Bridging the Gap between Home and School: Creating Inclusion through Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

By

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Abstract

With the increase of student diversity within the Greater Toronto Area, fostering a commitment to student learning has become a great concern (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). As a result, adapting instruction to integrate students’ identities and cultural diversities becomes imperative to fostering inclusion in the elementary classroom. Through the adoption of culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy (CRRP), this qualitative research study investigated teachers’ implementation of pedagogy to support inclusive learning of students in culturally diverse public classrooms within public elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators who identified with implementing a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approach in their classrooms. In exploring CRRP, it was found that the teacher participants commonly identified CRRP as pertaining to student-centered teaching with a focus on students’ needs and interests, and student empowerment through critical reflection and identity building. The findings also revealed that CRRP requires collaborative efforts and supports of students, teachers, parents and professionals in the community, which when limited can serve as barriers for educators adopting the approach. As a result, implications were identified for the broader education community as well as for teachers who wish to adopt CRRP in their teaching, in addition to several proposed recommendations.

Keywords: Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, inclusive education, teacher practices
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Walk into the doors of an elementary grade classroom within the Greater Toronto Area and you’ll instantly notice the extent of student diversity within the average makeup of a classroom. As educators, it is important to realize that this is the reality we will most likely come across in the makeup of our primary and junior classrooms. Students’ diversity ranges from diversities in intellectual abilities, gender identities, religious beliefs, developmental abilities, physical abilities, personalities, family backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, to linguistic abilities, to name a few (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This definition of diversity is adopted and expanded into cultural diversity in this research to include aspects of students’ values/beliefs, knowledge and life experiences as it pertains to students’ cultural and social belonging. With this increasing rise in diversity, various efforts have been put forth to improve teaching instruction within these classrooms, by educators, professionals in the educational field, and educational researchers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). In recognizing students’ differences and needs, parents, teachers, support staff, and students have come together to develop supports for students who may need them. These attempts often include a model of inclusion, where the differences and needs of all students are recognized by educators as critical for student learning and development.

In 2009 Ontario’s former Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, associated Ontario’s student diversity within the “equity and inclusive education strategy” and referred to inclusive practices as a goal of the Ontario education system (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Hence, it is evident that efforts in addressing student diversities of intellectual, physical and linguistic abilities have been dominant, and expansive in the development of various special
education programs, differentiated instruction techniques, accessibility services and ELL support staff (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Recently, culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) was emphasized in an edition of the “Capacity Building Series,” developed by the Student Achievement Division of the Ontario Ministry of Education, in its initiatives to improve student achievement and instructional effectiveness in Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This edition specifically situated CRP in a move “towards equity and inclusivity in Ontario Schools” and towards building an inclusive education system (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). More specifically, the framework recognizes cultural diversity and the coming together of students’ individual identities within school contexts as a foundation for this approach.

Although attempts to improve pedagogy, and increase inclusion of students with diverse intellectual, physical, or linguistic abilities has been increasingly prevalent, attention to students’ ethnic and racial diversities require equivalent emphasis within the Ontario education system. The report recognizes cultural differences related to race and ethnicity, family structure or socio-economic statuses in addition to several others as creating barriers for some students in school settings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Therefore, the significance of cultural diversity on promoting student learning through the use of inclusive teaching practices is the central focus of the research. This research study will focus on the implementation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) in elementary classrooms by Ontario educators as a way to build inclusive learning environments. Hence, I explore specific practices and strategies that teachers have attempted in their classroom to be inclusive of student diversities.
1.1 Research Problem

A greater recognition of cultural diversity among Ontario students has only become apparent recently in educational systems, with the rise in multicultural populations within the GTA (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Therefore, understanding how to best meet the needs of a racially and culturally diverse student population is still progressing. One of the earliest attempts to address cultural diversity in students was initiated by Ladson-Billings (1995) who examined the role of pedagogy in responding to the academic success of African American students. While exploring the link between schooling and culture Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) uncovered pedagogy that she identified as “culturally relevant,” and termed, “culturally relevant teaching” (CRP) (p. 159). In expanding Ladson-Billings’ approach to culturally relevant pedagogy as a “pedagogy of opposition,” several researchers have addressed cultural diversity through a promotion of equity and social justice (Villegas, 2002; Gay, 2002; Boutte and Hall, 2006; Irvine, 2010; Milner, 2010). Similar studies, such as that of Villegas (2002) and Kang and Hyatt (2009), have centered CRP on the individual empowerment of students from specific low-minority cultural backgrounds, and frameworks of social change. Gay (2002) has taken a slightly different approach to addressing CRP with reference to educators’ use of students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds to inform teaching and develop a socio-cultural consciousness in classrooms. Today, the term has been expanded to include the responsiveness of educators and may be referred as, ‘culturally responsive pedagogy’ (CRP) or ‘culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP)’. Hence, in this study I refer to pedagogy that integrates and responds to students’ cultural knowledge and background into classroom instruction as culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy or CRRP.
Although CRRP has been picked up by multiple scholars in addressing different issues, a lack of attention has been placed on how CRRP can be used to promote inclusion within elementary classrooms in Ontario. Although research is significant within this area, the effect of students’ identity on learning and success within educational settings continues to be a concern. Correspondingly, most researchers have confirmed that students from minority cultural backgrounds increasingly face challenges when it comes to achieving academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Boutte and Hall, 2006; Irvine, 2010; Milner, 2010). For instance, in a study of students’ experiences in school, “the lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African-American students” was located as the major source of struggle for students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). As a student from a culturally diverse background I have had experiences during my elementary school where I felt excluded within my classroom community and from my peers. From my own experience, I understood that students’ cultural backgrounds have a great impact on their ability to learn and participate in school. Experiences such as this shows that the cultural diversity of students isn't reflected in some teachers’ pedagogies and in their development of instruction.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Several attempts have been forth by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) to raise awareness. The promotion of CRP in the Capacity Building Series by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013) is a recent example. Nevertheless, the gap between CRRP and inclusivity remains intact as students from diverse backgrounds continue to feel excluded within school environments. This should not be the case for students growing up in an increasingly multicultural society. This shows that cultural/racial backgrounds can influence feelings of exclusion amongst students and act as a barrier for student learning. My personal experiences
made me realize that inclusion is best achieved when teachers are responsive to students’ individual experiences and needs. Accordingly, in many cases it was evident that culture is a central part of students’ identity and strongly informs their learning experience.

In addressing inclusion, I intended to explore how educators’ develop spaces where students’ cultural knowledge and experiences are included and reflected. Despite the increasing rise in culturally diverse communities and interactions between students of culturally diverse backgrounds, Gay (2000) notes that “students from these communities arrive at school knowing little of significance about people who are different” (p.20). Moreover, recent inquiries have brought to attention feelings of discomfort and lack of confidence among teachers who addressed cultural diversity in their classrooms (Durden, Escalante and Blitch, 2014; Milner, 2010; Boutte and Hill, 2006). The research aims to explore how teachers gain cultural competence about their students. Accordingly, the move towards inclusion begins when educators develop an awareness and acceptance of the cultural diversity that surrounds them and exists within their student populations. Correspondingly, inclusive education is achieved when, “students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honored and all individuals are respected” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This research study intends to explore how Ontario elementary school teachers have implemented this pedagogy in their classroom and offer a space for students where they feel reflected and accepted of their diverse cultural backgrounds.

1.3 Research Questions and Introduction to Research Methods

The main question that will be explored in this study is “How are elementary teachers incorporating CRRP to build inclusion and support students of diverse cultural backgrounds?” This question was supported by the following sub-questions:
1. What are teachers’ understandings of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and their rationales for using it?

2. How is culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy being used in the classroom to promote inclusion of all students?

3. What are some supports and challenges of addressing this pedagogy?

In this study, a qualitative approach directed an open exploration of CRRP and its implications on student learning and inclusion within classroom. Semi-structured interviews were the key data collection methods, conducted on two educators with experience in engaging in CRRP methods. Sampling procedures were carried out using purposeful sampling methods where participants were selected based on a set of criteria. Accordingly, information was analyzed according to themes as it related to the research purpose and contextualized information. These themes were then interpreted into findings. Although several ethical considerations directed the research process, some research methodology limitations were also acknowledged and identified in the methodology section, Chapter 3.

1.4 Background/Positionality of the Researcher

As an individual who self-identifies as having a mixed cultural identity and one who embraces the ethnic-cultural backgrounds of both my father who is of South Indian background, and mother of Sri-Lankan background, I have had my own unique set of experiences with developing cultural identity. More specifically my encounters with these two distinct cultural backgrounds as they intersected with my identity as a Canadian citizen were central to my own development. While contesting my own cultural identity, I found it especially difficult to transition into a school environment and classroom culture that seemed so different. During childhood, my engagement in various extra-curricular ‘cultural’ programs had helped me
develop a strong connection to my cultural backgrounds and community. For example, language heritage classes and traditional dance programs helped me learn more about my family heritage and experiences. Accordingly, my family/cultural values played an important role in the development of my identity as a child. However, whenever I left the boundaries of my home and cultural community and entered school settings, I often perceived a disconnection from my identity and culture. I remember seeing my school as a strange place as it was so different from my home.

During my primary years, I specifically remember feeling left out because I didn’t know or understand why some of my peers did things differently. I recall being nervous and afraid to speak out in class because everything seemed so new and unfamiliar. As a result of this, it took me a while to accommodate to the school environment and get comfortable being in my classroom. As I got older, I remember feeling ashamed of my cultural backgrounds and that often prevented me from sharing my cultural views and beliefs with my peers and teachers. This was mainly because I knew that my cultural identity wasn’t being valued and reflected in school settings. A lack of opportunity to explore my cultural background in school has had implications on my development of cultural identity as a separate element to my overall identity. Because of this, it took me a while to accept myself as an individual with multiple, intersecting identities. It is important that educators recognize and help students develop their own cultural identities which includes their identities at home and within their local communities.

I believe that it is imperative that students also develop an understanding of cultural diversity in classrooms at primary grade levels. Hence, students need to understand that cultural identity is wide-ranging and can include everything that makes them who they are as an individual, including their social identities. In addition, I believe that the presence of a culturally
reflective classroom climate is comparably significant in ensuring that students feel included and respected by their peers. To accommodate students and ensure inclusivity within classrooms, it is important for teachers to take into consideration the culturally diverse demographic of students within their classroom and reflect that in their teaching. This includes learning about students’ individual different identities as well as their background knowledge, beliefs/values and unique life experiences.

1.5 Overview of the Study

This study was designed to increase knowledge surrounding the use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy within Ontario elementary classrooms. More importantly, it intends to explore how CRRP can be used to develop inclusive environments for students in schools. This introduction chapter was the first of a five-chapter long research paper. Five sections are divided according to the multiple research processes within a qualitative study. Chapter 2 provides discussion on the beginning stages of the research which involved an exploration of relevant literature related to the topic. Key findings from current scholarship helped contextualize the research approach and focus. Therefore, Chapter 3 includes detailed descriptions of the research methodology including procedures related to data collection, participant sampling and data analysis. The chapter ends with two appendices that include the interview design protocol and informed consent letter that was used during data collection. Using information gathered from the data, Chapter 4 describes the organization of data into several themes and sub-themes as it related to the research purpose. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes key findings and provides an overview of implications and recommendations for future teachers and researchers.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

The following section reviews existing scholarship on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and insights amongst educational researchers and professionals. Beginning with an extensive review of the term culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), recent scholarship is explored in conjunction with two major conceptualizations. While CRRP has been identified by some for having the purpose of empowering students with respects to social justice it has been interpreted by others as pertaining to the social-cultural experiences of students. Secondly, an exploration of why CRRP was introduced and its purposes in education reveal current researches’ emphasis on multiculturalism and academic achievement of students. Finally, a look at existing inquiries on teachers’ understandings and implementation indicate inconsistent interpretations and confusions regarding CRRP. Building on these findings and in attempt to address voids found in existing research, my research examines CRRP through comprehensive lens. Accordingly, the research will bring together and expand on the multiple ways teachers integrate cultural diversity and inclusion strategies into their pedagogy.

