DESIRING DIVERSITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO 
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF K-12 EDUCATORS 
WHO VOLUNTEER FOR THE DISTRICT’S 
DIVERSITY COMMITTEES

by

Lisa A. Lindley

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, K-12 public school classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse in ethnicity, culture, language, exceptionalities, religion, family, socioeconomic status and political backgrounds. Achievement gaps between students in these diverse subgroups and typical White students have prompted educational leaders to identify strategies to improve academic performance across all subgroups. One area of focus in K-12 school districts has been on improving inclusiveness through the utilization of school diversity committees. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators in their role as volunteers on a diversity committee at the All Inclusive School District (AISD, a pseudonym). AISD is a public school district consisting of 33 schools and is located in a large metropolitan suburb in the southeastern United States. Eight participants were selected who were K-12 educators who volunteered on the diversity committee at the same Title I school. Data collection was conducted through a series of interviews, observations, guided reflection surveys, and site documents. Five themes emerged through the use of Moustakas’ modified Seven Steps approach to data analysis. The themes were: (a) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion, (b) bridge builders influenced by personal experiences, (c) the teacher becomes the student, (d) champions of the at-risk student, and (e) cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Employing the data, the central questions and four sub-questions were answered in detail and summarized at the end of each narrative for the five themes. Textural and structural descriptions were integrated to construct the essence of participants’ experiences.

Keywords: Diversity, diversity committee, school climate, school culture, inclusiveness
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, who made countless sacrifices so that I could achieve this momentous goal. Their unwavering support and encouragement for the past several years has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated; indeed, it has been the wind beneath my wings! To my husband, your faith in my abilities often outweighed my own. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader, for encouraging me through the obstacles and a few sleepless nights, and for always celebrating each victory with me. We accomplished this together; I love you always!

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### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation to Self</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Plan</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations and Limitations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural Theory</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Literature</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of K-12 Public Education</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and Achievement Issues</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Nontraditional Educators</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Culturally Responsive Teaching ................................................................. 57
Implementing Diversity Plans................................................................. 58
Diversity Training .................................................................................... 60
Summary .................................................................................................. 61

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .......................................................... 64
Overview .................................................................................................. 64
Research Design ..................................................................................... 64
Research Questions ............................................................................... 65
Participants ............................................................................................. 66
Site ............................................................................................................ 67
Procedures ............................................................................................... 69
Personal Biography ............................................................................... 71
Data Collection ...................................................................................... 73
	Guided Reflection Survey ................................................................. 74
Interviews ............................................................................................... 75
Observations .......................................................................................... 77
Site Documents ..................................................................................... 80
Data Analysis ......................................................................................... 81
Trustworthiness ...................................................................................... 83
Triangulation .......................................................................................... 84
Member checking .................................................................................... 84
Thick descriptive data ........................................................................... 84
Clarifying researcher bias ...................................................................... 85
List of Tables

Table 1 .......................................................................................................................... 95
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Today’s K-12 public school leaders and educators face the monumental task of effectively improving the inclusiveness of the school climate in response to an increasingly diverse and multicultural population. Census data in the United States illustrate a significant shift in the culture, language, religion, family structure, and economic state of society, with current trends suggesting that children of minority race or ethnic group, defined as African-American, Asian, Native American or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and those of Hispanic origins, will increase to more than half of the population under age 18 by 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In other words, majority status will no longer be held by any single group of students within public schools.

Yet, immigration statistics and an increasing multicultural population do not fully embody diversity. Placing people and cultures within six broadly defined racial categories fails to acknowledge the diversity which exists within those groups, such as diversity in languages, dialects, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Ellison, 2011). It would be illogical to assume that all people categorized as White across the United States share the same culture, customs, attitudes, and beliefs. Likewise, students in K-12 public schools reflect a true microcosm of the nation’s diverse population based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area” (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2006, p. 3). Consequently, serving the academic and social needs of each student presents a myriad of challenges to educators and underscores the importance of developing a culture of inclusiveness within the school climate. An effective learning environment does not expect conformity to a single dominant learning style; instead, differentiated instruction enables all students to flourish amid diversity. It would
be unreasonable to assume that all boys learn in the same manner simply because they share the same gender. While some common areas may exist, students are distinctly individual in how they process information and gain understanding. Although uniformity may seem easier to implement compared to managing the complexities of diversity in the classroom, accepting and accommodating differences support an effective learning environment for every student. Not only does it make the classroom inclusive, welcoming, and accepting, but also enables others to meet people from a wide-range of cultural, religious, and social backgrounds, each providing a unique perspective that broadens others’ knowledge. Indeed, knowledge of classmates’ background, cultural heritage, family make-up, beliefs, and other details broadens awareness and appreciation of individualism as well as what unites humanity beyond individual distinctions and idiosyncrasies.

The social nature of classroom learning communities accentuates the need for educators to recognize the significant role diversity and inclusiveness plays in today’s classrooms. Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning theory asserts that children learn most effectively within a positive social environment while engaged in cooperative interactions with both peers and teachers. He strongly advocated an inclusive and collaborative environment for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Gay’s (2000) theory of culturally responsive teaching asserts that curriculum and instructional practices should be developed and implemented with a multicultural worldview in order to validate cultural identities and provide relevant learning experiences for multicultural learners. In addition, Gay (2000) stated that an effective learning environment is one in which each member feels a sense of belonging and is valued. Cox’s (1994) organizational framework, Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD), posits that an organization’s established culture (mindset) toward diversity interacts
with actual diversity among stakeholders, impacting individual and group behaviors in a manner which has positive or negative effects on performance outcomes. In other words, in a school with a diverse population, student performance is impacted by the behaviors of members of the school environment as they respond to aspects of diversity and the responses of other members toward diversity.

Accepting diversity as a natural occurrence in a 21st century classroom means acknowledging that each student possesses unique learning characteristics and abilities, as well as a distinct set of cultural and background experiences, which directly influences individual knowledge acquisition. Recognizing uniqueness and diversity matters because “to diminish diversity is to diminish human dignity” (The Center for Public Justice, What is Educational Diversity section, para. 5, 2012).

Today’s inclusive general education classrooms contain a range of diverse students: racial and ethnic minorities, English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, students who are gifted, and students with low socio-economic status. Consequently, acknowledging diversity as the norm is a prerequisite to improving the inclusiveness of the school culture. Diversity offers an opportunity to learn from the experiences and viewpoints of others, which is beneficial to the academic environment. It is important to point out that diversity itself does not create problems; barriers are created when the wrong response to diversity contributes to students being excluded or made to feel as if they do not belong because they are in some way “different” from others. A failure to respond appropriately and timely to diversity within districts, schools, and classrooms places a generation of learners at risk (Gay, 2010; Young, Madsen, & Young, 2010). Effectively responding to diversity requires self-reflection to identify underlying beliefs, attitudes, and practices which may contribute to
prejudicial stereotypes and hinder an inclusive learning environment. Educators who seek to understand and build meaningful relationships with students who are different from them positively promote learning for all students (Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

Embracing diversity enriches and broadens the perspectives of school participants, but may also bring conflict and challenges to the status quo, especially if there is resistance and negativity toward diversity. School leaders who understand the enormity of the diversity challenge and districts experiencing achievement gaps between student subgroups are developing diversity plans and committees to address the issue (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013; Young et al., 2010).

Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study will seek to understand the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on a K-12 public school district’s diversity committee in regard to their role in fulfilling the specific mission of this district’s diversity committee. The district believes that effectively accomplishing their mission will advance the overall objective of improving academic performance for every student and closing achievement gaps between subgroups of students. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of diversity committee volunteers regarding their role in improving diversity and inclusiveness can help inform leaders about any effective strategies and challenges experienced by these educators. It will also provide insight into ways to effectively influence, train, and engage K-12 educators to participate in achieving the goals of a district’s diversity plan.

This chapter presents background information relevant to the study, along with the problem and purpose statements, and significance of the study. Also included are the study’s research questions, research plan, and a discussion of limitations.
**Background**

Based on current trends, the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) predicts that by the year 2020 minority students as a whole group will outnumber White students and that no single group will hold a majority population status in K-12 public education. Groups currently defined as minorities by the Census Bureau (2010) are African-American or Black, Asian, Native American or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and people of Hispanic origins. Furthermore, the Census Bureau reports that 18% of the population speaks a language other than English at home where an estimated one in four children under the age of five is being raised. These numbers indicate that students, whose native language is not English, known as English Language Learners (ELL) in K-12 schools, will continue to grow amid concerns of an ELL population already struggling with English (Lee, Lee, & Amaro-Jiménez, 2011). Conversely, K-12 educators remain predominantly White, middle class females (75%), who are mostly monolingual with relatively few experiences involving people outside of their own culture (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2010). Despite the obvious disparity in demographics between students and teachers, the crux of the problem originates with the wrong response to diversity, rather than diversity itself. Decades of striving for homogeneity and uniformity to the majority group in the educational environment have significantly impacted the performance of diverse students. The practice of excluding or segregating students based on ethnicity, disability, gender, and socio-economic status and failing to provide equitable educational opportunities and resources is deeply rooted in the nation, resulting in historically transformative legislation (Banks, 1995; Chafe, 1994; Tushnet, 2003). Today’s school districts are challenged to overcome a previously divisive stance from educational leaders and society while facing increasing diversity among students, a lack of diversity among staff, and considerable achievement gaps between subgroups.
A negative mindset toward diversity will not positively impact academic achievement; change in school climate is initiated by educators with openness toward diversity.

In an effort to support specific student groups who have been historically underserved, federal and state accountability measures of academic achievement are in place. Such legislation is designed to require state and local educational agencies to provide an effective and equitable learning environment for every student in the least restrictive environment. Specific legislation will be addressed comprehensively in Chapter 2 when examining the history of public education in the United States.

Numerous research studies support that a positive school climate is advantageous to learning for all students and instrumental in closing the academic achievement gap; therefore, educators must take ownership of their role in improving the inclusiveness of their own schools (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2010; Katz, 2013; Meusch, 2010; Thompson, 2010; Young et al., 2010). While legislation may require specific reforms, educators and school communities must possess a positive mindset toward diversity in order to enact meaningful changes to school culture. Recognizing educators who value diversity and understand differences in cultural norms, rules, communication styles, and shared meaning are most effective in implementing changes within school culture regarding diversity, district leaders are soliciting the insight and influence of these educators on their diversity committees (Young et al., 2010).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committee at the All Inclusive School District (AISD, a pseudonym), located in a large metropolitan suburb in the southeastern United States. The stated mission of AISD’s diversity committee is to improve the
overall inclusiveness of the school climate by embracing the diversity of its student population
and increasing staff diversity, while incorporating changes to curriculum, communications, and
interactions with all stakeholders. Research has shown a positive school climate increases
academic achievement, sense of community, and relationships between staff, students, families,
and communities (Eisenman, Pell, Poudel, & Pleet-Odle, 2014; Riley & Ettlinger, 2010;
Robinson & Clardy, 2011; Samuels, 2010; Scanlon & Baker, 2012; Thompson, 2010; Turner-
Vorbeck, 2005).

An examination of research related to diversity revealed a broad range of topics,
including (a) Culturally responsive leadership (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013;
Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Riehl, 2000; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011), (b)
inclusiveness in the school climate (Geiger, 2011; Riley & Ettlinger, 2010; Robinson & Clardy,
2011; Samuels, 2010; Thompson, 2010; Turner-Vorbeck, 2005), pre-service teachers’
curriculum and perceptions of diversity and inclusion (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, & Hudson, 2013;
Colon-Muniz, Brady, & SooHoo, 2010; McHatton & Parker, 2013; Polat, 2011; Silverman,
2010), nontraditional teachers (Lam, Shek, Lam, & Loh, 2010; Madkins, 2011; Rezai-Rashti &
Martino, 2010), and inclusive classrooms for special education (Eisenman et al., 2014; Scanlon

Other studies identified several academic issues which have been attributed to a failure to
respond effectively to diversity (a) achievement gaps for minorities, males, students with
disabilities, English language learners, students with low socioeconomic status (Cushman, 2010;
Geiger, 2011; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Split, Koomen, & Jak, 2011); (b) conflict
between students, staff, parents, and community (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Sherman, Beaty,
Crum, & Peters, 2010; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010); (c) lack of community and positive school climate (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mthethwa, 2013).

Furthermore, while research has focused on teacher motivations for factors such as longevity, principal’s leadership style, performance-based incentives, and training (Eyal & Roth, 2010; Finnigan, 2012; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez, 2010; Thoonen, Sleevers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011; Yuan et al., 2012), there is scant research regarding the motivations of educators who volunteer on a diversity committee to be an active part of creating an inclusive school climate.

Although much has been explored on the impact of diversity, inclusiveness, and school climate on education, there has been little research done to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators’ (administrators or teachers) who volunteer to lead transformation in improving school climate and inclusiveness, specifically in regard to district-wide diversity plans. I found just one study that specifically examined a diversity plan implementation and focused only on the perspective of school principals (Young et al., 2010). There were no studies found which specifically investigated the perceptions of K-12 educators volunteering on a diversity committee or volunteering to implement an inclusive school climate. Overall, quantitative research appeared to be more prevalent than qualitative, phenomenological studies regarding K-12 educators’ experiences in their role as volunteers on a district diversity committee.

**Situation to Self**

Personally, I hold a biblical worldview and believe teaching is a specific calling to which I will be held accountable for my actions. As a Christian educator, I believe every child is a unique person created in the image of God, and each one deserves an educational experience led
by a caring teacher who sets a path for the student’s academic success. Dr. King declared, “Life's most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” (n.d.). In Matthew 20:28 (New King James Version), Jesus declared that He did not come to be served but to serve others; He placed great value on servant leadership. Consequently, I choose to serve my students and their families from a humble position of obedience to God. I believe students are best served when they are taught in an environment which recognizes and values their diversity and creates a sense of belonging, a place where they feel safe and accepted. Students are empowered to learn in a positive school climate.

