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# The Perceptions of Teachers in a K-8 School on the Implementation and Impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS)

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education  
Doctorate of Education Program

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The Perceptions of Teachers in a K–8 School on the Implementation and Impact of Culturally  
Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS)

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Educational Administration

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Concordia University–Portland

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## **Abstract**

Despite decades of effort to change disciplinary practices in American schools, racial disparities continue and are most prevalent for Black students, according to national Office Disciplinary Referral data. While Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) is the result of years of adjustments to weave cultural responsiveness into Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) systems and decrease racial disciplinary disparities, the results at K–12 schools have been inconsistent. Cultural race theory, which recognizes racism is reflected in all societal systems and is the foundation for this study, may provide a clue as to why racial disciplinary disparities continue. This study took place in a school that had implemented CR-PBIS with fidelity for over five years and examined teacher perceptions about the implementation and impact of CR-PBIS through focus groups while also collecting data on the level of culturally responsive practices occurring in classrooms. The results indicated racism in societal systems funnel down into school systems and manifests as explicit and implicit bias on the part of teachers. Research results additionally suggest that students of color experienced racial microaggressions on multiple levels through the words and actions of staff, the physical classroom environment, and curriculum and supplemental materials.

*Keywords:* CR-PBIS, critical race theory, implicit bias, racial microaggressions

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all the students of color I have served throughout my career. These students and their families trusted me to keep them safe and provide them with an education even though I was unknowingly perpetuating racial microaggressions on multiple levels. The dissertation process has pulled away the veil from my eyes, and I seek to change my own practices while inspiring other educators to do the same so future generations of students of color do not have to suffer due to the ignorance of the educators in front of them.

## **Acknowledgments**

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, and colleagues. It is with deep gratitude that I thank my husband Taylor and children Kyra and Kelson for their patience and encouragement. My parents Bob and Goldie also gave endless support throughout the process.

The nature of my research required me to find a co-researcher, and I was very fortunate to find two dedicated educators from Portland State University, Sheldon Loman and Chris Pinkney. Their substantial experience and sense of humor was invaluable as I balanced being a school administrator and researcher at the same time.

I also need to thank the faculty at Concordia University–Portland who supported me throughout this journey. Their encouragement and ability to push me to heights I didn't know I was capable of achieving has had a deep impact on my work as an educator. Dr. Angela Owusu-Ansah deserves special praise, for she understood this process was about more than just getting a doctorate, but about changing the educational system so all students benefit. Her combination of brilliance balanced with patience and compassion was the perfect fuel for this work.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Black students in K–12 have twice the odds of experiencing disciplinary action at the elementary level and almost four times the odds of being referred to the office for disciplinary reasons at the middle school level as compared to White students (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, Tobin, & Tary, 2011), yet there is no evidence of a greater rate of misbehavior (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2000). Critical race theory (CRT), which expanded from the legal profession to other disciplines, examined how racism is engrained in the fabric of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), including structures such as the American education system. According to school disciplinary data, schools are reflective of societal systems with racism embedded in policies and practices. This is especially true for Black students, for whom racial disciplinary disparities are reflected on a national level (Skiba et al., 2000).

Student disciplinary processes, particularly those documented through office disciplinary referrals (ODRs), form a part of school systems. And like most systems in the nation, is not exempt from issues of race and remains one aspect of the K–12 educational experience where culture should be carefully considered. Several researchers have developed school-based discipline systems to reduce student misbehavior or disciplinary issues. One such school-wide discipline system is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which was designed to create a positive school environment for all students but lacked specific guidelines around cultural responsiveness. When data indicating racial disproportionality revealed that PBIS decreased disciplinary rates for all students yet did not significantly eliminate disciplinary disparities for students of color (Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011), researchers recognized this and incorporated cultural considerations into the PBIS system. The outcome of the PBIS researchers' or developers' revision was the emergence of a modified system: Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS).

Over the past decade numerous schools have implemented CR-PBIS, and while ODR rates for Black students decreased in those schools, racial disproportionality or bias, albeit reduced, persists in ODR data (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). CRT asserts that factors contributing to the persisting trace of racially disproportional ODR disciplinary discrepancies in CR-PBIS schools are namely: (a) the impact of societal systems, (b) the manner of implementation of culturally responsiveness practices within the school system, and (c) implicit bias in teachers leading to racial microaggressions.

Societal systems with racism engrained, according to CRT, impact the schools they serve. It is highly probable then that societal systemic practices towards culturally diverse individuals in the larger community could be reflected in schools. In addition, teachers and school staff may not be well versed in culturally responsive practices or may not be intentional in implementing the practices with fidelity. Of the many challenges facing the K–12 educational system in the United States, engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy and disciplinary practices remains priority because while over 40% of students are students of color, over 80% of teachers are White (World Development Report, n.d., Feistritzer, 2011). Teachers in American K–12 schools have varying perceptions and skills in culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive interactions with students in their classrooms, yet consideration of the influence and value of culture on all aspects of school ethos is minimal, at the least, in most schools (Gay, 2000). Hollins (1996) believed culturally-mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students. She postulated that it may help decrease the number of incidences of unacceptable behavior from students who are frustrated with teacher instruction not meeting their needs. Hollins, therefore, proposed a link between cultural responsiveness of teachers and disciplinary behavior of Black students, and that also has implications for the racial disproportionality of ODRs in schools. These

societal systems reflected in school environments, and teacher culturally-mediated experiences, or the lack of them, could affect the behavior of Black students in school. Societal systemic practices, school policies, and educator cultural responsiveness are intentional, overtly observable outcomes of society, the educational system, and educators, respectively. Additionally, implicit bias behaviors on the part of teachers and staff, called racial microaggressions, may covertly influence the proportion of discipline referrals of culturally diverse students.

In this study, I explored all three primary aspects of the CRT as potential or possible explanations for the fractional success of CR-PBIS in eliminating the racially disproportional ODRs in schools implementing CR-PBIS. And since the decision to refer a student is initiated by the classroom teacher, I used another theoretical lens, the Cycle of Decision-Making, to gain understanding of a teacher's process for deciding whether a student, Black or White, merits an ODR. The study determined: (a) teacher perceptions of how societal systems impact CR-PBIS implementation, (b) how culturally responsive practices were implemented in the classroom and teacher perceptions of implementation, (c) the relationship between CR-PBIS and ODRs, and (d) the relationship between implicit bias and the implementation of CR-PBIS in the classroom.

### **Background, Context, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Critical race theory (CRT), originally a legal movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), expanded to educators “who use CRT's ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (p. 3). Focal aspects of Critical Race Theory offer a description of the background, context, frame, and rationale for this study on disproportionate discipline of Black students. Specifically, three focal components of the critical race theory, which include race-impacting systems, misunderstood culture, and microaggressions due to implicit bias, may explain disproportionate discipline of students of color. In a school setting, these three components could be found in the schools' social

systems, teachers' culturally-influenced perceptions of student behavior, and the unconscious bias of teachers, respectively. These could each potentially contribute to the disadvantageous consequences of school discipline referrals for students of color.

With respect to school social systems, the first CRT element of interest in this study, according to Staats (2014), was the recent trend around the culture of zero tolerance, which has resulted in an increase in school disciplinary cases going beyond reference to the school principal's office with referrals to the criminal juvenile justice system. This national trend often means disproportionately disciplined non-White students moved from a system of education to a system of criminal justice for offenses that are school-related and should be school-disciplined, a phenomenon referred to as the "School to Prison Pipeline" (Staats, 2014).

The second CRT element of this study was the cultural perceptions of teachers. The ethnicity of a teacher is an important factor in determining teacher perceptions of student behavior. Vavrus and Cole (2002) proposed students who are undeservedly singled-out for disciplinary action are disproportionately "those whose race and gender distance them from their teachers" (p. 109). Research by Downey and Pribesh (2004) supported the impact of race of students on disciplinary perceptions of teachers. They found that while Black students are viewed in class as worse behaved than their White counterparts, when Black and White students are taught by "same-race teachers, Black students' classroom behavior is actually viewed as *more favorable* than White students" (p. 275). The current demographics of students and teachers, therefore, favor students of color being disproportionately perceived as disciplinary problems by their teachers. The cultural incongruity is because more than 80% of teachers are White and female and more than 40% of public elementary school students are non-White (Data World Bank, 2014; Feistritzer, 2011). The lack of cultural responsiveness on the part of the White teachers can lead to misconstruing benign behavior of non-White students as detrimental and result in disproportionate disciplinary actions.

For example, Cramer and Bennett (2015) described a scenario where the way a student responded to a question was viewed as rude or sarcastic, when in reality the student was simply responding to the question in a way that was culturally appropriate. Even though there had been no explicit instruction or modeling in how responses should be delivered, the behavior of the student was interpreted as a disciplinary infraction.

The third CRT element to be explored in the study was the unconscious bias of teachers. The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice (2014) recognized the unequal response in school discipline where students of color are disproportionately affected by disciplinary actions. The Kirwan Institute (2015) offered an explanation to these disparities, namely implicit bias. These unconscious biases that people are unaware they hold but which impact “their perceptions, behaviors, and decision-making is a powerful explanation for the persistence of many societal inequities, even among individuals with egalitarian intentions” (Kirwan Institute, 2015, p.2). A basic premise of CRT which provides an explanation for the difficulty to curb microaggressions legally is that in American society racism is entrenched and viewed as normal, natural, and ordinary, not an anomaly. Consequently, regulations and laws for equitable treatment of people of all races are crafted to “correct only the extreme racisms and shocking forms of injustices that stand out. The everyday injustices of alienation, despair and microaggressions go unnoticed by most except for the victim” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). Even though the impact of these microaggressions are hard to regulate, there ought to be a way to reduce or modify the behaviors that create this social or cultural construct. CRT proposes that since culture is not fixed, and that culture with words, stories and silence is constructed, existing culture, especially everyday injustices of alienation and despair, can be shaped by writing and speaking against such injustices to contribute to a better and fairer world.

Perez Huber and Solórzano (2015) rationalized,

approaching an examination of microaggressions from a CRT perspective means we engage an interdisciplinary analysis that centers the lived experiences of People of Color to understand how everyday racism, and other forms of oppression, intersect to mediate life experiences and outcomes. (p. 5)

With respect to misunderstood cultures, CRT proposes that normative discourse is highly fact sensitive and adding one new fact can change intuition radically. For example, when a teacher hears that a student just hit someone, his or her response would be an office referral. When the teacher is told that the student was laughing as he walked away, it is likely the teacher may even request suspension. But if the next fact states that the student is from an abusive home, the teacher is more likely to be lenient. In instances of civil rights, it is important for the teacher to pay attention to the lived experience details of students of color.

School classrooms and disciplinary decision-making could be the setting for racial bias to occur on the part of teachers, so understanding the intersection between CRT and racial bias is of extreme importance for educators. This understanding can occur through high-quality cultural responsiveness training. Culturally responsive experiences encompass both pedagogy and the creation of a classroom environment that is warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students (Hollins, 1996), while recognizing also that pedagogy and student behavior are closely intertwined and inseparable.

One strategy classroom used by teachers to document student misbehaviors and seek administrative support is through Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs). The perceptions of teachers documenting incidents as ODRs are infused throughout multiple decision-making events that occur when an ODR is processed. Not only does the teacher decide to classify an incident as an ODR, they also make decisions about: (a) categorization of the incident (minor versus major),

(b) the antecedent of the behavior, (c) the function of the behavior, and (d) the description of what occurred. In each one of these decisions, which are illustrated in Figure 1, teacher responses to students' disciplinary behaviors could be affected by racial bias influencing teacher perceptions of students and the resulting teacher decisions.

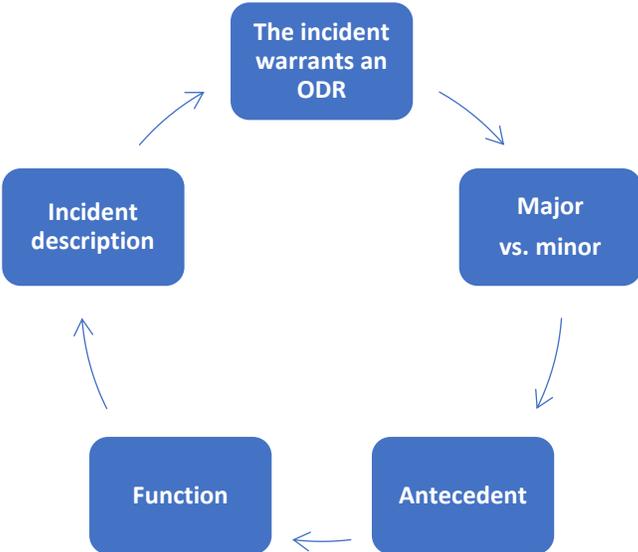


Figure 1. Cycle of Decision-Making for ODRS

The intention of cultural responsiveness training in schools involves “words, stories, and silence” and so has the potential to reshape the school culture. The training can help educators identify their own biases and reduce racial bias which can be intentional or occur on an unconscious level due to social conditioning and the brain’s tendency to be drawn to the familiar (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Research suggests extensive cultural responsiveness training, a key component of CR-PBIS, can help to counteract the effects of socially constructed racism and subliminal categorization tendencies of the brain (Lai, Hoffman, & Hosek, 2013). Cramer and Bennett (2015) cautioned:

Educators need to be aware of their biases and own them, despite their subtle and almost invisible natures. They must acknowledge any negative thoughts that they have. Even

professionals cannot always prevent such stereotyping, but they can recognize these feelings and preclude them from influencing their actions.” (p. 19)

It stands to reason that teachers receiving such training in schools implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity should consistently reduce disproportionality, yet research reflects inconsistent results, especially in the case of Black students (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Kaufman, Jaser, Vaughan, Reynolds, Donato, Bernard & Hernandez-Brereton, 2010; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). This may be because teachers with good intentions and a commitment to social justice think they are effectively implementing culturally responsive practices, but whose efforts are not having the desired effect.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In response to the cultural inadequacies of PBIS in school wide discipline, CR-PBIS was initiated. CR-PBIS reduced the racial disproportionality of ODRs, but despite these efforts Black students in the K–12 have increased odds of experiencing disciplinary action compared to White students. They are three times more likely to receive a referral in the elementary setting, and four times more likely in the middle grades (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, Tobin, & Tary, 2011).

To understand these CR-PBIS cases and outcomes it is necessary to analyze educator understanding of the influence of societal racial systems on CR-PBIS; explore teachers’ understanding of cultural responsiveness, and how teachers implement CR-PBIS.

This is important because the long-term impact of school disciplinary referrals for children and adolescents cannot be underestimated (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Noguera, 2003) During the formative years of as youth, they are “forming their identities as students who will or will not go on to successfully complete high school or postsecondary education, their experiences with discipline in the middle grades can form a positive or negative tipping point” (Cramer & Bennet, 2015, p. 24). The depth of inequity represented by the combined impact of these factors

“represents a top priority for civil rights in education and society” (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner & Smolkowski, 2014, p. 4), because they reflect how deeply embedded racism is both systemically and through individual teacher interactions with culturally diverse students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore the extent to which there are observable features of CR-PBIS in the form of cultural responsiveness in classrooms at a school that has implemented CR-PBIS for a period of five years. Since teachers are key players in CR-PBIS implementation at the classroom level, it was important to determine teacher perceptions of culturally responsive practices and how those practices impacted student behavior and the classroom environment. This gave meaningful information on the impact of CR-PBIS implementation. Equally important was an examination of how closely teacher perceptions of cultural responsiveness in their classrooms mirror classroom observational data, to determine whether teacher perceptions are consistent with what was actually observed (a measure of subconscious microaggressions).

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

#### **Principal Research Question**

With respect to critical race theory, how do teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation?

#### **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers’ cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS?

2. What evidence is there that culturally-responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms?
3. What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms?
4. What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices?
5. What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom?

I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers on the implementation and impact of CR-PBIS in a school implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity. I was curious as to whether these perceptions align with data collected during classroom observations. This case study exploration included classroom observations using a culturally responsive classroom observational tool and data collected from classroom teacher focus groups. If there were discrepancies between teachers who view themselves advocates who support social justice and the observational data I collected, the findings could have vast implications on CR-PBIS implementation and efforts toward systematically reducing intentional or unintentional racial indignities in the educational system.

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

This study may be relevant to schoolwide program behavior systems developers interested in designing effective systems for the growing diversity in schools. School administrators may also be interested in the results of the study to help them reduce discipline problems in their schools. Teachers form the main implementers of discipline programs and they may benefit from the results

in getting a better understanding of their role in the process of school discipline. Lastly, the diverse students we serve in our schools may be given fairer assessments of their behavior and may have better opportunities for academic success.

I was deeply interested in this study because as a school principal I openly share academic and behavioral data with all stakeholders in my school community, including teachers, parents, and students. While I am no longer assigned to the school featured in this study, the school is representative of a pattern of disciplinary disproportionality across the district despite efforts to reverse this trend. I am responsible for presenting the data to the parents of my Black students, look them in the eyes, and give a rationale as to why their children are more likely to receive an ODR simply because of their ethnicity. I do not have an acceptable answer. Through this study I hoped to gather information about the role of culturally responsive practices in classrooms. This will help me in my conversations with my parents and in modifying practices at my school, as well as give me direction toward further research I need to do beyond the scope of this study.

This study fit neatly into the CR-PBIS work occurring at the featured school during the life of the study. The results will be used to help guide future professional staff development my former staff receives, as well as potentially influence systems currently have in place such as peer observation protocols. If teacher participants choose to meet and review the observational data collected during the study, additional growth might occur for those individuals.

This knowledge will be extended to the other stakeholders in my larger community as we work together to maximize the educational experience of all our students. I am committed to sharing the study results with other educators through professional networks, conference presentations, and publications. But the people to whom I am most accountable are my Black students and their families, for one day I hope to present disciplinary data that does not reflect racial disparities.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to provide a common understanding of terms used for the purposes of this study. Each of the terms is defined as follows:

**Culturally responsive practices.** Culturally responsive practices recognize the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of the educational experience. Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching could include: (a) positive perspectives on parents and families, (b) communication of high expectations, (c) learning within the context of culture, (d) student-centered instruction, (e) culturally mediated instruction, (f) reshaping the curriculum, (g) teacher as facilitator (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Disciplinary disproportionality.** For the purposes of this study disciplinary rates are measured by ODRs. Disproportionality is present when ODR rates for a particular group of students are overrepresented as compared with enrollment rates (Children's Defense Fund, 1975).

A common criterion for judging whether a group is disproportionately represented is the "ten% of the population" standard (Reschly, 1997); that is, a subpopulation may be considered over- or underrepresented if its proportion in the target classification (e.g. suspension) exceeds its representation in the population by 10% of that representation. Thus, if Black students constitute 20% of the population, they are considered suspended disproportionately if more than 22% or less than 18% of students who were suspended are Black.

**ODR.** Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) are used by school personnel to evaluate student behavior and the behavioral climate of schools (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004, p. 1). An ODR is issued to a student when a student has participated in a perceived misbehavior that is a violation of school rules and interacts with school administration.

**Racial microaggression.** Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Racial microaggressions can be harmful even if the recipient does not consciously identify the action as having a negative impact (Sue et al., 2007).

**Systems.** The systems approach in education is a management tool that allows individuals to examine all aspects of the organization, to inter relate the effects of one set of decisions to another and to optimally use all the resources at hand to solve the problem (Gupta & Gupta, 2013, p. 52).

**SWPBIS.** School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), sometimes referred to as PBIS, is a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015, p. 1). SWPBIS was integrated with culturally responsive educational practices (Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011, p. 8) and retitled CR-PBIS. Since quality of implementation can influence effectiveness, fidelity of implementation assessment tools has been developed that track how key features of SWPBIS are being implemented at a school site (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions are present in this study:

1. The school featured in the study implemented CR-PBIS with fidelity for five years based on PBIS fidelity tools and culturally responsive practices are occurring in classrooms.
2. The teachers in the school featured in the study are committed to implementing CR-PBIS and reducing disciplinary disparities.
3. The study participants are truthful in their focus group responses.

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

The following delimitations and limitations are present in this study:

1. Only one school was used in this study because it was the only school in District A that had evidence of CR-PBIS implementation over five years.
2. The sample size of the study was delimited to the classroom teachers who agree to be participants.
3. Classroom teachers were implementing culturally responsiveness practices at varying degrees and at various levels of understanding of what it entails.
4. The length of the study was delimited to three scheduled classroom observations and two focus group interviews.
5. This study focused on the role culturally responsiveness practices in the classroom. It did not focus on other potential factors such as a lack of student ability, low expectations, home causes due to different expectations and practices between home and school, and cultural inadequacies including lack of motivation, poor behavior, or failed families and communities. The rationale for focusing on culturally responsiveness practices is because some of them are observable.

## **Summary**

Research shows that School-wide PBIS can effectively reduce ODRs overall, but racial disparities continue to exist (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011). Adding a culturally responsive component to School-wide PBIS helps to address disparities, but does not eradicate racial disciplinary disparities (Vincent, et al., 2011). This study endeavored to examine the role of societal systems, classroom teachers' perceptions of and interactions with culturally different students, and subconscious behaviors of teachers with respect to classroom teacher decision-making of societal systems, classroom teachers' perceptions of and interactions with

culturally different students, and subconscious behaviors of teachers with respect to classroom teacher decision-making. The case study method allowed me to track how the school has been implementing CR-PBIS over the past five years and why the pattern of disparity decreased over time but has not been eliminated. It also captured culturally responsive practices being implemented in the classrooms of the school, as well as gathered teacher perceptions in order to see if there was consistency between the two sources. The results of the case study were debriefed with the staff after completion of the study so the school can continue intentional work toward decreasing racial disciplinary disparities.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This study used critical race theory as a framework to explore the factors that prevent culturally responsive positive behavior support systems from adequately addressing the racial disparity of discipline referrals in K–12 schools. In this chapter existing studies and literature that are relevant to making the case for the study and which are related to the purpose of the study are presented. The literature includes the evolution of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), results of PBIS implementation, results of CR-PBIS implementation, critical race theory (CRT), CRT and the educational system, potential factors contributing to racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities, the role of teacher decision-making and implicit bias in ODRs, effects of racial microaggressions in schools, factors contributing to racial bias, reversing racial prejudice through cultural responsiveness, culturally responsive classrooms and the role of CR-PBIS, and a sense of urgency for culturally responsive positive behavior support systems.

### **Introduction**

Critical race theory asserts “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. ii). Public schools are no exception, for while the educational system has the intent to educate and develop all students equitably, racial disparities are reflective of the system with inconsistencies based on the ethnicity of the student(s). This is not a recent phenomenon, but can be tracked to the earliest attempts to collect school disciplinary data using a racial lens. In 1975 the Children’s Defense Fund, started in 1973 by Marian Wright Edelman as an extension of the Civil Rights Movement (CDF, 2016), published a report called *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* This report drew national attention to the fact that there were racial disparities in exclusionary discipline classified as suspensions and expulsions according to data that had been submitted to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) from school districts around the nation. Statistics showed that although Black children in grades K–12 schools

combined “accounted for 27.3% of the enrollment, in the districts reporting to OCR, they contributed 42.3% of the racially identified suspensions” (p. 12). The disparity increased at the secondary level where Black students were suspended at three times the rate of their White peers. The report stated there was no evidence of increased rates of misbehavior on the part of black students and concluded: “the disproportionate suspension of blacks reflects a pervasive school intolerance for children who are different” (p. 13).

