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## Case Study of a District-University Partnership: Developing Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting

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**CASE STUDY OF A DISTRICT-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP: DEVELOPING  
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATORS IN A RURAL SETTING**

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education  
In  
Educational Leadership

Approved By:

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CASE STUDY OF A DISTRICT-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP: DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATORS IN A RURAL SETTING**

Trenice Shauntel Durio  
Old Dominion University, 2022  
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Using a theoretical framework of critical race theory and conceptual frameworks of cultural education, this study explores the intersection of district-university partnerships and culturally responsive education. The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to examine the formulation and outcomes of a district-university partnership established to offer a college-level course focused on anti-discrimination, equity and inclusion, and social justice in schools. Using survey data, I explored the relationship between participation in the course and the participants' self-reflection in the areas of empathic concern and perspective taking, preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices, and comfortability with discussions about race. I conducted three interviews with course developers in the school district related to the sustainability of the partnership and the impact of the social-political context on the curriculum design. In addition, I examined how participants' discourse during the course was reflective of empathic concern and perspective taking. Findings revealed participation in the course impacted educators' self-reflection, and provided opportunities for discourse reflective of empathic concern and perspective taking. The district-university partnership demonstrated four elements of sustainability: well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation. This research study will contribute to the field's understanding of district-university partnerships in a rural setting, to school districts considering university-district partnership opportunities, and to universities and practitioners training current educators on culturally responsive practices.

Keywords: District-University Partnership, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Cultural Education, Race, Rural, Empathy

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I dedicate this dissertation to the legacy of my grandparents –who have watched this journey from heaven (Loretta Harrison, Charles Durio, and Carmelita Durio) and walked alongside me here on earth (Robert Harrison and Phyllis Edwards).

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

For centuries, historically excluded racial groups have advocated for educational inclusion as a means to advance in the areas of economic mobility, economic empowerment, political voice, and social transformation (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Despite school reforms in the past three decades, including the standards-based education movement, No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002), Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS; 2015), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015) the gap in performance between marginalized groups and their counterparts has failed to close (Howard & Navarro, 2016). As educational initiatives continue to be enacted, they fail to include innovative measures to meet the academic, cultural, and social needs of students who are systematically minoritized in the school environment (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Various factors account for the continual academic gaps in performance between Black and Hispanic students and their White peers, including structural inequality (Massey & Denton, 1993; Spring, 2006), poor teacher quality (Darling Hammond, 2010), lack of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), and racial re-segregation of the nation's schools (Donnor & Dickson, 2013). While research has documented the ways that race and racism in school policies, pedagogies, and practices affects Black and Hispanic students' ability to learn in a traditional school setting, little research has examined partnerships that support moving towards a more culturally responsive education system, particularly for historically excluded students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Despite the research conducted that calls for educational practices that reflect multicultural practices, historically excluded students continue to experience the tragedy of inequities in America's public school system.

## Problem Statement

### National Need for Culturally Responsive Educators

There is a national urgency to equip educators with tools to respond to the cultural needs of students while simultaneously raising academic outcomes. Consistently, there is a gap between the performance outcomes of White students and historically excluded subgroups, including Black and Hispanic students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the largest national representative of student performance in mathematics, reading, and many other subjects in public and private schools allows for comparison of scores between White students and Black and Hispanic students in reading and math. Little variations, if any, are noted from the year 1998 to 2019 for reading and from the year 2000 to 2019 for math, illustrating the pervasiveness of the problem, despite identifying that the gaps exist (see Table 1 and 2; U.S. Department of Education, 1998-2019). Moreover, in the State of Virginia, the state of focus for this dissertation, Black-White and Hispanic-White reading and math achievement gaps have not been significantly different in almost two decades (see Table 3 and 4; U.S. Department of Education, 1998-2019). One reason historically excluded students have had inequitable access to educational opportunities is because of a lack of consideration of their cultures. Thus, changing this habitual cycle will require teachers who are knowledgeable of culturally responsive practices.

**Table 1**

*2019 National Reading Report*

	4th Grade	
	Gap in 1998	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	31 points	26 points
Hispanic vs. White	31 points	21 points

8th Grade		
	Gap in 1998	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	26 points	27 points
Hispanic vs. White	27 points	20 points

*Note.* Score gaps are calculated based on average scores of students by race, and compare performance in 1998 to 2019.

**Table 2**

*2019 National Math Report*

4th Grade		
	Gap in 2000	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	30 points	25 points
Hispanic vs. White	26 points	18 points

8th Grade		
	Gap in 2000	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	40 points	32 points
Hispanic vs. White	31 points	23 points

*Note.* Score gaps are calculated based on average scores of students, and compare performance in 2000 to 2019.

**Table 3**

*2019 Virginia State Reading Report*

4th Grade		
	Gap in 1998	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	27 points	24 points

Hispanic vs. White	18 points	21 points
8th Grade		
	Gap in 1998	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	24 points	28 points
Hispanic vs. White	8 points	24 points

*Note.* Score gaps are calculated based on average scores of students, and compare performance in 1998 to 2019.

**Table 4**

*2019 National Reading Report (Math)*

4th Grade		
	Gap in 2000	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	26 points	21 points
Hispanic vs. White	13 points	15 points
8th Grade		
	Gap in 2000	Gap in 2019
Black vs. White	30 points	26 points
Hispanic vs. White	20 points	16 points

*Note.* Score gaps are calculated based on average scores of students, and compare performance in 1998 to 2019.

While White Americans make up about 60% of the American population, 79% of K-12 public school teachers are White and 47% of students in public schools are White (Taie & Goldring, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In contrast, Black Americans comprise



only 7% of teachers and 15% of Black students in public schools (Taie & Goldring, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). However, for schools with majority-Black student bodies, Black American teachers make up 36% of the teaching population (Taie & Goldring, 2020). Likewise, Hispanic students make up 27% of America's K-12 public school students; however, just 9% of teachers are Hispanic, though 33% of teachers in schools with majority-Hispanic student bodies are Hispanic (Taie & Goldring, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Furthermore, for schools where more than 75% of students are low-income and qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, the teacher workforce is comprised of 14% Black teachers and 17% Hispanic teachers (Taie & Goldring, 2020). In contrast, in schools with less than a third of children meeting the criteria of low-income and free or reduced lunch, only 2% of their teachers are Black and 5% are Hispanic (Taie & Goldring, 2020).

Howard (2003) used the term, "demographic divide," (p. 195) to explain this difference between the racial makeup of teachers and students within schools (Gay & Howard, 2001; Howard & Rodrigues-Minkoff, 2017). The majority of teachers are increasingly White, which is misaligned to the racial makeup of K-12 students, which is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. While efforts should be made to diversify the teacher workforce, this misalignment can be supported by culturally responsive teaching practices to provide high quality education. Current research supports the need for students, especially historically excluded students, to have teachers who are culturally competent and well equipped in culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014; Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Morrison et al., 2008; Paris, 2012). However, most educators do not currently engage in professional development on this type of pedagogy through pre-service teaching programs or through trainings in school districts (Bissonnette, 2016; Chiu et al., 2017; Howard, et al., 2018; Ladson-

Billings, 20016). As Chiu et al. (2017) argued, it is crucial that pre-service teachers complete their programs well prepared to become culturally competent teachers who are prepared for the diverse needs of their classrooms.

### **State's Role in Developing Culturally Responsive Educators**

While the State of Virginia has acknowledged the increasingly diverse needs of K-12 students, few programmatic, policy, or pedagogical changes have been implemented to decrease disproportionalities in achievement between Black/Hispanic and White students. In 2021, Virginia's professional evaluation standards for teachers were amended to require educators to demonstrate culturally responsive teaching as part of a commitment to ensure equity for all students (Lane, 2021). This evaluation standard was titled, "Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Practice and Equitable Practices" and included four domains: self-reflection, pedagogy and practices, learning environments, and community engagement. While teachers coming through the pipeline could receive education and training in their teacher preparation programs, educators who are already in classrooms would need to obtain this education and training through other means such as district professional development or continuing education.

### **Higher Education's Role in Developing Culturally Responsive Educators**

While institutions of higher education may be well positioned to support the development of educators committed to equity for all students, there is a gap in the literature on if and how faculty in institutions of higher education teach and utilize culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly in a way that models appropriate strategies for K-12 teachers. Teacher preparation programs must model similar culturally responsive practices that they desire to be incorporated in K-12 programs (Gay, 2000; Gay & Howard, 2001). One crucial element of becoming a culturally responsive educator is critical reflection (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995a;

Paris, 2012). Universities play a key role in creating an atmosphere to learn the necessary skills to challenge the status quo and reflect on the systems that created the current inequities experienced by historically excluded students. Fully developed teacher preparation programs will include pre-service coursework on culturally responsive education practices, as well as updated licensure standards, evaluation systems, and ongoing professional development. However, there is no guidance on elements of an educational program designed for current educators focused on culturally responsive and inclusive teaching either at the university level or the school district level. Therefore, meeting the needs of both teachers and students will require collaborative efforts at the university and school district levels. This study aimed to examine the development and outcomes of one partnership between a school district and university formed to provide professional development to current educators to become more culturally responsive and inclusive.

### **Research Purpose**

There is limited research on the intersection of university-district partnerships and the development and implementation of culturally responsive education. However, I propose that a district-university partnership is an avenue to encourage the professional development of teachers to include culturally inclusive educational experiences within their classrooms. The purpose of this mixed methods case study is to examine the formulation and outcomes of a district-university partnership established to offer a college-level course focused on anti-discrimination, equity and inclusion, and social justice in schools. The focus is a district-university partnership in which faculty at one university worked with leaders and educators located in a rural school district to collaboratively develop a course to meet the needs of the local

district. In addition, it examined how educators' perspectives and instructional practices were impacted by participation in the anti-discrimination college course.

### **Research Questions**

In this mixed methods case study, I explored the following questions:

1. How, if at all, does an educator's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
2. In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
3. What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
4. In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

The first research question explores the changes in participants' self-reflection after participation in the course. The second research question examines participants' discourse reflective of empathic concern and/or perspective taking. The third and fourth research question aim to explore the formulation of the district-university partnership and its connection to the social-political context and elements of sustainability (Thorskiltsen & Stein, 1996).

### **Rationale and Significance**

This study proposed that a university-district partnership is an avenue to encourage the development of culturally responsive in-service educators. The findings of this study added to the body of research that sought to understand how to develop a sustainable partnership between universities and schools, how to develop a course responsive to the specific cultural needs of a school district, and the impact such a course has on educators' instructional practices. While

current research illustrates the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, there is limited research that examines the professional development of in-service educators delivered by a district-university partnership. In addition, research on culturally responsive educators is typically situated in urban areas; this study provided a needed highlight on a rural setting.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study was informed by the theoretical framework of critical race theory in education and the conceptual framework of cultural education. Critical race theory as a theoretical framework provides a lens to examine the formulation of the district-university partnership and the course with race at the forefront (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Cultural education is a framework drawing on the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive education, culturally relevant education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, acknowledging that critical reflection is a first step in becoming a culturally responsive educator (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 2014; Muniz, 2020; Paris, 2012). I used cultural education as a conceptual framework to analyze the course's goal to develop competent culturally responsive educators and leaders who can demonstrate critical self-reflection. I drew on district-university partnerships research and literature to examine the sustainability of this partnership in improving the preparation and comfortability of communicating and addressing issues of race in schools. This study acknowledged the urgency of training educators who are equipped to meet the educational needs of all students, regardless of race, and specifically in a rural setting.

### **Overview of Methodology**

I conducted a case study using a mixed methods design to explore the development and outcomes of a district-university partnership focused on supporting culturally responsive educators (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002). I conducted three interviews with course development leaders at the district to gain understanding of the development and design process of the course and curriculum. These interviews supported answering two research questions: What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership? and in what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

I also examined the effect the course had on practitioners' perspectives of race and issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice, as well as their comfortability with race discussions. Prior to the first class, participants completed a survey that collected demographic information, self-reflection on empathy, comfortability with race discussions, and preparation for race discussions. The survey also included questions measuring empathic concern and perspective taking, derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980), a rigorous survey tool used to measure empathy. The scales for "empathic concern" - defined as the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion - and "perspective taking" - defined as the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life - were posed to course enrollees. In addition, participants were given an end-of-course survey which allows for an analysis of changes over time of participants' perceptions, as well as participants' critical self-reflection. The 12 pre-survey and post-survey participants were K-12 educators and school counselors. Survey results were reported through the use of descriptive statistics, as a whole and as individuals. The survey analyses answered the research question: What is the relationship

between participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course and a teacher's critical self-reflection. In addition to survey analysis, I watched class recordings and conducted an analysis of the discourse using deductive coding to examine how participants' discourse relates to empathic concern and perspective taking. The discourse analysis answers the research question: In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?

### **Key Terms**

The following terms have been defined below to provide clarity on their meaning as situated within this study:

- Critical self-reflection - "personal and challenging look at one's identity as an individual person and as an active professional. It is a process of improving practice rethinking philosophies, and becoming effective teachers for today's ever-changing student population" (Howard, 2003, p. 201)
- Culturally responsive teaching - "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (Gay, 2013, p. 49-50).
- Empathic concern – "tendency for the respondent to experience feelings of warmth, compassion and concern for others undergoing negative experiences" (Davis, 1980, p. 6).
- Perspective taking – "tendency or ability of the respondent to adopt the perspective, or point of view, of other people" (Davis, 1980, p. 6).

### **Organization of the Study**

This mixed methods case study consists of five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study including an overview of the problem, research purpose, questions and significance, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology and significance of the study. Chapter II provides the reader with a literature review of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including critical race theory in education, cultural education, and district-university partnerships. Next, Chapter III explains the study's design and methodology, including demographics of participants, data collection process, data analysis, and limitations of the study. Chapter IV reveals the findings of the study through a summary of the data collected and the themes that emerged. Finally, Chapter V provides an overview of the study and implications.



## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

This study is informed by the theoretical framework of critical race theory and the conceptual framework of cultural education. This chapter will provide a literature review of district-university partnerships, cultural education, and critical race theory. First, I discuss district-university partnerships in relation to teacher preparation and the benefits and difficulties of establishing them. Using case studies, I will also discuss elements of sustainability contributing to successful district-university partnerships. Second, I provide an overview of cultural education, a conceptual framework that is influenced by culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive education, social justice education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, and share how it is traditionally discussed in the literature. Finally, I discuss critical race theory, the theoretical lens of this research study, and how it is applied to K-12 and higher education. Throughout the chapter I share gaps in the literature that will be supported by this research study.

### **District-University Partnerships**

Limited research exists on district-university partnerships, specifically guidance on how to formulate and sustain the partnerships (Sanzo, 2014; Simmons et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2022). This study included two research questions related to the formulation of a district-university partnership, with a specific focus on the local social-political context and elements of sustainability. In this section, I first discuss partnerships formed to provide professional development, and then summarize the research literature on difficulties and benefits of establishing district-university partnerships. I also share case studies of urban and rural settings that formulated district-university partnerships to address performance gaps for minority students. Finally, through a review of the literature, I provide a list of characteristics of district-

university partnerships that contribute to sustainability, which were used when analyzing the partnership in this study.

### **Professional Development School Partnerships**

Effective training for pre-service teachers includes a collaboration between academic coursework and practical experience (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018). Along the same lines, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's *Blue Ribbon Panel Report* (2010) provided a call to action for teacher preparation programs and school districts to acknowledge a shared responsibility for providing pre-service teachers an opportunity to practice their learning in an authentic setting. One way that the field of education has sought to meet this shared responsibility is through a Professional Development School (PDS). Similar to how the medical field has teaching hospitals, PDSs seeks to link both theory and practice for pre-services teachers through a partnership with schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). High quality PDS models are characterized by school teams (including university and school educators) who collaborate on curriculum development, school reform, and action research. School-based and university faculty share the role of teaching in the teacher education program as well as teaching children within the schools. In addition to pre-service educators receiving hands-on training to apply their coursework, mentor veteran teachers note that PDSs allow them to improve their own practice through professional development opportunities. PDSs provide a model of the effectiveness of school/district-university partnerships and how collaborative efforts can result in well-prepared educators.

While the partnership in this dissertation exists at the district level, not school level, PDSs have a valuable framework that can be applied to district-university partnerships as well. In 2021, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) provided an

explicit statement to discuss the nine essential elements of high-quality PDSs: (a) a comprehensive mission, (b) clinical preparation, (c) professional learning and leading, (d) reflection and innovation, (e) research and results, (f) articulated agreements, (g) shared governance structures, (h) boundary-spanning roles, and (i) resources and recognition. Noteworthy for this study, the first essential element, a comprehensive mission, explicitly addresses that PDSs should have a shared vision for promoting equity and social justice, especially in the area of structural inequities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Dyches & Boyd, 2017). These partnerships allow an identified space for professional development that spans the boundary between the university and P-12 setting (NAPDS, 2021). PDSs are built on collaboration and sustained through a reciprocal approach. In addition, these elements highlight that partnerships should include shared-decision making, reflection, collaborative research, articulated agreements, and shared resources and recognition.

As PDSs highlight, there is a need for district-university partnerships to continue past pre-service programs and to support the learning of experienced, in-service educators as well. As new reforms and policies are enacted, teachers are required to learn new procedures and adopt new practices to meet the needs of diverse student groups. Thus, the connection between theory and practice continues to be crucial past the initial stages of teacher preparation programs. High-quality professional development, including strong connection between coursework and clinical work, linking theory to practice, and relationships with model schools that serve diverse learners, should be expanded to include not only pre-service teachers but also educators currently in the field (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The district-university partnership in this study adds to the literature as an example of a partnership formed to provide professional development to in-service educators.

### **Difficulties in Forming District-Partnerships**

While research has highlighted the benefits of district-university partnerships for both districts and universities (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015), limited district-university collaboration exists. In a survey of superintendents, nearly 89% stated collaboration between districts and universities occur sometimes or almost never, despite noting partnerships are crucial to preparation programs (Mendels, 2016). Common reasons contributing to lack of district-university partnerships are limited funding to support partnerships, lack of information on how to formulate partnerships, and low incentives for researchers to apply their research in authentic settings (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015). Lacking elements of true partnership, the university's needs coupled with limited resources of the school district often drive the formulation of the partnership (Walsh & Backe, 2013).

District-university partnerships often form with the university playing the role of knowledge-bearer and the leader of the content of the professional development (Holen & Yunk, 2014; Maina et al., 2021). For example, universities use schools primarily to serve as locations for student teaching experience and research sites for the university (Holen & Yunk, 2014). Traditionally, preparation programs of educators relied heavily on theories and methodologies, with no consideration for the needs of the school district (Holen & Yunk, 2014; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). The partnerships limited shared goals, and universities rarely supported school districts in developing curriculum or planning professional development (Holen & Yunk, 2014; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). Research on preparation programs for school leaders reveal that traditional programs have outdated techniques that are not linked to increasing student achievement (Simmons et al., 2007), have limited preparations outside classroom settings (Ferrandino, 2001; Tirozzi, 2001), and lack culturally responsive strategies to reach diverse

learners (Gay, 2002; Hoover et al., 2020). The aforementioned difficulties hinder successful district-university partnerships which impacts the development of schools to their full potential.