According to Van Brummelen (2009), “Modeling a Christian way of life is effective only if we are committed to it ourselves and if we show this commitment in our dealings with our students” (p. 50). The teacher is the model for the student. Therefore, if I believe that embracing diversity is the ethical thing to do since God created people as distinctive individuals, then my interactions within my learning community should support this belief. The foundation of my interactions is supported by the realization that although uniqueness is part of God’s divine plan, His vision for mankind requires unity in the midst of diversity. Accordingly, Paul admonished the Corinthian church for their lack of spiritual maturity and reminded them that all God’s people possess diverse gifts when they exalted their own spiritual giftedness above everything else. To help them understand that each person and every gift is of equal value and is given for the purpose of serving others while maturing together in unity, Paul instructed them in the following manner:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so
the body is not made up of one part but of many. (Corinthians 12:12-14, New International Version)

Paul’s point is that each person is of equal value in the kingdom of God, and the essential key to sustainable growth among its members is achieving unity amid diversity. The same can be said for developing an effective community of learners. Just as God provides a sense of belonging in His kingdom by validating individual diversity, effective teachers should also model acceptance of diverse members in their learning communities. Consequently, an educator’s effectiveness in creating a sense of belonging for every student and establishing unity among its members is impacted by the educator’s personal view of diversity.

History has shown that significant change and progress is achieved through the united efforts of individuals sharing a similar perspective which compels them to embrace a particular cause. In the 21st century classroom, diversity and inclusiveness is a significant cause for action. What perspectives and experiences are shared by teachers who commit to creating an inclusive climate for a diverse community of students in order to increase learning for everyone? This study sought to understand the meaning of K-12 educators’ volunteer experiences with the diversity committee and their experiences in improving the culture and climate of their school. It gave a voice to K-12 educators who desired to acknowledge, validate, and integrate diversity in order to create an inclusive climate where a sense of belonging extends to all group members within the district’s learning community. In addition to sharing their experiences and perceptions regarding their role on the diversity committee, participants described the impact they believe their efforts have had on inclusiveness in the school environment as well as contributors and challenges encountered along the way. Additionally, they made recommendations for diversity training for pre-service and current K-12 educators.
Problem Statement

The problem of this study was how to effectively respond to changing student demographics in ways that support diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate. In 2011, an estimated 44% of children in the U.S. were minorities (Latino/Hispanic, 24%; Black, 14%; Asian, 5%; Pacific Islander, 1%), 23% of children lived in an immigrant family, 23% lived in poverty, and 22% spoke a language other than English at home (Kids Count Data Center, 2013). While the student population is increasingly diverse in ethnicity, language, ability, socioeconomic status, and culture, approximately 16% of educators are minorities (NCES, 2013). The disparity in demographics between students and educators illustrate the magnitude of disproportion; however, more revealing is the research implicating the lack of effective learning environments for students different from the dominant majority as a prime reason for low achievement scores (Cushman, 2010; Gosse, 2011; Hightower-Weaver, 2011; Riehl, 2000).

Additionally, achievement gaps are exposing the lingering effects from a history of academically under-serving minority students, English language learners, students with low socio-economic status, and students with disabilities (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012; Bray & Balkin, 2013; Cushman, 2010; Herbers et al., 2012; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Split et al., 2011). Second, communications between school and home have declined as a result of language and cultural differences (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mthethwa, 2013; Sherman et al., 2010). Third, a lack of inclusiveness in the school climate has negatively impacted relationships between stakeholders—students, staff, families, and community—within the K-12 learning environment to the detriment of academic achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Tremblay, 2013). Such issues are associated with slow or ineffective progress in making necessary adaptations to curriculum and instruction,
professional development, and school climate to support the multifaceted aspects of diversity (Milner, 2013).

Addressing the aforementioned issues revealed through prior research requires educators who are willing to accept diversity and improve the inclusiveness of school climate. Inclusiveness goes far beyond celebrating traditional cultural holidays or seating a student with a learning disability in a general education classroom. Authentic inclusiveness requires connecting with a diverse student population in meaningful ways relevant to the learning abilities, cultural differences, and background knowledge gaps among students. Regardless of educational policy changes, shifts in demographics, and curriculum reform, educators are responsible for initiating and implementing effective change within their own districts and schools. A collective group of educators sharing similar goals for diversity can effectively achieve an organizational culture change (Schugurensky, 2002; Wang, Oh, Courtwright, & Colbert, 2011). Diversity committee volunteers collaborating for the purpose of improving inclusiveness in the school climate can positively influence many areas—academic achievement, home and school communications, and organizational culture for a diverse population.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committee at the All Inclusive School District (AISD). AISD’s diversity committees consist of volunteers collaborating to identify and implement changes to enhance the climate of schools in the district. The importance of school climate is revealed in studies which indicate the significant impact climate has on student achievement (Craig, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Understanding that school principals and teachers are typically
motivated by their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, this study sought to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of K-12 educators who share the phenomenon of volunteering on the district’s diversity committee as they lead the efforts to improve the inclusiveness of their school climate.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because limited research exists on the experiences and perspectives of K-12 educators who volunteer to work together on a district’s diversity plan. A number of quantitative studies address the topic of diversity or school climate and the impact on student achievement from a statistical perspective but limited qualitative studies exist on this topic and very few from the perspective of K-12 educators at any level (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013; Onorato, 2013; Taylor, 2009; Wang et al., 2011). After an extensive search, I located one study specific to implementing a diversity plan, but it was from the perspective of school principals only (Young et al., 2010). A fair amount of quantitative studies focused on diversity and the negative impact of ineffective practices resulting in achievement gaps (Cushman, 2010; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011; Split et al., 2011), declining communications and sense of community between school and home (Gay, 2000; Hightower-Weaver, 2011; Osman, 2012; Split et al., 2011; Thapa et al., 2013), and a continued lack of nontraditional teachers (Lauring & Selmer, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Madkins, 2011).

Thus, the findings in this study were significant in two regards. First, because there is a lack of empirical research examining how K-12 educators improve the diversity and inclusiveness of their schools, this study addressed that gap by giving K-12 educators an opportunity to articulate their experiences and perspectives as diversity committee volunteers.
Secondly, this research provided school leaders with K-12 educators’ perceptions of contributors and barriers to improving diversity and inclusiveness as well as common experiences, beliefs, and practices. These findings were beneficial in discovering ways to improve methods of establishing a positive school climate and providing training to other staff members.

Implications of prior research indicate that establishing an inclusive school climate will (a) help close student achievement gaps (Osman, 2012; Polat, 2011; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; Thoonen et al., 2011; Tremblay, 2013); (b) improve sense of community among staff and students (Thapa et al., 2013); and (c) enhance communications between school and home (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009). Existing educators are already experiencing the shift in diversity among students; therefore, by understanding the experiences and perceptions of someone who volunteers for the diversity committee districts could implement professional development strategies to engage more educators in creating and improving inclusiveness among diverse populations.

Additionally, most universities have added at least one course in diversity education in an effort to prepare pre-service teachers in managing the many elements of diversity present in today’s classroom. Research on the perceptions of pre-service teachers and graduates has indicated a general feeling of unpreparedness to handle diversity and multicultural issues in the actual classroom (Colon-Muniz et al., 2010; Siwatu, 2010; Silverman, 2010). Understanding the perceptions of educators in regard to challenges and obstacles in improving inclusiveness in the school climate would provide insight that would benefit teacher preparation programs. To better understand the experiences and perspectives of K-12 educators who volunteer to improve the diversity and inclusiveness in schools and why they do so, this study was guided by one central research question: What are the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer
for the district’s diversity committee regarding their role in improving the diversity and inclusiveness of the district?