Often awareness of an issue leads to changes, but over 40 years after the publication of the CDF report, racial disciplinary disparities for Black males are actually increasing (McIntosh, et al., 2014). Suspensions for White students have risen from 2% to 5% since the 1974-75 school year, yet for Black students the rate has risen from 6% to 16%. Unfortunately, race and ethnicity continue to be a predictor for which students are suspended. Losen and Gillespie (2012) discovered that during the 2009-2010 school year, 17% of Black students had been suspended at least once, compared to 8% of Native American students, 7% of Latino parents, 5% of White students, and 2% of Asian American students.

Suspensions are not the only way students may be excluded from instructional time; Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs) are also often an exclusionary practice. Office Disciplinary Referrals are a process used to address serious behavioral incidents in a systematic manner (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). Sugai et al. (2000) defined an ODR as

an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule/social norm in the school, [and] (b) a problem behavior was observed by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in a consequence delivered by administrative staff who produced a permanent (written) product defining the whole event. (p. 96)

When a student receives an ODR, the student may miss instruction to meet with an administrator or have a “time-out” away from the classroom. Scott and Barrett (2004) discovered students in

Maryland and Kentucky lost an average of 45 minutes of instructional time for each ODR issued. While suspending a student is an administrative decision that can result from an ODR, initiating the ODR process is a decision that can be made by any staff member at a school. Thus, a student has a higher chance of receiving an ODR than being suspended simply because there are a greater number of decision makers with the ability to instigate an ODR. Many schools use ODR data as a decision-making tool to determine whether additional structures and interventions may be needed for a student or groups of students (McIntosh, Campbell, Russell Carter & Zumbo, 2009). While ODRs are used to gauge problem behaviors at schools across the United States, McIntosh et al. (2009) found evidence that ODRs are more effective at measuring externalized behaviors and less effective at measuring internalized behaviors that may escape the attention of school staff. Skiba et al. (2000) found that if ODRs are not being used systemically they are not valid and are therefore more prone to ethnic bias.

ODRs unfortunately reflect racial disproportionalities, which often result in suspensions. Black students are more likely to receive a referral than their White peers (Drakeford, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Skiba et al., 2000; Townsend, 2000). Skiba et al. (2011) conducted a study where ODRs from 364 elementary and middle schools during the 2005-2006 school year were examined. The results revealed, “both initial referral to the office and administrative decisions made as a result of that referral significantly contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline” (p. 99). Black students at the elementary level were 2.19 times as likely to receive an ODR as White students. This rate doubled at the middle school level where Black students were 3.78 times as likely to receive an ODR than White students. The results from the study additionally indicated that Black students and Latino students who received ODRs were more likely to receive a consequence of suspension or expulsion than their White peers. One solution to the disparity could be a system that reduced ODRs overall.

## **The Evolution of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an example of a framework developed to improve both social and academic outcomes for students. The focus of PBIS is prevention of and systemic response to problem behavior. Most schools assess the effectiveness of their PBIS efforts by monitoring school discipline systems and decreased levels of ODRs. In 1997 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was modified to include Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) based on research from the field of applied behavior analysis (ABA). ABA practitioners developed methods for modifying behavior which were used initially with students who had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (Sugai & Horner, 2002). At the time of this development, safety in schools was a primary concern for parents, teachers, and community members. This resulted in an ABA-based PBS adoption in schools. PBS is defined as “the application of positive behavioral interventions and systems to achieve socially important behavior change” (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Heineman, Lewis, Nelson & Wilcox, 1999). While PBS was originally designed for individuals with severe disabilities, it evolved into a school-wide model (Sugai et al., 1999) and was sometimes referred to as School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS). Expanding the implementation of PBS school-wide helped to emphasize that PBS would benefit all students and go beyond students with disabilities.

Sugai et al. (1999) described the foundational pieces of PBS as being composed of behavioral science, practical interventions, social values, and a systems perspective. Behavioral science plays a pivotal role because:

Although learning and teaching processes are complex and continuous, and some behavior initially is not learned (e.g., biobehavioral), key messages from this science are that much of human behavior is learned, comes under the control of environmental factors, and can be changed. (p. 8)

Practical interventions are monitored and adjusted through data examination and analysis with thought put toward the environment around the student, including adult behaviors, social skills instruction, and other factors. Social values are based on the belief that “behavior change needs to be socially significant” (p. 9) and approached from a place of caring and respect for students and other school stakeholders. A systems perspective refers to the importance of PBS being embedded in the daily systems of a school with administrative support and team-based decision-making. This also included a continuum of support with tiered interventions to meet the varying levels of support needed for students.

In 2004 the IDEA Act was updated to include specific legislation around PBS after there were positive results at schools around the country. PBS was referred to as PBIS in the legislation, however, the two continue to be used interchangeably. The term “school-wide” was also applied to PBIS, which is also referred to as SWPBIS (School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports). Not only was PBIS specifically mentioned in the law, Congress designated funding for professional development (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2016).

A key component of PBIS is implementation with fidelity (Mathews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2014): “Fidelity of implementation is the extent to which the intervention is delivered as intended. [It] is the mechanism by which valued outcomes are obtained, [and so] fidelity becomes critical in sustainability” (p. 169). As with most initiatives, the effectiveness of the initiative cannot be measured if the initiative is not being implemented correctly. Certain key elements are needed for PBIS implementation: staff buy-in, administrator support, implementer skill, teaming, use of data, and on-going technical assistance (Mathews et al., 2014). After a series of assessments were completed by PBIS practitioners at 261 schools, specific practices were identified as most likely to predict sustained PBIS implementation: (a) school-wide implementation versus classroom implementation, (b) regular positive reinforcement, (c) matching instructional and materials to

student ability, and (d) access to assistance and recommendations. (Mathews et al., 2014). As PBIS expanded even further across the country, there was a decrease in overall ODR rates at schools that implemented PBIS with fidelity (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Miramontes, Marchant, Heath & Fischer, 2011; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

### **Results of the PBIS Implementation**

By 2009 PBIS was being implemented in 9,000 schools in at least 44 states across the United States, and in several international locations (Horner, 2009). Bradshaw et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study over five years in 37 elementary schools to measure the impact of training on PBIS implementation fidelity, as well as ODR rates. For the schools that were implementing PBIS effectively, according to PBIS fidelity of implementation measures, there were statistically significant decreases in the number of ODRs, the percentage of students receiving ODRs, and the number of suspensions.

Miramontes et al. (2011), sought to examine another aspect of PBIS implementation by conducting a qualitative study using a questionnaire that was administered to service providers, teachers, and administrators at schools successfully implementing PBIS. The study discovered that while participant perceptions were generally positive, there were three areas the participants felt needed improvement: (a) data collection methods, (b) progress monitoring procedures, and (c) the amount of paperwork required. The researchers felt the information was not evidence that PBIS should be practiced, but rather valuable to help the sustainability and growth of PBIS. While there is ample research to indicate that PBIS works in general if implemented with fidelity, it has inconsistent success in reducing racial disproportionalities in ODRs (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011; Vincent, Swain-Bradway, Tobin, & May, 2011). A three-year study that examined ODR data from schools implementing PBIS showed that ODR rates decreased overall and for all minority subgroups. Despite the decreases, Black

students still had the highest rate of disproportionality (Vincent et al., 2011). The researchers determined that schools need to consistently monitor racial disproportionalities (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014), especially as it appears that schools are reluctant to act when disproportionalities are identified.

Similar results were reflected in another study where suspension data was collected from 77 schools implementing PBIS (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Suspension rates overall were lowered, and culturally linguistic and diverse (CLD) students were more likely to be suspended from school, particularly Black students. Studies, such as these, caused PBIS to continue to evolve and to integrate a culturally responsive component in PBIS implementation.

### **Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS)**

Hollins (1996) believed culturally mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students. She postulated it may help decrease the number of incidences of unacceptable behavior from students who are frustrated with instruction not meeting their needs. Revelations such as these supported the formation of CR-PBIS, which continued and maintained the essence of PBIS, but incorporated cultural responsiveness (Banks & Obiakor, 2005; Vincent, et al., 2011). Gay (2000) described this as using “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective ... it teaches to and through strengths of these students” (p. 29). Banks and Obiakor (2005) summarized the need for cultural and linguistic variables to be included with PBIS as follows:

It is common knowledge that classrooms are not culturally neutral terrains; they are constructed around sets of norms, values, and expected behaviors that are culturally bound. Though zero-tolerance perspectives are adopted by many schools, they sometimes indicate incongruences between education strategies utilized by teachers and cultural and linguistic

differences that students bring to schools. As a result, combining PBIS with cultural and linguistic variables helps to enhance positive behaviors of CLD students. (p. 83-84)

The cultural and linguistic variables suggested by Banks and Obiakor (2005) would help to change traditional teaching to culturally sensitive pedagogy by examining the impact of teacher biases on CLD students through a series of practices:

1. Social skills instruction that gave explicit examples of desired behavior
2. Teacher reflection on expectations and tolerance levels for CLD students
3. Enhancing the cultural awareness and cultural knowledge of teachers
4. Improving instructional and behavioral instruction overall using culturally responsive pedagogy
5. Understand the need for culturally relevant interventions

Vincent et al. (2011) viewed PBIS as a framework through which cultural responsiveness could be delivered. Strong PBIS implementation could be used “to bridge various degrees of divergence between students’ cultural identities and the school environment” (p. 221). PBIS systems could be paired with culturally responsive practices that include:

1. Enhancing the cultural knowledge of staff members, including cultural differences and cultural similarities
2. Enhancing the cultural self-awareness of staff members by building a deeper understanding of one’s own culture
3. Avoiding “color blindness” and validating racial and cultural differences
4. Increasing cultural relevance of academic and social skills
5. Establishing cultural validity by examining disciplinary labeling of students and disproportionality
6. Emphasizing cultural equity by establishing the difference between equality and equity

Cramer and Bennett (2015) felt that CR-PBIS was of great importance for students in middle school who because they are “forming their identities as students who will or will not go on to successfully complete high school or postsecondary education, their experiences with discipline in the middle grades can form a positive or negative tipping point” (p. 24). Components of CR-PBIS include: believing all children can succeed, self-reflection on thoughts and actions, respectful and genuine interactions, building relationships with students and families, teaching multicultural curriculum, using instructional strategies that engage students, and implementing classroom management strategies that include explicit instruction in expected behaviors and positive reinforcement. Harris-Murri, King, and Rostenberg (2006) emphasized the importance of cultural responsiveness being applied to disciplinary practices, for “without consideration of culturally responsive instruction, discipline, and interventions within all stages of the RTI decision making model, there is continued possibility of misinterpretation of student behavior” (p. 781). While there are minor differences between recommendations for how to implement CR-PBIS, a shared commonality is implementing PBIS with fidelity while also engaging in professional development around cultural responsiveness and racial equity.

### **Results of CR-PBIS**

There is ample literature on what components should be included in CR-PBIS, yet studies that measure its effectiveness are more difficult to find. The limited research that has been undertaken exhibits that cultural responsiveness can be effectively woven into PBIS structures. Fallon, O’Keeffe, Gage & Sugai (2015) conducted a study to measure school staff perceptions about the feasibility of CR-PBIS implementation. The study participants were given a list of culturally and contextually relevant PBIS practices and asked to answer statements about the acceptability, feasibility, efficacy, and accessibility of each practice. Results from the survey found the participants to be receptive toward each practice, indicating school personnel would be open to

implementing aspects of CR-PBIS.

At schools where CR-PBIS was implemented there was a decrease in exclusionary discipline for CLD students when culturally responsive components, specific to the ethnicity of the students, were applied. One example was a Canadian K–12 school where 99% of the population was Indigenous. During a case study conducted by McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby, and Steinwand-Deschambeault (2014), PBIS was implemented with an emphasis on approaches aligned with Indigenous cultures for “because PBIS is not a rigid practice, features can be adapted to support cultural values and beliefs specific to a school and community population” (p. 251). At this particular school the features adopted included acknowledging the importance of Elders, engaging the community, using an inclusive education model, and teaching social responsibilities through cultural values. Over the course of eight school years of CR-PBIS implementation, suspensions were cut by more than half. In addition, there was ample anecdotal evidence, that staff members viewed the efforts with favor. While the study did not show the effect of CR-PBIS on racial disparities in disciplinary data due to the almost homogeneous nature of the community, the results indicated that cultural responsiveness and PBIS are compatible and can be modified to meet the individualized needs of communities.

In a case study that narrowed its focus to one student who had immigrated to the United States from China (Wang, McCart, & Turnbull, 2007), the authors compared and contrasted PBIS values based on an Anglo European structure and traditional Chinese value structures in the areas of collaborative partnership, functional assessment, contextual fit, and meaningful lifestyle outcomes. Specific modifications were made to PBIS structures to honor the cultural background of the student and her family, which resulted in the student having a drastic decrease in problem behaviors and deeper level of involvement in the school community. These modifications included:

1. Finding people familiar with the family and their customs to act as a liaison between the family and school staff
2. Showing respect to the family customs and traditions to build a trusting relationship
3. Focusing on the learning challenges of the student with an emphasis on concern versus emphasis on behavioral issues
4. Incorporating family spiritual practices such as prayer in the functional behavior assessment
5. Discovering compromises with the family on behavioral consequences at home that impacted the student's behavior at school

This case study showed the importance of school staff having a deep understanding of PBIS so that as cultural-specific knowledge is obtained, it can be seamlessly applied to support CLD students.

Yet even in schools implementing CR-PBIS, reversing racial disproportionality reflected in ODR data appears to require a long-term approach that may not show immediate conclusive results. Boneshefski and Runge (2014) studied one elementary school that had made changes to PBIS implementation. These changes included implementing PBIS with a higher degree of fidelity, conducting professional development to help decrease the cultural gap between staff and students, teaching behavioral expectations that contained language familiar to the students, upgrading reinforcement systems, and setting expectations to music. At the time the article was written it was inconclusive as to whether the changes would produce the desired long-term effect of decreasing disciplinary disparities based on ethnicity, but the researchers felt the fact the school was beginning to implement practices that addressed exclusionary practices was a promising starting point.

The importance of taking a long-term, consistent approach with CR-PBIS was evident in

one middle-sized suburban district with a large Latino enrollment containing 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools with a history of PBIS implementation. The district complemented its PBIS work with professional development in diversity training, examined disciplinary data outcomes disaggregated by student race, and solidified PBIS systems with cultural responsiveness at the forefront (Vincent et al., 2011). The researchers found that PBIS is compatible with cultural responsiveness if “evidence-based behavior support practices that are relevant to and validate students’ cultural backgrounds are likely to support all students equitably” (p. 226). During the 2009-2010 school year when CR-PBIS was implemented, the district experienced a decrease in expulsions for Latino students, as well as increases in reading levels.

Overall, studies around schools implementing CR-PBIS indicate that weaving cultural responsiveness and PBIS together is feasible. Because of the professional development required and limited levels of improvement in disciplinary disparities from year-to-year, CR-PBIS may require a long-term implementation commitment, for “if disproportionality exists, it is likely caused by multiple and complex factors that are undoubtedly unique to the particular school environment” (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014, p. 152). A deeper understanding of CRT and the factors contributing to racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities could help to improve the effectiveness of CR-PBIS.

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT is based on the belief that race is a social construction and racism is pervasive in American society and systems. It began in the legal system and initially examined the impact of racism on legal scholarship but it soon expanded to multiple disciplines, including education. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) urged that CRT is different from other academic disciplines because it has a central goal to transform society for the better. The expanded CRT movement contains “a

group of interdisciplinary scholars and activists interested in studying and changing the relationship between race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). CRT is composed of four major themes: (a) interest convergence or material determinism, (b) revisionist interpretations of history, (c) the critique of liberalism, and (d) structural determinism. Each of these themes illustrates how dominant culture is “based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 12).

### **Interest Convergence**

Interest convergence, or material determinism, supports the concept that changes within systems and policies occur not because White majority society feels compassion for the plight of Black, but because those changes will somehow benefit the majority culture. An example of this theory was presented by Bell (1978), who selected *Brown v. Board of Education* as an example of interest convergence. Bell argued that advocates had been working for years to implement school desegregation, yet progress was not made until the United States had an invested interest. After the Korean War, there were concerns about potential domestic unrest due to Black servicemen returning from war and anticipating better job options and social treatment. Simultaneously, the United States was trying to garner support against communism, which required cooperation with Developing Countries, most of whom were populated by people of color. Interest convergence means changes are made not because they are the right thing to do, but because they have other benefits for the majority culture.

### **Revisionist Interpretation of History**

Revisionism requires changes in historical records, as well as in current practices. Revisionist history refers to examining events from the past and reworking them to include multiple perspectives. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) extended this concept to the present and suggested making changes in all aspects of society, both material and cultural, in order for multiple

perspectives to be honored. Ideally society would see “both forces, material and cultural, operating together and synergizing each other, so that race reformers working in either area contribute to a holistic project of racial redemption” (p. 20-21).

### **Critique of Liberalism**

Critique of liberalism seeks to end certain liberal concepts such as “color blindness,” or claiming not to see race, and instead appreciate the diversity of each person. This also includes the concepts of “rights” that each person should be able to access in theory, but which is not the case for all Americans. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argued that even when laws are changed to support marginalized groups, poor implementation, administrative obstruction, and narrow interpretation can have a negative effect and can worsen situations despite the original intent of the law.

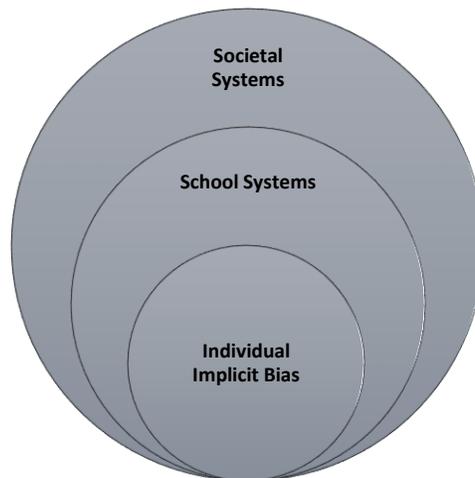
### **Structural Determinism**

Structural determinism, a large umbrella term for the concept of racism, is based on the idea, “that our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary, cannot redress certain types of wrong” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 26). Attempts to correct aspects of the system can lead to further imbalances or address only one component of a complicated issue. As a result, there can be a disconnect between how a recent change is viewed by majority culture and by groups that have been historically marginalized.

Much of CRT focuses on the impact of events and actions versus the intent, as good intentions are often the rationale behind actions that have a negative impact. Sapir (2003) argued an alternative standard should be used in legal cases at the very minimum, for it is difficult to present ample evidence that racial discrimination was the basis for an action. CRT exhibits the level to which racism is embedded within our systems and actions, even when positive intent is a motivating factor.

## **CRT and the Educational System**

Since the educational system is reflective of larger societal systems, an examination of the role CRT plays in education is vital to understanding the occurrence of disciplinary disparities. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described how knowledge of CRT supports educators “who use CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (p. 3). Institutional racism not only filters down to the educational system but influences the perceptions and implicit bias of individuals working with students.



*Figure 2.* Tiers of Institutionalized Racism within the Educational System

Using a CRT lens to examine the educational system indicates that institutionalized racism is embedded within the system at multiple levels. Societal structures influence educational systems, and influences from society and the educational system can influence the perceptions and assumptions of classroom teachers. Figure 2 shows how each of these factors is interconnected. Trying to determine which of these factors influence racial disciplinary disparities is a complicated analysis, but a necessary task for the K–12 educational system to continue work toward eliminating racial disciplinary disparities.

## **Potential Factors Contributing to Racial and Ethnic Disciplinary Disparities**

There are many postulations as to why racial and ethnic disparities continue in the educational system despite the fact attention has been drawn to the problem for over 40 years. It is difficult to categorize each of these as due to: (a) societal factors, (b) components within the educational system, or, (c) implicit bias on the part of a teacher, for they typically fit into multiple categories due to the level with which racism is embedded within American society. For example, if a factor is viewed as resulting from implicit bias on the part of a teacher, that teacher has been influenced by racism reinforced societal structures as well as the educational system according to CRT. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to specify the specific origin or root cause of the factors.

### **Poverty**

Socioeconomic status (SES) is often used as an explanation for why racial disciplinary disparities are prevalent in American schools. Skiba et al. (2011) discovered that while low socioeconomic status (SES) was a risk factor for suspension, “race continues to make a significant contribution to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes independent of SES” (p. 86). Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) tested this hypothesis by creating logistic regressions that controlled for multiple SES factors. The findings indicated that SES differences have limited impact on racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities. Skiba, Horner, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, and Hughes (2014) found that districts with higher poverty rates had higher suspension rates overall, however, racial disparities between Black and White suspension rates were at the same level or higher in suburban districts with a higher SES (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Wallace et al., 2008). These studies indicate that while poverty can be a factor in disciplinary disproportionality, it is not the only variable.

### **Higher Rates of Disruption**

Another theory that surfaces during discussions about disciplinary disparities is that Black

students have higher rates of disruption. Skiba et al. (2000) found “despite the ubiquity of findings concerning the relationship between race and behavior related consequences, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that Black students misbehave at a significantly higher rate” (p. 15). A more recent study by Skiba et al. (2011) found there were no differences in severity of behavior and no basis for the hypothesis students of color exhibit more disruptive behavior than their White peers. On the contrary, students of color were more likely to receive referrals for subjective behaviors such as disrespect or loitering.

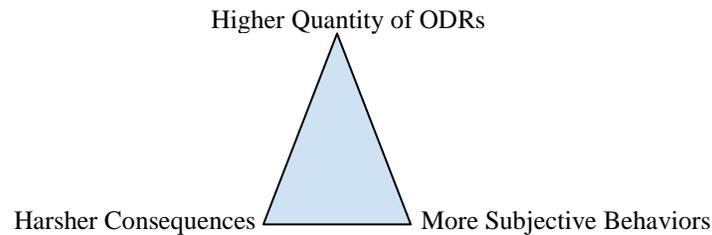
Bradshaw et al. (2010) conducted an empirical examination of ODR and other disciplinary data from 21 K–5 schools serving almost 7,000 students. The evidence showed that if two students, one Black and one White, had identical ratings and classifications, the Black student had a 24% to 80% higher chance of receiving an ODR than the White peer. This suggests that ODRs are not necessarily based solely on the behavior of a student but are dependent on how a staff member perceives behaviors and the student exhibiting that behavior.

Such variation is not due to more misbehavior on the part of Black students. Skiba (2000) found “despite the ubiquity of findings concerning the relationship between race and behavior related consequences, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that African American students misbehave at a significantly higher rate” (p. 15). Therefore, an examination of the perceptions of teachers writing the referrals is a key factor in understanding why race is a predictor in the number of referrals written.

Monroe (2005) additionally discovered “when disciplining African American students, teachers are likely to demonstrate reactions that appear to be more severe than required” (p. 46). Severity is additionally reflected in the harsher consequences Black students receive as compared to their White peers. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) reported “black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. On

average, 5% of white students are suspended compared to 16% of black students” (p. 1).