2.1 What is Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy?

In current attempts scholars have explored ways in which we can improve pedagogy. Accordingly, Ladson-Billings (1995) explains that closer investigations of culturally relevant pedagogy emerge after attempts to develop pedagogy into well-conceived conceptions (p.160). Culturally responsive pedagogy, also termed as culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), generally describes pedagogy that integrates students’ background and cultural knowledge within the teaching and learning experiences in a classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). However, recent inquiries have led scholars to delve deeper into the theory
and devise conceptualizations in relation to various scholarship and findings. Although a variety of definitions have been put forth, recent interpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy generally fall under two distinct categories. Accordingly, while some position CRRP as a tool for social justice education where students are empowered and offered equitable opportunities in classrooms, alternative views by scholars describe CRRP as teaching that fosters cultural diversity and uses students’ cultural experiences and knowledge in enhancing the learning for students of diverse backgrounds.

2.1.1 Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and social justice

Initial research on CRRP focused mainly on teaching in relation to social justice education and the development of equity in classrooms. Several scholars explored the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy among students from low-minority cultural backgrounds in attempt to discuss its significance in addressing inequities and challenges students faced in classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas, 2002; Kang and Hyatt, 2009; Milner, 2010). As one of the first researchers to explore the concept, Ladson-Billings (1995) offers a definition of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) that correlates with her study on the successes of using CRP amongst African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) points out to three propositions that the pedagogy rests on including: “(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Similarly, others have built on this definition by attributing the pedagogy of empowerment and striving for change from traditional methods. Relatively, a major section of Villegas’ (2002) culturally relevant curriculum proposal stresses the need for teachers to act as agents of change by developing a commitment to the pedagogy as well as acquiring
appropriate skills to do so (p. 24). Kang and Hyatt (2009) advocate for a powerful multicultural education that allows teachers to engage in critical dialogues and reflections thereby ultimately leading to social change and action (p. 44). Likewise, Milner (2010) situates culturally responsive teaching as contributing to the intellectual and social development of students through empowerment and making meaningful contributions to society (p. 69). Ladson-Billings (1995) locates culturally relevant teaching as a “pedagogy of opposition” that is committed to collective empowerment amongst students (p. 160). Moreover, others signify culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as emancipatory and liberating (Gay, 2000). In correspondence, Gay’s (2000) reference to the CRRP as a way to “release the intellect of students of colour from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge” correlates with this (p. 35).

2.1.2 Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy through socio-cultural lens

Recent proponents of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy have come to understand the value of CRRP in its emphasis on culture as a tool for successful learning. In his analysis, Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as: “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). By focusing on individual students’ background and cultural knowledge researchers have understood the importance of socialization outside schools and the knowledge that an individual student brings into the average classroom. This involves integrating information about students’ cultural norms, beliefs, values and experiences into teaching practices and curriculum. In their research on the use of culturally relevant pedagogy by primary caregivers including teachers and parents in early childhood programs Durden, Escalante and Blitch (2014) explored teaching through the lens of social-cultural theory (p. 223). In arguing that social and cultural factors mediate learning through culturally relevant pedagogy Durden et
al. (2014) found that these teaching strategies were effective in facilitating the socio-cultural growth of young children. In justifying this stance, Hollins (1995) references the theory of cultural mismatch or theory of cultural congruence that states, “Students’ academic achievement is greatly influenced by the relationship between school practices and the practices and values found in the students’ home culture” (p. 74). Such experts have made the claim for a different pedagogical model that departs from traditional methods of teaching to be implemented for students of diverse ethnic groups.

Accordingly, Gay (2000) attributes culturally responsive pedagogy as a pedagogy that “[…] filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through cultural frames of reference” (p. 24). Gay (2002) identifies five essential components of culturally responsive pedagogy including: “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106). Although CRRP’s connections to social justice education are significant, definitions that relate CRRP to social-cultural experiences also provide an essential framework for teachers. Accordingly, Gay’s (2002) expansive criterion of cultural responsive pedagogy is significant in contributing overall to teachers’ understandings of cultural diversity and their roles in implementing it. In pursuit of understanding cultural diversity and its impact on teaching and student learning, my research intends to explore teachers’ understandings and rationales for using culturally relevant and responsive teaching.

2.2 Purposes of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

A review of research on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has confirmed the purposes of adopting CRRP within our education system. In proposing culturally relevant and
responsive pedagogy most have shined the light on multiculturalism, students’ academic achievements and cultural diversity (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997, Gay, 2002). At the same time it became evident that researches often relied on a specific goal of CRRP whether it was to develop multicultural education or increase the academic achievement of students (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997, Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2010). However, broadening the lens of CRRP provides headway into different perspectives. In exploring an overview of research it becomes apparent that there is a lack of attention on CRRP in relation to helping students feel included and represented in their classrooms. In particular, the use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in fostering inclusivity of students requires greater attention.

2.2.1 Multiculturalism and multicultural education

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy roots from recent attempts to employ multicultural education in schools (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997). An increasing rise in multicultural populations has led educational researchers and educators to explore and experiment with various teaching strategies and pedagogies that adhere to student populations. An increasing rise in the cultural diversity of students into the 21st century has created a demand for teacher education preparation programs and in-service teachers to become well equipped to teach students of a variety of racial, ethnic, social class and language backgrounds (Villegas, 2002, p. 20). Through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy we see that many teachers have taken a role in responding to the changing demographics in classrooms. However, for some this meant taking a multicultural education approach. Correspondingly, Blake (1997) points out to the multicultural curriculum as a strategy that “has the potential of reversing the patterns of rigid ethnic, racial and gender roles frequently promoted by the curriculum” (pg. 3) Although building on this premise, this research strives to go beyond narrow interpretations of CRRP and
embark on an open exploration of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and its implementation in classrooms.

2.2.2 Student success and academic achievement

A great variety of research has focused on the academic achievements of students of culturally diverse backgrounds. For instance, Gay (2002) suggests that students have higher interest appeal and are highly motivated when “[…] academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students” (p. 106). Moreover, Gay (2002) indicates that culturally responsive teaching ensures that students are more connected to their learning and student learning becomes more personally meaningful (p. 106). Therefore, this indicates that CRRP has also been significant to contributing to students’ success and academic achievements.

2.2.3 Cultural identity and diversity

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is often attributed to supporting students within diverse settings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Hence, diversity is defined as, “the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p.1). Cultural diversity, therefore, recognizes cultural identities and the range of attributes that shape students sense of self and life experiences. White, Zion and Kozleski (2005) identify cultural identity as comprising of an individual’s ethnicity, race, language, religion, formal/informal community, and neighborhood or family connections. Others have referenced family structure, socio-economic status as well as sexual orientation, gender, ability and mental health as aspects of identity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Moreover, culture is described to be deeply rooted and also including, “students’ multiple social identities and their ways of knowing and of being in the world”
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p.1). White et al. (2005) specify that cultural identity is attributed to recognizing the unique traditions, values, beliefs, knowledges and life experiences that are shaped by individuals’ multiple forms of identity.

Correspondingly, Irvine (2010) indicates that, “A culturally relevant pedagogy builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and teachers can enhance students’ success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice” (p. 58). My research builds on this premise of cultural diversity where students’ multiple identities and life experiences are recognized and integrated into classroom instruction. Increasingly, culturally relevant and responsive teaching has been demonstrated as merely recognizing content from different cultures within the curriculum by educators who’ve attempted to address cultural diversity in their classrooms (Blake, 1997; Irvine, 2010). Rather than solely focusing on cultural differences, a shift towards discovering commonalities between cultures can provide a significant contribution to teachers’ understanding of cultural diversity in relation to pedagogy.

In the Capacity Buildings series report on culturally responsive pedagogy, educators are encouraged to value “cultural uniqueness” of each student, and use cultural diversity as opportunities for learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). In this research examining teachers’ use of cultural diversity in classrooms remains significant to understanding how an embracement of cultural diversity by students and teachers can contribute to a collective understanding and appreciation in classrooms. Through an examination of culturally relevant and responsive practices this research explores the value of cultural diversity as a useful resource within elementary classrooms.
2.2.4 Achieving inclusivity

Although research on culturally relevant teaching has raised concerns on multicultural education, academic success, and growing diversity in classrooms through emphasis on culturally competent teaching and development of multicultural knowledge, an inquiry on CRRP’s purpose in establishing inclusivity in classrooms is missing. While teaching about cultural identities and developing multicultural awareness in classrooms is critical to responding to diversity of students, it is also important that culturally relevant and responsive teachers have a mandate towards inclusion. Personal experiences as a student of culturally diverse background attending an Ontario elementary school has led me to identify with students who develop a sense of isolation and exclusion at school due to cultural differences. By exploring teachers’ use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy this research investigates how to establish inclusion in culturally diverse classrooms as well as create inclusive learning spaces. By directing greater focus on CRRP in relation to cultural diversity and inclusion, the study strives to fill the gaps in research.

Although such conceptualizations have led researchers to explore CRRP through specific lens, a commonality that researchers generally agreed upon is that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is designed to address the cultural diversity of students, thereby recognizing the value of culture in the lives of each child and designing a curriculum that centers on students’ experiences. Most perspectives have understood the role of the teacher in prompting an awareness of cultural diversity in classrooms. However, a significant element of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that is lacking within current research is in its ability to foster inclusivity among students. This study incorporates this aspect of inclusion in addition to building on to the formulated interpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.
Although emphasis has been placed on how CRRP enhances learning for specific students of culturally diverse backgrounds, an exploration of how CRRP contributes to the collective learning of students through inclusive strategies and the development of a class consciousness will be specifically addressed in this research (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

2.3 Teachers’ Experiences with Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

The extent of incorporating cultural diversity into curriculum and teaching is widespread and boundless within educational settings. However, recent research, mentioned below, have shown that teachers continue to face difficulties when implementing multicultural education or culturally relevant and responsive teaching in their classrooms. It became apparent that while some teacher respondents admitted feeling uncertain or hesitant on adopting CRRP in their classrooms due to lack of information or understanding, others pointed out to cultural incompetence (Kang and Hyatt, 2009; Young, 2010; Durden et al., 2014; Milner, 2010; Boutte and Hill, 2006). Alternatively, another scope of researches have brought to attention a general pattern amongst teachers who engaged in culturally relevant and responsive methods of teaching. Researchers pointed out to the inadequacies of teaching methods that merely added elements of culture into areas of student learning rather than integrating into the whole curriculum (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 2010; Young, 2010). Inquiries on CRRP brings to attention the inconsistencies that exist when it comes to addressing cultural diversity and implementing effective practices that are suited to meet students’ needs. My research strives to address these challenges by offering explanations of culturally relevant teaching as a process that can be achieved on a day-to-day basis and displaying examples of strategies that teachers can benefit from.
2.3.1 Teachers’ attitudes towards culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