**Research Questions**

This study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committee. Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research questions are open-ended and evolving; thus, my research was guided by five open-ended research questions. The central question of this study was: What are the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer for the district’s diversity committee regarding their role in improving diversity and inclusiveness in the district and its schools? While there is a significant amount of research regarding academic issues impacted by diversity, there is limited research examining the perspectives and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on a district diversity committee (Edmunds et al., 2009; Reihl, 2000; Young et al., 2010).

To address the gap in literature, the following questions were proposed: First, what are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as a volunteer on the district’s diversity committee? Vygotsky (1978) advocated inclusion of all students in the classroom in order to create an optimal learning environment. He believed a diverse and inclusive setting would create positive interactions between students and enhance learning in a socio-cultural learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Although learning environments are increasingly diverse among students, diversity among K-12 educators has developed much more slowly. Consequently, students in today’s public school classrooms are quite different from their teachers in regard to ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status. Thus, to engage students in meaningful instruction relevant to their individual background knowledge and experiences, teachers are expected to understand and value the uniqueness of every student’s culture and
ability. Also, students with disabilities and English language learners are now included in the
general education classroom, where teachers are expected to further differentiate instruction to
meet the learning needs of each and every student. Regardless, effective educators are able to
bridge these differences to develop positive collaborations which enhance the social nature of the
learning environment and benefit academic achievement. What then are the beliefs which
motivate K-12 educators to improve the social aspect of school culture specific to creating a
sense of belonging for all students in the classroom and what have their experiences been?

Second, what are the significant beliefs and perceptions about diversity and
inclusiveness in the school climate shared by educators who volunteer on the diversity
committee? Third, what are the perceptions and experiences of diversity committee volunteers
regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and
schools? Research has provided a fair amount of studies regarding pre-service teachers’
perceptions and beliefs on diversity and inclusiveness in schools (Gay, 2010; Gerke &
Cocchiarella, 2013; McHatton & Parker, 2013; Robinson & Clardy, 2011; Samuels, 2010;
Silverman, 2010; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2011), but there is limited
research focusing on experienced educators’ perceptions and experiences in managing diversity
and inclusiveness in their actual schools (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-
Aldrich, 2011; Edmunds, Macmillan, Specht, Nowicki, & Edmunds, 2009; Young, Madsen, &
Young, 2010).

Fourth, what are the main challenges educators perceive to achieving diversity and
inclusiveness in the school climate? Many obstacles to an equitable education for historically
underserved student groups have been overcome through legislation ensuring these students have
equal access to educational opportunities. Yet, significant barriers still remain for a variety of
learners, including minority students, English language learners, students in poverty and students with disabilities (Amoroso, Loyd, & Hoobler, 2010; Dessel, 2010; Herbers et al., 2012; Valdiviezo, 2014). These barriers may be related to lingering stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases held by teachers of diverse students (Bray & Balkin, 2013; Dessel, 2010; Geiger, 2012; Robinson & Clardy, 2011; Valdiviezo, 2014). Addressing these barriers are educators, who are responsible for establishing the culture and climate of a school (Craig, 2010; Dessel, 2010; Edmunds et al., 2009; Gay, 2010; Osman, 2012; Scanlon & Baker, 2012; Thompson, 2010).

Fifth, what are the contributing factors educators perceive beneficial to achieving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate? Limited research has indicated educators who possess a positive mindset toward diversity and inclusiveness, work to build relationships between schools and families, and seek to understand different cultures are successful in improving the school climate, which enhances student performance (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al., 2009; Katz, 2013).

**Definitions**

A general definition of key terms has been provided to ensure understanding and uniformity throughout this manuscript. For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used:

*Diversity*—in K-12 education, diversity typically refers to categories of (a) ethnicity, (b) culture, (c) socioeconomic status, (d) disabilities, (f) language, and (g) gender.

*Diversity Plan*—a document detailing the mission and goals of the district regarding improving the inclusiveness of the school climate, instruction, curriculum, and recruiting practices for the benefit of all stakeholders, students, staff, families, and community.
Diversity Committee—a group of volunteers at the district and school level who are typically led by the school superintendent to accomplish the missions and goals of the district’s diversity plan.

Educator—K-12 certified teacher, administrator, or paraprofessional.

Inclusive—an environment where all group members experience a sense of belonging.

School climate—conditions of the working and learning environment influenced by school leadership, organizational culture, and community, along with academic, social, and collegial support.

Research Plan

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which focused on how individuals put together the phenomena they experience in order to make sense of their world (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research is known for its naturalistic approach to understanding phenomena within context-specific settings (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990). The study examined the perceptions and experiences of participants who shared the phenomena of volunteering on a diversity committee. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological approach is appropriate to explore the lived experiences of a group of participants with a shared phenomenon while focusing on the individual’s interpretation of their experience. Specifically, the study gave participants an opportunity to voice their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs regarding their role as volunteers on the district’s diversity committee.

The setting for this study was a K-12 public school district located in a large metropolitan area in the southeastern United States with an increasingly diverse population. The district employs approximately 3,350 employees and has 33 schools. In 2013, student enrollment was slightly over 25,000 students in attendance at 20 elementary schools (grades K-5), eight middle schools (grades 6-8), and five high schools (grades 9-12). Student demographics as of 2013
included Black (51%); White (31%); Hispanic (12%); Multi-ethnic (4.41%); Asian/Pacific Islander (1.49%); and American Indian (.10%). Students in the district speak over 40 different languages. Pertaining to socioeconomic status, a majority of students (61%) qualified for the free and reduced meal program. The mission of the district’s diversity committee is to increase diversity among the staff to include more male teachers and to reflect the ethnicities of the diverse student population as well as improve the inclusiveness of the school climate so that a sense of belonging is created for all students and staff members. Diversity committees at the school level support the mission of the district by implementing inclusionary instruction in the general education classroom for both general education and special education students and purposing to create a sense of belonging for all students by recognizing, accepting, and celebrating the diversity of its staff and students. This diversity may include differences in ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, language, gender, and ability.

Participants for this study included eight educators who volunteered for either the district or their school’s diversity committee. Data was collected using four different instruments consisting of (a) interviews, b) observations, (c) guided reflection surveys, and (d) site documents. Analysis was conducted using Moustaka’s Seven Steps (1994), which is a step-by-step process of analyzing collections of data to identify recurring themes from the data to attain the actual meaning of the perceptions and lived experiences of the diversity committee volunteers. Creswell (2013) described an important part of the analysis process as highlighting “significant statements, sentences, and quotes” to enable the researcher to get to the essence of the phenomenon being studied (p. 82). Using this analysis strategy, I purposely analyzed the data from the interviews, observation field notes, participants’ surveys, and site documents to achieve the essence of the participants’ lived experiences.
Delimitations and Limitations

I chose to conduct a phenomenological study instead of a case study because I wanted to understand the essence of participants’ perceptions and experiences in their role as a volunteer for the district’s diversity committee through their own voice rather than examine the logistics and effectiveness of the district’s utilization of a diversity committee to carry out a plan for increasing diversity and improving practices related to inclusion for all students. A limitation to this approach is that people who volunteer for a common cause may possess a similar set of life experiences, beliefs, and attitudes which motivate their participation and collaboration with others in the group, which may make the findings not generalizable to a larger population. Furthermore, using a single school district in a specific geographic location will limit the broadness of this study; all participants worked at the same school in the district and their perceptions and experiences may not be generalizable to educators in other districts. Finally, this study was dependent upon the authenticity of the participants’ responses; the topic of diversity can be a sensitive or controversial issue which may influence participants to choose their responses accordingly without completely sharing their true experiences and perceptions.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Responding to diversity continues to challenge K-12 school districts across the nation, but many district leaders are focused on finding solutions. Understanding the perspectives and experiences of educators who have a positive mindset toward diversity and play a role in improving diversity and inclusiveness in their schools may contribute to solutions. Research has indicated that one of the most important elements in promoting academic achievement for K-12 students is a positive school climate in an inclusive environment which recognizes and values distinctions between learners related to ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status and ability (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Osman, 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). The responsibility for creating a positive school climate where all students feel valued and receive instruction appropriate to their learning needs and styles belongs to educators at every level, whether at the district office or in the individual classroom (Gay, 2010; Edmunds et al.; Samuels, 2010).