The research reflects racial disparities for Black students as compared to their White peers in three key areas (see Figure 3): (a) a higher quantity of ODRs, (b) a tendency to identify behaviors using subjective versus objective identifiers, and (c) harsher consequences for ODRs.



*Figure 3.* ODR factors contributing to racial disparities for Black students.

### **Cultural Inadequacies and Racial Stereotyping**

Research indicates such teacher perceptions may be based on attitudes about cultural inadequacies (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004), low expectations (Allen et al., 2013), racial stereotyping (Skiba et al., 2011), and the criminalization of Black males (Monroe, 2005). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) conducted a study that measured teacher attitudes about students. The results showed that teachers in the study had a “deficit view” (p. 607) of students of color by assuming the students were deficit due to deficit parents and deficit communities (Rudd, 2014). Allen et al. (2013) felt teachers interpreted differences as deficits and those perceptions are manifested in interactions with students. Boneshefski and Runge (2014) similarly recognized "the biases held by educators cause them to believe that the disproportionality is a result of variables external to the school, such as a societal cause or a problem at home (p. 153).

Skiba et al. (2011) found evidence in their research of cultural mismatch and racial stereotyping on the part of teachers. Townsend (2000) suggested the lack of familiarity with interactional patterns contributed to the behavior of Black males being perceived as combative, while Ferguson (2001) observed instances where racial stereotyping may have played a role in

Black males receiving referrals at the elementary level. Negative stereotyping of Black students having more behavioral challenges than their peers was documented in a number of studies (Pigott and Cowen, 2000; Zimmerman, Khoury, Vega, Gil, & Warheit, 2006). Vavrus and Cole (2002) found evidence reinforcing cultural mismatch and racial stereotyping during a study that included videotaped classroom interactions between teachers and students. They discovered the way teachers described interactions leading to ODRs made the incident seem far more serious than was indicated by the videotape.

Monroe (2005) collected evidence that the criminalization of Black males in American society influences disciplinary disparities in schools “systematic trends in disproportionality suggest that teachers may be implicitly guided by stereotypical perceptions that Black boys require greater control than their peers and are unlikely to respond to nonpunitive measures” (pp. 46-47). ODRs indicate that school staff members have more severe reactions to the behavior of Black males. Emihovich (1983) discovered that teachers are less likely to take steps to correct the behavior of Black males in the infancy of an incident even though a non-punitive correction could shift the behavior.

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) label “ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from believing that their students of color can be successful learners” (pp. 601-602) as “equity traps.” These “equity traps” were identified after the researchers conducted in-depth discussions with eight White educators. The first “trap” was deficit views of students, where teachers expressed negative attitudes about students of color, as well as assumptions about the families of the students not caring about education. A second theme that arose was “racial erasure,” also known as “color blindness.” The study participants claimed they did not see the color of their students, and, therefore, racism was not an issue in the school. The third “trap” was the use of visual gazing in a variety of ways. First, the teachers expressed they had moved to their

current low-income school because there they could avoid the gaze of administration and parents. Second, the researchers observed gazing being used when one teacher in the focus group began to say positive things about students. Her peers counteracted her examples with negative ones and stared at her until she stopped talking and had adopted their views. The last “equity trap” was paralogical beliefs and behaviors, where blame was put on the students to justify the failure of the school to support students in being successful. The researchers concluded the attitudes of school staff toward their students have a direct effect on student success, especially for students of color.

### **Lack of Intercultural Understanding**

A lack of intercultural understanding between teacher and student (Banks & Obiakor, 2005) could be a factor in disciplinary disparities based on race and ethnicity. Teachers working in an educational system within a majority culture that has traditionally dictated classrooms with rows of desks filled with students sitting quietly may be vastly different from the cultural values of CLD students (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Monroe, 2005; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Teachers could mistakenly misinterpret student movement or impassioned or emotive interactions as being argumentative or combative (Monroe, 2005; Townsend, 2000) if they have no knowledge of the culturally normative behaviors of their students. Vincent, et al. (2011) emphasized the need for schools to use evidence-based student behavior practices reflective of the cultural backgrounds of the students.

Gregory and Weinstein (2008) looked at the impact of the level of trust between teachers and Black students. They discovered teachers who were viewed by students as being caring and having high expectations were less likely to issue ODRs. Teachers who were perceived as uncaring were more likely to issue ODRs with “defiance” listed as the problem behavior. Both students and teachers agreed that the behavior of individual students varied from classroom to classroom. This indicated that teacher interactions with students influence disciplinary disparities.

## **Racial Microaggressions (MAs)**

Another potential factor for racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities might be racial MAs caused by environmental factors or teacher behaviors containing explicit or implicit bias (Allen et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2009; Solorzano et al., 2000). Racial microaggressions can be defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). An example of an environmental racial MA is a classroom that only displays pictures of White presidents, scientists, or other contributors to society. While the intent of the teacher might be to give students examples of how they could make a positive impact on society, the exclusion of people of color could send a message that one can only be successful or contribute to society if they are White. An example of a racial MA reinforced by teacher behavior would be a teacher expressing they don’t see race and view all students as human beings. While the intent of such a statement may be to show an acceptance of all students, it may be perceived by students of color as a denial of racial or ethnic experiences.

Allen et al. (2013) used CRT as a basis to describe racial MAs that are inherent in American districts and schools, as well as teacher level MAs based on deficit versus asset perspectives. Allen et al. (2013) described “because racial bias can unconsciously exist in teachers’ perceptions, it is imperative that teachers possess tools to deconstruct their life experiences, historical contexts, and socio-racial-economic realities” (p. 121). Such deep examination of perceptions and their roots to examine how racism embedded in societal and school structure affects their behaviors may be the key in changing disciplinary disparities simply because of the amount of decision-making a teacher needs to do when confronted with an incident they feel warrants an ODR.

## The Role of Teacher Decision-Making and Implicit Bias in ODRs

The perceptions of teachers during decision making about how to address student behavior is of importance to any discussion about disciplinary disparities because more ODRs are assigned in classrooms than in any other location (Spaulding, Irvin, Horner, May, Emeldi, Tobin, & Sugai, 2010). Noguera (2003) contended that schools for many diverse students, especially those with the greatest needs, focus so much on behavior control and dispensing punitive consequences that educators fail to realize that these administrative actions are counterproductive and lead students to reject the standards of the school.

When teachers perceive and document behavioral incidents as ODRs, it triggers multiple decision-making events that occur when an ODR is processed. Not only does the teacher decide how to classify an incident as an ODR, they also make decisions about: (a) in what category the incident is placed (minor versus major), (b) the antecedent of the behavior, (c) the function of the behavior, and (d) the description of what occurred before turning in the ODR to an administrator. Often these decisions are made very quickly and while the teacher is involved in instruction and monitoring the other students present, so there is ample opportunity for explicit or implicit bias to occur. Figure 4 revisits the number of decision-making opportunities that occur when an ODR is written.

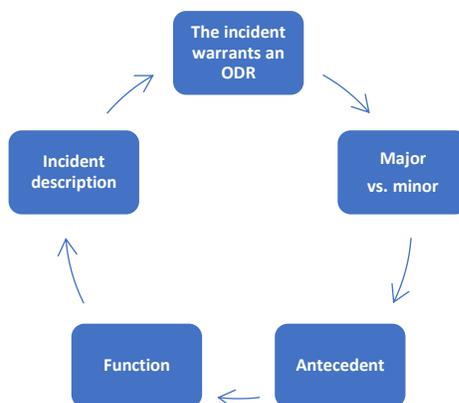


Figure 4. Cycle of decision-making for ODRs

Ferguson (2001) described the depth to which racial inequities permeate institutional practices in schools and influence cultural representations of racial difference. These factors can influence unconscious bias, allowing racial stereotypes to contribute to higher rates of discipline for Black students. Pigott and Cowen (2000) found evidence of negative teacher perceptions toward Black students during a study conducted at 24 schools in a high poverty inner-city district. Both Black and White teachers provided ratings about Black and White students. The results showed that teachers from both ethnicities rated Black students as having more serious school adjustment problems, fewer competencies, more stereotypically negative qualities, and poorer future educational prognoses than their White peers. Black teachers, however, had higher ratings overall for all students in the areas of competencies, level of problems caused, and academic expectations.

Zimmerman et al. (2006) conducted a study that examined the perceptions of teachers and parents toward students. The study grouped teachers, parents and students using the following categories: Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White. All three ethnicity groups of teachers gave Black students the highest behavior rating scores, while non-Hispanic White students received the lowest rating. The study then compared teacher perceptions to parent perceptions and discovered that teacher behavioral ratings for Black students were vastly different than the behavior ratings Black parents gave their children, far more so than the other ethnic groups. This may be an indication of cultural misunderstanding between teachers and their students and may also indicate teachers could be influenced by stereotypes when making disciplinary decisions.

This was evident in a longitudinal study consisting of classroom observations, videotaped lessons, and interviews conducted by Vavrus and Cole (2002) in an urban high school in the Midwest. The videotaped segments of teacher and student interactions indicated many of the incidents described as serious disruptions were "violations of...unspoken and unwritten rules of

linguistic conduct" (p. 91) that usually disproportionately involved students of color. Either teachers were intentionally inflating descriptions of what occurred, or a number of factors skewed how they perceived the incidents. Either of these options indicates bias toward certain students played a role in disciplinary reporting.

Decuir-Gunby (2009) researched the development of racial identity for Black adolescents by examining literature focused on Black Racial Identity (BRI). BRI is defined as "the attitudes and beliefs that a Black [individual] has about his or her belonging to the Black race individually, the Black race collectively, and their perceptions of other racial groups" (p. 103). Adolescence is an important time because the examination of one's identity peaks during this important developmental period, and White administrators and teachers can have a profound impact on that process. These effects are both direct and indirect as students see few representations of themselves reflected through curriculum and staff, sense low expectations from teachers, and treat students differently than their White peers. Peer relationships are also affected by this environment as Black students get negative treatment from other Black students if they attempt to "act White" by doing things such as being successful academically.

Suarez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cuellar, Smith, and Dias (2015) conducted an exploratory study in 60 classrooms across three community college campuses to measure if bias in the form of MAs was present. MAs were observed in 30% of the classrooms participating. The most frequent type of MAs observed was racial/ethnic in nature and questioned the intelligence and competence of students occurred at campuses with the highest concentrations of students of color. The study discussed the long-term effects that result when microaggressions are experienced and felt racial/ethnic MAs could be a factor in the poor performance of students of color.

Classroom teachers play a key role in racial disciplinary disparities because they are the staff members who have the most direct interaction with students. In addition to systemic racism

embedded within societal structures and the educational system, there are multiple opportunities for racial MAs stemming from explicit and implicit bias to affect interactions with students and decision-making about student behavior. A deeper understanding of racial MAs could provide insight into how to decrease racial disciplinary disparities.

### **Additional Effects of Racial MAs in Schools**

Racial disciplinary disparities are indicative of the pervasiveness of racism in societal structures and school systems, but ODRs are not the sole manifestation of racial MAs due to implicit bias on the part of teachers. Perez Huber and Solorzano (2015) rationalized, “approaching an examination of microaggressions from a CRT perspective means we engage an interdisciplinary analysis that centers the lived experiences of People of Color to understand how everyday racism, and other forms of oppression, intersect to mediate life experiences and outcomes” (p. 5). These life experiences include the time students and families spend inside schools. The authors stated that the identification of racial MAs can serve as a tool to “identify the often-subtle acts of racism that can emerge in schools, college campuses, classrooms and in everyday conversations and interactions” (p. 6). An examination of how racial MAs persist in society was not a new concept, but in fact originated with Chester Pierce over 40 years earlier.

Chester Pierce (1969) first explored the concept of racial MAs, which he referred to as “offensive mechanisms.” These were subtle forms of racism perpetuated in American society and needed consideration to prevent Blacks from continuing to be “socially minimized.” Nine years later racial MAs were described as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). Pierce continued to expand this concept over the next three decades and inspired other researchers to explore factors related to racial MAs.

Among those researchers were Sue et al. (2007) who initially examined racial MAs in a

therapeutic setting with White therapists and clients of color. Racial MA's were identified as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). Sue et al. (2007) traced the transformation of racism in the United States from being overt to being: "(a) ... more likely than ever to be disguised and covert and (b) has evolved from the "old fashioned" form, in which overt racial hatred and bigotry is consciously and publicly displayed, to a more ambiguous and nebulous form that is more difficult to identify and acknowledge" (p. 272). MAs can be expressed through words and phrases, gestures, or tone of voice and may not be limited to interactions between people, but also environmental slights, such as when classrooms only contain posters of White historical figures.

Sue et al. (2007) outlined three categories of racial MAs: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. Microassaults are explicit verbal or non-verbal attacks that are conscious and often expressed in a private setting. An example of a racial microassault is referring to someone using a racial epithet such as "colored" or "Oriental." Microinsults are rude, insensitive and/or demeaning verbal expressions or actions that convey a hidden, insulting message to a person of color. An example is a teacher ignoring a student of color who has their hand raised to ask a question or to contribute to a classroom discussion. Microinvalidations nullify the thoughts, expressions, or experiences of a person of color. An example of a microinvalidation is when an Asian American is complimented for how well they speak English, even though the person has lived in the United States and spoken English for their entire lives. Sue et al. (2007) gave a real-life anecdotal example of a racial MA one of the researchers had experienced with the intent to exhibit racial MAs were not only theoretical to the researchers, but a part of their personal experiences. The researcher, Dr. Sue, had taken a flight with another colleague of color, and even though they boarded the plane before White passengers, they were asked to move to the back in

order to “balance the plane.” This incident, as well as additional specific examples of racial MAs that could occur between White therapists and clients of color, which are easily transferable to other settings such as school classrooms.

Sue et al. (2007) outlined four psychological dilemmas that arise when a White perpetrator inflicts a racial MA against a person of color: (a) a clash of racial realities in which people of color see racism around them in their everyday lives, but White people do not notice the incidents; (b) the invisibility of unintentional expressions of bias when White perpetrators feel they had good intentions and did not do anything wrong, (c) perceived minimal harm that occurs when a White perpetrator feels people of color are overreacting to experiences, and (d) the “catch-22” of responding to MAs, when the victim initially questions whether or not they actually experienced the MA, and then sometimes have the doubt turned to anger. Thus, despite the best intentions of a setting such as a therapy session, the occurrence of racial MAs, even when unconsciously perpetrated by a White therapist, could have devastating effects on clients of color. Since the examples of racial MAs are transferable to a classroom setting, there is equal risk of a similar dynamic between teachers and students.

Racial MAs additionally cause psychological harm to victims in multiple ways. Allen et al. (2013) discussed three effects of racial MAs that may be experienced by students of color: (a) mental health and well-being, (b) ascribed intelligence and perceived deviance, and (c) self-concept and racial identity development. Negative mental health effects include depression, anxiety, trauma, or issues with self-esteem (Nadal, 2010). Teachers sometimes communicate impressions about students that reinforce low expectations about intelligence and assumptions of deviance that are mentally harmful and often result in disciplinary actions. The effects of these experiences are multiplied as they tend to contribute to poor self-concept and hinder positive racial identity development.

## **Factors Contributing to Racial Bias**

CRT maintains that racism is socially constructed (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) while recent research into implicit bias indicated there are additionally subliminal categorization tendencies of the brain (Lai et al., 2013). Both social construction and natural categorization tendencies can be modified through intentional actions (Lai et al., 2013). Delgado and Stefanic (2001) described social construction as:

race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory. (pp. 7-8)

Goodman (2008) debunked the concept of racial categories by making the following points: (a) racial categories are historically developed, (b) such categories have an effect on people's lives, (c) human biological variation is real only in the sense that no one is genetically identical, and (d) human biological variation does not fit into racial categories despite historical attempts to do so. Singleton and Linton (2006) discussed the process of racial meaning that is "inherited, interpreted, and passed on from one generation to the next. Each of us creates meaning around our current racial reality based on how we have experienced and understood our near and distant pasts" (p. 105-106). Since schools are a microcosm of society, the negative influences of racial categorization are woven in policies, systems and interpersonal interactions.

The effects of social constructions of racism have influenced negative biases not only for White people, but also for people of color. In 2005 results from the first brain imaging test that measured the reactions of both White and Black participants was published (Gosline, 2005). During the testing brain scans of participants were made using magnetic resonance imaging machines. Careful attention was paid to the part of the brain called the amygdala, which measures “fight or flight” responses. Both Black and White participants had increased activity in their amygdala when shown pictures of black faces, but amygdala activity did not change when participants of both ethnicities were shown White faces. These results were consistent with an implicit bias test given earlier, where both Black and White participants had higher positive association scores for Whites.

While there were more positive associations made with White faces during the visual tasks described above, verbal matching tasks had different results. Both Black and White participants had similar scores when verbally responding to pictures of various faces. The authors concluded the amygdala response could be overridden when expressing attitudes, feelings and emotions through words. This indicated that in addition to societal conditioning there are biological factors contributing to racism and implicit bias that can be nullified.

Subliminal categorization tendencies of the brain (Lai et al., 2013) can cause implicit biases to surface automatically, such as when the participants in the study described by Gosline (2005) had reactions in their amygdala when shown black faces. Lai et al. (2013) described such implicit biases as “social prejudices that exist outside of conscious awareness or control” (p. 315). These social prejudices are not limited to the United States and the debilitating experiences of Black citizens.

Recent research at Peking University indicated participant brains respond more strongly to pain being experienced by their racial ingroup than to pain being experienced by the pain of

individuals in other racial groups (Biotech Week, 2015). While ingroup preferences were consistent, there were exceptions based on the social experiences experienced by individuals. A similar study was conducted in Italy with White Italians native to Italy, and Black-African participants who had emigrated from African nations but had been in Italy for at least 2.5 years. The results showed that both groups had implicit preferences toward in-group members, however, that bias was much stronger for the White Italians who were part of the dominant culture. In contrast, self-reported explicit bias did not differ between ethnicities. Both groups also rated similarly for empathy, although the Black-African subjects felt more distress when others were in pain.

Back in the United States, researchers discovered that reactions to visual images were amplified when other factors were introduced (Forbes, Cox, Schmader & Ryan, 2012). White participants who self-reported they were free of prejudice were shown visual images of White and Black faces with one of three different auditory options: no music, death metal, music labeled as violent and misogynistic rap. The purpose of the study was to see if people who don't identify as having prejudice could downregulate a biased response to an out-group individual even when the environment presents a negative stereotype. The findings showed that when the participants viewed images with no music, they were successful regulating their reactions and there was no amygdala arousal. This was not the case, however, when the images were shown in unison with rap music. On the contrary, amygdala arousal was abundant, indicating that racial prejudice could arise when subtle influences such as rap music are present.

### **Reversing Racial Prejudice through Cultural Responsiveness**

Although the evidence presented shows racial prejudice is manifested through societal channels and implicit bias due to categorization tendencies of the brain, there is a body of research that indicates that both social constructs and biological responses can be overcome through

deliberate practices. These practices are not short-term solutions to creating a culturally responsive classroom, such as purchasing books that represent all students for a classroom library, but rather long-term changes that influence teachers as individuals both in and outside of school. This is of absolute importance in the field of education where educators not only are in a position to perpetuate racism, but to model it for impressionable students.

### **Broaden Social Circles**

White teachers can decrease racial bias by expanding their social circles and spending time with people of color. Xiangyu and Shishi (2013) wanted to see if empathetic responses were different for people who had spent time in cultures other than their own. They conducted a study with 20 Chinese adults who had lived in western countries. The participants, much like those in the aforementioned implicit bias study, were shown visual images of Chinese and White models receiving painful or non-painful stimulations. The scientists discovered the neural responses of the participants did not differ significant for either set of visuals, rather the empathy response to pictures of Chinese and White models was consistent. The researchers concluded that “cultural experiences with racial out-group members may increase the neural responses to the suffering of other-race individuals and thus reduce the racial bias in empathy” (p. 34).

Lai et al. (2013) found additional evidence to support broadening social circles or intergroup contact. Spending time with or living with people from other races and/or ethnicities can help to reduce explicit and implicit bias, although some of the effectiveness is determined by the quality of intergroup contact.

### **Association**

If one is in a setting that is primarily White, one way to decrease racial prejudice is by intentionally surrounding oneself with racially conscious individuals. Sinclair, Kenrick, and

Jacoby-Senghor's (2014) research on the relationship between interpersonal interactions and implicit prejudice revealed the following key points:

1. Implicit racial prejudice reflects common but unexamined biases of Whites toward Blacks.
2. People prefer to share reality, so they reduce implicit prejudice when expecting an egalitarian conversation partner.
3. Otherwise, implicitly prejudiced Whites prefer to interact with other Whites who seem uncomfortable with Blacks.
4. "Shared realities" mean that people's social networks may saturate with similarly prejudiced (or unprejudiced) individuals.
5. Contact with other Whites shapes Whites' implicit biases. (p. 81).

Sinclair et al. (2014) cautioned people of color who are encompassed in a socially biased network may not necessarily recognize racial bias when it occurs, and, therefore, may not compensate for the incident.

When these considerations are applied to the context of a school there is cause for alarm, for even in schools where the majority of pupils are students of color, the American educational system is steeped in White majority culture. In addition, a majority of teachers are White and do not match student demographics at many schools. However, even on a school staff that is primarily White, there are additional steps that can be taken to raise racial consciousness for classroom teachers.

### **Self-Reflection**

Cramer and Bennett (2015) cautioned "educators need to be aware of their biases and own them, despite their subtle and almost invisible natures. They must acknowledge any negative thoughts that they have. Even professionals cannot always prevent such stereotyping, but they can

recognize these feelings and preclude them from influencing their actions” (p. 19). Singleton and Linton (2006) acknowledged the difficulty around reflection, as “educators typically have not examined and discussed race in their schools because they have feared not knowing how to go about this process correctly” (p. 21). In response, the researchers developed a protocol called “Courageous Conversations” to help guide dialogues around race while helping White educators recognize their level of privilege and develop their own racial identities.

### **Development of Racial Identity**

For White educators to recognize the level of privilege they have compared to their people of color, there needs to be an understanding of their own racial identity. Singleton and Linton (2006) established a working definition of race they refer to as: (a) “corner”- which is the citizenship either through birth or naturalization, (b) “culture”- how we live on a daily basis, and (c) “color”- racial characteristics based on visible melanin levels. Identification of these three areas helps teachers to focus in on “color”, or race, as it “typically trumps ethnicity and nationality in our interactions” (p. 170). Singleton and Linton (2006) maintained awareness of one’s own racial identity is a necessary step in becoming racially conscious, but if not done carefully feelings of guilt could be counterproductive and limit the development of racial consciousness.

Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005) conducted a study that examined how to help White teachers develop their racial identity while mitigating the emotions that arise during racial equity work. During the study, 200 White teacher candidates were surveyed after reading McIntosh’s (1990) article, “White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack”. The participants were proponents of social justice and were “poised to reproduce and transmit the ‘racial order’ to the next generation of Canadians” (p. 148). When examining the reactions of the participants to the article, three themes emerged: ideological incongruence; liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy; and negating White capital.

Participants showed evidence of ideological incongruence by expressing their understanding of race as a social construct based on historical events but kept turning the focus of the conversation back to their own feelings of discomfort and pain around the issue rather than those who have been oppressed. The participants had difficulty discussing their own White privilege, in particular, White males. Liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy were exhibited when the participants maintained the privilege they had was due to hard work, while the privilege of people of color earned at the expense of Whites. Focus again was put on their own suffering and individualistic experiences. Negating White capital was exhibited through multiple responses that denied the privilege the participants had as White people, which makes it difficult to comprehend the role of systemic racism in society.

