

How One School-university Partnership Designed Learning Experiences to Propel Equity-based Teaching Forward in the PDS Context

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Abstract: This paper will discuss the efforts of one school-university partnership in providing individualized, high quality professional development in the form of a 9-credit, graduate course certificate program in culturally proficient leadership to in-service teachers across 3 schools in the university's PDS network. The researchers document their collaborative efforts in (1) developing the certificate program; (2) designing and implementing the graduate course work; and (3) using culturally responsive, anti-racist leadership tools to promote teacher awareness and critical reflection of issues related to equity, access, and social justice teaching (National Association for Professional Development Schools). Reflections on program implementation and student outcomes are also shared.

KEYWORDS: cultural competency; cultural proficiency; equity-based teaching; graduate education; reciprocal professional development.

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community.
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need.

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Introduction

Embedded in the Standards for Maryland Professional Development Schools, is the expectation that formal Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships in Maryland engage in reciprocal relationships across all stakeholders (Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K-16, 2003). For example, while the PDS provides a site for teacher candidates to integrate and apply the knowledge they gain from university coursework, university faculty are expected to become immersed in the school, providing on-site coursework for teacher candidates, and professional development activities for school-based staff related to articulated school improvement goals. Additionally, local school systems and partner universities in Maryland are encouraged to ensure the alignment of the curriculum and best-practices between schools and teacher education programs. By extension, the PDS informs curriculum development within the university teacher preparation program, and also acts as a “laboratory for demonstrations of best practices and introduction of new pedagogical techniques” (Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K-16, 2003, p. 3). This structure allows university faculty and students to participate in walk-throughs and classroom observations that provide authentic opportunities for promoting connections between theory and practice.

At the national level, PDSs, have experienced numerous benefits resultant of their partnerships (Beal, Niño, Alford, Armstrong, Gresham, Griffin & Welsh 2011; Breault & Breault, 2012; Cozza, 2010; Pellett & Pellett, 2009). In their synthesis report, Snow and colleagues (2016) identified five research-based outcomes associated with reciprocal partnership efforts. They included: (1) greater professional confidence in teacher candidates; (2) improvement in teacher candidate perceptions of themselves as future professionals; (3) more demonstrable teaching skills on the part of teacher candidates; (4) improvement in the quality and/or frequency of formative assessment for teacher candidates; and (5) improvement in mentor teachers’ teaching practices. They also identified three emerging outcomes in their research: (1) PDS program participants make better teachers; (2) K-12 students participating in PDS programming demonstrate higher achievement; and (3) PDS experiences promote improvement in the quality of college/university courses (Snow et al, 2016).

In Maryland, PDS partnerships are considered “ever emerging entities” that are developmental in nature, and designed to address the unique needs of *all* partners associated with the PDS, not just teacher candidates (Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K-16, 2003, p. 4). Examples of reciprocal partnership efforts in this university’s network have included leadership opportunities for school-based teachers such as peer coaching, mentoring, and teaching as an adjunct faculty member at the university. In addition, university faculty have taken advantage of opportunities to stay connected to the realities associated with teaching and learning in local schools and classrooms to better inform university course work. Local school system personnel have gained a better understanding of the teacher candidates they will eventually recruit, and as a result, more accurately anticipate the potential needs of first year teachers. Faculty and staff who have worked in PDSs have also reaped the professional benefits of collaborative efforts launched by the university and the school system to ensure that ongoing

professional development initiatives such as graduate course work are ongoing, data-driven, collaborative, and job-embedded.

This reciprocal and fluid context is what prompted this school-university partnership to initiate and develop a 9-credit, graduate certificate program in culturally proficient leadership for in-service teachers across 3 schools in the university's PDS network. It was during a PDS strategic planning meeting that the principal of one PDS partnership asked if the university would be able to offer graduate coursework in culturally responsive teaching practices to interested in-service teachers. This request prompted a series of meetings between the university and the local school system focused on making the principal's request a reality. Over a 6-month period, university and local school system personnel met to develop graduate coursework that would eventually meet the stated and anticipated professional needs of interested in-service teachers who worked at the school.