This phenomenological study was designed to gather, analyze, and describe the experiences and motivations of K-12 educators who volunteer on a district’s diversity committee to improve diversity and inclusiveness in the climate of the district’s schools. There is little known about the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators in their role as a volunteer addressing diversity and inclusiveness within public school districts. Exploring the experiences of these diversity committee volunteers provided insight into improving the inclusiveness of the school climate and developing diversity training for in-service and pre-service K-12 educators. Improving teachers’ practices and overcoming obstacles related to diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate will benefit students’ academic achievement.
Chapter two explored the theoretical framework for this study in order to establish a foundational structure and provide guidance in the research. A thematic review of existing literature was examined and discussed regarding issues in diversity and inclusiveness in the K-12 school environment, including the history of K-12 public school education in the U.S., lack of diversity among K-12 educators, academic achievement gaps, school climate, and diversity and multicultural training for in-service and pre-service teachers.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the perspectives of educators who volunteer on a district’s diversity committee for the purpose of improving diversity and inclusiveness for all group members. According to Creswell (2010), empirical support provides a necessary basis for properly framing a research study. This study will be built upon the foundation and guidance of Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory and Cox’s (1994) Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD).

**Socio-cultural Theory**

Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist, developed the socio-cultural theory of learning that explains the relationship between language, social interaction, and culture on cognitive development; he believed language was a fundamental factor to cognitive development. Language as learned through social interaction enables people to move from the elementary mental functions they are born with to higher, more advanced mental processes. Specifically, he described the development of knowledge as a dynamic process occurring between an individual and the surrounding cultural and social environment when the learner engages in a series of interactions with others where communication is vital. Vygotsky considered language and communication to be shaped and influenced within the cultural context of its society. Cultural tools within the society are developed for the purpose of sharing
knowledge and developing skills. These tools can be real, such as computers, phones, and other instruments of communication, or symbolic, such as language, codes, and signs. Understanding how to employ these cultural tools is a critical factor in acquiring knowledge and learning to solve problems.

Vygotsky (1978) further asserted that learning exists on two levels: through interactions with others (interpsychological) and then through the learner’s own mental process (intrapsychological). Children begin the learning process at home through verbal and social interactions with adults and others where language plays a significant role in their cognitive development. A sense of culture is also developed in the child through the values, beliefs, customs, and skills passed on by parents and other caregivers. Upon entering a formal educational environment, their learning is supported by engaging and collaborating with the teacher and more-skilled peers; interactions continue to be an essential part of learning and development. It is at this point where their sense of culture and knowledge intersects with the diverse cultures and learning abilities of others in the social environment of the classroom.

Vygotsky (1978) also maintained that the integration of speech and activity, when the student and others in the group use language to communicate knowledge and tasks, is a vital component of accomplishing the learning goal. He theorized that tools developed within the human culture influence the learning process of students as they navigate from utilizing these tools for means of communicating their needs to internalization of these tools for higher thinking skills. Students typically communicate learning to themselves through self-talk, talking aloud to themselves as they complete a task. They then progress to inner speech, where they mentally talk themselves through a process; this development of internalization allows the child to self-regulate his or her own learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, while learning takes place
within a social context, learning readiness and optimal learning times are individually
determined by each student. Vygotsky (1978) believed that any student could achieve
competence through effectual communication with a more knowledgeable other and with the
appropriate assistance. In his view, an effective learning environment supports individual
learning needs through collaboration in peer groups as well as scaffolding and connecting
instruction to students’ existing background knowledge in order to bridge the skill gap.

An important implication of Vygotsky’s theory is emphasis on cultural communication
and the progressive ability of learners to regulate their own thinking processes. Communication
occurs through language, symbols, and tools assigned by every cultural group. According to
Vygotsky (1978), “All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals”
(p. 57). Two key factors of the socio-cultural learning theory are collaboration and active
learning, particularly in a diverse learning group. Vygotsky opposed the exclusion of students
with disabilities from the mainstream classroom and advocated inclusion as an effective means
of promoting learning across ability levels. Interaction with a more knowledgeable other,
whether peer or adult, is essential to cognitive development and achieved through small group
instruction or within peer groups (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, an inclusive climate theoretically
promotes learning in an environment dependent upon effective communication and positive
social interactions across diverse cultures and abilities. One of the primary assumptions of this
study is that K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee hold the belief that
student achievement is impacted by communications and interactions within the school culture
and its social environment.
The Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity

Organizational culture exists within a range of sectors: business, education, government, community, church, and family. A school district is a type of organizational culture located within the influence of its surrounding community and the families the school serves and led by school board members who are voted in by members of the community. The school superintendent is appointed by the school board and heads an organizational chain of command with various leaders and staff in a central location. Beneath the hierarchy of a school district are individual schools influenced by the culture of the district, the school leadership team, and staff, yet also impacted by the demographics and culture of the community residents, students, and families. Thus, a district can have a particular culture and learning climate in addition to each school within a district possessing its own distinct culture with a unique set of beliefs, practices, values, and social realities.

An organization has a unique culture with its own social reality defined by members of the main group and subgroups (Morgan, 2006). Schein (2004) defined organizational culture as the following:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Cox (1994) further delineates the culture of an organization through the lens of a conceptual framework he refers to as the Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD). According to the IMCD framework, the type and form of diversity in a defined organizational system will combine with characteristics of the climate for diversity in that system to impact a range of
individual and collective outcomes (Cox, 1994). In other words, an organization’s established culture (mindset) toward diversity interacts with actual diversity among stakeholders, impacting individual and group behaviors in a manner which has positive or negative effects on performance outcomes. Thus, the culture of a district and its schools is influenced and impacted by the diversity of its educators, students, families, and community members, which in turn impacts learning and performance outcomes for the student population, both collectively and individually.

Cox (2001) defines diversity as “the variation of social and cultural identities among people existing together in a defined employment or marketing setting” (p. 3). Diversity can bring challenges to effective communications and initiate conflicts that must be addressed and constructively managed in order to reduce the negative impact to performance outcomes. Cox (2001) contends that when diversity is managed well, performance is positively increased to the extent that performance from diverse groups will outperform that of homogeneous workgroups; the key is proactively dealing with diversity through training and effective management. The IMCD framework explains how organizational culture and school climate impacted by diversity merge and interact with the behaviors of the stakeholders, to either positively or negatively impact student performance outcomes. In other words, student performance is impacted by the behaviors of other members of the school environment as they respond to aspects of diversity and interact with the responses of others toward diversity. Additionally, the IMCD framework supports Vygotsky’s socio-cultural learning theory in regard to the essential role an inclusive environment plays in effective learning for diverse student populations. Student academic and behavior outcomes are influenced by others within the school culture. This study examined the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators as they aim to positively impact school culture in
Regarding improving diversity and inclusiveness as part of their role as a diversity committee volunteer.