Based on participant responses, Solomona et al. (2005) determined key factors that need to be explored in teacher education programs, so teachers are prepared to thrive in racially diverse classrooms that are becoming more prevalent in North America:

1. All teacher candidates already have set beliefs and ideas about issues or race or racism. They need opportunities to explore and reframe pre-existing assumptions.
2. Candidates need to be able to safely explore questions and concerns without fear of judgment. This should not be limited to the theme of racism, but also the larger umbrella of discrimination so personal connections can be made.
3. Such discussions will lead to candidates to explore their own racial identity.
4. Notions of social construction should be explored so candidates gain an understanding of how their Whiteness impacts students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.
5. Teacher candidates need to be aware that racial equity work can produce strong emotions. They need to understand these emotions of anger and guilt are normal, however, the same emotions can shut down racial equity work because they are

uncomfortable. Written reflections can help with this process.

6. Teachers need to be able to have discourse around racial equity work in a safe space with others having similar experiences. This helps teachers to feel as though they are not alone or are not being judged or negatively labeled through the process.
7. Teachers need concrete tools and strategies to incorporate multiculturalism inside their classroom.

### **Evaluative Conditioning**

Lai et al. (2013) explained evaluative conditioning as a strategy that “provides experience linking concepts with attributes that differ from their preexisting attitudes to retrain or create alternative attitudes” (p. 316). Retraining associations can circumvent social conditioning and natural categorization tendencies. Olson and Fazio (2006) conducted a study where participants were shown positive pictures of black people paired with positive words, and negative pictures of White people with negative words. Immediate follow-up indicated racial implicit bias was reduced immediately with similar levels still in existence two days later. Evaluative conditioning can fade over time, but repeated opportunities to reframe prejudices allow continued reduction of implicit bias.

### **Culturally Responsive Classrooms and the Role of CR-PBIS**

Research shows that a culturally responsive classroom must have educators who have culturally relevant tools and strategies such as those previously mentioned, but who also continue to evaluate their words, actions, and thoughts through racial equity training. Such training impacts both the academic and behavioral spheres in the classroom, both of which are closely linked.

CR-PBIS contributes the basic tools and strategies needed to provide proactive structures through PBIS in schools and classrooms, while racial equity and cultural responsiveness training

help those structure be implemented in a way that is supportive of all students. There are numerous culturally responsive elements that can be woven into classroom climates.

### **Welcome Students into the Classroom**

Culturally responsive teachers seek to form a bond with their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). One strategy for accomplishing this is for teachers to greet and welcome students as they walk into the classroom. This helps students to feel accepted and sets a positive tone for the class.

### **Respond to Students in an Equitable Manner**

Culturally responsive teachers keep relations between themselves and their student's fluid and equitable (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In culturally responsive education, pedagogy is rooted in equity and fairness (Ortiz, 2012), so all students, regardless of ethnicity or race, are equitably called upon and helped.

### **Use Traditional and Non-Traditional Discourse Styles**

Teachers should use both traditional and non-traditional discourse styles in an effort to communicate with and connect with each student. Interactions in class should challenge the students to develop higher-order knowledge and skills (Villegas, 1991).

### **Communicate High Expectations**

Teachers should communicate expectations of success to all students. Work by Rist (1971) and Steele (2011) stressed that self-fulfilling prophecy is extremely high in minority cultures. The researchers emphasized how valuable it is to students of diverse culture when their teacher demonstrates a high expectation of them. Effective and consistent communication of high expectations helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1971). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful.

## **Develop Compatible Classroom Expectations**

Classroom expectations should consider the cultural backgrounds of all students. Students need to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a statement, event, or action. By being allowed to learn in different ways or to share viewpoints and perspectives in a given situation based on their own cultural and social experiences, students become active participants in their learning (Nieto, 1996). Hollins (1996) believed that culturally mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students. It may help decrease the number of incidences of unacceptable behavior from students who are frustrated with instruction not meeting their needs. Also, students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures.

## **Build Positive Relationships**

A positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationship should be established with all students. Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999). Culturally responsive teachers seek to form a bond with their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

## **Create a Safe Classroom Environment**

Classroom environments need to be warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students. Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) noted a key

criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

### **Gather Lesson Materials that Represent All Students**

Lesson materials should represent the cultural backgrounds of all students in the classroom. Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999).

### **Create Classroom Displays that Represent All Students**

Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron et al., 2002).

### **Encourage a Community of Learners**

Focus should be given to collective work, responsibility, and cooperation so all students can be encouraged to participate in a community of learners. Student-centered instruction differs from the traditional teacher-centered instruction. Learning is cooperative, collaborative, and community-oriented. Students are encouraged to direct their own learning and to work with other

students on research projects and assignments that are both culturally and socially relevant to them. Students become self-confident, self-directed, and proactive. Learning is a socially mediated process (Goldstein, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Children develop cognitively by interacting with both adults and more knowledgeable peers. These interactions allow students to hypothesize, experiment with new ideas, and receive feedback (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

### **Provide Knowledge Needed for Mainstream Culture**

All students should be provided with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that a key criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills without the expectation students should abandon their own culture.

### **Keep Disciplinary Responses Consistent**

Teachers need to pay attention to the fact disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior are consistent for all students. The “hidden curriculum” is not composed not of actual content, but of the underlying attitudes and beliefs that permeate the school. This may include a school’s stereotypical attitude and the fairness with which students from different cultural groups are disciplined. In a culturally responsive setting a hidden curriculum is contained for those who are not part of the majority culture (Ortiz, 2012). If teaching and rewarding appropriate behaviors equally validated students’ varying cultural identities, the common school social culture built on these practices could have equal relevance for all students (Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin & Swain-Bradway, 2011).

### **Include References to Other Cultures**

Teachers should make references to other cultures where appropriate, especially the cultures of the students in their classroom. According to Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992),

gaining cross-cultural skills is necessary for successful exchange and collaboration. An example of this would be a teacher's research or knowledge of the cultural background of students' families.

### **Build Intrinsic Motivation**

Teachers should work to build intrinsic motivation in students, so value is attached to tasks more than an extrinsic reward. Effective and consistent communication of high expectations helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1971). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful.

Students need to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a statement, event, or action. By being allowed to learn in different ways or to share viewpoints and perspectives in a given situation based on their own cultural and social experiences, students become active participants in their learning (Nieto, 1996). Also, students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures.

### **Integrated and Interdisciplinary Instruction**

The curriculum should be integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered. It should include issues and topics related to the students' background and culture. It should challenge the students to develop higher-order knowledge and skills (Villegas, 1991).

Integrating the various disciplines of a curriculum facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge (Hollins, 1996). Students' strengths in one subject area will support new learning in another. Likewise, by using the students' personal experiences to develop new skills and knowledge, teachers make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations (Padron et al., 2002).

## **A Sense of Urgency**

It stands to reason that teachers receiving such training in schools implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity should consistently reduce disproportionality, yet research reflects inconsistent results (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2010; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Discovering factors contributing to the implementation and impact of CR-PBIS is of great importance to the educational community because when students are unsuccessful in school there are direct and indirect societal impacts.

There is a sense of urgency around the effectiveness of CR-PBIS because the long-term impacts of school disciplinary referrals for children and adolescents cannot be underestimated (Bowditch, 1993; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Noguera 2003; Voelkl, Welte, & Wieczorek 1999). Tobin and Sugai (1999) found that just three or more suspensions in ninth grade predicted school failure in high school. Bowditch (1993) examined the role schools play in perpetuating racial inequity in society during a case study at an urban high school. She discovered a school with poor attendance rates, poor academic scores, and high suspension rates. Negative attitudes about students, who were referred to as “troublemakers,” and families were regularly expressed by the staff, and there was no concern that one third of the school population had dropped out, or that the majority of these students were students of color. Despite the reputation of the school, the researcher saw no evidence of harmful or unsafe behavior during her time there. Bowditch (1993) determined that the “risk factors” used to categorize students such as failing classes or coming from a low socio-economic background, were actually used to label the students in a negative way and to later justify their lack of success. Once they left high school, their level of education affected their social mobility, indicating that school staff can have a direct effect on the social mobility of students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Lee et al., 2011 discovered that students, Black or White who received suspensions were

more likely to drop-out of school. Schools with higher percentages of students of color, more students receiving free and reduced lunches, and lower per pupil spending had higher suspension rates than other schools. The study verified suspension does have a direct effect on drop-out rates and is a higher risk factor for Black students.

Noguera (2003) expressed concern that these students and others were at risk of more serious concerns than dropping out of school and pointed out the direct correlation between failure at school leading to imprisonment, especially for Latino and Black males. He asserted, "Too often, schools react to the behavior of such children while failing to respond to their unmet needs or the factors responsible for their problematic behavior. In so doing, they contribute to the marginalization of such students, often pushing them out of school altogether, while ignoring the issues that actually cause the problematic behavior" (p. 342). There are similarities between school discipline and the legal system and a cycle of punishment in schools can transfer to the legal system as students grow into adulthood.

Voelkl et al., (1999) determined delinquency may be a result of negative school experiences. The participants were male adolescents in an urban city in the state of New York. Young men chosen for the study had committed at least one minor crime. For White males in the study delinquency seemed unrelated to academic success and enrollment status. The opposite was true for Black males, who had higher rates of delinquency if they had lower grades or had dropped out of school. The study also revealed one benefit that could be attributed to White privilege. White males who dropped out of school reported more positive economic outcomes than their Black counterparts. Thus, negative school experiences could affect the lives of students, especially Black males, well after they have left high school.

The connection between disciplinary experiences and success after high school is not exclusive to students at the high school level. Often these patterns of punishment are established

earlier in student careers. As youth are “forming their identities as students who will or will not go on to successfully complete high school or postsecondary education, their experiences with discipline in the middle grades can form a positive or negative tipping point” (Cramer & Bennett, 2015, p. 24). Thus, it is important to focus on disciplinary practices for all age groups, beginning in elementary school.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

This study utilized CRT as a framework to examine factors that prevent CR-PBIS systems from adequately addressing the racial disparity of discipline referrals in K–12 schools. PBIS evolved over time into CR-PBIS to create more equitable systems within schools, however racial disciplinary disparities are still evident. The literature included potential factors contributing to racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities including the role of teacher decision-making and implicit bias in ODRs, the effects of racial MAs in schools, and the role of CR-PBIS systems at school and classroom levels.

The depth of inequity represented by the combined impact of factors related to discipline “represents a top priority for civil rights in education and society” (McIntosh et. al., 2014, p. 4) because they reflect how deeply embedded racism is both systemically and in individual teacher interactions with students of color. PBIS has helped to decrease the number of ODRs and suspensions being assigned to students of all ages, and CR-PBIS has worked to decrease both ODRs and racial disciplinary disparities even further, but racial disparities are still evident in school data. This may be because teachers with good intentions and a commitment to social justice are still perpetuating microaggressions that undermine culturally responsive practices, but on an unconscious basis. In order to gain a deeper understanding of CR-PBIS I pursued the following research questions:

## **Principal Research Question**

With respect to critical race theory, how do teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation?

## **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers' cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS?
2. What evidence is there that culturally-responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms?
3. What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms?
4. What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices?
5. What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom?

I hoped to discover the impact of CR-PBIS in the K–8 school from the perspective of the teachers who implement CR-PBIS. I also explored the depth of teachers' understanding of CR-PBIS and its implementation and sought to examine the effects of cultural responsiveness on PBIS at a K–8 school. Exploring this case also shed some light on Hollins' (1996) stipulation that culturally mediated instruction may impact the number of office discipline referrals teachers need to make.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

School discipline systems are challenging to implement without bias in schools composed of students of multiple diverse cultures. Specifically, Black students in the K–8 public educational system in the United States are far more likely than their White peers to receive an Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR). Student behavior modification programs such as Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (CR-PBIS) were developed to remedy such discrepancies. CR-PBIS is built on the premise that the addition of cultural responsiveness training at PBIS schools will decrease racial disciplinary disparities according to ODR data (Banks & Obiakor, 2008; Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner, & Sturges, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Vincent et al., 2011). While schools implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity have decreased overall referrals and disproportionalities, there is still a ratio of disproportionality between Black and White ODR data (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Vincent, Cartledge, May, & Tobin, 2009). I want to explore this phenomenon within the context of Cultural Race Theory (CRT).

My study endeavored to use the CRT lens to examine external and internal systems that impact schools and teacher intercultural understandings. In this chapter I will outline the method I used to observe and inquire about teacher perceptions of CR-PBIS impact with respect to the systems at the school featured in the study. CRT is embedded in the larger school systems and societal systems. CR-PBIS attempts to counteract the effects of embedded racism on teachers' intercultural understanding and by bringing awareness about racial MAs. I probed to determine the role of intercultural understanding and racial MAs in teachers' decision-making processes for assigning an ODR. I also justified my choice of design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis used to perform my research exploration and find answers to my research questions.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how teachers in a K–8 school perceived the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation. Since teachers initiate each ODR in the classroom and the initiation of an ODR is based on the intersection of the students' behavior and the teacher's perceptions of student behavior, the specific purpose of the study was to observe the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classrooms of K–8 teachers and determine teacher perceptions about the implementation of CR-PBIS, with attention to how teachers come about deciding which student to cite for disciplinary actions as ODRs. Additionally, I explored external systems, namely the larger school systems and societal systems, as well as the internal subconscious factors and racial MAs, which may affect teacher school discipline decision-making. CRT encompasses external systems of institutions and society, cultural responsiveness of individuals, and internal subconscious racial slights, which made it a suitable theoretical framework for this study.

## **Research**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

### **Principal Research Question**

With respect to critical race theory, how do teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers' cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS?

2. What evidence is there that culturally-responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms?
3. What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms?
4. What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices?
5. What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom?

This case study explored the extent to which there are observable features of CR-PBIS in the form of cultural responsiveness in classrooms, at a school that has implemented CR-PBIS for a period of five years. Since teachers are key players in CR-PBIS implementation at the classroom level, it was important to determine teacher perceptions of culturally responsive practices and how those practices impact student behavior and the classroom environment. This could give meaningful information on the impact of CR-PBIS implementation. Equally important was examining how closely teacher perceptions of cultural responsiveness in their classrooms mirror classroom observational data- are perceptions consistent with what was actually observed.

### **Research Design**

CR-PBIS is a school wide initiative and this study aimed to explore its implementation and impact. Consequently, a case study design was best suited for this research study. The purpose of the study goes beyond improving this single school (action research) to generating meaning of the persisting ODR racial disparity, making it a case study and not an action research. In addition, the study was designed to discover and gain deeper understanding of how the components of critical

race theory influence the implementation of CR-PBIS and racial disciplinary disparities, reflecting Merriam (1988) and Yin's (2014) characterization of a case study that goes below the surface.

According to Merriam (2015), a case study in contemporary times is “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 1). Yin (2014) blended the three forms outlined by Merriam into a two-fold definition of case study: a contemporary phenomenon viewed in a real-world context where boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident, and case study design and data collection that reveals “a case study will have more variables of interest than data points” (p. 2). This is not limited to data collection but includes all aspects of the research process such as the logic of design and data analysis. Creswell (2013) similarly viewed case study research as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

A myriad of procedures and data collection methods can be drawn upon depending upon the subject of the case and surrounding factors, but multiple sources of evidence that allow the researcher to triangulate data are an important aspect of case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2014). The qualitative research paradigms the study is founded on included an interpretive philosophy where education is a process and school a lived experience, as well as critical theory where education is considered to be a social institution designed as a reflection of society and culture.

## Procedures

At the start of the study I had to establish the extent of my participation because of my dual role as researcher and principal of the targeted school. I had inside knowledge of the institution and established relationships with the staff within the institution. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) identified three advantages of insider research: (a) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied, (b) maintaining a natural flow of social interaction, 3) having an establish intimacy that promotes truth telling. This added a depth to case study research that would take time for an outside researcher to acquire (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

However, issues of trustworthiness and bias may be heightened when the researcher and the principal of the school targeted for the research are one and the same. Granted, according to Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) bias is always present in some capacity and can occur at any phase of research, yet the researcher should make attempts to reduce bias and increase objectivity. Unlauer (2012) agreed with insider researcher advantages but cautioned that certain preventative preparations must be made to ensure objectivity. This included deep examination of ethical considerations and bias, as well as clear boundaries with role duality and confidentiality. Unlauer (2012) additionally emphasized the importance of outside advisors in helping to navigate the case study research as it unfolds. My dual role of insider researcher and administrator at the site where the case study was conducted made the advisor and dissertation objectivity even more vital in maintaining the credibility of the research.

For this reason, I enlisted the support of two external, neutral, third-party (ENTP) co-researchers who are professors at a local university. Both professors work in the special education department and received their undergraduate and graduate training in a research university that is a national leader in PBIS. Before research began we met in person and communicated multiple times to determine the logistical components of the research and discuss in detail the observational tool

and script for the focus groups. Throughout the study the co-researchers and I met regularly so that the ENTPs would represent me as closely as possible.

Three main approaches were used to acquire data throughout this case study: (a) classroom observational data, (b) focus group session data, and 3) archival and current data. After the conclusion of the dissertation process, the study results will be shared with the staff for the purpose of further professional development.

The observational tool was revised multiple times, most notably after I reviewed it for the first time with my co-researchers. The co-researchers, one of whom was White and one of whom was Black, conducted each of the observations together to allow multiple perspectives to emerge during the observations and to increase the reliability of the observational tool. Before officially collecting data, the co-researchers conducted a series of observations using the observational tool that allowed them to compare their scoring. We had an opportunity to discuss specific instances from the observations that did not fall cleanly into one scoring column of the rubric. This discussion and a deeper examination of the observational tool allowed greater reliability for future observations.

One example of a factor that affected alignment occurred during the first classroom observation where both co-researchers were present. I referred to as the “Sacajawea Effect” because the topic being taught at the time of the observation was a discussion of the Lewis and Clark expedition, with reference made to Sacajawea, the Lemhi Shoshone guide who accompanied the expedition. During the classroom observation the scores of both co-researchers were the same or only one point apart, except in one instance. This occurred on the item examining whether the classroom teacher brought in examples from other cultures to the lesson. To receive the highest score of “2” the observer needed to see the teacher provide and review examples from multiple cultures during the lesson. A score of “1” required the observer to see the teacher provide and

review examples from at least one other culture, and a score of “0” meant the observer did not see any other cultural examples brought to the attention of the students. During the classroom observation both co-researchers witnessed the same lesson at the same time, yet the Black researcher gave a score of “0” for this item on the observational tool, while the White researcher gave the item a score of “2,” resulting in a two-point discrepancy. Following the observation, the co-researchers and I reviewed their anecdotal notes and discussed the results. While both co-researchers agreed the teacher had referred to Sacajawea during a discussion of the Lewis and Clark expedition, the Black researcher felt reference to Sacajawea did not provide enough information about her contributions, while the White researcher felt reference to Sacajawea was enough to meet the requirements for a score of “2” on the observational tool. Whether this difference in perspective was due to the ethnicity of the co-researchers is not known, but the experience led to a deeper conversation about whether mere mention of other cultures qualified as meaningful exposure. It was determined that during future observations there would need to be some discussion of the cultures or historical figures being reviewed rather than just a brief mention. During the remaining observations scores between the co-researchers were consistently the same or differed by only one point.

While the identities of the study participants were kept from me, the primary researcher, after each observational session I met with the co-researchers and discussed what they had seen using the tool, as well as additional things they saw which were included in their notes. This allowed me to stay close to the actual research and to have a clear understanding of additional notes the researchers had made during the observations. An example of one discussion we held had to do with how to score when there are co-teachers in the classroom who are not necessarily exhibiting the same level of culturally responsive teaching. The co-researchers and I decided the tool would be scored from the experience of the students in the classroom, so the co-teachers

would be regarded as one presence in the classroom. This level of deep collaboration continued throughout the length of the study.

Each procedure used during the study was consistent with the normal processes of the school and did not disturb the natural setting of the school. The staff regularly examines ODR data, and classroom observations and discussions about culturally responsive teaching strategies were already familiar to the staff. In addition to the classroom observations and focus groups, archival records, and an examination of Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR) data was used to allow the triangulation of data with the benefits of deeper insider researcher understanding.

### **Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures**

The target population will be referred to as School District A and the specific school which served as the case will be “the school.” School District A was one of the largest urban districts in the Pacific Northwest with student demographics outlined in Table 1. While district goals focus on decreasing racial disparities both academically and behaviorally, there were inconsistent results district-wide. As a result, in 2011 the district developed a racial equity policy focused on providing professional development around racial equity for employees. The racial equity work at the school was reflective of this district initiative.

Table 1

*Teacher Experience Trends during Past Five Years and Demographics of the School and District A*

<u>Year</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>% FTE with Graduate Degree</u>	<u>Average Experience in Years</u>
2016/2017	27.7	85.6	10.2
2015/2016	29.6	87.8	9.9
2014/2015	27.5	85.5	10.9
2013/2014	25.5	80.4	10.8
2012/2013	24.1	77.2	13.1

<u>Student Demographics</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>District A</u>
Black	17%	10%
White	55%	56%
Multi-racial	14%	10%
Latino	13%	17%
Asian	1%	7%
Native American	< 1%	< 1%
Pacific Islander	< 1%	< 1%
Free and Reduced Lunch	29%	38%
English Language Learners	4%	9%

Given that the purpose of this research was to facilitate an in-depth exploration of a social issue in the educational setting, purposeful sampling allowed multiple perspectives to be accessed (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling involved careful selection of individuals and sites for the case study because “they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156).

The following factors were used to identify the school as appropriate for the case study:

- A school where the co-researchers have access to observing teachers and data on attendance without intruding or disturbing the culture of the school
- Consistent scores of 70% or higher on the PBIS Fidelity Measure Tools (ie: School Evaluation Tool, Team Implementation Checklist) or an equivalent tool, indicating fidelity of PBIS implementation for a period of at least five years. The process of applying a fidelity measure tool requires a school climate team and/or an outside rater to look at individual implementation factors and score each factor using a provided rubric. A score of 70% or higher is viewed as an acceptable level of implementation that will lead to positive student outcomes (PBIS OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2017).
- Continuing staff professional development on cultural responsiveness for a period of at least five years. Teacher participant identities and their length of time at the school were unknown to the primary researcher, however, multiple years of racial equity work created an environment of cultural responsiveness for all staff.
- Student racial/ethnic demographics for Black students that matched or exceeded 10%-the district percentage

The school in the study, located centrally in School District A, had students ranging from kindergarten through grade 8. Vincent, et al. (2011) determined implementation of CR-PBIS required PBIS implementation with fidelity paired with culturally responsive training for staff and other efforts to increase cultural consciousness. While the SET score for 2011-12, the first year of implementation, did not meet the 70% threshold, the school had maintained a score of 70% or higher consistently on PBIS fidelity measure tools or on district counterparts mandated by school climate work being conducted by District A for the subsequent years. Table 2 outlines the type of fidelity tool used each year and the scores.