The purpose of this descriptive article is to share our journey in planning and implementing the certificate program in culturally proficient leadership. In addition, we discuss the use of educational tools to promote self/other awareness and critical reflection. Student learning outcomes that showed promise in making permanent, positive changes in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students are also shared. Finally, we reflect on what we learned through an evaluation of student learning outcomes as we continue to modify and refine the program for future cohorts of in-service teachers.

Literature Review

Developing Cultural Competence

Despite the fact that cultural and linguistic diversity increases among students in America's public schools with each year that passes, the teaching population continues to remain mostly white and middle class. Statistics indicate that approximately 83% of America's teachers fit this description (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). Conversely, the number of racial and ethnic minority students in schools is rapidly increasing each year (Bischoff & Tach, 2018). Students of color now make up the majority of students attending public schools for the first time in U.S. history (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although many intersections of cultural identity exist, the most profound historical intersection found in today's schools is race and culture (Jacobsen, Frankenberg & Lenhoff, 2011). It is well documented that the longer Black and Brown students remain in school, the wider the achievement gap grows between them and their white counterparts (Reardon, Kalogrides, & Shores, 2018). As American classrooms serve more racially diverse students than ever (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020), educators will need increased support in gaining and sustaining the cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to reach all students, but especially those who have been historically underserved in public education.

In addition to an educator's knowledge, skills, and attitude, it is becoming comparatively important to consider the impact of the educators' race on pedagogy, student experiences, and academic outcomes (Crowley, 2019; Hill, 2014; Whitaker, 2019). Initial studies of this notion have found that African American students, in particular, have more favorable academic experiences and academic outcomes when taught by at least one educator who shares their racial identity, making the awareness of racial identity and cultural competency critical considerations in teacher development (Figlio, 2018; Will, 2018).

According to the National Education Association (2016), cultural competence is defined as having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom.

A growing body of educational research supports the necessity of culturally competent educators (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nord, 2014; Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2016), the effective implementation of culturally responsive and equity literate teaching practices (Gay, 2018; Gorski, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2014), and the development of culturally proficient schools (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2013; Bakken & Smith, 2011). In addition, the ability to deliver culturally relevant instruction and lead culturally proficient schools shows promise in closing the opportunity gap (Clark, 2017; Wachira & Mburu, 2019).

Researchers have made a strong case for the necessity of adopting culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching practices, and culturally sustaining pedagogies when working with racially and ethnically diverse student populations (Chen, Belle, & Nath, 2018; Vanessa, 2018; Griffin, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2014; Boykin & Ellison, 2008; Cammarota & Romero, 2009). According to Ladson-Billings (2014), cultural competence is necessary for teachers if they are to maximize the learning for all students in their classrooms. Cultural competence is about learning about oneself and others in light of society's larger social systems to make transformational decisions about how one chooses to live now and in the future (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

For teachers, becoming culturally competent extends far beyond learning about the static cultural backgrounds of students; this type of knowledge is often one-dimensional and can lead to stereotyping entire groups of students on the basis of one common cultural element, such as race (Milner, 2011). As part of their extension on Ladson-Billing's work, Paris and Alim's (2014) recent introduction to culturally sustaining pedagogy challenges educators to reposition their pedagogies to focus on the contemporary and evolving practices and knowledge of communities of color in an effort to showcase them as assets in the development of pedagogy. According to Paris & Alim (2014), "youth cultural and linguistic practices are of value in their own right, and should be creatively foregrounded rather than merely viewed as resources to take students from where they are to some presumably 'better' place, or ignored altogether" (p. 87).

Acquiring cultural competence is a developmental and comprehensive process that takes sustained time and effort (Bennett, 1993; Sue, 2001; Blakeney, 2005; Hammer, 2012; Moule & Diller, 2012; Lynch, Swarts & Isaacs, 2017). It is not achieved through attending a single training, reading a book, participating in a shotgun professional development session, or taking an isolated course; rather, it is a *process* by which educators take time to think, reflect, decide, and act as they respond to environments that are shaped by their diversity (Lindsay, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2013). In order for educators to develop the knowledge and skills needed to promote equity in schools, transformative learning must be considered. According to Brown (2006), "transformative learning changes the way people see themselves and their world" (p. 84). It guides learners to better understand themselves in relation to others and the systems that

promote status quo thinking. Transformative learning has the potential to bring about a change in one's perspective and mindset (Brown, 2006; Mezirow, 1997).

