37%). This percentage matches that of Maple Charter School which at the start of the 2007-2008 school year had a 60% African American population and 40% Latino population. Thus, Maple Charter School is not an anomaly in South Los Angeles and the findings will be significant for the local community.

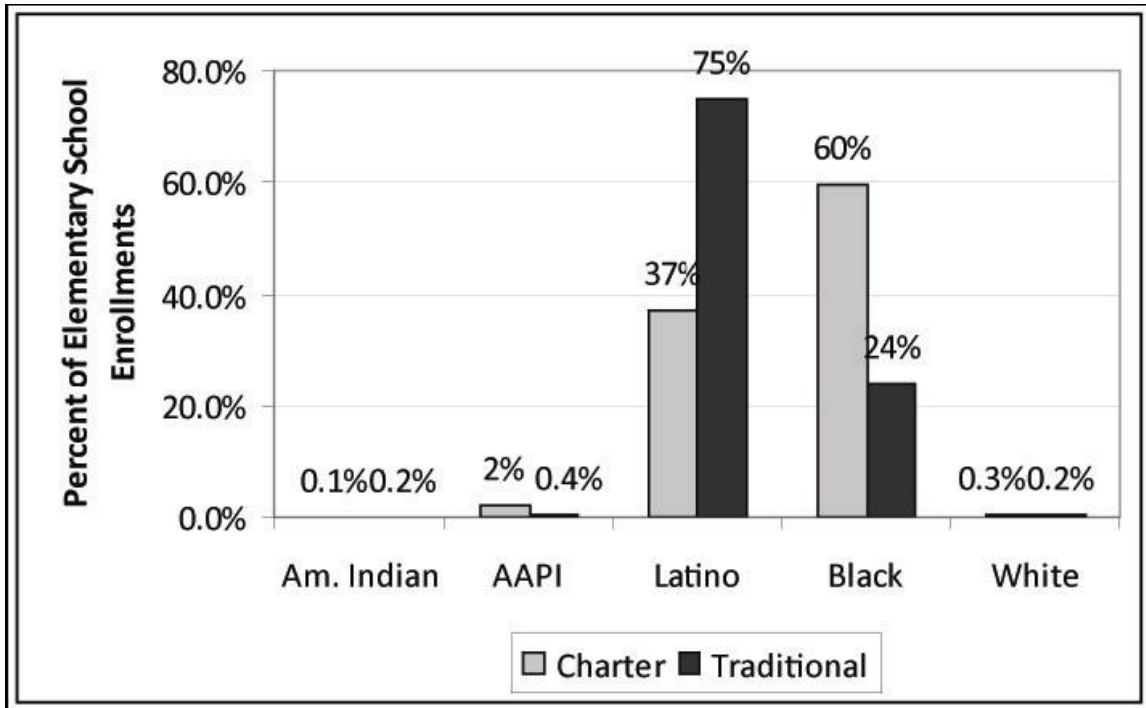
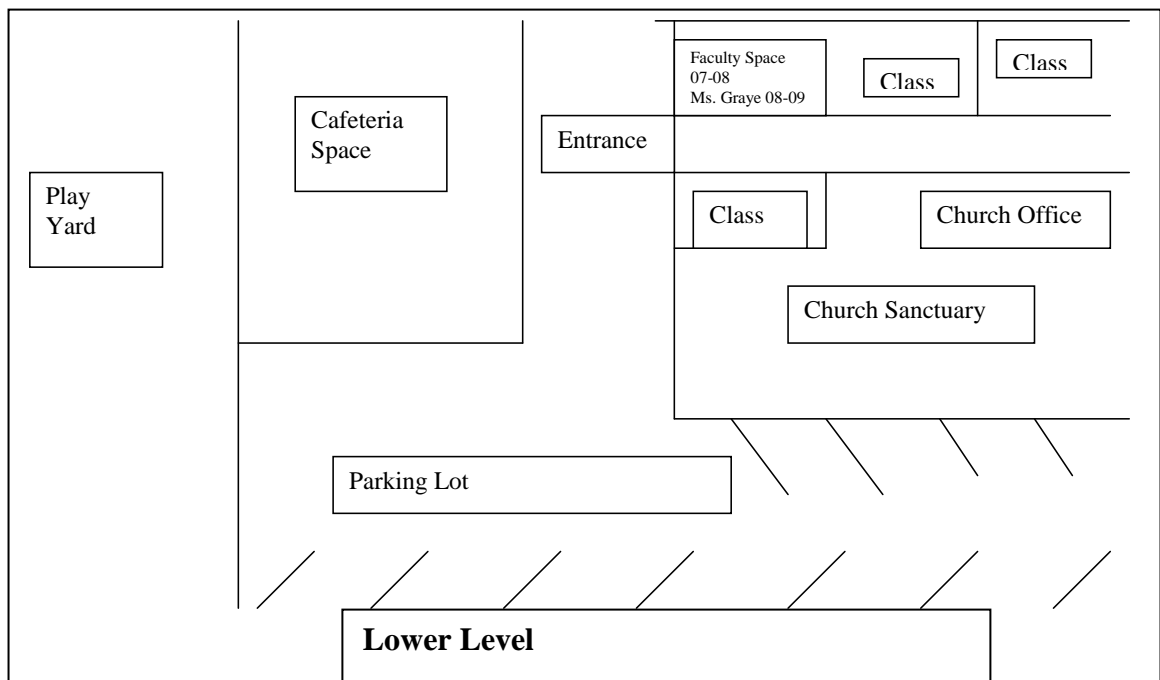


Figure 3. Racial distribution of elementary school enrollments, LA County 2007-2008. From *CA Department of Education 2007-2008 in The State of South LA* by P. Ong, T. Firestone, D. Pfeiffer, O. Poon, and L. Tran (2008), Los Angeles, CA: UCLA School of Public Affairs, p. 32.

Maple Charter School is situated within a pre-existing community center established within a congregational church. The church has been in existence for close to 97 years, and had been in its current location for 45 years at the time of the research. Though on church property the school is in no way religiously affiliated with the church and has no impact on the day to day teaching and learning at the school. The main correlation between the church and school is shared space. The map (see Figure 4 following page) details the layout of the school and church spaces. The school uses the church sanctuary once a month, on pre-scheduled dates, for the school-wide assemblies.

The church uses all of the school spaces, during non-classroom times, as needed with the exception of the School office. The play yard is actually a continuation of the church parking lot-and therefore on the weekend all play equipment is removed so that the church can utilize the parking lot in its entirety.



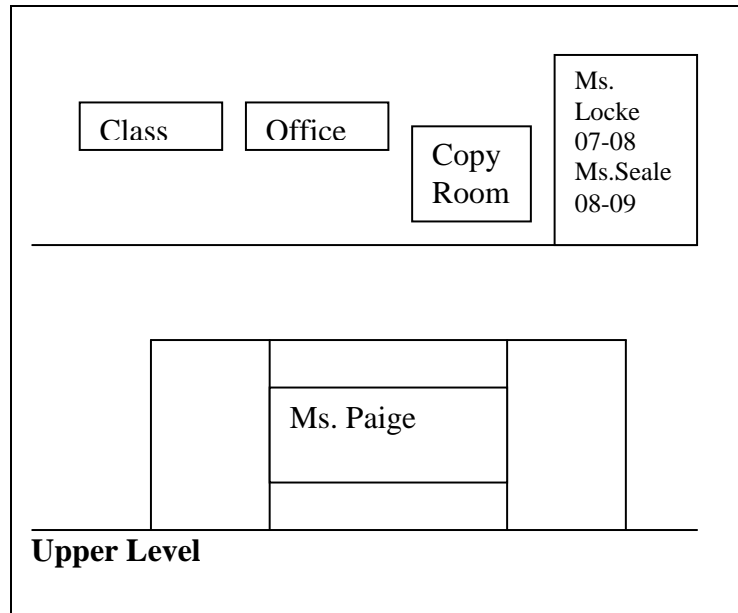


Figure 4. Physical map of upper and lower levels of Maple Charter School

Access

The process of receiving permission to enter a site continues beyond the initial entrance, as each individual must be considered, and the relationships which are initially created will grow and change throughout the research period (Schwartzman & Strauss, 1973). Access is not only gaining entrance to the research site, but also to the appropriate activity within it (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983).

Prior to the start of the research I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process and received permission from the school executive director to complete the research at the school site. As a former teacher at the school and a current employee, I was granted access as part of my employment. My request for access was done informally. I provided a brief description of the research questions and the methodology

to the school director. During my presentation I made it clear that if access was granted no reciprocal offer would be made beyond the sharing of research findings.

Though a familiarity with the school existed, there had been no previous reason for me to enter or observe classrooms of any teacher for a significant period of time prior to the start of the research. Additionally, though students and families were familiar with the researcher a relationship that allowed knowledge to be shared about expectations or perceptions of students' schooling experiences had yet to be developed.

Participants

The participants included the families, teachers and administrator of students at Maple Charter School. The research follows the students as they end third grade (with Ms. Locke and Ms. Paige) and begin fourth grade (with Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye) during the 2007-2009 academic years. In total 21 students, 13 family members, 4 teachers and one administrator (Ms. Tabor) participated in the research (Participant summaries are detailed in Appendix A, B, and C while protocols for collecting data are included in Appendix D, E, and F).

The school has very few veteran teachers and therefore the teachers selected were not the result of any particular expertise they had exhibited. Rather, I had to assume that as a whole, the staff ascribed to the school philosophies, which align with culturally relevant pedagogy. I based this on the understanding that all four teachers were "at-will" employees who made a particular choice to work with the students and follow the school philosophies. Therefore, the teacher selection was tied to student selection, which was achieved using purposive sampling.

A purposive sampling method takes into account the most appropriate sample of subjects and then uses all of the subjects within this group that are available. Participants came from a purposive sample based on two rationales. First, this was the only grade level, at which there were two self-contained classrooms. The other grades either shared classroom spaces or only had one grade level class. Second, I was familiar with many of the students from my previous teaching or co-teaching work with them. As a result, I believed the students would be more honest about their schooling experiences and perceptions based on the building of pre-established trust.

The research design included strategies to build and maintain trust. Verbally, the design included speech that the participants understood rather than educational jargon, as well as formal guarantees of confidentiality (Fetterman, 1998). Additionally, the research study, as part of the Internal Review Board for Human Subjects in Research, was approved prior to its inception and all included participants (as well as guardians) signed consent forms (see Appendix G, H, and I) in their home language.

To engage the families, who I hoped would be willing to sign the consent form, I personally called or spoke in person to family members when they picked up their students. Out of new students and families, with whom I did not have a previous relationship, only two of nine families were willing to have their students participate in the focus groups. This led me to believe that my rationale for using purposive sampling with these students was valid and important for gaining participant consent.

Following initial focus groups, 6 students (4 boys and 2 girls) and their mothers, were chosen for in-depth interviews. Three of the mothers in this group worked at the

school site as support staff in the main office or classrooms. These mothers were fully entrenched in the school and classroom routines. The other three mothers were rarely on site and relied on their relationships with their children, the teachers, and office staff to stay aware of school information. These different levels of interactions resulted in diverse perspectives that deepened the data. Additionally, having been at the school since it opened in 2006, these participants were witnesses and narrators of the growth and change of the school over time.

Research Design

This ethnography was designed to gain information on the understandings, perceptions and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy at Maple Charter School. Out of nine available classrooms, four classrooms were chosen to development a deep understanding of the implementation of pedagogy and school-wide practices .The data was compiled through focus groups, individual interviews, mapping, document analysis and both informal and direct observations. Data was collected in a field journal as well as a word processing program. At all times during the data collection, an open mind and an awareness of personal bias was considered in order to ensure validity—a necessity during the research process (Fetterman, 1998).

The research timeframe followed students as they transitioned from third grade to fourth grade, during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, academic years. Initial data were collected through both direct and informal observations which created the primary record for the research. Daily classroom observations occurred for six weeks equaling 120 hours. These observations were completed in third grade classrooms in four hour time

blocks daily. Observations occurred at a variety of times during the school day and continued until the primary record appeared to show patterns in the daily routines of the classrooms. Additional observations outside of the classroom, equaling 120 hours, occurred through my employment at the site which provided an understanding of school-wide practices. Observations were ongoing during the 2008-2009 school year. Direct classroom observations occurred daily during different 4-hour time blocks and continued until the record appeared to show patterns. Direct observations occurred for approximately 60 hours across three weeks in the fourth grade classrooms.

Following initial observations, 21 students and 13 families attended focus group sessions. Four student focus groups were held and one family focus group were held during the 2007-2008 academic year. Based on focus group data, 6 students and 6 family members were chosen for in-depth interviews which occurred during the 2008-2009 academic year. Interviews with four teachers and one administrator were ongoing throughout the research process. The two third grade teachers each participated in three interviews. The fourth grade teachers and one administrator participated in two interviews.

The final analysis relied on an analysis of the school as a whole system and as part of a larger outside system. At this point, topics that held deeper meaning were pulled out for a more detailed analysis which included reconstructions of situations, a review of the setting, a consideration of my presence in the setting, and the semantics and power dynamics of the participants. Analysis of the data were performed which included observation records, document analysis, mapping and transcriptions of focus groups and

interviews. Additionally, exploration into the outside systems, which included the local community and the church community, occurred at this time. The compilation of data was used in conjunction with Critical Race Theory in order to answer the research questions and reformulate theory in a manner which reflected the findings of the research data.

Data Collection Methods

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not include measurement. Human behaviors are contextualized within settings, and attempts to make them objective, discrete, or generalizable are inappropriate (Carspecken, 1996). The importance of using qualitative methods is that researchers gain the ability to view the world of the participants (Simon & Dippo, 1986). The constructs determined by qualitative research are made at the end of the study, after a careful examination of all the aspects has taken place. The following is a description of the methods that were utilized.

Classroom Observation

At different times in the research timeframe observations occurred daily in all four teacher's classroom. For Ms. Paige and Ms. Locke's observations occurred from May to June 2008. The length of time for each observation was two hours and occurred daily at different times throughout the day. For Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye observations occurred from February to March 2009. The length of time for each observation was four hours. The times of observations varied in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of classroom routines throughout the school day.

The initial classroom observations were done unobtrusively. I chose to observe in this way, in order to understand the setting outside of my position as a project coordinator, and determine how my interaction within the classroom was embraced. In order for the claims made by my primary records to be considered valid it was important that they would be agreed upon by other individuals observing within the same setting and not dependent on my presence. Once I felt I understood the classroom dynamics I began to interact with participants. These interactions assisted me in understanding the setting and in clarifying information.

Field Notes

“Field notes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 4). When writing up notes, researchers should focus on their initial impressions and their observations of important actions or activities of the participants. The notes should be jotted down in a manner which feels most appropriate to the researcher at appropriate times and should not include judgments or characterizations (Emerson et al., 1995). Field notes for this research project were recorded primarily in a word processing program. At all other times the notes were recorded in a paper journal. The field notes included not only the words and activities observed but also contextual details of the relevant conditions, the time and location, and those present as is research protocol (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983).

There are four implications for field notes that Emerson et al. (1995) have determined. They are: (a) data is inseparable from the process of observation; (b) in

writing field notes, the researcher should give attention to meaning and concerns from the perspective of the individuals being studied; (c) current written field notes are the basis for broader accounts; and (d) field notes should be inclusive of the interactions and social aspects of everyday lives and activities. All of these implications were considered in the process of recording field notes.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The initial interviews and focus groups were done using a semi-structured interview protocol. This choice was made in order to focus the interview around relevant research topics but allow for individuals to talk in detail and share their perspectives on topics that related to and impacted the research. Interviews were audio-recorded and focus groups were both audio and video-recorded to allow for complete transcription and coding. During the interviews, notes were taken that assisted in fully understanding the information in later coding. The teachers and administrator participated in two to three in-depth interviews.

Students and families were invited to attend focus groups. There were four student focus groups held for 21 student participants out of which 6 students were chosen for in-depth interviews. One family focus group was held and 6 family members were chosen for in-depth interviews. The data collection schedule is shown in Appendix J.

Teacher and Administrator Interviews

All interviews were essentially structured by both the researcher and the informant (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983). The initial interviews with both the teachers and the administrator served as opportunities to gain information that deepened my

understanding of school-wide practices. They also allowed me to gain an initial perspective of the personal and professional understandings and experiences they each held in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy. The administrator and teachers were interviewed using a combination of the informal interview protocol (Appendix D) and questions generated as the research progressed.

The third grade teachers, Ms. Locke and Ms. Paige, had their initial interviews while the student participants were still in their class during the 2007-2008 academic year. The inclusion of the fourth grade teachers, Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye, as well as the administrator, Ms. Tabor, came later in the research process once the students had transitioned into fourth grade during the 2008-2009 academic year. The two fourth grade teachers each participated in initial interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix D). The school administrator also participated in an initial interview during this time. Her interview was not based on a protocol but rather was led by open-ended questions based on emerging data.

Follow-up interviews probed deeper to enhance the data. Ms. Locke and Ms. Paige had two follow-up interviews. Ms. Tabor, Ms. Graye and Ms. Seale each had one follow-up interview. While there were initial topics to be covered in the first interview protocol, there were no prearranged questions during the subsequent interview (s). Rather, questions were developed based on the data obtained from the initial interview and observations made at the site. The interviews were used in identifying the administrator and teachers' understandings and implementation of culturally relevant practices. This included determining personal understandings as well as practices that

occurred in and out of the classroom setting. The third grade teachers had one additional interview than the fourth grade teacher and Ms. Tabor. Though the students had moved on from their third grade teachers their perspectives continued to be important during the research and interviewing them a third time served as a form of member-checking.

Family Focus Groups and Interviews

Families were invited to attend one of three focus groups, to discuss their perspectives on practices being used in the classroom and practices being used in the home (Appendix E). The focus groups were directed to families rather than parents. With the diversity of family structures, research geared only to parents would exclude important individuals who shape a child's life (Constantino, 2003). Families who attended were asked to offer their first-hand knowledge and perceptions of the ways their children learned most effectively. The focus groups were held at the school site at three different times. Although it was an option, the focus groups were not divided by language needs. The focus group invitation was sent out in English and Spanish, the families that responded and attended were bilingual and therefore translation was not needed.

Initially, I planned to choose one family from each group who would participate in two in-depth interviews, based on information shared during the focus group sessions. The families chosen would be those that demonstrated the potential for enhanced data as a result of further exploration. There were three family focus groups scheduled for 13 family members. Only one of these focus groups had enough participants (11) to be completed appropriately. The other two focus groups only had one participant each. I felt that these family members met the requirement of having enhanced data, as their students

had both attended the school since its original opening, and they were both invested in the school. Therefore, these focus groups turned into one on one interviews. Near the conclusion of the research in order to validate and add depth to initial findings four additional family members were interviewed in-depth.

The focus groups and interviews provided for a semi-structured session where participants' comments often guided the discussions. These sessions provided data on the previous and current school experiences of the participants. Additionally, the sessions allowed the participants to voice opinions of school community strengths and weakness in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Student Focus Groups and Interviews

In his efforts to understand the consequences of resegregated schools, Kozol (2005) challenged researchers to go to the children to gain true knowledge. He wrote that “you need to go into the schools in which the isolation of our children is the most extreme, do so repeatedly but, where it’s possible, informally and not obtrusively, and try to make sure that you are allowed the time to listen carefully to children” (p.12).

Students were invited to attend one of four focus groups. There were four focus groups in order to allow all students access to a small setting. The focus groups were offered at two different times: during the student lunch period and after school. This was done to ensure that all students were able to have an opportunity to speak and that the length of the focus groups and time spent on each topic was developmentally appropriate. The focus groups held were all guided by the focus group protocol (See Appendix F) but had different levels of detail and slightly different topics based upon student

commentaries during the process. This approach provided for a semi-structured session as participants' comments also guided the discussions within the groups.

Though the groups were offered at two different times, the students overwhelmingly preferred to meet during the lunch period and all four focus groups were held during that time. In order to determine which participants attended which focus group a random sample was selected from the available participant names.

To attend the focus group both the student and their parent or guardian had to consent for their participation. Before students signed their consent forms, I explained to the students very broadly and in child-friendly language, what topics we would discuss: their teachers, their classes and their learning. The students assented to signing the consent form after speaking with me. All of the students whose parents then consented for their participation attended a focus group with one exception. One student was frequently absent near the end of the school year due to personal illness and was unable to attend any of the scheduled student focus groups.

Mapping

Formal maps which outline the overall physical layout of the surrounding community, the school site, the classroom spaces, and shared school-wide spaces were utilized (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Mapping assists in determining initial points of reference. Consequently, maps were created both at the onset of the research and while examining system relations.

Document Analysis

Written information provides details on the purpose, image and values of organizations (Fetterman, 1998). Analyzing these documents is invaluable in telling about the history and future of schools and other social organizations and serves as one way to improve the quality of research findings (Fetterman, 1998). Documents and information displayed on both the school and congregational church webpage were viewed and analyzed throughout the research. In addition, promotional and descriptive documents provided to individuals about the school site were reviewed. Analysis of documents, were incorporated into the data analysis stage of the research. Information from documents were analyzed for patterns and triangulated with other data in order to determine its connection to findings.

Data Analysis

The validity of qualitative research comes from the depth of the data and the ability of the researcher to ask the right question of the data (Hatch, 2002). Repeated actions and beliefs make up the patterns that ethnographers are looking for in the field (Fetterman, 1998). Patterns, as well as the detection of themes and relationships are some of the small pieces to a larger puzzle (Hatch, 2002). In order to reveal these patterns there are different analysis models that can be utilized. Typically with qualitative data there are five data analysis models (Hatch, 2002). They are typological, interpretive, political, polyvocal, and inductive. Inductive analysis moves the data from individual pieces to a unified picture of the research topic, and is most suitable for use with ethnographic

research. There are nine steps to inductive analysis that have been detailed by Hatch (2002). They are:

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis: Read the data to determine how to break it into levels. These initial frames will be fluid throughout the research process.
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis: Domains will include terms, semantic relationships, and cover terms. An example provided by Hatch follows:

<u>Included Terms</u>	<u>Semantic Relationship</u>	<u>Cover Term</u>
Suspension	are ways to	hold student accountable

3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside: Narrow the number of domains based on which are most relevant and begin to provide these domains with alpha or numerical codes.
4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data: As data are reread, use the domain codes within the data to assist in the recording of relationships.
5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships to your domains: During this step, domains that have been repeated throughout the data will be ideally identified. The focus should also be on the importance of the domain to the research, not simply the number of times it occurs.

6. Complete an analysis within domains: The deeper analysis of each domain achieved in this step allows for deeper understanding.
7. Search for themes across domains: An analysis of relationships between domains leads to a determination of themes.
8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains: This outline brings the work done on frames of analysis, codes, domains, and themes into a unified outline.
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline: The data and outline will come together to support the final step of the ethnography when findings are reported.

The nine steps for inductive analysis described by Hatch were used to determine findings.

Reporting Findings

Analysis brings meaning to the data which can then be meaningfully shared (Hatch, 2002). Using inductive analysis, the information was organized into typologies and then examined in order to create a detailed knowledge of the participants, the social setting, and how the interactions involved led to the perceptions and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy across four classrooms.

In completing the ethnography, primary data (quotes, documents, and artifacts that represent the culture of the school) were included (Wolcott, 1975). In reviewing and writing down this information, the meaning of interactions and observations became

more apparent, allowing for a continuous move forward with new knowledge in the ethnographic process (Emerson et al., 1995).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness has four elements: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Internal validity pertains to how dependent and independent variables connect, and as this research did not contain set variables, internal validity will be low. However, researchers that do utilize variables are just as prone to have low validity because the artificial nature of their research does not allow them to move away from potential threats.

External validity refers to how transferable findings are from data. There are dangers in transferring conclusions made from data taken within research settings to the realities of everyday life (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983). Starting from an ethnographic base, which places research within an actual site rather than a laboratory, allows for more transferability of conclusions as well as greater external validity. This research was done on a micro scale which has the potential to limit the ability for the findings to be generalized. However, the existence of charter schools serving similar student populations in South Los Angeles may allow for the findings to be transferable within a larger sphere.

In considering the informal interview, researchers always possess some contamination as they must become involved on some impersonal level related to the embedded questions (Fetterman, 1998). In order to reduce contamination, the timing of questions and the disposition and tone of the participant throughout interviews and focus

groups was monitored according to protocol (Fetterman, 1998). Additionally, I worked to maintain a level of trust with the participants and not overstep ethical boundaries as recommended for ethnographers (Fetterman, 1998). Finally, the last element of trustworthiness to be considered is reliability. The strength of the reliability for this research comes from the member checking and triangulation. A critical ethnographer conducting sound research should use discipline subjectivity in analyzing data to avoid bias (Wilson, 1977). Disciplined subjectivity is the ability to take in information from participants from a personal perspective and examine it from an analytic perspective. Disciplined subjectivity was utilized throughout the research process.

The research data reflects the understandings that have been developed for preparing oneself to listen to others' perspectives (Delpit, 1996). These include the understandings that people are experts on their own lives, that it is not appropriate to assume that individuals have a false consciousness, that people are rational beings, and that being vulnerable to others' perspectives may create disorder for you (Delpit, 1996).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a navigational term utilized in research analysis. In navigation, the term refers to how a location is determined using a variety of sources. In qualitative research it refers to how data is used separately and combined in order to determine findings. . In ethnography sources of data are used with and against each other in order to establish one's place within the data (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983; Fetterman, 1998). Though triangulation does occur naturally as a result of being in the field, it must be noted and identified by the researcher.

Within this research, member checking, also known as respondent validation, was one way to triangulate data. Participants were used to check the validity of data. This was useful as participants may have additional contextual details and access to information sources which the researcher had not yet considered in the analysis (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983). In addition, when analyzing the field notes and interview data the information gained from focus group participants served as a triangulation tools (Figure 5). Finally, technique triangulation was utilized during the research process. As shown in Figure 5 (next page), field notes, focus groups, interviews and relevant documents were all used to triangulate findings.

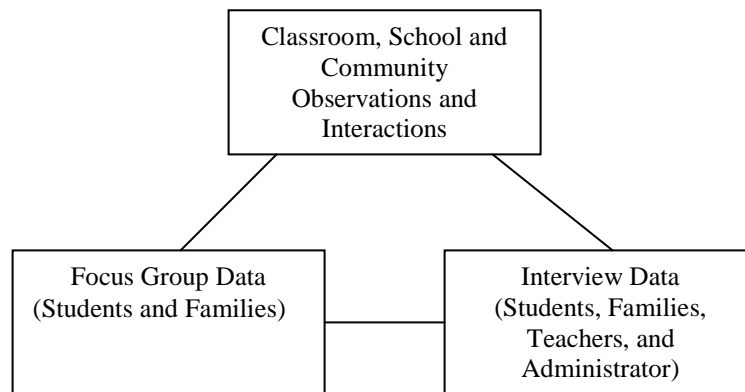


Figure 5. Triangulation of data.

Reciprocity

Though this study did utilize the time of participants, no direct payments were made. Direct payments are not traditionally used as they may adversely impact the information that participants share (Fetterman, 1998). The only pre-established form of reciprocity for this research was the offering of research findings to the school site, to be made available to all participants involved. These findings will not incorporate any identifying information or characteristics of the participants. Rather the presentation will focus on the understandings, perceptions and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy as a whole and specific site based findings and recommendations. In doing this, the research avoided the unethical and contaminating hazards associated with reciprocity (Fetterman, 1998).

Positionality and Reflexivity

Throughout the data analysis, analytic memos allowed for the formulation of statements that reflected ideas that had developed from the research (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). In creating these notes, researchers must question the acquisition, depth, and validity of their knowledge (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1973). Though these memos are not always used in the final findings, they serve to wrap up ideas and to preserve what may be future research topics.

To be reflexive, a researcher must “acknowledge that the knowledge we produce is inevitably limited by our own histories and the institutional forms within which we work” (Simon & Dippo, 1986). In order to avoid this inherent bias, researchers must recognize their roles in data production, the limits of their understanding, how they too

may silence participants, the authority they hold as institutional researchers, and the importance of constant reflexive inquiry of themselves (Simon & Dippo, 1986). The following is an overview of my own history in order to better understand my positionality and reflexivity.

I began working at Maple Charter School as a founding teacher in 2006. I currently serve as the Project Coordinator at Maple Charter School—a role I moved into in order to have the space to complete research at the site. This role was initially designed to support the implementation of a federal grant which required all teachers to complete professional development opportunities. I was to inform teachers of upcoming events, record attendance and complete reporting for the grant. This role allowed me to be on the school site for approximately 28 hours per week but did not require that amount of time. As a result, the position developed into one where I support the school in several ways.

Due to the number of first year teachers at the site, coming to Maple Charter School with five years' experience placed me in a role as a veteran teacher. This resulted in my appointment as a mentor for new teachers. I accepted this role because many of the teachers needed support and I knew the importance of having a mentor from my own formative teaching experiences. In addition to this role, I also support the school administrator in allocating time, assignments and supervision to support staff. I do not currently support families beyond providing them with school information. I have worked with students at all grade levels as a classroom teacher, substitute teacher, co-teacher and resource support. My experiences at the school site have been somewhat administrative in regards to support staff. However, I believe other roles that place me in the classroom

and as a resource to faculty and staff negated any potential power differential that may have impacted the research.

I do not believe my affiliation with the research site undermined the data. In fact I believe it supported the research as I held a personal investment in creating sound data that created a true picture of Maple Charter School as I school in which I am invested. Though there was the potential for a lack of candor out of concern for job security for myself and my teacher and family participants, I believe my desire for effective change at the school was greater.

In part, my interest in creating change is linked to being an African American woman; it is important to acknowledge my position within the research. My connection to the research topic, culturally relevant pedagogy, *was* personal as I wanted to see the outcome of proper transformative implementation—increased achievement by students of color. Yet, a critical examination of the data was an essential part of understanding the potential limitations to the pedagogy. Therefore, my position did not take away from my ability to remain critical in looking for improper implementation and the potential misappropriation of the term.

In gathering data, my race and age were potential attributes. All of the adult participants were within a close age range of myself. Therefore, I do not think that my age impacted my relationship with adult participants but rather placed us on an equal field. As for the students, my actual age was not a factor as they viewed me as merely an adult. In terms of race, I believe that I was able to gain consent from many families because they felt a level of comfort with me. African American adult participants in

particular, spoke with me on what seemed to be a basis of shared understanding. This was exhibited by common phrases like “you know” which presumed a commonality between experiences. The participants often prefaced comments with “I don’t want to sound racist” but then proceeded to share. My race may have negatively impacted the candor of my Latino participants but I believe having a prior relationship with the participants as well as contact with their children and in some cases a working relationship overcame any potential racial and language divide.

Beyond those barriers, another concern within the research was that my education level was higher than the participants’. This was potentially a factor in relation to educational jargon. In order to ensure clear communication, I wrote and presented both the protocol questions and consent form in what I believed were clearly understood terms, and I clarified as needed. Prior to providing student participants with their consent forms, I had a student read the consent form independently and relay to me her understanding of the document, to ensure that the reading level was appropriate for the age group.

A final concern was that I do not live in the community where the research was conducted and many of my experiences do not match that of the participants. I was born into a middle class family, with both parents in the home, in a suburban area in the Northeast. My work experiences have been somewhat broader. I have taught elementary-aged students in both general education and special education capacities in diverse schools. These schools provided formative experiences with Caucasian students and later experiences with African American and Latino populations. Despite differences between

the participants and me, I believe the combination of my own schooling experiences growing up and teaching in diverse settings enabled me to understand how students of color experience schooling amongst different populations, in different regions, and within socio-economic levels.

Plan for Results

The school has a goal of creating a strong connection between students, faculty, families, and the local community. As research alone cannot be used when learning about students' prior knowledge, inviting families into the conversation can promote participation and enrich the level at which parents stories can impact their children's learning (Auerbach, 2002). According to Simon & Dippo (1986), "To actually *do* ethnography is to engage in a process of knowledge production."(p.195). The findings of this research will be presented to all participants, including the school administrator, in the hopes that they will be used to evaluate current practices at the school and determine how to approach future needs.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

“Charter schools are the perfect example of strange bedfellows.”

—Ms. Tabor

In developing a brief biography for each participant, information was gathered from interviews, focus groups, observations, and school assessment data compiled during the 2007-2008 and the 2008-2009 school years. Students came from private secular schools, private religious schools, traditional neighborhood schools, and the wait lists and classrooms of other established charter schools. As a result, the expectations and perspectives of participants varied. Their impressions of life in school (academic and social), the role of administration, and the practice of teachers are briefly described within the biographies. I have chosen to include this information because it lends itself to a deeper development of the viewpoints, and a better awareness of the positionality and commitment that participants felt toward the school at both the beginning and end of the research timeframe.

Of the student and family participants, only the six students and mothers chosen for individual interviews are included here. The stories of the other participants are equally important but due the breadth of information they encompass it was necessary to maintain a focus on a few stories somewhat representative of the whole. However, demographic summaries for all participants are shown in Appendix A,B, and C .

Students and Families

Maura

Maura is a nine-year-old Latina female who entered Maple Charter School in second grade. The researcher was not her classroom teacher at that time. She is above grade level in Math and at grade level in English Language Arts. She is a former English language learner who is fluent in both Spanish and English. In thinking of her future she wants to be both a veterinarian and a teacher.

Before coming to Maple Charter School Maura was enrolled at a traditional school located near her grandmother's home due to her mother Gloria's desire to keep her out of her home school. Maura enjoyed attending the other school and living with her grandmother in the week but expressed that while there she missed her mother and while with her Mom on the weekends she missed her grandmother. Despite missing her grandmother Maura described the decision for her to come to Maple Charter as "good". Overall she shared "I like school. I get a lot of help here and I have a lot of friends here."

In third grade Maura's relationship with her teacher and other adults at the school site was tied to her perception of being good. She stated in discussing her relationship with Ms. Paige, "I don't really do anything [wrong]. I just tried my best even though she tells me it's wrong every time I fix it; and when my mom talks to Ms. Paige, she doesn't tell her anything because I didn't do anything wrong." Maura still relied on her teachers and other adults but as she transitioned to fourth grade she was better able to articulate herself and the positive traits her teachers had in common. She identified all three of her

teachers (2nd-4th) as having verbalized that they liked smart people and that they liked for “you to be yourself” two characteristics she identified with.

Maura is soft spoken and shy in the class. During both years of this study she was observed to raise her hand for assistance or to share an answer and then lower it if the teacher did not immediately call upon her. In considering this I asked Maura during the 2007-2008 school year how she felt about sharing her voice as a member of the school community to which she stated, “I don’t really think some of the adults really care about our problems.”

Gloria—Maura’s Mother

Gloria is Maura’s mother. She is a 26-year-old Latina female. She is not married, but lives with the father of all four of her children. Two of her children were attending the school site at the start of the research, and three by the conclusion. Her youngest child is not yet of school age. She was born in Mexico but moved to Los Angeles as an infant and was raised in Los Angeles. Gloria has completed up to tenth grade and is in the process of taking classes for child development that would allow her to be a teacher’s aide.

In recalling her experiences growing up Gloria described her neighborhood as crazy stating “... I used to live in this community where you would hear nothing but gun shots every single night um you would see people getting shot every night. I grew up some of my family members getting killed in front of me so it was really hard. It was really hard growing up.” Gloria remembered being able to block out the external world in the elementary and middle grades. She had fond memories of school sharing “The elementary I went to I really really really loved it and I really would have loved my kids

going there because it was a nice school. It was really calm you hardly even [pause] teachers were excellent. It was just so great.”

Her high school experiences were not as fond. After the death of an uncle Gloria described losing interest in academics. She shared:

“When I was in high school I was in high school I was doing good. I had teachers that cared that would help me out but then my uncle which was like a father to me got killed and from there on I just didn’t care. I mean I lived with my real father but he was an alcoholic and to this point is still an alcoholic. I would see violence in my house, Mom and Dad always fighting, he was always drunk. My uncle he was mostly there, you know if you need something I’ll help you out, hey you know let’s do this, more like a father you know I’m there let me know what you need. So, after my uncle got killed on a robbery at his job I just didn’t care. I just let myself go. I basically made my mother take me out of school. If she didn’t take me out of school. There was this law if you kid doesn’t go to school you are going to go to jail so I basically told her you know what “I’m not going to school” so if you want to go to jail I don’t care. In that situation I just didn’t care about anything anymore. I mean my uncle was like [pause] I mean I love my mother and she is the best thing ever but my uncle was always there when I needed something and I needed to talk to somebody [pause] basically he was my everything and he gets killed so I didn’t care anymore.”