**Related Literature**

Learning is a socio-cultural process influenced by organizational culture, school climate, the diversity of the environment, and interactions with others. School climate consists of the common beliefs, attitudes, and values shared and practiced by the principal, educators, and other school staff as well as students, families, and the community. All stakeholders, including students and their families, are impacted by the school climate. A positive school climate recognizes and values diversity in order to develop a sense of belonging for students, families, and staff. Diversity and responses to diversity influence the climate of the learning environment, as interactions occur with the behaviors and perceptions of group members, to either positively or negatively impact student performance outcomes. When school leaders and educators take the initiative to manage diversity by improving inclusiveness and communications while addressing conflicts, they can positively influence school climate and student achievement outcomes.

This review of literature began with an examination of the history of K-12 public school education. Significant moments and turning points were included as they relate to this study but it was not an exhaustive account of U.S. public education. Understanding events in history related to society and education is important because it establishes a foundation for diversity related issues occurring in today’s schools caused by barriers experienced in prior decades. Next, literature on student performance and academic achievement gaps resulting from the lingering impact of historical obstacles and current issues related to diversity were discussed. Finally, viable solutions to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate and the role of educators were discussed.
**History of K-12 Public Education**

The purpose of describing the historical context of K-12 public education in the U.S. is to establish a framework of a society whose divisive views and responses toward diversity have undoubtedly influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the people within that society, including participants in this study. Because significant changes in society, legislation and school policy have occurred in recent years or merely a few decades ago, the current culture of K-12 public education still reflects the impact and influence of its history. Even as public education continues to evolve, certain mindsets and stereotypes continue to be pervasive toward students with exceptional needs, minorities, immigrants who speak other languages, gender roles, and poverty, which impact learning in a variety of ways. Advocates of assimilation argue that immigrants should acquiesce to the “American” way of life, letting go of their cultural heritages and traditions (Lambert & Taylor, 1988). However, assimilation to the dominant majority devalues the rich history, contributions, and unique perspective of minority cultures, an important tenet of multiculturalism. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural learning theory asserts the essential role of language and culture in the development of knowledge.

Early on, Euro-centric superiority and a patriarchal mindset established an elite hierarchy system in the nation, to the exclusion of all others based on gender, ethnicity, or disability (Banks, 1995; Tushnet, 2004). In the early 1900s, schools were not only segregated by race but segregated by ability, with separate schools for students with disabilities who were not allowed to be educated in the general education classroom. Furthermore, students in poverty often had to work to help support their families and did not attend school for consistent periods of time (Tushnet, 2004). Language barriers, socio-economic disparities, gender inequality, and discrimination against minorities and individuals with disabilities are embedded within the
history of this nation (Chafe, 1994; Tushnet, 2004). Consequently, inequitable resources, discriminatory practices, and unfavorable opportunities in public schools significantly decreased the effectiveness of educating diverse groups of students, such as those students who were minorities, non-English speaking, female, or lived in poverty, had disabilities or religious differences. While diversity has revealed many challenges in U.S. society and the educational system, these challenges serve only as a barometer of the root problem—which lies within the context of exclusiveness favoring the dominant culture. The occurrence of diversity did not create barriers but rather the dominant majority’s response to diversity erected obstacles preventing equitable education and democracy within the culture of K-12 education (Banks, 1994; Tushnet, 2004).

Those excluded or underserved in the nation’s educational system were often minority students, students in poverty, female students, and students with disabilities. Segregation and inequitable academic resources among these diverse subgroups of students has resulted in achievement gaps (Cushman, 2010; Gosse, 2011; Lam et al., 2010; Madhlange & Gordon, 2012; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011). An overall lack of inclusiveness and positive school climate have negatively impacted the learning environment and the disproportionate student performance outcomes are a stark reflection of the depth of that impact.

**Poverty and education.** In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The aim of this far-reaching legislation was to address academic achievement gaps for students in poverty by providing equal access to education through the distribution of federal funds to state educational agencies (SEAs) to dispense these funds to local educational agencies (LEAs) for allocation to schools in need. Originally, the funds were to be used for school library resources, textbooks, and other
instructional materials as well as for the prevention of dropouts and school improvement.

Schools today that meet the threshold percentage for students in poverty are often referred to as Title I schools. In 1966, amendments were made to provide aid to children with disabilities; in 1967, amendments were made to provide for bilingual education programs. For the first 15 years after enactment, ESEA was reauthorized every three years. Since that time, it has been reauthorized every five years and has undergone considerable changes through the years. Typically, these changes focused on allocations of funds and thresholds for poverty levels in order to receive funds. The most significant changes came in 2001 under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This reauthorization required increased accountability for schools from teachers and students. Annual standardized testing was implemented and schools were required to show growth and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the mandated tests. NCLB (2001) legislation was specifically developed in an attempt to address achievement gaps. One major aspect of NCLB was the requirement for all classroom teachers to be highly-qualified. A highly qualified teacher was defined as (a) holding a bachelor’s degree; (b) having full state certification; and (c) showing demonstrated competency in each core academic subject, as defined by the state, taught by the teacher. This requirement was based on evidence from research which indicated students had higher academic performance with an effective teacher than students who had an ineffective teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The highly-qualified provision for schools was mandated to take effect in school year 2002-03 for all newly hired teachers. It has been over a decade since schools have met the highly qualified teacher requirement, and while progress has been made in closing the achievement gaps in some districts, standardized test scores and measurements of reading and math skills still indicate wide gaps between subgroups.
In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education offered schools a chance to opt out of NCLB and participate in a competitive grant program known as Race to the Top (R2T) to receive educational funds. Federal funding for this program is provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and is awarded to schools based on a points system for school improvement measures. These schools must be willing to implement comprehensive educational reform based on several different academic measures: (a) Utilizing performance-based standards for teachers and principals; (b) complying with Common Core standards; (c) building data systems to measure student growth and inform teachers; (d) recruiting and retaining the most effective teachers and principals; (e) turning around low achieving schools and (f) lifting restrictions on charter schools.

Throughout history, the process of addressing discrimination against any group has occurred through landmark civil rights movements and legislative action. Creating an inclusive society and public school system has been achieved by individuals motivated to overcome numerous obstacles so that all members benefit. Individuals of all ethnicities and statuses have made significant strides in improving educational opportunities and environments for all students. Similarly, K-12 educators today who are volunteering to impact the culture and climate of their schools in positive ways for the benefit of every member are acting in the same spirit of inclusiveness.

**Race and education.** While segregation in education has taken on many forms, the issue of racial segregation will be addressed first. Prior to 1954, segregation between African-Americans and Caucasians in the U.S. extended well beyond public schools to include virtually every public business and government entity. For African-Americans, separate entrances, separate schools, and even exclusion from a variety of public places were common practices. In
1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* legally ended segregation by government and business entities, enabling public schools to become desegregated. Regardless, the legally desegregated public schools still represented the demographics of their surrounding communities, which were segregated by ethnicity. This prompted officials to transport Black students by bus to predominantly White schools across town to achieve legal desegregation. While busing served to place Black and White students together in the classroom, building relationships among the two cultures was not an immediate result of legal desegregation. Decades of slavery and discrimination had created much animosity and distrust, preventing full and meaningful interaction.