### **Benefits of District-University Partnerships**

Formulation of district-university partnerships rely on collaboration that is interdependent with shared accountability (Cambron-McCabe & Cunningham, 2002) and a mixture of theory and practice (Barnett, 2005; Levine, 2005). District-partnerships can alleviate difficulties within school districts including budget cuts and staffing reductions that may also diminish adequate research support (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015). Collaborative efforts can enhance preparation programs by developing confidence in educators, providing hands-on experiences, and creating experience with diverse backgrounds of students (Quesenberry et al., 2018; Stone & Eggleston, 2020).

### **Case Studies of Sustained Partnerships**

Decreasing the prevalent achievement gaps that exist between White students and systematically marginalized students is essential to ensuring that learning for all students, not just some students, is the highest priority. Determining where additional resources and training are needed to support high quality instruction in high-need schools contributes to research on research-focused partnerships, preparation programs, and urban school settings (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015). Race and poverty are two factors that increase the achievement gap, and urban school settings highlight this issue (Hill et al., 2000; Kearney et al., 2021; Simmons et al., 2007; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). Urban settings are often the main focus of district-university research studies because they are underfunded, have a large number of disadvantaged students, and have a high teacher turnover rate (Papay et al., 2017; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). Some research studies, which include district-university partnerships in a rural setting, focused on specific areas like

STEM teachers (Maina et al., 2021) or teachers of English learners (Hoover et al., 2020).

However, there is limited research on district-university partnerships that aims to address the needs of rural communities and the ability to use culturally responsive practices to decrease achievement gaps.

Williams et al. (2022) provided an example of a sustained district-university partnership in an urban setting created to prepare and support principals serving predominantly Hispanic, Native American, low-income, and English Language learners. The partnership included two elements at its formulation that contributed to its sustainment. First, the partnership established a shared mission and vision co-constructed by the district and university (Williams et al., 2022). Second, the district elected to provide financial support upon the original grant's expiration in 2016, supporting candidates with tuition assistance and a semester-long release time to participate in the internship (Williams et al., 2022). The partnership included the following distinguished characteristics: cohort model, standards-based curriculum, large urban setting, co-supervision and mentoring during internship, and co-teaching by faculty and veteran principals to connect theory to practice in the local context (Williams et al., 2022). Findings revealed that the stable vision and co-designed process were crucial to partnership sustainability (Williams et al., 2022).

Addressing limitations from the literature and improving on recommendations, Simmons et al. (2007) studied a district-university partnership in an urban area that focused on learning and student outcomes, best practices from the research to integrate into current district practices, and use of a co-constructed and co-delivered model for implementation. The researchers found that in the area of program innovation (new instructional approaches, full-time mentoring, and district-university partnership) both the interns and mentors felt there could have been better

planning and delivery of the program and stronger university involvement (Simmons et al., 2007). The study identified that connecting the research and leadership theory to daily operations of the school district was also a challenge (Simmons et al., 2007).

Stone and Eggleston (2020) studied a two-decade district-university partnership in an urban school district to support school counseling candidates in the elimination of opportunity gaps. The partnership's goal was to remove institutional and environmental barriers for K-12 students by developing culturally competent leaders. Throughout the program, counselors were provided experiences in the school district that highlighted injustices through the use of data. Participants in the program demonstrated development in their attitudes, confidence, skills, and dispositions that influenced closing opportunity gaps in the school district. Collaboration between the university and school district was evident through shared goals and shared leadership roles. Counselors and supervisors from the school district served as adjuncts, guest lecturers, admission team members, faculty search team members, and advisory council members at the university as well.

Hoover et al. (2020) provided a unique example of a 5-year district-university partnership in a rural setting to improve literacy instruction and special education referrals for English learners. Sustainability in rural areas comes with unique challenges, including: securing scarce contemporary resources and training (Hoover et al., 2020; Maheady et al., 2016), limited cultural opportunities (Robinson et al., 2013), and improving teaching skills (Stockard, 2011). In addition, Hoover et al. (2020) noted that overrepresentation of English Learners in special education causing disproportionalities occur in rural communities due to lack of culturally responsive skills that lead to misinterpretations. Recommendations to improve sustainability in partnership development in a rural elementary school included emphasizing sustainability during

the planning process, developing project goals, planning professional development topics, and providing mentorship and coaching (Hoover et al., 2020).

### **Elements of Sustainability**

District-university partnerships are noted as a necessary component of leadership preparation programs (White et al., 2016). Nonetheless, long-standing district-university partnerships are not prevalent (Mendels, 2016). Lack of sustainability of partnerships exists due to systemic challenges, lack of deep relationships and collaboration, and levels of trust. Partnerships must address systemic challenges including accountability pressures, insufficient funding, and systems that limit partners' ability to prepare leaders for change (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015; Miller et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2018). Relationships must be built on elements of care, networking, communication, and sharing of knowledge (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015; Stone & Eggleston, 2020). A culture of collaboration is crucial to a successful partnership, which is supported by mutual philosophy of students and their education, and data-informed decision making (Butcher et al., 2011; Hunter & Botchwey, 2017; Officer et al., 2013; Stone & Eggleston, 2020).

Mutual benefit is an important characteristic of long-term, successful partnerships (Dyson, 1999; Holen & Yunk, 2014). In addition, trust between parties is crucial to sustaining partnerships (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015; Williams et al., 2022). Thorskildsen and Stein (1996) provide a framework of 11 factors that are foundational to formulating a successful partnership: "well-defined administrative structure, mutual self-interest and common goals, participant and time commitment, mutual trust and respect, external support, shared decision making, clear focus, information sharing, manageable agenda, dynamic nature, and ongoing process of evaluation" (p. 83). Using this framework, district-university partnerships must be



further studied to provide implications on the sustainability of a partnership to consistently and systematically support educators.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Future research on district-university partnerships is needed, specifically in the area of co-construction and co-delivery between the school district and university (Simmons et al., 2007). Though research on district-university partnerships discuss forming the partnership because of achievement gaps, limited studies address providing strategies to close identified gaps. Williams et al. (2022) suggest additional research on partnerships outside of the urban setting to determine partnerships' effectiveness in other contexts. This research study supports the current gaps in the literature by studying the formulation of a district-university partnership to support educators in a rural setting using cultural education as a strategy to close achievement gaps. In addition, sustainability of partnerships starts with the initial steps to form the partnership, so this study highlights elements of sustainability that are evident in the first year of formulation.

### **Conceptual Framework: Cultural Education**

#### **Derivation of Terminologies**

Several authors note the necessity of linking culture and education to increase student achievement using various terminologies: “culturally appropriate” (Au & Jordan, 1981), “culturally congruent” (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), “culturally responsive” (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Gay, 2002; Khalifa et al., 2016), “culturally compatible” (Jordan, 1985; Vogt et al., 1987), “cultural synchronization” (Irvine, 1990), “culturally relevant” (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a), and “culturally sustaining” (Paris, 2012). The common theme of each term is the disconnect between students' home lives and school

performance, and each term proposes actions to bridge that gap. Among the terminologies listed, two terms have been used repeatedly in the literature to shape the connection between culture and education: culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b; 2014) and culturally responsive (Gay, 2002; 2013). Aronson and Laughter (2016) created an inclusive framework of these two terms labeled *culturally relevant education*, noting its complementary features of pedagogy and teaching practices. Ladson-Billings (1995a) provided a scope of pedagogical practices that is influenced by three criteria: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Gay (2002) provides a focus on teaching strategies with the following five elements: (a) developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, (b) including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, (c) demonstrating caring and building learning communities, (d) communicating with ethnically diverse students, and (e) responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

A common strand of both culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching is social justice and the depiction of a classroom as the site for systemic change (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). In addition, beginning in higher education and transitioning to teacher preparation and K-12 education, social justice education emphasizes social identity and injustice, oppression theory, and intersectionality (Adams et al., 1997; Dover, 2013). In 2012, Django Paris built upon the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), proposing the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to extend past pedagogy that is relevant or responsive, but focuses on sustaining the culture of students' communities while also providing access to dominant cultural competence. Ladson-Billings (2014) asserted that using the term *culturally sustainable pedagogy* is an appropriate evolution of her earlier work to

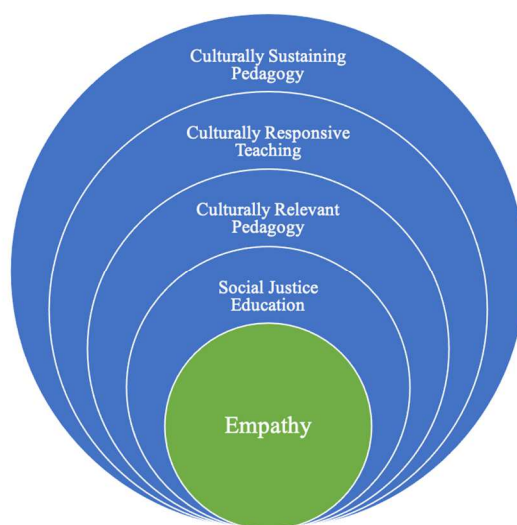
extend past focusing solely on racial or ethnic goals and expanding to arts, literature, music, athletics, and film.

## Cultural Education

Drawing on the principle that culture linked with education is a primary factor to academic success, especially for historically excluded students, I use *cultural education* as a conceptual framework to combine the terminologies and associated principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, social justice education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Dover, 2013; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Paris, 2012). At the heart of an educator who reflects culturally responsive dispositions is an educator with attitudes and beliefs reflective of empathy. Cultural education, influenced by empathy, includes strategies that are responsive to students, with an emphasis on sustaining not replacing students' culture. Using this framework (Figure 1), I analyze both educators' self-reflection and discourse during the course.

**Figure 1**

*Cultural Education Conceptual Framework*



## **Cultural Education: What Is and Isn't in the Literature**

Empirical research studies have covered the guiding principles of cultural education, including high expectations (Brown, 2003; 2004; Gutierrez, 2000; Howard 2001a; 2001b; Morrison, 2002); cultural competence (Bell & Clark, 1998; Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Christal, 2003; Conrad et al., 2002; Hefflin, 2002; Hollie, 2001; Leonard et al., 2005); and critical consciousness (Duran, 1998; Hyland, 2005; Jacob, 1995; Newell & Sweet, 1999). In addition, cultural education studies have focused on specific subject areas including reading (Bui & Fagen, 2013; Conrad et al., 2004; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Feger, 2006; Hefflin, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Robbins, 2001) and mathematics (Gutstein, 2003; Hubert, 2013; Tate, 1995; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Martell, 2013; Stovall, 2006). However, empirical data that illustrate educators working with diverse populations using cultural education teaching strategies is limited (Morrison et al., 2008). Studies traditionally cover urban settings or primarily racial minorities (mostly African American classes or Hispanic classes), but rarely the heterogeneous or rural classes that many educators will encounter (Morrison et al., 2008). Sleeter (2012) calls for additional evidence-based research in three areas: connections to student outcomes, education on cultural education through critical reflection and cultural competence, and critical discourse of power to reform education. Even with the increase of cultural education in the literature, student achievement data have been minimally affected by its use. Despite opportunities to be exposed to cultural education in teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates often lack the skills to transfer theory to practice (Morrison et al., 2008). It is necessary for teacher preparation programs, as well as continuing education and professional development opportunities, to include culturally responsive practices as an instructional tool in higher education as is expected in K-12 (Gay, 2002). This study explores how a university collaborated with a school district by

modeling instruction based on cultural education to develop more culturally competent educators who have the necessary self-reflection skills and comfortability with discourse in racial discussions.

### **Empathy: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking**

I am less convinced one can truly become culturally responsive...My broader contention is that teacher educators should focus much less on cultural responsiveness as an identity marker to be achieved, and foreground preparing teacher candidates to cultivate teaching orientations and habits centered on responding flexible to students' moment-by-moment. (Warren, 2018, p. 179)

In alignment with Warren's (2018) claim, this study proposed that empathy is one way that teachers can be responsive to students' cultural needs and provide evidence of cultural responsiveness (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Warren, 2014, 2018). Empathy is an iterative process of gaining knowing of a subject and then applying that knowledge to make professional decisions (Warren, 2014). It is through the process of knowing the cultural needs of students and using it to make educational decisions that teachers are able to produce evidence of cultural responsiveness (Warren, 2018). Empathy is a two-fold process, both emotional (empathic concern) and cognitive (perspective taking). Davis (1980) defined empathic concern as the "tendency for the respondent to experience feelings of warmth, compassion and concern for others undergoing negative experiences," while perspective taking is characterized as "tendency or ability of the respondent to adopt the perspective, or point of view, of other people" (p. 6). Perspective taking acts as the foundational piece of empathy in social interactions (Warren, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial that teacher preparation programs prioritize providing opportunities to practice perspective taking. For example, teacher reflection in connection to

field experiences, critical classroom discourse, and engaging in literature that centers race and justice are essential elements of the perspective taking process. In addition, examples of activities that promote teacher candidates to engage in perspective taking include: reflection, written and oral communication, understanding the community context, organized, structured time for student expression, and prior knowledge (Warren, 2014; 2018). Korthagen (2004) asserts that “good teaching” is the process of being responsive to students’ needs through perspective taking, combining accurate knowledge of students and the local-political context, and being responsive to that knowledge. This study analyzes the role of empathy (empathic concern and perspective taking) in educators’ self-reflection and discourse after participation in the course.

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory in Education**

The data collected were analyzed through the lens of critical race theory. Acknowledging race and racism in the field of education is a critical feature contributing to the success of cultural education. For historically excluded and underserved groups, education is an important pathway for economic mobility, economic empowerment, political voice, and social transformation (Navarro & Howard, 2016). However, race and racism exist in school policies, pedagogies, and practices (Dixson, 2014; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b). An analysis of instruction, assessment, and school culture reveal racial hostility impacts some students’ success (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Navarro & Howard, 2015). Despite the consistent increase of ethnic and racial diversity and educational reform, the performance deficits of non-White students continue to be prevalent (Aud et al., 2010; Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling Hammond, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Developed by a group of law professors to critique racism in the law and society, critical race theory serves as an analytical and theoretical framework to explicitly acknowledge that racism is a normal, ingrained feature of American society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Critical race theory was further developed through writings by Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Angela Harris, and Kimberle Crenshaw who emphasized four arguments:

Racism has been a normal daily face of life in society...challenges the experience of White European Americans as the normative standard... through the use of literary narrative knowledge and story-telling to challenge the existing social construction of race...attacks the inherent belief in the law to create an equitable just society (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260)

Critical race theorists acknowledge that classic, overtly violent forms of racism have subsided in America. Nonetheless, current racist practices still exist in the forms of subtle, automatic, non-verbal exchanges, which Lynn and Parker (2016) call “everyday racism” (p.191). “Everyday racism” formulates through microaggressions that are experienced by people of color in everyday actions of individuals, groups, institutional policies, rules, and administrative procedures. Currently, critical race theory has evolved from its focus only on the relationship between how the law impacts Black-White relations to an expanded focus on issues related to immigration, national origin, language, globalization, and education (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1994) wrote that race was untheorized in the field of education. Applying critical race theory to the field of education is crucial to understanding the role race plays in the inequities that exist in American education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997). In addition, critical race theory is a useful framework to

analyze the experiences of historically excluded populations in both K-12 and higher education and identify systemic issues that hinder needed policy discussions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solorzano, 1998). Building upon the work of cultural education and critical race scholars, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied critical race theory to the field of K-12 education with the inclusion of three central propositions:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

It is the first central proposition that is used as the theoretical framework for this research study to examine the role of race and racism in education.

### **Critical Race Theory in the Literature: K-12 Schools and Higher Education**

The literature on critical race theory provides a theoretical lens to explain its impact on research, theory, and practice to achieve educational equity (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Lynn & Parker, 2006). First, critical race theory has been applied to qualitative research methods (e.g., Brayboy, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lynn, et al., 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Parker & Lopez, 2003; Parker et al., 1998, Parker et al., 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Lynn and Parker (2006) encourage the continued use of critical race theory in education research to influence the way historically excluded groups are studied and written about. Second, critical race theory has informed how race and racism impact pedagogy and practice (e.g., Asato; 2002; Foster, 1998; Iseke-Barnes, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2003, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Lynn, 1999, 2002; Morris, 2001; Solorzano, 1997). These studies acknowledge racist classroom practices and national policies that impact educators' ability to teach diverse classrooms. Thus, critical race theory



helps address inequalities in the classroom and provide guidance on how to make classrooms a place where systematically marginalized students thrive (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Third, in the literature, schooling experiences of historically excluded students are included in the literature to provide a counternarrative by giving them a voice in the research (e.g., Bernal, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Morris, 2004). Fourth, educational policies are examined using the lens of critical race theory as a tool to uncover racist practices, beliefs, and discourses, including how racism has influenced the curriculum (e.g., Jay, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Grant, 1993; Love, 2004; Tate, 1993; 1995; Yosso, 2002).

Critical race theory identifies the centrality of race and racism when applied to the “demographic divide,” (Gay & Howard, 2001, p. 195) a significant racial and cultural knowledge gap between students and educators (NAEP, 2020). It is likely that White educators are not able to understand the racial experiences, cultural knowledge, practices, and dispositions of the non-White students in their classrooms (Howard, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Sleeter, 2012). On a larger scale, critical race theory can support educators in developing racial consciousness in their own self-reflection and instructional practices (Howard, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016).

There is limited empirical data of critical race theory connected to student experiences and outcomes (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Howard & Navarro, 2016). However, some research studies highlight how researchers have begun to use critical race theory to connect theory and practice in K-12 education. Ledesma and Calderon’s (2015) literature review reveals that current literature on critical race theory in K-12 education is situated among the following areas: curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling in general, and policy and community engagement (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Stovall (2016) used critical race theory to examine high school classrooms in Chicago by using the principle of counter storytelling to

provide a voice to students experiencing racism firsthand. Counter storytelling is a useful tool to provide a voice to historically excluded students, while also acknowledging that traditionally the majority White voice is the focal point of the curriculum, contributing to the racial divide (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). In addition, Stovall (2016) offered a framework for an inclusive school curriculum addressing race and racism (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Using critical race theory as an analytical tool, Datnow and Cooper (2009) studied the experiences of African American students in a predominantly White independent school. The results indicated that the African American students' feelings of racism and exclusion impacted the inclusivity of their social, psychological, and academic environments (Datnow & Cooper, 2009).

In higher education, critical race theory has also been applied to examine practices. Ledesma and Calderon's (2015) literature review for critical race theory applied to higher education includes three dominant themes: colorblindness, selective admissions policy, and campus racial climate. For example, in one study associated with campus racial climate, critical race theory was used to reveal the diverse histories, cultures, and experiences of Asian American/Pacific Islander (AA/PI) students (Teranishi & Pazich, 2013). Teranishi and Pazich examined AA/PIs exclusion from educational opportunities from the perspective of how race impacted educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes. Additional scholars have studied the importance of diversity in higher education through racialized lenses, using Black feminist thought and Black feminist economic theory (Collins, 1989, 2002; Davis, 2011) in connection to critical race theory as a guiding framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Howard & Navarro, 2016).