Having left school Gloria had her first child at eighteen and had three more children over the next five years. When it came time for Gloria to enroll Maura in school as the eldest child Gloria was not happy with the home-school in her neighborhood. She shared “Basically I had her in a unified school district school [outside of Los Angeles] and she was far apart from me and wasn’t living with me for two years because of the same reason. Schools around here, like the school that I was looking forward into putting her was ghetto and I had understood by people who have their children there that teachers would cuss in front of the kids and use inappropriate language and they didn’t teach kids. So since that was my community school that’s where she had to go and since that was where we had to go that forced me to put her somewhere else” To avoid having to send her there she had Maura move in with her grandmother, Gloria’s mother, who lived in a nicer area of Los Angeles by this time and had a home-school Gloria felt comfortable with. Gloria did this for two years, only seeing Maura on the weekends until she started to feel that she was losing touch with Maura. She attempted to get her children on the wait list for a local charter school and was given information on Maple Charter School.

Gloria chose to enroll her children at the school because she felt she had “no choice. All the elementary unified schools are ghetto”. Having enrolled Maura, Gloria also became a frequent volunteer at the school and was hired as a support staff member during the 2007-2008 school year. Gloria is currently employed at the school site. In her role, she supports teachers with clerical duties such as photocopying, laminating, and simple grading, but does not work directly with children.

In our first focus group meeting Maura shared that overall, she was pleased with her children's progress academically. She only became upset and teary-eyed when recounting that her daughter had experienced an upsetting situation with another student. At the time of the incident, Ms. Tabor spoke with the student and his mother but there were no formal disciplinary actions taken. In sharing this story with the other parents she became overcome and she shared that she "talked to Ms. Tabor [pause] she didn't do anything." However, even with this concern Gloria chose to keep her children in the school.

As fourth grade has ensued for Maura, Gloria shared that she feels positive about her daughter's work. She sees a "little difference" in Maura though she still describes her as shy and having some difficulty with her academic progress. She and her husband encourage Maura and support her as needed. She bases her own knowledge of Maura's progress on the teacher providing notes and observing in the classrooms on a daily basis.

Maura is now in a program to prepare her to be a teacher's aide. When I asked what led to return to school she shared "[My kids] ...they need me to be on top of things and I think by me going back to school and learning whatever I didn't learn back then I can help them out for their future and be a part of their learning"

Clint

Clint is a nine-year-old Latino male who entered Maple Charter in second grade. The researcher was not his classroom teacher. Clint is an English Language Learner at the intermediate level. He is at grade level in Math and below grade level in English

Language Arts. Clint wants to be a scientist when he grows up. In describing his plan to do this he shares that he will finish school, begin to experiment and win the Nobel prize.

In thinking of the private school he attended before Maple Charter he only looks back fondly on the “junk food”. He describes his transition from his old school as smooth stating “I made friends easily.” During the 2007-2008 school year Clint was observed as what I would describe as silly in class. He was often joking with Ms. Paige and attempting to get classmates to laugh. In thinking about his class he shared that he felt happy with the relationship his mother had built with school faculty and staff saying, “My mom and my teacher stay in touch....My mom has got Ms. Paige on her phone on important, important, important, important people.”

During the 2008-2009 school year Clint still shared that he had many friends and is happy at school but also expressed some anxiety about his ability to do well on academic assessments. In class his demeanor was much calmer and he was often observed taking notes as Ms. Seale taught. Though he began the year positively, his relationship with Ms. Seale became strained after his father told him that he thought Ms. Seale was racist. After a meeting held between him, his Mom, Ms. Seale and Ms. Tabor the relationship began to improve.

Clint shared a concern about robberies and shootings in his neighborhood and was unable to think about positive things in his school community. In describing his three favorite things about Maple Charter School he shared “There *was* yoga, there *was* karate and there are a lot of teachers and staff protecting the school”

Kelly—Clint's Mother

Kelly is Clint's mother. She is a thirty eight year old Latina female, and a divorced mother of two. Her other child is too old to attend the school site. Kelly is bilingual but has some difficulty speaking English due to a speech impediment. She is originally from El Salvador. She attended high school up to tenth grade but did not graduate. She is currently employed as a nanny and having worked in the homes of more affluent families, she had a unique perspective on child-rearing habits and community expectations for children across socio-economic levels.

When Kelly was growing up in El Salvador there was a civil war occurring. Her mother left the country to secure a place for them in America just as Kelly was beginning school. In thinking about these experiences she recalls that school was a short day and students had the choice to attend in the morning or afternoon. In thinking about other school memories she only remembers missing her mother during this time.

Kelly recalls how unprepared she was to attend school in Los Angeles when she finally joined her mother. She shared "From El Salvador we belonged to a really small town and you don't learn English until you are in high school. When you're younger you don't have to do it, it was not an option to take it or no. So we didn't know anything and we were all lost." Kelly struggled with being the last member of her family to learn English and had difficulty succeeding academically. It was not until her mother, who was a nanny, brought her to a school in the more affluent neighborhood where she worked that Kelly began to feel proficient with the language. She shared in comparing her old high school to her new school "...they only speak English so then I didn't have no

choice. My Mom took me to her job so then I was able to go to those schools you know where American people go. Few Latins [Latinos] nothing not much. Most were Chinese and White so they were only English.” Even with her English improved Kelly chose to end her education in tenth grade. Though her mother pushed her to stay in school she wanted to enter the work force and eventually her mother allowed her to leave school.

She sees her and Clint as having a shared stubborn nature but that rather than avoiding school he is constantly drawn to learn. She shared “I know that he is a smart little kid and I always tell him you can do better in all areas because he doesn’t stop. He loves reading he loves to talk about things. What I notice with him is he doesn’t accept any no, or I don’t have time for you right now.”

When Maple Charter School opened in 2006, Kelly was in the midst of a divorce and had to pull both Clint and his brother out of the private school they were attending due to financial constraints. Kelly who had been pleased with the private school was looking to find an equivalent school. She was pleased early on with his second grade experiences and developed a strong bond with Clint’s teacher who supported him throughout his parents’ divorce.

In third grade Kelly continued to be pleased with the school. Though she herself described Clint as challenging she shared that “Ms. Paige even though she was really strict she knew how to work him out.” Kelly’s main concern with Clint’s school year was that she felt that the school only communicated with her when things were going bad for Clint and that his positive aspects were never recognized. As a newly divorced mother who generally works during the school day, Kelly expressed that she did not feel like a

“good” mom. She verbalized that she had guilt about not always attending school events and frustration that it was often due to a lack of advance communication from the school about school events.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, Kelly stated that she was considering moving Clint to a different site because she felt he was not supported academically. However, at the time the research ended, she had not yet withdrawn Clint and felt more confident in his relationship with Ms. Seale.

Paul

Paul is an eight-year-old African American male who entered Maple Charter School in first grade. It was determined that he was advanced, and he was promoted a grade at which time the researcher was his second grade classroom teacher. He is not an English Language Learner and is not bilingual. He is above grade level in Math and at grade level in English Language Arts. He has a diagnosed medical condition but had no formal educational plan.

Paul attended Kindergarten at a traditional public school. During the second half of the school year he was expelled and did not complete Kindergarten. Despite this he had a keen memory of his friends and in reflecting he verbalized the anxiety he had when switching schools, stating, “I felt shy and sad because...I thought more kids from my old school would come, but they didn’t and I was sad.”

When Paul first came to Maple Charter it was the result of his mother receiving literature from a local charter school where he was waitlisted. He began first grade during the 2006-2007 school year. He quickly began to exhibit disruptive behavior and became a

challenge for his teacher. During time outs from his class Paul was often sent to my class to take a break. After a few occurrences of this I observed that Paul was able to complete the classwork as well as the second graders despite having only received a half year of Kindergarten and virtually none of first grade. His mother, first grade teacher, Ms. Tabor, and I decided to leave Paul in my class for the remainder of the school year. In asking Paul how he felt about this decision he shared that “First grade was easy so when I switched it just felt right like not too easy.”

In observing Paul after he transitioned to third grade he was observed exhibiting disruptive behaviors. He had difficulty starting assignments and spent class time making derogatory remarks to his classmates. In speaking to him during the 2007-2008 school year Paul shared that he did not feel he had a positive relationship with Ms. Locke because “She takes my stuff and doesn’t listen to me. Like, if I tell her something, she doesn’t listen; she goes to somebody else.” Though he felt that his mother had positive interactions with other teachers he did not feel there was strong oral communication between his mother and teacher, and felt it was related to his telling his mother that Ms. Locke was “mean” to him.

During the 2008-2009 school year Paul was observed to be more on task in class. He was often observed to have friends in his class and was seen working on the rug with them quietly during several different observations. He shared that he liked fourth grade and Maple Charter School because it was “...easy to make friends”. He identified having a positive relationship with Ms. Graye and believed it was because she knew what he liked, “[Ms.Graye] knows I like to read series and books about animals”.

Angel—Paul's Mother

Angel is Paul's mother. She is a thirty nine year old African American female and is a single mother of two. Her other child does not attend the school site due to the available grade levels. Her level of education is unknown. She has a position with the local city government. She was born and raised in Los Angeles.

In sharing about her early schooling experiences Angel did not have many memories. She shared that she attended public schools and that as a student "I was a little shy in everything but most of all my experiences there. I enjoyed it because I had friends." In comparing her own experiences to her children's experiences she shared that she felt they had better teachers and more attention than when she was growing up.

Angel enrolled Paul in Maple Charter School after receiving information from a nearby charter school where he was on the waitlist. In discussing Paul's last school she shared that it "didn't go well" and that she was pleased with her decision to enroll Paul at Maple Charter because she felt that, for Paul, it is "a real good school; it's a challenge, you know, and I think that's what he needs."

Though she was pleased with Paul moving from first to second grade she was not as pleased about his third grade year. Angel shared that she did not feel she had a relationship with Ms. Locke. She identified that most of their communication was when Paul had done something wrong. She expressed concern for the management in the class saying, "I don't know maybe if Ms. Locke can have help in the classroom to help her with the children you know what I'm saying to kind of assist her with the kids cause I know that she does get frustrated with the kids".

In considering her own transition into the school community Angel shared that she was a shy person and that as a result she did not feel she had positive communication with Ms. Locke, Ms. Tabor, or with most of the other school families. In speaking about her relationship with other family members she shared, “I guess I would like sometimes when I come the other parents would say hi kind of like hi bye you know kinda like that I guess I’m sort of like a quiet person and keep to myself but I guess passing them we say hi and bye”. She only identified Janice, a parent participant and school employee, as an individual she felt she had a relationship with.

Angel had clear views about the academic needs of her son. She verbalized that he needed to do hands-on work, needed frequent check-ins, and would benefit from learning “his history as far as [how African Americans], you know, had to struggle to get to now.” However, when asked if she had communicated these viewpoints, she stated, “I’ve never really liked to share my opinions with teachers so I’ll say no.” When asked what could be done at the school level to support her in improving her communication, she expressed, “That’s a good question [pause] maybe if I sort of had a little help or maybe if the person whose talking or what not would sort of ask me then maybe I would speak up and say something then like you know, Angel, what is your opinion then I would say something then.”

John

John is an eight-year-old African American male who entered Maple Charter School in second grade. The researcher was his teacher. He is not an English Language

Learner and is not bilingual. He is far below grade level in both Math and English Language Arts. John is an only child and lives with both parents.

Iris, John's mother chose to enroll him at the site because she did not feel the academics at his traditional school were individualized enough. Though his mother was excited to transition John shared "When I started going to a new school I started afraid because I didn't know much about everybody here". Despite this John assimilated relatively well into the school community perhaps because *none* of the students knew anybody there.

During the 2007-2008 school year John was happy with the relationship he had with Ms. Locke. He was often observed asking and receiving one on one attention during learning activities. John identified himself as having positive academic improvement several times throughout his focus group sharing that he liked the school because he was getting good at things. In thinking about learning experiences he would like to engage in he shared "When we go on field trips, we learn about people."

Though he had a positive relationship with Ms. Locke he shared in thinking about his transition from third to fourth grade that "Ms. Locke was [pause] I can't explain it [pause] Ms. Locke well...I don't know but I like Ms. Seale better" He was observed to be more independent during learning activities in Ms. Seale's class but had difficulty making independent decisions or getting materials independently.

In thinking about what he likes the most about his fourth grade class he shares it is the class expectations and recites the expectations for me. He shares that he tried to follow the expectations but was unsure how his teacher felt about him when he shared

“I think she thinks I’m bad ...because I pulled a lot of cards but I haven’t gotten a referral one time and when my Dad comes to pick me up and one time he picked me up and she said I’m doing okay”. John also shared that he is having trouble making social connections sharing “I don’t have that many friends and some [kids] keep on bossing me around”

Iris—John’s Mother

Iris is John’s mother. She is a thirty five year old African American female, is married to John’s father, and has no other children. Her level of education is some college but primarily nursing school. She works in the medical field as a licensed vocational nurse.

Iris grew up in a suburb outside of Los Angeles. She attended school in what she described as a “lily white” school through tenth grade. She recalled being one of two minority students but described her experiences as positive. In tenth grade Iris’ parents divorced and her family moved to Los Angeles. She described the shift between her schools as dramatic in relation to the quality of education which was diminished. She stated “...believe me it was a culture shock” in relation to the academic expectations and available resources she found in Los Angeles Unified School District schools.

She chose to bring John to Maple Charter because she was unhappy with his old school. Though she believed John had a positive Kindergarten experience, lack of funding at the school impacted the special education services he required at the time, and she felt the teacher did not know her child or his needs. She shared, “I swear to God, they must have had a little thing that they memorized and just read off that said ‘Insert child’s

name here,' cause that's what they did." She learned about Maple Charter from attending cooking classes at the church community center and meeting Janice who informed her that a school was opening in the space.

Iris is pleased with the progress John has made at Maple Charter School. She feels that he has grown socially and made academic progress. Though she herself does not always feel equipped to support John with his schoolwork she makes a point of requesting support from his teachers. During the observation period this was observed when she approached Ms. Seale and requested tutoring for both her and John on concepts relating to decimals.

Iris identified few areas of concern at Maple Charter School but was concerned about the loss of Janice from the office as the sole African American presence there. She missed knowing that watchful eyes were on John even when she could not be at the site. Additionally she was concerned about the visibility of Latino parents volunteering, although she cited that she was at least in part concerned because she was jealous that she did not have more time to offer. She also was concerned about the growth of lower income students in the student population stating "you get ghetto kids you get ghetto parents" whom in her experience had been responsible for disruptive behavior at the school.

Larry

Larry is an eight-year-old Latino male who entered Maple Charter School in second grade. The researcher was not his teacher. He is not an English Language learner

but he is bilingual. He is above grade level in Math and is at grade level in English Language Arts.

Karen, Larry's mother enrolled him at Maple Charter School because she was looking for more of a challenge. In explaining his understanding of this Larry shared, "I didn't learn much over there, so she brought me to this school, and at this [school]...I think I'm learning better." During the 2007-2008 year Larry was observed to be focused during observations. He generally completed class work before his classmates and would be allowed to use the computer to play academic games or would help other students who had not completed their work. In thinking about his class Larry shared that he thought Ms. Locke was a good teacher because she taught him new math skills. As a whole he felt that, in general, there were good teachers at the school who, in his words, "help us and ...encourage us to try and try again."

During the 2008-2009 school year Larry exhibited similar behaviors in terms of his class work. He was often seen taking notes in Ms. Seale's class and completing assignments before other students. He described Math and Science as his favorite subjects and was observed creating and solving his own math problems or completing independent reading when he finished work early. In describing an ideal class he stated "A good class [is one] that doesn't disturb the teachers and doesn't disturb the other people in the group." He was pleased with Ms. Seale's teaching particularly in Math. In describing what he enjoyed in Math he shared that "My teacher, her name is Ms. Seale taught us a lot of different ways to multiply she taught us the traditional way, the lattice

method and the box method. If you can be good at one then you can be good at two and then three.”

Karen—Larry’s Mother

Karen is Larry’s mother. She is a thirty year old Latina female, and is married to Larry’s father. They have two children. Only Larry attends the school site. The other child is not yet of school age. Karen is from Mexico and has resided in Los Angeles for twenty years. She has completed college and was completing her Master’s in Biology degree at the start of this research. Due to finances, she had to put her studies on hold during the 2008-2009 school year, and began working as a teacher’s aide at the research site, supporting teachers in Math and Science.

In describing her own school experiences Karen begins by talking about her fifth grade experience when she first moved to Los Angeles. When I ask her to go further to tell me about school in Mexico she begins by sharing how fortunate she felt to even be able to attend school. She shared “in Mexico kids will kill to go to school but they either cannot go because their parents can’t afford to buy their textbooks and materials or they have to get a little job to help the family.” She recalled learning a lot in Mexico but not feeling prepared to come to school in America.

When Karen moved from Mexico to Los Angeles she was in fifth grade and did not speak any English. The area she moved to did not have English Learner programs and therefore she was placed directly into an English only class. She recalls just paying good attention as the primary reason she was able to learn the Language and keep up-though she added that the addition of a Spanish speaking teacher’s aide joining the class mid-

year was also helpful. Karen knew she had done well because she received several awards at the end of fifth grade-including one for most improvement. She shared that “I was really happy because I had self-esteem issues and that made me feel really proud, like I had a lot of cousins here and they would make fun of me and my brother because we couldn’t speak English so that made me feel really proud”

The following year when Karen moved to middle school the family also moved to a different area of Los Angeles and this allowed her to spend both sixth and seventh grade in more formal English Learner programs before being completed mainstreamed in eighth grade. Karen described her experiences in both middle and high school as “horrible”. She felt that the teachers did not care and did not teach well and that she had to keep herself motivated to go on to college and later graduate school. Karen shared how her father had been similarly motivated to make a better life for himself sharing “My Dad grew up in a very nasty situation in a place where you grow drugs to live but he never did drugs because that’s what he chose. He chose to go to school and get an education even with no one else in his family. He chose something different...but it takes a strong person.”

In college and graduate school Karen had a professor and later mentor who she described as an ideal teacher. This professor provided opportunities to learn content in many different ways in the classroom and opened herself up to spending additional time with any student who still did not understand the content.

In discussing Larry, Karen shared that she enrolled him at the school because “she wanted him to have a challenge”. Karen shared that her decision was the result of

meeting Ms. Tabor and relying on her word that the students would not be bored and would be challenged. She was pleased with his second grade experience but felt that third grade had been academically disappointing. Karen admitted that her own thesis research prevented her from being on campus as much as she would have liked during the 2007-2008 year but based her understanding on two main elements-a drop in Larry's standardized test scores and her own brief observations in the classroom. While observing in Ms. Locke's class she shared that she began to understand why Larry did not seem as motivated as he had in the past and the challenges that Ms. Locke faced due to discipline issues. She stated in relation to discipline, "It's unfair to the rest of the kids that want to learn, because they don't let them, and there's no point in putting down rules if you're not going to follow them." In addition she shared that Larry's own motivation to learn was not as strong as it had been stating "He knows he's smart. I think that is kind of why he is lazy." During the 2008-2009 school year Larry entered fourth grade with Ms. Seale. Karen is happier because she felt that Ms. Seale had high expectations for the students and Karen herself is now a part of Larry's education.

Karen found herself unable to stay in her graduate school program due to financial concerns and temporarily withdrew. She applied for and was hired as an instructional aide at Maple Charter School. In this role she works in a first grade class, a fifth grade class and Ms. Seale's class mainly during Math and Science instructional times. When I asked Karen to describe how if at all her knowledge of the school had changed once she became an employee she shared "I was seeing some of the things before I started working here and now that I work here I understand them even more.

There's a discipline issue...I feel this school has a wonderful theory it's just not being applied correctly.”

Sarah

Sarah is an eight-year-old African American female who entered Maple Charter School in second grade. The researcher was her teacher. She is not an English Language learner and is not bilingual. She has a diagnosed medical condition and a formal academic plan geared towards Mathematical progress. She is far below grade level in Math and below grade level in English Language Arts. Sarah wants to be a teacher when she gets older.

Sarah came from a traditional school where her mother Janice felt the teacher could not pay close attention to Sarah's medical and academic needs. In 2nd, 3rd and not 4th grade Sarah was observed to have two very distinct personalities in the classroom. In the mornings prior to taking her medication she was very outgoing and engaged with all of her classmates as well as adults and other students coming into and out of the classroom. She generally would not be on task until approximately 45 minutes into the school day and would spend this time either supporting the teacher with different chores or by assigning herself different tasks, such as attendance counter, pencil sharpener and classroom greeter. At approximately 9 a.m. Sarah would become reserved and introverted. She became very focused on her class work and would complete all assignments quietly and independently.

Sarah had a smooth transition into the school, in part due to her mother's employment at the site. In 2008, Sarah shared that she felt the school staff and teachers

helped students socially by teaching them to focus on themselves and look for “really good attention” instead of negative attention.

Sarah had a positive relationship with Ms. Locke but had difficulty with the transition between teachers and took a short period of time before connecting to Ms. Locke. In her class she seemed to develop a strong understanding of her educational needs and throughout the focus group during the 2007-2008 she shared that math was an area she needed to get better at. She shared that she needed Ms. Locke to support her stating, “She helps me in Math and she tells me to practice, and I asked her for extra worksheets so I can practice on it.”. In thinking about the best learning experiences in the class Sarah shares that “[Ms.Locke] would help us understand stuff and she would after we finished our work she would let us like draw”

Sarah appears to have had a smooth transition from Ms. Locke to Ms. Graye. Her academic concern for herself remained focus on math and Sarah again relied on teacher input to measure her progress. She shared that when Ms. Graye would give her stars or fours on her paper she knew she was doing well. In 2009, Sarah was able to articulate more clearly how she learned best and her expectation for “caring teachers” during our time together. Sarah explained that she was able to learn best when the teacher, in this case Ms. Graye, first instructed the class, then allowed students opportunities to independently practice and then provided feedback on their work products.

Sarah lives with her mother and younger brother. In talking about things she would like her teacher to know she shared that it was important for the teacher to know that she did not live with her father. Sarah identified herself as “being from Los Angeles”

but also brought cultural artifacts from home from her grandmother that helped her understand the side of her family from New Orleans. In speaking to Sarah about the experience of sharing something about her culture to her classmates she shared "...it seemed interesting to share with my class".

Janice—Sarah's Mother

Janice is Sarah's mother. She is a 31-year-old African American female, and a single mother of two. Her other child is not yet at school age. She has lived in Los Angeles her whole life. Janice has completed college, receiving a Bachelors in Psychology. At the start of the research, she was a founding employee at the school site, as office staff. However, during the 2008-2009 school year, Janice left the site for a position in the social service field.

In sharing her own school experiences she shared, "I bounced a lot from Kinder to fourth" due to family moves but was stable from fifth to eighth grade at a private religious school. While she looks back fondly on her friends and her teachers during this time period she also recalls that while at this school she became math-phobic. She shared that "when I got to fifth grade [math] became really hard for me and the teacher that I had, seeing as I went to a Christian school and at that particular time they had corporal punishment, um I got in trouble a lot for getting wrong answers. I think that kind of scarred me and since then has me a little frightened about math".

In ninth grade Janice returned to public school a transition she described as "extremely scary" because of the rise in class size and larger campus. She did however transition in smoothly do to a family member already attending the high school. It was

not until her junior year that she began having difficulty at the school with bullying. Rather than remain in what she felt was an unhappy situation she attended summer school which allowed her to graduate from high school a semester early and attend a junior college in what would have been the second half of her senior year. While at junior college Janice met Sarah's father and took a break from school. After the birth of both of her children she returned to school and completed her degree.

During the timeframe when Janice was completing her degree she was not working but was an active member of the church where the school is located. Her role on a church board led to her employment at Maple Charter School. She shared "When the principal came to the [school site] I was on a board that was also trying to get a charter school for the church. At that particular time the church was not able to get a charter and she told us she was going to be looking for people to work and if we knew anyone they should apply. At the time I was not working and had not been working for a couple of years and I decided I'll apply for the job and I did and I got it."

Janice was the only founding staff member involved in the daily routines of the school who had a previous relationship with the church in which the school. She had attended the church until a short time before her employment began. Her mother was employed as office staff at the church. She was pleased about this because it allowed for another adult in Sarah's life to be available in situations where she was unable to attend to Sarah.

She chose to enroll Sarah because she did not feel that Sarah was progressing academically due to her medical condition and the limitations of the school she was

attending where the teacher did not have the time to focus on Sarah due to a large class size. In moving Sarah to Maple Charter School she believes that there has been strong academic progress. She attributes this to good teachers that care about the students.

Her concerns with the school all relate to the role of the family. She felt that her voice was not always heard in relation to change at the school. She also identified racial tensions as being an issue both while she was working in the office and since she has been participating in the school as a parent. Her final concern was that she did not feel adequately able to support her child academically and that even though she had attended the schools math night and spoken to teachers did not understand the new math program.

Though Janice no longer attends the church she did feel a commitment to their original goal. She expressed that the school needs to re-evaluate the goals that were established and shared with the church community when the lease was granted. She recalled in thinking back to the opening of the school “It was overwhelming because...I felt like there was, this is being said that this is how the school is gonna go but then when things started to come and happen it was like no I don’t like that let’s change it...There were a lot of things that I feel weren’t completely worked out before the school was open. Of course as a new school you know it’s kind of trial and error and I think some of these things were probably said and not taken to heart or something [pause] it was stressful actually, it was a lot of stress.”

Teachers

Ms. Locke

Ms. Locke was a third grade teacher of record during the 2007-2008 school year. She is a 27-year-old Asian American teacher who was born and raised in Los Angeles. She attended public schools K-12 in the Los Angeles area. In elementary school, she had predominately Latino classmates. However, as a result of participating in a busing program her middle school and high school were predominantly Caucasian and Asian American. Though Asian American, Ms. Locke did not identify herself as different from her Caucasian peers until a classmate asked her, “What type of Asian are you?” This prompted her to reconsider her identity in relation to race. She shared that in considering this question she began to struggle with racial identity and about not feeling “enough” of either the Asian or American sides of her cultural identity throughout her adolescence.

After Ms. Locke attended high school she completed her bachelors’ degree in History and French from a university in eastern California. She decided shortly after graduation that she was interested in teaching and enrolled in post-bachelor’s evening program to receive her teaching credential. Upon completion Ms. Locke decided she wanted to work in public schools where she felt she was most needed. Her first position was as a teacher’s aide at a public charter high school. She felt she really connected with her students and consequently, she stayed on as a teacher after taking her credentialing exams. Once she was comfortable teaching she reanalyzed the type of school she wanted to work in and began to move towards charter schools because she felt that these schools

held an uplifting role in local communities. Ms. Locke left the high school to work in a alternative schools where she served as a lead teacher.

Though in teaching roles, the nature of the oversight and design of Ms. Locke's schools did not compare to that of traditional classrooms, and as a result Maple Charter School was essentially her first traditional classroom teaching position. Ms. Locke joined the faculty mid-year after a teacher left on personal medical leave. In reflecting on why she wanted to work at Maple Charter, Ms. Locke recalled feeling connected to the mission of the school and liking the curricula that were in place.

In considering her experiences in the classroom Ms. Locke shared "The class was really rough and tough and I knew that going in but I wish I had resources or strategies that would really help, someone who could actually fix the problem." During her time at Maple Charter she had the unique experience of picking up where another teacher left off. This knowledgebase strongly informed her understandings of how to create a class community, particularly in cases where the classroom community had broken down due to a lack of consistency from one lead teacher.

Over time Ms. Locke made strong faculty connections and found that she was able to receive academic support from her grade level partner Ms. Paige. Despite this Ms. Locke resigned at the end of the school year, citing a desire to be at a school with a secure contract, a formal union, and a feeling of job security. She moved from the research site to a neighboring independent public charter elementary school under the Los Angeles Unified School District umbrella. This move allowed Ms. Locke to offer insight

into how the dynamics of Maple Charter differed from a neighboring school which was also a useful data point.

Ms. Paige

Ms. Paige was a third grade teacher of record during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. She is a 28-year-old Caucasian teacher. She preferred to identify herself as Jewish and not Caucasian in informal conversation and had a strong interest in assimilating into the Latino culture after several trips to Latin America. Ms. Paige attended public charter schools K-12 in an affluent suburb of Los Angeles. She did not recall any particular academic learning experience that was formative to her but described herself as very focused on athletics throughout her school years.

In considering her school experiences from a social perspective Ms. Paige had much clearer memories. She recalled coming to the conclusion in high school that education was disproportionately designed to benefit Caucasian students. In explaining this Ms. Paige shared that she never considered her own cultural or racial identity as strongly impacting her school experiences until “In high school I took Honors and AP classes and 99% of the students were White or Asian and then I remember I took regular history for one year and 99% of the students were Black or Hispanic. And I feel like its so the education system is so *obviously* preventing certain people to get to the same place as others.” These experiences were also confirmed to her in visiting and seeing the schooling conditions for students in Latin America.

Ms. Paige received her bachelors in Global Studies and her masters degree in Education from a university in northern California. After completing her degree Ms.

Paige wanted to find a position that would allow her to work at a lower income school for students of color. Ms. Paige found a job posting on an online education network. Having met Ms. Tabor and connected to the mission of the school she accepted a position during the 2006-2007 as the third grade teacher. Ms. Paige was one of six founding teachers at Maple Charter School.

When Maple Charter School opened there were only enough third grade students for one class. Therefore Ms. Paige did not have a grade level partner. She described having to figure out the curriculum as a first grade teacher with no partner as “really hard”. She also struggled in dealing with her students emotional needs. She shared “I feel like the first year I had it’s hard for me to not take home what I see in class and what you hear about. Because a lot comes out in the classroom when you spend that much time with the kids you know what they are going through and it’s hard to let that go so I take a lot of that on.”

In her second year of teaching Ms. Paige expressed a concern that her management was still not where it needed to be and that the mood of the class had changed from calm in the Fall to more chaotic in the Spring. Despite this she felt that overall her management and academic content knowledge had improved and that she had the “potential” to be a great teacher.

At the time of the research Ms. Paige was in her second year of teaching and remained at the school site during the 2008-2009 school year as the third grade teacher of record. Her experiences are unique as both a founding teacher and a constant for students in third grade as they transitioned between classroom teachers.

Ms. Graye

Ms. Graye was a fourth grade teacher of record during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school year. She is a 23 year old bi-racial female. Her mother is Caucasian and her father is African American. She grew up in West Los Angeles in a middle class neighborhood. She attended public schools throughout her education most of which she described as demographically being middle class and majority Caucasian. While in a traditional public school Ms. Graye recalled that her parents realized there were better educational opportunities available and switched her to an arts and drama magnet school. Though she could not recall specific teachers or activities that were memorable she described attending this school as an important life experience in that it helped her to see herself as creative and explore her artistic abilities.

At the end of elementary school she transitioned into a college preparatory magnet for both middle and high school. This school provided a more diverse student population both economically and culturally. When speaking about the move from elementary to her middle/high school Ms. Graye noted that she didn't really feel a change between the schools because many of her friends transitioned with her. Ms. Graye commented throughout the interview that she has a "bad memory" and does not remember many of her experiences that led up to her current position at Maple Charter School. However, when we discussed how she understood herself in relation to race she had a clear memory. She stated "That is the one thing I do remember. I never really identified [pause] I identified as being mixed with both races and never felt pressure to be

to [pause] hang out with one group as opposed to the other and I think middle and high school was so diverse that I could hang out with different races and cultures.”

Ms. Graye also recalled that the transition from high school to college was a culture shock for her in that the location of her school was so much smaller and homogenous than Los Angeles. Through her religious affiliation she had learned about the small private college in the Midwest which she chose to attend to see if she could “make it on my own”. After having worked as a tutor, camp counselor and YMCA volunteer Ms. Graye knew when she arrived at college that she wanted to become a teacher. And though she had moved far from home, she shared that it was always her intention to come back to Los Angeles to teach.

In describing how she came to Maple Charter School, Ms. Graye described knowing a hired teacher and relying on their knowledge of the school as her main factor. She did not have a strong understanding of the philosophy of the school when she first applied and was hired, having really only discussed the curriculum with the other teacher. Though it seemed she ended up at the school by chance she shared that she was pleased because she wanted to teach minority students. In describing why she shared that she wanted to teach a certain population of students she stated “Because any experiences I’ve had working with kids I feel that I connect better with minorities. It can be minorities in race or class or what not. I don’t know. I just feel I’m supposed to work with them.”

Ms. Graye describes her first year at Maple Charter School as challenging. When asked to further explain this she expressed that the students brought a lot of emotions to school that she did not know how to handle. In reflecting on how she managed what she

felt was a difficult situation she recalled that "...they brought a lot of their issues at home with them their family, their environment...we had a lot of meetings that year with that class and I allowed them to take any breaks that they needed. I would have kids sleeping just basically because they couldn't stay up [pause] You could tell their body needed it and they felt better when they were able to take that time and just rest...I gave them the opportunity to share but not share like too much. But I think the class meetings helped because it helped them to feel that other people were experiencing the same thing, that they weren't always alone. I never really gave them any advice or told them what they could or could not do. I just allowed them to speak"

In her second year as a teacher Ms. Graye feels that she is doing better and has created a space where the kids are learning similar to how her father raised her "My Dad was always really strict with us and didn't let us get away with anything and also gave us our space to do our thing. I think that's a lot of what I do". She believes that she allows students freedom to make choices in their daily activities sharing "They love to be able to design what they want to do and I like giving them that choice. All throughout the day it's me telling them what to do and how to do it I think they like the idea...it gives them a chance to be leaders of the class and gain respect for their classmates"

Though she is happy at Maple Charter she is critical of discipline at the school and still does not have a clear understanding or connection to the school philosophy and some of the curricula utilized. When thinking about the school in relation to its goals she stated that "I don't know [the mission is] tough with this demographic...with my class with the kids that I feel are a higher level I don't feel as if they are being challenged

enough as they could be and I on the [pause] there are so many low ones. I don't even know how it is for them. They are so low even with the curriculums." Ms. Graye sees that she as the teacher has a role in changing the achievement of her students but ties her ability to administrative support and feels that without it the school will never make progress with the students.

Ms. Seale

Ms. Seale was a fourth grade teacher of record during the 2008-2009 school year. She is a thirty year old African American woman. She along with Ms. Graye took over where Ms. Locke and Ms. Paige left off with the student participants. Coming to Maple Charter School Ms. Seale had received her Masters in Instructional Leadership with a focus on Elementary Education and had taught for three years in a large urban district outside of California, Ms. Seale was the only teacher in this study to have come to Maple Charter with previous teaching experience as a traditional classroom teacher.

Closely linked to her teaching philosophy were her own schooling experiences. From Kindergarten to first grade Ms. Seale attended a "store-front" school focused on Afrocentric teaching philosophies. In relating how she came to the school Ms. Seale shared "Initially the school started as a Saturday program for parents and their kids and there was a lot of parental support for it and they opened up a school in the storefront that went up to third grade". Amongst other memories of this school Ms. Seale recalled referring to her teachers as "mama" and "baba", learning Swahili as a second language and singing an anthem that described the colors associated with Africa (red, green and

black). Ms. Seale also shared how the teachers and students took community based field trips and interacted outside of school within an African dance circle.

When her family moved at the end of first grade Ms. Seale attended a public school which she described as different. “It was a weird adjustment ...at my school we did different things. We did the pledge of allegiance which I didn’t know and all the America songs. We didn’t call our teachers mama and baba....it was hard at first just because like I didn’t know. I came to the school and like everyone knew to stand up and to say the pledge of allegiance and kind of just took for granted that everyone kind of knew it and I didn’t.”

In middle and high school Ms. Seale recalls there being a diverse student population but felt that once she reached college looking back “...I felt like high school was a waste of time and I would say that...I couldn’t remember what it was about high school that was helpful to me because it wasn’t really until college that I learned how many things I could learn on my own”. She attended a historically black university and felt that was when she realized how responsible she was for her own learning. In addition to expanding her academic knowledge Ms. Seale found that her college experience removed her from the realities of society. She shared that at her university you “kind of forget about the rest of the world you go to get on the red line and you go wow look at all the white people you just kind of forgot we had white teachers but there weren’t a lot of white students and you just kind of forget... that there are other kinds of people until you see them”.

Ms. Seale realized she wanted to be a teacher in two ways. She recalled feeling proud when she tutored students in Math something she did throughout her schooling experiences. Additionally, Though she had planned to go into television writing she recalled that she wanted to write a show like “The Cosby Show” which she felt was a great representation of what African Americans could and should be but realized she could end up typecasting people of color into characters she felt poorly represented minority races. As she moved onto graduate school she found herself to be in the minority-“one of two” a feeling that placed her out of element. Though her professors were of many different races she remembered hearing from her classmates that this was the first time they had a black teacher and feeling bad for them. She shared “that was weird to me at first because I couldn’t image that it would take me until graduate school before I ever had a black teacher...it seemed odd because it wasn’t a part of my educational experience”.

She shared that “I didn’t know Maple Charter School demographics before I came here it just worked out like that but I wanted to teach at a school that was predominantly Black that was important to me I went to public schools my whole life...and for the most part I was around um Black students. And places that I’ve lived for the most part I’ve been around Black people and I wanted to teach at a school that was predominantly Black because I wanted to serve as a positive role model. And I always thought that if I knew Spanish I would teach at a school that was predominantly Latino. It was and it *still* is very important to me to teach students of color”.