It is evident that while teachers have taken an active role in establishing culturally relevant and responsive teaching styles, many report feeling disoriented when it comes to implementing effective CRRP methods in their classrooms (Kang and Hyatt, 2009; Young, 2010; Durden et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers’ experiences with culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies often aligned with the experiences of in-service teachers. From observations and interactions with pre-service teachers on their preparedness for serving culturally diverse student populations, Kang and Hyatt (2009) discovered that novice teachers were inadequately prepared when encountering “cultural conflicts” in classrooms and often expressed feelings of helplessness and frustration (p. 44). Although CRRP has been promoted by many as an essential pedagogical tool for educators working with culturally diverse student populations, Young (2010) points out that there is a need to further “discuss, apply and assess” the theory and its implementation in classrooms (p. 248). Durden et al. (2014) found that teacher participants in his study faced similar challenges when implementing CRRP in early childhood classrooms and identified some mediating factors that affected this. Teachers reported that they needed additional as well as ongoing professional supports for successfully implementing CRRP in their classrooms (Durden et al., 2014). Although teachers demonstrated greater comfort in addressing individual differences amongst students such as students’ learning differences and linguistic diversity, they expressed discomfort when it came to addressing sensitive issues like religious diversity (Kang & Hyatt, 2009, p. 49). Therefore, this shows that both pre-service and in-service teachers need greater exposure and training that will allow them to re-evaluate the impact of cultural diversity on students’ learning and explore methods to become improved culturally relevant and responsive teachers.
2.3.2 Attitudes towards cultural competence

Conceptualizations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that place high emphasis on culture and cultural differences have led teachers to develop feelings of uneasiness and hesitance when addressing cultural diversity in classrooms (e.g., Durden et al., 2015). Building cultural competence was recognized by many as an essential feature of CRRP. Accordingly, Ladson-Billings (1995) reinforces cultural competence as a major criteria of culturally relevant teaching as it ensures maintenance of cultural integrity amongst students and teachers (p.160). Correspondingly, in signifying cultural competence in his study, Milner (2010) makes reference to the premise that culturally relevant pedagogy is “more about a way of being than a specified set of practices” (p. 76). Investigations have revealed that teachers avoided or were doubtful towards implementing CRRP due to fears of being culturally incompetent (Durden et al., 2015; Milner, 2010; Boutte and Hill, 2006). For instance, Durden et al. (2015) even pointed out that for some teachers’ students’ cultural identities were perceived as a barrier to instruction rather than as an opportunity for growth (p. 230). Although many studies stressed the relevance of developing cultural competence as a basis for culturally relevant and responsive teaching, less concentration has been devoted to explaining how teachers can build and extend cultural competence. My research intends to expand on cultural competence and increase teachers’ perceptions by situating it as a resourceful tool for cultural relevant and responsive teaching.

Milner’s (2010) inquiry of a culturally relevant teacher was one of the few studies that addressed how cultural competence could be developed by teachers. Milner’s (2010) disclosure of how a lack of cultural understanding could lead to “[…] incongruence, disconnections, and barriers to success in classrooms” has directed my focus towards examining strategies that teachers could use to develop cultural competence (p.83). Moreover, research has demonstrated
that teachers lack or report a lack of understanding on the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students (Durden et al., 2015; Boutte and Hill, 2006). For example, in the case of teaching African American students Boutte and Hill (2006) pointed out that challenges teachers faced often rooted from their lack of understanding of black culture, respect of black culture as well as their narrow conceptions of black culture (p. 313). In some cases, scholars have even pointed out that teachers sometimes failed to take into account racial and ethnic differences among their student population (Young, 2010). Relatively, Young (2010) stressed the need for teachers to develop knowledge about their students by “taking a personal interest in them as individuals, not simply as pupils behind desks” (p. 252). Therefore, it seems that some teachers appear to be unbothered by the changing diversity in their classrooms in addition to overlooking the needs of students from culturally minority backgrounds (Young, 2010).

Building on the work of scholars like Milner (2010), Boutte and Hill (2006) and Young (2010), this research broadens understandings on cultural competence by positioning the development of cultural competence as a collective process. Therefore, in addressing concerns regarding teachers’ confusions on cultural competence this research demonstrates that students, parents and community members can be a major source of knowledge for teachers wishing to engage in CRRP methods. Finally, by investigating first-hand accounts of the implementation of CRRP, this research study discovers some methods for teachers to improve the cultural competency of both teachers and students. Current research has revealed that because many teachers are uncertain of what they are doing or are confused about what it means to be a culturally relevant or responsive teacher they abstain from engaging in it. On the other hand, those who have made attempts to engage in CRRP methods have done so selectively by progressing towards a practice of adding culture into curriculum.
2.3.3 CRRP as adding parts of culture to curriculum

Research studies on the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies in schools reveal a common pattern amongst teachers. It is evident that in attempt to being culturally relevant and responsive to diverse student populations in their classrooms, teachers are increasingly incorporating elements of ethnic culture into their teaching (Blake, 1997; Irvine, 2010). In particular, this generally involves teachers adding ethnically diverse materials into school curriculum or inviting students to share information about their culture in class (Blake, 1997; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In her study of teachers’ actions to integrate multiculturalism into the curriculum, Blake (1997) references Bank’s (1989) additive level of infusing multiculturalism into curriculum where teacher respondents incorporated cultural diversity by adding ethnic materials into curriculum that was already existing (Blake, 1997, p. 222). Irvine’s (2010) study of culturally relevant instructional strategies by an urban elementary school teacher is comparable. In correspondence to Blake’s (1997) stance on additive multicultural teaching, Irvine (2010) notes that educators often attempted to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy by simply acknowledging ethnic holidays or including ethnic popular culture into their teaching curriculum. In the case of Indigenous students facing challenges in schools a similar trend is evident. Likewise, Indigenous educator Cornel Pewewardy (1993) states “educators have traditionally attempted to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture” (as cited in Ladson Billings, 1995, p. 159).

In addition, Villegas (2002) findings on the ways teacher education programs responded to cultural diversity is also important to take into consideration. Villegas (2002) adds that a typical response of teacher education programs towards addressing the growing cultural diversity amongst students included adding optional multicultural education courses or bilingual/urban
education courses in the list of courses for pre-service teachers to choose from (p.20). By simply adding courses that address multicultural content these teacher education programs as a result leave the rest of the curriculum “intact” (Villegas, 2002, p.20). Therefore, it is apparent that many teacher candidates graduate without having exposure to or preparation for the realities of a growing culturally diverse student population in their prospective careers (Villegas, 2002, pg.20).

In more recent studies scholars have come to terms with the ineffectiveness of this method in addressing and responding to cultural diversity and have illustrated such misinterpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Young, 2010; Irvine, 2010). For instance, Irvine (2010) claims that such assumptions of culturally relevant pedagogy by educators often led to “awkward classroom moments, ineffective instructional practices and counterproductive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships” (p. 58). In his inquiry, Young (2010) identified similar findings amongst teacher participants who in attempt to build relationships with their students engaged in strategies that invited ethnic foods and cultural stories into the classrooms or celebrated students’ holidays and multicultural months (p. 252). It is evident that in attempts to be culturally relevant and responsive teacher respondents seem to place emphasis on cultural holidays and traditions thereby diverting less attention on student’s knowledge and experiences with cultural norms, beliefs and values (Young, 2010; Irvine, 2010). By simply acknowledging cultures of students’ teachers are overlooking specific aspects of students’ cultural identities.

Through this research study, I hope to clear this misinterpretation of CRRP by providing examples from educators who have adopted effective culturally relevant and responsive methods. More specifically this study focuses on how teachers can respond to cultural diversity by
implementing a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that is integrated within the overall curriculum and offers students a greater awareness of the diversity that surrounds them. Although these strategies were well intended, Young (2010) argues that it merely reaffirmed a sense of otherness that is commonly felt by minority student in addition to building “superficial” student-teacher relationships (pg. 252). Teachers need to take this important point into consideration when addressing cultural diversity in their classroom. This particular finding reveals that some teachers’ interpretations of cultural diversity is established specifically on cultural differences. As a result of this understanding it is apparent that teachers have shifted towards searching for the “different” experiences of specific students thereby widening the cultural gap between students unintentionally. As a result, this research focuses on gathering information about how cultural diversity can serve as a rich source of knowledge for both teachers and students. Additionally, an emphasis on inclusion seeks to close the cultural gaps within classrooms and widen teachers’ interpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

Whether teachers have chosen to keep distant from engaging in any aspects of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies or have attempted to confront and implement its methods in their classrooms, uncertainties remain existent across all the spectrum. As the researcher, my values towards cultural diversity has led to explore how culture can be embraced and used to inform teachers on how culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy could be integrated into curriculum. By using culture as a resourceful tool towards CRRP implementation in my study this research addresses misconceptions and explores successful efforts of teachers who’ve implemented CRRP in their teaching. In addressing teachers’ lack of knowledge on CRRP practices and cultural competency, this research attempts to bring forth greater awareness about
the pedagogy so teachers become encouraged to develop a social-cultural consciousness in their own classroom which they contest and reflect on based on their understandings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Moreover, this research exemplifies culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as a collective process that involves students, parents, teachers and others in the community. Perhaps this may help to ease the tensions teachers face when attempting to be culturally responsive in teaching.

2.4 Conclusion

A thorough review of current scholarship has led to a deeper understanding of culturally relevant and responsive teaching. A look at the various conceptualizations of CRRP was significant in pointing out to two major interpretations of CRRP as a pedagogy of social justice and a pedagogy based on social-cultural experiences. Moreover, it provided the grounds for this research within an appropriate framework and allows teachers to evaluate their own interpretations of the topic. An exploration of the purposes of culturally relevant teaching provided me with better articulation of concepts and led me to explore what was missing in literature. Finally, closer examinations of current studies and teaching practices has raised my attention of relevant uncertainties, confusions and challenges culturally responsive teaching has brought up. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of literature has directed this research towards several paths. It provided a contextual basis to evolve from and move towards more specific themes. More specifically, I was able to contextualize my research on the grounds of social-cultural views and cultural consciousness in addition to taking a position in contributing to teacher’s understandings of CRRP through development of cultural competence, embracement of cultural diversity and promotion of inclusivity.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter introduces the methodological approaches of qualitative research, which was selected to study the phenomena of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) and explore its practices within Ontario elementary classrooms. Given the complex nature of CRRP, a qualitative research approach was adopted to gain a deeper understanding of the purposes of the pedagogy and how it may be used in classrooms. Likewise, in consideration of the research purpose and problem, appropriate decisions that were made in data collection procedures, sampling methods, and data analysis processes are outlined. Finally, ethical examination and methodological limitations are considered and explained in detail.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach that explored the research problem through review of relevant and existing scholarship, and through semi-structured interviews. Marshall (1996) explains that qualitative approaches such as this are most appropriate, when there is an “aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues” and for “answering humanistic why and how questions” (p. 522). An extensive review of literature and research on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy served as a starting point and provide the basis for developing an understanding of the problem. In his definition, Creswell (2013) explains qualitative research as beginning with “assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). Accordingly, the process of this research evolved from broad assumptions of culturally relevant and
responsive pedagogy to an adoption of specific theoretical frameworks and interpretive lens, which informed data collection procedures and frameworks. However, Creswell (2013) explains that since qualitative researches are emergent, ideas and interpretations are shifted as new information is gathered and analyzed throughout various stages of research.

To better understand and generate meaning from the lived experiences of elementary grade educators who have adopted, or have attempted to adopt CRRP methods in classrooms, a qualitative approach was taken. The commitment towards discovering CRRP and implementation by elementary grade educators was well coordinated with a qualitative approach that shone a light on their own individual understandings and experiences. The qualitative research approach was also significant in my attempts to steer away from general understandings and patterns of CRRP that was prominent in existing research, and towards identifying alternative experiences, such as its ability to promote inclusion of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which is often overlooked by scholars. In accordance with one of Creswell’s (2013) reasons for conducting qualitative research, which is to “hear silenced voices,” I was able to explore educator’s perspectives on the use of CRRP, which was also found to be lacking in current research.