Professional Learning Considerations for Developing Culturally Competent School Leaders

Grounded in the works of Brown (2004, 2006); Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997); Diem and Carpenter (2012); Gooden and O'Dohery (n.d.); Lindsay, Robins, and Terrell (2009); Shields (2010), and Singleton and Linton (2006), Spikes (2018) thematically summarizes four essential components of transformative professional learning in developing culturally competent and racially conscious school leaders. These components include the following: (1) setting the stage, (2) building trust, (3) adopting an inside-out approach, and (4) endorsing transformative leadership practices.

In *setting the stage* for instructing and developing culturally competent leaders, the instructor/facilitator must consider establishing group norms/ground rules for interactions among participants. These norms serve as guidelines in promoting meaningful conversations about potentially difficult topics. They also ensure a safe and respectful environment that promotes transparency and allows for vulnerability. While there are many examples of guidelines outlined in the literature, one of the most widely used is Singleton and Linton's (2006) *Courageous Conversations about Race*. Their protocol establishes four foundational agreements that frame all participant interactions: (1) staying engaged, (2) expecting to experience discomfort, (3) speaking your truth, and (4) expecting/accepting non-closure. Once these agreements are introduced by the instructor/facilitator, it is expected that they be revisited frequently with participants to ensure fidelity when challenging conversations arise (Spikes, 2018).

The second component focuses on *building trust* among participants. In order to promote a learning environment where participants can feel safe to learn, reflect, and grow without being judged, Spikes (2018) suggests that the instructor/facilitator position her/himself as both facilitator *and* learner, sharing personal examples of roadblocks and blindspots s/he has faced in her/his ongoing, personal competency journey. Demonstrating compassion and discussing how we all have been socialized by systems that privilege some and oppress others is integral in moving away from inadvertently communicating that individual intent perpetuates the racism, classism, heterosexism, etc. that continue to exist in all of society's institutions. Spikes (2018) suggests using activities such as cultural artifacts, *I Am* poems, and name-tents, to help promote trust among participants. Important to note is that trust-building activities remain ongoing throughout the professional learning experiences that are shared among participants.

The *inside-out approach*, Spikes' (2018) third suggested component, emphasizes learning about one's self before exploring the social systems at play, or the self in relation to those systems. Once participants begin to understand that they are cultural beings who embody cultural identities based on their experiences, they can embark on the process of self-discovery. Activities promoting an inside-out approach to self-knowledge and understanding can include, but are not limited to racial autobiographies, diversity lifelines, and cultural portraits. In providing opportunities for participants to learn about others and their experiences, Spikes (2018), suggests the use of strategies such as rational discourse, educational plunges, life histories, and cross-cultural interviews. He also suggests using documentaries, video clips, and the literature to shed light on differing perspectives. Once participants begin to understand themselves as racial and

cultural beings, it is then time to address race as a sociopolitical construction and a system of oppression. Introducing concepts such as race, power, privilege, oppression, socialization, implicit bias, and macro and microaggressions opens the door for critical reflection and discussion about the impact of the sociopolitical context on individuals and communities. Activities such as taking Harvard's Implicit Association Test, participating in the Privilege Walk, and watching/discussing the documentary, *13th*, can reinforce participants' understandings of the social systems at play in the lives of all people.

Finally, Spikes (2018) highlights *transformative practices* as the final phase in which participants engage. This component focuses on the job-embedded tasks that will aid participants in transforming their schools. Examples of activities that can be considered are equity audits, community-based audits, classroom and curriculum audits, lesson planning, and activist action planning. Introducing templates that can guide participants through the process of these activities are valuable in framing participant evaluation and implementation.

Using Spikes (2018) literature review on research-based, professional learning experiences that assist in developing culturally competent and racially conscious school leaders, this paper will discuss the efforts of one school-university partnership in developing and implementing learning opportunities focused on culturally competent leadership through university course work in the form of a 9-credit graduate certificate program.