Once in the classroom Ms. Seale shared that she determined that the majority of students were below grade level. She felt that the best way to remedy this was through challenging the students with above grade level work explaining “When I started learning about the different philosophy Vygotsky was the one I was most interested in and his zone of proximal development and I thought of it as a little dare.”

Administration

Ms. Tabor

Ms. Tabor is a 44-year-old Caucasian woman and the lead administrator at Maple Charter School. She was born and raised on the East Coast where she attended public schools K-12. The schools she attended were approximately 75% Caucasian, 10% African American and 10% Latino. The schools were located in middle to upper class neighborhoods. Of these schools Ms. Tabor looks back most fondly at elementary schools. She has shared that she enjoyed doing topic research and as her school had a team teaching philosophy focused on research projects and oral reports she enjoyed being engaged academically there.

After high school Ms. Tabor attended a small private college. She took courses on race in America and one class, which was taught by a well known school reformist made a mark on her. The course led her to reanalyze her thoughts. She realized that her “... interests in equity played out most prominently in our school system.” Through her connection to her college professor and her completion of her Masters degree in Educational Administration and Policy Analysis she became a part of the school reform movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Ms. Tabor worked for many years in school reform nationwide. In this role she worked for several corporations that went into schools and worked with teachers to establish what were considered best practices. These experiences led her to feel that many teachers and schools could not be effectively changed once structured incorrectly. Though she did not have any classroom teaching or school leadership experience this belief and her reform experience led her to decide to found a school. In developing the school Ms. Tabor focused on what she believed worked best for school improvement, namely caring and rigor. In explaining this she shared she focused on caring because of relevant research; she knew that students who felt cared for “learn better and stay out of trouble.” She focused on rigor in terms of academic achievement. She felt that the standards and learning concepts needed to be organized in a meaningful way that she was not seeing in other schools.

In choosing the location for the school Ms. Tabor wanted a space that would bring a demographic diversity to the school. She found the current school site while attending a city planning meeting held at the church community center. In reflecting on her progress as a school leader she acknowledges that not having been a teacher she had never intended to run the school alone. The teacher that was intended to assist Ms. Tabor in running the school was not able to accept the position at the last minute.

As far as her progress as a school leader when asked to self-assess her progress over three years Ms. Tabor shared the following:

“Dissatisfied [laughs] no I guess there are two things I feel more comfortable with that I didn’t feel comfortable with when starting. One is just knowing everything like the

dailyness of school, in terms of like what has to happen compliance wise what has to happen just calendar wise just having never run a school all those things were a little bit of a mystery to me like I knew what had to happen but its different than doing it...the main learning I've had is how to deal with kids on the emotional and social things like I had very little direct experience with kids I had only worked with teachers and the district people and don't have any kids of my own so like the tantrums [laughs] all those things I just feel like much more like not that I'm perfect at all and not that sometimes I don't totally mess up but I feel I have a little bit of a bag of tricks. I have a sense working with [the psychologist and the psychology intern] and seeing how [the researcher and former second grade teacher] work and seeing how other people work to really handle kids well I think it's nice to know, okay this is doable I can do part of it I won't be able to do it all the time really well but at least I can so you know that was a relief also to not that we were not totally damaging children in relation to their strange outbursts..."

As far as the progress of the school, based on what she considers to be the "minimum" standard-that is strong finances, strong teacher retention and steady student enrollment-she feels the school has been successful. However, in considering the success of the school in comparison to initial vision being realized, Ms. Tabor believes that, "We are on the path...and we haven't abandoned the path." which she considered a positive achievement.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” –Maya Angelou

Introduction

At the inception of Maple Charter School, the executive director and the initial development team wrote the vision statement which was to define the growth of the school. The vision statement depicted a school designed “to prepare students in grades K-8 to use their minds well and become capable, caring citizens. [Where] students will learn academic knowledge and skills in a personalized learning environment that promotes health, creativity, and understanding of the big ideas that shape our world.” Further, in developing longterm plans for the school the overarching goal (as described in marketing material) to which Maple Charter School strived was determined “to be a caring community of learners for students, parents, teachers, and staff. We define a caring community as one in which we build caring and supportive relationships, have a sense of common purpose, are relevant to students' developmental and socio-cultural needs; and provide all stakeholders with opportunities to meaningfully participate in problem-solving and decision-making.”

The vision and goals of the school represent fundamental elements of education that have been shown to be attainable in school settings. Therefore, in beginning this research my initial intent was not to examine all of the school-wide practices that were part of daily life. Rather, the intention was to pinpoint and examine the understandings, perceptions and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy as they related to the

longterm goals of the school. However, within the research process, the role of charter school practices, was revealed to be influential in the shaping of both the classroom and school dynamic. This realization alongside recent charter school research that reveals challenges to the autonomy that charter schools rely on in order to make their visions and goals come to life combined to create a need to present a deeper look at charter school life in addition to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Within this chapter the data is divided into two main sections. The first section-titled “*From Theory to Practice-Curricular and Administrative Practices*” develops the history of the school up to the time when the analysis of culturally responsive pedagogy began. This section reviews how school-wide practices were created and developed over time followed by an analysis and critique of how well these practices have fared. The second section titled, “*Are we there yet? An Analysis of the Progress of Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices at Maple Charter School*”, takes a deeper look at the highlights and challenges four teachers face as they work to provide quality education to students. The teachers’ understanding and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy will be examined and critiqued using a critical race theory lens. Within both sections the students and families provide narratives of their school experiences. Their voices, as well as theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, combine to support, explore, and inform the findings.

From Theory to Practice-Curricular and Administrative Practices

Starting a Charter School

Participating in the first year at Maple Charter required both a commitment to educational change and a desire to depart from the status quo. The founding teachers relied on the paper presentation of the school and the words of the founding executive director, Ms. Tabor, in order to make their “school choices.” Having interviewed with Ms. Tabor in various locations around Los Angeles, I and five other founding teachers signed on without seeing the potential school site or students. Similarly, many parents chose to enroll their students based on their understanding of the school, without knowing which staff would be hired or the way in which classrooms would exist at the school site.

Our experience of starting a charter school may have looked very similar to many other “grass roots” projects where the staff and their families are hands on, but for many of us it was unique. Together, we literally built our large rooms into classroom spaces, doing everything from painting the walls to building the furniture. This initial experience was particularly important to Ms. Tabor because she felt that the “adults have to feel like a community, to share that with the kids.”

The first six weeks of school were methodically planned in terms of creating a cohesive caring community for the students, all of whom were coming from different backgrounds and schools. This involved planning class meetings, class discussions, and community building activities designed to build trust and friendship. However, noticeably absent from these first weeks of curriculum planning was a strong academic structure, which teachers soon found was a great disadvantage. We uniformly agreed that

structuring the planning time around community building rather than academics was a mistake, and the pressure built quickly to “catch up” students, most of whom, teachers discovered, were below grade level.

The other issue that became apparent in the first few weeks of school was classroom management. At the time, the school had no formal classroom management philosophy. Teachers were encouraged to come up with their own philosophies that did not include external rewards, but rather focused on intrinsic motivation. The veteran teachers had the most success with this, while the new teachers were left floundering for help in managing their students.

By the end of the first year together, there were many regrets, as well as areas the teachers felt they could improve upon, but we believed collectively that we had done the best job we could with the resources and support we had as a starting school. The faculty often discussed the reality of our actual experiences compared to our understanding of the school when we first signed on as teachers. When discussing this, a general catchphrase that was used was that if nothing else, “On paper we look great.”

Developing a Charter School

Oversight and Governance

Board of Directors. Maple Charter is an independent charter school of the Los Angeles Unified School District and is overseen through the governance of a board of directors. The school is a non-profit as well as a public entity. The board of directors, serve as the fiduciary responsible party. The board is made up of four members all of whom were embedded in the school’s initial development team. These members come

from a variety of career backgrounds that represent experiences in the legal, health and education fields. The board wrote the school charter along with Ms. Tabor, the executive director and founder of the school. The primary roles of the board are monitoring expenses, creating school policy, and evaluating Ms. Tabor.

The board does not include any teachers, students, families, church members, or community members. In explaining the choice of board members, Ms. Tabor, executive director, cited adherence to Senate Bill 790² and the recommendations of the Los Angeles Unified School District charter office in requesting that Maple Charter School have a disinterested board to avoid conflicts of interest. The board meetings are generally held every other month at the school site, during the school day. On the morning of the meeting the agenda is always posted on the door of the main office.

In order to provide communication between the board and school community members there were to be three advisory groups designed to look at achievement progress, culture and community, and programmatic areas. These groups were to be made up of school community members and at least one member from what was to be a seven-member board of directors. The first year at Maple Charter, three advisory groups existed. However, by the 2008-2009 academic year, the number shrank to one advisory group. In discussing why the groups were reduced over time, Ms. Tabor, executive director identified low attendance and overlapping themes as the cause.

The current parent advisory group is made up of 18 parents (2 representatives from each of the 9 classes). These parents also serve as “room parents” and were chosen

² The correct legislation is Assembly Bill 544

by the teachers from a list of interested family members. The advisory group, meet once a month at the school site. Meetings are held in the evening. One family member records the notes from the meeting. These notes are reported to the board of directors by Ms. Tabor.

In examining the structure of the board of directors it mirrors the structure of corporate boards. The boards are similar in that both serve as a fiduciary trust, evaluate the executive officer, and self-assess their performance. Though appropriate in the business world, this structure has created a glaring power dynamic which has yet to be addressed. As a result of the uneven distribution of power (Figure 6), school community members have been essentially excluded from the decision and evaluation progress at the school.

In determining the visibility of the board, I consulted my field notes and spoke to school faculty on their knowledge of the names of board members, their visibility, and their role at the school. In doing this, I found that no faculty could identify all four board members or accurately identify their roles at the site. Additionally, I learned that the board of directors had not observed in any classroom since the 2006-2007 academic year, the first year the school opened.

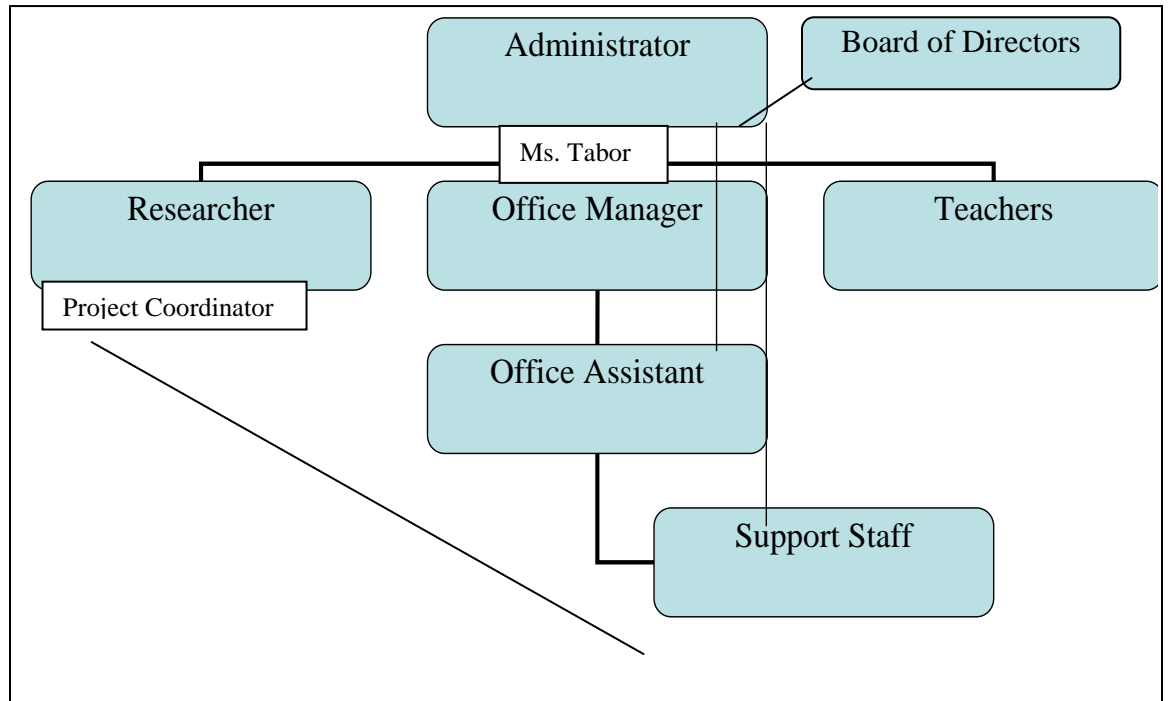


Figure 6. Distribution of power at Maple Charter School.

One faculty member shared the following statement about the board which generally summarized the responses of her coworkers:

I am not clear on the role they have in our school. I can only assume from what the director has mentioned in past conversations. I believe they approve the school budget and employees salaries. I am not certain about this. It seems to me that the board comes into the discussion every time we need to negotiate salaries or improvements for our school. “I will have to ask the board.” or “I am not sure the board will approve that.” In my opinion this is quite suspicious. Their actual job remains a mystery to me.”

The unease expressed by this faculty member points to a lack of transparency and collaboration in the governance of the school. The ideology that has resulted is that, there is the “board” and then there is everyone else. It appears that by merit alone they have arrived where they are, but having been chosen from an initial development group they had already been placed at the forefront of the school. Moreover, it raises questions as how and to what extent the board can effectively create policies and evaluate the progress of the school and Ms. Tabor without participating in the school community. Ms. Tabor shared that the board is informed by the outcomes of parent advisory groups. However, these groups even in her own words have been downsized and relegated over time and appear to be at this point merely a list of names on a page. During the timeframe of this research, there had never been a formal invitation for any faculty or staff to attend meetings. Further, the board of directors meeting time during the school day actually prevents most faculty, staff, and school community members from attending. Like all school boards in California these meetings should fall under the provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act (Gov. Code, § 549501). The purpose of the act was to ensure that the public could participate in meetings and that the time, location and agenda of meetings was public knowledge posted within 72 hours of a meeting. The failure of Maple Charter School to do so places them out of compliance with legal requirements and leads to questions as to the need to hold meetings in what appears to be a secretive and non-public manner. An additional concern, particularly as board meetings are not being held publically, is that as a whole, no board members live in the community nor do they have children who attend the school. These facts alone make them disinterested from the

school. There is nothing preventing them from taking the initiative to speak to the students, families and teachers at the school to find about their experiences in the public entity they oversee. Yet, their actions of coming to the school, speaking to the one administrator and leaving do not reflect that they care to.

Parent Advisory Group. Maple Charter School is failing in its goals to create a common sense of purpose by making decisions and solving problems collaboratively. This failure was manifest most clearly when I attended and facilitated a parent advisory group meeting with Ms. Tabor on the issue of discipline, one of the most common concerns at the school site.

The group met for the first time in December 2008 to establish the structure of meetings, identify roles (time keeper, recording of minutes) and upcoming agenda items. At this meeting Discipline was put on the agenda for the January 2009 meeting. On the morning of the meeting, office staff was observed calling the 18 parent advisory group members to remind them of the time of the meeting, but there were no formal notices displayed within the school building, alerting other family members to attend.

Five family members attended this meeting. During my focus groups, we sat intimately in a circle or close together and once started, I served less as a facilitator than as a witness to the discussion. I anticipated a similar meeting but found it to be quite different. When I arrived, the room was set up in a manner where Ms. Tabor and I faced the families from across a table. Rather than a discussion, we explained the choice of Responsive Classroom and elements of it being implemented at the school to the listening families. We then asked for questions and comments. There were two questions. The first

was whether the after-school staff had to follow the same school philosophy (to which we answered yes). The second question had no context to the conversation (as it was a request for field trips to be longer).

This meeting was an opportunity for discussion about discipline concerns and policies at the school. However, there was no opportunity for attendees to share their stories or make suggestions from their standpoints, as the meeting started off with an official stance, from official people sitting officially. The minutes from this meeting were written by a family member, but the presentation of the minutes to the Board of Directors is done by Ms. Tabor. From an ethical standpoint, this is problematic in that there is no way to determine what information Ms. Tabor ultimately shares. The structure of the board and advisory groups does not allow for a system of checks and balances. Further, it highlights the abundance of power and the absence of school community voices at Maple Charter School. Ms. Tabor, in allowing the role of the board to develop in this way, has created a barrier between herself and the benefit of any critical examination that individuals outside of the board may offer. The literature review identified that particularly due to the lower levels of administrator experience, charter school leaders need to be able to collaboratively involve teachers in decisions and create a professional community that supports the ongoing desire for professional development by school faculty (Cannata, 2007; Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). Ms. Tabor, as the school leader, should set the example for professional development by also looking to develop her own craft and learn from those around her whom have more experience in the classroom and with child rearing than she does.

Selling the Dream Teacher and Student Recruitment

Student. When Maple Charter School opened in 2006 there were 106 students in grades K-3. These students came from a variety of schools, through four main recruiting actions. Local Head Start programs were contacted to distribute school information for incoming kindergarten students. Local charter schools agreed to send information on Maple Charter School to students on their wait lists. Office staff handed out school information to parents outside of local public schools. Finally, church members provided school information and “word of mouth” to individuals attending their community center. Though Maple Charter School has not done extensive marketing, the enrollment has grown over the past three years to 186 students in grades K-5. Almost all new students come to the school through the four previously described avenues, or through a family member already attending the school.

In discussing the choice of moving to a charter school, family members loosely described charter schools as a place for “something different.” They believed that charter schools provided greater academic challenges and that the teachers were more involved with their students. Some families also equated charter schools with the qualities they knew of in small schools and used the terms interchangeably.

Charles (a parent) shared:

I think there are a lot of advantages to a school being small. Kids get more individual attention. You know the principal can learn every kid’s name. I think that there’s a lot to be said for that. It means something and has value when the

principal and all the administrators and teachers can get to know the kids and give them enough attention.

Particular to Maple Charter, families felt that the more intimate atmosphere of the school allowed for the personalization needed to help students develop both academically and socially. Family members often equated the quality of learning at Maple Charter to private or admission-based schools and believed that students were learning more than they would at neighboring schools. They also cited the ability to build continuity between grades as a strength. In describing her decision to enroll her student at the site, Iris shared:

I love the teachers. You've got some really, really smart, creative teachers who know how to pull stuff out of the kids and be creative and meaty, and just introduce new and different things than other schools, except maybe a high-priced private school.

But, unlike Iris, not all participants had specific reasons for enrolling at Maple Charter. Angel, a parent, when talking about her decision to enroll her student at the school, stated:

He was on a list for a [neighboring charter school] but I guess at the time they didn't have any openings, so that's when they sent me a letter for this school. So I came to the meeting and, you know, the other parents and everything, and they talked about the school and it seemed like a pretty good school, so from then on he's been going here ever since.

It's important, particularly when thinking of underserved populations, to consider why charter schools are flourishing and how well they actually serve the communities in which they exist. A review of the literature found that charter schools were most often opening in lower-income areas and serving students of color. The demographics of Maple Charter are no different. In a sense these schools provide an exciting opportunity to combat the inherent racism within many schools. They continue to open and enroll students because they meet a community needs for better schools. However, these schools run the risk of co-opting the term "charter" if they are run no differently than traditional schools and maintain the same structural and academic issues that have left students of color in these communities behind academically.

The office staff distributed fliers at neighboring schools, marketing the school as essentially a better option. Though it is generally not a typical practice to base educational choices on a flier, for Maple Charter this plan of action initially worked. The easiest explanation for this is that students and families have bought into an ideology of what charter schools represent even before seeing evidence of any success. This supports the concerns of those who oppose charter schools and school choice that are concerned that low-income families may not have the knowledge base or resources to seek out or transport their children to the most appropriate schools (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). As indicated in the literature review there are concerns that in the face of budget and financial constraints schools will rely more on persuasive advertisements to gain easy to educate students and less on implementing resources to support the needs of academically diverse student groups (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). This is particularly timely for the

position and timing of this research, as California, is the midst of an extensive economic meltdown which is heavily impacting upon funding for Education. The ability to maintain high academic outcomes with minimal financing may push schools to filter their student population.

Adding to this circumstance at Maple Charter School are families whom have expressed a concern to maintain what they see as the high quality of charter schools. The families expressed a sensitivity to the type of children and families that should receive the same “privilege” of attendance that they have. Gloria stressed that enrolling her children was not so much a choice *for* Maple Charter so much as a choice *against* the other “ghetto” schools. This sentiment was expressed throughout the focus groups and interviews; that coming to a charter school means you are moving away from the “ghetto” schools and the students and families associated with them.

The attention paid to “who was” or more importantly “who was not” a charter school family revealed that many families desired a more stringent enrollment process, and did not understand that charter schools are public schools. Iris (a parent) shared, “I love this school. If we could get the little crackhead parents out of here, we would be all right.” Karen, a parent, in speaking about discipline stated, “I thought that here they were going to take students that actually wanted to learn but they take everybody. I thought it would be you want to learn I want to teach you. You don’t want to learn I don’t want to teach you. Goodbye. Go to the public schools they have to take you I don’t”. Students who see and hear their families discuss charter schools in this way begin to see their

enrollment as a special privilege. Robert, a student, shared with me that he attended Maple Charter School because he believed that he received a scholarship to do so.

Linking the idea of charter schools with privilege points to school community members accepting the majoritarian stories proposed by the dominant ideology of society, validated or not. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) posited that these stories are told by all members of society and that even people of color, who have heard the stories, believe them, and share them with others. The desire is so great to attend a charter school, that in urban areas, the success of the school seems to be as much a testament to the number of students on the wait list as they are to the academic aptitude of their students of color. Thus, whether intended or not, charter schools tend to pit those who most need good schools against each other. Coming off a wait list, new charter school families do not want to return to their home schools and therefore may be less critical of their new charter schools. This stance is problematic in that it neither supports charter schools in providing a competitive alternative to traditional schools nor does it push traditional schools to improve their standards.

By providing an alternative option for some students charter schools are creating some effective change. Students in many of these schools receive a better educational experience than they may otherwise have received. Yet, there is so much hope misplaced by students and families on the charter school promise that the underlying issue of how traditional public schools can be improved is lost. Additionally, the reaction of the families at Maple Charter School only further support those who oppose charter schools and school choice because of concerns that low-income families may not have the

knowledge base or resources to make ideal educational decisions for their children (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002). Many of these families because they are so concerned with the “promise” may not look deeply into the ideology of the school and may further resegregate schools by working to isolate and push out students and families that they do not believe should have the same privilege as they.

Teacher. New teacher applicants come to Maple Charter School in different ways. There is no search committee, but job fairs, internet postings, random resumé mailings, and word-of-mouth create a steady flow of applicants. The first step in the hiring process is an introductory meeting with Ms. Tabor during which the vision of the school is described. When Ms. Tabor is satisfied that the applicant is comfortable with the ideals of the school and is a potential candidate, he or she is introduced to their potential grade level partner and often, near the end of the 2007-2008 school year, to me.

After the first contact, applicants are asked to come to the school to formally meet the staff, have a building tour, and complete a demonstration lesson. Depending on the time of the lesson, the applicant may also be invited to sit down with the teachers for coffee or lunch, to allow them time to ask “teacher” questions away from Ms. Tabor. During the demonstration lessons, generally Ms. Tabor, myself and one or two teachers (those available due to their schedules) would observe. After the lesson, the applicant would be encouraged to express how he or she felt the lesson went and answer any questions the staff may have.

By this stage most of the candidates have been narrowed down to novice teachers. During the past three years, 50% to 75% of the staff has had one year of teaching

experience or less (Table 1). As Ms. Tabor makes the final hiring decision, I asked her about this trend. She shared that though she was not opposed to hiring veteran teachers, she found that it was “hard to get veteran teachers to shift, just because we all want to do the same thing,” and therefore, she found it is easier to begin with a new teacher and start him or her “off in a certain direction.”

From a Critical Race Theory perspective the placement of largely first-year teachers at the school is a disservice to the students. Having worked at other school sites, I know that the ability to make any positive progress can be impacted by having even one individual who is not “on board,” and perhaps Ms. Tabor’s decision to allow the replication of similarly positioned and likeminded teachers to continue is a progressive and important one. However, many of the students are testing below grade level, which mirrors the lower achievement and graduation levels historically connected to students of color in low socio-economic levels. Novice teachers, having just completed their own schooling are often not in a position change to the outcomes for their students.

The reality expressed by many new teachers at the site is that the academic needs of the students are greater than their expertise. Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, having coming to the school in her fourth year of teaching shared, “I don’t think this is an easy school to do your first year of teaching at just because the things that they will teach you in a program about teaching about the classroom, all of that goes out of the window your first year.” Yet, the hiring of novice teachers is beginning to appear to be a school-wide structure. The sense of community Ms. Tabor is creating between faculty members, though ideal, will not assist students in becoming academically strong. There is

importance to the good of the community. However, once the community has been created there needs to be a point at which the school also serves as an establishment for learning.

Though the process of hiring novice teachers is a choice at Maple Charter School, it has also become the norm for many urban districts and start up charter schools. This development is a combination of finances, need and school philosophy. In my own experiences I have been hired for two large urban districts without establishing any expertise as a teacher. In both cases, I was not even living in the states I was hired in but there was so great a need for teachers to work in urban areas particularly at a low rate (being novice) that novice teachers are easily hired. Additionally, having watched the direction of the charter school movement in California it appears that novice teachers are the hiring base. For charter schools the choice is more about the opportunity to mold novice teachers to fit the philosophy of the school. In either scenario, there are important implications that have not yet been considered. The most important of which is that this trend presents an issue of social justice as the students in these schools do not have time for their teachers to have on the job training.

Table 1

Summary of Teachers by School Year and Years of Teaching Experience

School year	Number of teachers	Teachers per years of experience		
		0 years	1 year	2-5 years
2006-2007	6	3	0	3
2007-2008	8	3	3	2
2008-2009	9	3	2	4

Curricula Choices, Implementation and Outcomes

When Maple Charter School opened there were five adopted curricula: two for Language Arts, one for Math, one for Science, and one for Social Studies, as well as multi-disciplinary teacher-created social studies units that integrated the arts. Based on her previous school reform experiences, Ms. Tabor, executive director, chose curricula she felt had research-based track records of raising achievement levels for student groups similar to those of the incoming school population. This held true for all curricula with the exception of Text Talk and Singapore math. These curricula were piloted by one teacher, who then offered her opinions on their use and effectiveness before they were adopted school-wide. A brief description of curriculum design and analysis of curriculum implementation and outcomes follows. The analysis is based on data collected from observation and school participant experiences.

Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS).

Phonics is completed through, Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words also known as SIPPS. Students are given a fluency exam when they enter the school to determine at which level they should begin the SIPPS program: Beginning, Extension, or Challenge. In the primary grades (K-3), implementation occurs daily between 9 and 10 a.m.

Primary teachers are trained to teach SIPPS in a militaristic way. The lessons are highly scripted and include pre-determined sounds, blends, sight words and word lists to review with students. One of the more prominent routines of the program is reviewing words chorally. When reviewing words, either written on the board or viewed on a flash card, the teacher repeats, “Read, Spell, Read” to the students as many times as needed for them to properly read and spell the word chorally. In addition to calling out, there is a very stylized way of running your finger under the word as it is read, that is a hallmark of the program.

The Beginning and Extension levels are geared towards understanding letter sounds, short and long vowel sounds, consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words, sight words, and typical blends. The Challenge level is geared towards putting the fluency skills students have learned towards reading multi-syllabic words, and using the meanings of root words to define new and unusual words. Beginning and Extension groups generally have 8 to 10 students, but Challenge groups can have up to 25 students each. Teachers were responsible for teaching one to two different student groups based on the number of groups needed as students were regrouped over time. While teachers

worked with fluency groups, students were assigned independent activities which included worksheets and independent reading.

Student progress is monitored by frequent oral reading tests between lessons, and daily spelling tests after lessons. Students can be regrouped to higher and lower groups at any time during the program based on their progress and are generally able to complete the program by third grade. Therefore, though some fourth and fifth graders may attend SIPPS, fourth and fifth grade teachers are not trained in and are not responsible for teaching phonics.

Reader's Workshop. Reader's Workshop is a pilot curriculum which provides the overarching focus for each four to six week unit. Within the unit the teachers use two different curricula designed to teach reading strategies and new vocabulary, and improve students' reading comprehension. These are Text Talk and Making Meaning which follow essentially the same structure. Each lesson is meant to last approximately three to four days. On the first day, the lessons begin with the students looking at the cover of a trade book and making predictions about the story. The teacher then moves on, explaining to students which reading strategy they will be focusing on, (Reading strategies include predicting, questioning, using context clues and visualizing.) or reviewing new vocabulary words. This is followed by a read-aloud of the book. As the book is read aloud, the teacher stops to read scripted questions designed to enhance the learning experience of the students by drawing out important details and facts from the story. On the subsequent days of the lessons, the story is reread and vocabulary and/or reading strategies are reviewed. The students are then asked to "show what they know"

by either demonstrating the reading strategy effectively in a book at their level, or by successfully completing a vocabulary quiz that provides students with the word and context and requires them to identify the use of the word as Correct or Incorrect.

Writer's Workshop. Writing is taught in a workshop atmosphere. The curriculum is designed to spiral between grade K-2 and again between grades 3-5. There are six books of study within each spiraled curriculum. The workshop follows a standard routine. The teacher begins the lesson with a brief connection and review to a past lesson before teaching a new mini-lesson to students, focused on one way to enhance their writing for that day. This may include adding additional details, tightening up the amount of information provided in a given story, or making sure the illustrations appropriately match the narrative. In the younger grades, students are encouraged to first draw pictures that go with their story, and then utilize the pictures as a guide for writing the story. In third grade, students move from writing a few sentences across pages to writing more text on a page with less illustration as the year progresses.

After the mini-lesson, the students have an opportunity to write independently, followed by a time for the teachers to conference and check in with individual students. At the conclusion of the workshop, the teacher strategically presents the work of one or more students to exemplify the use of the mini-lesson for the day. Generally, the students work on a style of writing (narrative, poetry, etc.) for four to six weeks before choosing one writing piece to revise and “publish.” After revisions, the class has a “publishing party” where students share their work with one another and any invited guests, which may include families or school staff.

Singapore Math and Investigations. During the 2006-2007 school year the Investigations math program was adopted. Teachers were provided with the first unit of Investigations, which focused on number sense, and were encouraged to have students count objects such as buttons and blocks until the rest of the units arrived. These units did not arrive until the 2007-2008 school year. During the 2007-2008 school year, teachers utilized the curriculum but felt that it relied heavily on games and not instruction.

Singapore Math was adopted by the California Department of Education in 2007 and by Maple Charter School during the 2008-2009 school year. Singapore Math is based on the philosophy of the Singapore school and is designed to move students towards understanding math through word problems and problem sets. Students use visuals and real world objects to help them understand math algorithms.

Full Option Science System (FOSS). The students use FOSS, a district-wide approved Science program. The program is focused on teaching, at each grade level, a unit on Life Science, Earth Science, and Physical Science. Each unit is hands-on and has a scripted lesson and text for teachers and students to use. Depending on the unit, there may also be additional audio or video components. Due to the depth of each of the units, the teachers at Maple Charter have not yet been required to complete all three units in a given school year. Depending on the grade and teacher, one to two units are completed per year. The units are not made up at another time and are definitively separate from one another.

Social Studies. Teachers use the *Social Studies Alive!* curriculum in their classes. The curriculum includes some but not all of the California History-Social Studies content

standards for the elementary grades. Therefore, the majority of Social Studies units are taught through teacher designed units of study created using a backwards planning design.

Ladson-Billings (2001), in describing attributes of effective academic achievement, posited that teachers would be able to align their knowledge of the student and the academic content in order to create effective learning experiences. By this standard, the design of the curricula at Maple Charter School reveals inconsistencies. There are two different curriculum models utilized at the school site which do not fit cohesively and do not reflect an understanding of the learners at the site.

In theory, the writer's and reader's workshop structures work, but in practice, the units of study do not appropriately correspond to the trade books of *Text Talk* and *Making Meaning*. The curricula do not provide students with basic literacy skills such as how to structure writing, incorporate mechanics, or identify elements of plot in their reading—concerns all identified by teachers. In discussing piloting Reader's Workshop, Ms. Graye, fourth grade teacher, expressed confusion about its use and stated, "I still don't understand...it is a very vague, unfinished curriculum that was given."

Another concern with the workshops is that students expressed dissatisfaction with the structure of the lessons. Though students did not have the language to identify a scripted curriculum, they shared that they did not like that the flow of text, particularly during read-aloud, was punctuated by questions. Students expressed a preference to hear text read all the way through, in order to make their own meaning of the stories. Tony, a student explained, "Whenever we read chapters, we have to keep on stopping to ask

questions and I just want to read the whole chapter, and then just ask all the questions at the end.”

An example of a balanced curriculum used effectively at the site was Singapore Math. Singapore Math was introduced to Maple Charter School during the 2007-2008 school year by a second grade teacher. Intrigued by the visual design and structured skill-building, she piloted the program. The standardized assessment scores from her class during the 2007-2008 year showed that all of the students who participated in the program were proficient or advanced on the Math assessment which contributed highly to the increase in Maple Charter School’s API score. In using this curriculum in the 2008-2009 school year, Ms. Seale, Ms. Graye and Ms. Paige all praised it as being a balanced curriculum which they followed closely due to its design. Yet, even the successful adoption of Singapore Math has highlighted curriculum concerns at the site. It cannot be ignored that students were subjected to two years of ineffective math instruction. This, as well as the concerns around English Language arts, points to a concern that basic literacy and math skills have not been effectively taught. Though students may enjoy counting buttons or reading and writing in a workshop model, these experiences will not prepare them to successfully interact with the expectations of secondary schools and society.

In speaking to Ms. Tabor, executive director, about how the teachers and students interacted with the curriculum, she identified that each teacher’s “level of success and fidelity varies.” She attributed this to there being “many disparate pieces [that teachers] haven’t quite made sense of it all yet.” Ms. Tabor did not connect to her statements an understanding that the curricula she chose had different underlying designs nor did she

acknowledge that some of the curricula she provided had been incomplete. Her statements were also disconcerting as they related to teacher concerns; having no teaching experience, Ms. Tabor was not fully able to comprehend how a curriculum worked in practice. Ms. Seale pointed out in discussing classroom experiences, “When you haven’t been in the classroom...what you learn in graduate school versus what you learn when you are actually a teacher, I think that you see that all the stuff in theory you have to make modifications [to].” Additionally Ms. Paige explained why she believed there was tension between the teachers and Ms. Tabor’s viewpoint, stating, “I think part of it is not understanding unless you’ve been there; you can’t understand [teaching] if you haven’t done it...you can’t fathom.”

I asked Ms. Tabor how she felt she and other administrators at charter schools handled the dichotomy of choosing curricula for students and leading a school without classroom experiences. She shared that during her whole career, she had “...always been doing stuff where I should have been a teacher,” and that she had not become a teacher because she felt that in order to do that she had to “open a school worth teaching at.” She cited her recent experiences teaching at the college level in being helpful in running the school but also stated that she realized there was a limit to what she could offer the teachers and had not planned to run the school alone. She went on to share that running a charter school is “an entrepreneurial position...[which] deals with politics, money, understanding education reform and research.”

Without an effective curriculum in place, there cannot be a socially just outcome for the students at Maple Charter School. Further, from a culturally relevant standpoint,

the inability to incorporate basic skills into the academic programs does not allow students to reach their full potential. In order to be truly transformative, the school needs a structure that supports first, a true understanding of expectations, and then the space to explore how to meet them. Singapore Math stands out as one teacher's ability to critically examine a curriculum and make effective change. However, the teachers as a whole have not critically considered the curricula nor have they voiced any concerns and Ms. Tabor has not requested any. While Ms. Tabor is misguided in her focus on the curriculum, the experience level of the teachers may also hinder the process. The ability to be critical of the curriculum is an important characteristic of a culturally relevant teacher which will be furthered explored throughout the findings.

One of the important elements of Critical Race Theory in education is the interrogation of teachers' interactions (Chapman, 2007; Writer & Chavez, 2001). I further propose that it is necessary to interrogate the interactions of school leaders. The philosophy that seems to abound based on my examination of the implementation of school-wide curriculum is that if you read, write, or count enough you will know how to do it. Though the importance of practice is not lost here, there is a failure to see how repeating doing the wrong thing over and over again, having never learned basic skills, will lead to different results.

When Accountability Knocks-Turning from Autonomy to Assessment

Report Cards and Progress Reports. Formal assessment of the students' progress by the teachers occurs four times during the school year: Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. The students social skill growth is measured by grade level expectations aligned to the Responsive Classroom curriculum during all four marking periods. The progress reports are numeric, on a scale of 1 through 4 with each number representing the following performance levels:

Performance Levels

- 4** – Exceeds grade-level standards
- 3** – Secure: independently uses and understands concept/skill
- 2** – Developing: uses and understands concepts/skill with support
- 1** – Beginning: is at the initial stage of understanding concept/skill

Teachers write summative comments on students' English Language Arts and Math progress during the Fall and Spring. At these times, families are required to come in for a meeting to discuss both academic and social progress.