## **Gaps in the Literature**

Since its conception, critical race theory has been increasingly used in the literature as a theoretical lens to acknowledge race and racism and its role in educational opportunity and outcomes (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Ledesma and Calderon (2015) recognize the role of critical race theory in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy or multicultural education pedagogies (cultural). However, concrete examples demonstrating how to apply critical race theory in the education of educators as an analytical tool to improve school outcomes is missing from the literature (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Critical race theory is the theoretical framework of this dissertation as a lens to examine how race impacts the development of educators who implement cultural education practices. In addition, enacting the principles of critical race theory require educators to possess behaviors, including self-reflection and critical analysis of systematic issues, that current educators are inexperienced in implementing (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Solorzano, 2013). Howard and Navarro (2016) urge the inclusion of critical race theory in educational discussions concerning practices and policies in K-12 schools and higher education to support larger discourses about race. In this research study, I examined the discourse of participants in the antidiscrimination and social justice course, especially in relation to the influence of race on discussions.

One crucial step to improving systematic deficits influencing race and racism in American education is the area of teacher preparation. Due to the widening “demographic divide,” it is necessary for educators to be prepared to understand how race and racism impact learning and the influence of implicit biases on disconnecting students from the learning process (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Universities will need modifications to their current teaching programs to support this need. In addition, identification of educators who embody the principles

of critical race theory and cultural education is needed to use as model mentors for aspiring teachers. Howard and Navarro (2016) provide a recommendation for school districts and teacher education programs at universities to provide professional development to align teaching practices to critical race theory. However, there is a gap in this area, as limited research studies have been conducted to analyze the importance of a district-university partnership with in-service educators to develop culturally competent and inclusive educators who understand the impact of race and racism on student learning. Thus, my research study adds to the literature by studying the development of a district-university partnership, including an analysis of how race factored into the social-political context of the school district at the time the partnership was established.

### **Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology**

The purpose of this mixed methods case study is to examine the formulation and outcomes of a district-university partnership established to offer a college-level course focused on anti-discrimination, equity and inclusion, and social justice. The focus of the case study is a district-university partnership in which faculty at one university worked with leaders and educators located in a rural school district to collaboratively develop a course to meet the needs of the local district. In addition, I examine how educators' self-reflection were impacted by participation in the anti-discrimination college course. In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and methodology. The data collection process is divided into two phases, with the first phase involving a collection of quantitative survey data and the second phase collecting qualitative data using interviews and video-based observations. This chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis.

#### **Research Questions**

This research study examines both the formulation of a district-university partnership and its impact on the participants through the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, does an educator's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
2. In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
3. What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
4. In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

The first two research questions aim to analyze the self-reflection and discourse of participants to understand how their personal understanding of cultural education relates to their educational practices. The third and fourth research questions examine the context influencing the partnership's formulation and the elements of sustainability that it possesses. A crucial foundation of developing culturally responsive educators is critical self-reflection and comfortability with race discussions to disrupt systemic dysfunctions. These elements are analyzed together to inform how a district-university partnership can influence the development of cultural educational practices for current educators.

### **Research Design**

#### **Case Study**

Yin (2002) described research design as a logical sequence between the empirical data, research questions, and conclusions. Of the six types of qualitative research (phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case study, historical, and narrative), case study is most closely aligned with my research purpose and research questions. Case study is characterized by a logical design, pre-described data collection techniques, and predetermined data analysis methods. It also allows for triangulation of data sources to provide a more comprehensive view of the case. In addition, Yin's definition of case study research supports answering research questions where the researcher has little influence on the research events. Those questions are often "how" and "why" questions that are exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. The research questions posed in this study are explanatory in nature. They support finding explanations between the development of the district-university partnership and how it was influenced by the local social-political influence and demonstrated elements of sustainability. Thus, this dissertation study is as an explanatory case study based on its characteristics of explaining links

between an intervention and the subsequent effects (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). The district-university partnership served as an intervention to address the problem of practice in this study (developing culturally responsive educators). I sought to examine the link between how the leaders formed the course, and how their leadership decisions during this time period were affected by the local social-political context. I chose an explanatory case study design to explain the link between the partnership's development and elements of sustainability displayed during that first year of forming.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined case/unit of study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). In this explanatory case study, the unit of analysis is the process of developing a district-university partnership from the perspective of the school district's leadership team. The case is bounded by both time and place (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2003). Specifically, the partnership exists between a rural school district that partnered with a minority-serving university (serving over 25% of African American undergraduate students and displaying a devotion to incorporating culturally responsive practices in their degree programs) in the state of Virginia during approximately the first year of formulation (May 2021-February 2022). It is important to note that the case is not independent of its context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Thus, through the use of interview data, I gained the perspective of the district leaders on how the local-political context and elements of sustainability were evident during the process of developing the partnership. I also examined the interconnection of the case (partnership development) within the context of creating a college-level course for in-service educators focusing on issues of anti-discrimination, equity and inclusion, and social justice. Through survey and observational data, I gained additional insight about the partnership within the context of the course.

## **Mixed-Methods**

Quantitative research allows for explaining a phenomenon using numerical data. Aczel et al. (2015) called surveys the fiercest competitor to case study as a research strategy because they allow the researcher to collect a large sample of data in a shorter amount of time in comparison to the time it would take to personally conduct hundreds of interviews. In contrast, qualitative data allow for understanding the case from the perspective of the participants, rather than the researcher (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Patton, 2002). In addition, they allow the researcher the ability to understand the meaning behind observed actions and events (Aczel et al., 2015). For these reasons, I chose mixed methods because of its ability to provide an understanding of the problem through a combination of quantitative and qualitative, and its ability to offer a comparative analysis (Almeida, 2018). In this study, I combined quantitative data collection of surveys and qualitative data collection of interviews and observations.

Furthermore, I conducted a mixed-method case study using a sequential explanatory design (Creswell et al., 2007; Ivankova et al., 2006; Yin, 2002) to explore the development and outcomes of a district-university partnership aiming to develop in-service educators in the area of cultural responsiveness. I chose a sequential explanatory design because it is guided by a theoretical framework (critical race theory) and for ease of implementation as a novice researcher (Almeida, 2018; Doyle et al., 2009). Through this design, the first phase of the study is quantitative data collection (surveys) and analysis, then the subsequent qualitative data collection (video-based observations and interviews) and analysis (Creswell et al., 2003; Ivankova et al., 2006). This approach allowed for a general understanding of the research problem with the use of statistical results that provided greater depth in understanding participants' views.



### **Researcher Positionality**

As a novice researcher, I approach this study by bringing personal and professional experiences related to the research topic. I describe my personal identity as a Black woman with a strong commitment to being a lifelong learner. Throughout my schooling, both K-12 and higher education, I have attended schools where the predominate race was White. During this time, I have experienced a lack of culturally responsive practices that honored my cultural differences, and would describe my experience as one of assimilation. In my own reflection, I acknowledge that I viewed success through my ability to code-switch (adopting the behaviors of the dominant culture in a given situation), allowing me to blend into my surroundings. However, through my doctoral course experience at Old Dominion University, I was given the opportunity to challenge and reflect on my educational experience. The status quo became an entity to challenge and evaluate, rather than accept blindly. It is through this critical evaluation and self-reflection that I gained a passion for exploring cultural responsiveness and critical race theory, which gave vocabulary to my personal experiences.

After earning my Bachelor of Science degree with a focus on Special Education, I entered the field of education where I have worked for the past 13 years. During this time, I have worked as a Special Education teacher, Assistant Principal, and currently as a Coordinator of Student Services (providing instructional coaching and professional development to educators working with special education students). Working with special education students allowed me to explore equity and inclusion from a different viewpoint than just race. It challenged me to differentiate instruction to meet individual student needs, and identify the barriers that standardized curriculum created to student success. My professional opportunities provided a

foundation to my interest in exploring cultural responsiveness, equity, and inclusion, in order to advocate for students receiving an educational experience reflective of these core concepts.

I was deeply invested in this research topic to support providing students with an education that is reflective of their culture. Therefore, I acknowledge that I bring biases based on personal experiences associated with my race and my professional background as an educator. During the video-based observations, discussion of race often reminded me of my own experiences or provoked me to view situations discussed in a different way. However, I aimed to diminish the effect of my personal experience through a coding structure that clearly defined using research-based definitions of empathic concern and perspective taking. In addition, I attempted to limit the effect of my biases in the analysis process through triangulation, peer consultations and semi-structured interview protocols. While I can relate to the research topic, the analysis process proved to support limiting my biases by using protocols and structures that did not solely rely on my personal opinions.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included a combination of secondary data collected at the time of the course and primary data collected by the researcher. Pre-survey data were collected at the beginning of the course in August 2021 by the course leaders. Following the last class, a post-survey was completed by participants in March 2022. I began the process of analyzing survey data in May 2022, and used the preliminary data to inform the final version of my semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E). Preliminary analyses supported the type of questions included about course design to determine how the course design impacted survey results. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted in June 2022. In July 2022, I continued the process of

analyzing survey data, and began analyzing interviews and video-based observations of the classes.

### **Demographics of Participants**

The participants in this study were either leaders in the district-university partnership or educators enrolled in the college-level course for continuing education credits. There were three leaders of the district-university partnership who were recruited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Of the school district representatives, one is a White man who is the superintendent, one is an African American female who is the special education liaison and equity coordinator in the district, and one is an African American woman who is the instructor of record for the course. In the second category, there were 12 educators who were chosen based on their participation in the pre-survey and post-survey given in the course. The participants included 11 women and one man. Of the 12 participants, eight identify as Black/African American, and four as White. The professional titles include a range of educators at the elementary school level (school counselor, special education teacher, classroom teacher), middle school level (science, math, history, and English), and high school level (history), who have been working in the school district for a range from one year to over 21 years.

### **Phase 1 Data Collection: Quantitative**

I collected data in two phases, where the first phase of quantitative data collection informed the second phase of qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2003; Ivankova et al., 2006). In the first phase, I used secondary survey data collected while the college course was in session, including a pre-course survey and post-course survey (see Appendices C and D). The pre-course survey asked participants about their self-reflection in the areas of empathy (empathic concern and perspective taking), comfort with race discussions, and preparation for race discussions. The

survey questions on the pre-course survey were derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980), a rigorous survey tool used to measure empathy. The scales for “empathic concern” defined as the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion and “perspective taking” defined as the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life were posed to course enrollees.

Survey questions also asked participants how prepared they felt to provide evidence of culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices. In addition, participants provided their preparation level with ensuring systematically marginalized cultures feel included in the curriculum/instructional materials. Finally, the post-course survey allowed for a comparison of responses to the pre-course survey by including identical questions in both surveys. The survey also included questions related to their opinions of the impact the course had on their teaching practices. Using the survey data collected in the first phase, I gained an understanding of the educators’ critical self-reflection in the areas of empathy (empathic concern and perspective taking), comfortability with race discussions, and preparation for race discussions.

### **Phase 2 Data Collection: Qualitative**

In the second phase, I collected qualitative data using video-based observations and semi-structured interviews. First, I conducted video-based observations of the classes within the college-level course, which were recorded with participant permission. Transcription of each class was done using an online platform (Otter.ai). By watching the class recordings, I gathered examples of participants’ discourse which were reflective of empathic concern and perspective taking. Each class recording was viewed a minimum of two times to collect data on discussions related to empathic concern and perspective taking. The first time viewing the recording was focused on categorizing discourse that may fit the definition of empathic concern and perspective

taking. The second time viewing the class recording, I used the transcription in conjunction with the audio to confirm the chosen examples met the definition. Subsequent viewing occurred as needed for clarity.

Second, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the district-university partnership. The three participants in the semi-structured interviews were invited to participate in the study through an initial email and follow-up emails, as necessary (see Appendix A). The interviews focused on the socio-political context that influenced the development of the partnership, how race and culture influenced the development of the college-level course, and elements of sustainability of the partnership. The semi-structured interview protocol had 15 questions with additional probing questions as an option for clarification (see Appendix E). The use of the protocol supported consistency among the interviews and increased the reliability of the results. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded using a video-conferencing platform (Google Meet) and transcribed for analysis. Prior to the interviews, all participants were asked to electronically sign a consent form, which discussed confidentiality provided throughout the research study (see Appendix B). After the interview, each recording was transcribed using an online platform (Otter.ai) and then reviewed for accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Confidentiality of identities were maintained throughout the data collection and analyses through the use of pseudonyms.

### **Data Analysis**

The first phase of the data analysis process included analyzing quantitative data, and then qualitative data were analyzed to inform the four research study questions. Quantitative data were collected through surveys and analyzed through descriptive statistics. I provide an overview of this process in the next section. Qualitative data were collected through interviews and

through observations of a pre-recorded videos of the course. Qualitative data analysis includes four common steps: data collection, data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing/verification (Graue, 2015). Using categorizing and coding, the data were reduced to a more manageable amount. Then, I used the codes to explain relationships, using my research questions to guide that process. A more in-depth description of this process is included in the following sections. The collective use of the three types of data collection (surveys, video-based observations, and interviews) allowed for data triangulation and a comprehensive analysis to support cross-validating and confirming findings (Almeida, 2018; Yin, 2002).

### **Survey**

All survey data were completed using Google Forms. The survey data were then transferred to Microsoft Excel for the analysis process. After deidentifying the survey data through the use of pseudonyms, I prepared the data for analysis by changing the text responses to a numerical format. For example, for 5-point Likert-scale statements which included choices such as “strongly disagree” or “strongly agree,” I modified the spreadsheet to a numerical format, using one for “strongly disagree” and five for “strongly agree.” This process allowed for analysis using formulas and descriptive statistics. Only participants who completed both the pre-survey and post-survey were included in the analysis process. Pre-survey and post-survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the average, median, and standard deviation. Comparison of the difference between the average response on the pre-survey and the average response on the post-survey were used to determine how participants’ responses changed over time.

The pre-survey and post-survey were reviewed separately and then compiled together for analysis. The survey questions were coded into three themes: empathic concern and perspective

taking, preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practice, and comfort with race discussions. Open-ended questions were analyzed individually, first as a whole and then as individual participants for relationships. The data were displayed using charts that compared pre-survey and post-survey data to illustrate how participants' responses changed after participation in the course. The survey results were analyzed in conjunction with the analysis of the video-based observations to support a comparative analysis

### **Interview**

Three interviews with the course leaders were conducted and recorded using the online platform, Google Meet. Each interview was transcribed using an online platform (Otter.ai), and transcriptions were deidentified using pseudonyms. Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis guided my analysis of the quantitative data, which includes six steps:

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data by repeated readings and making notes for future coding.
2. Generating initial codes using descriptive codes.
3. Searching for themes from the list of codes, collate, and provide visual representations (i.e. thematic tables/maps)
4. Reviewing themes to determine if they match the overarching theme and match the overall data set.
5. Defining and naming themes for presentation.
6. Producing the report to tell the story of the data using data extracts.

I used Thorskiltsen and Stein's (1996) elements of sustainability including definitions found in the article (see Appendix F) for deductive coding of the transcripts. From this process,

four main themes emerged based on the interview responses: well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation.

During the interview analysis process, three peer reviewers, one graduate and two current students in the doctoral program at Old Dominion University were included to reduce the subjectivity and strengthen the identification of themes. Each reviewer was provided with a document that had a blank chart with four sections labeled by the four main themes with definitions at the top and quotes from the interviews organized by each course leader at the bottom. In addition, peer reviewers were given the three deidentified interview transcriptions to support their analysis process. Peer reviewers were asked to place the quotes from the interviews in the appropriate sections based on the themes. If a quote did not fit the themes identified, there was a section labeled “quotes that do not fit a theme” where quotes could be placed. Only quotations that were common across all four researchers (including me) were included as evidence of each theme. Finally, I also analyzed the interviews using inductive coding and narrative analysis to answer the research question associated with the local-political context in relation to forming the district-university partnership.

### **Observations**

The analysis of video-based interviews included transcribing the dialogue that took place in each class, deidentifying using pseudonyms, deductive coding followed by inductive coding, and then determining relationships. First, I used an online platform (Otter.ai) for transcribing the 13 classes, each lasting about two hours. Using the same program, I replaced the participants’ names with pseudonyms. Second, I excluded discourse by the course leaders and only included participant discourse by the educators in the school district for analysis. For the initial analysis, I coded quotations using the two themes in the research questions, according to the two themes



(empathic concern and perspective taking) and used Davis' (1980) definitions for clarification.

Then, inductive coding was used to analyze the identified discourse and reveal relationships and themes.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Merriam (1998) suggested several strategies to enhance reliability and internal and external validity that guided my qualitative research. Four suggested strategies for the qualitative researcher include: researcher positionality, triangulation, peer examination, and an audit trail. A statement of researcher positionality was included in the earlier part of this chapter and provides an explanation of how my personal and professional attributes affected this study. In addition, methodological triangulation was included in the research design through the use of three data collection methods (survey, interviews, and video-based observations; Graue, 2015). An audit trail was kept through the use of a researcher journal and electronic records of the study's design including the data collection and analysis process. Also, peer reviewers, one doctoral graduate and two current doctoral students, supported the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 1998). Likewise, Yin (2002) provided guidance to case study researchers on construct validity, external validity, and reliability. I considered this guidance and enhanced the research study in the area of construct validity (using triangulation of multiple sources), external validity (thick descriptions explaining cultural significance), and reliability (semi-structured interview protocols). External validity during the interview and video-based observation analysis was enhanced through thick descriptions that explained the cultural significance.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

There is a national and state need for culturally responsive educators to meet the unique needs of a growing diverse population of students. The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to examine the role of a district-university partnership to support the development of culturally responsive educators. I acknowledge the significance of the local social-political context in affecting the development of partnerships, and that barriers exist to ensure sustainability of the partnership. Though providing educators with resources to support implementing culturally responsive strategies is a critical step in improving classrooms that are responsive to all students, it is not the only element affecting the transformations of classrooms. Therefore, I examined not only the impact of the course on educators through the use of survey data and video-based observations, but also used interviews with the course leaders to examine the local social-political context and elements of sustainability. In addition, the study acknowledges that at the heart of becoming a culturally responsive educator is the demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking.

Using a theoretical framework of critical race theory and a conceptual framework of cultural education, I engage in a mixed methods case study to explore the process of developing culturally responsive educators through the use of a district-university partnership. The first chapter provided an overview of the problem, research purpose, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology and significance of the study. The second chapter provided a comprehensive literature review of district-university partnerships, the conceptual framework of cultural education, theoretical framework of critical race theory, and teacher preparation/partnership work. The third chapter described the research design to include a description of the case study method and the two phases of the sequential explanatory design. In

addition, it gave an overview of the thematic analysis conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to answer the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, does a teacher's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
2. In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
3. What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
4. In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

In this fourth chapter, after providing demographic information of the study participants, I explain the two phases of sequential explanatory design, starting with the quantitative data collection and then the qualitative. The chapter is organized by the research questions and the corresponding data collection method (see Table 5). I first present the findings of the survey results to explain the effect of the course for participants according to the following three themes: preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices, comfort with discussions about race, and demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking. Second, I present the results of the video-based observations to identify two sub-themes of empathic concern and perspective taking: voice and counter storytelling. Finally, I share the results of the interviews with the district-university leaders in the study, which focused on the local-political context and four themes of sustainability of the partnership: well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation.