Background on PDS Partners

Local School System Partner

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) is one of the three largest school systems in Maryland. Historically, BCPS was classified as both a suburban and rural school district. BCPS now has characteristics of urban, suburban, and rural school districts. There are approximately 108,000 students who attend school in the district. Nearly half of all students enrolled in the district participate in the free and reduced meals program. The racial breakdown of the students consists of the following: 44.4 % White; 38.6% Black; 6.6% Hispanic; 6.3% Asian; 3.6% two or more races; and >1.0% American Indian/Alaska Native and/or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Approximately, 4.2% of the population represents English learners (ELs), making BCPS a majority nonwhite school system. This is a drastic demographic inversion from 30 years ago, when the district was 87% white. When collaborative PDS efforts to create the certificate program were initiated, a system-wide focus of BCPS was promoting equity in its schools and in developing cultural competence in its teachers and administrators.

University Partner

Notre Dame of Maryland University is a small liberal arts college set in a metropolitan area. The university formally partners with BCPS to include seven state-endorsed professional development schools (PDSs) where its pre-service teachers gain the clinical experience necessary to earn degrees as educators. In addition to its commitment in preparing pre-service teachers for the profession, a major emphasis of the PDS model at this university is the collaborative focus on the professional development needs of the in-service teachers who currently work in the seven BCPS–PDS partnerships. Because the development of cultural competence in its teachers was a school improvement goal for most of the PDSs with which the

university formally partners, the university offered the 1-year, graduate certificate program opportunity to all teachers who worked in these partner schools over a 3-year period.

Participants/Teachers Enrolled in the Graduate Certificate Program

Certificate program participants over a 3-year period consisted of 29 in-service teachers. All participants were female and identified as U.S. citizens. Sixty-one percent of the teachers identified as white; 39% of teachers identified as black/African American. Sixty-two percent of the teachers worked in secondary schools, and 38% worked in elementary schools. Age ranges of the teachers included the following: 38% were between the ages of 22 and 30; 29% were between the ages of 31 and 40; 16% were between the ages of 41 and 50; and 17% were between the ages of 51 and 60. The highest level of education for 34% of participants was a bachelor's degree, followed by 63% with a master's degree, and 3% with a master's degree plus 30 credits. Participants' years of teaching experience ranged between 2 and 24. Seventy-nine percent of the participants held tenured positions; 21% served in non-tenured positions.

Development of Graduate Certificate Program

The 9-credit graduate certificate program was titled, *Culturally Proficient Leadership*. To ensure cohesion and alignment in the adoption of equity/social justice frameworks and philosophies to frame each course, both school system and university partners collaborated to design the curriculum for each of the courses in the nine-credit certificate program. Parties representing the school, the school system, and the university met over a 6-month period to plan the coursework which included the learning objectives, student outcomes, learning activities, and performance-based assessments for each course. Textbooks and readings for each course were also selected collaboratively. One representative from each party agreed to co-teach the courses – that is, 3 instructors co-taught all 3 of the courses offered in the program. The nine graduate credits in the program were offered and completed within 1 academic year: that is, over a 10-month period, with the first course beginning in September of the school year and the last course ending in May of the same school year. Three cohorts of in-service teachers – 29 total – went through the graduate certificate program over a 3-year period.

Each course ran for 10 weeks. Classes took place in the evenings between the hours of 5:00 and 9:00 p.m., one night per week. While most of the coursework was offered in a face-to-face setting, some of the sessions were accompanied by online components. In addition, courses were offered on-site at local PDSs. Each year, a new site, in a different geographic location in the school system, was identified to host the year-long courses. The local school system and the university worked together to offer the courses at reduced rates. When tuition reduction (determined by the university) and reimbursement amounts (determined by the local school system) were considered, teachers paid a fraction of the cost they would have ordinarily have paid for each of the graduate courses. The program was advertised to all seven PDSs in the university's network via email and word of mouth. In-service teachers from three of the seven schools opted to participate in the program. Seven teachers total participated in the program during the first academic year; 14 participated in the program during the second year; and eight participated in the third year.

Development of Coursework for Graduate Certificate Program

Coursework was taught through the following developmental stages: desire, awareness, knowledge, practice, and advanced practice. These were consistent with the school system's delivery of professional development opportunities to in-service teachers focused on cultural proficiency and equity. These stages were also consistent with the university's focus on prerequisite coursework as preparation for more application-based coursework in graduate education.