The value of a qualitative research approach lies in its ability to take on both inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I was able to combine information gathered from the literature review, and the collected data to simultaneously analyze themes and evaluate the phenomena of CRRP and its’ significance throughout the research process. Using a qualitative research method also provided the flexibility to situate my positionality within the research and recognize the interpretive lens in which the research was driven (Creswell, 2013).
As a result, the study attempts to showcase a holistic account of my participants’ experiences with CRRP. This includes highlighting the importance of multiple perspectives, common themes in the use of CRRP in culturally diverse classrooms, as well as, discrepancies among educators’ experiences and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, within qualitative approaches, “researchers are bound not by tight cause-and-effect relationships among factors, but rather by identifying the complex interaction of factors in any situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Given the complex nature of CRRP conceptualizations and implementation, a qualitative approach was the most suitable, and substantial method for the study.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection was semi-structured interviews where information about teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and experiences with CRRP were gathered through open discussion and dialogue. Face to face interviews were conducted with two educators who became the primary participants of the research. Although a set of predetermined interview questions were designed prior to the interviews, the flexible nature of the semi-structured interview protocol allowed for adaptations to take place and the development of new questions during dialogue with participants.

In attempts to discover educators’ experiences with CRRP, semi-structured interviews served as a useful tool to understand my participants’ individual perspectives. Likewise, Warwick (1982) argues, “social research often gives participants with an opportunity for self-expression and people will often derive satisfaction from having had the chance to express an opinion in subjects that they have an interest in” (Clark, 2010, p. 401). Although the questions served as a guide during the interview process, conversations were adapted based on individuals’
responses. Accordingly, within such interview approaches, Turner (2010) situates the researcher as the driver of the interview but claims that “flexibility takes precedence based on perceived prompts from the participants” (p. 756). As a result, this method of data collection allowed me to capture my participants’ voices and provide, what Rabionet (2011) refers to as, a “window to their stories” (p. 563).

3.3 Participants

This section provides details on decisions related to the research participants. First, I present information on the sampling criteria that was used to recruit participants for the study. Next, I review the methods in which participants were located for the study. Finally, I provide bios of all participants chosen for the study. Bryne (2001) suggests that, “understanding what purpose research served should be a decisive factor in selecting a qualitative sample” (p. 494). Therefore, providing a rationale for these sampling decisions was deemed necessary, given the nature of the research design and purpose. Reporting on these truthful, and authentic sampling processes also helps maintain credibility in the research. In correspondence, Bryne (2001) explains, “The researcher must document the decision-making process involved in qualitative sampling to provide credibility for the research findings” (p. 498).

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

A set of criteria was established for sampling participants, as the research addressed a specific pedagogical method, and thus required participants to have some prior knowledge and experience. In recognizing that some educators might have greater experiences with CRRP and inclusion practices than others, and therefore qualify as suitable for the purposes of this study, particular considerations were made while sampling (Marshall, 1996). In their analysis, Palinkas
et al. (2015), explain that this sampling strategy involves, “identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (p. 534). Therefore, participants were required to have had previous experience adopting a CRRP approach in their teaching.

These criteria served to be the most important and only fixed requirement during participant requirement. The remaining set of criteria were also considered. Participants were required to have a role as a certified teacher because the research specifically addresses teachers’ implementation of CRRP strategies within classrooms. Next, participants were required to have experience working within an educational setting in the GTA, as the research pertained to the cultural diversity of students within the diverse multicultural demographics of Ontario. Finally, research participants were required to have had experience working with elementary grade students. Although the latter set of criteria were prioritized, slight variations were also accepted and the criteria was flexible due the availability of participants, and in recognition of limitations to using a single criterion based sampling approach, which is explained in detail below.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Scholars have pointed out to the importance of being discreet when selecting participants for a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013; Turner, 2010). Although several techniques to finding participants may have been utilized, non-probability sampling approaches were taken in order to ensure a productive sample was obtained. Given the topic of the research, which dealt with the implementation of a particular pedagogy and teaching practice, the use of a combination of sampling strategies were used as per Palinkas et al., (2015) recommendation, who points out to the worth of using mixed method designs in similar implementation research (p. 533). They
explain, “This has been precipitated by the realization that the challenges of implementing evidence-based and other innovative practices, treatments, interventions and programs are sufficiently complex that a single methodological approach is often inadequate” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 533). Therefore, several purposeful sampling techniques were used to identify participants, whom, were best equipped according to judgements made by myself, the researcher (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

In this case, the participant sampling was initiated using a criterion-based sampling strategy in order to find respondents who can provide, as quoted by Turner (2010) “the most credible information to the study” (p. 757). Using the criteria participants were selected based on the assumption that they have some knowledge about the topic and are, therefore, deemed as “[…] representative of that role” (Palinkas et al, 2015, p. 539). Even though it served to be useful, relying solely on the established criteria would have limited my ability to capture experiences of other individuals (Palinkas et al, 2015). For instance, having fixed criteria of only recruiting certified teachers would have limited the research’s aim of understanding the experiences of other educators and school staff in taking culturally responsive CRRP approach. Because the research focuses on the adoption of pedagogical strategies that promote inclusion of students with diverse cultural backgrounds, the role of educating professionals is equally important and would have been acknowledged. To address such potential limitations, flexibility was vital when addressing the sampling criterion and adoption of other sampling strategies was necessary. Therefore, the advent of attending several professional development conferences hosted by school boards, professional associations, and teacher-education programs, as well as, contacting organizations and university departments that specialized in the areas of multicultural education and CRRP were critical to the sampling of participants. Furthermore, a snowball
sampling technique served to be useful, in identifying participants who had similar characteristics or experiences with selected participants and adopted through verbal recommendations (Marshall, 1996). Finally, when required, convenience sampling was used to gather information and find participants from existing contacts and within networks of the OISE community.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

The participants of the study are both primary grade educators in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. Both participants were grade one classroom teachers at public schools in Ontario at the time of the interview. The participants, Jane and Lisa (pseudonyms) had previous experiences adopting a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approach in their classroom instructions. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used for participants’ names.

Jane

Jane was a grade one teacher with over twelve years of teaching experience at the time of the study. She began her teaching career as a special education teacher and taught from grades one to five. Accordingly, for the last seven years she has been teaching primary grades within mainstream classrooms. Her experience with CRRP began following an initiative that took place in her school which provided her with insights and resources on adopting the pedagogy in her classroom.

Lisa

Lisa was also a grade one teacher with fifteen years of experience working as an educator within the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. Lisa had taken on several positions in the community
in which she worked, previously serving as a member of the Equity committee for a family of schools within that community. She identified equity and social justice education as a passion. Also, as a member of the Equity and Social Justice committee she actively participated in workshops, conferences, and outreach programs where she gathers information about CRRP and equity education.

3.4 Data Analysis

Using the information gathered from the interview process, an analysis of data was conducted in stages of organizing the data through transcribing and coding, and synthesizing of data through identification of common themes and categories. Themes were derived from the data through close examination of expressions and ideas that were presented and categorized based on commonalities and discrepancies (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In addition, themes were also developed based on broader understandings of CRRP that was found in existing scholarship. Accordingly, Ryan and Bernard (2003) state the value of generating themes using both an inductive approach where information from collected data is explored and a priori approach where prior theoretical understandings help develop themes (p. 88). Data was explored in codes, and examined in relation to the research questions and existing frameworks of CRRP. Saldaña’s (2009) coding manual served as a reference as data was deconstructed and coded using three types of codes including, descriptive codes, in vivo codes and values codes.

Through coding information was analyzed in-depth and attributed meaning and careful interpretation (Saldaña, 2009). Next, codes were linked and classified systematically into several categories based on recurring patterns and emerging concepts (Saldaña, 2009). Finally, the categories were consolidated into thematic concepts and theoretical constructs (Saldaña, 2009).
The analysis of data was approached using what Creswell (2013) refers to as, a deconstructive stance, where information was evaluated according to contradictions, and examined based on what was excluded or missing (p.186). This was significant to the research, given the variety of interpretations of CRRP among educators. Accordingly, such an analysis contributed to a better understanding of how CRRP practices can contribute to inclusivity among students, in addition to, uncovering underlying challenges related to implementing such practices within elementary classrooms.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Ethical conducts and codes have increasingly become a major concern and the need for ethical research practices have been a greater priority within the field of educational research (Abed, 2015). In her model for achieving quality in qualitative research, Tracy (2010) prescribes ethical practices, specifically procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics as markers of quality research (p. 847). Ethical actions were followed in designing interview questions, through participant recruitment, and during data collection. It was important to ensure that the development of proper ethical procedures have been considered throughout the entire research process, rather than just during the participant sampling, or data collection stages (Abed, 2015).

Participants were asked to provide consent prior to being interviewed and audio-recorded with a consent letter that was designed to provide participants with information on the research and their expectations as participants. Ethical protocols of the study were outlined in the letter, including participants’ right to withdraw from participating in the research at any stage of the process. In acknowledging participants’ “[…] right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research and understand that their participation is voluntary,” specific
measures were enacted (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Participant personal information was safeguarded and kept as confidential in a password-protected computer and through the use of pseudonyms. In addition to controlling procedures, ethical considerations were made while interacting with participants and analyzing their accounts. At the same time, the researcher’s own moral principles as an individual, and potential professional within the field of education were considered.

Relational ethical procedures were upheld throughout the study, in recognition of participants’ right to have their voices heard. Tracy (2010) defines relational ethics as “[…] related to an ethic of care that recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (p. 847). This included ensuring that my personal biases weren’t reflected in the interview questions, during interviews and while interpreting participants’ responses. This meant creating a comfortable and safe space for participants to express themselves. Likewise, in addressing the teacher-academic researcher divide, Zeichner (1995) suggests the building of more ethical and democratic social relations among researchers and teacher participants to avoid exploitation of teacher participants in research studies. Accordingly, the development of an ethical and democratic relation between researcher and respondents was pursued throughout the research and various attempts were made by researcher to ensure that responses made by participants were accurately represented in the study. For example, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before data analysis, and an opportunity to review research report upon completion of the research process. More importantly, the perimeters of the research approach and data collection methodology were
maintained by the ethical protocols of Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Although ethical considerations were made throughout the research process, there were some limitations to the study. Given the parameters of this assignment and ethical approval for the Masters of Teaching Research Project, research methodology was limited in terms of access to limited number of participants and to the semi-structured interview data collection procedure. Participant selection was bound to educational professionals only and conducted among limited number of respondents due to the shortage of time and availability of participants. In identifying quality in qualitative research, Tracy (2010) indicates “number and length of interviews” as a demonstration of rich rigor in data collection procedures (p. 841). Perhaps, the collaborative effort of teachers, parents, and students in implementing CRRP might be better understood if alternative perspectives, like those of parents and students, were measured. In accordance, Creswell (2013) explains that participant meaning derived in qualitative researches often “suggest multiple perspectives on a topic and diverse views” (p.47). In this study data was collected using a single method of semi-structured interviews. Instead of relying on a single data source, Creswell (2013) points out to the value of gathering multiple forms of data through interviews, observations, and documents as a key characteristic of qualitative research. Although the selected methodology was valuable to leading a detailed analysis of CRRP practices, and essentially addressed the research purpose significantly, it is important to note that the representation of a general understanding of CRRP is not plausible. Therefore, the research supersedes a goal of generalizability and presents a mere exploration of the phenomena at hand.