Long-held prejudices remained which hindered full integration. The realization of this fact prompted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s remarks on the ethical demands of integration: “I may do well in a desegregated society but I can never know what my total capacity is until I live in an integrated society” (1962, p. 121). To understand Dr. King’s stance on desegregation versus integration, consider that desegregation equates to the letter of the law, while integration reflects the spirit of the law. Desegregation enabled Blacks to have access to public areas and opportunities they were formerly denied but it did not ensure Whites would willingly welcome or interact with them in conciliatory and meaningful ways.

Adding to the problem of segregation were the national housing policies of the 1930s to 1950s which specifically created restrictive covenants designed to segregate residential buildings by ethnicity and prevent individual homeowners from selling their property to someone of another ethnicity (Tushnet, 2003). By the time these practices were ruled unconstitutional, the pattern for segregation was already entrenched within society, most deeply in the former slave states of the southern regions of the United States (Tushnet, 2003). Had it not been for the
practice of busing students across town to implement diversity, schools would have remained segregated. Even so, it was a tough and uphill battle for those students and families willing to leave the comfort of their own neighborhoods in an effort to attend educated White schools, most often where humiliation and discrimination were the norm for Black students.

Today’s neighborhoods are once again becoming segregated by ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic level. As a result, the student population takes on the same characteristics of its community to become a reflection of the re-segregated residential demographics. This practice is known as *de facto* segregation, which is segregation that occurs by fact rather than legislation and is enabled by either pressure from the dominant group to remain segregated or the ability of individuals to use their income level, along with personal preferences, to make decisions about housing and schools (Tushnet, 2003). This has greatly contributed to the re-segregation of neighborhoods and schools after legal desegregation occurred. It has occurred throughout the history of a desegregated society.

Another contributing factor to re-segregation is the availability of school choice. Families with higher socio-economic status, different viewpoints on education, or greater accessibility to other options may choose to remove their children from diverse public schools and educate them in charter schools, private schools, or home schools. Data from the Department of Education illustrates the depth of this dilemma – 43 percent of Latinos and 38 percent of African-American students attend schools in which less than one-tenth of their peers are Caucasian (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Another concern plaguing schools is the disproportionate number of African-American and Hispanic males represented in special education, accounting for approximately 80% of all special education students. In addition, African-American males are three times more likely than
White males to be suspended or expelled from school for rule infractions, resulting in a significant loss in instructional time. National graduation rates also reveal considerable gaps between ethnicities: African-American males, 52%; Hispanic males, 60%, and White, non-Latino males, 78% (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

**Disabilities and education.** In U.S. history, individuals with disabilities were another largely marginalized population who required legislative action to gain access to public places, combat discriminating hiring practices, and receive a free public education. Discrimination against people with physical and/or learning disabilities was so significant that these students were often denied enrollment in public schools as recently as the 1970s. It was not until 1975 when then-President Gerald Ford committed to end this practice and initiated educational equality for students with disabilities by signing into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). IDEA ensured all students with disabilities are provided access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in any program which directly receives federal funds, defines appropriate education, and states specifically that educational services must be designed to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities, (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). Later amendments specifically mandated that instruction for students with disabilities should take place in the least restrictive learning environment available, typically the general education classroom.

By our very nature, human beings are unique individuals with varying levels of physical and mental capabilities; every person represents some aspect of diversity. Nussbaum (2006) best summed up the meaning of diversity in education when she declared, “It would be progress if we
could acknowledge that there is no such thing as ‘the normal child’; instead, there are children with varying capabilities and varying impediments, all of whom need individualized attention as their capabilities develop” (p. 210). Educators who maintain this type of open mindset regarding students will be able to effectively improve the inclusiveness of the learning environment for students with disabilities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), inclusive education is “central in promoting inclusive and equitable societies” (p. 206). When students who are not disabled participate in an inclusive learning environment over a period of time with students who are disabled, familiarity tends to increase and prejudice is reduced (WHO, 2011).

**Gender and education.** In addition to segregation against minorities and individuals with disabilities, gender discrimination has strong roots in U.S. history. For centuries, Caucasian females were prevented from receiving a formal education, could not hold property in their own name, could not vote, and were often viewed as a possession that transferred from father to husband at marriage (Chafe, 1994; Tushnet, 2003). The ratification of the 14th amendment in 1868 sought to change such discriminatory practices for all citizens of the U.S., including women (United States Constitution, amend. XIV).

Prevalent during the early 1900s were labor laws designed to ensure females remained within society’s designated feminine roles and duties. These laws claimed to protect women from immoral reputations and harsh work conditions while also blocking them from taking traditional male job opportunities or receiving fair wages for equal work (Chafe, 1994; Tushnet, 2003). Women lacked the power or voice to initiate legislative change because they were denied the right to vote until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 (United States Constitution, amend. XIX). When women began to unite to transform their status in society, significant progress was made against discrimination in the workplace regarding compensation inequalities.
The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) prohibited “discrimination on account of sex in the payment of wages by employers engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Pub. L. 88-38, SEC. 206, Section 6d). Although, women now have greater access to educational opportunities and expanded career choices as the nation’s workforce continues to become more inclusive and diverse, discrimination continues to occur and women’s pay still falls short of their male counterparts. Major corporations such as Google, Facebook, and Apple have revealed their lack of diversity in the workplace and are just now beginning to initiate specific changes in recruiting and hiring practices. Employers and educators who work to improve diversity and inclusiveness for all students, regardless of gender and traditional stereotypes, will increase opportunities for all students to succeed in today’s diverse and global workplaces.

**Language and education.** The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 specifically sought to make education equitable for students of low-income families and later added an amendment during reauthorization in 1967 to provide for bilingual education programs, known as Title VII (U.S. DOE, 2008). This section of the ESEA also included Native American, Hawaiian, and Alaskan students because of their diverse cultural backgrounds. In 1968, it transformed into the more comprehensive Bilingual Education Act (BEA). The objective was to provide students the opportunity to receive instruction in English simultaneously with the native language of the student with the belief that allowing students to maintain a sense of pride and identity in their native language would benefit their academic performance.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education, which resulted in the expansion of bilingual education programs. President Clinton supported bilingual
education programs and increased funding for bilingual and immigrant education through the
*Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994*. A subsequent reauthorization under NCLB replaced
this with Title III, *Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students*
(NCLB, 2001). However, with no designated national language in the U.S., there continues to be
much debate from both sides of the issue regarding bilingual education programs; opponents
favor assimilation to the English majority, while proponents advocate multiculturalism to
promote academic achievement for diverse students.