**Table 5***Organization of Data Collection by Research Questions*

<b>Surveys</b>
How, if at all, does a teacher's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
<b>Video-based Observations</b>
How, if at all, does a teacher's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
<b>Interviews</b>
What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

**Demographics**

This case study includes an analysis of both the course leaders and course participants. Pseudonyms were created for all participants mentioned in this research study to support anonymity. The analysis of the course participants focuses on the 12 educators who completed both the pre-survey and post-survey (see Table 6). Of the 12 respondents (11 women and 1 man) who completed both surveys, four identified themselves as White and eight identified themselves as Black or African American, with no participants indicating their ethnicity was of

Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish origin (see Figure 2). Participants identified a variety of experience levels: 0-10 years (8%), 11-20 years (50%), and 21 years or more (42%) (Table 6; Figure 3).

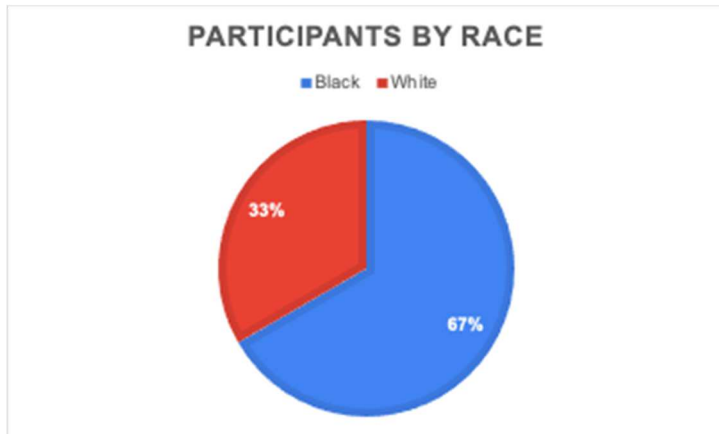
**Table 6**

*Demographics of Course Participants*

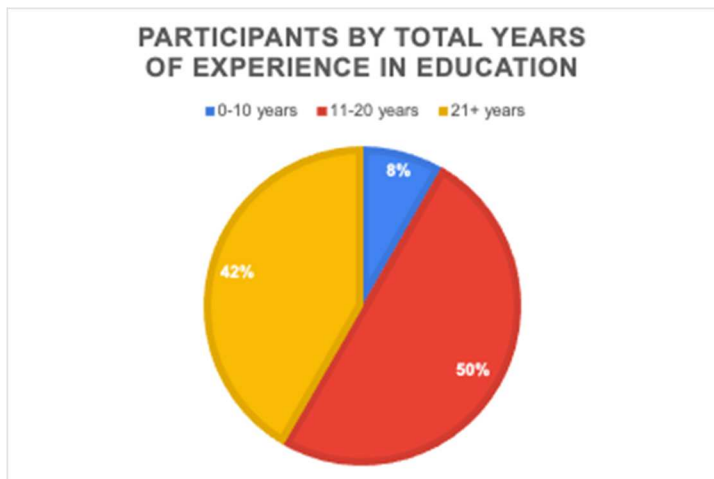
<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Professional Title</b>
Jayda	F	White	21+	Elementary School Counselor
Cilicia	F	White	21+	Elementary Special Education Teacher
Da’Naria	F	White	15	4th and 5th Grade Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher
Malayah	F	Black	21+	6th grade Science Teacher
Milanie	F	Black	21+	K-12 Physical Education Teacher
Daija	F	White	17	4th Grade Math Teacher
Timothy	M	Black	16	8th Grade History Teacher
Eliana	F	Black	17	3-5 Elementary Special Education Teacher
Alorah	F	Black	21+	Elementary School Counselor
Tiana	F	Black	18	11th and 12th Grade History Teacher
Janae	F	Black	4	4th Grade Special Education Teacher
Autumn	F	Black	14	Elementary School Counselor

**Figure 2**

*Participants by Race*

**Figure 3**

*Participants by Total Years of Experience in Education*



In response to an open-ended question on the post-survey, 9 of the 12 responses indicated race to describe their personal cultural identity. In addition, participants described their cultural identity based on their gender, professional title, position in their family (e.g., mother), family background, religion, ethnicity, and character traits. When asked about their detailed professional title on the pre-survey, educators indicated a range of professional titles at the elementary school level (school counselor, special education teacher, classroom teacher), middle school level

(science, math, history, and English), and high school level (history) (see Table 6). One participant identified as a physical education teacher at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high school). The majority of teachers and counselors at the elementary level ( $M=66.67$ ) and secondary level (middle and high school;  $M=60.00$ ) had at least 15 years of experience in the field of education (see Table 6; Figure 3).

### **Phase 1: Survey Results (Quantitative)**

Through thematic analysis, three themes were created based on the survey questions:

1. preparation for culturally responsive and equitable practices,
2. comfort with race discussions, and
3. empathic concern and perspective taking.

In the following sections, I first I share the results of how prepared teachers felt to utilize culturally responsive teaching strategies and equitable practices within their classrooms. Second, I provide an overview of how comfortable teachers indicated they felt with having race discussions in their current professional role. Finally, I discuss how teachers provided a self-reflection of their current level of empathic concern and perspective taking. The following results solely include course participants who completed both the pre-survey and post-survey to allow for analysis of change in responses over time.

### **Pre-Survey Description**

Prior to the first day of class, participants were asked to complete a pre-survey. In addition to demographic information, the pre-survey included three sets of Likert-scale statements and three open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The respondents used the following scales for the Likert-scale statements:

- a. 5-point Likert-scale statements: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree,
- b. 4-point Likert-scale statements: not at all comfortable, slightly comfortable, mostly comfortable, or very comfortable,
- c. 3-point Likert statements: does not describe me well at all, describes me to some extent, or describes me very well

The Likert-scale statements asked participants to identify their level of preparation to incorporate culturally responsive strategies in the classroom (5-point Likert-scale statements), comfort with discussions about personal identity and race (4-point Likert-scale statements), and assessment of their own empathic concern and perspective taking (3-point Likert-scale statements). The following three open-ended questions were also presented:

1. Currently, what would you say are the biggest barriers to engaging in difficult conversations about social justice, equity, and anti-discrimination with your students? If none, please leave blank.
2. Currently, what would say are the biggest barriers to incorporating racially and ethnically diverse perspectives into your day-to-day instruction? If none, please leave blank.
3. Any other information you'd like to share about yourself or the course, or questions you may have?

### **Post-Survey Description**

Following the last day of class, participants were asked to complete a post-survey. In addition to being asked to describe their personal cultural identity, the post-survey included the same three sets of Likert-scale statements as the pre-survey to allow for analysis of changes in responses over time after participating in the anti-discrimination course (see Appendix D). In



addition, two Likert-scale statements were added to assess teacher dispositions reflective of culturally responsive teaching practices and comfort with providing evidence of Standard 6 in the area of history, science, special education, and world languages. The following two open-ended questions were presented:

1. What impact, if any, did participation in ELS 697 have on your teaching practices this school year and in the future?
2. Any other information you'd like to share about yourself or the course, or questions you may have? Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the course in future semesters?

### **Theme 1: Preparation for Culturally Responsive and Equitable Practices**

The pre-survey and post-survey included ten 5-point Likert scale questions for participants to identify their preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices both before and after participating in the course. Likert scale responses were coded on a scale of 1 to 5. For example, if a participant responded that they “strongly disagree” with a statement, the response was coded as a “1;” if they responded that they “neither agree nor disagree,” the response was coded as a “3;” or if they responded that they “strongly agree,” the response was coded as a “5.” Prior to starting the course, participants identified they had no concerns about the following areas:

- develop and maintain positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationships with students
- create a warm, supporting, safe, and secure classroom environment for culturally diverse students
- create a community of learners by encouraging students to focus on collective work,

responsibility, and cooperation (see Figure 4)

However, participants indicated they were unprepared for creating culturally responsive instructional examples to scaffold learning (40% agree) and using non-traditional discourse styles to communicate in culturally diverse ways (47% agree; see Figure 4). Through participation in the course, these two areas significantly increased: creating culturally responsive instructional examples to scaffold learning (84% agree or strongly agree) and using non-traditional discourse styles to communicate in culturally diverse ways (84% agree or strongly agree; see Figure 5). In comparing the average response from the pre-survey to the post-survey (see Figure 6), the following five statements had the largest average difference between the two surveys, indicating growth in understanding over time:

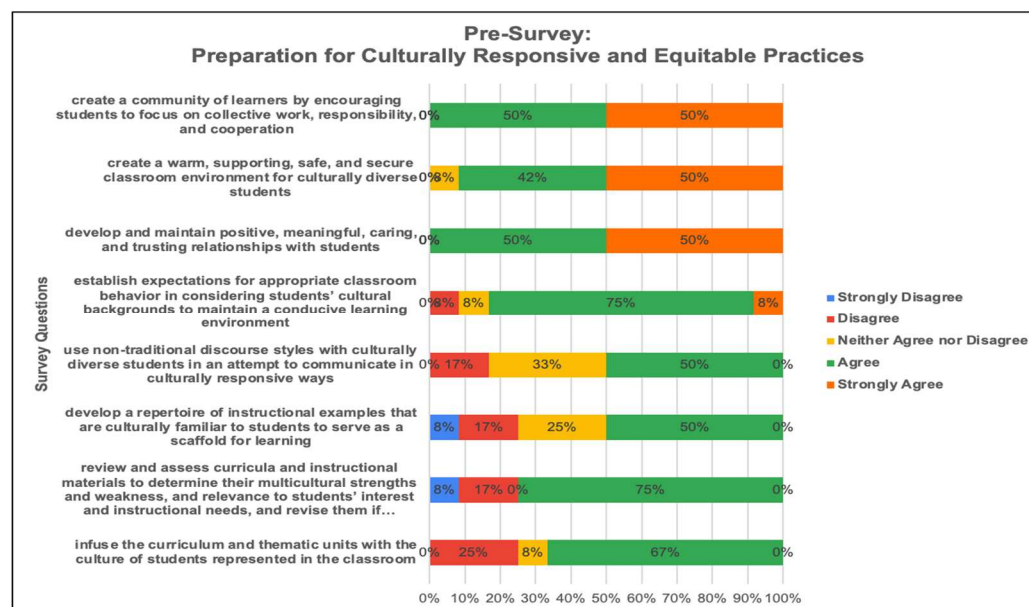
- review and assess curricula and instructional materials to determine their multicultural strengths and weakness, and relevance to students' interest and instructional needs, and revise them if necessary (0.96 average difference)
- develop a repertoire of instructional examples that are culturally familiar to students to serve as a scaffold for learning (1.16 average difference)
- use non-traditional discourse styles with culturally diverse students in an attempt to communicate in culturally responsive ways (1.02 average difference)
- identifying classrooms resources that incorporate and value diverse voices (0.97 average difference)
- locating resources to learn more about the history of discrimination in America (0.97 average difference)

Educators acknowledged that the course increased their ability to identify (54% strongly agree) and locate (69% strongly agree) classroom resources that incorporate and value diverse voices.

In response to an open-ended question on the pre-survey, educators identified the following barriers to incorporating racially and ethnically diverse perspectives into daily instruction: lack of knowledge/understanding, feelings of others, and lack of resources. An indication of a teacher's critical self-reflection changing over time after participation in the course would be shown by an increase or decrease in the green and orange bars in a visual comparison of the pre-survey (see Figure 4) and post-survey (see Figure 5). In addition, the course leaders would hope to see the blue (strongly disagree) and red (disagree) bars decrease after educators participated in the course to indicate a positive change in their preparation for culturally responsive and equitable practices. In the results of the post-survey (Figure 5), participants did not choose blue (strongly disagree) or red (disagree), demonstrating after participating in the course they felt prepared for culturally responsive and equitable practices.

**Figure 4**

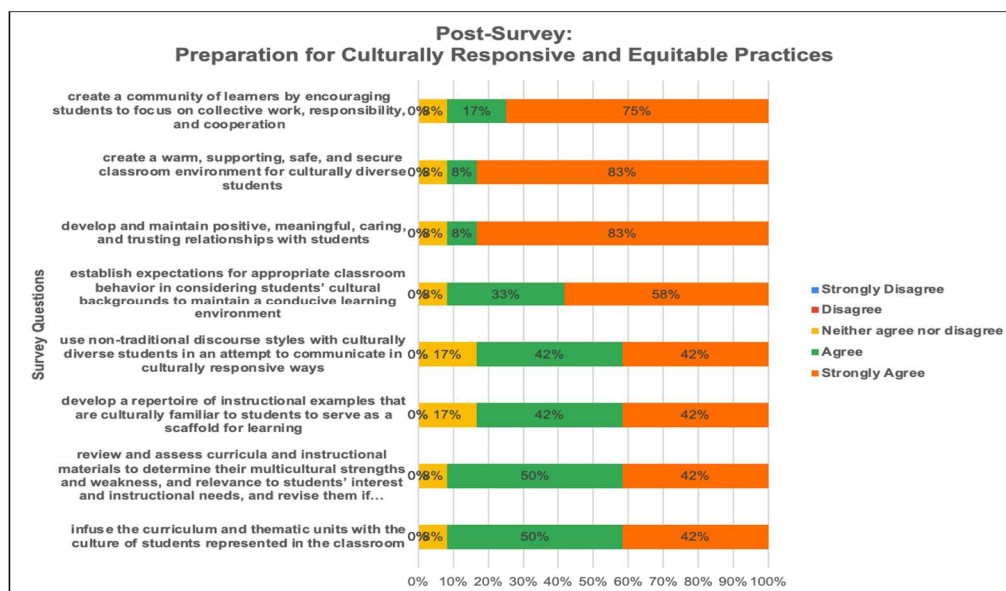
*Pre-Survey: Preparation for Culturally Responsive and Equitable Practices*



*Note.* Strongly Disagree (blue bar), Disagree (red), Neither Agree nor Disagree (yellow), Agree (green), Strongly Agree (orange)

**Figure 5**

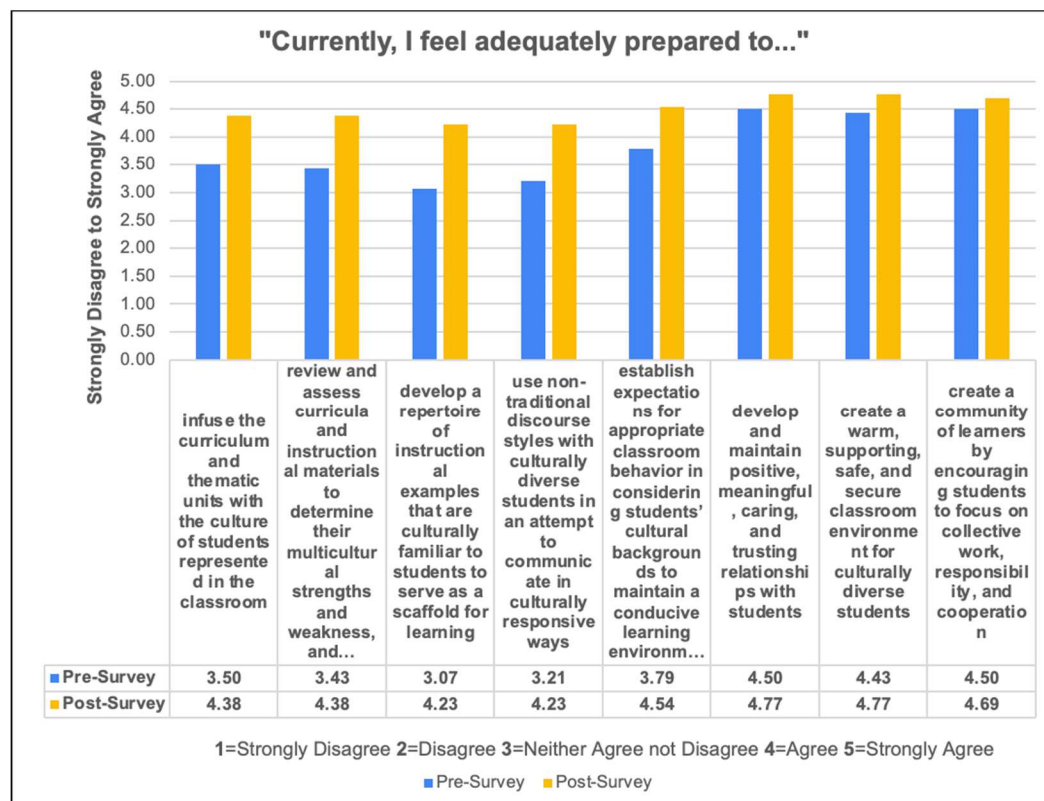
*Post-Survey: Preparation for Culturally Responsive and Equitable Practices*



*Note.* Strongly Disagree (blue bar), Disagree (red), Neither Agree nor Disagree (yellow), Agree (green), Strongly Agree (orange)

**Figure 6**

*Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey: Preparation for Culturally Responsive and Equitable Practices*



*Note.* Pre-survey (blue bar), Post-survey (yellow)

## **Theme 2: Comfort with Race Discussions**

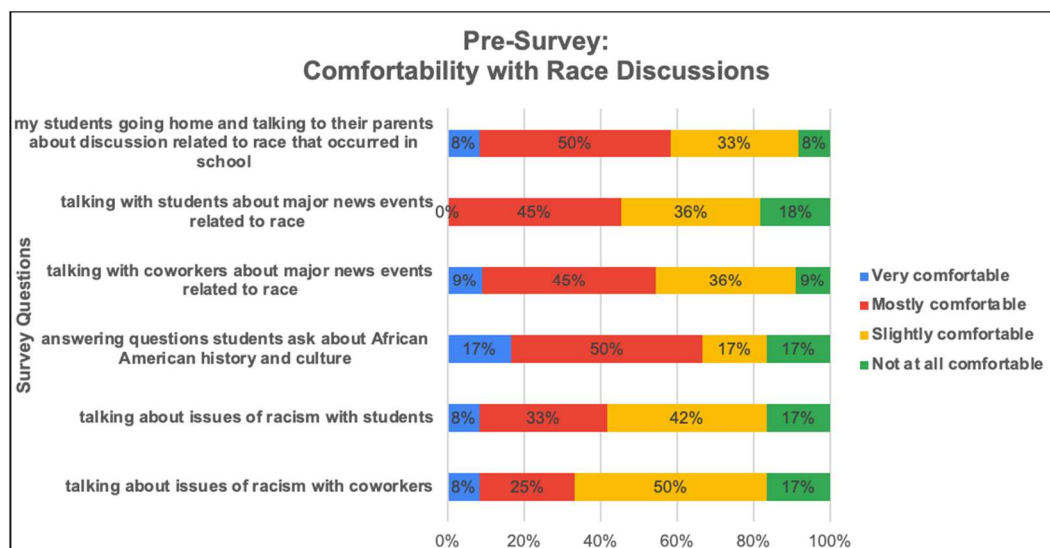
In the first class, Dr. Taylor stated, “Hopefully, when you leave, you’ll feel more comfortable, more courageous to have those conversations because that’s the intent of the course.” Of the three themes, this is the area that participants showed the highest growth in understanding overall. The pre-survey and post-survey included six 4-point Likert scale questions for participants to identify their comfort with race discussions both before and after participating in the course. The participants’ self-reflection showed an overall increase in all six

survey questions. An indication of an increase in comfort with race discussion after participation in the course would be shown by an increase in the blue bars (very comfortable) in a visual comparison of the pre-survey (see Figure 7) and post-survey (see Figure 8). For all six survey questions in this area, the blue bars (very comfortable) increased between the pre-survey and post-survey.