The interview method chosen for the study, nevertheless, was significant to providing
evidence of CRRP and its uses in the classroom. It provided an opportunity for both the participants and myself, to reflect on the pedagogy in addition to increasing our own understanding and perceptions of the topic. Palinkas et al., (2015) explain the importance of acknowledging participants’ ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. Thus, semi-structured interviews were best suited in allowing educators to voice their lived experience as well as reflect on their practices.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methodology for this study was discussed. The significance of a qualitative research approach was explained and justified as the relevant framework for this particular study. Next, data collection processes were defined, with respects to the chosen method of semi-structured interviews. Participant-related decisions were then discussed in detail in terms of outlining sampling criteria that was used to gather participants and other sampling procedures. Data analysis procedures were also signified in relation to the research topic. Next, ethical issues were addressed in discussions of procedural ethics and relational ethics. Finally, methodological limitations of the study were recognized. The next chapter will proceed to a report of research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter reports findings and themes from my interviews with two elementary school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. My participants, identified as Lisa and Jane, offered important insights on how culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) can be used to promote inclusive learning of students. In this analysis, five themes were derived from the data:

1. Teachers’ understandings and rationales for using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy
2. Teachers’ methods of integrating student cultural identity and knowledge into classroom instruction to create inclusive learning of all students
3. Teachers’ ways of developing inclusive learning environments through the use of reflective design elements and culturally relevant teaching materials
4. Teachers’ approaches towards receiving support from building relationships with students, families, and professional communities
5. Challenges and resistance towards implementing and maintaining a culturally relevant pedagogical approach

These themes have several sub-themes that specify interpretations and approaches by both participants. In this discussion, participants’ responses are reported and analyzed, as well as connections are made with prior research on the topic culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in classroom implementation. A brief summary of my findings is provided, before I present a synopsis of Chapter 5.

4.1 Understandings and Rationales for using Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has been widely understood through various interpretations. However, in this examination of responses it was apparent that participants’
understandings of CRRP generally adhered to Ladson-Billings’ (1995) definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. Through this analysis, it became evident that teachers understood CRRP as pedagogy that attempts to improve academic success of students, incorporate cultural competence of students, and empower students through a critical consciousness of their own identities and social justice issues (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Accordingly, participants’ understandings and rationale for adopting CRRP included positioning students at the core of curriculum, learning about needs, interests and experiences and enhancing students’ awareness about themselves and on social justice issues. Participants’ interpretations of the pedagogy was explored in relation to adopting a student centred approach, learning about their identities and experiences, empowering students and in developing inclusion in the classroom.

4.1.1 Student-centred approach in teaching

When describing CRRP, both participants indicated taking on a student-centered approach where students provided the foundation for learning experiences in the classrooms. While one participant attributed this to the acknowledgement of student voice in the classroom, another took it up as building partnerships with students and using their identities as a basis for learning. Consistent with Ladson-Billings’ (1995) proposition of culturally relevant pedagogy in improving students’ academic success, participants placed emphasis on ensuring that learning is meaningful and accessible for their students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In doing this, Lisa located her students at the core of her teaching by including and encouraging greater student voice in the classroom. Accordingly, the participant emphasized the need to use and include student voice as a basis for all learning experiences in a classroom. Lisa attributed student voice to ensuring that students “feel that their voice can be heard, they feel acknowledged and understood, recognized and celebrated.” As a teacher, Lisa recognized that this means ensuring
that her own voice doesn’t take up the entire space of the room. On the other hand, Jane described this as establishing a partnership with students in the classroom so that their experiences and identities contribute to overall learning. In supporting a student centred approach Jane spoke of making learning accessible for all students. These perceptions are consistent with claims by Gay (2002) that incorporating student identities and knowledge into instruction ensures that students make meaningful connections to learning.

4.1.2 Understanding students’ needs, interests, and experiences

Additionally, participants reported that CRRP relied on understanding and knowing their learners within a wider context and learning about their identities, experiences, family lives and social interactions. Participants agreed that getting to know their students’ needs, interests, and experiences is a primary activity in their classroom. Lisa stressed the role of the teacher in making a conscious effort in gaining information about students. She explained that her efforts begin at the beginning of the year where she gathers information about students from the student list and records she receives. Lisa accentuated on the importance of observing students on a daily basis to learn more about students’ needs, interests and experiences. The value of teacher observations was noted by Lisa as, “That is very key, who they play with, who they don’t play with, I do a lot of anecdotes about that. You watch, you listen and then you build on it.” On the other hand, Jane explained that this meant creating an awareness of cultural diversity in the classroom among students, teachers and parents.

Jane went on to further explain that getting to know students’ needs, interests and experiences begins with developing a greater awareness within the classroom. She extended the teacher’s role of learning about students to student peers in the class and promoted it as a responsibility of all students in the classroom. She explained, “this includes having a sense of
conscientiousness of everyone. Just being aware of everyone’s needs and everyone’s strengths and weaknesses.” Their responses correlated with Ladson-Billings (1995)’s criteria of developing cultural competence in classrooms as participants aimed to increase their knowledge about students’ experiences and cultures and utilized it for teaching and learning. Jane and Lisa’s understandings of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as building on students’ identities, cultures and knowledge is distinctive from teachers who overlook changing diversity in classrooms and fail to recognize students’ racial and ethnic differences (Young, 2010). Rather, in recognizing that each student is unique participants demonstrated that they embrace individual personalities of students and go beyond from perceiving them as simply, what Young (2010) cites, as “pupils behind desks.” Therefore, this shows that Jane and Lisa are exceptional teachers who go above and beyond to recognize students, in contrast to what was reported by Young (2010).

4.1.3 Empowering students to develop identities and think critically about social issues

Another finding in this study was that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy was identified as pertaining to students’ understanding of identity and development of self-identities. Jane signified the use of CRRP in creating an awareness of identity in the classroom. She explained that this pedagogy is useful for fostering mutual respect and an appreciation of similarities and differences among students. Jane explained that within her classroom, she ensures that “every member is represented with a sense of belonging.” In addressing identity, Lisa acknowledged the importance of using CRRP to help students develop their sense of self and teach them to be proud of who they are through self-pride. Constantly encouraging students to make reflections about themselves and their identities and having discussions about students’ roles and responsibilities is cited by Lisa as an integral aspect of her teaching.
Parallel to understandings of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy found in current literature, participants similarly acquainted CRRP to social justice education. These premises were justified by both participants as exposing students to critical social issues and concerns about equity. As Lisa claimed, “I think that one of the major benefits is in preparing students to be citizens of tomorrow and functional citizens that will create change.” Using CRRP, Jane taught students to be think critically about stereotypes related to identities as well as disadvantages and struggles some might face because of their identity. Jane confirmed that she understood stereotypes in relation to ‘everyone is on a different point in the continuum and not everyone wants to accept a change in their own mindset.” Therefore, she worked on helping students develop changes to mindsets. On the other hand, Lisa embraced her use of CRRP to “getting students to stretch their minds” and empowering students to “advocate for themselves and others around them.” These perspectives of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy similarly adhered to Ladson-Billing’s (1995) theorizing of the pedagogy in promoting critical consciousness in classrooms.

4.1.4 Building a culture of inclusion for students in the classroom

Finally, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is articulated as creating inclusion of students in a classroom. In contrast to recent research on the use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy by teachers, participants indicated a greater focus on using CRRP to promote inclusion of all students. A literature review confirmed that most studies regarding CRRP relate to social justice education or socio-cultural teaching. However, participants of this study embraced inclusion of students as a main priority for CRRP implementation. More specifically, these participants characterized their use of pedagogy in handling exclusion of students in a classroom. Lisa reflected on her own experiences in school by stating, “I’m a
woman of colour and I’ve been in classroom situations as a student where I just couldn’t relate, it didn’t relate to me what this person was talking about or I didn’t have anything to share.”

Accordingly, in addressing inclusion within a general context, both participants signified their role in incorporating identities and experiences of individuals who weren’t in the class. Lisa helped students understand inclusion by ensuring she incorporated an awareness of everyone and the multiple identities that exist in the world. Lisa revealed:

Like when Rosh Hashanah comes up and there are no Jewish students in my classroom, we will still learn and talk about it. We will talk about Homophobia. We will talk about those issues that parents will sometimes are uncomfortable with but it’s important that students understand these things as well.

These insights by participants provide a new way of exploring culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Instead of narrowing down to a specific goal of CRRP, which is a common trend in current research, responses by my participants provided leeway into a comprehensive investigation of CRRP in addressing inclusion generally. Accordingly, the next section explores general practices by culturally relevant educators in working towards inclusion of all students in a classroom. More specifically, it brings forth evidence that in building inclusion, teachers have attempted to include student diversity into their instruction and have been committed to enhancing student diversity on a daily basis.

4.2 Teachers’ Methods of Integrating Student Cultural Identity and Knowledge into Classroom Instruction to Create Inclusive Learning of Students

A common way of using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to achieve inclusion was by integrating students’ identities and knowledge into classroom instruction. Therefore, some methods that were adopted by participants involved collective discussions about
students’ cultural identities, incorporating multiple ways of knowing into lessons and weaving it into everyday learning and conversations.

4.2.1 Collaborating to develop cultural competence in the classroom

Supporting inclusion of students in the classroom is generally attributed by participants to developing cultural competence and greater awareness about student background knowledge and experiences through collaboration. The following responses are valuable in contributing to gaps in research on how teachers can build and develop cultural competence in their classrooms. In developing cultural competence in the classroom, participants stressed the need for collaboration among teachers, students, and parents in sharing what they know. Jane took on a leading role towards engaging students in discussions about identity. In initiating conversations in her classroom Jane claimed to take on a personal commitment of disclosing information about her own identity in which we shared information about herself to her class: “So what I usually do is I usually begin and so there’s a lot of questions about me. And what am I. And I will tell them well, I’m Muslim, and I dress Hijab.” Contrary to reports where teachers recognize cultural differences as an obstacle and barrier to learning leading to disconnections between teachers and students, the participants’ reference to cultural knowledge as beneficial learning tool is significant (Milner, 2010). Opening up to her students and creating that community in the classroom results in students opening up more and sharing information about themselves. She explained, “I open up first in order for them to feel comfortable to open up.”

Alternatively, Lisa demonstrated taking on an invested role in seeking information about students’ cultures and identities. Lisa claimed that she actively seeks information about her students by having casual conversations with parents at the end of the day, relying on information provided by school support staff like social workers as well as acquiring information
from her engagement with the community in which she works. Her dedicated attempts are revealed when she says, “being part of the community, just going out and exploring the community, just going out to walk around helps give you an understanding also of where the students are coming from.” She also ensured that parents understand and are aware of these conversations she has with students in the class. Lisa explained:

Right off the bat I let parents know that this year we are going to be celebrating, and working and learning about diverse groups of people, that we are going to be celebrating lots of different special days, and that we are promoting one over the other which I make clear and that student need to have an awareness of everything and everyone.

These findings are helpful to addressing concerns in current reports that account teachers’ lack of understanding of students’ cultures as resulting in challenges for teaching students from low minority backgrounds (Boutte & Hill, 2006). Therefore, it is apparent that learning about each other's’ lives and cultures is a collective responsibility in the classroom. Consequently, in this case it contributes to inclusive learning and helps maintain the knowledge and unique identities of individuals in a classroom. Furthermore, the next section explores another distinctive approach to how participants pursue inclusive education.

4.2.2 Incorporating multiple ways of knowing into lessons

Contrary to trends in research where culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is understood by teachers as simply incorporating ethnic materials into curriculum, the participants offer an alternative approach in maintaining culturally inclusive practices (Blake, 1997). The teachers consistently demonstrate that CRRP spans beyond just recognizing student identities and should be reflected entirely and comprehensively throughout instruction. Likewise, they both agreed that this involved embedding multiple knowledges and ways of doing into lessons. In
signifying this approach, one participant said, “I think that’s important because sometimes I think as teachers there’s always this top-down mentality where what I say as a teacher is the answer and this is sort of how education has been for a long time.”