Some of the major philosophical and theoretical frameworks addressed in the courses included problem-posing pedagogy, anti-racist teacher leadership, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. Prominent researchers and academics used in the courses included Freire, Singleton and Linton, Crenshaw, Lynn, Nieto, Ladson-Billings, Gay, Pollock, Wise, DiAngelo, and Delgado. Assessment tools that promoted measurable teacher outcomes during the courses included the following: racial autobiographies, personal reflections, equity dictionaries, personal cultural analyses, reflective practitioner projects, curriculum revision projects, community wealth walks, and collaborative research projects.

Development of Initial Course: Introduction to Educational Equity and Cultural Competency

The first course in the program was titled, *Introduction to Educational Equity and Cultural Competency*. This course was built upon the desire, awareness, and knowledge stages of professional learning. It focused on the development of reflective practices that seek to unearth individual beliefs in relation to educational equity and access. Participants were introduced to a comprehensive analysis of the historical frameworks undergirding access to educational equity in American schools. The course also provided an examination of various qualitative and quantitative data points – locally, regionally, and nationally – that sought to challenge the current belief systems about public schooling. This foundational course set the stage for participants in understanding the inside-out approach embedded in the desire and awareness stages of professional learning. During the course, participants were expected to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop working knowledge about major trends and systemic issues related to equity and excellence in public schools;
2. Critically examine personal social belief systems and self-reflect upon personal racialized histories in relation to equity and access;
3. Learn common language and research-based protocols to facilitate open dialogue with colleagues and students about difference, equity, and excellence in education.

In addition to several contemporary journal articles focused on building awareness and knowledge of equity and access, the following texts were required: *When Treating All the Kids the Same is the Real Problem* (Johnson & Williams, 2015), and *Data Strategies to Uncover and Eliminate Hidden Inequities: The Wallpaper Effect* (Johnson & LaSalle, 2010).

In this course, three major assignments were used to engage participants in building personal capacity and an inside-out developmental approach to learning. The first assignment was a Macro Level Scavenger Hunt. This assignment asked participants to engage in an informational “scavenger hunt” to analyze examples of systemic racism and the types of macro level aggressions that our students, their families, and their communities can experience throughout

their lifetimes. Examples included health, wealth, employment, housing, government surveillance, and incarceration. Participants then analyzed the impact of these inequities on student educational outcomes, and their role as disruptors of the “systems” at play in their students’ lives.

The second assignment was a Racial Autobiography. This assignment asked participants to construct a personal autobiography using race as the lens in analyzing their past, present, and future lived experiences. The final assignment was the development of a ‘Leading for Equity’ TED Talk. As the culminating assignment for the course, participants were asked to communicate their vision of who they are – and who they are becoming – as equity leaders in a 5-minute TED Talk to the class. They were asked to share specific insights they gained about themselves, and goals they would set in the future as they built their capacity to become equity leaders in their school systems.

Development of Second Course: Critical Race Theory in Education

The second course was titled, *Critical Race Theory in Education*. This course built upon the desire, awareness, and knowledge stages emphasized in the first course. It focused on the development of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to investigate how race and racism are organized and operate within the educational systems in the United States. Participants examined the foundational scholarship upon which the theory was based, and used the central tenets as lenses to evaluate present practices in schools and school systems. This course provided an historical overview of Critical Race Theory and asked participants to consider the following inter-related questions: How are racial, gender, socioeconomic, disability, and orientation inequalities produced, re-produced, and maintained in educational institutions and society? In what ways is Critical Race Theory used as an analytic tool to explain and address policy, reform, and practice? During the course, participants were expected to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the development of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical construct in law, society, and education;
2. Analyze the tenets of Critical Race Theory to inform, question, and evaluate pedagogy;
3. Evaluate the intersectionality of Critical Race Theory with contemporary constructs, and other critical theories.

In addition to several contemporary journal articles focused on the application of Critical Race Theory in education, the following texts were required for the course: *Everyday Anti-Racism* (Pollock, 2008), and *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (Lynn & Dixon, 2013).