Table 2

*PBIS Fidelity Tools Implemented at School*

Year	Tool	
2011–2012	School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)	67%
2012–2013	School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)	91%
2013-14	School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)	79%
2014–2015	Culturally Responsive- Tiered Fidelity Inventory (Modified district version of TFI)	75% (Teams)
		78% (Implementation)
		88% (Evaluation)
2015–2016	Culturally Responsive- Tiered Fidelity Inventory (Modified district version of TFI)	100% (Teams)
		83% (Implementation)
		100% (Evaluation)
2016–2017	Culturally Responsive- Tiered Fidelity Inventory (Modified district version of TFI)	100% (Teams)
		83% (Implementation)
		100% (Evaluation)

As part of the development of the cultural responsiveness portion of CR-PBIS, school staff had been receiving professional development in racial equity since 2009, which included the formation of a staff racial equity team, monthly staff development, a mandatory two-day racial equity training, and classroom observations using observational tools focused on the engagement of students of color. The school also had a CR-PBIS team formed in 2011 that examined disciplinary data on a monthly basis. Intentional work toward reducing racial disciplinary disparities began in February 2012 after disciplinary data showed Black students had received 89% of the referrals for the school year even though they only made up 23% of the student population. After years of racial equity work, the school staff was familiar with openly discussing race and racial disparities, and both academic and disciplinary data were examined with a racial lens on a regular basis. PBIS and racial equity work were embedded initiatives in the school culture, which

qualified the school as a school implementing CR-PBIS. Despite its commitment to CR-PBIS implementation and high ratings of implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity, the school’s data showed that while referrals for Black students had dropped, persisting disparities between ODRs compared to enrollment were still evident at the end of five years of implementation (see Table 3).

Table 3  
*Disciplinary Data from Comparing Enrollment and ODR Data*

	Black Students			White Students		
	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs
Feb. 2012	23%	89%	-%66	52%	11%	+41%
2011-2012	23%	65%	-42%	52%	10%	+42%
2012-2013	21%	65%	-43%	55%	22%	+33%
2013-2014	21%	49%	-28%	59%	41%	+18%
2014-2015	19%	48%	-29%	58%	39%	+19%
2015-2016	16%	44%	-28%	60%	36%	+24%

The focus of the study was teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of CR-PBIS for Black students, for even though there are other ethnicities, the disproportionate number of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) for Black students compared to their White peers is the most pervasive (Drakeford, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Office for Civil Rights, 1993; Skiba et al., 2000; Townsend, 2000) in American schools. The school had a higher percentage of Black students than is typical in the district, so research with this focus was of extreme importance.

**Instrumentation**

For the purposes of this study two data collection tools were developed: a classroom observational tool and focus group questions. The classroom observational tool was developed based on three different sources: (a) research literature featured in Brown University Teaching

Diversity Research (2017), (b) a survey developed by Hsaio (2015), and 3) work around racial microaggressions by Sue et al. (2007). The components adapted from Brown University (2017) and Hsaio (2015) contained observable examples of culturally responsive teaching. The materials from Sue et al. (2007) were modeled from therapeutic examples provided by Sue et al. (2007). Each component of the classroom observational tool aligns to research on cultural responsiveness featured in these three sources aligned to CRT, which will be illustrated later in this chapter.

Focus group questions were developed for two focus group sessions. The questions asked during the first session were modeled off Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (1978) for the purpose of linking the perceptions of the teachers to their culturally responsive pedagogical practice in their classrooms. The questions in the second session asked teachers to reflect upon how societal factors, school systems, and implicit bias affect their ability to implement CR-PBIS in the classroom. Of particular interest to the primary researcher was whether or not teacher perceptions of their practice were aligned to the data gathered during classroom observations.

### **Classroom Observational Data**

A classroom observational tool was developed that allowed the co-researchers to conduct classroom observations and look for examples of culturally responsive pedagogy. The observational tool was developed using research from three sources. The first resource, which had a collection of literature specifically focused around culturally responsive pedagogy, was the Brown University Teaching Diversity Research website (2017). The second source was a survey developed by Hsaio (2015) that identified 32 culturally responsive teaching competencies from existing literature. These competencies were classified in one of three factors: (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) relationship and expectation establishment, and (c) group belonging formation. The third source was research on racial microaggressions by Sue et al. (2007).

Sue, et al. (2007) defined MAs as common verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults. These racial MAs, outlined in Figure 5, were categorized in three ways: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations, each with its own descriptive examples. Since its publication in 2007, Sue et al.’s article “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice” has been referenced by over 1300 articles, making it a foundational piece of research in the study of racial MAs and a tool to help identify occurrences of implicit bias.

Microinsult (Often Unconscious)	Microassault (Often Conscious)	Microinvalidation (Often Unconscious)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ascription of Intelligence</li> <li>• Second Class Citizen</li> <li>• Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles</li> <li>• Assumption of Criminal Status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Microaggressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alien in Own Land</li> <li>• Color Blindness</li> <li>• Myth of Meritocracy</li> <li>• Denial of Individual Racism</li> </ul>

Figure 5. Categories of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007).

The classroom observational tool was used on three occasions with each of the four study participants, once before the first focus group occurred, once between the first focus group session and the second focus group session, and again just before the second focus group session. Table 4 is an excerpt of the classroom observational tool shown in greater detail in Appendix A.

Table 4

*Sample from Classroom Observational Tool*

Observable Culturally Responsive Behavior	0	1	2
1. All students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom. (If applicable or describe scenario if rubric does not apply)	Less than half of all students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.	More than half, but not all, students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.	All students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.
2. All students are equitably called upon and/or helped.	White students are disproportionately called upon and/or helped as compared to perceived African American students.	Students from different ethnicities and groups are called upon and/or helped, but preference is sometimes given to White students.	All students are equitably called upon and/or helped.

The use of classroom observational data has successfully been used in the past to track teacher interactions with students using a racial /ethnic lens. Emihovich (1983) used similar strategies to track the classroom experiences of two kindergarten students, one Black, one White, who had been labeled early in their school careers as having disciplinary issues. She tracked the trajectory of the two students and the perceptions of their teachers through observations, interviews, and videotapes. Emihovich (1983) discovered the two boys had very similar behavior but were responded to differently by teachers. The White student received minor reprimands for his behavior, while the Black student was disciplined more harshly and referred to a specialized program for students with behavior issues. Interviews indicated the teachers had lower expectations for the Black student, even though they viewed their interactions with all students in a positive light. The use of multiple forms of evaluation allowed the researcher to see variations in the behavior of the teachers during classroom observations versus how they expressed their

relationship with students in interviews. This indicated that even though the teacher participants were well-meaning in their thoughts and words, their actions were inconsistent with their philosophy.

This study similarly looked at how teacher perceptions align with their actions within the classroom. In order to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions, the data collected from the classroom observations were compared and contrasted to teacher perceptions of CR-PBIS and its implementation during focus group sessions.

### **Teacher Focus Group Sessions**

Two focus group sessions were held with the study participants to gather the perceptions of the classroom teachers as to how CR-PBIS is implemented in their classrooms and the factors contributing to its implementation. The same participants were involved in all three classroom observations and in both focus group sessions. The first focus group session was held between the first and second observations, while the third focus group session was held between the second and third observations. The focus group sessions were facilitated by my co-researchers to protect the identity of the study participants. The focus group sessions were recorded and then transcribed by a neutral third party hired by the primary researcher.

The first focus group session used a line of questioning tied to Vygotsky's CHAT (1978). CHAT examined the link between human behavior and consciousness and "helps in exploring and understanding interactions in their social context, multiple contexts and cultures, and the dynamics and development of particular activities" (Igira & Gregory, 2009, p. 435). The questions, outlined in Table 5, explored teacher perceptions of CR-PBIS and aligned teacher perceptions to their activities in their classroom following the train of conversation around teacher knowledge, dispositions, and skills.

Table 5

*Focus Group Session One Questions and Expressions*

Question	Expression
What do you think about CR-PBIS?	Knowledge
What does CR-PBIS feel like in your classroom?	Dispositions
How do you “do” CR-PBIS in your classroom?	Skills

The second focus group session featured a series of questions that examined teacher perceptions of potential barriers that decrease their ability to implement CR-PBIS in their classrooms. These perceived barriers may be connected to societal factors, systems within the educational setting, or implicit bias. Table 6 outlines the questions and categorical factors that were covered in the focus group discussion.

Table 6

*Focus Group Session Two Questions and Potential Barriers*

Question	Potential Barriers
How do societal factors influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?	Societal Factors
How do school systems at this school influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?	School Systems
How does implicit bias influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?	Implicit Bias

Gaining information about teacher perspectives is an important aspect of any classroom research and has been done in past studies through interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. Boyd and Arnold (2000) examined the intersection between teacher beliefs about education, the aims of antiracism education, and moral education of the teaching program in which they had been trained. By fostering a way to reflect teacher voice the researchers were able to find patterns of thought that were not reflected in course descriptions from the program. This, in turn, allowed the author to

reflect on what additional pieces needed to be included in teacher training so teachers can serve as agents of social change.

For this particular study the focus groups were the vehicle through which teacher perceptions and perspectives could be heard. Aligning these perspectives to the data collected from classroom observations showed interesting patterns that would verify teacher perceptions, indicate teacher perceptions are not consistent with their actions in the classroom, or a combination of the two.

### **Staff Debriefing**

Since this study fit into a regular inquiry cycle at the school, the results of the study and the focus of the study will be shared with the staff once the dissertation process is concluded. A school leadership team will then use the data to inform professional development design for the staff. An appreciative inquiry model (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) will be used to focus on the positive features already in place at the school and how those positives can be creatively utilized to address any challenges that need to be addressed.

### **Additional Data Sources**

As part of the implementation of CR-PBIS, the school collected data regularly. This archived data was used as artifacts to enhance triangulation of the study. These include Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR) Data from 2011- 2017, PBIS Fidelity of Implementation Tools Data, and culturally responsive Professional Development Records from 2011-2017. I will refer to these in my study as *Archival and Current Data*.

Archival and current data on ODRs, PBIS fidelity of implementation tools data, and professional development records were collected to triangulate data (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2003; and Yin, 2009). This was in addition to the classroom observational tool and focus group data collected.

## **Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR) Data from 2011- 2017**

The school regularly collected disciplinary data and entered it into data keeping system called the School-wide Information System (SWIS). This data was used by the school to make decisions about systems that need to be modified, interventions that need to be provided for students, or offer an opportunity for staff self-reflection about the quantity and type of referrals they are writing. Data was regularly examined using a racial lens as part of the school's CR-PBIS work. ODR data from September of 2011 to June of 2017 was collected to examine comparisons of White students and students of color.

The use of ODR data to identify racial disparities in school discipline is well documented in PBIS and CR-PBIS literature (Skiba et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2014). A study conducted by Banks and Obiakor (2015) detailed the efforts of a staff to decrease overall ODRs by 20-60%. In time, the staff requested more training in integrating cultural and linguistic differences which led to fewer culturally and linguistic students being designated to tiers requiring a greater number of interventions. This study documented not only that there were racial disciplinary disparities at the beginning of the study but showed how the disparities decreased with the implementation of professional development in the areas of cultural and linguistic diversity.

## **PBIS Fidelity of Implementation Tools**

The National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions encourages school PBIS teams to conduct assessments on an annual or bi-annual basis in order to measure whether or not schools are implementing PBIS with fidelity. The school's PBIS Team completed the Team Implementation Checklists (TIC), a self-assessment, twice a year since 2011. In addition, district PBIS Coaches came to the school annually to conduct a School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET) in order to have outsider impartiality. A score of 70% or higher on the SET is required to

classify the school is implementing PBIS with fidelity, and the school exceeded that goal each year from 2011-2016.

### **Professional Development Records from 2011-2017**

The content of each staff meeting at the school was recorded each week on Staff Meeting Agendas were kept on file to document professional development hours for the Oregon Department of Education. Agendas from professional staff development opportunities were collected to document the school had consistently engaged in racial equity work since 2011. Proof of professional development showed the staff was accustomed to discussing race as a factor in education, using a racial lens when examining data, and discussing race in the classroom and school community. Documentation of past staff training fit the focus of the study and allowed for further triangulation of data.

### **Data Collection**

Multiple data collection methods are a key aspect of case study research according to experts in the field (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Creswell (2013) recommended observations, interviews, document collection, and audiovisual as approaches to qualitative research. Yin (2014) recommended triangulation of six major sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. For the purposes of this study, five types of the evidence listed above were collected: classroom observation notes, focus groups held with classroom teachers, ODR records spanning from 2011 to 2017, archival and current professional development records, and PBIS Team fidelity tools ranging from the 2011 to 2017. A case study database was created to maintain records for each participant, signed informed consent forms, and protocols.

Each research question was addressed by one or more methods of data collection for triangulation to be applied during analysis to answer the principal research question. Table 7

summarizes each method of data collection and which sub-questions were addressed by the method.

Table 7

*Data Collection and Analysis Summary*

Type of Data Collection	Sub-Questions Addressed
Classroom observations	<i>Principal Question</i> <i>Research Sub-Question Addressed: #2, 4, 5</i>
Teacher focus groups	<i>Principal Question</i> <i>Research Sub-Question Addressed: #1, 3, 5</i>
ODR data from 2011- 2017	<i>Principal Question</i> <i>Research Sub-Question Addressed: #4</i>
Collection of Team Implementation Checklists (TIC) and School-Wide Evaluation Tools (SET) from 2011-2017	<i>Principal Question</i>
Collection of professional development records from 2009-2017	<i>Principal Question</i>

**Operationalization of Variables**

The items on the classroom observational tool were aligned to focus group questions in order to indicate whether or not teacher perceptions mirror their actions in the classroom. The alignment also allowed a succinct coding system that will allow the data to speak for itself without the need for over-interpretation. In fact, a misalignment of the results from the focus group data and classroom observations provided interesting information about teacher perceptions on their own actions within the classroom.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Creswell (2014) described three steps in data analysis: preparing and organizing the data, using coding to reduce the data into different themes, and representing the data. Data was analyzed in numerous ways in order to create a multi-faceted case study. Prior to the observations and focus groups a coding system was created that was reflective of each culturally responsive pedagogical component featured on the classroom observational tool. These components and other categories

that arose during the focus group sessions and from co-researcher comments were used to see if a direct correlation could be made between the two tools, allowing patterns to emerge. My hope was that naturalistic generalizations would stand out from the data, allowing “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases” (Creswell, 2013, p. 200). I used ATLAS.ti software to assist with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to “assemble a story that describes the interrelationship of categories in the model” (p. 87).

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Based on the topic chosen for this study there are pre-understandings, preconceptions, and biases I possess. The struggle for racial equity in the K–12 educational system was a focus for me during my 27-year career as an educator. In a previous teaching assignment, I worked closely with students in the juvenile justice system and saw countless examples of racism embedded in the legal and educational system. Because I had close access to the “school to prison pipeline,” I approach racial equity work with a sense of urgency and view it as the most important issue that needs to be addressed in the educational system.

Because of this background, whenever there is a disciplinary issue with a student of color, I find myself questioning whether implicit bias might be at the root of the issue. I hear the accounts from my Black students and their parents and I have concerns about implicit bias at my school. Fortunately, the observational tool developed requires specific observable examples of culturally responsive pedagogy that will be recorded by ENTPs. Having the research collected by my co-researchers helped me focus on the evidence versus my interpretation of the events with an emotional lens based on my past experiences.

As this was an in-depth case study, it would be enhanced if it was replicated at a school site that was implementing PBIS with fidelity but did not have the racial equity pieces in place.

Likewise, it would also be interesting to do a similar case study in a school not implementing PBIS. There were two challenges around this: (a) there wasn't enough time to do a case study for three schools, and (b) few schools in District A were implementing PBIS with fidelity at the time of the study.

The purpose of this study had several potential benefits. On a personal level I felt this line of research would help me become a better instructional leader and a better person overall in my interactions with others in my community. The more I learned about racial MAs and how they manifest, the more I could do to change my own behaviors and those of my employees. This knowledge can also be shared on a larger scale with parents, students, and community members.

The school featured in this study benefitted because the teachers experienced a level of growth similar to my own during professional development opportunities that occurred before and during the life of the study. The school's Leadership Team used the results to craft future professional development and used data-based decision making to design timely and appropriate training for the different stakeholders.

The results of this study could benefit the K–12 educational system as a whole. If other educators learn about specific examples of racial MAs that were existent in a school implementing CR-PBIS, professional development opportunities could be designed to replicate what is working at the school and make modifications based on the research results for what hasn't been successful. This research could add additional depth to racial equity efforts at the school featured in the study and be expanded and modified for all stakeholders in the school community, as well as for other K–12 institutions.

### **Expected Findings**

Based on the evidence collected through this study, I hoped to learn information about teacher perceptions around the implementation of CR-PBIS, in relation to CRT, in their classrooms

and supply the field of education with additional information about the potential impact of societal factors, school systems, and unconscious racial bias on the effectiveness of CR-PBIS. While this is a small contribution, the evidence collected could help to fill in specific gaps about why CR-PBIS isn't consistently effective in schools with Black students. This information may lead to higher quality professional development for classroom teachers, resulting in a decrease in racial disciplinary disproportionalities in schools with grades K–8.

### **Trustworthiness and Bias**

Because of my role of principal at the school during the life of the study and my closeness to the study participants, I took additional measures to avoid bias toward the data collected and the participants. These measures included researching different types of bias and how they can influence different stages of the research. I used journaling to reflect on my reactions to the classroom observation notes my co-researchers shared with me and carefully maintained the anonymity of the study participants by setting up strict guidelines as to the collection of the data, how it would be transcribed, and where it would be stored. The co-researchers handled the recruitment of study participants, classroom observations, and focus groups.

The teachers in the school were regularly observed and assessed on instruction effectiveness and successful implementation of school initiatives, not only by school administration, but by outside parties supporting the implementation of new school initiatives. Recruitment, therefore, involved processes normally used in school-wide evaluation of teacher effectiveness including the CR-PBIS initiative. Consequently, there was little or no reactivity on the part of the participants, and the co-researchers were able to collect naturally occurring, in-depth and contextualized data during classroom observations and focus groups.

## **Ethical Issues**

Before the study was conducted, written approval was needed from the research, evaluation, and assessment department of District A. Once written approval was granted, my ENTP co-researchers sought out study participants who were open to having classroom observations and participating in focus group sessions. Participants were given a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study, how data would be collected and analyzed, and how the results would be used. Their anonymity was guaranteed, and they were given specific conditions regarding the use of ENTP co-researchers, so they could be assured observation results will not be used against them in a job-performance evaluation.

The risk of this study was minimal because there was no intent to cause harm, but due to the sensitive nature around the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy, participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time. Data collected was used as part of the five-year analysis on the program effectiveness of CR-PBIS at the school, as examining such data is a regular practice. After the debriefing, study participants were free to request that their classroom observational data not be included in the data analysis portion of the study. They were reminded that data will be used and reported as an aggregated case study, and not by individual participants.

The confidentiality of participants was protected through the numeric and alpha coding used to identify the participants, with real identities known only to each participant and the ENTP co-researchers. Any specific comments or data included in the findings were identified using the participant code rather than a name. Additionally, both the school district and school were not identified by name, but by a pseudonym. Overall study results were made available to staff with participants kept anonymous, while the original focus group recordings and transcripts were stored in a secured location to which I did not have access. All the classroom observation data collected was stored by the researcher in a secure location. Archival records, documents, and ODR data

usually available to the school community retained their availability, but any researcher notes connecting these public documents to the confidential classroom observations and surveys were also stored in a secure location.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Recent research has shown the success of PBIS if it is implemented with fidelity, however inconsistent impacts on students of color have led to the implementation of CR-PBIS. CR-PBIS has also had mixed results, and the reason for racial disciplinary disproportionalities may be due to inconsistencies on the part of classroom teachers between their perceptions about how they are implementing CR-PBIS, and their actions in the classroom. Case study methodology was chosen for this study in order to move beyond disciplinary data and take a deeper look into teacher perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom as compared to classroom observations based on the larger theoretical lens of critical race theory. Multiple sources of data were accessed, including classroom observational data, teacher focus group data, ODR data, PBIS fidelity implementation tools results, and records of professional development opportunities focused on racial equity training. The results from the study were triangulated and documented in a variety of ways. Chapter 4 provides an analysis and interpretation of the data collected through multiple methods over the course of this study.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The K–12 educational system does not provide equal access to education, as a student’s chances for success vary based on their ethnicity. Black students are more likely to experience racial disciplinary disparities (Skiba et al., 2011), despite the absence of evidence that they have greater rates of misbehavior (Skiba, 2000). This is not a recent phenomenon but has been evident since disciplinary data aggregated by ethnicity began being collected in the 1970s (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). CRT proposes these imbalances exist because “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 14), and schools are no exception.

One system designed to address disciplinary behaviors was PBIS, which transformed into CR-PBIS after having inconsistent results with students of color (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2009). CRT asserts that factors contributing to the persisting trace of racially disproportional ODR disciplinary discrepancies in CR-PBIS schools are namely: (a) the impact of societal systems, (b) the manner of implementation of culturally responsiveness practices within the school system, and 3) implicit bias in teachers leading to racial microaggressions. Societal structures influence educational systems, and influences from society and the educational system can impact the perceptions and assumptions of classroom teachers. These influences are not independent of one another, but are deeply embedded within societal factors, school systems, and teacher psyches.

This case study was conducted for two primary purposes: (a) to examine the impact of CRT on the perceptions of teachers in a school that had done intentional CR-PBIS work for at least five years, and, (b) to determine what observable components of cultural responsiveness are present in the classroom. A comparison of classroom observational records and teacher perceptions shared

during focus group sessions provided insight as to whether teacher perceptions are consistent with what was observed during the classroom observations.

### **Description of the Sample**

The classrooms and teachers featured in the purposeful sampling of this study encompassed grades two through eight at one urban K–8 school, referred to as “the school.” I was principal of the school but requested permission to conduct the study from my immediate supervisor, a district administrator. Simultaneously, approval for the study was requested through the research and evaluation department for the school district. School District A, a pseudonym, granted approval to conduct this study in October of 2016. My unique position as researcher and principal of the school required certain safeguards to be built into the study because I was the direct supervisor and evaluator of the study participants. As a result, upon district approval of the study I began contacting local universities to recruit a co-researcher who could do the classroom observations and conduct the focus groups. Two professors from a local university volunteered to conduct the research and we arranged a meeting to overview the study and examine the classroom observational tool. One of the co-researchers was Black, and one was White, which allowed two different perspectives to be represented with the classroom observation tool in regard to how many students in each classroom were perceived to be Black, and on the scores for each item of the observational tool. Both co-researchers have an extensive background in PBIS and have participated in racial equity trainings through their university.

During the initial meeting with the co-researchers, the classroom observational tool was refined for clarity and consistency. The co-researchers wanted a clear understanding of what factors they should observe, for the classroom observation tool required them to pay attention to the classroom environment, the materials being used, and teacher interactions with students. It was decided that instead of tracking the frequency of certain behaviors, the classroom observation tool

would be modified to include a rubric with clear, measurable qualifiers. These modifications were made over a period of a month through electronic communication and another meeting. The co-researchers then came to the school and conducted three classroom observations to test out the practicality of the classroom observation tool and to see if they scored consistently with one another.