Accordingly, Lisa attempted to shift this traditional authoritative approach to teaching by allowing her students to take over, share what they know, and critically perceive learning through different lens. Instead of “being a sage on the stage, I know everything and I’m going to tell you the answers,” Lisa pointed to how learning can be extended and made valuable when students are provided opportunities to, as she claims, “share the wealth and knowledge that they know.” This practice of CRRP diverges from general approaches noted by Irvine (2010) where educators lead the role of bringing in culture into a classroom by merely identifying cultural holidays and ethnic pop-culture of different groups. Lisa justified her approach in relation to shifting the control over learning to her students by stating, “This allows me to release control like I don’t have to know all the answers and we can work together and together we can learn from each other.” The participant explained that she taps on to multiple knowledge by inviting students to bring in artifacts from home, getting parents to come visit and share stories and by opening up the classroom to local visitors who might connect to where students’ backgrounds are from.

On the other hand, Jane took slightly different approaches in her classroom. In integrating multiple ways of knowing, Jane adopted a reflective approach in her teaching and constantly revisited and expanded her lessons to include diverse perspectives. She described this process as taking multiple risks and then reflecting by “tweaking things around and incorporating more into it to make it more effective for students.” When consolidating lessons, she claimed to go back to them and reflected on ways in which she can present it differently. Jane characterized this
process as “battling that change of mindset.” By integrating multiple ways of knowing these teachers addressed major concerns in research that teachers who simply relate culture to objects and events are overlooking specific aspects of students’ identities (Young, 2010; Irvine, 2010). Moreover, by effectively integrating this into their practices, participants have shown the value of recognizing student knowledge and experiences with cultural norms, beliefs and values in contributing to inclusive learning of students.

4.2.3 Weaving cultural diversity into everyday learning and conversations

In addition to incorporating multiple ways of knowing, inclusive learning through CRRP is regarded by participants as an everyday experience. Participants pointed to several ways in which culture is embraced and included in daily curriculum. Jane pointed out to questioning as an effective strategy she uses in her class to engage students in discussions about each other on a daily basis. For example, she explained that having a star of the day or student of the day incites conversations and provides grounds for learning about cultures regularly. Likewise, Jane reported that general discussions about students’ likes, dislikes, personal interests, and families often reflect students’ identities and leads to frequent talks about students’ cultures and experiences.

On the other hand, Lisa ensured that students were exposed to cultural diversity on a regular basis from their daily lessons to their use of classroom materials. She made purposeful choices to ensure that culture was integrated into everyday learning experiences of students because she recognizes that, “simple things make a difference in the students seeing themselves being reflected so when I’m shopping or putting things up in my classroom I do it with a purpose.” She ensured that this was even reflected in her selection of weekly student helpers as students of diverse backgrounds. These approaches reflect intentional everyday actions by
teachers contrary to findings by Young (2010) who found that teacher participants occasionally brought culture into a classroom by having a multicultural potluck day where ethnic foods were brought in or cultural days where students’ holidays were recognized. In steering away from occasional moments of culture in a classroom, Lisa explained that culture and identity was embedded as “part of constant conversation and constant activities in the classroom.” Rather than conforming to trends by educators where culture is traditionally inserted into education as indicated by Pewewardy (1993), participants in this study illustrate how educators can instead progress towards “inserting education into the culture” (as cited in Ladson Billings, 1995, p. 159). By integrating cultural knowledge and identities within the overall curriculum and daily practices, Jane and Lisa discussed how educators can make learning conducive for all students.

4.3 Teachers’ Ways of Developing Inclusive Learning Environments through the Use of Reflective Design Elements and Culturally Relevant Teaching Materials

An exploration of classroom learning environments provides another insight on how teachers’ have addressed inclusion in classrooms. This next section tackles an important feature of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that has been underestimated in current investigations but is evident in my findings. Both participants in this study have indicated the need be responsive to students through creation of inclusive learning environments. From designing classroom walls with representative posters to providing access to relevant teaching tools, Lisa and Jane have expressed their deliberate efforts in making students feel included in their classrooms.

4.3.1 Creating a classroom space that is reflective of students’ identities

Participants have highlighted the significance of having a physical classroom space that particularly reflects and is representative of students’ diverse identities. Lisa undertook an
intensive effort in creating a classroom that encompasses diversity in all forms. She described this as a “holistic approach” where everything from posters, banners, signs, to books all reflected the student body she teaches. Lisa explained, “everything is interwoven into the classroom, like from what you see on the walls to what you see we use in math, what we might use in terms of books and literature is going to be reflective of my students.” Therefore, Lisa responded to her students by situating their learning “within a local cultural context” as identified by Durden et al (2015). This effort is claimed to be carried out throughout the year where classroom walls are continuously added with pictures of students from home and of their families and lives outside of school. The participant justified that doing this allows students to visually pinpoint similarities and differences amongst one another.

Whereas, Jane placed emphasis on representing students’ diverse perspectives and identities by showcasing their work on bulletin boards outside the classroom and around learning spaces within the class. In her classroom, she attempted to create inclusion by reflecting students’ work onto the walls and creating an awareness for diversity. Jane affirmed that creating a classroom bulletin of students’ projects of creating faces with different skin tone and posting the question, “Which skin tone color are you?” was intriguing to students and created a buzz in and around the classroom. Although recent studies have proclaimed an increase in teachers responding to the changing diversity in today’s classrooms, only few have highlighted the altering of physical classroom environments to represent students. My participants’ efforts in their classroom to change the physical space of a classroom diverges from teachers’ who’ve affiliated an adoption of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy by only changing teaching strategies.
Likewise, research on multicultural education efforts have stressed the need to reverse dominant patterns and stereotypes that is promoted by curriculum (Blake, 1997). In correspondence, both participants demonstrated that through designing of a classroom they are able to incorporate representations that help shift students’ understandings of rigid ethnic, racial and gender roles. For instance, a participant embraced her capacity to do this by pointing to the poster of a brown scientist on her wall and a poster of diverse individuals on her door and claimed, “There’s a variety of different identities represented all around so it’s not all Caucasian.” Jane brought forth an alternative view that in doing this teachers also need to be mindful of who isn’t being represented in the classroom. She explained that in expanding the notion of student diversity she brings to light identities that aren’t readily available in class: “I try to incorporate images of students with different abilities and also bring in things students may relate to but also might not relate to.” These perspectives are useful to understanding the implications of multiculturalism on student learning that is similarly presented in current literature (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997).

4.3.2 Providing access to a variety of culturally relevant teaching tools and manipulatives in the classroom

Developing inclusive learning environment was also linked to using teaching tools and manipulatives that are relevant to students’ lives and identities. While Lisa emphasized the use of diverse books and classroom resources, Jane stressed the importance of providing access to a variety of different manipulatives and objects inside the classroom. Lisa made reference to children books, puzzles and activity sheets in which multiple elements of diversity is represented. She explained that in selecting resource kits and while collecting books she is always “cognizant” of ensuring that her students see themselves reflected. As foundations of her
lessons she uses these resources to engage students in discussions about identity and representations.

Similarly, Jane defended her use of diverse manipulatives in the classroom by saying, “I bring in different materials from home all the time which encourages my students to do the same.” In contrast to Durden et al.’s (2015) finding that there was little interaction by students with culturally relevant materials in the environment, Jane pointed out how her incorporation of a doll dressed in hijab at the dramatic center incited further exploration by students and led to discussions in class. Likewise, Lisa pointed out that “mirrors are always handy around the classroom in the bins for students to look at themselves.” Therefore, it was apparent that participants’ selection of classroom resources and materials were relative to students’ identities and physical appearances. In particular, representation of various skin tone colours in materials were a common target of these teachers. When implementing similar lessons on self-representation using self-portraits both participants uniformly ensured that students had access to a variety of skin tone colours in the classroom. While one described her use of paint-chips and array of skin-tone crayons to teach about different skin-tone colours, another revealed her incorporation of foods from home like coconuts, cinnamon, nutmeg and spices for students to explore and correlate with skin tones. In both cases, participants assured that a wide array of materials were available for students to choose from. Furthermore, the next section provides insight on supports that have been available for these educators in implementing CRRP and how they capitalized on them in helping support inclusion of students.
4.4 Teachers Approaches towards Receiving Support from Building Relationships with Students, Families and Professional Communities

Although participants pointed to their development of inclusive classrooms through various strategies and building of classroom spaces, an exploration of how this was made possible in their practices is essential. Therefore, this next section presents supports and resources that the participants used in taking on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Accordingly, this analysis made it evident that developing meaningful networks with several members served to be essential support in both cases. Students, parents and professionals were significant sources of support for these teachers.

4.4.1 Building community within the classroom

Building an inclusive environment for students is consistently associated with building community within the classroom by participants. Jane and Lisa pointed out to the significance of building connections with their students and ensuring that students develop meaningful connections with each other. Both teachers pointed to the significance of including community building activities at the start of each school year where an emphasis is placed on learning about each other. The value of this is manifested when a participant said, “because if we don’t start at who we are and telling our stories we can’t move anywhere else.” Lisa recited her development of classroom community as a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and students where each contribute to one another. She pointed out that within her classroom community everyone take ownership in supporting each other in the classroom.

Whether it’s the teacher taking a role in establishing rules and standards in the classroom or it’s the students standing up for each other during inequitable situations, everyone takes on responsibilities towards inclusion within their class community. She explained, “Inclusion means
that students are working together and we are a community where we are learning from each other.” One way in which Lisa sets the foundation for inclusion is through purposeful grouping strategies where she makes conscious attempts to get students of diverse backgrounds working together in the same group.

Jane adopted a slightly varying direction towards community building where she devoted her efforts in establishing trust and mutual respect in her classroom. Trust was developed within her classroom through frequent communication, sharing and exchanging personal information, and through fostering respect towards each other's’ differences. She justified her approach by claiming that although students were initially very hesitant towards revealing themselves to their classmates and teacher, they opened up once they began to perceive their sense of belonging to the community. She clarified her role in this process by stating, “I don’t learn a lot or all of it at the beginning but it does take building that community of trust and making students aware that there is a community where we learn from each other and you teach each other.” In correspondence to Gay’s (2002) reference to the need for educators to establish caring learning communities participants have confirmed the value of doing this in contributing to inclusion of all students in the classroom. As Lisa explained, only when community is formed can inclusion take place because then teachers and students are able to move on to discovering commonalities and differences that make each other unique.

4.4.2 Establishing relationships with students’ families and professional partnerships in the school and community

In supporting inclusion of all students in a classroom, participants demonstrated the value of developing bonds with students’ families and within their professional communities. Lisa explained that building relationships with her parents was “very key” and took place throughout
the year from casually checking in with parents at the end of the day to making phone calls to parents to welcome them into the classroom and holding curriculum night sessions to meet parents one on one and introduce herself. She characterized parents as resources who supported her in the classroom and which she capitalized on to “bridge the gap between home and school.”

Lisa recognized that since students spent a majority of their time in a classroom, building strong networks with their families was integral to improving students’ learning conditions at school. This approach coincides well with the cultural congruence theory referenced by Hollins (1995) where parallels between schools practices and students’ home cultures is described to positively influence students’ achievements in schools. Jane, on the other hand, disclosed the value of building partnerships with like-minded colleagues in the school who she plans with to implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in her classroom. Participation in professional learning communities and programs like the “Improving Black Students’ Achievement Initiative” served to be useful in her teaching. Accordingly, Lisa’s active involvement in teachers’ union conferences and workshops, working within multiple school boards and membership in the Equity and Social Justice Committee has contributed significantly to her practices. Although participants have indicated a variety of sources of support, their reference to challenges and resistance in the next section brings to light some concerns regarding implementation of this pedagogy.