Maple Charter School uses a standards-based report card created directly from the California Department of Education (see sample, Appendix N). The students are scored on almost every individual grade level standard for the four major content areas: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The report card incorporates the same performance level scores as the progress report, rather than a letter grading system. Report cards are generally lengthy documents, between eight and ten pages long, which are distributed twice a year in the Winter and Summer terms. Report cards are

mailed directly home and the teacher and families do not have a conference unless one party requests it.

The students and families at Maple Charter School are provided with a report of progress that is difficult to understand. In my experience, when assessing students using the report card, I found them to contain large amounts of educational jargon. Though the report card scores, and other standardized scores should be considered as only one measure of a student's ability, it is one way for students to understand their own abilities. This system does not align with a Culturally Responsive approach, as the pedagogy conveys the importance of students understanding what achievement means within the classroom. Having this understanding helps students create an academic identity, thus defining their own roles in society, rather than fulfilling the roles society often presents to students of color.

When the easier report that measures social skills progress is distributed, families are held to a mandatory conference. Yet, during the distribution of report cards which are distinctly more difficult to understand, families are not required to come in and not given any assistance in understanding the document unless they actually come in and request it. To determine how students and families derived meaning from the report card, and consequently created an academic identity for themselves, I discussed with participants what the performance scores meant.

In speaking with students it became apparent that many of them were confused. When asked to detail what the performance scores meant, students connected the numbers with phrases such as, "I'm not trying enough," "Did all your work," and "Just

Okay.” Students relied on family members and teachers to tell them what to work on or created an academic identity for themselves based on what they believed the performance scores said about their progress. Family members also did not fully understand the language of the report card. Gloria, a parent, shared when looking at the report cards for her three children:

Like, well, in some parts I am out of it so I don’t really understand and so, me and my husband go through it. We were going through all three of their report cards and Dad is actually, he was paying more attention to, uh, say math. [Maura] is, say, a three but Dad would want her to be a four.

From a critical race theory perspective, the assessment system is not transparent enough for students and families to understand the state standards, make academic progress in the classroom, and achieve acceptable scores on the California Standardized Tests they will be asked to take. Additionally, if there is to be a socially just outcome for the students, close attention must be paid to whose needs standards based report card are truly meeting.

California Standardized Tests. According to the California Department of Education, the range of scores for the Academic Performance Index (API) is between 200 to 1000; the statewide performance target is 800. The scores are based on the California standardized test scores. In its first year Maple Charter received a score of 685. Though this score was far from the statewide target, it was competitive with neighboring schools and above the district-wide average for the Los Angeles Unified School District. In addition, as shown in Table 2, in 2008 the API increased to 738 which is greater than at

neighboring schools or within the average district school. By this measure the school is making positive academic progress. However, there are concerns about how test preparation is executed at the site and the impact it has on the quality of education offered.

Table 2

Academic Performance Index (API) Scores, 2007 to 2008

Schools	API 2007	API 2008
Research Site	685	738
Neighboring School A	570	612
Neighboring School B	703	706
Los Angeles Unified School District Average	664	683
California State Average	728	742

Test Preparation. In the 2008-2009 school year, as the tests loomed closer, Ms. Tabor, executive director, became concerned about the test outcomes and began holding meetings with teachers in order to determine how prepared they felt their students were to be formally assessed. This was the first year that the API scores would show a true statistical representation of the school (as it is now K-5). Also, in that it is the third year the school has been open, an undercurrent of importance began to be associated with the

scores as Ms. Tabor considered the outcomes in relation to both school accreditation and charter school renewal.

This concern is new for Ms. Tabor who, in initial observations the previous year, did not exert any overt pressure on teachers to either fully complete classroom curriculums within a school year, or complete the teaching of all standards. Rather, on more than one occasion, she stated that the standards were “a mile deep and an inch thick” – a popular phrase that refers to the broad span of standards, many of which lack depth. Though Ms. Tabor recognized this fault in the standards, it did not support her newly-realized reality that students *need* to be prepared to take the test.

Critical Race Theory puts forward that schools have been designed from an inherently racist place, and the education system, as it currently stands, is no different. The state assessment holds students to an accountability measure which does not take into account the access that students have to the appropriate resources, effective teachers, and organized curricula that will appropriately prepare them for the test. This external measurement has been determined by individuals within dominant groups. It serves essentially as a measure of how well students take on and meet the expectations of others. However it is an unavoidable evil and just one more example of how society is designed to support the continued success of those in the dominant group. Having realized this, the teachers were appropriately concerned all along—*not* just in the 2008-2009 school year, as Ms. Tabor was—with students’ abilities to meet standards, and their own efforts in holding students to standardized progress.

During their initial interviews, both third grade teachers noted that they felt pressure to complete the standards and the curriculum prior to the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (CST) test held in early May 2008. Reflecting on this, Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, remarked, “I think I got pressured. First year, I just didn’t know [what to do] and the second year, I got pressured to get all the standards taught, and we started curriculum on day one.” Similarly, Ms. Locke, third grade teacher, shared that, “I felt that I was cramming everything they needed to know the whole year into like one month...so there was a lot of pressure as far as making sure that they knew the material, making sure they knew how to test and just being able to sit down for that long a period and test”.

The unintended consequence of the teachers’ internalization of pressure, in preparing for the test, negatively impacted on their classroom teaching and therefore their students’ ability to learn the content they were so desperate to teach. In Ms. Locke’s room the effects of moving quickly through the curriculum were observed when students became confused during a fast-paced math lesson. During the approximately two-minute review, five students were observed having difficulty, and two yelled out to the teacher. Danielle, a student, yelled, “You’re going too fast and I don’t know where you are!” while John yelled, “Teacher, you got me messed up!” Ms. Locke responded to the students by stating, “We are in the fifth row.” and “Why?” to their respective comments. She then concluded the lesson saying, “Make sure you know your multiplication for Friday, 1 through 10.” Her responses did not address the fact that she was attempting to

cover a great deal of content in a small frame of time which was the actual cause of confusion for the students.

Likewise, a student of Ms. Paige observed and reported the impact of her rushed efforts to complete academic content. Clint stated that Ms. Paige:

does a bunch of subjects—math, social studies—all by herself, and she has to look in that book and in the morning she’s always rushing to find the right page for our morning work and check out how many mistakes there are and once we get in, she’s writing the morning message and the whole words, and she forgot a lot of stuff just because she was running late.

Clint’s words are important not only in thinking about how teachers manage test preparation, but also in considering how capable the teachers are at teaching standardized content material.

In looking at the issue of pressure, in preparing for the test at the school site it appears that the feelings the teachers hold are internal. The third grade teachers recognized that the students are below grade level and desire to move them forward. This is a necessary and important goal but needs to be considered in relation to teaching practice as well as school wide curriculum and planning concerns. In considering and acting on these concerns the response of the fourth graders teachers, as observed and discussed during the 2008-2009 school year, appeared to be a more appropriate approach.

Observations of Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye occurred right before the California Standardized Assessment in Writing for Fourth Grade in March 2009. In preparation for

this the teachers changed their daily schedules in order to incorporate extra writing time, but were not observed to have the same level of “test pressure” as the third grade teachers. The fourth grade teachers seemed to have more of a concern about student progress in relation to the curriculum and available resources at the school. Ms. Graye , fourth grade teacher, shared, “With the writing test I didn’t feel pressure, *but* I didn’t think I had enough time to teach them the three different types of questions because the Writer’s Workshop units did not allow me to do more along the way.” Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, commented,

In meetings where I feel like teachers have expressed that this is where the students are falling behind, I haven’t seen from an administrative standpoint, this is how we can improve that. I see that looking at the test scores, they are dismal. How come at the beginning of the year [pause] you knew these kids were here? Why isn’t there more?

Ms. Graye was observed completing reviews to prepare students for the fourth grade Writing Test. Though the test differed from the third grade test in that it is focused on an independent writing sample rather than an analysis and answering of multiple choice questions, there was a distinctly different tone to the classroom in preparation. Though she devoted more time to it, Ms. Graye did not deviate from the structure of the Writing Workshop. Rather she utilized it as a base from which to design her own lessons. She presented mini-lessons which related to the potential writing prompts in a visual format on the whiteboard. These included how to respond to literature, write a summary,

and complete a narrative prompt. In teaching her lessons, Ms. Graye would first model and then ask students to work independently.

Ms. Seale followed a similar lesson format to Ms. Graye. She also utilized more class time for writing but did not deviate from the structure of the workshop. Ms. Seale modeled the structure for the writing pieces through an outline of each writing form. She would then walk through an example with the students and give them time to independently write. After a few minutes of writing, Ms. Seale would stop students and praise positive elements of different students' papers that met the criteria within the outline. She would then give students a timeframe (generally 15-20 minutes) in which to complete their writing and request that students consider sharing. At the end of the timeframe, Ms. Seale would ask students to indicate their writing progress using body motions. Thumbs up, nose up, cheeks sucked in, neck wiggle and booty shake were all used as indicators of how many paragraphs had been completed, from one to five, respectively. She then had students closest to being done share their pieces, and provided them with praise and critiques.

Though both Ms. Graye and Ms. Seale recognized the importance of preparing students for the standardized assessment, they also recognized their students' academic and developmental needs. They structured their classrooms around test preparation in the days leading up to the test, but utilized classroom time by focusing on the curriculum in a looser more effective way. This approach though still concerning as it relates to an alignment with dominant expectations, allows students to be validated and successful in their classroom environment.

The experiences of the teachers at Maple Charter School mirror those found in similar research studies. It has been found that charter school teacher's ability to be autonomous within their classrooms, in designing instruction more fluidly than at other schools that have more constricted expectations has been reduced as charter schools align their academic structure meet those requirements of state regulations (Vergari, 2007). The pressure to succeed on assessments limits the level of autonomy a charter school has around curriculum and instruction (Finnigan, 2007). Furthermore, the assessment push at Maple Charter School negatively impacted on teacher's sense of self, collegiality, adherence to school-wide policies and administrative expectations and most importantly their quality of classroom teaching.

The Cultural and Social Implications of Mandating Discipline

Responsive Classroom Philosophy. In 2006, when students enrolled at Maple Charter School, the school's community handbook was presented to each family member. This handbook outlined student behavior expectations, examples of and consequences for safety and school policy violations (see sample, Appendix K). The family member and student were asked to read and agree to the school guidelines and expectations. Despite this written agreement to community expectations, throughout the 2006-2007 school year, there were numerous safety violations involving students.

The Responsive Classroom program was adopted in 2007 by Maple Charter School as a response to discipline concerns. The overriding philosophy of the program is to teach students social skills and discipline in a respectful and caring manner. The staff was informally trained by teachers from a charter school located in Santa Monica,

California. As part of this program, students in all grades begin the day with a Morning Meeting.

Morning Meetings are geared toward creating community within a class, and building social skills for students by teaching them how to listen and communicate as part of a group. A typical Morning Meeting begins with a written message that greets students when they enter the classroom. The message is generally interactive and has a question for students to answer that is related to their personal lives or classroom learning.

Depending on the grade level, a message could vary from asking students, “What is your favorite color?” to “Solve 428 divided by 7.” Likewise, the response may be a picture, a word, a prediction, or a number. Students at all grades are encouraged to write their names next to their responses. The Morning Meetings are generally held in a circle on the rug, and follow a three-part routine that starts with a greeting for each child, offers an opportunity for some or all individuals to share something personal, and concludes with an activity geared towards team building.

During the first year Responsive Classrooms was put into practice, the number of safety violations against students grew. Teachers too, were kicked, hit, and touched inappropriately by students on at least three occasions. The violations as a whole could be attributed to the growth of the student population, but five particular students (two kindergarten and three third grade) were identified by school community members as being the primary cause of an increase in suspensions (which rose from .33 days to 8 days). Responsive Classroom approaches did not resolve the discipline issues of the five identified students, and near the conclusion of the 2007-2008 school year, all three of the

third grade students left the school site. These students were not expelled. However, their parents were encouraged by Ms. Tabor, to look into alternative school settings that would be more appropriate, before the students were actually expelled from the school.

At the start of the 2008-2009 school year, teachers were formally trained on the Responsive Classroom program. In addition to the morning meeting, strategies for establishing classroom routines, using respectful language, and designing logical consequences for students were provided to teachers and Ms. Tabor. Though requests for parents to pick up their children due to discipline matters certainly continues at the school, there has been a decrease in the number of documented suspensions and expulsions. To date there have been four in-school suspensions but no out-of-school suspensions and no expulsions. The formal training of teachers may have led to the decrease. However, in light of problem students leaving the school, this decrease cannot be decidedly attributed to training alone.

The Responsive Classroom program was generally regarded by teachers as a positive social skill and classroom management tool. However, there were some discrepancies in the execution and acceptance of the philosophy. Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye, both fourth grade teachers, diverged from the program expectations and utilized a card system for behavior. Depending on the behavior, students received a green, yellow or red card. Gloria, a parent and office support staff, shared she gave stickers to students “behind Ms. Tabor’s back” to get them to be good. These two approaches relied on extrinsic rewards and did not adhere to the philosophy of the program.

Observations and participant data also revealed that the identification of safety violations and ensuing consequences detailed in the discipline policy were documented and handled inconsistently. This was observed to impact negatively on academic achievement as well community building. Ms. Locke, third grade teacher, in reflecting on the potential strengths of the school observed, “The only thing, the only big thing that stands out for me that is holding Maple Charter back is the way students are held accountable for things, the disciplinary system. It’s a little chaotic at times.” Similarly, Douglas, a visually frustrated student shared,

I’m just going to come out and say this school has made me losing my freaking mind. It’s made me lose my patience. Because like a lot of people at this school, they get on my, they get on my last nerve...because, like, they come and they mess with me.

Ms. Tabor, executive director, in thinking about discipline issues, expressed that teachers gave up on students too quickly and were too often looking for external support. She believes that students can succeed in the right setting and has moved students from teacher to teacher, sometimes successfully sometimes not, in order to find what she feels is the right environment where the child will flourish. Ms. Tabor, too, has occasionally diverged from established expectations. She has provided students with external rewards, blocks or books, when they are angry. Though she focuses on respectful language when speaking to students, she often does not hold them to logical consequences.

Faculty and staff, having seen Ms. Tabor’s responses, expressed concerns that her actions led to threatened feelings of physical and emotional well-being for students and

teachers. Further, they believed her philosophy reflected a lack of understanding of the cultural and community norms. This was evidenced by conversations with both teachers, staff and families.

Ms. Graye, fourth grade teacher, pointed out in discussing discipline,

I think [Ms. Tabor] needs to be more aware of what the kids go through...I don't know if its more aware or more understanding of what they are coming from but I don't think she understands the students or the parents when issues come up.

Karen, a mother and teacher's aide also shared,

[Ms. Tabor] has very idealist ways in which behavior can be modified and education should be given but not everybody is that way...not everybody learns the same way. You can't treat everyone the same and expect them to respond the same way. Some will but others need a firm hand and others you just have to admit to yourself that you don't have the tools necessary to help them.

During the family focus group a discussion about discipline between three mothers also highlighted concerns about Ms. Tabor's understanding of community norms. The following is an excerpt from the conversation:

Betty: [Ms. Tabor's] level of discipline is so strange to me, being in with this community, the type of kids you get are not all good kids so you can't discipline everybody the same way.

Kelly: It's not about our community, because I work for rich people and I've been working for the other two, and you know it doesn't matter the color, where's the range? I mean, if they're bad, they're bad, and uh the mom...

Betty: No, I agree with that.

Kelly:has the best education ever...

Betty: They don't whoop their kids and they don't hit their kids, and in the area you are, the kids curse at the parents. Here, we don't accept that, you know what I'm saying? You don't get away with that.

Kelly: It's not where we come from, it's not what the issue is. (inaudible) It's how they handle themselves. Nice parents, it doesn't matter what, it's more about the whole cycle; it's how you believe, overprotected...

Caroline: What I mean by good parents is parents that are really attentive to the children, [who] do what they need to do living in circumstances; that they don't want to live in, you know, you want to keep moving forward always and at some point in our life we are in this community, and I know that I'm proud to live in this community, and I didn't really know the community when we moved here.

And I see, hmm, there is a level to what she was saying about who uses corporal punishment and who doesn't; how you discipline your children, how you interact with your children. When you're in the lower socio-economic level, you're going to work. You might be working two jobs. You may be tired when you get home. You don't have the same interaction with your child if you're working ten, twelve hours a day, running from one end to the other. A lot of children—not all of them, but some—act out because they are trying to get that attention, and it is the same if you're in a higher socioeconomic [level] because your parents are so busy making all the money that they don't have time for you. You're acting out

because you want that attention too... Communication is a big part of education, and discipline is a big part. We're really struggling with that in this school—communication and discipline.

The excerpt began with a conversation about Ms. Tabor but moved into a larger discussion of how cultural groups and socio-economic levels impact how discipline is viewed and handled. Having looked at discipline from a broad perspective, there are concerns with the acceptance of school-wide expectations by *all* school community members. At the heart of these concerns seem to be questions about how well the discipline philosophy is adhered to and how well it addresses cultural and socio-economic norms in the school community. As school administrator, Ms. Tabor seems to bear the burden for this disparity. Questions have been raised about her motives, understandings and goals not only from families but also the faculty. Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, in discussing Ms. Tabor's philosophy remarked,

I don't want to sound racist. I don't know if the belief is with Black children, with children of color, children that are different than you that you just need to give them all the love and you need to give them all the patience and kindness because your doing this is going to save their life in some way and this child just needs love and love is going to fix it because unfortunately...maybe continuing to coddle kids is going to work...but I don't think it's going to help the child.

From her comment, it appears that Ms. Seale is concerned about a micro-invalidation on the part of Ms. Tabor. Microinvalidations are one type of micro-aggression in which the actions or verbal displays that reduce, exclude or negate the intelligence, experiential

knowledge or beliefs of people of color (Sue, et. al, 2007). As previously reviewed in the literature review micro-aggressions are problematic to determine because the intent of the perpetrator cannot be determined. Research has identified that individuals of color often have to rely on experiential knowledge to determine the intent of a situation-while the perpetrator is mostly likely only thinking within the context of the situation at hand. Ms. Seale in questioning the motives of Ms. Tabor appears to be trying to determine how she should approach or understand the micro-aggression she believes has occurred. In fact, her concern is manifested throughout the interview as she asks me to tell her what I think about Ms. Tabor's action or to let her know where I believe Ms. Tabor's motives lay based on her actions.

Beyond the concern about racial micro-aggressions, Ms. Seale in identifying empathy has revealed a key trait many educators bring to working with diverse student populations. Research on the importance of empathy in culturally relevant education finds that it is an important trait but not a sufficient one in isolation (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Therefore, in determining a sufficient approach to discipline a more collaborative process to examine the underlying discipline structure was needed.

The previously discussed advisory group meeting on discipline presented an opportunity for Ms. Tabor to reach commonalities and understandings within the school community about the discipline program and policies. However, it was run from a position of power. Limited community members were invited and those that arrived were not given the space to share concerns.

Since the time of the advisory group meeting, parenting classes have begun at the school site around healthy eating and adolescence. These are run from an external community groups and not attended by the teachers or Ms. Tabor. This reflects a perpetuation of the view that the school and the family hold separate rather than collaborative roles (McCaleb, 1994). Classes on discipline is an area that should, but has not yet, been established. A culturally relevant teacher should be teaching the students but also learning from them about their own cultural experiences and beliefs. Research has been done that support that differences between teacher and their students once acknowledge can be positively addressed (Brice-Heath, 1983; Irvine & Foster, 1996). A class on discipline offered at the school site could serve as an opportunity for all school community members to come together to discuss the different philosophies they hold, and learn from one another about alternative discipline methods.

Community

A Disingenuous Approach to Community. The school leases space within a Congregational church which holds a historic place in the surrounding neighborhood. According to church documents generated to celebrate the 95th anniversary of the church, there has always been a strong community connection. Over the years, the church provided meals during the Great Depression, supported community groups, and partnered with the city to create jobs and activities for youth. In opening the community center, the church had the following vision:

We envision a community that provides a nurturing environment where family needs are met and family unity, self-sufficiency, educational attainment, and

community pride is encouraged. Families in our community will be self-aware, empowered, productive citizens who are important contributors to their neighborhood. (Congregational Church Website, 2008)

From 1999 to 2006, the community center provided a base for the local neighborhood watch and partnered with any and all groups interested in investing in the community. This included providing healthy cooking classes, classes for fathers to improve their parenting skills, and opportunities for neighbors to improve their financial literacy. The church decided there were enough families and students attending community center activities to attempt to create their own charter school. They applied but were unsuccessful in having a charter approved. This as well as the added income to the church and the potential for Maple Charter School to take on the community center mission led church members to agree to a three-year contract with Maple Charter School.

The space, though ideal when the school opened in 2006, has now become overcrowded for both staff and faculty. At the start of the 2008-2009 school year, every available space was in use. What was formally the school copy room became Ms. Locke's and then Ms. Seale's classroom; the faculty lunchroom became Ms. Graye's classroom. The main office, which originally was designed for three staff members now houses five, and serves as a storage space for teachers with small classrooms. There were four classes sharing classroom space, which, though large, did not accommodate either class appropriately. These classrooms were extremely loud due to the numbers of students in one space, and were not spaces in which students were able to complete

concentrated work. There are additional spaces within the church but the confines of the lease do not allow for their use.

There are other church policies outside of the lease that also must be adhered to during the school day that are problematic. The front gate leading into the parking lot is never closed and the back door to the school is never locked. This is to ensure that church members can come and go through the building as needed. My initial analysis of the neighborhood identified property and violent crime rates in and around South Los Angeles as being disproportionately high. In addition, a search of a registered sex offender database for the area in and around the school's zip code brought up 1799 offenders of crimes against children (<http://www.familywatchdog.us/Default.asp>). The parking lot, which is used as a playground, does not allow students a safe area in which to play. There are no soft surfaces and because the space reverts to a parking lot on the weekend, no actual play equipment is set up and available to students. Students have balls, jump-ropes, and colored cones for their play options. As a result, many students avoid going to recess by staying in their classrooms or by sitting under the lunch tent to have access to the shade.

In addition to the church community there is also the larger neighborhood community to consider. When I spoke with the former community center director, she stressed the importance of having the support of the community behind your programs. This point is particularly timely in light of the economy and the potential for schools to encounter economic difficulties where they may need the support of the community. This was emphasized by the former community center directors who stated with me, "You

really need community members because if something goes wrong, they are going to be the ones to stand up for you. If you don't have that you could easily sink.”

In order to determine how Maple Charter School was viewed by the local community, I planned to speak with employees in the five businesses situated across the street from the church (Appendix L). However, since the physical building and lack of public identifiers on the school have rendered it largely invisible, I decided to first establish whether or not they knew of the school, and then ask additional questions as needed.

When I entered each business, I asked if they had any information on charter schools in the area. Two individuals told me they were not aware of *any* schools in the area. Another two directed me to the local public schools, neither of which were Maple Charter School. The last participant identified that there was a “good school in the church” but only after first directing me to a charter school a few blocks away and the local middle school to receive a school guide. These conversations point to the fact that there has been no effort to incorporate the local community into the school community, and that those closest to the school are largely unaware that it even exists. This raises two concerns in regards to the school. First, students are not provided access to business owners from whom they may be able to learn skills. Second, these same individuals (one business in particular even sells school uniforms) could partner with the school so that the school, church and local community are being uplifted socially and economically. Considering this concern, the church community and local community do not hold strong ties to the school which may be critical to its future, not only at the site but within the

local community. Even having such a strong hold in the community, the congregational church and its members have been relegated to the role of leaser. This has led to strained relations that negatively impact on the learning spaces, safety, and potential transformative relationships and opportunities.

There are questions that arise as a result of these relations and the knowledge that the school board has no local community members or connection. These questions point to a potentially larger racial micro-aggression at work at the school site. The lack of interest and harnessing of the intelligence and experiential knowledge of people of color surrounding the school site in contrast to the recruitment and employment of school board members, coaches and trainers used at the school is a micro-invalidation of the local African American and Latino community talent and resources.

In thinking about Critical Race Theory and suppositions about community there are various forms of cultural capital that can be accessed. The school community members hold a great deal of this capital in terms of the family and linguistic knowledge they bring to the school. However, the local and church community having been established in the community over a period of time can provide social and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). These two forms of capital can aid the school in making connections to and navigating local institutions as well as access community resources including notable community members.

Are we There Yet? An Analysis of the Progress of Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices at Maple Charter School

In the previous section school wide structures were explored. These structures influence the teachers but do not wholly define their practice. Each of the teachers, Ms. Paige, Ms. Locke, Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye, having lived through distinct life and school experiences approached teaching differently. Yet they all shared certain commonalities important to the research project. All of the teachers had earned teaching credentials in programs which incorporated culturally relevant teaching strategies and all of the teachers had chosen to work with students of color in a low-income urban school. How these commonalities and differences shaped each teachers practice is presented in an individual analysis divided into three sections.

The first section begins with a definition, in the teacher's own words, of what Culturally Relevant Pedagogy means. Each teacher was asked to define the pedagogy. This was important as a misunderstanding or misappropriation of the term could impact the class environment and students, a concern highlighted by Critical Race Theory in Education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The second section is a record of the teacher's classroom routines drawn from my observations and interactions in the classroom. The descriptions of routines (see also Daily Schedules Table 3) in the classroom are written in order to provide a view into each classroom and later analysis of the use culturally relevant strategies (if any).

The third and final section is an analysis of the teacher in relation to their understanding, and implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Critical Race

Theory in education identifies calls for this kind of interrogation of teachers' interactions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The analysis is based on my observations, the teacher's perceptions of their own practice and the narratives of the student and family participants in their description of experiences. (Classroom Maps for each teacher can be found in Appendix M.)

Table 3
Daily Classroom Schedules for Teacher Participants

Times	Ms. Paige	Ms. Locke	Times	Ms. Graye	Ms. Seale
8:15 – 8:30 a.m.	Read morning greeting Complete morning grammar review	Morning Meeting	8:15 – 8:30 a.m.	Morning Routine	Independent Reading
8:30 – 9:00 a.m.	Morning Meeting	Morning grammar review	8:30 – 9:00 a.m.	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
9:00 – 9:45 a.m.	Fluency	Fluency	9:00 – 9:45 a.m.	English Language Arts-Reading	Grammar review(until 9:20) English Language Arts- Writing
9:45 – 10:30 a.m.	Center work- English Language Arts	Math	9:45 – 10:45 a.m.	English Language Arts-Writing	English Language Arts-Writing & Reading
10:30– 10:45 a.m.	Recess	Recess	10:45 – 11:00 a.m.	Recess	Recess
10:45 a.m. – noon	Math	English Language Arts	11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.	Meditation Math	Math
Noon – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	Science	Social Studies	1:15 – 2:15 p.m.	Science	Social Studies
2:00 – 3:00 p.m.	Social Studies	Science	2:15 – 3:00 p.m.	Social Studies	Science
3:00 – 3:15 p.m.	Complete classroom jobs Read aloud	Review Activities	3:00 – 3:15 p.m.	Complete classroom jobs Homework	Complete classroom jobs Homework

*Pedagogical Approaches-Teachers Understandings, Perceptions and Implementation
of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Ms. Paige

Ms. Paige had 19 third grade students during the 2007-2008 academic year. There were 8 girls and 11 boys. The students were 61% African American and 39% Latino. Two students were classified as English Language Learners. When asked about her understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy she shared,

Culturally relevant teaching is when your curriculum relates to the students in your class so that they, whether its their culture or something that is familiar to them so they can draw on some background knowledge but it makes sense in their lives. Something that is not completely out of context for their life, it relates to them directly.

Observations in Ms. Paige's class revealed the following classroom routines. Ms. Paige's students began the day with a "Hug, Handshake, or High Five" policy, used when entering the classroom at the start of the day, or after activities where the whole class had to reenter the room (such as lunch, physical education, or art). At this time, Ms. Paige allowed students to identify what they needed at the moment. During my observation of this routine, I also observed on several occasions that Ms. Paige would stop to whisper to a student, or place her hand on their chest and tell a student to calm down and breathe with her.

After students were greeted, they would put their completed homework away and pick up their new homework from two pre-established locations. The students would then

file to the white board at the front of the class and read a “morning message” that would greet them with a concept-related “title” and insight for the day. An example of one of Ms. Paige’s daily messages follows:

Dear Magnificent Mathematicians,

Yesterday we reviewed our multiplication facts. Today we are going to learn how to multiply double digit numbers. Can you think of a time that you would need to know how to multiply double digits? Write it down below to share with the class.

Love,

Ms. Paige

After the students read the daily message, they would respond in writing on the board and then move to their seats to begin their daily review, which generally was related to grammar. After completing her own morning routines related to checking homework and taking the attendance and lunch count, Ms. Paige would call the students to the rug for a Morning Meeting.

It was clear from observing the students that they were familiar with having Morning Meetings daily. The students would quietly get up and move into assigned spots on the rug. They knew the flow of the meeting and offered suggestions for different ways to share with one another and different activities they could play together. When reading the message aloud together, the class had identified sound effects to make when they came across certain punctuation marks. For periods they would pop their tongues, for

commas they would mime drawing a comma with their hands, and for exclamation and questions marks they would make a beeping noise.

The students transitioned from the Morning Meeting into SIPPS. Fifteen of the students were either in Ms. Paige's or another classroom teacher's fluency group during this time. The four remaining students were allowed to read quietly in the reading nook, although they occasionally chose to remain in their seats and participate in the fluency lesson.

After completing fluency work, the students would break into groups of five for center work. Ms. Paige generally had two adults in her classroom during centers. One of the adults was a teacher's aide who did reading comprehension out of a scripted curriculum for the students. The other adult was Charles, Bill's father, who volunteered. He primarily taught chess, but would also support Ms. Paige when she requested the centers have a different focus. In addition to these centers, Ms. Paige had students using the computers. The students would either do math or language arts games on the computers. Ms. Paige would be in charge of a language arts center which was either focused around learning cursive or developing writing skills, depending on her daily choice. Nearing the end of the school year, Ms. Paige was also observed using centers to wrap up activities related to the Social Studies unit which was predominantly being taught by Ms. Locke. The students used some of their center time to work on their Chumash research paper or complete worksheets related to facts about the Chumash people.

After centers, the students would take a fifteen minute recess break before returning to the classroom for Math, the first whole group lesson of the day. During Math, Ms. Paige would use the overhead projector to show students new math concepts. She would have the students do one or two problems at a time and then review together as a group. Ms. Paige generally used photocopied worksheets for math instruction. There was no clear observation of Ms. Paige or the students following a particular set of expectations during Math time. During Math, students generally called out answers to problems or were observed moving up and down the classroom for different supplies or a “better view” of the board.

During the observation timeframe, students were completing multiplication and moving on to division. To review multiplications facts, Ms. Paige had found and/or written songs for all the multiplication facts. One of the songs which I observed the students reviewing was “The Dirty Sixes.” The lyrics were:

6, 12, 18, 24, 30! How did these sixes get so dirty?

36, 42 (Clap), 48! I'm hanging up my sixes so they (Clap) look great!

54, 60, 66, 72! I'm folding up my sixes just for you!

When the students were reviewing or learning the multiplication songs, they were often most engaged, and seemed to focus more on Ms. Paige, as opposed to lessons where she was orally delivering or reviewing math concepts from the teacher’s guide or the worksheets.

At the conclusion of Math, students who had completed their worksheets would play with math flashcards or other math review games around the classroom. Students

who had not completed their math worksheets were generally asked to remain at their seats and complete their pages with support from Ms. Paige or a classroom buddy. When lunchtime came, all students were generally lined up regardless of whether their classwork was completed because, as Ms. Paige shared, she did not like students to miss out on getting a chance to move outside if they had been working hard. Ms. Paige would then walk her students down to the school yard for lunch and recess. Students walked in a straight line that I would describe as talkative.

At 1 p.m. when students completed recess, Ms. Paige met them and greeted them with the “Hug, Handshake, or High Five” routine. The students would then come in and have a few moments to take trips to the restroom and water fountain before transitioning into Science. During the observation timeframe, the class was learning about the phases of the moon in their science unit. Similar to Math, there did not seem to be specific expectations for students during Science. Though the lessons varied, the students were generally working at their seats reading the Science text whole group, or completing related worksheets. Ms. Paige would teach and share both content and instructions throughout the lesson, but often had to repeat herself or go from table to table to ensure that students were listening. At the conclusion of Science, the students would line up single file outside the classroom and transition to Ms. Locke’s room for Social Studies. As Ms. Locke’s students entered the classroom for Science, the routine was essentially the same as when her own class was there. However, with Ms. Locke’s class, Ms. Paige had more difficulty managing the students’ behavior and teaching the content. It was

observed that she often did not get through as much of the lesson material with Ms. Locke's students as she had with her own.

After completing the rotation, Ms. Paige's students returned to complete their classroom jobs. Jobs in the classroom were determined on a weekly basis and posted on a bulletin board to the left side of the classroom door. The jobs were typical of those assigned to elementary students, such as Board Eraser, Supplier & Collector, Pencil Sharpener, and Light Monitor. Depending on the progress of the students with their jobs, there was sometimes enough time at the conclusion of the day for Ms. Paige to read aloud to the students from a chapter book. The book they were reading during the research timeframe was *Runaway Ralph* by Beverly Cleary. At the conclusion of the day, Ms. Paige would make last minute announcements, line the students up single file, and walk them to either the after-school program or outside to wait for family members to pick them up.

Ms. Paige began each day by creating a space in which her students could feel comfortable acknowledging and having their emotional needs met. She believed that becoming emotionally involved with the lives of her students is important in creating a relationship with them. She attempted to achieve this through frequent check-ins, lunch meetings, frequent opportunities to talk to one another, and the "Hug, Handshake or High five" routine which she considered a daily affirmation, personalized to each student. This is important as students cannot begin to be academically successful if their basic needs have not been met. It appeared that Ms. Paige's students responded well to these opportunities to physically and emotionally connect. During observations, Natalie was

seen sitting directly in front of Ms. Paige with her head resting on Ms. Paige's lap throughout the lesson. Maria, when describing what made the relationship good, stated that, "She is close to me."

Through her daily morning messages, Ms. Paige provides the space for her students to take on a new academic identity each day. The students are engaged during several parts of their day, as she offers them creative lessons that provide options for learning visually, auditory, and kinesthetically (The Dirty Sixes, Reading aloud the morning message).

There are however concerns in Ms. Paige's practice. Though students were engaged during part of the day the majority of the day the students completed highly scripted activities. These lessons seem to correspond to Ms. Paige's teaching and not her students' academic desires or needs. She frequently referred to her teacher's guides and notes and did not seem to have the confidence in the content to teach the lesson independent of these items. The lessons also did not allow students to have a role in their learning. Students were frequently off task and appeared bored.

In planning her lessons Ms. Paige seemed to focus on the needs on the students whom as she put it were in the "middle of the road". As a result her lessons did not project high academic expectations for her students or provide them with meaningful opportunities to develop an academic identity for themselves. Maura, a student, identified writing as a significant difference between third and fourth grade. She shared, "Writing is something different. Instead of doing a few sentences we do essays." When I asked how

she felt about this change, Maura went on to say that a few sentences had been too easy and liked to write more.

In discussing how race and culture effected her class, Ms. Paige spoke primarily from the perspective of how understanding her students' cultures shaped the teaching strategies she utilized. Ms. Paige stated, "I think the strategies are the same. I think that African Americans tend to be more social and, um, *really, really* like rhythm and movement, and so I think I've thought of more things than I may have had to in other classrooms." In her understanding of African American culture, she determined that students like music, rhythm, and in her follow-up interview, loud volume. Based upon this, Ms. Paige creates learning experiences for both African American and Latino students relying on what appear to be cultural stereotypes. There is of course the potential that her students do indeed like these elements of her teaching. However, Ms. Paige has based her cultural knowledge on her first class at Maple Charter and continues to use the same strategies in each subsequent class. An interest in developing a stronger connection to characteristics of each class and further each student would be a more appropriate and culturally relevant practice.

Though observations in Ms. Paige's class did not reveal any negative racial or culturally motivated interactions, the out of class issues, which Ms. Paige was aware of were not dealt with constructively in the classroom. In one of the student focus groups, Clint and Bill argued back and forth about the fact that Clint had initially called Bill "black" when he first came to the school. Likewise, in relating Bill's experiences at the school and how she handled them, Bill's mother Caroline shared that:

At the beginning of the year, because my child is a dark child and it seems to be the first thing people gravitate to, it's like, 'Let's find your weakest things and what we believe is the weakest thing about you,' and we had always taught him to be proud of who you are and I always told him, 'You're closer to your African roots.'