As this process occurred, I sent the co-researchers email addresses for each of the teachers at the school and a staff list showing grade levels taught and room numbers. The co-researchers sent a cover letter and consent form describing the study which ensured teachers anonymity should they choose to participate. The co-researchers recruited study participants and collected consent forms from each of the participants and arranged dates and times to do the observations and focus group sessions. Because the identity of the study participants was highly confidential the co-researchers were only able to share limited information with me. Three of the teachers who volunteered to participate taught students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, while one of the study participants who volunteered to participate taught students in grades six through eight. Due to the need for anonymity, the length of time each teacher participant had been at the school was unknown, but regardless of experience, cultural responsiveness and an examination of data using a racial lens was embedded within the school culture. Any new staff members hired within the five-year period had to exhibit an understanding of CRT during the application and interview process. The interview team contained teachers who had participated in the racial equity work at the school, as well as parents participating in racial equity work being done at the community level. As the study progressed, one of the study participants who taught grades Kindergarten through fifth grade had difficulty scheduling classroom observations and focus group sessions when the co-researchers were available and ended up withdrawing from the study.

Classroom observations and the focus groups occurred from April of 2017 to June 2017. The co-researchers did some observations together, and some separately due to time and schedule constraints. The observations they did together allowed us to evaluate if they were continuing to be consistent in how they were scoring on the classroom observation tool. Each time the co-researchers were on site for the classroom observations, we met afterward to review each of the observation records so that I could stay as close to the research as possible despite my position as principal. During these meetings the identity of the teachers was kept from me to protect their anonymity. During the meetings we discussed what the co-researchers had observed in relation to the classroom observational tool, and I would review their written comments and ask for clarification. I would then journal my thoughts and perceptions of the results as both a researcher and a principal, for my co-researcher's observations and comments during our discussions gave me ideas for professional development and how I could better support the teachers and students under my care.

The recordings of the focus group sessions were turned over to a transcription service to protect the identity of the study participants from being identified based on their voices. The transcripts were returned and entered into ATLAS.ti for the purpose of coding the content. The classroom observation tool records were anonymous and did not contain the identity of the study participants.

### **School Description**

The school featured in the study was located in District A, one of the largest urban districts in the Pacific Northwest. During the 2016-17 school year, when the study was conducted, there were 446 students enrolled. The racial/ethnic background of the students included 17% Black, 55% White, 14% Multi-racial, 13% Latino, 1% Asian, and less than 1% Native American. 29% of the

students qualified for free and reduced lunch, and 4% were designated as English Language Learners.

District A had focused on racial equity training and school climate work, and the school had expanded that work for over five years, qualifying it as a CR-PBIS school. The initial racial equity work was called “Courageous Conversations” and was provided through the Pacific Education Group (PEG) using a three-phase model. During the first two years a “train the trainers” model where the equity team from the school was given content, and that content was then shared with the staff. During the second phase a new team called the Collaborative Action research for Collaboration (CARE) team was formed which received training, conducted classroom observations, and provided professional development for the staff. In the third phase the entire staff began CARE observations, and a Parents Addressing School Success (PASS) team was formed to begin transferring the knowledge the staff had been gaining to the larger school community. This resulted in racial affinity groups, parent discussion groups, and racial equity workshops open to the community.

In addition to the district provided Courageous Conversations model the staff regularly looked at academic, behavioral, and social-emotional data to gauge which students needed interventions and to review the effectiveness of interventions. Each data review included an examination of the data using a racial lens and a discussion of disproportionality. Multiple forms of data were reviewed in this manner, including standardized testing, district and school benchmark assessments, and anecdotal data.

Additional professional development designed to specifically address racial disciplinary disproportionalities was sought out by the school administrative team. This included training in Vulnerable Decision Points provided by a professor from a local university that was done over multiple sessions and reinforced during classroom observations and staff discussions.

Supplemental trainings in racial microaggressions, implicit bias, and CRT were developed by the school equity team and administration.

During the study the school continued the past practice of having teachers complete peer observations. The purpose of the observations was to identify the engagement of students of color and to identify culturally responsive strategies being implemented in the classroom. The school also participated in a national grant funded through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and had frequent visitors from across the country. Since teachers were accustomed to observers, the classroom observations completed for this study provided minimal disruption for study participants. Because the staff had participated in multiple years of racial equity training and regularly reviewed student data using a racial/ethnic lens, the information contained within the focus group questions were not unusual topics of discussion for the study participants.

During the 2016-17 school year the school received well over the passing score of 70% on the CR-TIC, a district version of the TIC that incorporated culturally responsive elements. There was a total of 151 ODRs, which averaged to less than one per day. There were 103 ODRs, or 68% of the referrals, that occurred in the classroom. 38% of the students receiving ODRs were White, 33% were Black, 18% were multi-racial, 10% were Latino, and 1% were Native American. The majority of ODRs fell into three categories: 31% were categorized as defiance/insubordination, 30% were categorized as disruption, and 20% were categorized as bullying. According to the PBIS triangle that designates each student to a tier that indicates the amount of support needed for behavioral success, 94% of the student body were classified as tier 1 or in need of no additional support, 5% were classified as tier 2 or in need of some additional support, and 1% was classified as tier 3 or in need of intensive support.

## **Research Methodology**

Based on the focus of this study, it was determined that case study methodology would be the most effective way to gauge teacher perceptions about the implementation of CR-PBIS. Focus groups allowed the co-researchers to dig deeper into how teachers felt about different aspects of CR-PBIS implementation and the influence of CRT on school systems and classrooms. The participation of co-researchers who were well versed in CR-PBIS and school systems was highly beneficial, for it allowed the study participants to speak freely without having to define educational terms or foundational pieces of the educational system. Analysis of the data collected during classroom observations and focus groups was made easier through use of protocols, electronic recording, and an observational tool that had been carefully modified by all co-researchers. Throughout the data collection process, the classroom observation tool was carefully reviewed after each day of observation and focus groups were audio recorded on two devices. The anonymity of the study participants was insured by eliminating any identifiers other than a participant number and a note about the general age range of the students: grades K-5 or 6-8. The focus group recordings were turned over to a transcription service and only the written transcripts were given to me, the primary researcher.

## **Analysis**

The data from the culturally responsive classroom observation tool was composed of rubric scores and notes from 12 classroom observations. The observations, conducted by ENTP co-researchers from a local university, ranged from 20 to 30 minutes each. One co-researcher completed five classroom observations, while the other co-researcher completed seven classroom observations. Eight of the 12 observations were done by the co-researchers together, which allowed an examination of calibration and rich discussions about the research tool and interpretations of items contained within the tool. These discussions occurred with me, the primary

researcher, after each day of observations for me to be as close to the research as possible, as well as ask questions about written comments on the culturally responsive classroom observation tool. Each study participant was observed a minimum of two different times.

While the study was designed to have two focus group sessions with all study participants present at each, the schedules of the co-researchers, study participants, and the close approach of the end of the school year did not allow this to happen. While four teachers had originally agreed to participate in the study, Participant 2 ended up having multiple schedule conflicts and was unable to participate. Instead, a total of four focus group sessions occurred, two for each series of questions. Study participants simply attended the focus group time and date that best met their schedule needs and each of the sessions ranged from 22 minutes to 56 minutes (see Table 8). The focus group sessions were recorded on two voice recorders and following the last session the recordings were transcribed by a transcription service, so the identity of the study participants would be kept anonymous from myself, the primary researcher.

Table 8

*Summary of Focus Group Sessions*

Track	Length	Focus Group Session	Participant(s)
5/3/17	53:52	Session 1	Participant #1/Participant #3
5/17/17	22:47	Session 1	Participant #4
5/24/17	46:13	Session 2	Participant #3
5/26/17	45:02	Session 2	Participant #1/Participant #4

After reviewing the culturally responsive classroom observation tool results, it was determined the use of tables would be beneficial for reporting the findings. The focus group transcripts were coded using ATLAS.ti software. For the first coding cycle provisional coding was applied using categories developed before fieldwork began. These categories: (a) societal factor, (b) school systems, and 3) implicit bias, came about from the questions used in the second focus

group session. In Vivo coding was used to capture specific quotes made by study participants, and descriptive coding was applied to additional topics that arose during the focus group sessions. During the second coding cycle axial coding was used to develop sub-codes, as the codes developed in the first cycle contained numerous items. In addition to the research, school ODR records were also used to answer study questions, and additional tables exhibit how the data collected was triangulated.

### **Summary of the Results**

For this case study, the following research questions were chosen prior to conducting the study:

#### **Principal Research Question**

With respect to critical race theory, how do teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation?

#### **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers' cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS?
2. What evidence is there that culturally-responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms?
3. What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms?
4. What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices?

5. What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom?

Table 9 shows how each of the research questions were aligned with one or more of the data collection methods before the study was conducted.

Table 9

*Alignment of Research Sub-Question Strands to Data Collection*

Research Sub-Question Strand	Classroom Observation Tool	Focus Groups
1. Role of societal systems in the implementation of CR-PBIS		<b>X</b>
2. Evidence of culturally-responsive practices in classrooms	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
3. Teacher perceptions about the implementation of culturally responsive practices		<b>X</b>
4. Relationship between culturally responsive practices and ODRs	<b>X</b>	
5. Impact of implicit bias on CR-PBIS implementation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

Classroom observations were conducted using an observational tool that measured elements of culturally responsive pedagogy with ties to student engagement and disciplinary success. The factors observed during the observations fell into the following broad categories:

1. type of communication and interactions with students
2. variety of learning activities that honor multiple learning styles
3. positive reinforcement and communication about expectations
4. opportunities to connect content to the personal experiences of students
5. classroom displays and materials that reflect multiple perspectives

These elements aligned to questions featured during the focus group sessions and discussion during the focus group sessions allowed additional themes and thoughts to emerge. As the research progressed, the co-researchers discovered that two of the elements on the classroom observational

tool were difficult to measure due to the timing of the observations. Since some of the study participants were K-5 teachers who supervised the students for the entire day and observation times were dependent upon the co-researcher's schedules, the co-researchers were unable to observe two elements with consistency. The two elements were: (a) the teacher greeting students as they entered the classroom, and, (b) the teachers setting high expectations for all students. The co-researchers typically did not attempt to score these items, but instead wrote a note that they were unable to observe the behavior.

The focus group questions were related to the observation tool, particularly the first focus group session where study participants were asked:

1. What do you think about CR-PBIS?
2. What does CR-PBIS feel like in your classroom?
3. How do you “do” CR-PBIS in your classroom?
4. What training have you received around CR-PBIS?
5. What would you like to know about CR-PBIS?

The second focus group session was related to the classroom observation tool but sought to gain teacher perceptions about the influence of societal factors, school systems, and implicit bias on their ability to implement CR-PBIS. The questions were as follows:

1. How do societal factors influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?
2. How do school systems at this school influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?
3. How does implicit bias influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom?
4. What resources are available to help with implementing CR-PBIS?
5. What additional resources would you like to help with implementing CR-PBIS?

These deeper questions were reserved for the second focus group, so study participants would feel more familiar with the co-researchers, and thus more likely to share their opinions openly. Both the classroom observation tool and the focus group questions align with the research sub-questions.

The only additional data needed to answer research sub-question four are ODR records. The data collection tool for disciplinary data used by the District A is automatically entered into the School-Wide Information System (SWIS). SWIS is used by over 25,000 schools across the United States and in other countries such as Canada, Australia, and Norway (Educational and Community Supports, 2017). SWIS allows schools to review disciplinary data in a variety of ways so schools can determine what additional systems are needed to support individual students, groups of students, or the entire school. SWIS additionally produces reports that review data by ethnicity, a key feature for the questions posed in this study.

Consequently, the findings of this case study were presented using two strategies that overlap. This will begin with the results of the classroom observations, as the elements contained within the classroom observational tool span multiple research sub-questions. Each of the research sub-questions will then be addressed using the evidence from the classroom observations, as well as study participant responses that were gathered.

### **Classroom Observation Results**

Classroom observations were completed by two co-researchers from a local university. Both researchers had educational experience in the K–12 system, as well as experience with PBIS and racial equity. The co-researchers and I, the primary researcher, modified the original classroom observational tool to ensure the research would be consistent with multiple observers. The classroom observational tool specifically asked the co-researchers to identify students who they perceived to be Black, for the purpose of identifying differences in interactions between teachers and students. The co-researchers had different racial/ethnic backgrounds, for one was

Black and one was White, which allowed the observational tool to be used by two researchers who might have viewed things with different perspectives due to their differing racial/ethnic backgrounds. In order to calibrate their use of the classroom observational tool, the co-researchers conducted one observation to test out the tool, and then conducted four classroom observations together. Appendix D shows the level of calibration between the two co-researchers. A comparison of the scores between the two co-researchers indicates that as time progressed the co-researcher's scores were more closely aligned. Other than during the first observation described in Chapter 3 where reviewer scores for one item were off by two points, the remainder of the scores throughout the length of the study were no more than one point apart. This indicates the classroom observational tool is a reliable instrument for measuring certain aspects of culturally relevant instruction in a classroom when the raters are familiar with the components being measured.

The classroom observational results indicated that there are areas of culturally relevant instruction where the teachers were consistently strong, areas that were moderately strong, and areas where certain culturally relevant strategies were not observed or were partially implemented. There were 12 observations in total and each culturally responsive element was scored on a 0, 1, 2 rubric, with 0 indicating no or partial implementation and 2 indicating full implementation, thus the highest combined score an element could receive during the length of the study was a raw score of 24. A percentage was derived for each element by dividing the combine raw score by 24.

Table 10

*Classroom Observational Tool Results by Raw Score and Percentage*

Observable Behavior with Item # in brackets	Raw Score (out of 24)	Percentage Score
All students are equitably called upon and/or helped. (#2)	21	87.5%
Disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior are consistent for all students. (#13)	21	87.5%
The teacher uses both traditional and non-traditional discourse styles to communicate with all students. (#3)	19	79%
Learning activities are designed for multiple learning styles. (#9)	18	75%
Teachers encourage all students to participate in a community of learners by focusing on collective work, responsibility, and cooperation. (#11)	17	71%
A positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationship is established with all students. (#6)	17	71%
Teacher offers praise or rewards when expectations of success are met, e.g. “You can do it” “That’s brilliant” “I like the way you think”, etc. (#5)	16	67%
Classroom displays represent multiple cultural backgrounds. (#10)	15	62.5%
Teacher communicates specific expectations of success to all students both verbally and visually. (#4)	14	58%
The teacher’s classroom environment is warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students. (#7)	7	29%
The teacher’s lesson materials represent multiple cultural perspectives. (#8)	6	25%
Teacher refers to different cultures where appropriate. For example, a lesson refers to poems from both Langston Hughes and Robert Frost (#14)	2	8%
New content is connected to student’s cultural backgrounds (#12)	1	4%

Two elements on the classroom observational tool received a score of 87.5%, indicating the teachers were implementing the strategies most of the time. Item #2 dealt with whether all students were equitably called upon or helped. For this item the co-researchers counted the number of students who were perceived to be Black and White in the classroom, tracked the number of times students in each category were supported by the teacher, and determined if such support was given equitably.

The second culturally responsive element which also received a score of 87.5%, item #13, also had to do with teacher response to students, in this case disciplinary responses to off-task or loud behavior. The co-researchers used the strategy described above to track teacher responses to students and gauge the equitable distribution of the responses. An examination of the individual co-researcher scores indicates the same score was given or there was only a gap of one point between the co-researchers, indicating perceptions were consistent regardless of the ethnicity of the observer.

Item #3, which scored 79%, measured whether the teacher used both traditional and non-traditional discourse styles to communicate with all students. The rubric specified specific qualifiers, which were evidence of: (a) flexible grouping, (b) supplemental resources other than the textbook, and 3) student-directed discussion groups. Item #9, which scored 75%, also examined teaching strategies used to engage the students. The co-researchers looked for learning activities designed for multiple learning styles, which included at least two of the following: (a) partner/group discussion, (b) hands-on activities, (c) song/rhythm, and (d) movement.

The next set of items were viewed as areas of moderate strength, for the overall score ranged between 58% to 71%. Item #11, which received a score of 71%, examined how teachers encouraged students to participate in a community of learners by focusing on collective work, responsibility, and cooperation. The co-researchers looked for evidence of learning activities that were student centered with the teacher acting primarily in the supportive role of facilitator with students taking a leadership role.

Item #6, which also received a score of 71%, looked at the level to which the teachers made effort to build positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationships with all students. This was indicated in two ways, through the observation of interactions between teachers and students that reflected mutual caring and respect, and by teacher reactions to student contributions. The co-

researchers sought to see if student contributions were consistently openly valued, expanded by the teacher, and then connected to the content of the lesson.

Equitable positive reinforcement was the focus of item #5, which received a score of 67%. This positive reinforcement could be delivered through some type of reward, or simply through the teacher making a positive statement when the student met expectations of success. Communication of expectations of success was represented in item #4, which received a score of 58%. Such expectations could be presented in two ways, either verbally or visually. In order to receive the highest score, verbal expectations and visual expectations both had to be observed and had to be consistent with one another.

The last item falling into the moderate range was item #10, which was connected to the physical classroom environment. The co-researchers looked to see if classroom displays represented multiple cultural backgrounds, preferably those of the students. This item received a score of 62.5%, indicating there was some effort on the part of the teachers to create a classroom space that represented multiple ethnicities and perspectives.

Certain items on the classroom observational tool were clearly poorly implemented or not implemented at all, as indicated by the wide gap in percentage points between these strategies and the ones that scored moderately high. Item #7, which received a score of 29%, examined whether the classroom environment was warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students. This was measured by how learning activities allowed opportunities for all students to share different aspects of their cultural and personal experiences. Item # 8, which received a score of 25%, focused on the materials used for the lesson and if they reflected multiple cultural perspectives. These materials were not limited to textbooks but could include any supplemental materials teachers included in their lessons.

Item #12, which received a score of 4%, looked at how the cultural backgrounds of the students were connected to new content presented by the teachers. This required teachers to not only refer to student cultural backgrounds, but to find a way to use student backgrounds as a foundational part of the new content. The co-researchers discovered the study participants typically used student knowledge of the school setting as the connection to new content.

The classroom observations indicated areas where the study participants were strong, areas where there was moderate evidence of practices being in place, and areas where there was little or no evidence of practice. Because the school was a site where intentional racial equity training had been implemented for at least five years, it is helpful to classify each item on the classroom observation tool as related to curriculum and materials, classroom environment, or professional development to see how racism might be disrupted in the school environment through culturally relevant practices.

### **Delivery of Culturally Responsive Practices**

A deeper examination of the classroom observational tool indicates there are three broad ways culturally responsive practices can manifest for students, as is indicated in Table 11. A lack of awareness about certain types of manifestations does not lead to a neutral outcome, but instead can perpetuate harmful racial microaggressions on students (Sue et al., 2007).

Table 11

*Classroom Observational Tool Results by Category*

Observable Behavior	Category	Percentage Score
All students are equitably called upon and/or helped. (#2)	Professional Development	87.5%
Disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior are consistent for all students. (#13)	Professional Development	87.5%
The teacher uses both traditional and non-traditional discourse styles (#3)	Professional Development/ Materials	79%
Learning activities are designed for multiple learning styles. (#9)	Professional Development	75%
Teachers encourage a community of learners (#11)	Professional Development	71%
A positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationship is established with all students. (#6)	Professional Development	71%
Teacher offers praise or rewards (#5)	Professional Development	67%
Classroom displays represent multiple cultural backgrounds. (#10)	Environment	62.5%
Teacher communicates specific expectations of success (#4)	Professional Development/Environment	58%
The teacher's classroom environment is warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students. (#7)	Professional Development	29%
The teacher's lesson materials represent multiple cultural perspectives. (#8)	Materials	25%
Teacher refers to different cultures where appropriate (#14)	Professional Development/Materials	8%
New content is connected to student's cultural backgrounds (#12)	Professional Development/Materials	4%

Professional development for teachers supports them in learning a variety of culturally responsive teaching strategies that engage all learners, but also can support educators in reflecting on their interactions with students and their responses to certain situations. At the school featured in this study, there was a practice of intentional racial equity work for at least five consecutive years. Appendix E indicates the racial equity training spanned three major areas intended to help teachers work successfully with students of color while becoming aware of White privilege and their own

implicit bias: (a) training teachers to embed culturally responsive practices within their pedagogy, (b) having teachers examine disciplinary practices using student data, and 3) building opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own thought processes and practices, with opportunities to have peer discussions. A review of the classroom observation results shows professional development was a key factor for each of the strategies scoring as consistently strong. Professional development was also contributed significantly to four out of five strategies falling into the moderately strong range.

Materials used to teach lessons, which included textbooks, supplemental materials, and technology, are typically supplied by school districts. In the school represented in this study, teachers were encouraged by the administration to supplement the district curriculum with culturally relevant materials whenever possible. According to CRT, the content of the district curriculum is reflective of societal racism embedded within the educational system. Teacher attempts to supplement the curriculum indicates their awareness of the issue their attempts to correct the imbalance. In the classroom observation results item #3, referring to traditional and non-traditional discourse styles received a strong score, indicating teachers did pull supplemental materials into their lessons. Items #8, 14 and 12, which specified materials that reflected multiple perspectives, scored poorly with a range of four to 25%.

Sue et al. (2007), include physical environment as a key factor in having a culturally relevant setting. The choice of what is displayed can send unconscious messages to both White students and students of color regarding what holds importance. For example, posters of White U.S. presidents send a message to all students that only White men have the capability to become president, with only one exception in over 240 years. The classroom observations indicated a moderately strong score for item # 10, focused on classroom displays that reflect multiple cultural backgrounds. The other item dealing with the physical environment, #4, also received a moderately strong score based on whether the classrooms had visual representations of the

expectations that aligned with expectations shared verbally with the students. The physical environment of the classroom is a representation of racial bias within the school system for not providing culturally relevant displays and is also representative of the teachers and implicit bias that may inform their choice in what to display in their classrooms.

All three potential manifestations of a culturally relevant classroom, professional development, materials, and the physical environment, are representative of the influence outlined by CRT. Racism embedded within societal factors has a direct impact on school systems, as well as on the implicit bias of teachers and the potential for racial MAs. It is reassuring the topics covered by professional development at the school were reflected in classroom observations. An examination of the comments made by study participants during the focus group sessions will reinforce the observations, but also raise additional questions. Those comments are featured in the next section that examines the evidence from both the classroom observations and the focus group sessions regarding the study sub-questions.

### **Analysis of Sub-Questions**

Cultural Race Theory played a pivotal role in this study, specifically the theory racism permeates all systems of the United States. Not only are school systems reflective of the larger system, but classroom teachers, as members of society, possess implicit bias and perpetuate racial MAs. The primary question of this study explored this phenomenon by using CRT as a lens to examine how teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of CR-PBIS after five years of implementation.

### **Role of Societal Systems on the Implementation of CR-PBIS**

The first research question explored the role societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems, with respect to teachers' cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS. Since this question focused on teacher perspectives, the data collected during the focus

group sessions was used to reflect upon this question. Numerous societal factors were mentioned, including larger societal challenges such as institutional racism, an awareness of personal bias and the bias of others, and systemic challenges as the “school to prison pipeline.” The study participant who mentioned the school to prison pipeline defined it as, “Our school to prison pipeline is our kids of color cannot read.” Socio-economic status, specifically low socio-economic status and homelessness, was voiced as factors limiting the success of students of color. Study participants also expressed a lack of motivation on the part of the students due to a stronger interest in entertainment and other distractions.