4.5 Challenges and Resistance towards Implementing and Maintaining a Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogical Approach

While discussing their adoption of CRRP, participants ascribed to challenges they faced on a daily basis when taking on this approach in schools. Single-handedly taking on this
approach in their school often resulted as a barrier in finding resources and led to development of conflicting views within the professional community.

4.5.1 Challenges finding resources and support in school

A challenge when implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy was identified as the lack of access to culturally relevant and responsive resources. Participants generally attributed this to a lack of funding and investment by school administration. As a result, Jane explained that as teacher taking on this approach she has to actively seek for resources outside of school or create them herself. Lisa claimed that most of the time she uses her own resources from home or relies on resources she receives from her involvements in external workshops and initiatives. These concerns by participants coordinate with research findings that reveal several misinterpretations on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy amongst educators (Young, 2010; Irvine, 2010).

In finding a solution to this, Jane proposed the need to change individuals’ mindsets about CRRP and validate the pedagogy in schools by supporting it using data that is available. This understanding resembles supporting data on CRRP that advises educators to “develop a social-cultural consciousness in which they contest and reflect on their understandings (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). In overcoming this issue of a lack of educational support, Lisa recommended that teachers make use of equitable school policies and curriculum documents as supportive resources. This participant’s resilience was revealed when she claimed, “It’s in all of our policies and curriculum documents that we have to do this, so I use the documents as my sort of backup” and declares that “so everyone knows that I’m not just a rebel with cause.”

Correspondingly, the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013) “Capacity Building Series” report
on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy provides a useful framework for educators that take on this approach.

4.5.2 Resistance within the professional community

As advocates of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, participants similarly reported that a major challenge was when their work wasn’t valued by others in the professional community. As one participant emphasized that the biggest challenge is being in a school where inclusive pedagogies such as this are not valued and encouraged. Correspondingly, another participant claimed the reality of this sometimes is that when she attempts to integrate rich and diverse resources while trying to plan with a team only some are on board while others aren’t. In supporting her claim, Lisa argued that it becomes especially difficult when this has an impact on students and their ability to feel included. She proclaimed, “You do so much work and then students leave your classroom and this is not valued and respected in their next classrooms then that is where it becomes a disadvantage.” Likewise, Jane pointed out that this requires changing the mindsets of others’ and bringing out an awareness among educators. Jane offered hope that this can be overcome with additional training and increased professional developments for teachers in schools.

4.6 Conclusion

An exploration of two teachers’ adoption of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has brought fourth several themes. In particular, it exposed us to broader understandings of this particular pedagogy and it provided a rationale for using this approach in today’s classrooms. It became evident that participant’s interpretations of CRRP correlated well with Ladson Billing’s (1995)’s propositions that the approach is useful for improving academic success of students, developing cultural competence and leads to a critical consciousness among students in
classrooms. It was found that participants identified culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in relation to adopting a student-centered approach in teaching, understanding their learners needs and experiences, and empowering students to develop their self-identity. More importantly, the responses resonate with the premises of this research that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy can be used to support the development of inclusion in a classroom. When exploring how CRRP was implemented in promoting inclusive education, several new insights on the topic emerged.

Exploring CRRP in relation to inclusion shed some light on specific approaches that participants took within their own classrooms. Therefore, I found that in addressing inclusion of all students, participants integrated students’ cultural identities and knowledge into their daily instruction. This involved collaborative engagement by teachers, students and parents in developing cultural knowledge within a classroom, incorporation of multiple knowledges into lessons and teachers’ efforts towards engaging students in daily interactions with diversity.

Next, in responding to inclusion it was found that teachers’ placed a significant emphasis on creating inclusive learning spaces for students in which they had access to a variety of reflective materials. Accordingly, the value of integrating specific design elements into the physical environment to represent students was noted by these teachers. Additionally, careful selection of classroom resources, tools and manipulatives ensured that students’ identities were reflected and embraced in the classroom. These practices brought to attention new ways to respond to students’ needs in a classroom.

Furthermore, it became apparent that in taking on a culturally relevant and responsive approach teachers relied on support from students, parents and other professionals in the community. This was accompanied by the development of a classroom community, establishing
partnerships with students’ families as well as other professionals in the school community. On the other hand, it was also clear that these participants faced several barriers and resistance from other professionals in the school community. Nonetheless, participants brought forth some critical concerns and valuable recommendations to improve conditions for educators.

Ultimately, findings indicated that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy can be used to develop inclusion in classrooms. However, it was also evident that this required consistent efforts, energy and investments by educators who are committed to taking on this pedagogical approach. Accordingly, in Chapter 5 I will explore how these results can serve to be useful in contributing to the increasing growth of scholarship on this topic. Implications of this study’s findings for myself, for the general education community, as well as recommendations will be also addressed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter explores findings in depth and discusses implications, as well as recommendations for educators. The inquiry on how educators can integrate culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy into their instruction to build inclusion in their classrooms will be expanded to discuss the significance of this research for the broad educational community and for teacher practitioners who integrate a culturally relevant approach in their classrooms. Finally, areas for further research will be described and followed by concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Following interviews with two educators, an analysis revealed five important themes:

1. Teachers' understandings and rationales for adopting a culturally relevant pedagogical approach
2. Teachers’ methods of integrating student cultural identity and knowledge into classroom instruction to create inclusive learning of all students
3. Ways of developing inclusive learning environments and culturally relevant teaching materials in classrooms
4. Teachers’ approaches towards receiving support from building relationships with students, families, and professional communities
5. Challenges and resistance towards implementing and maintaining a culturally relevant pedagogical approach

The first theme, which explored definitions and teachers’ understandings of CRRP, reminds us that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is understood in relation to inclusive practices where students’ needs, values and experiences centralize learning and empower students to celebrate diversity. Both participants pointed to the elements of a student-led
curriculum. Hence, it was found that educators understood the value of a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approach in supporting student learning, cultural competence and consciousness. This indicates the potential of the pedagogy in creating inclusion.

The second theme included CRRP strategies that the teachers used in their practices to integrate students’ cultural identity into classroom instruction. These methods included encouraging students to engage in conversations about themselves, their knowledge, and experiences. Participants brought to light the importance of incorporating multiple ways of knowing into lessons and ensuring that cultural diversity becomes a part of daily learning experiences. This finding helps us understand the practices of a culturally relevant educator and their adoption of purposeful teaching strategies into classrooms.

The third theme, which pointed to ways of developing culturally relevant learning spaces, indicates the significance of developing classroom environments that is inclusive and reflective of students in the class. Hence, it was found that classroom design elements such as representative classroom posters help build inclusion of students in classrooms. This was found to be also reflected in teachers’ selection of relevant classroom materials and use of representative books and manipulatives during instruction in the classroom. This finding speaks to the conscious efforts of culturally relevant educators in ensuring that inclusion of students is made a priority in the physical development of classroom spaces.

The fourth theme, which focused on resources and supports available for teachers, exemplifies that culturally relevant and responsive educators’ main sources of support include students, their families and other professionals in the school. Teacher participants relied heavily on information from students or actively sought culturally relevant information and resources
from parents, support staff and local experts in the community. This was supported with the establishment of a classroom community and from developing partnerships with others.

Finally, it was evident that the educators who took on culturally relevant and responsive approach in their classrooms often faced challenges and barriers to implementation. Challenges stemmed from lack of access to culturally relevant and responsive resources and resistance within the professional community of schools. Participants accounted this to lack of awareness about the benefits of CRRP within the broader educational community. This finding made it clear that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is a new and emerging approach within Toronto schools and that more work needs to be done by researchers and educators to spread awareness of the pedagogy in schools.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I discuss implications of these findings for the educational community. First, an outline of broader implications suggests the impact of these findings on the general educational community. Then, a discussion provides narrow implications of this research on elementary school teachers and their practices in the classroom.

5.2.1 Broad implications on educational community

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has been subject to a wide variety of interpretations in the educational community. Correspondingly, when describing their understanding and rationale for implementing this approach in the classroom the participants brought forth several conceptualizations of CRRP. While one described CRRP as pedagogy that centralizes on student empowerment, another description signified the use of student identity and culture as a tool for learning. Furthermore, it was evident in similar studies that elementary teachers who took on this approach in their classrooms met with confusion and
misinterpretations when it came to identifying culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Durden et al, 2015; Milner, 2010; Boutte & Hill, 2006).

Consistent with current studies that report multiple interpretations of CRRP by teachers in the field, participants’ responses in this study verify that there are differences in teachers’ understandings of the pedagogy. The teacher participants offered several interpretations of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, indicating that there is no cut clear definition of what this pedagogy entails. Furthermore, this brings to light the concern of identifying CRRP and assessing teachers’ adoption of a culturally relevant instructional approach in their practices. Therefore, this implies that the term culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy requires a clear definition by experts in the educational community and a consistent set of principles and criteria for culturally relevant teaching needs to be established. Furthermore, the variation in understandings and approaches indicate that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is complex and requires careful implementation by teachers in school settings.

Next, participants placed an emphasis on creating inclusive learning spaces for students within school settings. Therefore, the need to build inclusion is significant to all educators in the field, including those working in the ministry, school boards and administration. Hence, this finding exemplifies the need for other professionals in the educational community to adopt similar mindsets of culturally relevant teachers. However, trends in current research reported that there is often avoidance or hesitancy from educational professionals on the implementation of CRRP approaches and methods in schools (Kang and Hyatt, 2009; Young, 2010; Durden et al., 2014; Milner, 2010; Boutte and Hill, 2006). Correspondingly, Lisa described it to be a disadvantage when students leave her classroom and enter a new classroom environment where inclusion is not valued. Both participants of this study confirmed that it was a challenge when
other members of the school community did not support their in-class methods outside of their classroom. These findings demonstrate the need for greater awareness about inclusive pedagogies, such as CRRP, within the greater professional community. Likewise, Jane suggested that this discrepancy can be overcome by changing the mindsets of others in the school through professional development and education initiatives. Knowing that teachers require support from students, parents and other professionals in the community, schools will understand that they have a role in raising awareness about CRRP within the educational community. Hence, school staff and administrators can join teachers in expanding CRRP beyond the classroom and increase consciousness about cultures and diversity within the school culture.

A final implication of this study for the broader educational community is that it points out to the impact of educational policies and access to resources on teacher pedagogy. From the participants’ responses, it was evident that there is a lack of available resources and supports for culturally relevant educators within schools in the GTA. As a result, this can have a negative impact on their adoption of pedagogy, often resulting in individual teachers committing their own time and financial investments on resources. Described as a barrier, this finding indicates that the broader educational community needs to make greater investments into resources and services for supporting teachers taking on the approach in their classrooms. This will help policy makers and administrators decide on what resources should be made available for teachers. This implication will help members in the educational community make considerations regarding programming and funding. In the next section, I outline narrow implications of the findings on teacher professionals and on personal professional practices.
5.2.2 Narrow implications on classroom teachers

With respects to elementary teachers like myself, the findings bring forth several implications for instructional planning, development of learning communities and teacher professional development. Findings regarding these elementary school teachers’ culturally relevant practices indicate that educators taking on this approach need to become more cognizant of their practices in the classroom throughout the year. Participants’ responses signified the need for teachers to integrate culturally relevant teaching throughout the curriculum and make it a part of everyday learning. Current literature reported several misunderstandings of educators who understood culturally relevant teaching as simply adding ethnic materials into lessons and acknowledging holidays on occasion (Villegas, 2002; Blake, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 2010; Young, 2010). However, participants of this study advocated CRRP as a holistic approach, where cultural diversity serves as a foundation for daily learning.