The avoidance of the issue of race may relate to Ms. Paige and her comfort level. Ms. Paige revealed that she is hesitant to reach out to improve her cultural competence and that her comfort level around families, particularly those that are African American was low. When discussing how she felt working with a diverse student population Ms. Paige shared that although she was more confident in her second year, initially she was "really intimidated by the parents. I felt like I was this little white girl...I felt really sheltered...I felt like, 'Who am I to tell them about their kid?'"

Despite this concern, Ms. Paige did make connections with families who reached out to her. She shared that:

The parents that come around, I have a very good relationship with. I'm not that good at reaching out and I know that is something I need to do more. I don't make a lot of parent phone calls, so any parent that wants to come talk to me, I will always make time for them, whether it's by phone, writing notes, after school; and certain parents want, you know, request daily report cards, and certain parents come and check in every day, and I will sit and talk to them. So I would say there are a good amount of my parents that I have good relationships with, and even the ones that are really busy, we manage to talk. But there are a couple that are never

around, and don't show up to meetings, and I didn't do the best job of reaching out and calling, just to check in.

The concern here is that for the parents who have not reached out to her first will not be reached out to. Additionally, even the parents Ms. Paige did have a relationship with were not observed to be partners in the classroom. Gloria, a parent who also worked at the school, could not remember when she had ever been asked by Ms. Paige to share information on her daughter Maura. Gloria could only identify providing work-related information to Ms. Paige. Ms. Paige also acknowledged in conversation that she did not rely on the parents to provide her any guidance in the classroom but rather for her to provide guidance to the families:

. . . . With the parents that come in to me, a lot of them, I'll tell them specifically what to do with their kid. I'll tell them where we are in class. They know what's going on when they support their kid at home. It's really obvious; the improvement that you see is enormous.

Charles, a father, offered Ms. Paige the service of him coming in on a weekly basis to work with students and share his academic expertise in the classroom (he is a mathematician and chess expert). Though Ms. Paige accepted Charles' offer, it was for him to run a center. In making this decision, she did not take the opportunity to interact with him on a close basis and due to the structure of centers, she never interacted with him.

Efforts towards cultural awareness were observed in the writing and planning of Ms. Paige's Chumash unit. When writing the unit and determining the field trips she

considered the prior knowledge and socio-economic norms students had and developed lessons to improve their awareness of their own life in relation to another culture at a another time. Beyond this unit however students were not engaged in learning activities that increased their cultural competence with the exception of drawing pictures of famous African Americans.

Ms. Paige entered into the field of education based on her understanding that societal structures impact how different racial and socio-economic groups achieve differently in society. However, she does not yet seem to see her role as a change agent for her students. Beyond the utilization of a monthly Scholastic News pamphlet her students did not have structured opportunities to consider their role in their own community and the global world. In addition, Ms. Paige has been at the school site longer than the other teacher participants and still does not have a strong understanding of the local community having only once in her three year period attended a community event independent of her employment.

Ms. Locke

Ms. Locke had 17 third grade students during the 2007-2008 academic year. There were 7 girls and 10 boys. The students in her classroom were 59% African American and 41% Latino. There were three students classified as English Language Learners. When asked about her understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy she shared,

...I definitely like to bring into the curriculum a familiar background, what they identify with. If they don't identify with something they are not that interested so

I definitely, like right now we are doing poetry and I bring Langston Hughes and other poets that they may be able to identify with or even poetry that they might identify with. I just think there should be some kind of culture relevance to their learning because a lot of times they need to make that personal connection so I definitely try to bring in stuff that they can connect to.

Observations in Ms. Locke's class revealed the following classroom routines. Ms. Locke's students entered the classroom in the morning to find their morning message on the front board to greet them. Ms. Locke did not have a formal greeting procedure when the students entered the classroom but wished the children "Good morning" as they entered. Depending on the day, Ms. Locke was either by the door as the students entered the classroom or organizing her space, which is located in the front of the classroom to the right of the door.

The morning message was generally tied to the learning concepts for the day. An example of Ms. Locke's morning message follows:

Dear Terrific Third Graders,

Today is Monday. We have been learning about the Chumash people in Social Studies. Think about the Chumash home we looked at in pictures yesterday and think about what you think the Chumash people used to build them. Draw and label a picture of what you think they used.

Sincerely,

Ms. Locke

Once students were in the classroom they followed what appeared to be an established routine of reading and responding to the morning message on the white board

before going to the rug and waiting for the Morning Meeting to start. While waiting on the rug, the students generally talked to those on the rug and those that were still entering the classroom. The students did not appear to have assigned seats or an assigned order when sitting on the rug but did have an assigned order that five students could use the five green pillows available on the rug. While waiting for all the students to arrive, Ms. Locke would complete the attendance and lunch count for the class.

Ms. Locke began Morning Meetings by giving students a style of greeting to use for the meeting. The greetings varied from those focused on speed (where the students tried to greet everyone as fast as possible), to greetings focused on students' movement (switching seats with one another as they greeted one person at a time until everyone had been greeted once).

After the greeting Ms. Locke generally led students in a group share but did not complete the activity. When informally speaking to Ms. Locke, she stated that she chose to often only do the share because her students became rough and sometimes uncontrollable during activities. This was observed by me during a game of Buzz!—a game where you skip, count, and then buzz (skip) on predetermined numbers.

During the morning meeting share, Ms. Locke would often allow students to choose what they would like to share. The students were quiet and focused their attention on whichever student was sharing. The students were also observed asking questions and making comments directly related to what the student shared. An example of this was when Douglas shared he won an art contest and the students asked what he chose to draw and why he chose to draw it.

At the conclusion of the Morning Meetings, Ms. Locke had the students chorally read the morning message aloud, after which she would review the academic content of the morning message and the schedule for the day. The students would then return to their seats and complete grammar review worksheets independently. During this time, Ms. Locke would circulate through the classroom and check on individual students who raised their hands for help or to ask specific questions. Students remained seated and quietly working during this timeframe.

At approximately 9 a.m., Ms. Locke would send eight of her students to the appropriate class for SIPPS, leaving up to eight students in the classroom. Because her classroom was smaller than most of the classrooms at Maple Charter School, Ms. Locke did not teach SIPPS. Therefore, during the time that her students were attending fluency groups, she would have the remaining students complete their grammar work, read quietly at their seats, or use the computer for math games.

When all of her students had returned from their fluency groups, Ms. Locke would transition her students into Math. The format for Ms. Locke's math lesson was fairly constant. Students created their own math worksheets after Ms. Locke would write math questions on both white boards in the room and provide students with blank paper on which to copy and complete the problems. She would give the students approximately 30 minutes out of the 45 minute block to complete the problems, and then spend the last 15 minutes reviewing the answers together. Depending on the day, Ms. Locke would either call on students to orally share answers as she wrote on the board, or she would call students up to the white boards to solve the problems in front of the class. If and when a

student had difficulty, Ms. Locke would either walk the student through the problem or, allow the student additional time to solve the problem independently, while directing the other students to another problem

At the conclusion of Math, Ms. Locke would line the students up single file and walk them to the school yard for recess. During observations, Ms. Locke's students generally all finished the work they were assigned. However, if students did not finish the work, Ms. Locke would ask individual students to stay in for recess and work one-on-one with them to complete the work as needed.

At the end of recess time, Ms. Locke would walk down and meet the students at the door to walk them back to class. She generally gave them directions before moving, in regards to the type of line she was looking for. When I shadowed the class as they walked from the yard to the classroom, I observed them walking in what I would describe as a straight and quiet line. Each day after recess, students had English Language Arts. If the students were engaging in Reading Comprehension, Ms. Locke would use the provided curriculum and teach the lesson whole group. She generally followed the structure of the lesson very closely and used the teacher's guide throughout the lesson to guide both her teaching (questions to ask, appropriate vocabulary to focus on) and to determine which content to place on the board as visuals for students.

When completing Writing with her class, Ms. Locke would begin the writing time with a brief five- to ten-minute lesson on one writing strategy before giving students the remainder of the writing block to write independently. The writing strategies the students worked on remained constant throughout the week and were built upon in Ms. Locke's

mini-lesson. At the conclusion of Language Arts, Ms. Locke would line the children up in a manner similar to recess time, and walk the majority of students down to the yard for recess and lunch; students who needed additional help remained with her for support.

After lunch Ms. Locke's students would return to the class for Social Studies. Ms. Locke was teaching content from the Social Studies curriculum. The curriculum description identifies the curriculum as having two main goals, learning basic geography and learning about different cultures and public service. In addition to this curriculum, Ms. Locke was also teaching her students and Ms. Paige's students a multi-disciplinary unit written by Ms. Paige on the Chumash people, a Native American tribe in California. As part of this unit the students, in small and whole group lessons, had opportunities to look at pictures and read informational text that focused on helping them connect the ways that the Chumash people lived that was both similar and different to their own experiences. During my observations, I was able to see students use the information they gathered to write guided research reports (based upon a pre-determined template) and create three-dimensional artistic renderings of Chumash villages. Ms. Locke was observed to have more difficulty in managing some of Ms. Paige's students, but in general, students completed the same amount of curriculum in both rotations.

At the conclusion of their day, Ms. Locke had her students review their homework assignment for the evening and play short review games. One of the games played during this time was "Wraparound Math," a game where each student had a flashcard with both an answer and an addition or subtraction fact on it. If the first student's card said $7 + 5$ the student whose card said 12 would yell out 12 and then read

the math problem from their card. Eventually, all of the questions and answers would be used as the game “wrapped around” the class. At the conclusion of the review activity, Ms. Locke would dismiss students to after-school programs or to a waiting family member.

Ms. Locke was beginning to create a space where students respect one another and their learning. She felt that when students looked up to her as a role model and accepted her presence as permanent, she began to be “visible” to them. She held high expectations for students in relation to preparing them to meet the grade level standards. She did not however provide students with opportunities to be independently successful which they need to be not only on the standardized assessment but also as they move through school and life. A culturally relevant teacher sees their own future in their students. In focusing on short term goals, Ms. Locke is not identifying the importance of education over time for her students.

Ms. Locke did structured lessons for her students but did not seem to have a set plan for students who completed their work early and needed to be challenged. As a result she relied on different learning games in place of opportunities to creatively build content knowledge. Across focus groups when students described her class they would comment not on classroom learning experiences but on playing math games and language arts games when they finished their work. Ms. Locke was available to students throughout the school day and provided them with individualized academic attention but often was unable to do the direct teaching of lessons due to disruptions.

Ms. Locke had a more difficult role than the other teachers establishing rules and routines in her classroom. Having come into the classroom as a replacement teacher she did not have the opportunity to create a classroom community for as long as the other teachers. Additionally, having come into the classroom after another teacher she was challenged with undoing the routines of the last teacher in order to establish her routines. Yet, it appeared that her routines were still not established near the end of the school year. The class as a whole had many safety violations which occurred in the classroom. Her students were aggressive towards one another and the hostile dynamic in a small space made the classroom a challenging environment to learn in. In addition effort at resolving discipline problems using the Responsive Classroom program did not work.

In her interviews Ms. Locke articulated the importance of trust in the creation of the student-teacher and the teacher-family relationship. Ms. Locke believed that having the parents on her side helped her to build a relationship with her students. However, though she utilized the Chumash unit, she did not allow students to further explore or share different cultures nor did she improve her own cultural competence. Ms. Locke reached out to families to focus on academics, rather than to education herself and improve her comfort level. Ms. Locke shared:

There are some parents that are just wonderful. If I ask them to come in, they do. By email, I write them notes. But I have other parents where I can't get ahold of them. They just say, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,' but nothing's ever done and that's frustrating.

As a result, in considering her own cultural competence, Ms. Locke expressed that she relies on her prior knowledge of a different urban area in Los Angeles. Perhaps as a result, the students in Ms. Locke's room seemed to have more difficulty creating a relationship with her. The cultural differences between home language and school language appeared to be a source of frustration that contributed to this problem. Ms. Locke noted that, in her own culture, the level of respect shown to adults was greater than the respect shown by her students and the culture her students came from. The following excerpt is from our conversation, during which Ms. Locke described how, when frustrated with the slang language her students used, she had responded angrily in turn:

Ms. Locke:[The student] rolls her eyes at me. Like, I grew up in my culture; you do not disrespect adults. And I felt that she was beyond disrespectful because she got out of her seat and she put her hands on her hips and she rolled her eyes.”

Researcher: How did you handle that?

Ms. Locke: She's done it many times. The first time she did that, but she's done it so many times and I said... 'Look, Ms. Thing' and I stopped myself.

Ms. Locke went on to explain that she stopped herself because she felt like she was crossing the line of what was appropriate for a teacher-student conversation.

Ms. Locke's students also noted the cultural differences and lack of connection between them. In focus groups when discussing their classroom interactions and relationship with her, George shared, “[Ms. Locke] says ‘toss away,’ but it's ‘throw away.’” Three students also noted and agreed when Douglas said she was “weird.” Douglas went on to further explain that she was weird “because she's Chinese.”

Additionally, in thinking back to third grade John shared “Ms. Locke was [pause] I can’t explain it [pause] Ms. Locke well...I don’t know but I like Ms. Seale better”.

Though Ms. Locke has had personal experiences that forced her to question her own racial identity as an adolescent she has taken on a color-blind mentality even in the face of racial tensions in her classroom. During the discussion of and focus on aspects of race and culture in the classroom, Ms. Locke noted that students were focused more on gender differences than on cultural and social differences at their age. When asked what she thought her students felt about their own culture, she answered, “I think that’s not an issue right now. I think they’re more aware of their sexes, boys versus girls, so I don’t think it’s a big issue yet.” However, in describing classroom interactions, Ms. Locke quoted students as saying, “Don’t make me slap the black off of you.” or “Don’t make me get ghetto on you.” which she felt was a reflection of their home lives. In our follow-up interview, I asked Ms. Locke to explain what seemed to be a contradiction between her perceptions of how her students felt about race and culture, and their actions. She replied “I think they don’t know what they are saying, but they are aware because of their parents; they are aware of what they are ethnically ...but I don’t really think they understand the complete history of it.” When asked how to resolve this issue she stated that the students needed to be “provided that history”. I then asked Ms. Locke about how she saw her role in this process. She shared, “I think it should be a collaborative thing but then at the same time, if parents think that’s acceptable and the teacher doesn’t, it’s almost as if the teacher is imposing his or her personal beliefs.”

Ms. Locke was a novice teacher and as a result was still building up a repertoire of lessons and activities for her students. Her lessons and lack of planning reflected that she needed more time in the field in order to develop skills. Though Ms. Locke was open to receiving help and received suggestion from coworkers on best practices for her students she did not feel supported or successful in the class. After leaving Maple Charter Ms. Locke reflected on her time there as a growing process. She shared of her new class “I feel so much more comfortable and so much more confident in providing my students with a good lesson. I don’t feel like I am doing them a disservice. I feel like I am working really hard to provide equity to my students.”

Ms. Graye

Ms. Graye has 21 fourth grade students during the 2008-2009 academic year. There are 12 girls and 9 boys. The students in her classroom were 67% African American and 33% Latino. There were 3 students classified as English Language Learners. When asked about her understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy she shared,

“To be pro-active and responsive in a way that’s not harmful to the students...I think we should focus on breaking some of the stereotypes that they think of themselves and other people because a lot of them come with these ideas. Some of them come with this hatred for others. If they are black for Latinos and vice versa [it comes] just from their home and their environment where they don’t really get along. They come with these ideas that it is okay to call each other names based on the color of your skin. We need to empower them to do something with their lives because a lot of them see the people in their

communities that have not been successful and I think that they think that is what they are supposed to be. I think it has a lot to do with their lack of caring about their education.”

Observations in Ms. Graye’s class revealed the following classroom routines. Ms. Graye’s students began their morning by entering the classroom, turning in their homework, marking on the board if they want a school lunch, and finding their seat or location for the day. Ms. Graye had chosen not to have a seat for every student, and had seating for 16 students while 5 students worked from the rug. Ms. Graye made this choice because she wanted students to have a variety of seating options while they worked. Which students sat at tables and which students sat on the rug was determined on a weekly basis on a displayed classroom chart. Students at tables did not have an assigned spot but some of them had been instructed who they should or should not sit near. The same rule applied to the students on the rug. Ms. Graye was generally at her desk when students arrived and soft music of different genres was usually playing. At 8:15 when school started, morning meeting in Ms. Graye’s class was done differently from the other classrooms. The morning message was often not posted when the students entered the class. Rather, the students came in and socialized for the first fifteen minutes of the day, which Ms. Graye considers to be the daily greeting for the students. At 8:30 Ms. Graye then allowed the students to choose an activity that involves music or dance. During this time students often choose to perform a choreographed dance whole group. She taught the dance to the students at the beginning of the school year and at the time of the observations, the students knew the piece well enough to independently perform it in

sync. For music activities, the students were observed playing musical chairs. Students generally do not conclude the morning meeting with a sharing activity.

At 9 a.m., the students had independent reading time. At this point two students left for phonics. The remaining students read quietly, and Ms. Graye used this time to review homework. At 9:45 the class begins Writer's Workshop. Ms. Graye called students to the rug. She did not give them a timeframe and students came to the rug slowly and while chatting with friends. It took three minutes for students to be seated, but when they sat, they directed their attention to Ms. Graye. The student behavior was monitored by a colored card chart. All students had a paper pocket of cards (green, yellow and red). If there behavior was problematic Ms. Graye would ask students to "change your card". Ms. Graye did not often utilize the cards unless a student was observed exhibiting was she considered dangerous behavior.

The students sat in a U shape. The students on the outside of the U brought their chairs to the rug area and the remaining students sat on the inside of the U on the rug. Ms. Graye sat in the middle of the top, open portion of the U with a whiteboard attached to an easel. The students came to the writing area with their "writer's notebooks," some of which were adorned with personal photographs of the students and their families. (Ms. Graye shared that adding the photographs was one way for students to remember people and events they may like to write about, but that not all students had chosen to decorate their notebooks.) Ms. Graye generally presented an area to focus on during writing (strong conclusion, using dialogue) and then modeled a sample story on the whiteboard that utilized the writing concept. She then had the students begin their writing during

which she answered questions for approximately five minutes before sending students back to their original seats to complete their writing.

At 10:30, Ms. Graye gave students a math problem to solve. This served as their “ticket” to recess. The type of math problem varied daily. At times it was a mathematical equation, while other times it was a word problem; still other times she allowed students to create a difficult math problem for themselves. While solving the math problem, students moved throughout the classroom, checking in with classmates and Ms. Graye on their progress or to answer questions. As students finished, they were allowed to go to recess.

When students returned from recess they had five minutes of meditation time. During this time, Ms. Graye shut off the lights and played music for the students. The students were relatively quiet but tended to whisper at their tables to one another. Ms. Graye would sit at her desk with her head down during this time. Ms. Graye shared that though she does meditation for the students it is also a way to help the students calm down and help her refocus herself.

After meditation at 11:05 a.m. the students had Math. Math began with timed math fact reviews. The students had 60 seconds to answer as many questions correctly as they are able. After chorally correcting the review together students returned to the U shape on the rug. There, Ms. Graye would explain the math lesson of the day. She would then write the page number or problems that the students were to do independently and students were to complete their work independently. Ms. Graye remained by the whiteboard in the U. Students would often come up and have the work corrected by her.

If there were errors, students were sent back to make corrections; if the work was correct, they were instructed to read quietly. Over the course of the Math period, Ms. Graye would end up with four or five student sitting near her in the U who were having the most difficulty with their work. She would work with these students while grading other students' work. At the conclusion of Math, students were sent to lunch/recess.

In the afternoons, similar to 3rd grade, Ms. Graye and Ms. Seale rotated students for Science and Social Studies. Ms. Graye taught Social Studies to both classes. During the observation period, she was teaching California history to the students. Ms. Graye would pick up Ms. Seale's class from lunch. When the students entered they would proceed to the rug area and be seated. They did not make the U shape, but sat facing the whiteboard where Ms. Graye would sit when she entered the room. Ms. Graye utilized one of two teaching strategies during Social Studies. She would either read aloud or have students read informational text and then ask questions to ensure the information was understood. She would also show and explain visual symbols of California (such as the state flag, bird, flower, etc.) and then ask students to create a symbol on their own. When Social Studies was completed, Ms. Graye would walk the students back upstairs to Ms. Seale's room. Ms. Graye generally finished before Ms. Seal and therefore the students would wait for a few minutes in the hall. During this time the students talked to one another and were only occasionally reminded by Ms. Graye to lower their voices so as not to disturb other classes. When Ms. Seale was ready and the classes switched, Ms. Graye would walk her students back down and repeat the Social Studies lesson. Ms. Graye was observed using the same teaching and behavior management strategies when

working with the two classes and interacted with all students in the same manner. The last fifteen minutes of the school day were used as an opportunity for students to complete assigned classroom jobs and receive their homework for the night. During my observation period, students also started using this timeframe for “show and tell,” after a student requested to share information about the New Orleans side of her family. Ms. Graye agreed to it and allowed students who brought things from home to share with the class for a few minutes and explain why the object was important to them. At 3:15, once the after-school staff arrived, Ms. Graye generally did not stay in her classroom with the students.

Ms. Graye provides students with a semi-structured learning environment. This allows them opportunities to learn directly from her and opportunities to participate in independent learning opportunities. In considering this structure she shared, “I measure success, I guess, [not] like academics on final projects and tests, but like the confidence going into it. At this age they complain the whole time if they don’t get something. But if they get it, it’s like “Oh I get it!” I like to see that.” Students, such as Paul, respond positively to this classroom structure. Paul shared that he liked learning in different ways stating ““we learned it I think on a paper and in our workbooks”. Despite this, the routines of the day seem at times to reflect more on Ms. Graye’s teaching practice than her student’s learning needs, such as during her meditation time when she is the only one meditating. Additionally, it does not seem that she has carefully considered her time in the classroom as much as she has adopted different elements in her schedule. Sarah, a student shared “In the morning when we do [morning time] we don’t have anything to do

but do morning meeting and our greeting and one of the students figured out that we should do a game after we do our greeting and then Ms. Graye thought it was a good idea and then we started doing that”

Ms. Graye is critically conscious of how the school curricula do and do not meet the needs of her students and feels comfortable diverging from established routines in order to meet their needs. She places herself within the class space so that she can provide students with individualized academic attention. However, during recess, lunch and after school, she is generally not seen engaging with the students and does not seem to see her role with the students as lasting beyond the established classroom times.

Though she did not have an established classroom routine for sharing information or objects from home, she started “show and tell” in the class once a student requested it. This provides students with opportunities to build a sense of cultural competence amongst their peers. She is comfortable with the families and reaches out to them through a variety of methods. Moreover, she enjoys participating in a variety of community activities and is generally seen pushing other staff members to join her on outings into the community. Ms. Graye also provides opportunities for students to consider their own cultures in relation to a larger world context through media such as video and different music genres.

These opportunities are enjoyed by the students, but Ms. Graye does not always provide the structure for students to meaningfully make connections. In talking with John, a student, about the local community, he shared, “People don’t get along. People need to know people better, like how blacks and whites came together...or else there

would be a big fight, there would be a war...because not really blacks and whites go together if whites and blacks be together they would get along better...Blacks and Whites are not really friends because in Ms. Graye's class we had a movie about Martin Luther King." I asked John if the class talked about the movie, to which he responded, "No." When I asked him if he had any questions about the movie he said "Yes", and asked, "Why did the Blacks and Whites have to fight...Ms. Graye said that they don't really meet together." Ms. Graye's response did not adequately answer John's question. In showing the movie, Ms. Graye provided an opportunity to teach her students about the historical and current connections between people of color and Caucasian people. Nonetheless, showing the movie without context was just a superficial way of acknowledging Martin Luther King Jr. instead of a useful learning experience.

Ms. Graye had difficulty articulating a clear understanding of her role in relation to her students' outcomes. She often referred to not feeling administratively supported but it was in areas that she did not necessarily see her own role. Ms. Graye stated in discussing why she felt he could not change students academic mindset "[Teachers] should have a lot [of the role] in changing it [the students' academic mindset] from home to school. I think the teacher can do a lot if they are in a place where they are supported by administration [but] I don't know".

Though she had shared in her interview how effective the opportunity to share was for her students she had removed from her morning meeting routine. During observations, Ms. Graye did not incorporate the share portion of the morning meeting in her class. This may have been the effect of Ms. Graye not feeling confident with students

as she had addressed feeling unsure of how to respond when addressing topics in relation to students' home lives and the larger societal connections.

Ms. Seale

Ms. Seale had 21 fourth graders during the 2008-2009 academic year. There were 12 girls and 9 boys. The students in her classroom were 52% African American and 48% Latino. There were 2 students classified as English Language Learners. When asked about her understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy she shared,

I don't know if there is a certain way that students of color need to be taught. I was always bothered in my teaching classes when we would have to read these books, you know like *Brown faces* or *Black faces* and *White teacher*, all these kind of books like ooh teaching in a multicultural classroom cause they were all like 'I'm this white teacher and I have to teach these inner city kids' like those were all the books that we were ever reading. Huge, you know, culture shock or this huge disconnect and most of my cohort, most of these people were not of color teaching students that were of color, and it's just like I hated having to read this book to see what it's like to teach Black kids ... I was a Black kid. I didn't see that there was a different way that any of my teachers had to teach me and it wasn't because I was Black, you know for everything you had to speak in Ebonics. You know everything has to have a beat because Black people like to dance and sing it wasn't anything about, you know, about the way I felt I had to be taught.

Umm, I know the thing that my Mom would say because my Mom is like Johnny pro-nationalist. A lot of the things that she found in having Black teachers is she felt that the teachers really cared about her...and even reading about when schools were segregated that was kind of the feeling that these teachers really cared about you and wanted you to do well. And I didn't feel that White teachers I had cared about me any less but I don't really ever remember having a teacher that was White that was like my buddy or my friend...the teachers I was closest to probably were the teachers of color and I don't know if it was because I thought they liked me more or cared more about me... consciously. I don't know why. But it's important to me that people of color in America can raise the bar because no I am not a woman. I am a Black woman and so it is important to me... just as it is important to me that any minority is treated fairly. Having certain characteristics unfortunately doesn't put you on a level playing field and I know as a woman I know as a person of color that you have to be on your game.

Observations in Ms. Seale's class revealed the following classroom routines. Ms. Seale's students began their morning outside of the classroom space. Due to the size of the classroom, their student mailboxes are located outside of the classroom on a book shelf. When students arrived they emptied their backpack belongings into their mailboxes and took out their reading bags (the books in their bags were at their tested reading level). Students then proceeded into class and were seated, to begin their independent reading time. During this time, Ms, Seale watched for students transitioning well into the class and the first three "ready" students were given a helper card. This card allowed students

to be Ms. Seale's academic helper for the day, meaning that they would be called upon to share their work with the class or demonstrate a new concept. During the timeframe when students were working on independent reading, Ms. Seale would take the daily attendance and lunch count.

Like Ms. Graye, Ms. Seale chose not to have a seat for every student. She did this to preserve space in the classroom after seeing that Ms. Graye was not using chairs and the students were choosing seats appropriately without them. She had seating for 16 students and 5 students worked from the rug. Which students sat at the table and which students sat on the rug was determined on a weekly basis on a displayed classroom chart. At approximately 8:30 a.m., students were called to the rug space for the morning meeting. The students would sit in a circle and were told by Ms. Seale which greeting to do for the day. The students would begin the greeting, but would generally have difficulty making it all the way around the circle before some students began to get angry that other students were slowing down the greeting or missing their turn. Ms. Seale generally responded to this with firm redirection to help the students complete the greeting. After the greeting, the students had share time. The students chose a topic on which to share. Students were very quiet and respectful to one another during this time and appeared to be engaged by the speaker, regardless of which student it was. Ms. Seale generally did not incorporate the activity portion of the morning meeting. She chose not to do so because of space restrictions and her finding that it was difficult for students to calm down after an activity. Therefore, Ms. Seale closed the morning meeting by having the

student read aloud the morning message. Here is a sample of Ms. Seale's morning message:

Dear Class,

Today we will prepare for our *impending math test. It requires you to use your #cranium and a lot of ^concentration. What type of questions will be on the math test?

Sincerely,

Ms. Seale

* coming up

brain

^ deep thought

Each day after the students read the message aloud, Ms. Seale would ask them to define the difficult words in the message. Even though she provided a word key with symbols somewhere on the whiteboard, students sometimes had trouble finding it and guessed at the answers until someone located the key. On some days, Ms. Seale used the weekly vocabulary words that the students were studying and included them within the message. On those days, she did not include a key but would ask students to build the key for her.

At 9:00 a.m., four students would leave the class for SIPPS with Ms. Paige. The remaining 17 students were given grammar review worksheets, and Ms. Seale would go over the worksheets with them at approximately 9:15 a.m. At 9:20 a.m., when the four SIPPS students returned, Ms. Seale would begin writing time. For writing, students remained in their assigned spots within the classroom. Ms. Seale would teach at the front

of the classroom. Students were quiet as Ms. Seale taught them. She would spend approximately five minutes of the lesson reviewing the concept for the day and demonstrating it in a sample writing piece on the white board. She would then ask the students to begin writing. Students were responsible for getting their own writing materials from two small metal filing cabinets in the classroom. The cabinets have small drawers and within the drawers are pencils, pens, blank writing paper, post-its, highlighters and other supplies for the students. During the writing block she would walk around the classroom and read the students' writing, occasionally asking them questions about their pieces such as, "Why did that happen?" or "What was the character thinking right then?" At the conclusion of the writing block, after approximately 25 minutes of writing, Ms. Seale generally had one or two students share their writing with the class and would refer back to the initial lesson to help students make connections.

Students then transitioned into reading time. Ms. Seale began reading time by calling students to the rug for a mini-lesson. The mini-lessons were on reading comprehension strategies. Ms. Seale demonstrated with a book from one of the reading comprehension programs used in the school. After modeling a strategy to work on (such as rereading, considering points of views, etc.), she would then ask students to use the same strategy with their independent reading books. Similar to writing, as students worked, Ms. Seale moved around the classroom, checking their progress.

Ms. Seale would then break for recess at 10:45 a.m.. She is known for continuing work time for students into their recess time (both morning recess and lunch/recess). Many students would stay when she did this, but she allowed any student who wanted to

go to recess to go ahead independently. When she did complete the lesson on time and sent students to recess she did so using where students fell on a behavior chart similar to Ms. Graye's. The behavior chart was used in conjunctions to Class Expectations (see below) posted in the classroom. When students were not meeting the Class Expectations, Ms. Seale used the behavior chart. When asking students to change their card, Ms. Seale would tell the students to "pull a card." When students were on Green they were allowed to walk first to recess unattended. When students were on yellow or red they were walked out by either Ms. Graye or by a teacher's aide.

Class Expectations

1. Be careful with the property of others
2. Be a thoughtful leader
3. Listen to each other
4. Be kind in speech and in actions
5. Try your best every time
6. Think first

After recess, students returned to the class for Math. Ms. Seale was always very animated during Math and often informed the students how excited she was to teach it, since it is her favorite subject. The lessons were done with students in their assigned seats and Ms. Seale working at the white board in the front of the room. For math she would begin with problems on the board and would ask students to solve them in their math notebooks. After they solved the problems she would ask a few students to come up and

show their work and explain their thinking (this is one opportunity for helper cards). She generally tried to then scaffold the math problems for the students in relation to prior concepts they had learned (for example how decimals and fractions relate). During Math, Ms. Seale used visuals and math problems that incorporated the students and real world scenarios. For example, one math problem was :

Phillip was $\frac{2}{5}$ of the way through his Harry Potter book.

If there are 378 pages in the book, how many pages has Phillip already read and how many pages does he have left?

After Math, students would sometimes go out to lunch recess from 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. As mentioned, Ms. Seale often went over the 12:15 recess time and up to $\frac{2}{3}$ of her class could be seen working diligently with her. When she did this, she generally did not continue on beyond 12:40. Students were dismissed in the same manner as for the first recess.

After recess, Ms. Seale picked up students from Ms. Graye's class. The students came with a plastic tub filled with their Science books and Science notebooks which they stored in Ms. Graye's class to preserve space in Ms. Seale's class. Ms. Seale would meet them outside and walk them upstairs to her classroom. Once they arrived she had them sit at the desks and on the rug. She did not have assigned seats for them during Science. Similar to Math, Ms. Seale was noticeably more excited to teach the students the content. She generally began with a brief introduction to a Scientific concept and allowed students to experiment to see the concepts in action. For example, she wanted students to understand the poles of a magnet so she had them experiment with putting magnets

together in different ways and measuring how strongly, in centimeters, the push or pull was. When teaching Ms. Graye's students, Ms. Locke had difficulty with behavior for being disruptive during Science. As the year continued, she set up a plan where disruptive students would return to Ms. Graye for the duration of the Science period. When this occurred, students had to change their card and complete the science experiment or lesson independently. Similar to other times of the day, Ms. Seale often did not finish Science on time but generally would wrap up by 2:20 or so and then switch with Ms. Graye who would walk the students up and wait for the transition. Once transitioned, Ms. Seale would repeat the lesson with her own students. The behavior of her own students was noticeably closer to classroom expectations than the behavior of Ms. Graye's class.

The last fifteen minutes of the school day were used by Ms. Seale to review homework assignments and allow students to complete their classroom jobs. At the conclusion of the day, 3:15 p.m. when the after-school staff arrived, Ms. Seale generally stayed in her classroom preparing for the next day and interacting with students as needed.

Ms. Seale shows students her enthusiasm for learning in both her demeanor and her lessons. She has created respect for learning time in her classroom through the Class Expectations which students have memorized. These expectations relate to both their academic and social behaviors. She teaches students into their recess breaks and a testament to her ability to keep students engaged is how many remain in their seats even when they have the option to go play. Ms. Seale incorporates new knowledge into many aspects of the day. She often wears shirts with academic puns for students to figure out

and incorporates new knowledge into many tasks such as the reading of the morning message.

Ms. Seale exhibited high academic expectations for the students and pushed them beyond their comfort zone. She expressed that, “I want every child who is one of my students to be successful. I want them to do well in school and do well in life that’s what I want. That’s why I am a teacher. I want them to do well and to be able to do anything they want to do and to believe they can do anything they want to do”. This increase in expectation was appreciated by both students and families. Karen, a parent, in describing her son Larry, shared that believed that his interest and engagement in education had decreased since attending Maple Charter School. Karen shared “I’m finding it is hard for [Larry] to lose the mentality that I just have to do the bare minimum to get by.” But she has seen a positive change, citing that “Ms. Seale is more strict and she pushes [the students] a little more.”

Though Ms. Seale utilizes many strategies that relate to the formation of a student’s positive identification of themselves as a student, she tends to not show an interest in moving students to a place where they feel they are capable of being strong student if they do not show interest and enthusiasm themselves. This observation was corroborated by some of her students. Maura, who clearly has a positive identification of herself as a student, shared,

“I am smart ‘cause I tell a lot [in my stories] and even though we go right to recess, I ask Ms. Seale for math problems I can do during recess or something...My dad tries to challenge me with extra problems and I get them

right and my Mom put [a computer math game] on her computer and I get a lot of my facts rights. And at school, Ms. Seale, during the winter break, I asked for more work for my multiplication and I got better at it.”

There are other students however who do not seem to know how they are doing academically or how to receive support.

Clint expressed that

Fourth grade it starts getting hard; you have to do decimals and fractions. I am taking a special class to divide and multiply decimals, that’s the next step, but I don’t know if I’m ready yet because I am very bad at it. I don’t think I am ready for that...I don’t think I am ready...I always do it the wrong way and we’re gonna take a test but I don’t know if I’m ready.

Ms. Seale, through her own background at an Afrocentric school, has a strong cultural awareness of African American culture. She has expressed an interest, but has not reached out to increase her understanding of the community norms or learn more about the Latino culture in order to support her Latino students’ competence levels. Both Clint and his mother Kelly shared that issues of race and racism came up when Clint worked on a project and was not allowed to share it with the class. Clint shared the following story of his project:

I still have it. I posted a lot of pictures of where I live and I put a bunch of things we eat, the most common things is pupusas; we eat tamales too. And then I started putting global festivals...[a woman from a museum] came and told us we were going to do our relative history but I didn’t know that we were supposed to just

bring the things so it made me really sad. I was so happy when I finished it because it took four days to finish it. I had to print things out of the computer and I bought the flags at the store. I bought a lot of stuff and I did some research on my Dad, he's from Guatemala, and he didn't help that much. He said that he didn't want to help because he said it was 'too much information,' so I just got pictures out of the computer and I started gluing them on index cards...[When I brought it to school] they said we weren't supposed to bring the entire thing already made—just the stuff to the school so we can make it...I didn't get to share anything.

Though there was a mix-up in communication which was not Ms. Seale's responsibility she needed to carefully consider her actions in handling Clint's project, particularly in light of the personal connection and time spent researching. Ms. Seale has not since provided outlets for students to share or explore different cultures. However, she does incorporate her students and real world scenarios into their daily learning.