The course included 4 major research-based assignments. The first assignment was titled Assumptions Reflection. Assigned at the start of the course, this assignment asked participants to respond to a series of questions about their perceptions of different groups of students who appear in their classrooms, and later analyze how those assumptions could act as roadblocks in building relationships and designing instructional environments conducive to student learning. The second assignment – Critical Race Theory Tenets Application and Analysis – asked participants to analyze several anti-racist strategies from Pollock’s *Everyday Anti-Racism* text, using the tenets of CRT as a lens in their analyses. The third assignment was a Critical Race Theory Intersectionality Research Presentation. For this assignment, participants

were assigned to small groups to research an identity intersectionality topic to enhance their understanding of race across races, and the intersection of race with other identities. Intersectionality criticism topics included Fem Crit, Lat Crit, Disability Crit, Tribal Crit, Queer Crit, and Asian Crit. The research project included three parts: interactive presentation, analysis paper, and presenter post-analysis and reflection. The fourth assignment, a Cultural Proficiency Dictionary, was carried over from the first course. This assignment was ongoing and asked participants to identify at least 25 unfamiliar words that they were able to add to their vocabulary as a result of taking this course. Students listed, defined, and provided an authentic example of each term used in the context for which it was developed.

Development of Third Course: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The third course in the program was titled, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. This course built upon the practice and advanced practice stages of professional learning, and focused on the direct application of culturally responsive practices in and outside of the classroom. Participants examined environmental factors, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment practices to determine how each had the potential to reproduce inequalities or promote success for all students and their communities. During the course, participants were expected to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine literature focused on culturally relevant/culturally responsive teaching;
2. Identify factors that contribute to writing culturally relevant curriculum, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and assessment practices, and creating culturally relevant learning environments;
3. Evaluate curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices, and learning environments in light of present practices in their schools and school systems;
4. Develop culturally relevant practices to ensure access and opportunity for all students;
5. Articulate what it means to be a culturally reflective practitioner.

In addition to several contemporary journal articles focused on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in education, the following texts were required for the course: *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Gay, 2018), and *Everyday Anti-Racism* (Pollock, 2008).

This course included four major research-based assignments. The first assignment was a Curriculum Revision Project. Participants were asked to select a lesson from their curriculum guide based on a standard they would be teaching within a two-week timeframe. They were asked to rewrite the lesson, incorporating the elements of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) discussed in course readings and discussions. The second assignment – the Reflective Practitioner Project – asked that participants teach the lesson they revised for the Curriculum Revision Project, mentioned previously. They videotaped their lesson and evaluated it based on a rubric designed for evaluating culturally responsive instruction. In addition, they evaluated the lesson of a peer using the same rubric. Time was provided for feedback and discussion in comparing peer evaluations of lessons based on the rubric.

The third assignment was a School Community Observation/Interaction Journal. Participants were asked to spend a day or evening in their school's community observing community norms and values, and interacting with people who called that community their home. They were then asked to journal about the experience, using discussion prompts that allowed them to focus on the community as a fund of knowledge, and as a partner in the education of the children they

taught. The final major assignment for this course was a Personal CRP/Anti-Racism Essay. After having read and analyzed dozens of essays from researchers who each proposed a personal “single action” that educators could include on a daily basis to create culturally responsive classrooms and to counteract racial and social inequalities in schools and society, participants were asked to develop a personal essay that focused on a “single action” they have taken during the past year to promote culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. Example essays were provided to students from Pollock’s (2008) *Everyday Anti-Racism* text.

Reflections on the Evaluation of Program Implementation and Student Learning Outcomes

The course sequence and objectives were designed to take our in-service teachers through a professional learning process that built on their desire, awareness, and knowledge of educational equity in their local school system. Additionally, the aim was to develop courses and professional learning experiences built on the belief that transformational leadership and learning practices are the foundation for teacher growth and development in cultural competency and anti-racist teaching. Each major assignment provided educators with an opportunity to think, reflect, decide, and act as they responded to environments that were shaped by their diversity (Lindsay, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2013). The next section will outline some anecdotal examples of student learning outcomes associated with each major assignment required in the certificate program.

Macro Level Scavenger Hunt

The Macro Level Scavenger Hunt introduced participants to the systemic inequalities that pervade many of the communities in which their students live. Most participants were surprised or unfamiliar with the various facets of systemic racism in society, and the associated micro aggressions faced by students of color. The majority of reflections indicated that the implications for students of color in America faced a “different reality” than most participants faced in school. While many participants indicated that they believed it was the job of educators to empower students to challenge inequitable systems, most participants said that they did not know how to begin to interrupt the systemic factors at play in schools. Through this assignment and during the reflective conversations that followed, the overwhelming majority of participants developed an understanding of race as a sociopolitical construction and as a system of oppression. These insights opened the door for critical reflection and discussion about tangible next steps they could take as educators in disrupting inequitable practices in their schools.