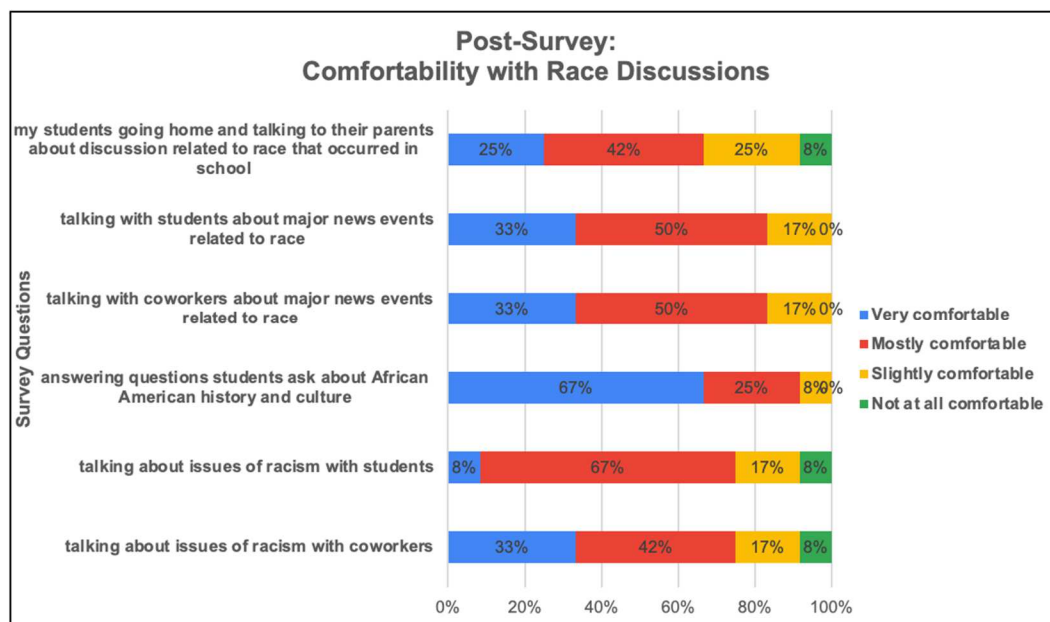
When comparing the pre-survey (17% strongly agree) to the post-survey (67% strongly agree), educators' participation in the course increased their ability to answer questions about African American history and culture (see Figure 7 and 8). In addition, they increased comfort with talking about issues of racism with coworkers (75% very comfortable or mostly comfortable) and students (75% very comfortable or mostly comfortable; see Figure 7 and 8). Although there was an increase in comfort after the course, educators still had some reservations about students going home and talking to their parents about the discussions in school about race (see Figure 7 and 8). For example, one participant, Eliana, indicated that she continued to be "not at all comfortable" (green bars) even after participation in the course for the following areas:

- My students going home and talking to their parents about discussion related to race that occurred in school
- Talking about issues of racism with students
- Talking about issues of racism with coworkers

Prior to participating in the course, at least one educator stated they were uncomfortable in all areas of the survey. However, after participation, none of the educators indicated they were "not at all comfortable" for three questions of the survey: talking with students about major news events related to race, talking with coworkers about major news events related to race, and answering questions students ask about African American history and culture.

**Figure 7***Pre-Survey: Comfort with Race Discussions*

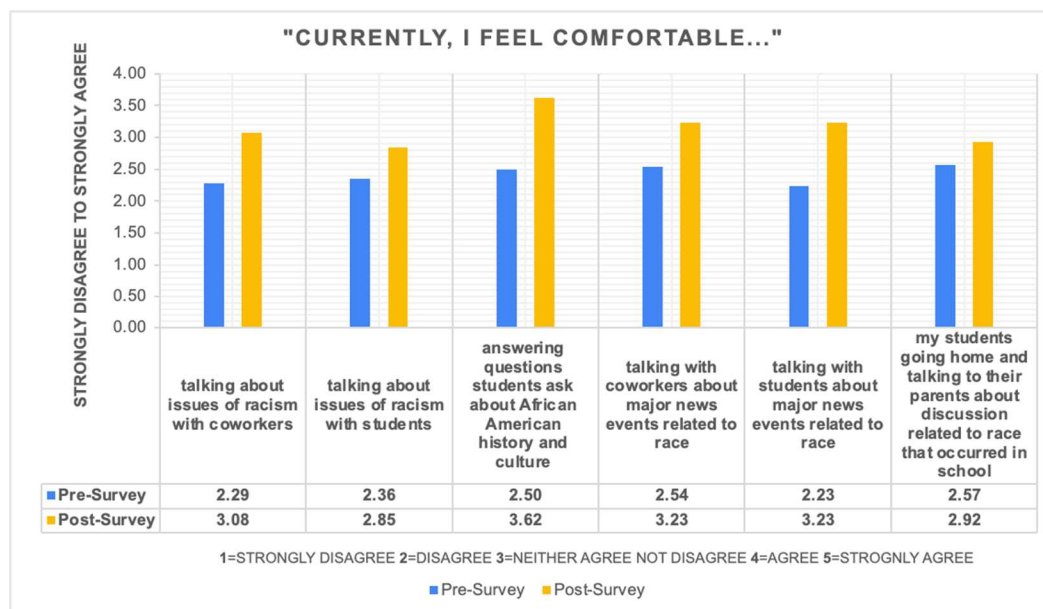
*Note.* Very comfortable (blue bar), Mostly comfortable (red), Slightly comfortable (yellow), Not at all comfortable (green)

**Figure 8***Post-Survey: Comfortability with Race Discussions*

*Note.* Very comfortable (blue bar), Mostly comfortable (red), Slightly comfortable (yellow), Not at all comfortable (green)

**Figure 9**

*Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey: Comfortability with Race Discussions*



*Note.* Pre-survey (blue bar), Post-survey (yellow)

### Theme 3: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking

Empathy is displayed through a combination of empathic concern (“the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others”) and perspective taking (“the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life”; Davis, 1994, p. 57). Teacher reflection, in combination with field experiences, critical classroom discourse, and engaging in literature about race and justice is an essential part of developing teacher dispositions (behaviors) that are reflective of culturally responsive practices (Warren, 2018). The pre-survey and post-survey included fourteen 3-point Likert scale questions for participants to self-reflect on whether the empathy statement describes them or not (see



Figures 10 and 11). Of the three themes, this is the area that participants showed the least change over time (see Figure 12). Four participants demonstrated no change in survey responses from the pre-survey to the post-survey (Jayda, Janae, and Alorah). For five survey items, educators indicated they already displayed the intended dispositions prior to starting the class, so there was limited room for growth in these areas:

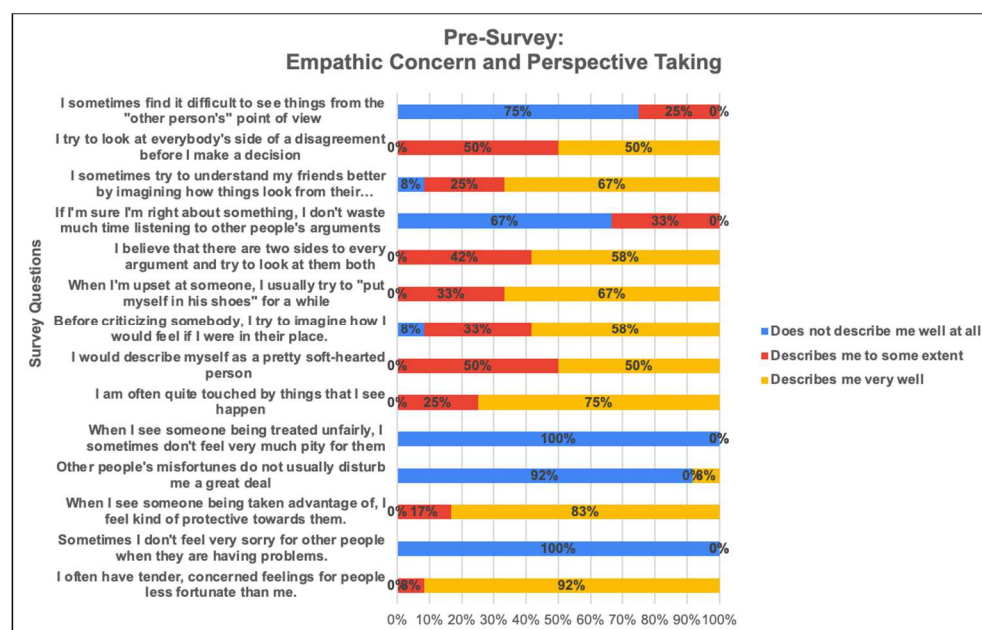
- When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them (100% does not describe me well at all)
- Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal (92% does not describe me well at all)
- When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them (83% describes me very well)
- Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (100% does not describe me well at all)
- I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (92% describes me very well)

Overall, growth was still demonstrated in some areas for participants. For example, participants' perspective taking increased from 58% to 92% (describes me very well) after participating in this course, stating that “before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place” (see Figures 10 and Figure 11). Likewise, in response to the perspective taking statement “I believe that there are two sides to every argument and try to look at them both,” respondents increased from 58% to 75% (describes me very well) after participating in this course (see Figures 10 and Figure 11). In response to a statement about empathic concern, “I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person,” educators’

responses changed over time (50% to 75% describes me very well; see Figures 10 and Figure 11). When looking at participants' individual responses, eight educators' self-reflection of empathic concern and perspective taking changed after participating in the course. In the following three areas, several participants changed their responses: "I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person" (Da'Naria, Timothy, Tiana, and Eliana), "Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place" (Malayah, Eliana, and Tiana), and "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view" (Cilicia, Da'Naria, Timothy, Eliana, and Tiana).

**Figure 10**

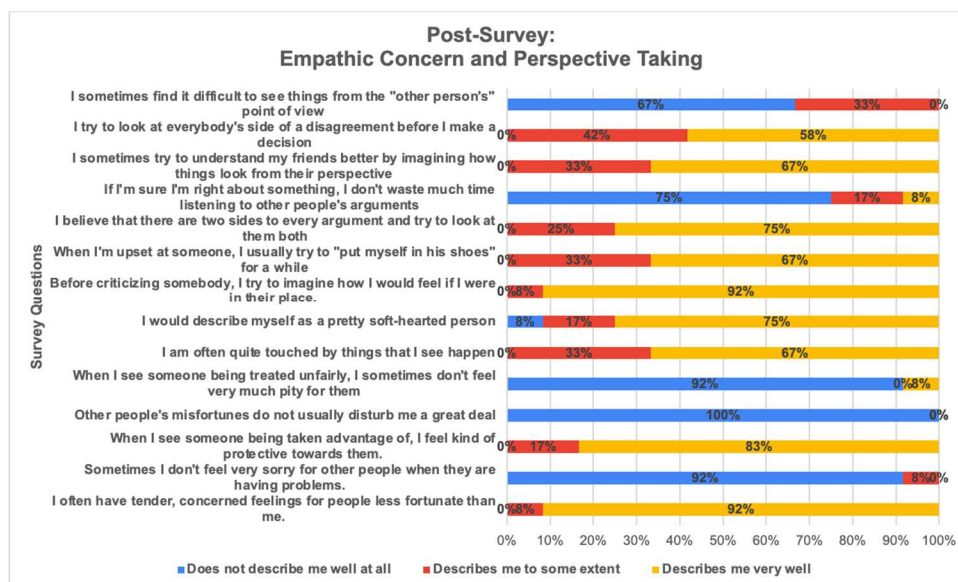
*Pre-Survey: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking*



*Note.* Does not describe me well at all (blue bar), Describes me to some extent (red), Describes me very well (yellow)

Figure 11

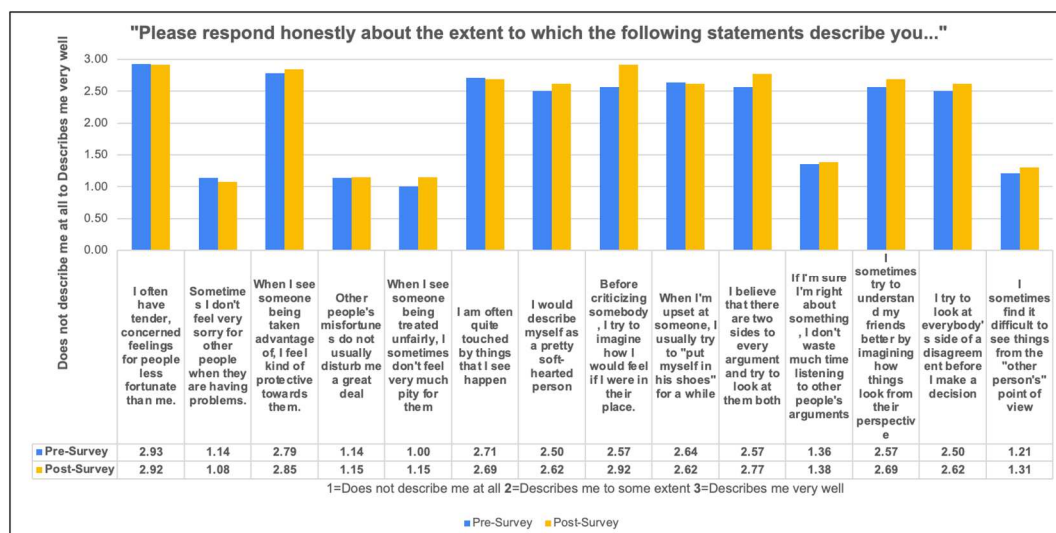
*Post-Survey: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking*



*Note.* Does not describe me well at all (blue bar), Describes me to some extent (red), Describes me very well (yellow)

Figure 12

*Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey: Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking*



*Note.* Pre-survey (blue bar), Post-survey (yellow)

## **Phase 2: Video-based Observations Results (Qualitative)**

In the next section, I present the themes from the survey of empathic concern and perspective taking based on participant discourse in the video-based observations. Using Davis' (1994) definition of empathic concern ("the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others") and perspective taking ("the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life"), I coded discourse from the educators participating in the course in those two categories. Using a lens of critical race theory in education, the following two themes emerged from the coding process based on classroom discourse related to empathy and perspective taking: voice and counter storytelling. The two themes are interlinked as ways to explain how power is manifested in the educational system. Following the section on empathic concern and perspective taking, I provide a connection between the additional two themes indicated by the survey results (comfortability with race discussions and preparation for culturally responsive practices) and examples of these themes within the video-based observations. Quotes from the video-based observation supported triangulation of the data according to identified themes.

### **Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking**

Consistent with the literature, course discourse revealed that the teachers in this study felt that historically marginalized student groups' voices have been silenced (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The following quotes are from course participants who demonstrate empathic concern and acknowledge their role in exposing the hidden power behind silenced voices:

- As a school counselor, sometimes when students tell us things or give us confidential information, we are the ones we have to be their voices because we are an advocate for them. (Alorah, Elementary School Counselor)

- A lot of times I don't feel children know how to communicate or say what they want to say for fear of what it will sound like to others. So I just think everybody's voice is important and we need to try to figure out how to reach them so they can feel like they can, you know, share? (Milanie, K-12 Physical Education Teacher)
- However, we also stated that when we remain silent, then we do not speak for those who have no voice or can't speak, which are usually the students. And also there are teachers who wish to have various diversity in their classroom. But we don't do it because we want to abide in that little box that we've been given. So the voice is that of the publisher or the state or whoever, but when we remain silent, that's where we fail. And we fail our students and we fail our kids. (Janae, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Education Teacher)
- People want to shut you down. They don't want to hear what you have to say, when it doesn't reflect what they think. And we all have opinions and everybody's opinions are valuable. You might not agree with me. We can agree to disagree. But at the end of the day, it's just to be able to give our opinions. So there's something that stood out to me the importance of voice and when you hide your voice you get overlooked. (Malayah, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher)

Culturally responsive educators have a role in creating avenues to amplify those voices in and out of the classroom. One course participant acknowledged the power of the voices in education that affect the trajectory of historically excluded students:

Why don't teachers push the gifted program as if they would push an IEP, like, um, let's say you see someone struggling and then automatically say 'they probably need an IEP.' But you see someone excelling and you don't say, 'Oh, well, they might be in the gifted program. Let me, you know, let me make their parents aware of the gifted program.' So

it's not the same, you know, you don't treat it the same way. (Eliana, 3-5 Elementary Special Education Teacher)

Likewise, another participant acknowledged how the education system is skewed for historically excluded students:

We noticed obviously, that the charts were skewed positively for whites and negatively for blacks...when we're looking at the dual enrollment, specifically, you know, if you're a student with a disability that is male and is black, then you are, you know, at the bottom, all these categories, you know, like you really have all those things against you. (Jayda, Elementary School Counselor)

Throughout the course, storytelling was used by participants to share their own experiences, to share experiences of their students, and to share literary examples that highlighted empathic concern and perspective taking. One course participant shared that teachers, society, and life impact the perspective students have, but ultimately students should have control:

As teachers we have no right to decide whose story can be told. Our students depend on us to provide them with the clay that they mold. Society provides the platform and life provides the perspective. It is important that we always listen and remain respectful. There will be biases and we won't always agree. But in the end, there should always be love and respect between you and me. (Autumn, Elementary School Counselor)

Most notably, in alignment with developing culturally responsive educators, the course facilitated an opportunity for perspectives to change through self-reflection:

That's kind of the perspective that I had when I read this book. You know, it was like I don't see color, you know, I'm like, I'm not racist, I don't see color. I love everybody, you know. And so this book changed my perspective, in that way. Incredibly, and it's by a

white author, but reading this book changed my perspective. And it opened me up to reading books like *Stamped* and books about anti-racism and things like that. And it really, really just opened me up... That moment right there made me really check my white privilege and really see it you know, and, and it really led me to, to doing more and more research into racism and where it comes from and when and how it is, you know, spread and, and really to check myself and my bias and, and it really opened my eyes a lot. And so that remains one of my favorite books because it has really changed my viewpoint and my outlook. (Da’Naria, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher)

In alignment with the course’s survey results, the participants were impacted on both a professional and personal level. Using perspective taking from stories in their own classrooms, examples from their communities, and from the literature within the course, educators had a broader understanding of the different viewpoints that students bring to the classroom. Ultimately, their ability to reexamine the perspectives of silenced voices and have empathy for the counternarratives created a foundation for becoming more culturally responsive.

### **Comfort with Race Discussions**

The course provided opportunities for educators to discuss cultural differences using civil discourse and vulnerability. For example, one class included a discussion on microaggressions, subtle exchanges of discrimination against historically excluded groups, which Lynn and Parker (2016) refer to as “everyday racism” (p.191). Da’Naria, a White woman, questioned why some Black class participants had a negative reaction to Black students being called “articulate.” She stated that she called one of the course leaders, Courtney-Ann, after the class to have her discuss this issue. In the next class, Da’Naria shared her perspective,

I feel like someone being articulate that's a compliment for everyone. Like I would love for someone to say that my children are articulate and being a fourth and fifth grade teacher, I try to teach my students to be articulate. So with that situation, and this was more of a question of, why it was taken negatively?