Ms. Seale understands the role that race and social class has in the world and she wants to empower her students to achieve success. She understands the importance of her students' success in relation to her own life. Though she is aware of the role that family and society play in her students lives she often becomes skeptical in her ability to have a positive impact on her students. She does not take into account the role that families play in helping students to achieve success *and* live in the world and allows her own lived experiences to impact her views. This was evidenced when she stated, "I've been disillusioned to think that the parents care as much as my parents did...they show up on

the first day and pretend they know all about their kids and then you never see or hear from them until report cards.”

*Student and Family Understandings and Perceptions
of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Through their narratives families verbalized a clear understanding of the educational practices that benefit their students and were able to clearly identify what concerns related to race and class they would like to see remediated in schools. Similarly, the students articulated their perceptions based on their experiences with different teachers and different teaching practices in relationship to what did and did not work well for them. The participants’ counterstories are important in that they challenge the beliefs about why students of colors are not achieving at the same rate as their Caucasian counterparts. A dominant societal view is that academic achievement is attainable for all students but the parents and students in this research expressed a belief that the “typical” Los Angeles public school did not provide high academic experiences. Rather, these schools were seen as places where teachers did not care and were frequently absent, academic expectations were low, student disabilities went unnoticed and resources were lacking.

Using the frame of Academic Achievement, Cultural Competence and Socio-Political Consciousness the participant narratives of ineffective strategies at typical Los Angeles schools are chronicled and juxtaposed against an evaluation of Maple Charter School.

Academic Achievement

The family participants verbalized a desire for an autonomous approach to the style of learning offered in the classrooms. They believed that students needed to accept ownership for their own learning and that this could be achieved if they could independently pursue their interests—an ideology shared with culturally relevant pedagogy. (A report card template is included in Appendix N.) A parent, Charles, in sharing his experiences as a substitute teacher in San Diego, reminisced about seeing students create very authentic work products. He felt that Maple Charter had similar qualities and stated,

At this school, they have the kids try out new projects, books, videos, and it's helping kids to see themselves as authors, creators, producers, doers, um you know, people who make things happen.

However, my observations showed that most of the creative projects that Charles was referring to were made during the after school program. When I asked Ms Tabor how capable she felt the school and teachers were to offer similar opportunities during the school day, she answered that, “To get there [the teacher needs to be] more familiar with the curriculum [so] *we* are using it, not *it* using us. Then we can open up the time for more opportunities to be less cookie cutter.”

When I spoke to Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, about moving students into learning experiences where they take ownership, she shared, “I’m trying to move their dependence away from me and to [have the students] learn to seek out their classmates as

resources.” However, classroom observations revealed that there were few opportunities to be “doers” in either third grade classrooms.

During, a whole class lesson in Ms. Paige’s third grade class, the students were asked to use a Native American fact sheet to develop a paragraph. After an oral review of the fact sheet, a student asked, “Can we start writing?” This sentiment was orally agreed upon by other students. However, Ms. Paige responded, “I’d like your help in coming up with the sentences, and then you can begin writing.” Ms. Paige then proceeded to guide the students in writing model sentences. At the conclusion of the lesson, only four students still remained engaged, while the rest of the students had already begun copying from the board or drawing pictures on their papers.

In Ms. Locke’s classroom, a lesson on editing a paragraph about Native Americans revealed a similar concern. During Ms. Locke’s final editing she was observed circulating through the class, editing students’ work for them, using White-Out. When a student named Paul stated, “I need White-Out,” Ms. Locke responded, “Don’t ask me for White-Out as I check your work. I will use it if I need to.”

Ms. Locke, in reflecting on students that expressed a desire to do independent work stated, “Larry... Martin, like the higher performing kids, they wanted to just break out and do work and not work with the class.” Ms. Locke went on to explain that she had not provided these opportunities due to the time required for whole group activities necessary to complete the curriculum and prepare for the state assessments. She went on to share that no parents had expressed a concern to her about the lack of challenge and independence, with the exception of Karen, a mother and teacher’s aide. In speaking with

Karen about her son, Larry's experiences, at the, she acknowledged this concern and noted that although she brought him for a challenge, he had "not since second grade" been given one. In speaking with Ms. Locke after she had left Maple Charter School she described several independent activities she was doing at her new school. When I asked why it seemed that she was gearing more learning experiences towards independence now, she shared that the curriculum was more structured, allowing her to better understand it and then make modifications up or down for students.

Based on my observations, however, it seemed that the students were not given opportunities for independent work because their teachers felt they were not academically capable, despite the fact that the teachers espoused independence as an important learning tool. Having observed Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, doing challenging lessons and encouraging students to take ownership for their work, I discussed with her the reason she was using above grade level class work with the students when, based on assessments and their third grade teachers, they were working below grade level. One question I asked was, "Why not focus on just bringing the students up to grade level?" She responded,

Because I don't know how to do that...tell me how to do that [pause] When I started learning about the different philosophies, Vygotsky was the one I was most interested in and his zone of proximal development, and I thought of it as a little dare. So if this is you here [demonstrates a place to the left with her hands] and say I need you here [demonstrates a place to the right] and I *want* you here [demonstrates a place further to the right] I am going to use an experienced other, whether it's a teacher, a resource, another student, and hopefully from stretching

you here [to the furthest point] you will get here [demonstrated middle point]... A lot of times, students are lacking the basics and I could spend all day everyday on the basics and that would bore the kids who *got* the basics, and at the end of it all I would want you to put it together, and what if you can't?...So you all now know how to write a sentence. Too bad in fourth grade you should be writing three paragraphs. Oh great. To me that ain't shit. So you can write a sentence. So the fuck what? It's not what your supposed to be able to do...your not going to be ready for fifth grade if I am doing things down there.

Ms. Seale alone stood out in relation to high expectations for her students' ability to make academic strides. Further she was the only teacher that seemed to connect that the level of expectation and variety of instructional techniques impacted on the progress of students and the formation of their academic identity.

In addition to autonomy, both students and families outlined how inappropriate resources and staffing impacted on their ability to achieve academically. Danielle shared "At my other at my old school my teacher she always got sick so I had substitutes and sometimes we didn't even have class and we had play all day and then my mom said this school would be better..." A more concise example of available resources came from Iris, a parent. She critiqued moving from what she described as a "lily white" school in the suburbs to a large urban school and the disparity that she found. She recalled,

When I was sixteen and my parents divorced and I had to go to a [Los Angeles Unified School District] school. Believe me it was a culture shock. We didn't have any textbooks. Everybody thought I came from a private school for one,

because of the way I talked, so they kind of dumbed me and my sister down because we were so far ahead. We went to school and I was like “We did this already” they would ask “Did you go to a private school” and I would say “No”. ...I remembering go to health for the CPR class and we had the books and I remember I went to take the book out after class and the teacher was like “Where are you going” and I said “I’m going to my next class” she said “You have to give the book back” and I [laughs] said “We don’t get to keep the book?” and she said “No I need it for my other class” and I said “okay” but I remember when I had P.E. at my old school everybody got to keep the books. It was the best of everything.

In thinking about Iris’ experience we are able to ascertain how disparate the resources are for students based largely on locale and race. Her last statement “it was the best of everything” paints a picture of a student unexpectedly faced with fierce inequalities. In considering how Maple Charter School is doing in this respect it appears the school is providing more support than the typical school.

Ms. Tabor, executive director, has been successful in writing and receiving grants that offset the costs that are usually passed on to students and their families. Students are never charged for field trips and the school does not allow fundraisers. Upper grade students are provided with backpacks and students in all grades are provided with basic school supplies. In relation to the availability of curriculum, with the exception of the Investigations math program, teachers and students have been provided with complete sets of curriculum.

An additional support comes from the before and after school program. Students may attend the before school program where they receive breakfast. Those meeting the income requirement receive a free or reduced lunch. Additionally, through a grant written by Ms. Tabor the school has free after school where students are provided with a snack. The after school program is attended by upwards of 85% of the students. Between these programs students can potentially be at the school from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Though this schedule is not ideal for young children it does allow for parents who cannot afford child care or weekly groceries a viable option.

Janice, a parent and office staff, came to Maple Charter School in part because of the available childcare while she worked at the site. She also wanted a healthier atmosphere and the opportunity to be close to her daughter Sarah. In describing Sarah's last school she expressed concern noting "...her [last] class was overcrowded, there were 32 kids in the class and I started to notice she was having some issues but the teacher did not feel she could handle Sarah with the other 31 kids and help her determine what the problems were that she was having academically" In coming to Maple Charter School Janice felt that Sarah's academic needs had been met stating "I think she started to fall in love with school again" However, after her initial interview Janice expressed concern that the requirement of her student's education plan were not being met by the school. A close examination of the Special Education system and how it allows teachers to positively connect to students and meet their academic needs finds that the Special Education program is in disarray.

Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, shared that her student's levels varied widely with the high students moving quickly and the lowest students (those who received special education services) moving very slowly and that the disparity impacted on her practice. When asked why she felt the level of the special education students was not progressing, she shared three main issues: the school had changed resource teachers too many times; the students were grouped inappropriately; and the support they received was not addressing students' weaknesses.

In my own observations, Resource Support Providers, the teachers hired to provide special education services, have changed times throughout the year (4 different ones to date) and the expertise with which they served the students is debatable. Students appear to be grouped based on availability rather than age or disability. Moreover, many of the mandated progress reports for students have gone untouched. Though the school is using a formal company that deals with Special Education there does not seem to be any priority from this agency in assisting students.

Recently, having previously taught Special Education, I was called in to an Individualized Education Plan meeting to assist a mother and Ms. Graye, fourth grade teacher, in understanding the education goals. The special education lead for the company did a phone conference rather than attend the meeting in person. When I entered Ms. Graye was reading the students Present Level of Performance (the summary of a student's educational strengths and areas of weakness) from the previous year aloud and the lead on the phone was asking her to identify if the student had met the special education goals for the current year. This pointed to a concern that she did not know the

child and did not have enough knowledge of the format of the Individualized Education Plan to determine an inaccuracy when read to her.

In addition to helping families navigate through the Special Education process there was a concern from families, particularly those who worked during the school day that they were not capable of supporting their children academically. Kelly, a parent, stated “I’m not so good as a Mom” during the family focus group. Janice, another parent, also shared during her interview,

“I do know that there is not a lot of instruction in the workbooks or sheets that they send home with the kids so you have to kind of wing it yourselfthe parents don’t know math like the teachers do...I mean I’m trying to understand. The teacher probably had a whole chapter of instruction and I have one sentence”

Though the school has held both Math and a Literacy Nights, it seems that the families require more authentic experiences with the curriculum. Iris identified that she had approached Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, and asked for tutoring in math for both her and her son. However, there are parents who based on language or comfort level, are not going to take that step and will still need support. Angel, a parent, in describing the relationship she had with Ms. Locke expressed unease. She stated, “Mmmmm [pause] Ms.Locke mmmm I don’t think we have like well how do you say it um relationship wise well [pause] I mean we talk on occasion if Paul’s disrupting the class or what not. In terms of really having a relationship you know parent to teacher I don’t think it’s there maybe where it needs to be...”

A system of inappropriate resources and a lack of collaboration between community members have combined in schools to create a system that portrays life in school as impersonal and not worthwhile. In South Los Angeles, 43% of the residents have left school without attaining a high school diploma (Ong et al., 2008). Changing this mindset was an important concern for families. Kelly, a parent, shared her own story of dropping out in her interview,

I stopped in ten and a half grade. I just decided not to go. I told my Mom that I wanted to work and somehow she let me. Well she didn't let me but I just refused and then I started to go [to school] into the night time. The thing is I never finished. I just went like one or two years more.....I wanted to stop because I wanted to work. I was in love with money which is not good. Now I know that it is not good.

To determine if the students were developing the longer view of education their families desired I spoke with students about how they felt coming to Maple Charter School had been good or bad for their education and what their future careers may be. Katherine, a student, shared that she had learned more since coming to the school. Martin, another student, also shared, "I like coming to Maple Charter School...[here] you can be much more in life than you can expect." Their comments are positive signs that the school is moving in the right direction. Nevertheless, in continuing to help students, who like Kelly may begin to question the value of school, there needs to be an internalization of a belief that the students can succeed from both the students, families and teacher.

Having already determined that the students and families felt positive for the future I wanted to further determine teacher's expectations for their students. Ms. Graye , fourth grade teacher, remarked, "I don't know. They are just lazy especially the ones that have been here. I don't think they find value in doing well...I think [not finding value] comes from home." Ms. Locke, third grade teacher, shared that,

Culture does impact [the students] just because it dictates the way they talk and the way they treat each other. As far as...I'm not sure if you say culture or subculture but I have a few students who, you know, how can I say this and be politically correct—they take pride in acting ghetto.

Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, also commented,

I would like to think that I definitely have high expectations for them but because I've been with kids that have been below grade level for my whole time at Maple Charter School I also question my expectations in comparison to another third grade class. I am hoping that my expectations aren't lower because I have seen what is really difficult for them. I'm hoping that it is still consistent with other third grades but I have actually questioned myself

Finally, Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, revealed, "I'd like to say that the teacher can be enough to push the child over the edge but honestly I don't believe that..."

The teachers' comments illustrate a disbelief in the ability of the students as well as skepticism that they can combat societal expectations. They do not believe that the community the students come from or the teaching experience they bring to the situation

will result in sustained academic progress. Further, they serve as a reminder that despite an increase in economic support, equitable education has yet to be reached.

The students and families clearly identified that there were four main elements of academic achievement that they were looking for in the classroom. (1) There was a desire for an autonomous approach in the classrooms. (2) Students and families also believed that in order to attain academic achievement students must have the appropriate resources to place them on an even playing field with their counterparts from other socio-economic communities. (3) An additional concern that teachers would be able to identify students' academic needs and that a system at the school is in place to support it. (4) Finally, it was noted that students need to understand long term consequences for their actions in relation to Education. This requires successful academic experiences for both students and families that support an academic identity.

In these areas the school and teachers are beginning to make steps in the right directions but have not yet met the needs of the students and families.

Cultural Competence

A culturally relevant teacher utilizes a deep understanding of culture in helping students feel personal pride and negate the stereotypes that exist for them. The neighborhood in which Maple Charter School is situated in a place deeply entrenched in stereotypes created by the media and those who hold power over media sources. "South Central Los Angeles" evoked so strong a connotation to disparate conditions that the city changed the name to "South Los Angeles" in order to break down prejudices (Ong, Firestine, Pfeiffer, Poon, & Tran, 2008). From a Critical Race Theory perspective the

expectations for students coming from this setting must be challenged. The existing connotations serve as stories which meet the definition of majoritan offered by Solorzano & Yosso (2002) who theorized that “A majoritan story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools” (p. 20).

Students and family members in discussing how culture impacted school had two distinct views. The family members identified personal stories in their own schooling where they did not always feel a sense of pride in their own cultures. Iris, a parent, shared,

“I remember [a teacher] who chastised me because I didn’t know the year slavery was abolished and that stuck with me and I remembered that date until right now because I kind of felt bad. I mean he asked me and I said “I don’t know” and he said “I’m surprised I figured someone like you would know that answer” and I was like what are you talking about. I didn’t understand it at the time because they never really talked about black history and we didn’t talk about black history in my family either.”

In thinking about the expectations parents have for Maple Charter school it is that the students will not have experiences like those off Iris which isolated her as the “representative” of her race. In determining the teachers’ understanding of working with students in the South Los Angeles, the following are the thoughts that teachers had about their choice to work at Maple Charter School. Ms. Graye, fourth grade teacher, shared,

I think we should focus on breaking some of the stereotypes that they think of themselves and other people because a lot of them come with these ideas.

Some of them come with this hatred for others. If they are black for Latinos and vice versa just from their home and their environment where they don't really get along. They come with these ideas that it is okay to call each other names based on the color of your skin and also empower them to do something with their lives because a lot of them see the people in their communities that have not been successful and I think that they think that is what they are supposed to be. I think it has a lot to do with their lack of caring about their education

Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, having moved from out of state recalled thinking, "...so this is South Los Angeles. I didn't know if it was South or if it was Central or if it was South Central..."

Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, shared:

I decided that I wanted to fill the gap between, basically, people of color and the white community, and lower income populations and upper income populations. And the root of all that, I think, is public education which has gone downhill in, you know, the last ten or fifteen years. And the difference, even though it has gone downhill in all public schools, the schools that [are] in rich communities are able to supplement some of those cuts and so the children don't suffer as much.

Likewise, Ms. Locke, third grade teacher, shared:

"I have seen so many students where they have fallen through cracks. So as an Educator, I would like to be that person or be part of something that really does make a difference in their lives to constantly want to learn"

The families are expecting the teachers to provide students with cultural competence from a non-judgmental stance. In this respect, Ms. Graye's statements are most concerning as they identify a belief about the way in which students approach education and the value it holds in their lives. The other statements show that the teachers have an understanding, not necessarily a judgment, of how race, class and locale affect the students. However, there are underlying concerns about how the students to come to school which need to be carefully watched so as not to become problematic.

An additional concern at the school site was how different cultures were incorporated into the classroom based on the student and family population. Several family members shared that though it is not hostile at the school, there is a divide between African American and Latino families. In talking to Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, I asked what school-wide events focused on cultural competence. She shared, "Everybody makes a big deal about African American history month but not that many people make a big deal about Latino heritage" She went on to share a sentiment concurred by several families that though there is not yet a big concern, use of racial slurs on the schoolyard could soon become something bigger. Additionally, the relationships between the teachers and students are beginning to be shaped by race and the stereotypes they hold. Katherine, a student, shared "What I don't like about this school is that people keep saying names and then that goes into my mind and I keep remembering and sometimes I say it by accident and I don't like that..." Kelly, a parent, also shared how Clint reacted in the aftermath of Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, not allowing him to share his project. She stated,

He didn't see the difference between colors or Latinos or Americans he never saw a difference, but lately, because of this teacher, he was feeling that way and I started to worry because I know how much he likes [the researcher] and most of his friends, they were, you know [African American] and so I said, "We need to talk," because I don't like that.

To rectify these problems, the teachers must first acknowledge their existence. However, their expertise in their classrooms, along with their levels of awareness and comfort levels with discussing these concerns has not been a focus at the school. During the past three years, 50 to 75 percent of the staff has had one year of teaching experience or less (see Table 1). With the participant teachers' experiences in mind and my own observations of other new teachers at the site, I asked Ms. Tabor, executive director, if she had considered developing a particular structure or training program to introduce new teachers not only to the academic content (as is currently done) but also to working with students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds that may differ from their own. She first answered, "No," but then elaborated that in hiring the teachers, she "just assumed, coming here, [the teachers] understood what they were getting into, and that even if they might not know how to handle it, they were committed to figuring it out." This indicated that gaining information related to cultural competence was entirely in the hands of the teachers or in the case of my teacher participants the result of their prior knowledge of the student population and their understandings about how they could best serve the students.

Critical Race Theory proposes that educators move their understandings of students of color away from those assigned through the propagation of the dominant ideology. Though it is not apparent from their comments that this has yet occurred, when the teachers at Maple Charter School are able to fully do this they will be in a unique position to transform their classroom context. They can be at the helm of a space where race and class for the students is a positive rather than a negative experience as it is in society. However, in order to do this the teachers need to be culturally competent themselves first. Having background knowledge and a context in which to understand the cultures of their students, how these cultures relate to one another and to the local community will provide the teachers valuable knowledge that would likely support their efforts to have students take an interest in their learning.

Despite concerns about incorporating a space to discuss race, culture and developing racial tensions there has been one positive implementation by the teachers. The majority of Social Studies units are taught through teacher designed units of study created using a backwards planning design. Teachers create the units independently but can receive support using the backwards planning design by myself or two other faculty members who have been trained on the model. Learning museums, where the class is designed as a museum, are held at the end of each school year. The focus is the products from the Social Studies units designed by the teachers. Each classroom sets up the learning museum differently but as a general rule work products are displayed and students either make a presentation or serve as “museum docents” for visitors. Visitors are students from other grade levels and invited family members.

The units are meant to traverse disciplines an important element of teaching and learning from a Critical Race Theory standpoint. When teaching second grade to the research participants I designed a unit on culture that focused on how stories travel from long ago through oral histories, written histories and the arts. The students brought in artifacts which included African masks, Mayan Worry Dolls, gourd instruments from different countries and clothes from El Salvador. As a class we explored the artifacts and then the students completed a research project on their own families. This unit was the focus of the learning celebration for the participants during the 2006-2007 school year.

In third grade during the 2007-2008 year students completed another learning museum based on the Chumash tribes of California. This curriculum taught students about interactions with nature and how locales change over time. In sharing their learning students wrote stories about the lives Chumash people led and designed a book cover that showed an area of their choice both now and long ago. Within this unit students also studied artifacts and visited a Chumash learning center.

Natalie shared when describing her second grade learning museum, “It was actually fun because at the end of the day, everybody got together...It was like a class community, how everybody got together and how we were sharing all of our stuff.”

Katherine also shared, “I liked it when we did the learning museum.”

Speaking to students in the focus groups I learned that both social studies units and learning celebrations had been memorable experiences for the student participants. The opportunity to share knowledge of their family tree, cultural traditions, and unearth artifacts as “museum docents” were often shared by students as a positive learning

experiences. And, almost a full year after the learning celebration the students had detailed memories of the event. Students also fondly remembered their field trip to the learning center which was on a local beach and what it was like to enter a Chumash home. They recalled facts about the Chumash in relation to other Native American tribes and shared what they illustrated for their “now and long ago” covers.

Larry shared “I was learning about the Chumash people. I never knew there was an Indian tribe called the Chumash and I learned more about art and Native Americans.” John also shared “...when we go on field trips we learn about people...we learn about people like the Chumash people when they lived in huts we learned about it and we researched it and we made it into a book”.

The students and families have identified two concerns in relation to Cultural Competence. First, teachers must approach the cultural competence of students from a non-judgmental stance. Second, teachers must develop their own cultural competence in order to offset the racial tensions in their classrooms. In looking at these tensions and how the teachers approach culture, another concern arose. From a Critical Race Perspective the units and learning museums provide the opportunity for the stories of people of color to have importance. The interaction between the students and their teachers became collaborative during these museums. Additionally, the experiences of the students and their enthusiasm for the content they learned and shared signified that the learning celebrations at Maple Charter School are meaningful for students and useful in developing a cultural competence for students in relation to cultural groups and historic events.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the units are designed to match California content standards. Though these standards may provide a base they do not establish a political understanding of the experiences of different peoples. Gay (2002) details how in classroom practice, formal lessons as well as the symbolic and societal curriculum can all be analyzed and then designed to ensure cultural congruence. If the units are truly to be used to increase cultural competence they must now move from away from themes focused on the celebrations, homes and foods if they are to be different than the superficial artifacts of multicultural education. Teaching students the *real* history of different groups in America rather than the oft-called hidden curriculum, will be a step in offsetting the socialization of students into developing a hegemonic view of the history of America (Jay, 2003).

Socio-political Consciousness

“This is our life. We can’t drive home.”—Fifth Grade Student

The absence of socio-political learning experiences at Maple Charter School can be attributed to it not being structured towards teaching students about any particular social or political issues. My observations and data collection with the student participants did not reveal the existence of any classroom interaction with the issues of consciousness or awareness of their surrounding neighborhood. In my interview with Ms. Tabor, I asked her if this was something she had considered integrating into the school. She revealed that in founding the school, she did not want it to have any social justice theme. She felt that,

“Showing up [and having] passion is not enough,” and that she did not want her

students marching on the street. She felt that as a school, it was more important to increase the academic achievement of the students so they could “go wherever they want or do whatever they want to do....[because] the only way you make change is to be powerful enough to be in the system,” and students who were marching without a deep enough understanding were not as likely to make real change.

In discussing how socio-political consciousness played out at the school site, Ms. Locke, third grade teacher, shared that it was important from the standpoint of the teacher rather than the student. She stated, “It’s very important to be aware of what’s going on in their environment, what kind of media they are watching, and their background so you know how to deal with that in the classroom.” Considering Ms. Locke’s statement I did find, during the research timeframe, that there was an important issue occurring not only for the students and families in their neighborhood but also within the school. There was deep concern that students were going largely unacknowledged—that, just as in society at large, the students were going largely unseen.

In addition to learning museums, only school assemblies served as another way for students to receive “community praise” in place of the traditional awards and acknowledgements students generally receive at schools. Yet some students also shared that they were disappointed that they did not receive formal rewards and recognition from the school. Bill shared that one of the things he missed from his old school was that,

They invited all the parents in the whole school, to make sure they knew it was assembly [time], and we got awards and certificates. We got to walk up on stage

and shake hands with the principal and staff and get awards for, like, the A's honor roll, the B's honor rolls, and the C's.

Clint also shared how, at his old school, the students had “science awards, the Golden science award for perfect in Science,” and that he missed this aspect of his old school.

The inability to move students from this stance may also lie in the importance that families placed on formal recognition, which became a heated discussion during the first family focus group. The following is an excerpt of the discussion from the focus group after one family member spoke about the lack of recognition for students at Maple Charter. This conversation, between five mothers, was the result of an organic discussion starting from the point of view of how students at the school were making academic progress:

Eileen: But they don't have programs that encourage the kids, that are really advanced, because some, I know the school is not for that, but the kids that are advanced, they get um they need to stay challenged. And then my son, he cries. Like when my daughter goes to the other school, he sees all the kids get awards or something or recognition. Some of them are for being in school every day – attendance for different things, but everybody gets something, and my son cries, ‘How come my school, you know [doesn't reward me]? I'm a good reader and I read all the books in a whole year.’ and they don't recognize him. And, well, you know, I'm like well, every school is different and I try to encourage him myself and it's hard.

Caroline: We talked about that in another parent meeting...It's hard as a parent because we grew up getting those external rewards – somebody telling us, 'You did a good job,' but teaching this generation of kids differently so they build it from the inside out helps to build them up inside and out and if we're not giving the certificates and recognition ...

Kelly: The school that my son was coming from, they would give him a certificate like student of the month and ...

Betty: That's what I'm saying.

Kelly: It was just a certificate. My son is, what I mean, I know that he [has trouble] but he's focusing...he's not one of those kids that doesn't learn. He needs to be kept up and he asks a lot of questions, too, and one of the problems that I always have is like, [when he asks] 'Why?' and then I say 'Oh Clint, I don't want to do this,' and he says 'I want to know why.' I'm like, 'Okay.' I'm not really good as a mom. I work ten hours every day but I have my mom here. You don't see me much, but my mom is always here and he's always on time, you know, and at the other school he woke up, he was children of the month. He made it there. He knew he was gonna get something...

Caroline: But not giving that paper.

Kelly: But he got...

Caroline: Get the message to the children that we see their accomplishments. We understand the pat on the back. If we're not gonna give that piece of paper, what are we doing so that kids...[feel acknowledged for accomplishments]

The data reveals that both the participants and their family members are expressing a need. Acknowledgement was at least one way that many of families measured their success and for the students one way to make their families proud. Thinking from a Critical Race Theory perspective, I believe this concern is the result of the societal structures in and around the participants, including schools, which have not traditionally been geared to grant a voice to individuals of color and individuals from lower socio-economic levels. Schools have had an unseemly history of providing a voice and a chance only for those in the dominant groups of society. A system of silence, where their affirmation comes from competition or meritocracy, exists that forces individuals to try to get ahead of one another.

The students at Maple Charter School have a unique opportunity to go against the norm and understand the role that society has had in creating the current cultural context in which they live. The students come to the school from a community norm that pits “black and brown” against one another. Particular to South Los Angeles is the uprising of territorial relationships as the demographics have shifted and changed over time. As Y. Lapayese points out, it is only through an understanding *of why* they are fighting for the crumbs, that the students can begin to ask and respond to the bigger question of “who owns the bakery?” (personal communication, July 26, 2007). This will, in turn, lead students to begin to take on a mindset of socio-political consciousness.

My early classroom observations revealed no learning activities focused on raising the socio-political consciousness of students. Judging only from those observations, I might have determined that Maple Charter not only has no socio-political

consciousness, but it has no ascertainable interest in having one. Fortunately, those assumptions would have been premature. The new school year (2008-2009) had brought fresh faculty, including Mr. Williams, a first-year fifth grade teacher and, as it turns out, the catalyst for socio-political consciousness at Maple Charter School.

In October 2008, the fifth graders began working with a non-profit community group that offered their services free of charge to the school. A teacher from the program came into the class once a week for four weeks to discuss with the students community issues in their lives. During the first class, I happened to be in the room providing coverage for Mr. Williams. The project intrigued me from the first lesson and, though I was not able to attend all four classes, I was able to attend two. The fifth grade class and their teacher were not formal participants in my research. Therefore, my observations and notes from informal conversations serve as the primary record of the visual media project upon which they embarked.

During the first class the teacher talked with the students about the “crab in a bucket” phenomenon. She showed them a slide of an Ed Massey sculpture titled *The Corporate Ladder*. The sculpture depicts five individuals, mostly dressed in suits, climbing a metal ladder. At the top is an elderly Caucasian man, followed by a younger Caucasian man, a Caucasian woman, an African American man and a young white man dressed as a mail carrier. All of the individuals on the ladder are pulling, pushing or kicking one another in their pursuit to reach the top of the ladder. The guest teacher worked with the students to help them understand how the order of individuals on the ladder mimics dominant society, and how, like crabs in a bucket, people are always

trying to pull one another down. At the conclusion of the lesson, she explained to the students that the sculpture was originally designed to be a reflective piece in the lobby of a prominent business office in the state of Washington.

During the third lesson, the students were asked to voice the concerns they had about issues in their own neighborhoods. The students responded with many answers including gangs, guns, police, tagging, drugs, alcohol and pollution. The students were then asked to create an action plan to resolve the problems, which would then be sent on to a local congressman as part of a community writing contest.

After the students completed their fourth class, Mr. Williams proposed that in preparation for their school-wide assembly, the students make a visual media presentation about community issues. Mr. Williams shared that he had originally wanted the students to make a video about their class community, but realizing how pertinent their community issues work was, he wanted to capitalize on the moment. The students put a great deal of time into writing their lines, and Mr. Williams taught the students how to use a microphone, video-camera, and a software program to create short videos. As I watched the class prepare for their assembly, I saw that the students rose to the occasion with surprising eloquence for their young ages, and began to have an interest and investment in the final product.

The day before the school assembly, Mr. Williams brought DVD copies of the students' final product for all of the faculty, myself, and Ms. Tabor. Over informal lunch conversation, he shared that the students had been very candid about their experiences. One student in particular was brought up in our discussion. This student in the past had

been known to be unwilling to discuss his emotions when having difficulties with other students, but in the video, had openly discussed the death of his cousin. In describing his cousin's death, he shared that his cousin had been "shot in the head three times and had to wear a hat at his funeral." Upon hearing this, Ms. Tabor felt that perhaps the student's language was too violent and potentially scary for some students, and recommended we view the DVD in advance of the assembly.

Mr. Williams proceeded to set up his laptop and he, three of the staff including Ms. Paige, and I all viewed clips of several of the students, including the one who discussed his cousin. As a whole, we felt and told Ms. Tabor that the context of the students' sharing within the video was not scary, and since it related to many of the community issues that students were experiencing, it was appropriate to view as a school. Ms. Tabor decided that the best decision would be to check with the school psychologist, who had been working part-time at the school since 2006, to determine the best process for the DVD presentation.

Concerned that the video might not be shown, Mr. Williams structured his class meeting that afternoon around discussing options for what to do in the assembly if the video could not be viewed. The students became very angry at the prospect of having to change their presentation. When Mr. Williams suggested they show the video without the problematic language, the students felt that it was not fair to have to change their video. The conversation soon turned to Ms. Tabor, who the students knew to be the individual making the final decision. Amongst other angry comments made about her, Mr. Williams quoted a student as saying under her breath "This is our life. We can't drive home," a

comment which he felt was directed at Ms. Tabor as an “outside” member of the student’s community.

Ms. Tabor’s final decision, made collaboratively with the school psychologist, was that students in Kindergarten and First grade would not view the DVD. Students in grades 2, 3 and 4 were able to view the DVD in its entirety during the school-wide assembly, but immediately following the presentation, the fifth grade students would break into small groups to visit students in grades 2, 3 and 4 to debrief them and answer any questions students may have had. In talking with the classroom teachers, I learned that the debriefing sessions were very successful. The second, third, and fourth grade students did not have many questions for the fifth graders but used the opportunity to share similar experiences from their own neighborhoods, comparing them to the experiences they had heard about in the DVD.

This event brought to life two separate but important issues at Maple Charter. First, when students are obviously hungry for opportunities to share and discuss issues about their local communities, why did it take a free service, a new teacher, and three years for socio-political consciousness to be considered? Second, how well is the school meeting the founding ideal of creating a space for meaningful participation, when the opinions of six full-time staff members are overturned by the opinion of one part-time staff member? It is important to remember, in developing socio-political consciousness, that from a Critical Race Theory perspective, cultural groups cannot and do not have equal standing in society, and marginal groups are only allowed as far as the dominant culture feels comfortable (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Therefore, from a Critical Race

Theory perspective the final decision on the fifth grade DVD project was problematic. The choice was taken out of the hands of the students and their teachers, and was ultimately determined by an outsider. Perhaps the reactions of the students towards what was seen as censorship was therefore justified, as it may have been seen as co-opting the opinions of the class and local community or as a micro-assault.

Critical Race Theory views society from a lens of inherent racism and when the “gloves came off” in this situation racism and classism were the first two words thrown around-and not only by the fifth graders. A micro-assault is defined as an action or verbal displays that are intentionally racist an understanding that the students may have been hinting towards in her statement. Not appropriately planning and engaging in socio-political consciousness and cultural competence with the students has led to an undertone within the school of concern. Regardless of the diverse or communal nature of the school community disregarding race and class has and will continue to have a negative impact on molding the *whole* child and the *whole* community.

Summary of Findings

In looking at the Curricula and Administrative practices several issues were brought to light. The corporate structure of the board of directors and executive directors does not allow for meaningful communication or collaboration from students, teachers and families. This is concerning as the board create the policies which the school community members are held accountable to. Despite this structure, in enrolling at the school site many students and families have come to see charter schools as a privilege. As a result many families have become territorial about which families should be allowed to

attend charter schools even as they remain quiet about concerns at the site. This has resulted in long wait lists at charter schools rather than a resolution of traditional school concerns.

The curricula and ultimate assessment of students are problematic. Curricula were chosen based on theoretical approaches. In its implementation these curricula have revealed that they do not work together seamlessly. The curricula and administrator approach also has not placed an emphasis on the teaching of basic math and literacy skills. The assessments which are sent home without explanation to students and families are difficult to understand in their use of educational jargon and are not transparent enough to be used in supporting the academic achievement of students.

Discipline was also a concern at the site. Expectations for how discipline was to be handled created incongruence between families, as well as between teachers, families, students, and administration. While the school emphasizes their policy as “caring” and/or “responsive,” the family member participants believed it to be ineffective as did some of the teachers. In gently pushing out students who did not meet the expectations for behavior the school is not teaching the students the “codes” they will need to participate in society (Delpit, 1988). This was a concern also voiced by at least one parent, Caroline, who asked, “How can we change this picture because we got to educate this child. This child is going to be an adult. What’s our responsibility to get him there? If we overlook it year after year and this child’s been destructive and tearing up the classroom we haven’t done our job as a community.” This and other concerns around discipline were the result of a lack of community connections between the school and families. These concerns also

echo Delpit's (1998) findings which emphasized that efforts made towards determining the needs and desires of the population being served must be done collaboratively. When this is done it informs all community members and allows participants to consider their current position as well as future decisions that will affect them from a standpoint of critical awareness.

Epstein and Jansorn (2004) identified several options for involvement with families and communities. These included opportunities for communication, volunteering and collaborating on reciprocal opportunities. In looking at the relationship with both the local and church community these levels of involvement have not been met. The local community is not aware of the school and therefore has not established what could be a reciprocal opportunity to improve the economic status of the surrounding neighborhood and provide students with models from their own communities.

The teachers expressed a surface level understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy but the implementation of is not yet comprehensive. Teachers most often based their understanding of culturally relevant strategies on their own life experiences and positions of power within society. This resulted in an uneven and at times superficial implementation of culturally relevant teaching practices.

The two third grade teachers, during the 2007-2008 academic year, relied on two distinct models for working with their students. Ms. Locke determined that the students were focused more on gender than race and culture, and she did not consider race and culture an area to be focused on in her class. Ms. Paige did focus on race and culture but did so through her own stereotypes of her students' ethnicities when determining

classroom content and learning strategies. Ms. Graye, fourth grade teacher, has developed a classroom where students were able to take ownership for their learning and share aspects of their cultures but her comments did not reflect high academic expectations for her students. Ms. Seale, fourth grade teacher, had high academic expectations, an understanding of the societal inequalities facing students and a desire for students to be culturally competent. Yet, she too was not able to incorporate all of her understandings and desires into the classroom.

The fact that the teachers expressed different perspectives is not surprising as majoritarian stories and research (Duncan, 2005; Yosso, 2005) have revealed that discourses from the dominant Caucasian group and those considered to be minorities are often divergent. However, regardless of their experiences, none of teachers seemed to recognize the importance of her role in helping students of color feel not only academically successful, but also culturally competent and conscious of the greater world around them.