Parents were recognized as playing a key role in the success of students and the study participants expressed building relationships with the parents as having high importance. Despite this desire to build relationships, the teachers felt unsuccessful with some families and sometimes felt the parents were working against them and did not value education. Concerns about exposure to media and video games that were violent and age-inappropriate for the students, even when the teachers had raised concerns with the parents, were mentioned multiple times, but deeper concerns surfaced:

It’s not just media. It’s what do my parents say when I go home? And what is their association with school and responsibilities with homework, and expectations of the value of education or even specific subjects? And if I was traumatized in reading as a child, I might project that on indirectly...not intentionally, project those feelings to my children.

So, I think societal factors influence how children show up at school every day (Participant 4).

One of the “feelings” the participants felt might be carried over to their students was a lack of trust toward teachers and the school system from certain parents: “... things in kid’s lives affect their ability to be successful in school and your ability to build relationships with them. Some kids are

very guarded and very untruthful ... very untrusting. Some families are very untrusting” (Participant 3). The same participant expressed uncertainty about why families, specifically Black families, were hesitant to make relationships and reflected on the potential cause for that hesitation:

Sometimes families... And I've had this experience with many Black families, of not wanting to come into school really. Not being comfortable talking to me in the classroom, being very leery of that. And so, it makes me wonder about their school experiences and what school was like for them (Participant 3).

This lack of trust manifested a situation described by two participants where parents acted supportive of the teacher during phone calls and face-to-face interactions where concerns about student progress were discussed but would then tell the student contradictory information at home. Students were given different messages by the parents than the teacher had given the students, causing a disconnect between home and school.

The responses to the focus group questions indicate the study participants felt there were numerous societal factors that negatively influence the success of students in school. While some of the factors were known due to conversations with students or families, there were some factors built from assumptions formed by the study participants. These assumptions implied the parent or student was responsible for the negative relationship between the teacher and family, or for the student's lack of success.

### **Evidence of Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices**

The second sub-question sought out evidence of culturally responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms? This question was addressed through both the classroom observations and the focus group responses. The classroom observations indicate multiple culturally responsive strategies were being implemented

at the school, with varying degrees of success. These include types of teacher and student interactions, activities designed for multiple learning styles, positive reinforcement, and attempts to represent multiple cultures in classroom displays. Evidence of other culturally responsive strategies was minimal, especially regarding teachers connecting the cultural backgrounds of the students to the content.

Focus group responses provided more depth and details to this sub-question. The study participants recognized the need for teaching social-emotional skills and school expectations. There was recognition of the need to build these strategies by re-teaching them, as needed for groups of students and individual students. The theme of individualization came up multiple times with recognition the needs of some students are different than others.

Knowing what individual needs a student might have was obtained by building relationships with students and their families. Study participants built relationships by working to, “engage with students and interact with them in a nonacademic time” (Participant 3). Classroom community building was also a priority where classroom agreements were formed, and the class had discussions about community building. Participant 2 described this process:

We talk a lot about strategies. And we use super flex curriculum to work on social skills and work on strategies for making better choices. And, try to recognize feelings. And feelings are fine. And it's okay to feel angry. Learn how to handle anger in an appropriate way.

Study participants additionally referred to specific lessons about equity and helping students to understand that different students have different needs. Participant 1 expressed, “I’m trying to give each person what they need to be successful and to grow during the year.”

Finding strategies for engaging all students in the classroom beyond building classroom culture were important for the study participants. This was recognized as a key aspect for

motivating students, along with knowing students and their individualized needs. Study participants realized learning was not a silent activity. Teacher flexibility was listed as an important factor, as was differentiation in instruction and the need to sometimes adapt the core curriculum due to its lack of cultural relevance.

Each of the study participants made some reference to professional development around racial equity influencing their teaching. Specifically mentioned were activities that required self-reflection, and the school practice of choosing a focal student of color each year whom the teacher would intentionally find ways to engage throughout the school year. Such efforts were not apparent during the classroom observations, so the focus group session was integral to forming a well-rounded picture of CR-PBIS implementation in the classroom. The consistency between participant responses and the strategies observed indicate culturally responsive strategies are being implemented in the classrooms featured in this study.

### **Perceptions of Classroom Teachers on CR-PBIS Implementation**

The third sub-question overlaps with the second question by exploring the perceptions classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms. While the second question examined what things were occurring, this question focuses on teacher opinions around the implementation of CR-PBIS at the school. The relevance of racial equity training was questioned by one participant, who stated, “sometimes I think we get hung up on culturally relevant. And we just need to literally lay it all out there and just talk about it” (Participant 1). Another participant defined, “culturally relevant means that you’re looking at the individual kids and what will reach them, especially when it comes to behavior” and felt some of the challenges with implementation at times may be because, “it’s a confusion of what being culturally relevant really means” (Participant 3).

The need for additional racial equity training that included opportunities for discussion about race was echoed by two study participants. One participant reflected, “we’re not going to change things unless we really start having conversations about what’s going on and the disparity” (Participant 4). The purpose for the discourse was to allow teachers to self-reflect on their practices for “you have to examine Whiteness and the role it plays in your behavior expectations, the way you’re presenting material” (Participant 3). Discussions of a self-reflective nature needed to be with someone the teacher trusted, “there’s people I trust and would be really helpful with talking about culturally relevant practice” (Participant 3).

Continued professional development was not only important for having discussions, but also because the study participants felt some of their colleagues were not implementing culturally responsive practices consistently. Participant 3 expressed frustration with peers when describing CR-PBIS implementation on a schoolwide level,

we still have teachers who might not be as onboard as we would hope, or onboard at all. I think that’s not true. I think we have teachers...I think everyone is...is onboard, at least at some level. But the people that weren’t have lapsed.

There was a perception that different teachers would reinforce expectations differently. Participant 3 theorized, “as far as the expectations for the common areas go, there’s kind of maybe lax or different interpretations by staff about what those expectations mean and how you hold the kids accountable for following those expectations”. Because of such different interpretations, “If I tell them to be quiet or stop, they don’t listen to me because they don’t know me. Their teachers aren’t telling them to stop.” Participant 3 suggested this issue could be addressed by increasing teacher accountability, “We have to keep coming back around and then following back up with those teachers and making sure that everyone on the team is doing what they are supposed to be doing and really holding people accountable.”

The need for more student accountability was also raised, as there was disagreement between the study participants as to what should happen to students when they were disruptive. Implementation of culturally relevant practices posed some challenges because there weren't enough consequences for students, a perception that students got away with unacceptable behavior. One study participant felt this was a common complaint of the staff, as "a lot of staff that feels like there's really not any consequences for behavior" (Participant 1). In fact, some of the interventions were viewed as having the opposite effect,

... it's almost like a reward for the student to be able to just go out and kind of, in their words, like chit chat as they're walking around. And so, then teachers become leery of trying to ask for help from whoever happens to be acting administrator at the time, or maybe a special education teacher or an administrator because they don't feel it's help in the way that they want help, based on their perception of the situation. And then sometimes that can come down to feeling belittled (Participant 1).

The concerns expressed were not only centered around how a lack of consequences affected the teacher, but also around how the perceived inaction affected the student, "at what point do kids start internalizing" (Participant 4). Study participants shared consequences wouldn't always look the same for every student, "I do believe that discipline does need to be handled somewhat individually" (Participant 1) but felt an individualized approach could sometimes lead to inconsistency, "I see it both ways where sometimes behavior is ignored and sometimes behavior is allowed. And it just seems confusing sometimes, why decisions are made" (Participant 3).

There was unanimous agreement between the study participants regarding a lack of support with implementing CR-PBIS from the district. Factors such as time for training, money for training, a lack of materials for social-emotional lessons, and a lack of time to train or implement conflict resolution were cited. They also felt there should be more support from the two school

administrators in the form of more frequent classroom visits and faster follow-up on disciplinary issues. Participant 3 rationalized,

I think both of them are just stretched so incredibly thin. And I think that primary concerns often aren't met with as quickly as the midlevel concerns with discipline, just because the primary ones maybe don't seem as urgent or as volatile.

Overall the study participants supported the concept of CR-PBIS and the importance of building relationships, building classroom communities, and having positive reinforcement in place. There was disagreement as to what should occur if a student received an ODR, and an overwhelming opinion teacher do not receive enough support from the district and school administration to implement CR-PBIS as it should be implemented. Concerns were shared about a lack of consistency in implementation on the part of other teachers, especially in regard to the expectations in common areas. Interestingly enough, two study participants admitted while they recognized the value of the CR-PBIS for the school, they did not personally use the school positive reinforcement or teach school expectations lessons in their classrooms.

### **Relationship between CR-PBIS and ODRs**

The fourth sub-question explored the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices. Table 12 revisits the disciplinary trends of Black and White students over a period of six years during which CR-PBIS was being implemented. Intentional work toward decreasing racial disciplinary disparities began half-way through the 2011-12 school year in February 2012. At that time, 89% of the referrals has been assigned to Black students, who composed only 23% of the student population. This disciplinary data was used as the rationale to begin focusing on racial disciplinary disparities.

Table 12

*Disciplinary Data from Comparing Enrollment and ODR Data*

	Black Students			White Students		
	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs
Feb. 2012	23%	89%	+66%	52%	11%	+41%
2011-2012	23%	65%	-42%	52%	10%	+42%
2012-2013	21%	65%	-43%	55%	22%	+33%
2013-2014	21%	49%	-28%	59%	41%	+18%
2014-2015	19%	48%	-29%	58%	39%	+19%
2015-2016	16%	44%	-28%	60%	36%	+24%

Even with population shifts in demographics the results still reflect racial disciplinary disparities discussed in the literature. However, there was a notable decrease in ODRs for Black students and an increase in ODRs for White students over the years.

Classroom observations indicated multiple culturally responsive strategies were being implemented at the school in the areas of student interactions, activities designed for multiple learning styles, positive reinforcement, and attempts to represent multiple cultures in classroom displays. Appendix E demonstrates the content of the racial equity training over the past six years, and the skills observed by the co-researchers indicates there is a connection with the professional development offered. Additionally, the focus group transcripts indicated culturally responsive practices being reinforced through professional development, self-reflection, and discourse about race. Even though more support from school and district administration was desired by the study participants, a connection surfaced between CR-PBIS implementation and racial disciplinary disparities reflected through ODR data.

## **Relationship between CR-PBIS Implementation and Racial MAs**

The fifth sub-question examined the relationship between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS, such as social implicit bias or racial MAs, exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom. Sue, et al. (2007) described how implicit bias can lead to the manifestation of a variety of racial MAs. Their influential work defined racial MAs as “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (p. 279). These indignities could be expressed through words, actions, and environmental surroundings. Table 13 demonstrates how each item in the observational tool can be classified as a type of racial MA if the culturally responsive strategy is not in place. The table also contains the overall percentile score derived from the data collected during the classroom observations.

Table 13

*Alignment of Classroom Observational Tool Items and Racial MAs*

Classroom Observational Tool Items	Category of Racial MA for Contradictory Behavior	% Seen
1. All students are greeted/ welcomed verbally	Second Class Citizen	N/A
2. All students are equitably called upon and/or helped	Second Class Citizen	87.5%
3. Multiple discourse styles used	Communication Styles	79%
4. Specific expectations communicated	Ascription of Intelligence	58%
5. Positive reinforcement	Ascription of Intelligence	67%
6. Relationship building	Second Class Citizen	71%
7. Safe classroom environment	Color Blindness	29%
8. Materials represent multiple cultural perspectives.	Environmental Microaggression	25%
9. Learning activities for multiple learning styles.	Communication Styles	75%
10. Classroom displays represent multiple cultures	Environmental Microaggression	62.5%
11. Community of learners	Second Class Citizen	71%
12. Content connected to student's cultural backgrounds	Color Blindness	4%
13. Consistent disciplinary responses	Assumption of Criminal Status	87.5%
14. Teacher refers to different cultures	Color Blindness	8%
15. Teacher builds intrinsic motivation	Ascription of Intelligence	N/A

Past professional development opportunities were represented in high scores for different culturally responsive strategies observed by the co-researchers. These included students being responded to equitably when requesting help or for off-task behavior and teachers using a variety of learning activities to honor multiple learning styles. While there were evidence study participants sought to build relationships with their students, there were few opportunities for students to connect their culture and experiences to the content and materials did not reflect a variety of ethnic perspectives. Lack of materials and opportunities allowing students to connect their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds are indicative of how racial MAs were

manifested in the classroom. Even the items that received higher scores indicate some level of manifestation of racial MAs, for even a score of 87.5% means that 12.5% of the time students were receiving a contradictory message.

The data collected during the focus group sessions communicate a similar contradictory message. Study participants had actively worked to build their ability to use culturally responsive strategies in their classrooms. Their testimony reflected they had participated in racial equity training, reflected on their own interactions with students of color, and had discussions about race with colleagues. Philosophically, the participants agreed with the importance of having CR-PBIS systems in place with the realization different students have different needs, and thus require different levels of support to be successful. Yet there were numerous comments made that were indicative of implicit bias which could result in racial microaggressions. Table 14 outlines the alignment between comments made by study participants and the categories of racial MAs in which they fit.

Table 14

*Alignment of Focus Group Comments and Racial MAs*

Category of Racial MA	Study Participant Comments
Assumption of Criminal Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... came with a lot of challenges from another school"</li> <li>• "If they don't meet these expectations, it's on them. It's their fault ..."</li> <li>• "It's a kid issue, not a me issue ..."</li> <li>• "unfortunately, negative interactions are cemented in our brain for much longer than positive ones."</li> </ul>
Color Blindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I want to treat my students the way I want my kids to be treated when ..."</li> </ul>
Myth of Meritocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... sometimes I feel like we get hung up on ... culturally relevant."</li> <li>• "I'm isolated to only what I know, but then I come into a diverse population ..."</li> <li>• "... if you're isolated and you only know what you know, and you're asked to teach and instruct with others and you don't have exposure to levels of diversity or openness to other perspectives, it a hundred percent is going to influence your ability to do culturally responsive PBIS, effectively."</li> </ul>
Ascription of Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It's what do my parents say when I go home? And what is their association with school and responsibilities with homework, and expectations of the value of education or even specific subjects? And if I was traumatized in reading as a child, I might project that on indirectly...not intentionally, project those feelings to my children."</li> <li>• "...and how our kids show up each day." (in regard to ability for students to be successful)</li> <li>• "It's our kids of color that...And we can't get them to read thirty minutes a day, plus what they do in the classroom."</li> <li>• "I realize that kids come with...You know, he's working on a lot of stuff."</li> </ul>
Denial of Individual Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "But in with the families, when we're at family events and night events and, you know, I'm a minority."</li> <li>• "I'm isolated to only what I know, but then I come into a diverse population ..."</li> </ul>

## Summary of Chapter 4

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of CRT on the perceptions of teachers in a school that had done intentional CR-PBIS work for at least five years and determine what observable components of cultural responsiveness are present in the classroom. Through classroom observations, focus group sessions, and data review, there was a well-rounded picture of teacher perceptions and CR-PBIS practices within the classrooms at the school featured in the study. Five consistent years of targeted professional development on PBIS and racial equity resulted in decreased racial disciplinary disproportionalities and observable culturally relevant practices being used in classrooms. The effectiveness of the culturally relevant practices varied from strategy to strategy. Classroom observational data and focus group testimony indicated that while teachers are receiving racial equity training, reflecting on their own practice, and discussing race with colleagues, there were indications students are experiencing racial MAs through the words and actions of staff, materials and curriculum that have limited perspectives, and classroom environments that are only somewhat reflective of student ethnicities. The existence of racial MAs was a result of a combination of seemingly unconscious implicit bias on the part of teachers and school systems with limited materials and professional development around cultural relevance. In Chapter 5, the analysis of the data is discussed and concluded.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

CRT recognizes “power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 10). The K–12 educational system is representative of such power structures and racial disciplinary disparities marginalize students of color within schools. CR-PBIS was intended to address overall school climates and racial disciplinary disparities, so it is beneficial to review the perceptions of teachers around implementation and impact of CR-PBIS at a school in its sixth year of CR-PBIS execution. Chapter 5 will analyze the data reviewed in Chapter 4 and present a discussion of the results, implications of the results for further practice, policy and theory, and recommendations for further research. Results will be reviewed using the study’s five sub-questions to discuss the findings.

### **Summary of the Results**

The purpose of this case study was to examine how teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of CRT on the perceptions of teachers in a school that had done intentional CR-PBIS work for at least five years and to determine what observable components of cultural responsiveness are present in the classroom. The study focused on answering the following questions:

#### **Principal Research Question**

With respect to critical race theory, how do teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation?

#### **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers’ cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS?

2. What evidence is there that culturally-responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms?
3. What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular CR-PBIS, in their classrooms?
4. What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices?
5. What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom?

CRT recognizes racism is embedded within societal structures and school systems are no exception. One example of racial bias in schools are ODR rates that reflect racial disciplinary disparities. The most prevalent inequalities experienced by Black students (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner & Smolkowski, 2014) are not a new phenomenon, but were identified as early as 1975 by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF, 2016) when disciplinary data was first examined using a racial lens. CR-PBIS has been modified over time to address such inequalities, but racial disciplinary disparities continue (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014).

The school featured in this study had CR-PBIS systems in place and had decreased disciplinary disparities for Black students, but there was still a noticeable gap between ODRs for White students versus a higher percentage received by Black students. Recent research in the effects of implicit bias on disciplinary decision making (Smolkowski et al., 2016) led to this case study, which sought to examine teacher perceptions about CR-PBIS implementation compared to practices observed in the classroom.

## **Discussion of the Results**

Chapter 4 provided an overview of activities, findings, and results as they occurred over the course of the case study. Results from the focus group sessions suggest classroom teachers recognized the value of implementing CR-PBIS in the school. Classroom observations indicated culturally responsive strategies are being implemented at varying levels. This suggests CR-PBIS has contributed to decreasing racial disciplinary disparities for Black students at the school over a six-year period. During the 2011-12 school year Black students, who represented 23% of the student population, received 65% of ODRs issued at the school, while White students, who represented 52% of the student population, received 10% of the ODRs. In contrast, during the 2016-17 school year Black students, who represented 17% of the student population, received 40% of the ODRs issued, while White students, who represented 55% of the student population, received 39% of the ODRs issued. While there are still racial disparities reflected in the data, measurable progress has occurred since the implementation of CR-PBIS began five years ago.

Based on the classroom observation results and teacher responses during focus groups, a discussion of the findings indicated an analysis of the data related to each sub-question. The collective results were used to determine how teachers in a K–8 school perceive the implementation and impact of CR-PBIS within a CRT framework.

### **Research Sub-Question One: Impact of Societal Systems on CR-PBIS Implementation**

The first question was: What role do societal systems, as defined by CRT, play in school systems with respect to teachers' cultural perspectives, with the implementation of CR-PBIS? If “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 11), as CRT asserts, teacher perceptions should reflect an understanding of the impact societal factors have on the implementation of CR-PBIS. Data collected during focus group sessions showed the study participants believed a number of outside societal factors had a direct impact on

the success of students. These factors included the school to prison pipeline, homelessness, low socio-economic status, a lack of student motivation, student “life factors,” and parents who didn’t trust the system and worked against the teacher.

A closer examination of the negative societal factors identified by the teachers required looking at the source of the factors and where teachers got their information. Focus group transcripts list or imply four sources for the identification of societal factors: (a) through conversations with parents, (b) through professional development and professional experience, (c) through the media, and (d) resulting from teacher assumptions, sometimes informed by “clues” they have received through conversations with students and from other sources. Table 15 illustrates each negatively impactful societal factor mentioned by study participants during interviews, and the origin from which the teacher is drawing that information.

Table 15

*Negatively Impacting Societal Factors and Origin*

Societal Factor	Origin
School to Prison Pipeline	Professional Development/Media
Socio-economic Status	Professional Development/Assumption
Homelessness	Professional Development/Assumption
Lack of Student Motivation/Students Not Ready to Learn	Assumption
Student “Life Factors”	Assumption
Social Media/Video Games	Parent Conversations/Assumption
Entertainment More Interesting Than School	Parent Conversations/Assumption
Parent Mistrust of School System	Professional Development/Assumption
Parents Tell Students One Thing and Teachers Another	Assumption
Awareness of Own Bias	Professional Development
Awareness of Racism in Society	Professional Development
Awareness of Academic & Disciplinary Racial Disparities	Professional Development

While CRT was not specifically mentioned during the focus group sessions, study participants referred to aspects of CRT such as an awareness of racism being embedded in society and a recognition of the school to prison pipeline. The majority of societal factors listed were included in some type of professional development but were presented as factors of which to have an awareness, rather than factors that would prevent teachers from helping all students be successful. While some of the factors listed resulted from teacher conversations with parents, in numerous cases the teachers used the information to form assumptions about what was shared and how it influenced the student.

These factors were brought about during focus group sessions as a result of the question: How do societal factors influence your ability to implement CR-PBIS in your classroom? Study participants shared societal factors had an impact on the potential for students to be successful. Some of the assumptions made could be influenced by implicit bias and influence teacher expectations for student success, so it is important for educators to separate facts from assumptions and emphasize factors outside of educator control can influence students, but do not prevent students from being successful in school systems if the correct supports are in place.

### **Research Sub-Question Two: Evidence of Culturally Responsive Practices**

The second question was: What evidence is there that culturally responsive practices, with respect to CR-PBIS, are being implemented by classroom teachers in their classrooms? This question was addressed through both classroom observations and focus group responses, as there were some CR-PBIS practices that weren't directly observed, but which consistently came up in conversation during focus group sessions. Table 16 shows practices featured on the classroom observational tool and if they were referred to during focus group sessions.

Table 16

*Evidence of Culturally Responsive Practices*

Culturally Responsive Practice	Consistency During Observations <i>High, Medium or Low</i>	Mentioned During Focus Groups? <i>Yes or No</i>
Activities for multiple learning styles	High	Yes
Classroom positive reinforcement system	Medium	Yes
Student ethnicities represented in classroom displays	Medium	No
Student ethnicities represented in materials	Low	Yes
Students responded to equitably	High	No
School positive reinforcement tickets/reward system	N/A	Yes
School expectations taught in classrooms	N/A	Yes

Additional practices were brought up during the focus group sessions that included teaching social skills and school expectations, individualizing teaching and interventions as needed, building relationships, forming classroom agreements, and trying a variety of student engagement strategies.

The practices mentioned consistently which also achieved high scores on the classroom observational tool reflected professional development the staff had received during the six years of CR-PBIS implementation (see Appendix E). Some of the topics included were: sheltered instruction strategies intended to improve student engagement, classroom management training focusing on clear expectations and positive reinforcement systems, and racial equity training that encouraged participants to examine their own implicit bias and review their own disciplinary practices. Staff reviewed disciplinary and academic data using a racial lens on a quarterly basis, with additional opportunities to reflect on racial bias potentially reflected in the data.

The data suggested a connection between professional development in CR-PBIS, and implementation in the classroom. Numerous strategies teachers discussed during the focus group

sessions were observed by the co-researchers. The focus group sessions also revealed teachers acknowledge the importance of using culturally responsive strategies. Decreases in racial disparities reflected in disciplinary data over the six years of CR-PBIS implementation could be the result of professional development related to CR-PBIS implementation. There is ample evidence to show culturally responsive strategies were being used in the classrooms of the study participants.