In response to her question, one of the university course leaders, a White man shared,

So, does somebody's judgment about somebody being articulate, get impacted by a bias about Black English? Where's the microaggression coming from? Does that person feel like they put time and energy to make a clear and articulate point, and they weren't heard because of a particular form of speech? And if they simply weren't articulate, then maybe that's a, you know, a form of feedback that they need to reflect on to improve their performance. And I think separating those things is difficult, but which I think requires vigilance and reflectiveness and forgiveness when people misstep, and then apologize.

Da'Naria responded by stating,

I think that this class was set up, you know, to help teachers be more inclusive and think about all races and genders and everything but for somebody who has never been a racist at all, it's making me think about things in different ways too because I was heated last week, because it's stuff that I don't see as racist at all, because race has never been a big deal for me at all. And so it just, it makes me think about I've always thought about race, like, when talking to some but certain things like this. I don't know, like, it may or like, we're talking about the micro whatever. It's something that I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have thought about, like, just because of somebody being not racist at all, is something that I've never thought about, it makes me understand more. So, I guess maybe that's the point of, of this class.



In alignment with the previous statement, the course explicitly provided opportunities to examine biases and self-reflect on their own perspective of race. This example also provided an example of a counternarrative, where a White teacher was provided an opportunity to engage in perspective taking of the way a situation may be different for a Black person than for herself.

### **Preparation for Culturally Responsive and Equitable Practices**

The course leaders were influential in modeling culturally responsive practices to support educators incorporating diverse strategies in the classroom. Using the four domains of Standard 6 for teacher evaluation (self-reflection, pedagogy and practices, learning environments, and community engagement), the course leaders incorporated literary examples and real-world application. The class content included poems, songs, articles, and books as discussion pieces. For example, each participant conducted a book study and presented their learnings about subjects such as empathy, race, discrimination, and inclusion. In one class session, Dr. Taylor sums up the objectives of the class that align to the domains of Standard 6:

We all know the practical piece of why we're doing this - you're educators, we love kids, we love what we do in the business, because we care, we are lifelong learners. And we also want to learn more about ourselves, at least the ones that are here you want to get better, you want to know yourself better...But the reason also goes into it is standard six is a state standard now. And the standard reads as you can see, up on the screen, we are trying to create an opportunity for everybody to have voice for all of our students, regardless to gender, race, ethnicity, if they're ELL, if they're students with disability, I mean, we want to create an environment and we're hoping that you will walk away the goal is you'll walk away with tools, and some means to have conversations to make sure this happens in your class. And hey, share your learning with your peers too. You don't

have to limit it to just your class. But how do we begin to change the world? Because we are the world.

In a culminating activity in the last session, course participants were asked to present a lesson where they connected what they learned about culturally responsive practices with teachers and other students. It was an authentic representation of their preparation for culturally responsive practices. Educators were asked to identify a Standard of Learning (SOL), which are subject-based learning objectives for students in Virginia, as well as include an objective under Standard 6. Student quotes were embedded in the presentation and provided insight on their perspective of the lessons. Jayda and Alorah (School Counselors) both conducted lessons on empathy with students using a literacy connection. Cilicia taught a lesson with students with disabilities on an alternative curriculum and incorporated student choice throughout the lesson. Janae co-taught a lesson using the instructional strategy reciprocal teaching (scaffolded discussion technique that allows students to assume the role of the teacher), and explicitly taught vocabulary that students with cultural differences may have difficulty understanding. In Tiana's lesson, she gave students a voice in the lesson on social-emotional learning, and honored their request for incorporation of more group work during a Black History Escape Room activity. Autumn led a counseling lesson with students and incorporated journaling and drawing for students to self-reflect. Finally, Daija, who primarily works to support teachers instead of students, created a website for teachers to access electronic resources related to each objective under Standard 6. Throughout the culminating presentations, students commented in an online polling system to create a visual representation of the themes that collectively represented their lessons. Of the responses, the four main themes revealed were empathy, relationships, power, and students. The course participants

clearly connected their subject fields to culturally responsive practices, and their themes closely related to the themes of this study.

### **Phase 2: Interview Results (Qualitative)**

After the completion of the course, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the district-based course leaders, each lasting about 30 minutes. The questions focused on the partnership overall, the leader's role in the partnership, and the anti-discrimination course (Appendix E). In the next section, after providing demographics on the leaders I interviewed, I discuss the findings of the interviews with three leaders of the district-university partnership. The interviews support answering the two research questions: (1) What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership? (2) In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability? Of the 11 characteristics of sustainability identified by Thorskiltsen and Stein (1996) four themes were highly representative of the district-university partnership being studied: well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision making, and ongoing process of evaluation. In the subsequent sections, I first discuss the four sustainability themes, and then I discuss the connection between the local-social political context and the district-university partnership.

#### **Demographics of District-level Course Leaders**

The course leaders included in this study are two Black females (Courtney-Ann and Dr. Taylor) and one White male (Dr. Harrison) who were responsible for formulating the course at the district level in collaboration with the university. The male leader, Dr. Harrison, served as the superintendent of the rural school district for the past four years. He collaborated with Courtney-Ann (Equity Coordinator), Dr. Taylor (Education Consultant), and two additional university

partners (one White male and one White female) to develop a college course for educators to gain insight on culturally responsive practices. The following section will discuss the specific role that each leader served in the partnership, as described through responses to the interview questions.

### **Theme 1: Well-defined Administrative Structure**

A well-defined administrative structure is characterized by the way in which partners organize to work together (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). The leadership structure should include an issue-oriented leader and an advisory committee (representative of both sides of the partnership) that has decision-making responsibilities (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). Throughout the interview, the three leaders identified that each leader had a clear role based on their professional strengths. Dr. Harrison was identified as the issue-oriented leader who built the course and partnership out of identified issues his school district faced. A statewide evaluation requirement, “Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices” influenced the district recognizing they needed to meet the cultural needs of diverse learners, while also developing educators who demonstrated characteristics of cultural responsiveness. Dr. Harrison was the connection between the school district (superintendent) and the university (adjunct professor) as he was employed by both. He built the advisory committee with two representatives from the school district and two representatives from the university. Dr. Harrison acknowledged that the university has a strong commitment to diversity and equity, which made them an ideal partner for this project. He stated that if they did not share this commitment then he would not have sought their partnership for this course.

While Dr. Harrison initially led the formation of the partnership, the leader of the course was unanimously identified as Dr. Taylor. Dr. Harrison chose Dr. Taylor because of the

sensitivity of the matter in the district's social climate, and her past connection to the school district. Not only was she a former teacher and district leader, she had worked with the teachers previously in her current consultation role.

Courtney-Ann was also chosen as a course leader to bring a connection between the school district and course content. She is the district's Equity Coordinator who serves the district by collaborating with teachers to support creating equitable school environments. Through this role, she was able to provide information to the partnership about what teachers needed. In addition, she had a strong connection to the community and was able to inform the partners on the current events that would impact the course. For example, during the design and planning of the course, which occurred throughout the semester, Courtney-Ann would support the team in thinking through what would be acceptable to address based on the social climate.

## **Theme 2: Clear Focus**

A partnership that has a clear focus works to provide clarity of purpose and goals (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). Dr. Harrison identified the mission as integrating cultural responsive teaching and Standard 6, and exploring how to inspire students to learn through non-traditional methods. Likewise, Dr. Taylor acknowledged the focus was to form a partnership that could give teachers tools to feel comfortable helping students navigate discussions of race and discrimination. In addition, a goal was for teachers to increase self-awareness of their own biases and to share what they learn to their community. In a related manner, Courtney-Ann identified three goals: forming a partnership with the university, encouraging teachers to be better for the community, and understanding the plight of those whose voices often are not heard. The course leaders shared a common clear focus which supports a sustainable partnership.

**Theme 3: Shared Decision Making**

Shared decision making encourages all course leaders to be actively involved in the process of making decisions and that process should be clearly articulated (Galligani, 1990; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). Courtney-Ann recognized that though the course leaders had identified roles, there was not one ultimate leader, as everyone had a voice and it was evident that their input mattered. She also stated that the focus of the partnership was a joint decision. The team met regularly and planned the course in chunks. They collaborated to design the course as a whole and design the class sessions. Dr. Harrison stated there was equity in the roles of each leader. The professional and personal experiences shaped how each leader's voice supported the creation of the course and partnership.

**Theme 4: Ongoing Process of Evaluation**

An ongoing process of evaluation supports analysis of the implementation, process, and outcomes (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). Dr. Harrison identified himself as the primary evaluator of the course and partnership due to the nature of his role as superintendent of the school district. However, the course leaders indicated that seeking feedback throughout the course was an important part of building the course. One process of seeking feedback was through the pre-survey and post-survey. The responses of the surveys were used to shape and redirect the course curriculum. Dr. Taylor also identified that focus groups and observations were also used as part of the course development process. The focus groups supported creating an outline of the main concepts that should be a priority for the course. The teachers' focus group responses were used to design the course and determined the tools that teachers received in order to implement culturally responsive strategies in their classrooms.

Dr. Taylor explained the process of collaboration among the course leaders which included using teacher feedback and class observations to design two or three sessions at a time. Two interviewees did note that at the beginning of the course, the focus deviated due to the influence of a cultural event in the school district. However, the team met and evaluated the course plan to stay devoted to the primary focus. Finally, feedback from the school board was influential in changing the dynamic of the course. Several members of the school board in conjunction with the community were not supportive of the course, specifically its topic area of cultural responsiveness. Courtney-Ann acknowledged that their input impacted the degree to which topics were discussed because the leaders did not want teachers to fear that participation would have an impact on their employment. In the following section, I will discuss the social-political influence on the district-university partnership and anti-discrimination course.

### **Social-Political Influence**

Using interviews with the course leaders, I answer the research question: What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership? The course leaders provided insight on the impact of the historic racial struggle of the county and the need for culturally responsive educators to support the student population (42.9% Black and 49.8% White). The anti-discrimination and social justice course started in August 2021 and ended in February 2022, covering a significant political transition both at the local and state level. The school district's superintendent, Dr. Harrison stated, "The local political context cannot be overstated." In November 2020, 76% of voters supported a confederate monument in the city center remaining as a permanent fixture in the county. This amplified a racial divide that had been ingrained in the county's history. Dr. Taylor explained the county is "mired in a lot of the old traditional beliefs and thoughts, and it's very

common to see the Confederate flag flying on the back of a truck or hanging in someone's yard. If you read our local paper, it's clear that there are several people who still believe the inferiority of different people.” Furthermore, Courtney-Ann shared:

I think we live in a community that is built on racism, and I can't say it any other way. And if I didn't use the word racism, I would use the word power. Those who are in power continue to be in power when you teach others to be in power. And so therefore, you continue to step on those who feel powerless, or whose voices are not heard. And I think that sets the tone for where we are, and not to mention being afraid. I think we have a community that's afraid that when you don't feel the same as those who are in power, you tend to back down rather than speak up. That's the climate here. I guess it's the haves and the have nots. Until we change that climate, we're gonna continue to go in the circle that we're going in.

The Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices” evaluation requirement for educators influenced the need for teacher training in the area of cultural responsiveness. In 2020, State Superintendent, Dr. James Lane, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), released the “Navigating EdEquityVA Roadmap” which outlined resources and strategies to eliminate opportunity gaps that influence historically excluded populations. In March 2021, VDOE added “Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices” to the state’s teacher evaluation standards. In November 2021, VDOE provided guidance on cultural competency training to include four domains: culturally competent self-reflection, culturally competent pedagogy and practice, culturally competent learning environments, and culturally competent community engagement. In addition, this document provided suggestions for professional development and training that school divisions



must provide to cover the four domains prior to the 2022-2023 school year. The district-university partnership offered a college course on anti-discrimination and social justice in an attempt to satisfy the state's requirement to train educators by this deadline. However, Dr. Harrison shared that fulfilling the state requirement was only a small part of the social-political context:

So that was our goal, State Standard 6, integrating that into a way to where we could teach culturally relevant teaching, which we use broadly to also mean equity, diversity, and inclusion. Which I mean, honestly, when we started, we didn't see the depth of the cultural war that we were going to be in.

Dr. Harrison explained “equity became a bad word in the summer of 2021.” The school board was largely unsupportive of the anti-discrimination and social justice course. This was part of a national event where equity initiatives were combatted by local communities and school board meetings became inundated by citizens expressing their dissent or support. In January 2022, Virginia's new elected governor, Glenn Youngkin, took office and the support for the culturally responsive initiative decreased significantly.

The interviews with the course leaders provided additional insight on the cultural war occurring in the school district. In the first month of class, there was a gang fight that impacted the trajectory of the course. Courtney-Ann explained that the course leaders became more careful on the topics presented as teachers feared retaliation for participating in the course. Unfortunately, the course leaders did receive backlash for their role in offering the course to the school district, including threats, negative news articles about them, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, and personal and professional legal cases.

Coinciding with the end of the anti-discrimination and social justice course, a new Republican governor, replacing a Democrat, entered office and Dr. Harrison resigned from his position as superintendent. This created some uncertainty regarding whether the district-university partnership would continue in the future. While the district-university partnership had strong elements of well-defined administrative structure, clear focus on goals, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation, the social-political influence had the potential to overcome these structures. As Courtney-Ann shared, “I’m unsure if our (new) superintendent has the same desire that Dr. Harrison had for equity, and not to mention the governor. I really think that the governor’s voice will make a difference.” In agreement, Dr. Taylor stated,

Do I think this school district will be the continued focus? Not sure, because we have a new superintendent and with new leadership comes change and new people have different focuses. So, I do think it will continue. Do I think it will continue with this school district? That’s a big giant question mark right now.

Change in leadership is predicted to create a hindrance to the well-defined administrative structure and clear focus that was characterized by the current district-university partnership.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the results and findings for the four research questions associated with a study on a district-university partnership to provide an anti-discrimination and social justice course to educators in a rural school district. The course participants included 11 women (four White and seven Black) and one Black man. The course participants’ level of teaching experience included: 0-10 years (8%), 11-20 years (50%), and 21 years or more (42%) (Table 6; Figure 3). The data collection process for this study included a pre-survey and post-survey with course participants, video-based observations of course

participants' discourse, and three interviews with course leaders. The following research questions were posed and answered through the data collection process:

1. How, if at all, does a teacher's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
2. In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
3. What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
4. In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

For the first question, How, if at all, does a teacher's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course? the data showed that participants' self-reflection changed after participating in the course. All eight survey questions indicated that participants' self-reflection demonstrated an increase in preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices. The top five areas with the largest average difference between the two surveys included reviewing and assessing curricula and instructional materials, developing instructional examples to scaffold for learning, using non-traditional discourse styles to communicate in culturally responsive ways, identifying classroom resources that incorporate diverse voices, and locating resources to learn about the history of discrimination in America. Overall, in the area of comfort with race discussions, participants indicated that participation in the course improved their ability to have race discussions with students and coworkers. However, participants were still concerned with students going home and sharing they discussed race issues in the classroom. After participation, none of the

educators indicated they were “not at all comfortable” for three questions of the survey: talking with students about major news events related to race, talking with coworkers about major news events related to race, and answering questions students ask about African American history and culture. In the third area of empathic concern and perspective taking, course participants had a strong foundation in this area, but did indicate some growth after participating in the course. Growth was demonstrated in the areas of perspective taking (“before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place,” “I believe that there are two sides to every argument and try to look at them both,” and “I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person’s point of view”) and empathic concern, (“I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person”).

For the second research question, In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking? I found that discourse in addition to empathy is reflective of two sub-themes: voice and counter-storytelling. Participants acknowledged that their students’ voices, especially those who have been historically excluded, are often silenced in the educational environment. They recognized that their role as culturally responsive educators is being an advocate so their voices can be amplified. In addition, educators acknowledged the importance of counter-storytelling. Whether through lived experiences or in literary examples, the counter-narratives provided an avenue to self-reflect and dismantle biases.

The third question was What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership? Interviews revealed that the school district is in a county that had significant racial beliefs embedded throughout its social and political history, which impacted the educators participating in the course. In addition,

politically, the new teacher evaluation standard, Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices, influenced the superintendent creating the district-university partnership to form the anti-discrimination and social justice course. The course met state requirements to provide cultural competency training in four domains: culturally competent self-reflection, culturally competent pedagogy and practice, culturally competent learning environments, and culturally competent community engagement. Socially, course leaders and participants in the course went against the grain of their peers and the community to learn strategies to demonstrate dispositions of culturally responsive educators.

Finally, the answer to the fourth research question, In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability? is answered through evidence of four elements (well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation). The three course leaders collaborated to create an administrative structure that was reflective of each members' strengths. Though the topics of the course were developed throughout the course meetings, the team developed a clear focus on supporting teachers in developing culturally responsive dispositions. The team of course leaders met regularly to share the decision-making role throughout the development of the course. Surveys, focus groups, course dialogue, and community input were used as a means for ongoing process of evaluation that impacted the direction and topics of the course. In the following chapter, I will use the aforementioned findings to share implications for this research study.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

### **Overview**

Culturally responsive teaching is truly good teaching, reflective of the diverse cultures in the classroom and supportive of advocating for students (Ladson-billings, 1995). Culturally responsive classrooms cannot exist without educators who acknowledge and celebrate the differences students bring to the classroom and then reflect on how to incorporate those diverse voices into the curriculum. The research included in this dissertation matters not only because it provides an avenue to give all students a voice within the education system, but also because it encourages educators to grow in their teaching capacity by using their own voice. I share the following quote from one of the course leaders as an authentic representation of why this research matters:

I think, probably my proudest moment, was not being afraid of my voice. I used to feel like my voice was very minute in all of this, but now I realized that my voice is very powerful. Even though it's just one voice, it is a very powerful voice. I think the class itself was a favorite part of my life. If I was to put it into words, it was very significant. I don't think I will ever forget the lessons that I learned in this class and from those who sometimes you see, when people have doctors beside their names and things like that, you see them in a different light. But to see that they also said, oh, Courtney-Ann you have a voice. As a matter of fact, your voice is just as important as ours, if not more important, because you are in the trenches, so you understand what is going on. So, I don't think I had a favorite moment. I think the class itself was my favorite moment in totality.

May this research open the door for others to continue to explore the value of their voices.