Students and families based on their previous school experiences identified salient elements of culturally relevant pedagogy they would like to see implemented in the classroom. These practices included a desire for students to have access to the resources they believed would place students on an even playing field with their counterparts from other socio-economic communities. The resources included a class and school structure which would allow for students to have their educational needs identified and met. Economically the school is meeting expectations but providing students with a variety of material objects. However, the special education program is not sufficiently meeting the

students needs. This raises questions about there ever being an even playing field by materialistic items alone.

Delgado (2001) speculated that there are two approaches within Critical Race Theory, the realist and the idealist. The realist approach is concerned with the attainment of material objects resulting from race and discrimination (Delgado, 2001). This approach alone will not yield any significant societal change and when the students enter the “real world” many of the same limitations that they face will be no different as a result of the folders and backpacks they were provided with.

Due to this societal concern and the high drop out rate in the surrounding community there is a need to support families in feeling academically capable of helping their students. This again, requires an authentic interaction with the curricula, content standards and assessment. The need for successful academic experiences for students was also determined. These experiences were deemed important in helping students develop an academic identity for themselves which transforms into an understanding that there are long term consequences for their actions. In regards to cultural competence a non-judgmental and collaborative approach that moves away from superficial celebrations to a deeper political understanding of American history is needed.

When asked about certain culturally relevant classroom lessons, the students felt that they were important learning experiences. However, there is not yet a connection between the role of both, family and students, in creating cultural competence in the classrooms. Cultural differences between home language and school language are a source of frustration for teachers, and impact their ability to effectively communicate and

collaborate. An open door policy between families and teachers to increase the cultural competence of teachers requires an equal partnership, not just a literal open door.

The effect of race and culture on individual students is an essential element of increasing socio-political consciousness. This was seen most prominently in Mr. Williams class project. When allowing students to explore issues of social justice and socio-political consciousness, the level of support shapes their understanding and comfort level. Even within small schools, focusing on opportunities for small grade level groups is important for communicating issues of concern, fostering socio-political consciousness, and creating strong communication and community between teachers, families and administration.

Conclusion

As a founding teacher in 2006 and as a current teacher-mentor and project coordinator in 2009, it was my hope that engaging in this ethnography, and recording my experiences and those of the participants in my research, would lead to a deeper understanding of the complexities required to meaningfully achieve the initial goals of Maple Charter School. These included not only academic growth but the cultural, societal and economic outcomes espoused as the school's mission.

In this process I took a broad look at how community can be developed and maintained by diverse individuals in a charter schools community. I closely examined the goal of Maple Charter School of being "relevant to students' developmental and socio-cultural needs" through the lens of what successful culturally relevant pedagogy looks like at the classroom level. Additionally, through Critical Race Theory the ways in which

students and families of color from lower socio-economic levels were, included and excluded, were explored. Throughout Chapter 5, the research findings and supporting data were detailed. In determining these findings I began asking new and different questions than those I had originally formulated. However, I found that in each new answer, important elements of culturally relevant pedagogy were uncovered.

This ethnography revealed surprising details about how well the “common good” of charter schools has provided a meaningful change for low income students of color. Though the context differed, Dyson (2006), in his evaluation of the silencing of Hurricane Katrina victims wrote, “Episodes of good will and compassion are no replacement for structural change. Charity can never be a substitution for justice” (p.152), a sentiment that also rings true in South Los Angeles. The findings point to a divide between the charter school promise and the daily reality of charter life. This outcome does not support the recent and rapid growth of charter schools. Yet, a system has begun that maintains the ideology that traditional schools are lost causes and charter schools are the cure.

In Chapter 6, a final look at the structural causes and pedagogical concerns outlined in the work will be reviewed. Critical Race Theory will be utilized to assist in creating recommendations for Maple Charter School, similar school settings, and the field of education at large. In addition, the relation of my findings to my initial research questions will be further developed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs
and the history of this need.”-Nel Noddings*

The purpose of this study was to analyze aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy as seen by different participants in an urban, elementary charter school. The research began in May 2008 and concluded in March 2009. During this timeframe, nine weeks were spent observing how teachers and students interacted in four of the nine classrooms at Maple Charter School. The remainder of the timeframe was spent understanding the context of the school site and how it supported both culturally relevant pedagogy and community building between participants. An understanding of the perceptions and approaches around the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy by teachers was gained. In addition, students and their families were provided an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions of schooling and culturally relevant practices at the school.

The research was conducted in an effort to understand and potentially influence a start-up charter school in South Los Angeles, both in the manner in which school life meets the needs of students of color, and in the development of pathways of communication between administration, teachers, students and families. Throughout the research the ways in which participants would be able to use the findings was considered. The following section includes answers to the research questions as well as final recommendations, based on data collection and analysis. In addition, the findings of the

school community members are included, as they offered insight into practices specific to Maple Charter School and to the implementation of culturally relevant teaching strategies.

Reflection on the Research Process

An important element of research based on Critical Race Theory and ethnography is that the researcher must be self-reflective. Throughout the research process, I had to confront my positionality and reflexivity, and be self-reflective about my participation and how my presence might improve or hinder the academic experiences for students at Maple Charter School. In this process I questioned my own role in what I perceived as the subordination of community members at the school, particularly when I participated in the Parent Advisory Board. During this meeting, I found myself questioning the blatant power differential that was unfolding between the school and the families. Further, I wondered if this was my first time participating in a meeting of this type, or if it was simply the first time I had the critical consciousness to recognize it for what it was.

I also had to carefully consider how my perceptions of power may be tainted by my perceptions of race. As an African American woman I have experienced racial microaggressions and in my own processing of the meeting I did have to consider if I felt that Ms. Tabor's actions and the flow of the meeting were racially motivated or more closely related to issues of power and voice within the school. Research around racial microaggressions has identified that rather than singular incidents the compilation of racial microaggressions combine to make one more sensitive to the actions or motives of White individuals and the need to remain vigilant to the potential for racism. Both of

which could potentially offset my research outcomes if I did not remain focused on considering the observation and data from a variety of angles.

In addition to concerns about race, power and voice at the site, I also had to move to a place where I could objectively consider the issue of discipline. As I delved deeper into how cultural competence was playing itself out at the school site, I considered how, as an African American woman, my view was impacting my perceptions. I realized that in particular, my view of discipline was effecting my evaluation of how discipline was handled at the school site in relation to race, culture, and socio-economic status. In my own childhood experiences, spankings were an infrequent but real reality, and though it sounds horrible on paper, many of my favorite stories of my mother's childhood antics ended with her being "beaten" with one of two switches from her front yard. "Dr. Do Good" was the switch used for minor infractions while "Sting and Nettle" was pulled out for severe ones. Further, one of my few memories of my grandfather was of him comically (but seriously) threatening us with, "Don't make me take off my belt!" as we ran through his house. This is not to say that I don't take corporal discipline seriously—as a teacher and mandated reporter, I have called child services in the past. However, when students make comments about being "spanked," "whooped," or "smacked," I don't always assume that the situation is serious, but rather just a part of their lived reality. As a result, I had to pay close attention, from an objective standpoint, to how Maple Charter faculty and staff collaborated with families concerning the issue of discipline, as it became a major point of discussion in *every single* focus group and interview I held, and pointed to important cultural and socio-economic differences I could not ignore.

As my research progressed, I also became aware of how limited and inauthentic my initial understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy had been when I first began the work. Understanding the pedagogy in theory did not immediately translate into practice. It was my engagement with students and families and my own exploration of the community in and around the school that aided me in internalizing an understanding of culturally relevant practices and allowed me to meaningfully collect data. In this process, I began to understand that the elements of culturally relevant teaching that I was looking for are not static, and therefore could not be judged by my initial protocols alone. They required examination and evaluation by the insiders at the school site—in this case, my participants.

General Conclusions

Question 1: What are elementary school teachers' understandings, perceptions, and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in their classrooms?

Ladson-Billings (1995) contends that culturally relevant pedagogy is “just good teaching” but that in order to implement this type of pedagogy, teachers must continue to question what good teaching looks like. Though all of the teachers in the research study were well intentioned teachers, they were not necessarily reflective of their practice. Of the four teachers studied, none were found to have an understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy as having a comprehensive focus on academic achievement, cultural competence and socio-political consciousness. Despite all the teachers having completed teacher education programs within the last five years, the teachers' understandings as verbalized through their definitions of culturally relevant pedagogy, strongly mirrored

their own schooling experiences as well as their own race, social class, and position within the dominant society. This translated into an implementation that was heavily focused on preparing students to be academically successful on taking standardized assessment and not necessarily in the larger context of academic life or the larger world.

The teachers taught the curricula but were not as critically aware of the outcomes for their students. Even more alarming is that even if the curricula were effective, the teachers do not all express or exhibit high expectations for their students. The teachers questioned their teaching as well as their students' abilities. Ms. Paige, as one example, shared that she had questioned whether she held high expectations that were third grade level appropriate for her students, or if her expectations were low based on working with students testing below grade. Though no teacher should be judged on his or her ability to bring students up to grade level, an easy approach to at least understand expectations is to collaborate with other grade level teachers. In this case, Ms. Seale and Ms. Graye had said in many faculty conversations that their students were not at fourth grade level, which squarely points to a lack of competency in third grade skills. In truly moving to a culturally relevant teaching stance, teachers would challenge their students to achieve to the best of their abilities and begin to internalize that there is an intense connection between the students' success and the teacher's own life.

The fourth grade teacher, Ms. Seale was the only teacher that stood out as seeing academic achievement as having long term consequences. The data collected from speaking with her was the most thought provoking in that she critically questioned what was going to happen to the students at Maple Charter School and what was being done

for students now to shape their futures. Ms. Seale exhibited a positive approach focused on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. By doing so, she constantly taught and pushed her students beyond grade level expectations. However, even she questioned if her teaching style would be valuable in light of the students' social class and community.

The students come to the school from a community norm that pits "black and brown" against one another. Particular to South Los Angeles is the uprising of territorial relationships as the demographics have shifted and changed over time. As a result, many schools have predominantly Latino or predominantly African American populations. The students at Maple Charter School have a unique opportunity to make connections with students from different cultural backgrounds in that the student population is more balanced. However, teachers did not acknowledge that there were students of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in their classrooms. Auxiliary to this concern, teachers had an ineffective understanding of how to convey cultural competence to their students or deepen it for themselves. There is a division between African American and Latino families and there is starting to be one between the students as well. The focus that has been turned to the issue focuses more on the division rather than the process of division, a concern noted by Critical Race Theorist when breaking away from Critical Legal Studies (Yosso, 2005).

When culture was acknowledged, it was overwhelmingly towards increasing the cultural awareness of the African American culture. This focus may have been due to the higher percentage of African American students (60%) to Latino students (40%). Students were observed learning about individuals most prominent in African American

history during Black History Month, and notable days such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day were celebrated. However, Latino Heritage month was not observed, and only Cesar Chavez Day was noted through the reading of a handout and the creation of picket signs. These observations exposed cultural competence at Maple Charter School to be a biased and, at best, a superficial acknowledgement of the student population.

Teachers relied on prior knowledge from experiences with African American and Latino individuals that did not necessarily match the lives and experiences of their students. Ms. Paige, third grade teacher, in designing lessons for her students, relied on stereotypes she attached to African American students. She identified these students as liking rhythm, dancing, and loud volume and continues to use the same lessons with each subsequent class based on her prior knowledge.

Irvine (1990) suggested that being color blind does not support the background, understanding, or beliefs that children bring with them to school (1990). This was manifested in Ms. Locke's inability to make connections with her students. Acknowledging the differences between herself and her students would have increased their cultural competence, and would likely have reduced her students' feelings that she was "weird" because she was Asian. An additional concern is that in taking on a color-blind stance, Ms. Locke allowed tensions to develop in her class. Even though she had heard racial slurs used in her classroom, she did not acknowledge that there was need for concern, and her disciplinary emphasis was turned toward gender issues between students.

In relation to socio-political consciousness, the teachers understood that both race and socio-economic backgrounds affect the equity of education for students. In addition, all of the teachers cited equity disparity as a reason to work with students of color. They did not, however, explore what it meant to help students of color move beyond these obviously disturbing equity issues. The only exception of this was in Mr. William's class, it was clear that students were questioning societal structures and wanted the space in which to begin to ask questions. Critical Race Theory explains the role that racism in society has played in creating the cultural context within which people of color live. The lesson on the corporate ladder was a bold approach, making a clear statement about the realities of both the business world and society that was more in line with the experiences I had hoped to observe within the classrooms. However, I observed no focus on socio-political consciousness in relation to the student and teacher participants. This was disappointing since it was obvious, after watching and discussing the DVD, that these students demonstrated a desire to learn more and discuss similar concerns.

Question 2. What are students' and families' understandings and perceptions of the utilization and effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching practices?

Allowing people of color to share their experiences for validation in an effort to reach socially just outcomes is an important element of Critical Race Theory (Chapman, 2007; Writer & Chavez, 2001). Therefore, it was important within this research to allow opportunities for meaningful sharing in order to identify areas where a need exists to hear more from the students and families at Maple Charter School.

As schools are societal structures not initially organized to help lower socio-economic students of color and their families achieve, the perspectives and understandings of all student and family participants, in some manner, were shaped by the themes of Critical Race Theory. Families and students, based on their own schooling experiences, have internalized an understanding of culturally relevant teaching strategies. From the foci of the three elements that make up culturally relevant pedagogy, the families articulated an understanding that these were important elements of educating their children. The students, when introduced to the three elements in informal conversations, had positive memories and recalled academic knowledge from learning experiences that incorporated culturally relevant teaching strategies.

From an experiential standpoint, the families perceived which educational practices most benefited their students. They also perceived which concerns relating to race and class they would like to see addressed in school. The students were able to talk about their experiences with different teachers and different teaching practices in relationship to what did and did not work well for them.

Question 3. In what ways can the culturally relevant practices at a charter school be informed by the student and family members of the school community?

The structure of the focus groups and the opportunity to get together with grade level families were well received and could serve in the future as an important catalyst. Continuing to collaborate in situations which allow for dialogue, similar to focus groups,

would create opportunities for students and families to share information on what is and is not working for them, using the strength of their numbers to create change.

There were concerns about communication between home and school regarding academic and social expectations. The roles once seen as collaborative and equally valuable can create a space to critically examine how well the school outcomes align with the school philosophy. Families and students would then be able to assist teachers in transitioning from teacher-centered to collaborative relationships in relation to academic achievement. Finally, families and students can take on an informative role to help school staff and faculty stay aware of cultural, economic, and social issues occurring in and around the school neighborhood.

Recommendations from Students and Families

1. When considering the socio-economic norms for students in urban schools, families, students, and community members identified the importance of teaching independence and resiliency to students in both academic and social settings. This was a concern previously identified. Delpit (1998) theorized that even if students are taught explicitly how to live in a diverse world and access power, their abilities will be relegated by the larger societal system. This concern was geared towards the understanding that local communities and neighborhoods do not and cannot offer students an abundance of economic opportunities. Students need instruction and preparation in order to successfully interact in society, attend institutes of higher education, and begin careers. Adult participants, in particular,

stressed that even though many schools work to create a safe space for students, better instruction on the realities of society are necessary in order to ensure that they can effectively transition between settings and later into the global marketplace.

2. The single largest concern of students and families at the site was the discipline policy at the school. They acknowledged that not feeling a sense of safety on the school yard and in the classrooms contributed negatively to academic achievement. In examining this concern it was revealed that at the heart of these concerns, there were questions about how well the discipline philosophy had “buy-in” and how well it addressed cultural and socio-economic norms in the school community. Families felt strongly that a school focused on cultural relevance must be aware of the discipline policies in their students’ homes, as well as how home language ties to discipline.

In relation to discipline Maple Charter was reactive rather than proactive. When the school opened, there was no formal classroom management program and the expectations for discipline outlined in the community handbook were not followed. These two elements set the stage for an exponential increase in disciplinary problems the following school year. In response to this, the Responsive Classroom program was adopted, basically targeting the skills students bring to school with as the concern—skills, the school assume, that they’ve learned from their homes and families. The Responsive Classroom

program essentially, removed the impact that the structure of the classroom, abilities of the teachers, and adherence to the policy bring to the discipline issue.

When these steps did not work, students were pushed out of the school. At the time, many school community members identified a concern that the issue of discipline and how to resolve it was not handled collaboratively. These participants were not expecting that schools would model school-wide discipline on home discipline, but felt instead that home discipline was an important data point that could be useful in understanding the acceptance and reaction to policies and management styles. In moving forward, families would like the issue of discipline to be addressed in a collaborative manner which is not top-down.

3. Students had a strong interest in the creation of programs or curriculums geared to helping them learn how to be environmentally friendly and responsible in their own communities. The school had sent students on field trips largely outside of their communities, where they learned how to clean up pollution, save sea animals, and preserve nature. However, they did not learn about problems that were more immediate and pertinent in an urban setting. During interviews, the students were able to tell me many of the “bad” things within their community but no “good” things. Programs and projects that would acquaint them with their own communities, from an environmentally aware point of view, are recommended.
4. Finally, the findings show that the local community was largely unaware of the school’s existence. Again, projects that safely bring the students into the community, or programs that bring members of the business community to the

students are recommended. These interactive programs will improve the relationship between school and community and increase the visibility of the school.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs in Relation to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The findings from this study point to the fact that teachers—even those fresh out of education programs—may not have an effective understanding of culturally relevant teaching practices. Therefore, the following recommendations, address teacher education programs that truly want to ensure that they educate and support teachers as they enter the diverse classrooms of the future.

1. A culturally relevant teacher must understand that academic achievement goes beyond standardized assessment. Part of this is helping the student feel that his or her academic achievement will be viewed, acknowledged and supported in the class and at home. In this research setting, the high school drop out rate was a staggering 43%. While this may not be the norm, the reality is that for many students, particularly in lower income areas, families will need assistance and support in helping their students academically. In addition to the level of education within the community, the lack of employment options in the area, as well as the societal discrimination, both contribute to a 30% poverty rate for residents, and a home ownership level that is below the county average (Ong et al., 2008). Teachers need to be prepared to raise the academic and socio-political knowledge of both the students and their families. This requires a collaborative

and open relationship where a student or family member feels comfortable enough to come to the teacher and request support.

2. A culturally relevant teacher must create a cultural competence for themselves before they can develop it for their students. Irvine notes that even though students may experience dissonance between home and school, this can be overcome through shared communication and goals between schools and homes (Irvine, 2003). In assisting teachers, many of whom will have different cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds from their students, teacher education programs need to develop differentiated courses for incoming teachers. These courses need to provide a variety of reading, research and application opportunities that consider what school, life and cultural experiences teachers have already had and adequately prepare them for new ones.
3. Finally, for teacher education programs to produce teachers who maintain that culturally relevant teaching strategies and socially just outcomes are important, there must be better, stronger, and more organized support for teachers engaging in their first years of teaching. This will be an important resource for teachers who are geared towards social justice and cultural relevancy, so that they do not enter the field of teaching and lose sight of their goals or begin to misappropriate the pedagogy in the absence of a functioning support network of like-minded individuals.

Practical Recommendations

Important ideas about effective community building practices were revealed as the research of culturally relevant pedagogy ensued. Systematic issues that plague start-up schools and their solutions were also generated. The following recommendations have important implications for (a) teachers and schools which espouse culturally relevant practices; (b) schools that are struggling to build community between school participants; and (c) start-up schools that are in the process of making decisions about their oversight and governance practices.

Charter School and Community Building Recommendations

- School administration must stay in constant contact with the local police or gang units to stay informed of the neighborhood occurrences.
- Teachers and administrators must open themselves up to and authenticate themselves to the community.
- Act with a sense of urgency for students struggling academically.
- Bring community members and business owners into school-wide assemblies as visitors and presenters.
- Look closely at how democratic the decision making process is. Identify whose voices are being heard and be open to critical examination of school practices.
- Create more meaningful opportunities for parents to interact with the curriculum beyond just Open House or Literacy Night.
- Teachers and school administration begin to self-exam their biases

- Acknowledge that there may be issues of voice and power between school community members.
- Appropriately prepare incoming staff for the realities of the school community through readings and community outings, maps and experiences.
- Carefully examine school-wide goals and structures in relation to students' needs and the school's ability to meet them.
- Ensure that there is transparency in the long-term plans of the school.
- Help students, families, and community members understand how charter schools differ from traditional schools.
- Clarify the role of the school board to teachers, families, and community members.
- Incorporate community member perspectives into the recruitment and evaluation of both teachers and administration by providing access to the classrooms and board of directors.
- Create opportunities to understand and reconcile racial and social class tension as neighborhoods continue to change.
- Demystify academic progress reports for students and teachers who may not have the literacy skills to interpret traditional reporting measures.
- Evaluate the school-wide retention and promotion policies to ensure socially just outcomes for students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Continued research into the utilization of culturally relevant pedagogy in schools is necessary, and the unique demographic make-up of South Los Angeles based charter schools is an ideal location. However, care should be taken, when engaging in the research process, that the culturally relevant teaching strategies are from a holistic basis, rather than what could easily be designed using only the established characteristics for culturally relevant teachers. Further research is recommended to address the following questions and concerns:

1. Within South Los Angeles Elementary Charter Schools, African American students are currently in the majority, even as the Latino population in surrounding neighborhoods continues to grow. Is there a self-segregation trend occurring in schools? Are there particular elements of charter schools that attract African American students, but discourage Latino students?
2. Charter Schools in South Los Angeles area are flourishing. How well are charter schools serving the communities where they exist? Are these charter schools influencing the neighborhood schools to improve or merely providing an opportunity for a small group of students?

Charter School faculty and governance is largely determined by the independent or dependent status of a school. Relevant research identified that charter schools run by CMOs, EMOs or under local district regulations had less autonomy over hiring practices and decisions. The experiences of teachers and school leaders are also tied to the level of adherence and compliance that is needed with the school's original mission and founders' beliefs. With this

in mind, the unique characteristics and circumstances of charter school teachers, administrators and school board members require additional evaluation.

1. Charter school teachers demographics within this research and relevant demographic studies indicate that independent charter school teachers tend to be younger, have less experience and hold fewer advanced degrees than their dependent charter school counterparts. Looking closely at charter schools against one another rather than through the lens of traditional schools, are their distinct academic achievement differences between independent and dependent charter school students? Does the presence of a teacher's union and district resource structure support or negate the flexibility of charter school autonomy in the classroom?
2. Within this research concerns arose in relation to the school leader and her role in determining curriculum, assessment and policy being neither a classroom teacher nor a member of the local school community. Many charter school leaders face similar circumstances as relevant research identified that many charter school leaders do not the same level of classroom experience or relationship within the school as do traditional school leaders. What routes-experiential, academic or other- have charter school leaders taken in order to be effective school leaders? How do these leaders gain legitimacy from school community members? In comparing charter school leaders to one another is there a particular field outside of education that best prepares an individual to be a school leader or are there particular characteristics that are ideal?

Conclusion

Initially, the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory seemed most appropriate to examine Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. On the surface, there were many similarities in the formative ideologies and they both can be traced backed to legal decisions for schools made during the years of the civil rights movement. Critical Race Theory is focused on looking at race and racism as a central theme and its connection to other forms of subordination in social institutions such as schools, and Culturally Relevant pedagogy is the outcome of critical responses to multicultural education and to the ongoing inability to close the achievement gap.

However, after completing the research I believe that a lens that was only comprised of Critical Race Theory was not fully effective in analyzing Maple Charter School. The lack of community involvement, the recruiting of school board members in higher socio-economic levels, the focus on external input rather than school community member voices all speak to a larger issue of social class and social ostricization which played a large part in many of the issues that faced Maple Charter School. Additionally, Critical Race Theory, though extremely important in assessing the viewpoints of families and students on their past experiences, did not allow for social class issues that were also underlying to be fully explored.

Every school site is a complex coalition and partnership with equally complex social variables. During the process of examining culturally relevant pedagogy, issues of social justice appeared at the school site. This is a finding that cannot be ignored as the theoretical framework for this research included a commitment to socially just outcomes.

In this respect, the research was successful in allowing teachers as well as community participants to feel that their voices were heard and understood.

My initial intention was to utilize catalytic validity as a measure of how well I took the information gained and used it towards raising consciousness and creating change (Anderson, 1989; Sumner, 2003; Writer & Chavez, 2001). Based on this measure, the consciousness of the school community members has been raised. The clearest example of this came from the last moments of my final interview with Ms. Paige, the third grade teacher. We had discussed how students of different backgrounds are recognized in the school, and then moved into a conversation about how she had experienced the school as a Caucasian woman. The following is an excerpt from the conversation;

Ms. Paige: I'm constantly reminded by my coworkers what Blacks and Latinos are like and what Whites are like and I think [pause] what I notice is that White people don't have generalizations about what they are like but apparently Blacks and Latinos do, so its been a funny mix.

Researcher: Why do you think white people don't have generalizations?

Ms. Paige: I don't know. I never really thought about it. [long pause] You know, maybe because white people always have the upper hand. They don't have to sit and generalize about the way other people are. It's like [pause] the race that hasn't been pushed down; so they are not as aware. White people are just not as aware and they are not a minority. You tend to stick together more when you are a minority.

Ms. Paige, a Jewish woman, in being placed in a minority position at the school, came to a realization about how society is structured and how this impacts people of different cultural backgrounds. This was much different than her statements a year earlier when she saw the negative outcomes for students of color as very external from her. At that time, she did not seem to see herself as someone who had benefited from societal structures and needed to actively identify how this impacted her day-to-day living in a much different way than her students. Likewise, the other teachers began to ask questions of me as we delved deeper into the research process as they began to carefully consider the questions I asked of them. However, it was important that beyond the teachers, the consciousness of the students and families was also raised. In this area, I realized that the research participants, including the teachers, had already attempted in many ways to have their voices heard. They were conscious of concerns at the school but had been denied by the power dynamics in place.

After three years, the school administration has had ample time to resolve initial start-up concerns and it is time to turn the attention back to the goals established in the vision. One of the initial goals is to provide students with learning experiences which are “relevant to students' developmental and socio-cultural needs”. The goal of this research was to examine how culturally relevant pedagogy was understood and put into practice by school community members. In the process I determined that there are many learning experiences occurring at the site that benefit the students. However, these experiences have been disjointed, largely unplanned, and do not represent a collaborative approach to

instilling a sense of academic affirmation, cultural competence and socio-political consciousness for the students

In Chapter 1, I established a three-part goal for this research: using Critical Race Theory as a framework to rely on people of color telling their own stories; focusing on challenging inequalities; and providing a catalyst for transformative change at the school site. Throughout the research I have met the goal of relying on the narratives of my participants and I have focused on revealing the inequalities at the site. In order to meet my final goal of providing a catalyst for transformative change, my findings will be presented to students and family members with the hope that they might pursue the recommendations formulated through our time together, in order to enhance the academic and community outcomes at the school site. To work towards ensuring their voices will be heard the findings will be presented on behalf of the teachers, students and family participants to the administration at the school site in order to challenge the elements of the school vision that have yet to be met, namely, the goal of a “caring community as one in which we build caring and supportive relationships [and] have a sense of common purpose.” Finally, I will continue to work aggressively within the Maple Charter School community to provide opportunities for concerns to be raised, in order to move toward solutions to problems uncovered during the process of this research.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Name	Classroom	Race	Age	ELL Learner	Years at School
Douglas	Paige	African American	8	No	2
Robert	Paige	African American	9	No	2
Maura	Paige	Latino	9	Formerly ELL	2
Bill	Paige	African American	9	No	1
Katherine	Paige	Latino	8	Formerly ELL	2
Clint	Paige	Latino	9	Yes	2
Paula	Paige	Latino	8	No	2
Natalie	Paige	African American	8	No	2
Maria	Paige	African American	9	No	2
Coby	Paige	African American	8	No	1
Paul	Locke	African American	8	No	2
John	Locke	African American	8	No	2
Larry	Locke	Latino	8	No	2
Martin	Locke	African American	8	No	2
George	Locke	African American	9	No	2
Abraham	Locke	Latino	8	No	2
Carl	Locke	African American	8	No	1
Sarah	Locke	African American	8	No	2
Danielle	Locke	African American	9	No	2
Judy	Locke	Latino	9	Yes	2

APPENDIX B
FAMILY PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Race	Role in student's life	Number of children	Children enrolled at site*	Years at site*	Education of caregiver
Betty	41	African American	Mother	1	1	2	**
Charlotte	**	African American	Grand-mother	N/A	N/A	2	**
Gloria	26	Latino	Mother	4	2	2	Some High school
Caroline	44	African American	Mother	2	2	1	2 Year College
Charles	44	African American	Father	2	2	1	4 Year College
Francine	29	Latino	Mother	3	2	2	**
Kelly	38	Latino	Mother	2	1	2	Some High School
Tara	31	Latino	Mother	2	2	2	2 Year College
Angel	39	African American	Mother	2	1	2	**
Iris	34	African American	Mother	1	1	2	Some College
Karen	30	Latina	Mother	3	1	2	4 Year College
Eileen	33	African American	Mother	2	1	2	**
Janice	30	African American	Mother	2	1	2	4 Year College

Note. *At start of research. **Decline to Share

APPENDIX C
TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

Note: *At start of research. **Identifies as Jewish.

Name	Age	Race	Education	Credentialed Teacher	Number years teaching*	Years at school*
Ms. Paige	28	Caucasian**	Masters degree	Yes	1 yr.	1 yr.
Ms. Locke	27	Asian American	Bachelors degree	Yes	0 yr.	Less than 1 year
Ms. Seale	30	African American	Masters degree	Yes	3 yr.	Less than 1 year
Ms. Graye	23	African American & Caucasian	Masters degree	Yes	0 yr.	Less than 1 year

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

- In what way did the teacher decide to enter into the field of education?
- What is the relationship that the teacher perceives she has with students?
- What is the relationship that the teacher perceives she has with families?
- In what ways does culture relate to schooling (inclusive of personal experiences, previous teaching experiences, site experiences)?
- If students are making either academic or social progress what would it look like and how would it be measured?
- In what ways does the teacher believe she supports academic and or social growth of her students?
- Which forms of communication are used to share expectations with students and families?
- Which forms of communication are used to receive feedback and expectations from students and families?
- What do typical classroom practices look like?
- How did you develop your vision of both education and your personal classroom?
- In what ways has she or would she like to change her practices to meet her students' needs (if any)?
- How does the teacher perceive herself as a teacher?

APPENDIX E
PROTOCOL FOR FAMILY FOCUS GROUPS

- How were schools structured when they were their student's age and what were their experiences?
- How do their experiences compare to their student's?
- What guided their decision to remove their child from another school and enroll them at this school?
- How have they found their overall experiences at the school site?
- What is the relationship that the families perceive they have with their student's teacher?
- What is the relationship that the families perceives they have with other families at the school site?
- What are their beliefs about the academics of students at the site (academic gains or setbacks)?
- In what ways have they experienced the classrooms of their student?
- Do the classroom reflect practices that benefit their student?
- Which classroom and school-wide practices would they add or take away?
- Do they feel free to voice their opinions of school practices?
- In what ways do they think culture should relate to schooling (if at all)?
- In what ways do the families believes they support academic and or social growth of their student?
- How knowledgeable are they of the body of research written about the best practices for students of color?

APPENDIX F
PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

- How do they feel about their families' decisions to move them from another school and enroll them at this school?
- How would they compare and contrast the two schools?
- What are their overall experiences at the school site?
- What is the relationship that the students perceive they have with their teacher?
- What is the relationship that the students perceives exists between their families and their teacher?
- What are their beliefs about their academics at the site (academic gains or setbacks)?
- What do they think is the cause of their academic gain or setback?
- Do the students think their classrooms reflect practices that benefit them?
- Which classroom and school-wide practices would they add or take away?
- Do they feel free to voice their opinions of school practices?
- What classroom practices help them learn best?

APPENDIX G
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Student Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study. The focus of the study is learning how culturally relevant pedagogy is understood by students and as well as how it is understood and implemented by their teachers and families. You were selected as a participant due to your enrollment in the third grade class at Maple Charter School in the 2007-2008 school year. Please read this form to insure any and all questions are answered prior to your consent for your participation.

This study is being done by:

Elaine McNeil-Girmai, an Educational Leadership for Social Justice Ed.D student at Loyola Marymount University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is multilayered. First, it will investigate the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices by two third grade charter school teachers. This will include examining its use, relevancy, effectiveness, and efficacy in their classrooms. Second, it will examine the perceptions that teachers, students, and families have of these practices as well as if and how there are shared commonalities. Third, it will explore the ways that culturally relevant practices at charter schools can be informed by the student and family members of the school community.

Procedures:

If you agree to be part of this study you will be observed in class along with the rest of your classmates. Classroom observations may be taped or photographed. However, there will not be an overt interruption to classroom learning as a result of the

research. Data will consist of notes taken by the researcher. You will also be asked to participate in a focus group to be held during a non-academic time of the day or after school .You may also be asked to participate in interviews. The focus group and interviews will be audio and videotaped. The data will be transcribed. None of the data gathered will include information that identifies you (identifiers) and the data will remain confidential and off site.

Risks and Benefits:

This study has no major risks. There will be no impact on your academic progress and social skills grades as a result of participating in this study. There is no cash or incentive benefit to your participation. However, your participation may benefit your school as there is the potential for change in the manner in which culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and implemented at the school site as a result of this study and your families may become more involved and have a greater voice at the school site.

Confidentiality:

The data will be kept private. In any report of the findings presented or published no information that could lead to identification of individual students will be included. Data collected, including audio and video tapes, shall be retained only for research and/or teaching purposes for an indefinite time. Research records will be stored securely.

Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer. Your decision to participate (or not) will not affect your relationship with Maple Charter School or the researcher. If you choose to participate you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting said relationships and or your grades. I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

You will be given a copy of this information for your records. If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I also understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate me before the completion of the study.

Statement of Consent:

In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Student Signature	Date
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I hereby authorize Elaine McNeil-Girmai to include my child/ward in the following research study:

Parent/Guardian Signature:	Date
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Researcher Signature	Date
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APPENDIX G
FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA ESTUDIANTE

Cosentimiento para Estudiante

Le invitamos a participar en un estudio de investigación. El enfoque de este estudio será el aprendizaje del estudiante sobre pedagogías dentro nuestra cultura y su propósito. Así mismo como son comprendidos por los maestros y familias. Usted fue seleccionado por su matriculación en el tercer grado de la escuela Maple Charter School en el año escolar 2007-2008. Por favor de leer este formulario para asegurarnos que hemos respondido todas sus preguntas y favor de leer antes que usted de permiso a su hijo/a para que participe en este estudio.

El estudio sera hecho por:

Elaine McNeil-Girmai, Estudiante de la Universidad Loyola Marymount-Liderasco para Justicia Social e Educational, Doctorado en Educacion.

Base de Informacion:

El proposito de este estudio tiene multiples etapas. Primero, investigaremos como implementar las prácticas y el propósito que tiene culturalmente las pedagogias con dos maestros del tercer grado en una escuela charter. Esto incluye examinar el use, proposito en el salón de clase. Segundo, examinaremos las percepciones que tendrán los maestros, estudiantes y familias sobre las prácticas y haci mismo como compartimos prácticas en comun. Tercero, descubrir modos en cual culturalmente tenemos el mismo proposito en las escuelas charter y como usamos esta information por el estudiante, familia, y miembros de la comunidad dentro la escuela.

Procedimiento:

Si estas de acuerdo con ser parte de este estudio, te estaremos observando durante el tiempo de clase juntamente con los demas alumnos en tu salon. Observaciones durante clase y dentro del salon podrian ser grabados por video o fotografiado. Por lo tanto, no habra ninguna interrupcion de nuestra parte, al resultado del estudio durante el tiempo de clase. Todo los datos seran escritos por el investigador. Tambien tendras que participar durante un tiempo que no es academico. El grupo se enfoca en este estudio y se juntara al terminar el dia escolar. Este grupo sera gravado por audio o video. Todos los datos del grupo se transcribiseran. Todos los datos que se colectan incluyen informacion te intificara (intificaremos) y los datos permaneseran en un sitio fuera de tu escuela y seran confidencial.

Beneficios y Riesgos:

Este estudio no tiene algún riesgo mayor. Tu participación y el resultado no tendrán ningún impacto en tus calificaciones sociables o académicos. Al participar, no habrá algún incentivo o beneficio monetario. Pero, tu participación será un gran beneficio para la escuela. Con los resultados de estos estudios, la escuela tendrá la oportunidad de hacer cambios en la manera en cual formaremos y usamos pedagogías dentro la cultura de nuestra escuela y los padres estaban maas invulo crado y potencialmente tendran mas voz para opinar.