The Racial Autobiography

The Racial Autobiography proved to be one of the most transformative experiences for participants. Understanding the origins of their individual and collective racial stories across race, gender, and generational lines served to build trust and provided a common experience for all, essential components to the inside-out approach to professional growth. Participants indicated the differences shared in narratives when asked to focus on race in recalling experiences in childhood, in schooling, and in their communities. Many highlighted the invisibility of racial differences, or the stark visibility of being non-white. It was also noted that a

lack of racial diversity in many of their childhood experiences led to a lack of racial diversity in their adult relationships outside of work.

‘Leading for Equity’ TED Talks

In creating their TED Talks, almost all participants indicated that they understood themselves to be on a journey in becoming culturally competent and racially conscious. Many talked about their roles in the perpetuation and/or interruption of systemic inequities in schools. All demonstrated an understanding of common, equity-based language and protocols to begin having courageous conversations with their colleagues, their students, and their families. In addition, many highlighted their commitment to learning more about the inequities to which they were introduced in the first course.

Assumptions Reflection

The second course began with participants sharing their ingrained assumptions and perceptions about the various cultural identities represented in their classrooms. Participants indicated a range of responses from contemporary stereotypes to a lack of instructional or personal experiences with particular student groups.

This assignment set the stage for trust-building discussion about the ways in which race and other intersectional identities sub-consciously or consciously shape societal norms including those associated with schooling. Most participants met with immediate success in deconstructing the stereotypes and the impact on their students. The socialization process was discussed in detail and the majority of participants recognized that each of them had been socialized by oppressive systems in some shape or form. Many participants also noted the importance of demonstrating compassion and an understanding that much of the ignorance associated with race and racism is largely due to institutional oppression and not to individual intent.

Critical Race Theory Tenets Application and Analysis

Many participants highlighted the efforts communicated by the practitioners in the text as useful models in analyzing their own classrooms for opportunities to embed anti-racist pedagogy. Through these assignments, participants demonstrated the ability to apply equity based vocabulary to anti-racist pedagogy, using the tenets of critical race theory as a lens. Vocabulary development and the application of anti-racist teaching strategies became the focal point of their learning in completing these reflections.

Group CRT Intersectionality Research Presentation

This assignment served as the culmination of knowledge and application for the second course. Students were eager to disseminate and deliver the knowledge they collected and created on these topics. Many students thoughtfully reflected on their understanding of these emerging critical theories, pairing race with other social identities such as gender, disability, and sexuality. One participant commented, *‘I didn’t understand the differences in a common experience until it was racialized.’* Another communicated, *‘Protection under the law means something different based on the skin you are in and the zip code of your school.’* A third participant shared, *‘I won’t*

make the mistake of ignoring race again when it comes to examining experiences I thought would have been common for all children.'

In addition, the majority of participants highlighted the need for a greater understanding of service delivery models to provide access, support, representation, and differentiation of pedagogy grounded in student's intersectional identities, with race at the center. These key understandings are aligned to the transformative practice of discovering that others experience the world differently than they do.

Cultural Proficiency Dictionary

A requirement for each course, students created a Cultural Proficiency Dictionary which included new terms learned through readings and class discussions. The definitions of terms were widely based on participants' internalized understandings of the meanings, coupled with literature that supported these understandings. Terms such as systemic racism, systemic inequity, equity, access, structural racism, intersectionality, whiteness as property, cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, and interest convergence were commonly defined terms found in participant dictionaries. Additionally, as terms were defined, they were used in personal reflections and in context across assignments. Students increased their vocabulary by an average of 75 words from beginning of the certificate program to the end.