The following chapter is organized to provide an overview of the study including the findings and implications for future research. First, I provide a restatement of the problem that provoked this study, followed by a summary of the methodology and findings. Following that section, I provide theoretical implications and implications for practice. The following research questions guided this dissertation study:

1. How, if at all, does an educator's critical self-reflection change over time after participation in the anti-discrimination and social justice course?
2. In what ways, if any, does participant discourse within the anti-discrimination and social justice course demonstrate empathic concern and/or perspective taking?
3. What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?
4. In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

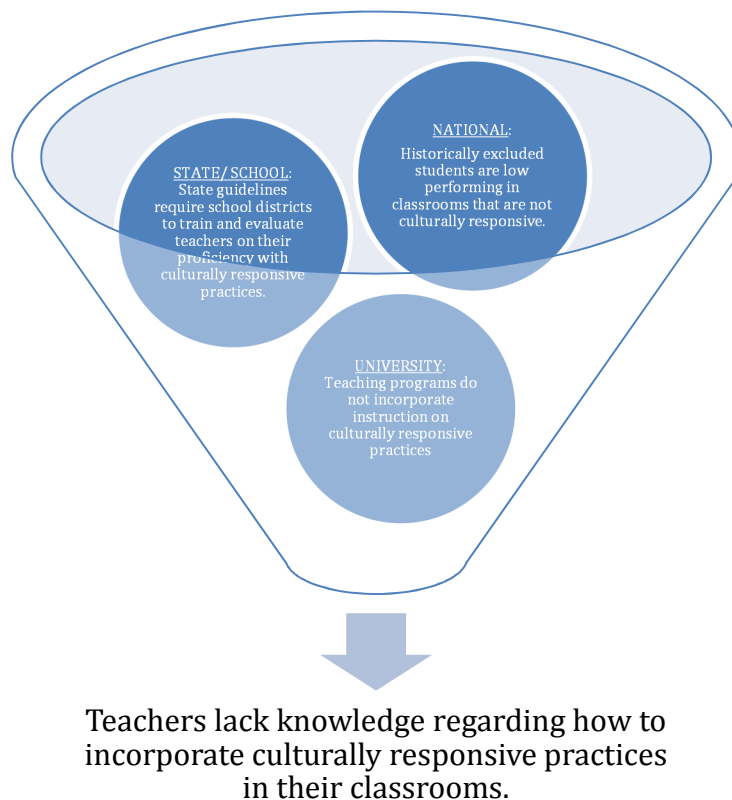
### **Restatement of the Problem**

The problem that prompts this study stems from combined issues at the national, state, and university level (Figure 13). Nationally, there has been substantial data illustrating that historically excluded students are not reaching the academic outcomes of their White peers. At the state level, Virginia has acknowledged that teachers need to incorporate more culturally responsive practices within the classroom, and has tasked school districts with evaluating teachers according to this standard. Additionally, at the school level, schools are tasked with providing training to teachers on culturally responsive practices. Teaching programs at the university level often fail to incorporate explicit teaching on culturally responsive practices, so teachers joining the profession lack training in this area. These combined issues have funneled

down to a main issue affecting teachers and students: teachers lack knowledge regarding how to incorporate culturally responsive practices in their classrooms (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

*Problem of Practice*



In this dissertation, I study a potential solution to the problem posed. Through a district-university partnership, educators participated in a college-level course that focused on principles that support incorporating culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Course instruction included providing resources, studying diverse literature, and engaging in discourse that included discussions on race and empathy.

### **Summary of Methodology**

I conducted a mixed method case study using a sequential explanatory design with a collection of both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (video-based observations and interviews)



data. Participants in the study included 12 course participants (8 Black and 4 White educators) and three course leaders (two black women and one White man). The course participants' level of teaching experience included: 0-10 years (1 participant), 11-20 years (6 participants), and 21 years or more (5 participants; Table 6; Figure 3). First, I used descriptive statistics to compare the pre-survey and post-survey data to answer the research question related to an educator's critical self-reflection in the areas of empathy, preparation for culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices, and comfort with race discussions.

Second, I viewed recordings of the college course to analyze the course participants' discourse. I transcribed the course classes using an online program (Otter.ai), and then analyzed the data through discourse analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I used deductive coding of the participants' discourse during the anti-discrimination and social justice course based on the definitions of empathic concern and perspective taking (Davis, 1980). Then, I used inductive coding of the discourse to reveal two sub-themes: voice and counter-storytelling.

Finally, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with course leaders to support answering two research questions related to sustainability and the local-political context. The interviews were conducted over an online platform (Google Meet) and then transcribed using an online program (Otter.ai). I used deductive coding to analyze themes based on Thorskildsen and Stein's (1996) 11 elements of sustainability. After the four themes were identified (well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation), three peer researchers coded the transcriptions according to the four themes to increase validity. In addition, I used inductive coding and narrative analysis to answer the research question associated with how the local-political context related to the development of

the district-university partnership, which also revealed a relation to the sustainability of the partnership.

### **Summary of Findings**

Consistent with the literature review, the findings revealed that participation in the course supported educators in the areas of self-reflection, empathy, and counter-storytelling. Based on the study's research questions and the subsequent data collected, five findings were revealed:

1. After course participation, survey analysis supported that teachers' critical self-reflection indicated changes in three areas: empathic concern and perspective taking, preparation for culturally responsive practices, and comfort with race discussions.
2. Course participants' discourse was reflective of empathic concern and perspective taking and two sub-themes (voice and counter-storytelling).
3. Interviews provided evidence that the district-university partnership demonstrated four elements of sustainability (well-defined administrative structure, clear focus, shared decision-making, and ongoing process of evaluation).
4. The interviews shared that the new teacher evaluation standard, Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices, influenced the superintendent creating the district-university partnership to form the anti-discrimination and social justice course.
5. Interviews revealed the school district is in a community that has a social and political history that includes significant racial barriers, which impacted the development of the course and the district-university partnership's sustainability.

Teachers' critical self-reflection, in combination with field experiences, critical classroom discourse, and engaging in literature about race and justice is an essential part of developing teacher dispositions that are reflective of culturally responsive practices (Howard, 2003; Warren,

2018). Empathy is not only a way to view students, but also a manner to view oneself through a new lens (Warren, 2018). This case study supported the research that discussion on race should be linked with opportunities to encourage empathy (empathic concern and perspective taking). In addition, it adds to the body of literature a case study of a district-university partnership in a rural setting that incorporated elements of sustainability during the formulation and implementation of the partnership. As research stated systemic challenges such as accountability pressures and hindrances to change affected the sustainability of the district-university partnership (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015; Miller et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2018). While the social-political context (racial divide of the community and Standard 6) was the catalyst for starting the course, it may also be why the course potentially doesn't continue within the school district.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Critical race theory emphasizes three arguments:

Racism has been a normal daily face of life in society...challenges the experience of White European Americans as the normative standard... through the use of literary narrative knowledge and story-telling to challenge the existing social construction of race...attacks the inherent belief in the law to create an equitable just society (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260).

Using this lens, the district-university partnership provided opportunities to acknowledge racial differences and interact with literary narratives that had diverse perspectives. The course discourse displayed powerful moments of vulnerability and awareness that dismantled preconceived notions. Teachers were provided the opportunity to self-reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes which they bring to their classrooms and examine its impact. Those of different

racers were able to discuss with their colleagues cultural differences in a non-combative manner. Educators gained a better understanding of their students based on acknowledging their cultural differences. However, it is important to note that though this research uses critical race theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the data collection, the tenets of critical race theory were not explicitly used as a feature of the college course that provided professional development. The term *critical race theory* created negative tension within the school district based on negative political press on the topic. Thus, the benefits of the course were skewed by preconceived notions about the topics and purpose of the course.

Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 2010). It is this type of medicine that was the aim of the district-university partnership. The county of the school district held the pain of racial oppression, and this course offered an avenue to provide the medicine to the school community. The course's discourse supported the literature that states opportunities for storytelling were essential to dismantling power structure and constructing a reality that maintains power structures (Delgado, 1989). In addition, this research highlights that storytelling is a crucial part of perspective taking and giving voice to historically excluded racial groups. When silenced voices are not active members of discussions, only a limited portion of the story can be reflected. The course's discourse indicated that race was an important part of both counter-storytelling and advocating for silenced voices. It illustrated the benefits of openly talking about race.

### **Implications**

“Students are asking us to look critically not only at structural conditions, but also at individual attitudes and behaviors. This implies that we need to undertake a total transformation not only of our schools, but also of our hearts and minds” (Nieto, 1994, p. 208). I acknowledge

in this research that past reforms (standards-based education movement, No Child Left Behind, Common Core State Initiative, and Every Student Succeeds Act) have failed to address the challenges and pervasive performance gaps of historically excluded student populations. While change often involves the policy level, the changes needed to create more inclusive, culturally responsive schools will not occur based solely on policy. The systemic changes will occur because of educators who respond empathetically to the cultural needs within the classroom. This research reveals that cultural responsiveness is a journey with guiding principles, such as empathy, rather than a finish line to obtain. Through this lens, implications of this research can be shared for school districts and universities individually and as a partnership.

### **Implications for School Districts**

While the state of Virginia acknowledged the need for teachers to be evaluated according to a standard of culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices, it did not provide a connection to what practices would meet this standard. This was left to the school district to translate the given policy and determine how that would look for their teachers and classrooms. However, school districts should be cautious about providing a narrow definition of both culture and cultural responsiveness. Narrow definitions may further create exclusionary practices that will impact additional marginalized student groups. Previous research illustrates that historically excluded students have been negatively impacted by standardizations that fail to consider their cultural needs when designing instruction (NAEP, 2020). This research highlights that instead of standardization, school districts' professional development should be focused on addressing biases, encouraging empathic concern, and providing opportunities for perspective taking. Teachers' critical self-reflection will be a crucial component to developing culturally responsive classrooms. Therefore, school districts should aim to empower teachers, not through narrow

policies, but through professional development that encourages foundational skills such as critical self-reflection.

Mandates to follow a standardized curriculum hinder teachers' ability to craft a classroom environment that is unique to their classroom needs. Therefore, one recommendation for school districts is to support teachers in understanding curriculum design so that they can incorporate culturally responsive practices while still meeting the state standards. Frequently, curriculum is designed to center the dominant culture, and standardized testing follows this same pattern, contributing to continual gaps in student performance (Gay, 2010). Instead, school districts should support teachers in identifying silenced voices and designing lessons that promote inclusive practices for all student groups. Another recommendation is for school districts to conduct a curriculum review to modify content to be more reflective of their student population. By examining the current curriculum materials within schools and incorporating teachers in this process, school districts can empower teachers with an understanding of processes that support culturally responsive practices rather than simply a checklist of culturally responsive activities in a lesson plan.

### **Implications for Universities**

Research has provided the field of education with definitions and case studies that highlight the importance of culturally responsive and equitable practices (Bell & Clark, 1998; Brown, 2003; 2004; Bui & Fagen, 2013; Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Christal, 2003; Conrad et al., 2002; 2004; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Duran, 1998; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Feger, 2006; Gutierrez, 2000; Gutstein, 2003; Hefflin, 2002; Hollie, 2001; Howard 2001a; 2001b; Hubert, 2013; Hyland, 2005; Jacob, 1995; Leonard et al., 2005; Martell, 2013; Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Newell & Sweet, 1999; Robbins, 2001; Stovall, 2006; Tate,

1995). However, the answer to what cultural responsiveness looks like is ambiguous at both the policy and practitioner level. Thus, universities can serve an important role in translating the research into practice (Barnett, 2005; Levine, 2005). One implication of the research for universities is to use course discourse to facilitate the process of acknowledging cultural biases and providing opportunities for critical self-reflection. This can be done throughout teacher preparation courses, not simply in an isolated course devoted to learning about culturally responsive practices. Modeling of culturally responsive teaching practices within courses and using culturally diverse literary examples are ways to break down the illusive terms to concrete examples in action. Along with opportunities for discourse, teacher reflection and field experiences are necessary features of providing educators with the foundational skills needed for designing culturally responsive classes. Teacher preparation programs are a crucial catalyst for developing educators who demonstrate culturally responsive dispositions.

### **Implications for District-University Partnerships**

The findings of this research provided three implications for district-university partnerships in the areas of sustainability, recruitment, and field experience. First, this research provides an examination of the sustainable elements of a district-university. Findings revealed the importance of considering the local-political context when building and sustaining a partnership. The district-university partnership within the study had four main elements of sustainability including an ongoing evaluation process, clear focus, well-defined administrative structure, and shared decision-making (Thorskildsen & Stein, 1996). However, the research illustrated that partnerships do not happen in a vacuum; individuals who are part of the partnership should consider their local social-political context during the design and

implementation process, and address those needs during the planning process to support finding solutions.

Second, district-university partnerships can be a strong force in recruiting diverse candidates. Research indicates that a “demographic divide” (a significant racial and cultural knowledge gap between students and educators) is becoming increasingly wider as more White teachers are hired and more minorities represent the K-12 student population (Gay & Howard, 2001; NAEP, 2020). The district-university partnership in this study was intentional in their commitment to recruit diverse candidate. The school district intentionally appointed Black females to be the face of the program, which when compared to 67% of course participants being Black provides implications that the race of course leaders matter. Further, the university was recognized as having a commitment to being a minority serving institution because it serves over 25% of African American undergraduate students. As a minority serving institution, the university regularly incorporates culturally responsive practices in their degree programs. Their previous experience allowed them to be prepared to meet the school district’s needs to provide professional development in a timely fashion. District-university partnerships should intentionally create systems to recruit minority candidates, and provide a clear method of support as they enter the field of education. Universities can support this process by having a strong partnership with school districts throughout the entire teacher development process, from recruitment during high school to professional development once employed as an educator.

Finally, in this case study, educators were able to connect what they learned about culturally responsive practices in the course to field experiences in the classroom. Field experiences can start as early as high school as part of career exploration programs and be supported by universities to provide mentorship to students. In addition, a district-university



partnership can improve the student-teacher internship experience by having a specific district that will work to embed coursework topic areas into authentic experiences. This collaboration will build high-quality teaching candidates who are prepared for diverse classrooms and willing to demonstrate culturally responsive dispositions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I have identified four limitations of this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the study experienced time constraints that impacted my ability to access research participants. Due to their professional contract, participants were unavailable in the summer months which impacted my ability to have follow up interviews or focus groups to gain an additional perspective of the course's impact. Second, the video-based observations were conducted by viewing recordings of the classes when in whole group discussions. However, there were opportunities for the course participants to break into smaller groups and discuss the topics more in depth, and these breakout sessions were not part of the recordings. Thus, while valuable observations were made of the course's discourse during the whole group sessions, there were missed opportunities to observe the discourse of participants when in smaller groups with their peers. Future research should consider these limitations, too, and consider ways to inform technology departments and companies to allow for recording of breakout rooms. Third, there was limited prior research on culturally responsive teacher development in a rural school district using a district-university partnership. Thus, I was unable to rely on previous case studies to guide this research. Finally, I acknowledge my own biases as part of a historically excluded racial group that impacted the lens I used during the analysis of the data. In addition, I acknowledge that I am a novice researcher who has limited experience in conducting case study research. However, through the use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework

and using peer reviewers in the coding process, I aimed to limit the effect on the reliability and validity of the study.

### **Conclusion**

The first chapter of this dissertation provided a brief overview of the study and highlighted the problem of performance gaps between racial groups that exist at the national, state, and local level. District-university partnerships focused on providing professional development on cultural responsiveness is a potential remedy to this problem. In the second chapter, I provided an overview of the current literature in the areas of district-university partnerships, the conceptual framework of cultural education, and the theoretical framework of critical race theory. The third chapter outlines the methodology of the research study, including using a case study approach and a thematic analysis of survey data, interviews, and video-based observations. Within the fourth chapter is a presentation of the research findings based on the research questions. The findings revealed the importance of critical self-reflection, empathy, sustainability, and social-political context throughout the formulation and implementation of the course on cultural responsiveness led by district-university partnership. Finally, this chapter provided an overview of the implications and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The systemic racial trauma that plagues communities and transfers into schools cannot be ignored. It has an impact on every facet of the educational policies, practices, and structures. Through this dissertation research, I examined a collaborative approach to use empathy and discussions about race and culture to create more inclusive classroom environments for students. The research questions focused on an analysis of empathy, cultural responsiveness, sustainability, social-political contexts, and district-university partnerships. The findings

supported the current literature, but echoed that more research is needed in this area to support translating theory to practice, for both pre-service and in-service educators. The needs of students are diverse and schools must be responsive to these needs through continual learning and flexibility in practices. The development of cultural responsiveness is not a goal to be achieved, but a continuous devotion to an evolving process. It is a commitment to using empathic concern and perspective taking to analyze the students within the classroom, and designing an educational plan that is responsive to their needs. In conclusion, I leave the reader with this final quote in reflection of the journey we took throughout this research study: “Let what began in exhaustion end in hope for ourselves, our field, and our worlds” (Dover et al., 2018, p. 238).

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## Appendix A

### Initial Participant Recruitment Email and Replies: Interview

Title: Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators  
in a Rural Setting

Dear XXXX,

I hope that your school year is going smoothly, and that this message finds you safe and healthy. My name is Trenice Durio and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am currently conducting a research study for my dissertation to explore the district-university partnership focused on developing culturally responsive school educators that you were a part of forming.

I am contacting you because you were a valuable part of establishing the district-university partnership and can provide information about how the partnership formed and developed throughout the implementation of the course. I would like to conduct an interview with you and two other leaders in the partnership, lasting approximately 60 minutes via a videoconference (Zoom or Google Meet) interview. Your identity will be kept confidential, all transcripts will be deidentified, and no other than members other than myself and my dissertation chair, Dr. Rachel White will have access to your interview transcripts.

If you are willing and able to participate in an interview, please let us know by replying to me, Trenice Durio with your availability between May 16 and June 9. If you agree to participate, I will follow up with a consent form for your consideration.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to reach out and I'd be happy to answer them!

All the best,

SIGNATURE

#### **If no/denial**

Hi [Title + Last Name],

Thank you very much for responding to our invitation. I completely understand that these are incredibly busy and challenging times for principals across the state. I will remove you from our sample selection process.

I hope you have a great week/day/weekend!

[Signature]

**If yes/acceptance**

Dear [Title + Last Name],

Thank you so much for your willingness to work with us as an interview participant in this study. Given the available times you have provided, I have scheduled you for a Zoom interview with [insert name] on [insert date and time].

The link to the Zoom room where the interview takes place is: [insert link].

In preparation for the interview, I would like to ask you to please review the attached consent form. If possible, please sign (e-signature is accepted) and return the consent form to me prior to the Zoom interview. I will then sign the form and we will provide a completed copy to you. If you have any questions or concerns with the form, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Looking forward to speaking with you soon!

[Signature]

**If no response after 1 week**

Title: Follow-up Reminder - Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting

Email: [insert e-mail]

CC: [rswwhite@odu.edu](mailto:rswwhite@odu.edu)

Dear [Title + Last Name],

[Something nice lol...e.g., I hope you have had a great week thus far, and that your Thursday is off to a great start!] I am following up on an initial invitation sent last week asking if you would be willing to participate in an interview as part of my dissertation research to explore the district-university partnership focused on developing culturally responsive school leaders that you were an integral part in forming.

We would be grateful to have an opportunity to learn more about your experiences and perceptions as they relate to the district-university partnership via an approximately 60-minute videoconference (Zoom or Google Meet) interview. All interview data will remain confidential, all transcripts will be deidentified, and no one other than members of the research team would have access to your interview transcripts.

If you are willing and able to participate in an interview, please let us know by replying to me, and include a few dates and times between May 16 - June 9 that would work well for you to schedule an interview.

If you would like to discuss this study in more detail, please contact me. If you agree to participate, we will follow up with a consent form for your consideration.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to reach out and I'd be happy to answer them!

All the best,  
Trenice Durio

cc: Dr. Rachel White,

**If no response after 2 weeks**

Title: Final Reminder: Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting

Email: [insert e-mail]

CC: [rswwhite@odu.edu](mailto:rswwhite@odu.edu)

Dear [Title + Last Name],

[Something nice...e.g., I hope your day is off to a great start!] I am sending a final follow up e-mail to invite you to participate in an interview as part of my dissertation research to explore the district-university partnership focused on developing culturally responsive school leaders that you were an integral part in forming.