### **Research Sub-Question Three: Teacher Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Practices**

The third question was: What perceptions do classroom teachers have of the implementation of culturally responsive practices, in particular, CR-PBIS, in their classrooms? Study participant responses to this topic indicated a number of contradictory statements from the teachers based on comments made during focus group sessions. Table 17 shows some of the contradictory ideas that surfaced.

Table 17

*Contradictory Ideas Voiced During Focus Group Sessions*

Concept Aligned with CR-PBIS Practices	Contradictory Ideas Expressed
Teachers need to be doing racial equity work and learning about cultural responsiveness	There is too much focus on racial equity work and cultural responsiveness
Teachers need to use individualized interventions with students	An administrator speaking with a student isn't enough, they should not be returned to class if they have misbehaved
Other teachers aren't implementing school CR-PBIS practices and it has a negative impact on effectiveness	I don't teach/reinforce the school expectations or the schoolwide positive reinforcement system
Society is too consequence based	There need to be more consequences for students
It's important to build relationships with students and families so I can help students be successful	If students aren't doing what they should, it's on them
Teachers need to find a way to engage all students	Societal and family factors prevent student success

These contradictions were not stated simultaneously in response to one question, but rather were interspersed among a variety of answers spread throughout the focus group sessions. This may have indicated that despite professional development on cultural responsiveness and conscious declarations that support the philosophy of CR-PBIS, implicit racial bias could be influencing teacher thought patterns and perceptions. This, in turn, could have influenced the quality of CR-PBIS implementation and play a role in the continuation of racial disciplinary disparities.

**Research Sub-Question Four: Effect of CR-PBIS Implementation on ODRs**

The fourth question was: What is the relationship between culturally responsive practices observed in classrooms, in particular, implementation of CR-PBIS and teacher office discipline referral practices? Table 18 showed a decrease in the disparity gap between Black and White students ever since the staff began examining disciplinary data with a racial lens in February of

2011. The gap shrunk the remainder of the 2011-12 school year and continued through the 2012-2013 school year, however, from 2013 to 2017 the disparity gap between the two populations plateaued. Professional development in CR-PBIS and racial equity continued over the four years, and, based on the comments shared during focus group sessions, teachers recognized the value of CR-PBIS implementation. PBIS fidelity tools indicate the staff was implementing PBIS with fidelity over the five-year period, so there is a question as to why racial disparities in disciplinary data did not continue to shrink.

Table 18  
*Disciplinary Data from Comparing Enrollment and ODR Data*

	Black Students			White Students		
	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs	% of Student Population	% of ODRs Received	Gap between Enrollment & ODRs
Feb. 2012	23%	89%	-66%	52%	11%	+41%
2011-2012	23%	65%	-42%	52%	10%	+42%
2012-2013	21%	65%	-43%	55%	22%	+33%
2013-2014	21%	49%	-28%	59%	41%	+18%
2014-2015	19%	48%	-29%	58%	39%	+19%
2015-2016	16%	44%	-28%	60%	36%	+24%

During the focus group sessions, the teachers identified numerous obstacles to CR-PBIS implementation that ranged from inconsistent implementation amongst staff members to a lack of support from the administration and district. While the school had systems in place qualifying the school as implementing PBIS with fidelity, the combined effect of the obstacles discussed by the study participants could have influenced ODR rates. Another influence on ODR rates could have been the implicit bias potentially influencing the words, actions and perceptions of classroom teachers evident in contradictory statements expressed during the focus group sessions.

### **Research Sub-Question Five: CR-PBIS and Implicit Bias**

The fifth question was: What relationship exists between the extent of un-intended slights in the implementation of CR-PBIS (i.e., social implicit bias or microaggressions) exhibited by a teacher in his or her classroom? Sue et al. (2007) described how implicit bias can lead to the manifestation of a variety of “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (p. 279) referred to as racial microaggressions. The classroom observational data indicated there are three ways in which students of color are experiencing racial microaggressions in the classroom: (a) environmentally, (b) exposure to curriculum and materials, and 3) through teacher words and actions. The responsibility for this impact does not lie solely on the shoulders of the teachers but is embedded within the school system because of racism on a societal level based on the CRT framework. This results in a compounded effect where students of color are bombarded by racial microaggressions on multiple levels throughout each school day.

Further evidence for the perpetuation of racial microaggressions within the classroom was gathered during focus group sessions. While the study participants supported the concept of CR-PBIS and listed various ways they implement CR-PBIS in their classrooms, and an understanding of the need for racial equity work, they also made several contradictory statements that reflected how implicit bias can stay present at an unconscious level even when there is awareness of its existence. The data indicates potential correlation between awareness of implicit bias resulting in teachers successfully implementing certain culturally responsive strategies. This was not the case for all factors contained on the classroom observation tool, for other strategies were not implemented as successfully.

## **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

### **Challenges with CR-PBIS Implementation**

Each of the study participants listed challenges which they felt impacted the effectiveness of CR-PBIS implementation. These included inconsistent implementation on the part of other teachers and insufficient support from school and district administration. PBIS literature emphasizes the importance of how PBIS structures are implemented “because fidelity of implementation (the extent to which the intervention is delivered as intended) is the mechanism by which valued outcomes are obtained, fidelity becomes critical in sustainability” (Mathews et al., 2014, p. 169). While the school featured in the study scored above the passing rate on the SET each year, teacher perceptions about the obstacles in implementation could be a factor in continuing disciplinary disparities at the school.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to the importance of teachers establishing equitable relationships with students. The classroom observation data showed the study participants received high scores for responding to their students equitably, regardless if it was to answer a question or to redirect behavior. Students thrive in a culture that is community oriented and which allows for different learning styles to be honored (Darling-Hammond, 1997)., another are where study participants scored well. Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995), however there was limited evidence of this during observations. The classroom environment, materials, and references to the curriculum did not allow for students to connect the content to their own backgrounds and experiences. These results indicate varying consistency in the implementation of culturally responsive practices.

## **Teacher Assumptions about Students**

The literature indicates teachers sometimes have unconscious negative assumptions about students. Bonesheski and Runge (2014) postulated "the biases held by educators cause them to believe that the disproportionality is a result of variables external to the school, such as a societal cause or a problem at home (p. 153). This was consistent with statements made by study participants during focus group sessions, who pointed out the negative effects of societal factors on student success. The factors mentioned included a lack of family support for education, poverty, homelessness, social media, and other influences outside of the school's control. Societal factors may not be the sole contributors to student challenges in the system, for "underachievement, or poor performance, which often leads to special education referral and placement, may also be explained by factors such as the effects of low teacher expectations, cultural differences in students' and teachers' behavioral expectations, language differences, and poverty" (Harry & Klingner, 2006). The contradictory statements that surfaced during focus group sessions indicate assumptions about the effect of outside factors on students may reflect the literature and influence teacher decision-making.

## **Limitations**

A case study was selected because "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 2015, p. 1). The combination of classroom observations and focus group sessions offered a deep look into the perspectives and practices of the study participants, however, there were limitations around the case study.

The study would have been strengthened by being expanded to two other schools. One school would implement PBIS with fidelity, but without intentional work on culturally responsive

practices. The second school would be site where PBIS is not being implemented at all. Collecting data from these other sites would have allowed additional insight as to whether the culturally responsive practices at the school featured in the study are the result of professional development conducted at the school, or due to another factor.

Time was a limitation in this study, as the 2016-17 school year was severely impacted by inclement weather that led to multiple days of school closures. This interrupted the observation schedule, especially since the co-researchers were professors from a local university and had busy schedules outside of the research demands for this study. Longer classroom observations, additional classroom observations, and at least one more focus group session could have allowed additional themes to arise. Schedule conflicts affected the focus group sessions, for originally all participants should have been interviewed together on two different occasions. Instead a total of four focus group sessions were held; two for the first series of questions and two for the second series of questions.

One last limitation was the need for co-researchers, as the primary researcher was the principal of the school featured in the study. While I stayed close to the research through frequent communication with the co-researchers and through maintenance of a reflexive journal, there are nuances presented during the research that I may have missed. Fortunately, the co-researchers were experts in CR-PBIS and the fact there were two, one Black and one White, allowed an opportunity to determine the reliability of the classroom observational tool, especially since culturally responsive strategies were the focus of the observations.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Hollins (1996) postulated culturally mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students because it does far more than support students in meeting educational goals. It also decreases behavioral challenges from students who are typically frustrated with

instruction not meeting their needs and reduces the chance students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures. This is of great importance in combatting the effects of CRT and the national epidemic of racial disciplinary disparities for Black students. While this study had a limited number of participants, it allowed some interesting insights about CR-PBIS implementation over a six-year period at a K–8 school.

### **Implementation of CR-PBIS**

The school featured in the study had been implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity for a period of six years, according to the SET and study participant testimony during focus group sessions. Yet the study participants mentioned several challenges they felt made it difficult to implement the systems contained within the CR-PBIS framework. An examination of these challenges could help to refine CR-PBIS implementation in K–8 schools.

**Teacher buy-in.** The study participants expressed they understood the positive impact of CR-PBIS on the school climate. Examples of implementation included common areas expectations, teaching those expectations, a schoolwide positive reinforcement system, and other characteristic features. Participants expressed frustration school expectations in the common areas were not consistently enforced among staff members, which resulted in students receiving mixed messages about appropriate behavior. These statements indicated the study participants were supportive of CR-PBIS implementation, yet additional statements revealed the study participants were not reinforcing the school expectations or the schoolwide positive reinforcement system within their own classrooms. Such incongruity indicates that while teachers may seem to invest in the CR-PBIS philosophy on the surface, a closer examination of perceptions or reinforcement of the value of CR-PBIS systems needs to occur on a regular basis.

**Fidelity measures.** It is apparent that even if a school seems to be implementing CR-PBIS with fidelity, there need to be other measures considered beyond the SET. This could include observational data and teacher surveys or interviews, which in the case of this study allowed a deeper glimpse into the practices at the school. Triangulation of data is not only important in research (Merriam, 2015; Stake, 2003; Yin, 2009), but can play a key role in determining the effectiveness of a system.

**Administrative support.** Study participants felt administrative support, when it came to student discipline, was inconsistent. Having administrative follow-through and feedback when an ODR was assigned to a student was a key concern. Since administrative involvement influences teacher implementation of CR-PBIS, administrators must make a firm commitment to make sure time and resources are committed to CR-PBIS implementation.

**District support.** A lack of district support was listed by the study participants as a factor that decreased the effectiveness of CR-PBIS. Teachers felt more time and resources were needed for professional development, peer observations, and opportunities for discussion about race. They also felt school administrators were given tasks by the district that prevented them from visiting classrooms as frequently.

### **Effectiveness of Professional Development in CR-PBIS**

While this study was not focused of the impact of professional development on CR-PBIS implementation, the results from the classroom observations indicate professional development provided at the school (see Appendix E) may have influenced the effectiveness of specific culturally responsive strategies. Over the six years of CR-PBIS implementation, the staff had professional development in each of the areas that received a high or moderate score on the classroom observation results. These included making a conscious effort to respond to students equitably, positive reinforcement strategies, student engagement strategies designed for multiple

learning styles, and the importance of relationship building. Each of these topics was reinforced multiple time over the six-year period through professional development and peer observation protocols. In addition, ODR records show that racial disciplinary disparities did decrease since February of 2012. The results indicate that professional development in CR-PBIS can change teacher behaviors and practices.

### **Evidence of Implicit Bias**

While professional development did influence classroom practices, it also helped to reinforce the importance of CR-PBIS and racial equity work. This was expressed multiple times during the focus group sessions by study participants, who were not only supportive of CR-PBIS, but felt there should be more support for CR-PBIS implementation from school and district administration. Yet woven into the focus group transcripts were statements that reflected implicit bias on the part of the study participants. This is reflective of CR-PBIS and the recognition “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society” (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 11). Even though educators are thinking about the effects of racism and learning culturally responsive teaching strategies, unconscious implicit bias could have a negative influence on the effectiveness of those culturally responsive strategies. Even more concerning are unintended racial MAs resulting from implicit bias, which would not only impede the effectiveness of culturally responsive strategies, but harm students of color.

### **Racial Microaggressions**

Data from the classroom observations were concurrent with CRT by indicating students of color are experiencing multiple levels of racial MAs each day they are in the classroom. The words and actions of staff members, even when the intent is positive, could lead to racial MAs due to implicit bias. Classroom environments with representations primarily of White culture reinforce the message for all students that other ethnicities have less importance in society. Content reflected

in textbooks and supplemental materials could further reinforce unspoken messages about White supremacy. Such verbal and non-verbal messages reinforce racist ideals and could possibly undermine efforts by educators to use culturally responsive strategies, or at the very least send conflicting messages to students.

### **Possible Solutions for the Educational System**

If professional development over the six years of CR-PBIS implementation at the school led to teacher success with specific culturally responsive strategies in their classrooms, then additional and more intense professional development could expand the positive results. This professional development should include intentional work on eliminating racial microaggressions, based on the evidence that implicit bias and the perpetuation of racial MAs are pervasive in the educational system.

If school districts supported CR-PBIS implementation more systemically with resources, funding, and professional development, this could lead to more opportunities for educators to reflect on their practice. Districts could invest in resources for classroom environments that are more reflective of multiple ethnicities and perspectives. The cost for replacing district curriculum and supplemental materials with culturally relevant materials would be costly and difficult but could be a long-term goal of school districts. In the meantime, professional development could provide teachers with concrete strategies to allow students to connect their ethnic backgrounds and personal experiences. The evidence suggests that while racism is pervasive, many of the effects can be circumvented through professional development and an investment in resources.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

After the conclusion of this study there are recommendations for future research in CR-PBIS implementation. This study conducted a deep examination of the practices and perceptions of classroom teachers around the implementation of CR-PBIS, but the results are limited due to a

small population and study sample. It could be beneficial to research a larger population over a longer period of time with longer classroom observations. It is possible the study participants were more open with their perceptions about CR-PBIS because they got to know the co-researchers over time due to multiple classroom observations and two focus group sessions. It may be that this familiarity that allowed comments to surface the study participants may not have felt comfortable sharing with limited exposure to the co-researchers.

Another recommendation for research would be to conduct an identical study in a school that does not implement CR-PBIS. The focus group questions would have to be modified slightly if the study participants were unfamiliar with CR-PBIS, or a definition would have to be shared in the framing of the questions. The classroom observations would be of great interest in order to see if the teachers have similar results as compared to the teachers in this study, or if there would be different areas of strength. The results would help to verify if professional development played a role in the effectiveness of the culturally responsive strategies that received high scores in this study.

This study exhibited a connection between professional development in culturally responsive teaching strategies. Further research into what content should be included in teacher training should be examined, as well as ways to develop culturally responsive strategies through coaching and long-term professional development. This professional development should contain guidance not only for teaching strategies but should also provide opportunities for self-reflection and discourse that were labeled as important by the teacher participants in this study.

Since the study identified students experience racial microaggressions not only during interpersonal interactions, but also due to the physical school environment and classroom textbooks and materials, additional research should be done to determine how school environments and materials can be restructured so all students feel a sense of belonging. If such curriculum and

environmental materials already exist, how can the educational system gain access to them with current budget limitations and bureaucratic challenges?

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers around the implementation and impact of Culturally Responsive- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (CR-PBIS) after five years of implementation. Prior to the study the numbers of Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs) at the school had decreased for all students, but the disparity between Black and White students persisted albeit, at a lesser extent. Based on the data collected during classroom observations and focus group sessions, it was evident the study participants valued CR-PBIS and were successfully implementing certain learned culturally responsive strategies in their classrooms. The study participants expressed some challenges with CR-PBIS implementation which they attested to societal factors, inconsistent implementation by other teachers, and insufficient support from school and district administration. The data also revealed evidence of unconscious implicit bias which could result in unintended racial microaggressions (MAs) toward students. In addition to potential racial MAs on the part of staff members, students also encounter racial MAs in the classroom environment among their peers and through classroom curriculum and materials. These racial MAs could be responsible for racial disciplinary disparities, particularly for Black students.

Racial disciplinary disparities persist for Black students within the American educational system (Skiba, et al., 2011) despite knowledge of these inadequacies for over 40 years (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). CR-PBIS, which incorporates culturally responsive training in the discipline system, has decreased ODR rates for Black students in some schools, but racial disproportionality or bias, albeit reduced, continues and is still present in ODR data (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). This

indicates current training and implementation practices are not adequate to reverse the historic trend of disproportionality.

The principles of critical race theory (CRT) which expand beyond its original context of the legal system states “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001. p. 17), including systems such as the American education system. Although eradicating racism from systems entirely is not likely, there should be no relief from the moral responsibility of doing everything possible to make systems, such as schools, less prone to and less impacted by it. Based on the success of teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy, according to my study, the toxic effects of systemic racism in schools could be decreased through intentional professional development/training of teachers in recognizing micro-aggressions and strategies to mitigate it. In addition, a district investment in culturally relevant materials for the classroom environment, curriculum, and supplemental materials, which are culturally responsive, could also decrease the systemic neglect of students of color in schools.

The results of the study portray a sense of urgency for schools, and the educational system to be intentional using specific and targeted trainings distinguishing it from societal weak efforts for social justice reform.

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## Appendix A: Culturally Responsive Classroom Observation Tool, Part 1

0	1	2
Less than half of all students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.	More than half, but not all, students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.	All students are greeted/ welcomed verbally or with a gesture as they enter the classroom.
White students are disproportionately called upon and/or helped as compared to perceived African American students.	Students from different ethnicities and groups are called upon and/or helped, but preference is sometimes given to White students.	All students are equitably called upon and/or helped.
Content is delivered from the textbook through lecture and/or independent work.	Learning activities include at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible grouping</li> <li>• Supplemental resources other than the textbook</li> <li>• Student-directed discussion groups.</li> </ul>	Learning activities include two of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible grouping</li> <li>• Supplemental resources other than the textbook</li> <li>• Student-directed discussion groups.</li> </ul>
Vague, conflicting, or unclear expectations are given to students, or no expectations are communicated at all.	The teacher verbally communicates specific expectations to students or has expectations visually displayed in the classroom.	The teacher verbally communicates specific expectations to students. Expectations are posted in the room and are consistent with what the teacher communicates verbally.
White students are disproportionately praised or rewarded as compared to perceived African American students.	Students from different ethnicities and groups are praised and rewarded, but preference is sometimes given to White students.	All students are equitably praised and rewarded.
Interactions between teacher and students are strained or non-dynamic. Student contributions are ignored or discounted by the teacher.	The teacher and students have respectful interactions. Student contributions are sometimes openly valued, expanded, and connected to the lesson.	The teacher and students have interactions that reflect mutual respect and caring. Student contributions are consistently openly valued, expanded, and connected to the lesson.
There are no opportunities for students to share aspects of their culture/personal experiences.	Students have occasional opportunities to share different aspects of their culture/personal experiences.	Learning activities allow opportunities for all students share different aspects of their culture/personal experiences.
Lesson materials represent only White majority culture.	Lesson materials represent both White and non-White cultures some of the time.	Lesson materials represent both White and non-White cultures consistently.

## Appendix B: Culturally Responsive Classroom Observation Tool, Part 2

0	1	2
Learning activities are limited to lecture and note taking.	Learning activities include at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner/group discussion</li> <li>• Hands-on activity</li> <li>• Song/rhythm</li> <li>• Movement</li> </ul>	Learning activities include at least two of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner/group discussion</li> <li>• Hands-on activity</li> <li>• Song/rhythm</li> <li>• Movement</li> </ul>
Classroom displays are limited to White majority culture.	Classroom displays represent some cultural perspective.	Classroom displays represent multiple cultural backgrounds.
All learning is teacher-centered and teacher-directed with no opportunity for student input.	Learning activities are a combination of teacher-directed instruction and student-centered learning.	Learning activities are student-centered with the teacher acting primarily in the role of facilitator.
New content is connected only to knowledge from the school setting.	Teacher refers to student cultural backgrounds, but there is not a clear connection to new content.	Student’s cultural backgrounds are regularly used as a foundation for learning new content.
Students perceived as African American disproportionately receive disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior as compared to White students displaying similar behaviors.	Students from different ethnicities and groups receive disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior, but more emphasis is placed on students perceived as African American.	All students equitably receive disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior.
Teacher presents the core content without bringing in examples of other cultures.	Teacher refers to example(s) from another culture during lessons.	Teacher provides and reviews examples from multiple cultures during lessons.
Teacher expectations are not reflective of African American student ability.	Teacher sets high, realistic expectations for some students including African American students.	Teacher sets high, realistic expectations for all students.

### Appendix C: Culturally Responsive Classroom Observation Results

Observable Behavior	Raw Score (out of 24)	Percentage Score
All students are equitably called upon and/or helped.	21	87.5%
Disciplinary responses for off-task or loud behavior are consistent for all students.	21	87.5%
The teacher uses both traditional and non-traditional discourse styles to communicate with all students.	19	79%
Learning activities are designed for multiple learning styles.	18	75%
Teachers encourage all students to participate in a community of learners by focusing on collective work, responsibility, and cooperation.	17	71%
A positive, meaningful, caring, and trusting relationship is established with all students.	17	71%
Teacher offers praise or rewards when expectations of success are met, e.g. “You can do it” “That’s brilliant” “I like the way you think”, etc.	16	67%
Classroom displays represent multiple cultural backgrounds.	15	62.5%
Teacher communicates specific expectations of success to all students both verbally and visually.	14	58%
The teacher’s classroom environment is warm, supporting, safe, and secure for all students.	7	29%
The teacher’s lesson materials represent multiple cultural perspectives.	6	25%
Teacher makes reference to different cultures where appropriate. For example, a lesson makes reference to poems from both Langston Hughes and Robert Frost	2	8%
New content is connected to student’s cultural backgrounds	1	4%

### Appendix D: Comparison of Co-Researcher Classroom Observation Results

Observation	Researcher (by ethnicity)	Item #														
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Observation #1	Black	n/a	2	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	1
	White	n/a	1	2	1	0	2	1	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	1
	Difference	n/a	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
Observation #2	Black	n/a	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	2	0	1	0	1
	White	n/a	2	2	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	2
	Difference	n/a	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Observation #3	Black	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	1
	White	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
	Difference	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Observation #4	Black	n/a	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	1
	White	n/a	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	2	1	0	2	0	1
	Difference	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0

## Appendix E: Racial Equity Professional Development Topics

### *Topics Required Multiple Professional Development Sessions*

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Professional Development Topics</b>
2011–12	Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens Examination of White Privilege/Racial Autobiography
2012–13	Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens Critical Race Theory Culturally Relevant Instruction
2013–14	Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens Critical Race Theory Culturally Relevant Instruction
2014–15	Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Vulnerable Decision Points Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens Culturally Relevant Instruction
2015–16	Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens Racial Microaggressions in the Media
2016–17	Racial Microaggressions Courageous Conversations CARE (Collaborative Action Research for Equity) Peer Observations Focal Student of Color- Lesson Design Action Research for Equity Groups Academic and Behavioral Data Review using a Racial/Ethnic Lens

## **Appendix F: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### *What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### *What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

*Kathleen Ellwood*

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Digital Signature

Kathleen Ellwood

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Name (Typed)

November 7, 2017

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Date