Confidencial:

Todos los datos son confidenciales y privados. Algunos reportajes y descubrimientos que in tífica al estudiante no se utilizaran paras reportaje o publicaciones del estudio. Los datos, incluyendo audio y videos, serán retenidos por los investigadores y/o se utilizaran un tiempo indefinitivo. Investigaciones serán guardadas en un sitio asegurado.

La Especie de Estudio:

Su participacion en este estudio es por su propia voluntad. Nosotros entendemos que mi hijo tiene el derecho de rechazar a responder un pregunta que no desee responder. Su decision de participar (o no) no tendra ningun efecto en su relacion con la Escuela Maple Charter o los investigadores. Si usted elije participar en este estudio, podra retirarse a cualquier tiempo, tomado encuesta que no afecte la relacion y tus calificaciones. Yo entiendo que toda informacion que no me senale directamente a mi persona, sera compartida y podra circular sin ningun permiso de mi parte, ecepto en particular por la leyes requeridas.

Le daremos una copia de esta informacion para sus archivos. Se le notificare en escrito si haremos cambios al diseno del estudio o la informacion. Yo tendre que informarles y entregar un permiso nuevo. Yo entiendo que que habran situaciones en cual el investigador tendra que terminar mi participacion antes que terminen el estudio.

Declaracion de Permiso:

En firmar este formulario, yo doy permiso al estudio, y tengo conosimiento que he recibido una copia de esta informacion y una copia de las leyes "Proyecto de Derechos del Subjecto" (Subject's Bill of Rights).

Firma del Estudiante

Fecha

Yo autorizo que Elaine McNeil-Girmai incluya a mi hijo/a en la investigacion de este estudio:

Firma de Padre/Tutor:

Fecha

Firma de Investigador

Fecha

APPENDIX H
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Teacher Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study. The focus of the study is learning how culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and implemented by teachers-their students and their students' families. You were selected as a participant due to your role of a teacher of a third grade class at Maple Charter School during the 2007-2008 school year. Please read this form to insure any and all questions are answered prior to your consent for participation.

This study is being done by:

Elaine McNeil-Girmai, an Educational Leadership for Social Justice Ed.D student at Loyola Marymount University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is multilayered. First, it will investigate the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices by two third grade charter school teachers. This will include examining its use, relevancy, effectiveness and efficacy in their classrooms. Second, it will examine the perceptions of teacher, students and families of these practices and how if at all there are shared commonalities. Third, it will explore the ways that culturally relevant practices at charter schools can be informed by the student and family members of the school community.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study you will be observed teaching and working with students during academic opportunities and enrichment activities both in and outside of the classroom. In no way will this observation be used to influence or evaluate your

performance. Classroom observations may be taped or photographed. However there will not be an overt interruption to classroom learning. Data will consist of notes taken by the researcher. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in interviews. These interviews will occur prior to the end of the 2007-2008 school year, during the scheduled summer vacation and during the 2008-2009 school year. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. All the data gathered will not include identifiers and data would remain confidential and off site.

Risks and Benefits:

This study has no major risks. This is not an evaluation of your job and there will be no impact on your performance or ability to be promoted as a result of participating in this study. There is no cash or incentive benefit to your participation. However, your participation may benefit your professional practice and the manner in which culturally relevant pedagogy is or is not presented at the school site.

Confidentiality:

The data will be kept private. Any report of the findings presented or published no direct indicators to your individual identity will be included. Data collected, including audio and video tapes, shall be retained only for research purposes for an indefinite time. Research records will be stored securely.

Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer. Your decision to participate (or not) will not affect your relationship with Maple Charter School, or the researcher. If you choose to participate you are free to withdraw at any time not to participate without affecting said relationships. I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I also understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study. You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent:

In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Signature	Date
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Researcher Signature	Date
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APPENDIX I
FAMILY CONSENT FORM

Family Consent Form

You and your family are invited to participate in a research study. The focus of the study is learning how culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and implemented by students as well as their teachers and families. You were selected as a participant due to your child's enrollment in the third grade class at Maple Charter School during the 2007-2008 school year. Please read this form to insure any and all questions are answered prior to your consent for participation.

This study is being done by:

Elaine McNeil-Girmai, an Educational Leadership for Social Justice Ed.D student at Loyola Marymount University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is multilayered. First, it will investigate the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices by two third grade charter school teachers. This will include examining its use, relevancy, effectiveness and efficacy in their classrooms. Second, it will examine the perceptions of teacher, students and families of these practices and how if at all there are shared commonalities. Third, it will explore the ways that culturally relevant practices at charter schools can be informed by the student and family members of the school community.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study you will be invited to be part of a focus group of families. The focus group will be audio-taped and videotaped so that the data can be transcribed. The first focus group would occur prior to the end of the 2007-2008 school

year with a follow-up focus group in the fall of the 2008-2009 school year. Based on observations of the focus group you may be asked to participate in family interviews. One of which will occur prior to the end of the 2007-2008 school year and one of which will occur during the scheduled summer vacation. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. All data gathered will not include identifiers and data will remain confidential and off the school site.

Risks and Benefits:

This study has no major risks. There is no cash or incentive benefit to your participation. However, your participation may benefit your school as there is the potential for change in the manner in which culturally relevant pedagogy is perceived and implemented at the school site as a result of this study.

Confidentiality:

The data will be kept private. Data collected, including audio and video tapes, shall be retained only for research and/or teaching purposes for an indefinite time. In any report of the findings presented or published no information that could lead to the identification of individual families will be included. Research records will be stored securely.

Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer. Your ability to participate or not will not effect your relationship with Maple Charter School or the researcher. If you choose to participate you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting said relationships. I understand that no information that identifies me or my child will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I also understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study. You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent:

In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the “Subject’s Bill of Rights”.

Participant Signature Date

Relationship to Student

Researcher Signature Date

APPENDIX I
FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA FAMILIAS

Consentimiento para Familias

Le invitamos a participar en un estudio de investigación. El enfoque de este estudio será el aprendizaje del estudiante sobre pedagogías dentro nuestra cultura y su propósito. Así mismo como son comprendidos por los maestros y familias. Usted fue seleccionado por su matriculación en el tercer grado de la escuela Maple Charter School en el año escolar 2007-2008. Por favor de leer este formulario para asegurarnos que hemos respondido todas sus preguntas y favor de leer antes que usted de permiso a su hijo/a para que participe en este estudio.

El estudio será hecho por:

Elaine McNeil-Girmai, Estudiante de la Universidad Loyola Marymount-Liderazgo para Justicia Social e Educacional, Doctorado en Educación.

Base de Información:

El propósito de este estudio tiene múltiples etapas. Primero, investigaremos como implementar las prácticas el propósito que tiene culturalmente las pedagogías entre dos maestros del tercer grado de la escuela charter. Esto incluye examinar el use, propósito en el salón de clase. . Segundo, examinaremos las percepciones que tendrán los maestros, estudiantes y familias sobre las practicas y así mismo como compartimos practicas en común. Tercero, descubrir modos en cual culturalmente tenemos el mismo propósito en las escuelas charter y como usamos esta información por el estudiante, familia, y miembros de la comunidad dentro la escuela.

Procedimiento:

Si estas de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, le invitaremos a reunirse con los grupos de familias. Este grupo será observando durante el tiempo de junta y serán grabados por video o fotografiado. La primera junta se llevara acabo en invierno del año escolar 2008-2009. Basados a la información de la investigación, le preguntaremos que participe en dos entrevistas de familia. Una entrevista se llevara acabo antes del fin de año escolar 2007-2008 y la otra será durante las vacaciones de verano. Todas las entrevistas se grabaran y los datos del grupo se transcribieran. Todos los datos que se colectan no incluyen tu información y los datos permanecerán en un sitio fuera de tu escuela y serán confidenciales.

Beneficios y Riesgos:

Este estudio no tiene algún riesgo mayor. Al participar, no habrá algún incentivo o beneficio monetario. Pero, tu participación será un gran beneficio para la escuela. Con los resultados de estos estudios, la escuela tendrá la oportunidad de hacer cambios en la manera en cual formaremos y usamos pedagogías dentro la cultura de nuestra escuela.

Confidencial:

Todos los datos son confidenciales y privados. Algunos reportajes y descubrimientos del estudio no se utilizaran para reportaje o publicaciones del estudio. Ninguna información relatada a las familias o individuo se incluye en este estudio. Investigaciones serán guardadas en un sitio asegurado.

La Especie de Estudio:

Su participación en este estudio es por su propia voluntad. Yo entiendo que tengo el derecho de rechazar preguntas que no deseo responder. Su decisión de participar (o no) no tendrá ningún efecto en su relación con la Escuela Maple Charter o los investigadores. Si usted elije participar en este estudio, podrá retirarse a cualquier tiempo, tomado en cuenta que no afecte la relación y tus calificaciones. Yo entiendo que

toda información que no me señale directamente a mi persona o a mi hijo/a, será compartida y podrá circular sin ningún permiso de mi parte, excepto en particular por la leyes requeridas.

Le daremos una copia de esta información para sus archivos. Se le notificare en escrito si haremos cambios al diseño del estudio o la información. Yo tendré que informarles y entregar un permiso nuevo. Yo entiendo que habrá situaciones en cual el investigador tendrá que terminar mi participación antes que terminen el estudio.

Declaración de Permiso:

Mi firmar indica que yo tengo conocimiento de este estudio y he recibido una copia de esta información y una copia de las leyes “Proyecto de Derechos al Sujeto’ (Subject’s Bill of Rights).

Firma de Participante	Fecha
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Relación al Estudiante

Firma de Investigador	Fecha
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APPENDIX J
DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

Initial research completed	Spring 2008
Dissertation Proposal Defended	Spring 2008
Institutional Review Board Submission	Spring 2008
Daily 3 rd Grade Classroom Observations	Spring 2008
School-wide Observations	
3 rd Grade Teacher Interviews	
Student and Family Focus Groups	
School-Wide Observations	Fall 2009
3 rd and 4 th Grade Teacher Interviews	Winter 2009
Administrator Interview	
Observations at the School Site	Winter 2009
Daily Classroom Observations	Winter 2009
Family and Student Interviews	
Final Participant Interviews	Spring 2009
Community Mapping	
Document Analysis	

APPENDIX K

DISCIPLINE POLICY FROM COMMUNITY HANDBOOK

Maple Charter School Community Handbook (2006):

STUDENT BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

At all times, all students are expected to make learning their priority and be respectful of the rights of others. In order to ensure that Maple Charter School is a caring learning community, the school must be safe at all times.

We ask all students to follow the Maple Charter Code of Conduct:

1. Be respectful to each other, all staff, community, and school property.
2. Follow directions the first time.
3. Participate thoughtfully in all school activities.
4. Think about and reflect on your behavior and listen for ideas that will help you.
5. Make healthy choices.
6. Try...and try again.

Any student action or intention that can be deemed as violating the code of conduct or the safety of one's self or others can result in serious consequences.

Examples of safety violations include:

- Not following directions in school and when walking off school property
- Running in class and hallways.
- Disobedience
- Littering, spitting
- Chewing gum (or other unhealthy foods)
- Verbal abuse of others (using profanity, etc.), rude talk
- Pushing, tripping, hitting, play fighting, rough housing
- Intentionally hurting another person
- Threatening others physical or emotional safety
- Inappropriate touching
- Lying

Any student action or intention that can be deemed as damaging the property of the school or others can result in serious consequences.

[NOTE: EXAMPLES OF DAMAGING THE PROPERTY AND THE INTERNET POLICY SECTION REMOVED AS STUDENTS DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET DURING THE RESEARCH TIMEFRAME]

If a student violates any of the policies (uniform, absence, tardiness, homework, safety of self and others, respect of property), they may be referred to the office at the discretion of the teacher or adult working with the child. Depending upon the specific circumstances surrounding the student's behavior, a student may remain in the office for a "time out" period, and an appropriate consequence will be devised. Depending on the violation, a student's parent or guardian might be called to immediately pick up the child and the student will remain in the office until he/she is picked up. Detentions may be served during lunch, after school, or on Saturdays.

After the third office referral of a student, the following action will be taken:

- The parent/guardian will be called and informed of the child's violation(s).
- Within one week, the parent will be required to attend a conference at the school and to observe the child in his/her classroom(s) for at least one hour.
- A plan of action will be devised with the student, teacher(s), administrator, and parent to improve the child's behavior.
- If the child is referred a fourth time, after the above interventions, a suspension may result.

Classroom Formal Observation Time

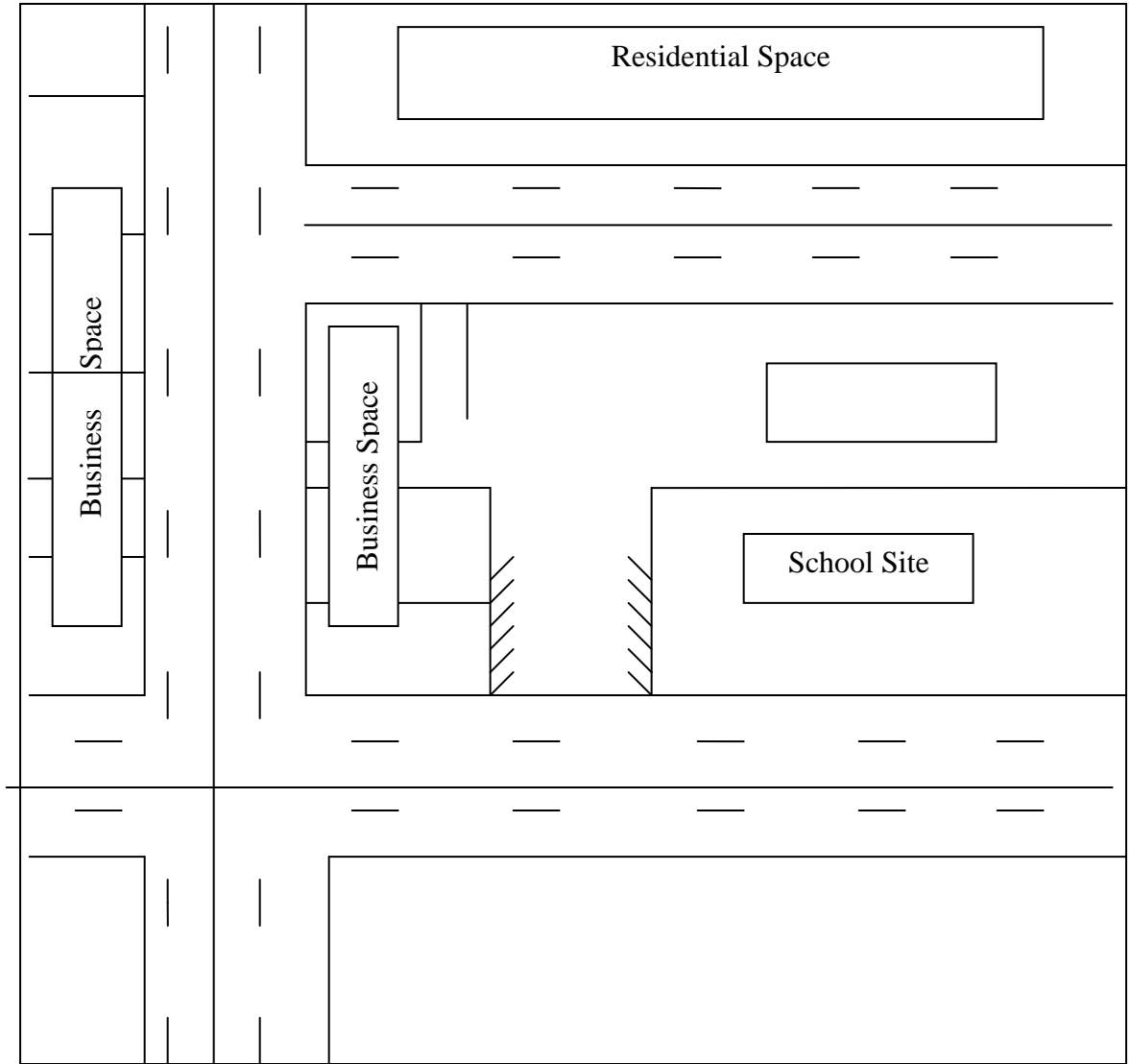
After a child's third office referral, the student's parent or guardian may be required to come to school and to sit with the student in his or her classroom(s) and through school activities. The observation must be for at least one hour and perhaps more, depending on the violation.

Suspension and Expulsion

Any student who engages in repeated violations of the school's Code of Conduct and behavioral expectations will be required to attend a meeting with school staff and the student's parent or guardian. The school will prepare a specific, written intervention plan outlining future student conduct expectations, timelines, and consequences for failure to meet the expectations which may include, but are not limited to, suspension or expulsion.

Students who present an immediate threat to the health and/or safety of others or themselves may also be immediately suspended and later expelled by the school's governing board upon recommendation of the Executive Director. The policy of Maple Charter will provide all students with an opportunity for due process and will be developed to conform to applicable federal law regarding students with exceptional needs.

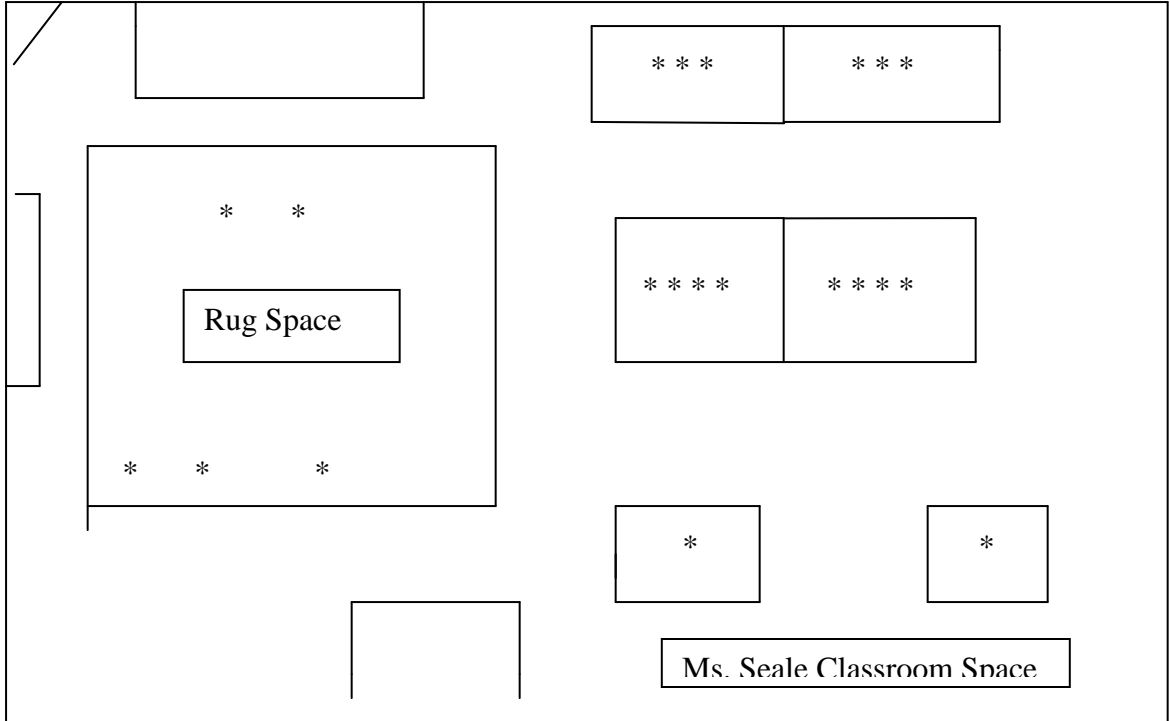
APPENDIX L
NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

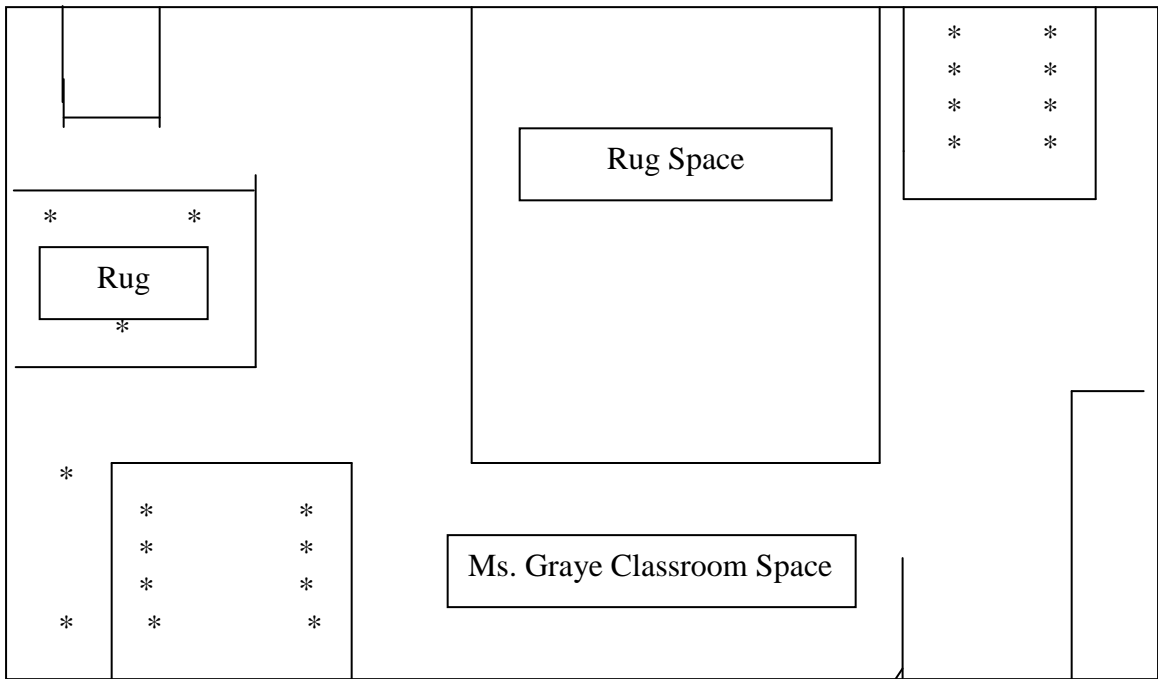
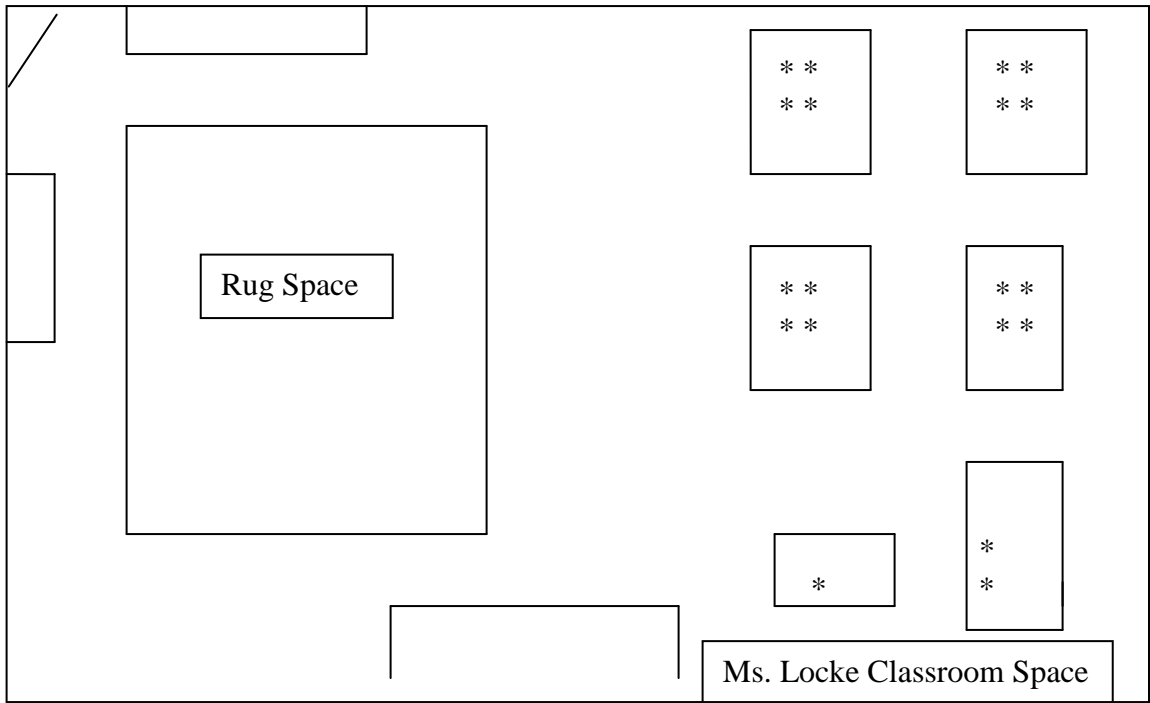


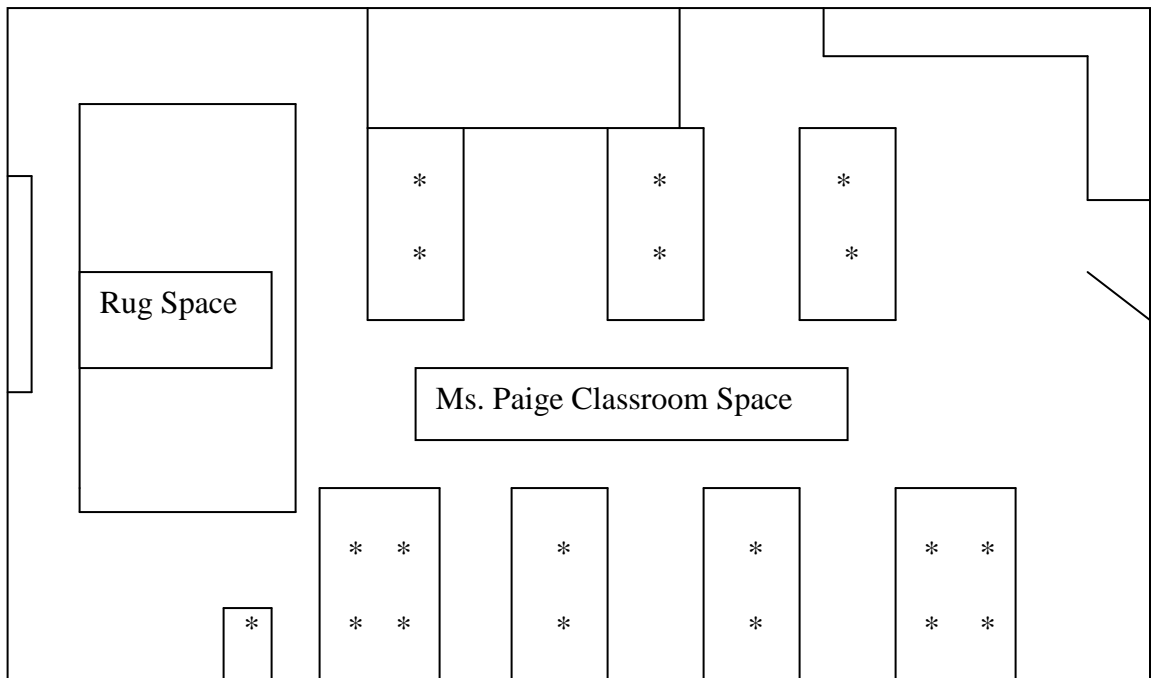
APPENDIX M

CLASSROOM MAPS

* Indicates Student







APPENDIX N

REPORT CARD TEMPLATES

**Maple Charter School
Fourth Grade Report to Families**

Name of Student				Teacher			
<u>Attendance</u>	Winter	Spring	Final	<u>Parent Volunteer Hours:</u>	____Hours Completed	____Hours Remaining	
<u>Possibility of Retention</u>		_No	_Yes	Recommendation for After School Tutoring _____			
<u>Student Personal and Social Growth</u>				Winter			
				Consistently Demonstrates	Often Demonstrates	Developing	Area of Concern
Allows everyone a chance to participate							
Supports the group's agreement or decision							
Tries and tries again							
Shares opinions respectfully							
Transitions well in the class, school and yard							
Follows directions the first time							
Encourages and accepts different opinions through words and actions							
Actions reflect empathy for others							
Makes safe and healthy choices							
Takes on positive leadership roles within the group							

		<u>Strengths/Weaknesses/Next Steps</u> <u>– Spring</u>	
<u>Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking</u>			
<u>Performance Levels</u> 4: Exceeds grade-level standards 3: Secure - Independently uses and understands concept/skill 2: Developing - Uses and understands concepts/skill with support 1: Beginning – Is at the initial stage of understanding concept/skill			
	<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>
<u>Reading Habits</u>			
Shows an interest in reading and being read to			
<i>Reads various kinds of text</i>			
Discusses books with teacher and other students daily from reading and discussions.....			
<u>Word Analysis, Fluency, and Vocabulary Development</u>			
Word Recognition.....			
Vocabulary and Concept Development.....			
Use knowledge of root words and related words to determine the meaning of unknown words analyze complex words			
<u>Reading Comprehension</u>			
Structural Features of Informational Texts (titles, tables of contents, chapter headings)			
Comprehension and Analysis of Text (main ideas, cause and effect).....			
<u>Literacy Response and Analysis</u> (compare and contrast elements of stories)			

<u>Writing</u>		
Writing Strategies (organization and focus of multiple paragraph compositions).....		
Write fluidly and legibly in cursive or joined italic.....		
Research (use a dictionary, thesaurus and quote).....		
Revision (to improve coherence and progression).....		
Writing Applications (write brief narratives, responses to literature, information reports and summaries).....		
Written/Oral Conventions (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling)		
Use traditional structures for conveying information (chronological order, cause and effect, compare and contrast, posing and answering questions)		
<u>Listening and Speaking</u>		
Comprehension.....		
Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication (effective introductions and conclusions, use traditional structures for conveying information, emphasize points, use volume tone and pacing to enhance meaning)		
Speaking Applications (retell, share an event in sequence, describe story elements)		
Report (deliver oral summaries, recite brief poems and make both narrative and informational presentations).....		
Analysis and Evaluation of Oral Media Communication (evaluate the role of the media in focusing attention and forming opinions on events and issues)		
<u>Strengths/Weaknesses/Next Steps - Winter:</u>	<u>Strengths/Weaknesses/Next Steps - Spring:</u>	

Italicized = Spring Semester Standard

Mathematics

<u>Performance Level</u>	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>
<u>Number Sense</u>		
<p>Understand numbers and number relationships.....</p> <p>Count, read, write up to 1,000,000</p> <p>Round whole numbers through the millions and decide when a rounded solution is called for and explain why</p> <p>Order and Compare whole numbers and decimals to two decimal places</p> <p>Explain different interpretations of fractions and represent by using drawings; and relate a fraction to a simple decimal on a number line</p> <p>Write tenths and hundredths in decimal and fraction notations and know the fraction and decimal equivalents for halves and fourths</p> <p>Use concepts of negative numbers</p> <p>Identify on a number line the relative position of positive fractions, positive mixed numbers, and positive decimals to two decimal places</p>		
<p>Students extend their use and understanding of whole number to the addition and subtraction of simple decimals.....</p> <p>Estimate and compute the sum or difference of whole numbers and positive decimals to two places</p> <p>Round two place decimals to one decimals or the nearest whole number</p>		
<p>Students solve problems involving addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers and understand the relationships among the operations.....</p> <p>Demonstrate an understanding of, and the ability to use, standard algorithms for the addition and subtraction of multi digit numbers.</p> <p>Demonstrate an understanding of, and the ability to use, standard algorithms for multiplying a multi digit number by a two-digit number and for dividing a multi digit number by a one-digit number; use relationships between them to simplify computations and to check results.</p> <p>Solve problems involving multiplication of multi digit numbers by two-digit numbers.</p> <p>Solve problems involving division of multi digit numbers by one-digit numbers.</p>		

<u>Algebra and Functions</u>		
<p>Students use and interpret variables, mathematical symbols, and properties to write and simplify expressions and sentences Use letters, boxes, or other symbols to stand for any number in simple expressions or equations. Interpret and evaluate mathematical expressions that now use parentheses. Use parentheses to indicate which operation to perform first when writing expressions containing more than two terms and different operations. Understand that an equation such as $y = 3x + 5$ is a prescription for determining a second number when a first number is given.</p>		
<p>Students know how to manipulate equations..... Know and understand that equals added to equals are equal. Know and understand that equals multiplied by equals are equal</p>		
<u>Measurement and Geometry</u>		
<p>Students understand perimeter and area..... Measure the area of rectangular shapes by using appropriate units, such as square centimeter (cm^2), square meter (m^2), square kilometer (km^2), square inch (in^2), square yard (yd^2), or square mile (mi^2). Recognize that rectangles that have the same area can have different perimeters. Understand and use formulas to solve problems involving perimeters and areas of rectangles, squares and figures.</p>		
<p>Students use two-dimensional coordinate grids to represent points and graph lines and simple figures..... Draw the points corresponding to linear relationships on graph paper (e.g., draw 10 points on the graph of the equation $y = 3x$ and connect them by using a straight line). Understand that the length of a horizontal line segment equals the difference of the x- coordinates. Understand that the length of a vertical line segment equals the difference of the y- coordinates.</p>		
<p>Students demonstrate an understanding of plane and solid geometric objects and use this knowledge to show relationships and solve problems..... Identify lines that are parallel and perpendicular. Identify the radius and diameter of a circle. Identify congruent figures.</p>		

<p>Identify figures that have bilateral and rotational symmetry. Know the definitions of a right angle, an acute angle, and an obtuse angle. Understand that 90°, 180°, 270°, and 360° are associated, respectively, with $1/4$, $1/2$, $3/4$, and full turns. Visualize, describe, and make models of geometric solids in terms of the number and shape of faces, edges, and vertices; interpret two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects; and draw patterns (of faces) for a solid that, when cut and folded, will make a model of the solid. Know the definitions of different triangles (e.g., equilateral, isosceles, scalene) and identify their attributes. Know the definition of different quadrilaterals (e.g., rhombus, square, rectangle, parallelogram, trapezoid).</p>		
<u>Statistics, Data Analysis, and Probability</u>		
<p>Students organize, represent, and interpret numerical and categorical data and clearly communicate their findings..... Formulate survey questions; systematically collect and represent data on a number line; and coordinate graphs, tables, and charts. Identify the mode(s) for sets of categorical data and the mode(s), median, and any apparent outliers for numerical data sets. Interpret one-and two-variable data graphs to answer questions about a situation.</p>		
<p>Students make predictions for simple probability situations..... Represent all possible outcomes for a simple probability situation in an organized way (e.g., tables, grids, tree diagrams). Express outcomes of experimental probability situations verbally and numerically (e.g., 3 out of 4; $3/4$).</p>		
<u>Mathematical Reasoning</u>		
<p>Students make decisions about how to approach problems..... Analyze problems by identifying relationships, distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information, sequencing and prioritizing information, and observing patterns.</p>		

<p>Determine when and how to break a problem into simpler parts.</p>		
<p>Students use strategies, skills, and concepts in finding solutions... Use estimation to verify the reasonableness of calculated results. Apply strategies and results from simpler problems to more complex problems. Use a variety of methods, such as words, numbers, symbols, charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, and models, to explain mathematical reasoning. Express the solution clearly and logically by using the appropriate mathematical notation and terms and clear language; support solutions with evidence in both verbal and symbolic work. Indicate the relative advantages of exact and approximate solutions to problems and give answers to a specified degree of accuracy. Make precise calculations and check the validity of the results from the context of the problem.</p>		
<p>Students move beyond a particular problem by generalizing to other situations..... Evaluate the reasonableness of the solution in the context of the original situation. Note the method of deriving the solution and demonstrate a conceptual understanding of the derivation by solving similar problems. Develop generalizations of the results obtained and apply them in other circumstances.</p>		
<p><u>Strengths/Weaknesses/Next Steps - Winter:</u></p>	<p><u>Strengths/Weaknesses /Next Steps - Spring:</u></p>	

Italicized = Spring Semester Standard

Social Studies

Performance Level

	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>
Demonstrates understanding of basic social studies content.		
Participation Skills.....		
Critical Thinking Skills.....		
Study/Research Skills.....		

Science

Demonstrates an understanding of strategies used to interpret science content. (estimation, prediction, causal relationships)		
Able to make and differentiate between observations and inferences.....		
Records data and both creates and interprets graphs.....		
Students understand that electricity and magnetism have everyday applications.....		
.....		
Students understand that all organisms need energy and matter to live and grow and that living organism depend on each other and their environment		
Students know that waves, wind, water and ice shape the Earth’s surface and use this knowledge to determine how rocks were formed based on their properties.....		

Arts

Participates in arts activities.....		
Knows how to use materials.....		

Health

Understands and acts on basic health concepts and facts.....		
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Physical Education

Participates in physical activities.		
Displays good sportsmanship.		
Shows progress of developing athletic skills.		

Work Habits

Stays on task.....		
Works independently.....		

Completes work on time.....		
Completes homework and turns it in on time.....		
Works neatly and carefully.....		

I have read the Maple Charter School Report Card for my child.		
<u>Parent Comments:</u>	Signature	Date

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