We would be grateful to have an opportunity to learn more about your experiences and perceptions as they relate to the district-university partnership via an approximately 60-minute videoconference (Zoom or Google Meet) interview. All interview data will remain confidential, all transcripts will be deidentified, and no one other than members of the research team would have access to your interview transcripts.

If you are willing and able to participate in an interview, please let us know by replying to me, and include a few dates and times between May 16 - June 9 that would work well for you to schedule an interview.

If you would like to discuss this study in more detail, please contact me. If you agree to participate, we will follow up with a consent form for your consideration.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to reach out and I'd be happy to answer them!

All the best,  
Trenice Durio

cc: Dr. Rachel White, [rswhite@odu.edu](mailto:rswhite@odu.edu)

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Agreement for Interview

#### INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT: INTERVIEW

**Study Title:** Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting

**Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study. Each person choosing to participate must sign an Informed Consent Agreement.**

**Introduction:** The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The name of this research project is “Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting.” This research will be conducted remotely.

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this case study is to examine the formulation and outcomes of a district-university partnership established to develop and offer a college-level course focused on anti-discrimination, equity and inclusion, and social justice in schools. The focus will be a district-university partnership in which faculty at one university worked with leaders and educators located in a rural school district to collaboratively develop a course to meet the needs of the local district. In addition, it will examine how educators’ perspective and instructional practices were impacted by participation in the anti-discrimination college course

**What you will do in the study:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you will participate in an interview about formulation and sustainability of the district-university partnership. The interview will be conducted remotely via videoconference or telephone, which will be agreed upon between the researcher and interviewee(s).

**Time required:** Your participation will last for approximately 60 minutes.

**Exclusionary criteria:** You should be a teacher participant in the anti-discrimination and social justice college course for at least seven class sessions. Non-participants in the course are not eligible to participate in this study.

**Risks:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face exceptionally minimal risks of being burdened by taking time to participate in the interview, and possibly feeling slightly uncomfortable during conversations about race. The researchers are dedicated to reducing these risks by protecting your identity by assigning you a unique ID and taking care to remove any descriptors that would reveal your identity or that of your school in all transcriptions and data analysis and publication processes. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The information you provide us will help inform the formulation of district-university partnerships and development of culturally responsive educators.

**Confidentiality:** The researchers are committed to keeping private information, such as sensitive answers to interview questions, confidential. The researchers will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. All data files will be stored on a password-protected computer and all interview data will be encrypted. Access to the data will be strictly limited to the research team (myself and my dissertation chair). In addition, when results are written up and circulated, they will be done in a way that does not allow individuals to be identified (i.e., no identification of name or school). No personally identifiable information will be included. Identifiers will be removed, and the de-identified information will not be used for future research without additional informed consent from the subject. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All audio or audio-visual recording of your interview will be destroyed should you choose to withdraw.

**How to withdraw from the study:** If you want to withdraw from the study, you just need to tell your interviewer to stop the interview. If the interview has already concluded, you should contact the interview to convey your desire to withdraw from the study. There is no penalty for withdrawing. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the school district or university. Your decision will not cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be

entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

**Payment:** You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

**Using data beyond the study:** All video or audio recordings will be permanently destroyed within six months of the completion of this study.

**If you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher or dissertation chair by using the following contact information:**

Trenice S. Durio  
PO Box 2025  
Professional Studies  
Newport News, VA 23609  
Telephone: (757) 593-5874  
Email: [tduri002@odu.edu](mailto:tduri002@odu.edu)

Dr. Rachel S. White  
Darden College of Education and  
2306 Education Building  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529  
Telephone: (757) 683-6694  
Email: [rswwhite@odu.edu](mailto:rswwhite@odu.edu)

**Agreement:** I agree to participate in the research study described above.

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_


**You will receive a copy of this form for your records.**

## Appendix C

### Pre-Course Survey

#### ELS 697 - Pre-Class Survey

tduri002@odu.edu [Switch account](#)



\* Required

Email \*

Your email

First and Last Name

Your answer

Preferred Name (if other than legal name)

Your answer



**E-mail address**

\*\*\*IMPORTANT NOTE: Please provide the e-mail address that you would like to use for all course communication. Once the course begins, the e-mail you provide here will be associated with the course e-mail list-serv and will not be able to be changed.

Your answer

**Gender: How do you identify?**

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ No response
- ☐ Other:

**Race: How do you identify? (select all that apply)**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ White
- ☐ Prefer Not to Answer
- ☐ Other:





Ethnicity

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
- ☐ Not of Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Detailed professional title (e.g., elementary principal, fifth grade science teacher, middle school intervention specialist)

Your answer

Total number of years in this position at HCPS

Choose ▼

Total number of years in ANY position at HCPS

Choose ▼

Total number of years in field of education

Choose ▼



Currently, I feel adequately prepared to...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
infuse the curriculum and thematic units with the culture of students represented in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
review and assess curricula and instructional materials to determine their multicultural strengths and weakness, and relevance to students' interest and instructional needs, and revise them if necessary.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
develop a repertoire of instructional examples that are culturally familiar to students to serve as a scaffold for learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
use non-traditional discourse styles with culturally diverse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



students in an attempt to communicate in culturally responsive ways

establish expectations for appropriate classroom behavior in considering students' cultural backgrounds to maintain a conducive learning environment

develop and maintain positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationships with students

create a warm, supporting, safe, and secure classroom environment for culturally diverse students

create a community of learners by encouraging students to focus on collective work, responsibility,



and  
cooperation



Currently, I feel comfortable with...

	Not at all comfortable	Slightly comfortable	Mostly comfortable	Very comfortable
talking about my personal experiences <u>with</u> <u>coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my personal experiences <u>with</u> <u>students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my own identity and/or privilege <u>with coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my own identity and/or privilege <u>with students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about issues of racism <u>with coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about issues of racism <u>with students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
answering questions students ask <u>about African</u> <u>American history</u> <u>and culture</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
answering questions students ask <u>about American</u> <u>history and</u> <u>culture</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

identifying  
classrooms  
resources that  
incorporate and  
value diverse  
voices

locating  
resources to  
learn more about  
the history of  
discrimination in  
America

☐☐☐☐

talking with  
coworkers about  
major news  
events related to  
race

☐☐☐☐

talking with  
students about  
major news  
events related to  
race

☐☐☐☐

my students  
going home and  
talking to their  
parents about  
discussion  
related to race  
that occurred in  
school

☐☐☐☐

expressing what  
I believe in even  
if it puts me in a  
vulnerable  
position

☐☐☐☐

Currently, what would you say are the biggest barriers to engaging in difficult conversations about social justice, equity, and anti-discrimination with your students? If none, please leave blank.

Your answer

Currently, what would you say are the biggest barriers to incorporating racially and ethnically diverse perspectives into your day-to-day instruction? If none, please leave blank.

Your answer



Finally, please respond honestly about the extent to which the following statements describe you

	Does not describe me well at all	Describes me to some extent	Describes me very well
I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am often quite touched by things that I see happen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>





When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while

☐☐☐

I believe that there are two sides to every argument and try to look at them both

☐☐☐

If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments

☐☐☐

I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective

☐☐☐

I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision

☐☐☐

I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other person's" point of view

☐☐☐

Any other information you'd like to share about yourself or the course, or questions you may have?

Your answer




## Appendix D

### End-of-Course Course Survey

### ELS 697 - End-of-Course Survey

tduri002@odu.edu [Switch account](#)



\* Required

Email \*

Your email

Name

Your answer

I would describe my personal cultural identity as...

Your answer



After participating in this course, I feel adequately prepared to... \*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
infuse the curriculum and thematic units with the culture of students represented in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
review and assess curricula and instructional materials to determine their multicultural strengths and weakness, and relevance to students' interest and instructional needs, and revise them if necessary.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
develop a repertoire of instructional examples that are culturally familiar to students to serve as a scaffold for learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
use non-traditional discourse styles with culturally diverse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



students in an attempt to communicate in culturally responsive ways

establish expectations for appropriate classroom behavior in considering students' cultural backgrounds to maintain a conducive learning environment

develop and maintain positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationships with students

create a warm, supporting, safe, and secure classroom environment for culturally diverse students

create a community of learners by encouraging students to focus on collective work, responsibility,



and  
cooperation



After participating in this course, I feel comfortable with... \*

	Not at all comfortable	Slightly comfortable	Mostly comfortable	Very comfortable
talking about my personal experiences <u>with coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my personal experiences <u>with students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my own identity and/or privilege <u>with coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about my own identity and/or privilege <u>with students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about issues of racism <u>with coworkers</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talking about issues of racism <u>with students</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
answering questions students ask <u>about African American history and culture</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
answering questions students ask <u>about American history and culture</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please respond honestly about the extent to which the following statements describe your teaching practices. \*

	Does not describe me well at all	Describes me to some extent	Describes me very well
I use assignments, assessments, and instructional resources that allow my students to see themselves and see others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I review assignments, assessments, and instructional resources for historical accuracy, stereotypes, cultural relevance, and multiple perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use assignments, assessments, and instruction that connect content area knowledge to students' daily lives, including experiences with racism and injustice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use assignments, assessments, and instruction that develop my students' self-efficacy, civic responsibility, and motivation to challenge the status quo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I communicate that I have high expectations for	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



students of all backgrounds, even those who have historically struggled

I provide supports and scaffolds to ensure that all students are able to meet rigorous outcome goals.

☐☐☐

I help students recognize their responsibility to stand up against all forms of bias incidents in their everyday lives.

☐☐☐

I create learning environments that are safe, respectful, and inclusive for students of all identity groups.

☐☐☐

I involve families from various backgrounds in developing classroom and school activities.

☐☐☐

My behavioral and communication expectations take into account varying cultural norms.

☐☐☐



What impact, if any, did participation in ELS 697 have on your teaching practices this school year and in the future?

Your answer



Please respond honestly about the extent to which the following statements describe you

	Does not describe me well at all	Describes me to some extent	Describes me very well
I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am often quite touched by things that I see happen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while

☐☐☐

I believe that there are two sides to every argument and try to look at them both

☐☐☐

If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments

☐☐☐

I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective

☐☐☐

I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision

☐☐☐

I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other person's" point of view

☐☐☐

Beginning in 2022-23, all teachers will be evaluated on Performance Standard 6: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equitable Practices. The standard states: The teacher demonstrates a commitment to equity and provides instruction and classroom strategies that result in culturally inclusive and responsive learning environments and academic achievement for all students.



VDOE's examples of evidence for Standard 6 are included below. Please indicate your level of comfortability with being able to provide these various types of evidence \*

	Extremely comfortable	Moderately comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Barely comfortable	Not at all comfortable
Samples of culturally-diverse and inclusive instructional materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Samples of communication materials that are inclusive of the language, dialects, cultural, social and literacy needs of all students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Samples of connecting learning objectives to the social and cultural diversity of students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equity audit of instructional materials and resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differentiated supports and lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Examples of different ways for students to demonstrate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



content  
knowledge and  
understanding

Evaluation of:  
Academic  
Growth Data  
(including  
language  
proficiency for  
ELs), SEL  
Supports, Gap  
Data (including  
academic  
achievement, ID  
for supports or  
Giftedness),  
and/or  
Discipline Data



There is one supplemental performance indicator for for History & Social Studies teachers: 6.8 Encourages critical examination of content, paying particular attention to addressing power, systems, position, bias, stereotypes, assumptions, and dominant narratives.



If you teach history and/or social studies, please indicate your level of comfortability with being able to master supplemental indicator 6.8

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all comfortable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely comfortable

There are three supplemental performance indicators for science teachers: 6.8: Connects life experiences, diverse cultures, and communities to science using culturally rich resources, role models and examples. 6.9: Demonstrates how science and engineering practices can be used to collaborate and communicate with diverse groups to find solutions for societal problems. 6.10: Includes culturally- and socially-diverse resources when presenting materials in order to build a sense of unity in the classroom.



If you teach science, please indicate your level of comfortability with being able to master your supplemental indicators 6.8, 6.9, and 6.10

	Extremely comfortable	Moderately comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Barely comfortable	Not at all comfortable
6.8	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.9	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.10	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There is one supplemental performance indicator for teachers of special education: 6.8: Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics and effects of the cultural, physical, and social environment of students and their families



If you teach special education, please indicate your level of comfortability with being able to master supplemental indicator 6.8

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all comfortable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely comfortable



There are two supplemental performance indicators for teachers of world languages: 6.8 Facilitates experiences in which diverse cultural products, practices, and perspectives within students' own communities and throughout the world are explored and respected. 6.9 Demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and how experiences may be interpreted differently.



If you teach a world language, please indicate your level of comfortability with being able to master your supplemental indicators 6.8 and 6.9

	Extremely comfortable	Moderately comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Barely comfortable	Not at all comfortable
6.8	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.9	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>





Any other information you'd like to share about yourself or the course, or questions you may have? Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the course in future semesters?

Your answer

Page 1 of 1

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## Appendix E

### Sem-Structured Interview Protocol

#### Forming a District-University Partnership to Develop Culturally Responsive Educators in a Rural Setting

**Question #1:** What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?

**Question #2:** In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?

#### Introduce self + study

Hello everyone, my name is Trenice Durio. As you know, I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University, and in addition, I serve as an assistant principal at two elementary schools. I am grateful that you have joined me for this focus group session.

Today's interview will support my research in understanding how your school district and the university worked together to create the anti-discrimination and social justice course. Your input is crucial to my research in understanding how the partnership was developed, and what elements of sustainability were exhibited to support replication in the future.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

#### Recording Session

At this time, I will begin recording our session. The recordings will be used to transcribe our discussion at a later time, but your identity will be kept confidential during this process. The recordings will be permanently destroyed within 6 months of completing the study.

#### Consent Form

As a reminder, you received a consent form in a previous email.

*(Review the consent form, emphasize confidentiality.)*

**This consent included information about:**

- Purpose of the research study
- Your participation in the focus group which will cover your own self-reflection, discussions about race, and culturally responsive teaching practices
- This video conference will last approximately 60 minutes.
- Risks include sacrifice of time, and feeling slightly uncomfortable due to the nature of conversations about race.
- Confidentiality will be maintained, such as through removing identifiable private information, and storing data in a password-protected computer.
- Voluntary participation and you can withdraw at any time.
- No benefits or payments will be provided for participation.
- This recording will be permanently destroyed within 6 months of completing the study.

Please type your name and "yes" in the chat, if you agree to participate in the study.

### **Questions**

*[Items noted in italics are optional/secondary questions that can be used at the discretion of the interviewer.]*

*(Give about 3 minutes for each question.)*

**Let's start by discussing your overall experience from both the partnership and the course development. Please provide examples when possible.**

- What was your favorite memory (*or most proud of*) with the partnership? Example?
  - Course? Example?
- If you could change one thing about the partnership what would it be? Example?
  - Course? Example?

*(transition - let's talk a little bit about the partnership specifically)*

- What were the goals or vision for this partnership?
  - How did the group decide the goals?
- What was the leadership structure of the partnership?
  - Who was the leader?
  - What was each person's role?
  - Can you give examples?
- *District leaders:* Did you have any specific reasons for being interested in working with this particular university?
  - Were there any characteristics of the university that made it a good match for the school division? What are some examples?
- *University leader:* Did you have any specific reasons for being interested in working with this particular school division?
- Were there any characteristics of the school district that made it a good match for the university? What are some examples?
- What methods of evaluation were used throughout the partnership?
  - Feedback from the educators?
  - Feedback from the leaders?
  - Feedback from the district?
  - Feedback from the university?
- In the future, do you see this partnership continuing or developing further?
  - (if yes) What actions were started to continue this partnership?
  - (if no) What actions prevented the continuation of the partnership?

*(transition - let's talk a little bit about your role in the partnership specifically)*

- At the time of this partnership, what was your position in the school division (or university) and how it support the partnership?
  - Tell me about your career experiences that prepared you for this district-university partnership.
- What would you say is your primary role of involvement in this partnership?
  - Is there a particular reason why you pursued this role?
  - Who had the primary leadership role in this partnership?
- Are there aspects of your training, background or education that may impact your approach or involvement in the district-university partnership?
  - What about your local context – is there anything about your current context that you think impacts your involvement in the district-university partnership?

*(transition - let's talk a little bit about the course specifically)*

- From your perspective, what was the purpose of the course?
- Tell me a little about the climate of the school division and county that you feel contributed to the need for educators to participate in this antidiscrimination and social justice course.
  - Did you feel there was a need for this partnership? Can you share examples of this?
- In the creation of the course, how were decisions made? What was the process?
  - Can you give examples?

Anything else to share related to the research questions:

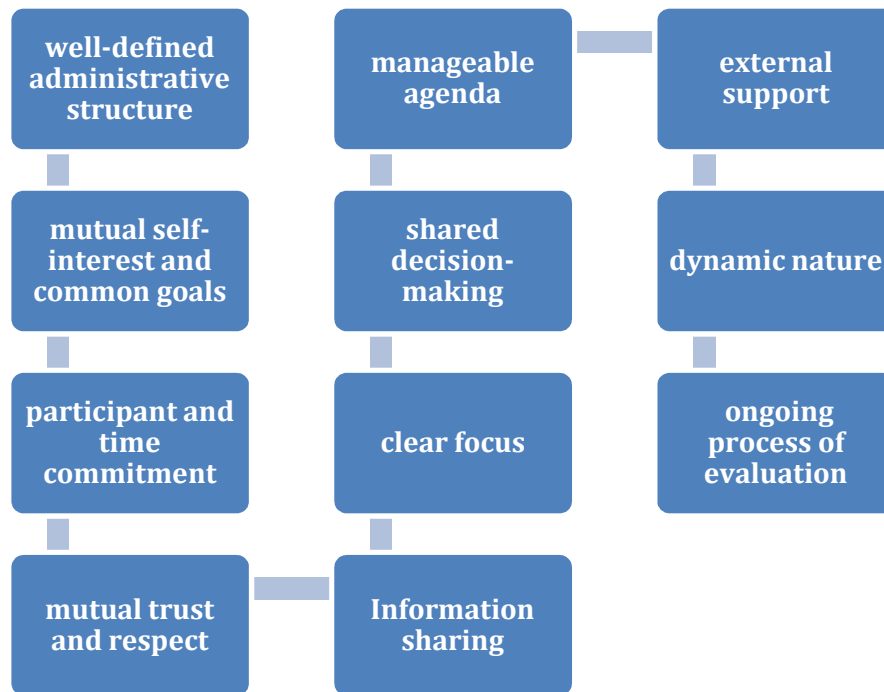
**Question #1: What is the relationship between the local social-political context of the school district and development of the district-university partnership?**

**Question #2: In what ways, if any, does the district-university partnership demonstrate elements of sustainability?**

**Thank participants for their time!**

## Appendix F

### Coding Structure: Elements of Sustainability



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Trenice Durio is a Coordinator of Student Services in Yorktown, Virginia. Her research interests include culturally responsiveness, equity, inclusion, professional development, and district-university partnerships.

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Doctor of Philosophy: Educational Leadership, August 2021.  
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

Educational Specialist: Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, May 2018.  
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

Master of Science in Education, May 2010  
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