As described by Jane and Lisa, cultural relevance remains as the mandate when planning instruction, setting up the classroom and gathering resources and materials. In contrast to the general pattern by teachers who engaged in an additive approach of multicultural education, participants in this study ensured that student identities, including knowledge, experiences and values are embed into daily lessons, serve as basis for classroom discussions, and fostered throughout the year. This additive pattern of culturally relevant teaching practices as exhibited by teachers in recent studies is evident of the varied misinterpretations of CRRP among educators. By expanding their efforts on a day-to-day basis, Jane and Lisa demonstrate that culturally relevant teaching goes beyond introducing cultural elements to include an integration of multiple ways of knowing and doing. This has widened my own understandings of culturally relevant and
responsive pedagogy and provides new insights on how the pedagogy could be implemented within elementary classrooms.

Another implication of this study is that it demonstrates the need for supportive learning communities where all teachers and staff at a school foster inclusion of cultural diversity through culturally relevant approaches. In particular, these findings expose educators to the realities of being a culturally relevant educator within an elementary school in the Greater Toronto Area. The data provides a glimpse into the considerable efforts of these educators and the challenges they face when implementing a culturally relevant approach in their schools. Both Jane and Lisa commented significantly on their consistent endeavours and commitments as culturally relevant educators. This is apparent from their investment in culturally relevant resources and materials to their elaborate attempts to build relationships with parents and local community members. This finding invites educators to pursue an active role in developing pedagogy and promoting it in their schools. As participants have shown, it reminds educators like myself to become cognizant of my actions as an educator and to take on purposeful attempts in the classroom and around the school. Data showed that teachers need to open up regular opportunities in the classroom for student discussion and conversation. Finally, it was found that teacher’s creation of representative classroom environments also had a positive impact on student learning. Hence, these findings suggest the need for teachers to always be responsive to students’ needs in their classroom.

Lastly, a final implication of this research is that it demonstrates the value of teacher pedagogy on student empowerment and success in the classroom. Findings indicated the significance of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy on contributing to inclusion in the classroom. Participants of this study brought forth several rationales for taking on a culturally
relevant approach in their classroom. Some rationale for CRRP that both participants agreed on include the development of student identity and awareness about cultural diversity among students in the classroom. Jane commented on the importance of culturally relevant teaching on fostering mutual respect and appreciation of similarities and difference among students. Lisa explained how teachers can use CRRP to empower students to develop a sense of self-pride about their identity.

This implies that equity based pedagogy such as CRRP can be beneficial for student development and success in the classroom. This is significant as literature confirms that students from diverse cultural background continue to feel excluded within school based environments. In accordance, both participants confirm that exclusion of students persists within classrooms. However, participants also commented on the changes in attitudes among students throughout the year. Accordingly, their own influences as a culturally relevant educator and adoption of inclusive practices on students’ actions and private conversations is described to be significant. Therefore, an implication of this is that it will help teachers better understand their roles in the classroom and the positive impact they leave on students. As a participant explains, a major benefit of CRRP teaching is that it helps prepare students to become functional citizens in the future. This implication will support teachers’ adoption of inclusive practices and contribute to their day-to-day responsibility of being a good role model for their students.

5.2.3 Narrow implications on personal professional practice

Given my own values towards culture and identity and interest in this area of inclusive education, I will adopt a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approach in my own practice as a professional educator. Hence, understanding the learner and their unique identities, values and experiences will remain a priority throughout the year and will inform my approaches
in the classroom from designing my classroom environment to reflect individual identities of students to planning everyday learning experiences in which cultural diversity is embedded. In doing so, I’ve understood the importance of community building and collaborative planning with students, families, local professionals and other staff in the school. Moreover, this research has inspired me to become an advocate for responsive teaching, and using culture as a resource for teaching and developing inclusive spaces within school communities. Finally, in contributing to my understandings about inclusivity, this research will direct me towards empowering students and educators to recognize the value of their unique identities in my professional career.

5.3 Recommendations

Given these implications, I provide several recommendations for different stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, administrators and elementary teaching practitioners in Ontario. The following recommendations are suggestions that arise as a result of the findings and implications of this study.

5.3.1 Ministry of education

Considering what I found regarding the lack of awareness about culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in schools, I propose recommendations for developing policies that bring to attention inclusive strategies and culturally relevant practices for educators. I suggest implementation of frameworks and reports by the Ministry of Education that promote the benefits of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy on student inclusion. Next, to support teachers’ integration of CRRP into instructional planning cultural diversity should be embed into curriculum expectations to encourage teachers to select content that is relevant to students’ lives and knowledge. Finally, the ministry can ensure that more funding is allocated to resources and materials that are culturally relevant and reflective of student diversity in Ontario schools. As
identified by both participants, lack of culturally relevant resources and materials is a major concern for educators. Greater funding will increase educators’ access to relevant materials and resources and promote the adoption of culturally relevant teaching practices by elementary teachers.

5.3.2 School administrators

Relatively, the support of school administrators in contributing to a responsive learning community in schools is equally valuable to the implementation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. I recommend that administrators adopt similar mindsets of culturally relevant and responsive teachers, and engage in equity based educational practices in and around the school. This includes emphasizing students’ cultural identities in the delivery of programs and services and creating reflective learning environments in spaces of the school where there is a representation of student identities. School administrators could also help spread awareness about inclusive pedagogical approaches in the school by opening up workshops and professional learning opportunities for teachers in the school. Inviting experts from the Equity Committee or school board programs to provide professional development on culturally relevant pedagogical strategies will be supportive for teachers. This will also promote a greater focus on student diversity and cultural relevance within initiatives in the school and among other support staff.

5.3.3 Teacher practitioners

Considering what was found regarding the impact of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy on student development and inclusion, I provide some recommendations for teacher practitioners. Culturally relevant educators can enhance inclusion in their classrooms by adopting some strategies that were mentioned by teacher participants in this study. Given what was found regarding the significance of collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and local
members of the community, I recommend that teachers engage in network building in and around the school community to deepen their understanding about students, their backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, teachers could invite and open up their classrooms to parents and other knowledge holders to come and guide learning experiences in their classrooms.

Furthermore, teachers could get involved in professional development, invest in resources, build partnerships with other staff, and develop opportunities throughout the year to gather data and resources from students and their families. Finally, I recommend that teachers use the CUS framework developed by Jeff Kugler and Nicole West-Burns (2010) and the Capacity Building Series report on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as guides to develop strategies for adopting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

5.4 Areas for Further Research

This research provided significant insights on how elementary teachers can implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in classrooms. However, uncertainties still exist regarding the definitions of CRRP and teaching strategies related to the approach in classroom. Therefore, interpretations about CRRP can be explored further and analyzed among a greater number of participants to develop a clear and coherent definition of this approach. This would help professionals in the education community better understand CRRP and inclusive practices and its effect.

In this study, we saw two exemplary models of culturally relevant teaching within a general context. Another area of research could focus on specific in class strategies related to culturally relevant teaching. Perhaps, research can be narrowed down to investigate specific methods and examples that teachers can use in the classroom. For instance, future research could
explore teaching strategies that help integrate students’ cultural identity into daily conversations. This would be beneficial for classroom teachers to adopt and use in their practices to better support their students.

Finally, another area of research can focus directly on the impact of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches on student learning. CRRP can be studied further by looking at the effects of the pedagogy on student experiences in schools. This will provide significant insights on the effectiveness of CRRP in contributing to inclusion in school settings.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

This research study explored culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) and its impact on student success in classrooms. It focused on elementary teachers’ implementation of CRRP to support inclusion of students from culturally diverse backgrounds. This research interest stemmed from my own experiences as a student of low minority background growing up in the public school system. It was evident from my own experiences that students from low minority background sometimes feel excluded in school settings. In hope to explore pedagogy that supports integration of students’ socio-cultural knowledge and experiences, this research investigated the nature of teachers’ implementation of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in Toronto schools. More specifically, it explored teachers’ understandings, practices and experiences with CRRP.

Given the extent of student diversity in Toronto, an exploration of an inclusion based pedagogy such as CRRP was deemed necessary to figure out best practices that support student learning. Although research in the area is significant and emerging, a review of current literature pointed to the gaps in research regarding how culturally relevant practices can contribute to inclusion of students. Furthermore, it was evident that there was very few attention to specific
teaching strategies that are deemed culturally relevant. As a result, an emerging trend in current studies reported that several misconceptions and confusions persist among teachers taking on a culturally relevant approach in their classroom.

Findings pointed out that CRRP was understood in relation to four main principles. These included student centred learning, understanding students’ needs, identities and knowledge, empowerment of students through development of identity, and the inclusion of diverse cultural identities. Next, teachers’ methods included integrating cultural identity and knowledge into learning discussions, embedding multiple ways of knowing and into everyday learning.

Moreover, it was found that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy was supported through the development of inclusive learning environments in which students were reflected and represented in the physical design of the classroom and through use of relevant classroom materials and manipulatives. Finally, culturally relevant educators spoke to the value of community and relationship building as sources of support and also brought forth concerns regarding some challenges and barriers in finding resources and support from administration.

Given these findings, this chapter reported several broad and narrow implications on both the educational community and elementary teachers. Next, recommendations for the Ministry of Education, administrators and teacher practitioners was discussed in detail, followed by suggestions for areas of research. This study has brought forth several insights regarding the implementation of culturally relevant and responsive teaching. Ultimately, it demonstrates the value of responsive teacher pedagogy for supporting inclusion of student diversity in elementary classrooms.
References

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date: ________________________________

Dear ________________________________,

I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience adopting this approach in addressing cultural diversity of their students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic. Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my Research Coordinator Angela MacDonal. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy. Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Ajitha Maniyaran
Telephone____________________
Email: ajitha.maniyaran@mail.utoronto.ca

Research Coordinator Name: Angela MacDonal
Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Telephone: _______________________
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Ajitha Maniyaran and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________
Name: (printed) ____________________________
Date: ____________________________________
APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about the practices of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy for the purpose of promoting inclusion among culturally diverse students. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your perspectives and beliefs on the topic, your practical experiences with the approach, and the supports and challenges that were in place while addressing this topic. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade(s) have you taught in previous years?
3. What is the range of cultural identities of the students in your classroom currently?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

4. What is your understanding of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy?
5. What does culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy mean to you?
6. What do you think CRRP is useful and not useful for?
7. What do you think are the benefits or disadvantages of employing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy?

Teacher Practices

CRRP
8. Have you had any experience in incorporating culturally relevant teaching materials in your classroom? If yes, explain.
9. Have you included any specific design elements in your classroom that reflect the cultural diversity of your students?
10. What are some ways that you gain cultural competence/knowledge from your students?
11. Who or what are your sources of information when learning about the cultures of students in your classroom?
12. A major component of CRRP is developing cultural consciousness within a classroom. Do you aim to develop cultural consciousness within your students, and if so, how do you do this?

Inclusion
13. Have you ever noticed a sense of exclusion among students of diverse cultural backgrounds in your classroom?
   a) If yes, provide an example.
   b) If yes, explain why you think this might be.

14. Do you see a connection between CRRP and inclusion in a classroom? If so, how?

15. What are some ways teachers could implement inclusion in culturally diverse classrooms or design a culturally responsive classroom that is inclusive?

**Supports and Challenges**

16. What supports and resources have been available to you to learn more about CRRP and implementing a CRRP approach in your classroom?

17. What were your biggest challenges when addressing cultural diversity in your classroom?

18. What were your biggest challenges when implementing CRRP methods in your classroom?

19. How might the educational system better prepare teachers to adopt a culturally relevant pedagogical approach?

**Next Steps**

20. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to the topic at hand?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.