Curriculum Revision and Reflective Practitioner Projects

These assignments focused on transformational practices grounded in instructional shifts, beginning with the curriculum. The process of selecting, evaluating, and rewriting curriculum presented a nuanced challenge for participants. They quickly detected areas in their curriculum guides where racial and social identity representation, opportunities for acceleration, and responsive materials were void or limited. Participants viewed this as an opportunity-rich challenge, and were open to the idea of change at the inception. However, during the planning and implementation stages of the assignments, educators reported some cognitive dissonance. This assignment is aligned to what Spikes (2018) refers to as "self to system." One participant commented, *'The standards make sense but, it's difficult to know if the selection of materials will prompt interest and positive learning outcomes for my students.'* Another participant communicated, *'creating verbal assessments of learning is something we have never tried in the curriculum. We always use a device or pen and paper.'* A third participant shared that, *'traditional scaffolds only provide a pathway to the dominant curriculum; the use of different materials that create access changes the road traveled.'*

After reflection, consultation with their peers, and use of their cultural responsiveness rubrics, participants were able to improve the implementation steps and deliver their lessons with fidelity. Many reflected a positive response from their students, but reflected on the extended time it took to create responsive curriculum and lessons.

School Community Observation/Interaction Journal

Upon observation of their greater school community for a day, participants reported being unaware of the community services, popular gathering spaces, and the daily operations of their students' communities. Reflections also indicated a need to understand the unspoken rules, customs, and traditions of their communities in hopes to incorporate some of the positive aspects

in the classroom environment, instruction, and extra-curricular opportunities. Several participants shared their fear and discomfort in “living” in their students’ community for a day. These comments led to class discussions that allowed participants to deconstruct their socialized belief systems. Some shared that while they believed the experience was valuable, they did not intend to make a habit of spending any more time than necessary in their students’ communities. Others saw the need to spend more time in their students’ communities.

Personal CRP/Anti-Racism Essay

The final assignment in the last course asked that participants reflect on a “single action” that they took over the course of the school year to promote a culturally responsive classroom, and/or interrupt racial and social inequities in their school. This final transformational practice sought to help participants see themselves as disruptors of inequitable systems. Participants selected topics such as the following, each accompanied by action steps in moving their idea forward: 1) interrupt the exclusion of marginalized student populations from advanced academics/gifted and talented courses; 2) promote the acceleration of students who received English language learning support services in mathematics; 3) advocate for classroom-based supports for students who had social-emotional challenges; 4) create a ‘No-Zero Zone’ which provides access to opportunities for remediation for students who miss class time due to absences or excessive lateness. As a part of the assignment, participants were also asked to provide a “try-tomorrow” action step for educators who might read their essays. Some of these “try-tomorrow” ideas included the following:

1. Listen to your students’ histories with school and schooling;
2. Ask for multiple racial perspectives before deciding how to discipline a student for a minor infraction;
3. Allow students to lead formative assessments and instructional feedback loops;
4. Ask students to review materials with ‘representation’ as the focus;
5. Review the language you use in discipline referrals for bias, assumptions, and stereotypical wording;
6. Co-plan lessons with your students;
7. Assist students in leading professional development opportunities for teachers.

Future Learning

The importance of graduate level programs and courses that focus on the development of in-service teachers in the area of cultural competence became profoundly clear during the course sequence. Educators’ abilities to engage in conversations about race, culture, and difference is imperative for personal growth, daily instructional decision-making, relationship building, and student achievement in every classroom. Educators need transformative practice experiences that force them to think, learn, reflect, decide, and act on behalf of their students regardless of racial and social differences. These experience and actions must be continuous and authentic to evoke lasting change. The development of these courses also affirmed the notion that becoming culturally competent is a journey, an act of becoming, not a destination (Sue, 2001).

Where We Are Now: Program Growth and Future Development

Over fifty-percent of the in-service teachers who participated in the program now serve in equity-based leadership roles in their schools, or in the school system. One-hundred percent of participants have made professional strides in aiding their schools in becoming more culturally responsive. Some tangible examples of their combined work include leading curriculum revision efforts, initiating equity committees and student diversity clubs, creating community outreach program booklets for parents and families, participating in climate-focused equity audits in their schools, engaging in peer coaching, delivering professional development opportunities, and leading book studies focused on student voice.

Since the development of the initial PDS prompted program, the university now offers a 12-credit Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) approved certificate, recognized by the State of Maryland as a micro-credential. In addition, the graduate courses were used as prerequisites to create a Master's Degree at the university titled, *Leadership in Teaching: Culturally Proficient Leadership*. Finally, the courses developed for this certificate were used to replace and supplement courses that have been offered in a variety of leadership programs in the School of Education at the university.

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