**Diversity and Achievement Issues**

Despite significant legislation and various degrees of funding, standardized test scores as
well as measurements of reading and math skills have revealed significant gaps in achievement
between students based on ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, gender, and disability.
While schools cannot fully address all aspects of the achievement gap without the help of parents
and communities, they certainly play a significant role in improving student achievement (Gay,
2013; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Ornstein, 2010; Split et al., 2011). However,
Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) contend that taking a purely academic approach to the
achievement gap is inadequate in addressing performance issues because it does not take into
consideration the affective nature of students; impactful education takes a holistic approach.
Beyond intellectual needs, educators must be able to develop the social and emotional needs of
all students. In order for educators to be effective and culturally responsive, they must
understand the “values, norms, and beliefs of the communities, families, and students served by
the school” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 179). Knowledge of students’ culture and
background provide indicators of learning styles and student needs while also explaining certain
behaviors in the classroom. This type of knowledge could be acquired through multicultural
coursework offered in teacher preparation programs and professional development for existing teachers. Educators are often responsible for initiating their own learning to gain an understanding of diverse factors which are specific to the student population of their school; this is accomplished through reflection and self-examination of one’s own beliefs and attitudes regarding diversity. Reading books on the topic, observing peers who model inclusive practices, and attending specialized training and conferences are also ways for educators to acquire knowledge about diversity issues. Acting on this knowledge, educators can then effectively utilize it to positively influence student performance.

Educators must also understand how culture is defined so that they do not encourage cultural stereotypes or uphold the erroneous belief that because a student is of a certain ethnicity, they share the same culture as all others of that same ethnicity (Neito, 1999). While ethnicity has an integral role in shaping beliefs, attitudes, and practices and how people respond and are responded to within society, it is only one piece of a multi-faceted dynamic at work. Economics, origin, language, religion, ability, circumstances, and life experiences are other key factors. For instance, it would be entirely presumptuous to expect a Puerto Rican student who has lived in the U.S. from birth to have the same cultural experiences as another Puerto Rican student who was raised for any significant period of time in Puerto Rico. Likewise, Caucasian students raised in the South will have different experiences from Caucasian students raised in the North. Regardless of ethnicity, students raised in military families who travel frequently will have different background experiences than urban or suburban students as will students who live in poverty compared to students raised in middle-class families (Bray & Balkin, 2013; Herbers, Cutuli et al., 2012). Yet, most schools and educators do not take these differences into account; educators must be wary of making assumptions based on cultural stereotypes. Seeking out
information through participating in training and reading books on diversity and inclusiveness from topic-related experts are viable ways to understanding a variety of cultural norms and traditions that impact education in a multicultural setting. Additionally, observing and learning from educators who have acquired an in-depth knowledge of culture is beneficial to developing one’s own understanding. Most often, teachers are left without guidance from administrators in obtaining an understanding of diversity due to a lack of priority and resources.

Nieto (1999) contends that culture is dynamic and multifaceted, embedded in context and influenced by social, economic, and political factors. In addition, culture is created and learned; it is socially constructed. Nieto (1999) defines culture as “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (p. 129). Developing a concept of culture in this manner compels educators to do away with preconceived perceptions of people from different cultures or backgrounds and endeavor to understand the experiences and cultures of each student as an individual, unhindered by underlying assumptions based on a student’s ethnicity, language, disability, or culture (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al., 2009; Katz, 2013).

Effective learning environments affirm and value the diversity of students through culturally responsive teaching and instructional practices (Gay, 2013; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010). Student performance is promoted in an inclusive school climate where diverse students feel a sense of belonging and can engage in a learning environment consisting of positive social interactions with peers and teachers (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Gay, 2010; Katz, 2013; Reihl, 2000; Split et al., 2011). Creating such an environment is achieved by
culturally responsive leaders and educators (Edmunds et al., 2009; Gay, 2010; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Thompson, 2010). One study participant defined a culturally responsive leader as possessing “the ability and willingness of the leader to look beyond their own personal beliefs, values, and biases to see other people for who they are – one who is willing to relate to and learn about others and then embrace their differences as they lead and impart change.” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 183)

Furthermore, the Madhlangobe and Gordon’s (2012) study, along with others, revealed attributes of culturally responsive educators and leaders as (a) caring; (b) building relationships; (c) being persistent and persuasive; (d) being present and communicating; (e) modeling cultural responsiveness; and (f) fostering cultural responsiveness among others (Spalding et al., 2010; Taylor, 2009). The challenge is developing the necessary skills and motivation needed to respond to diversity in leaders and educators as the student population becomes multiethnic, multilingual, and economically diverse while the school’s staff remains static, with White, female teachers who are predominantly middle-class and unilingual (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2013; Young et al., 2010).

Nieto (as cited in Gay, 2010, p. 3) identified five attitudinal qualities necessary to being an effective promoter of cultural diversity and asserted that “the cultivation of these attitudes could constitute the core of teacher education programs devoted to developing beliefs that are ideological anchors for incorporating cultural diversity into teacher behaviors.” These attitudinal qualities were (a) A sense of mission to serve ethnically diverse children to the best of their abilities; (b) solidarity with, empathy for, and value of students’ lives, experiences, cultures, and human dignity; (c) courage to question mainstream school knowledge and conventional ways of doing things, and beliefs and assumptions about diverse students, families, cultures, and
communities; (d) willingness to improvise, to push the envelope, to go beyond established templates and frameworks, and to embrace uncertainty and flexibility; and (e) a passion for equality and social justice (Nieto as cited in Gay, 2010, p. 9). Developing these foundational beliefs would be a prerequisite to integration of culturally responsive teaching behaviors.

Valdiviezo’s (2014) ethnographic study of teachers of English Language Learners revealed that diversity-minded educators take on the role of learner as they seek to develop their culturally relevant knowledge in order to benefit their students’ academic success. They focus less on test scores and more on emphasizing student successes by “becoming allies, investing in connections, and developing trust with their students’ families” (Valdiviezo, 2014, p. 70). They actively sought to learn from their students’ families by reaching out to them because they believed making such connections would increase student learning successes, regardless of test scores. Rather than focusing on the globalizing trends in education which seem to create inequalities, these educators listen to the voice of the local community to reframe how their school responds to inequalities. Likewise, this study examined the experiences of educators who collaborate to improve the inclusiveness and diversity of their school climate despite the differences between students and staff.

While studies offer mixed results concerning the effectiveness of male teachers versus female teachers on teaching boys (Cushman, 2010; Gosse, 2011; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Reza-Rashti & Martino, 2010; Skelton, 2012; Split et al., 2011), there still exists gender gaps in student performance. Specifically, female students tend to outpace male students in reading and literacy, while male students tend to perform higher in math and science. This disparity most likely results from gender stereotypes, prompting a recent initiative by education proponents to focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum as a means to
open up opportunities and close performance gaps between male and female students as well as minority students.

**Lack of Nontraditional Educators**

Given that the typical K-12 teacher is a White, middle-class female (75%), there is a definite lack of diversity within the profession itself. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE, 2013) reported that 80 percent of the bachelor’s degrees in education went to non-Latino White students during the 2009-10 school year, with three-quarters of recipients being women and only 4.2 percent Latinos. White students continue to outnumber minorities in college attendance and minorities in college are choosing other career paths (AACTE, 2013). Decades of gender and racial bias are largely to blame; a history of segregation and discrimination provides a plausible explanation as to why today’s K-12 schools significantly lack nontraditional educators (e.g., ethnic minorities, males, and individuals with disabilities). Additionally, gender bias still regards teaching as a female profession, especially in K-8 schools (Skelton, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Yet, implementing an effective diversity plan at a district or school level should take into consideration the diversity of its educators, not just the student population (Lauring & Selmer, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Madkins, 2011). A school climate inclusive of diversity gives all students, staff, families, and community members the opportunity for belonging and success (Gay, 2000; Hightower-Weaver, 2011; Osman, 2012; Split et al. 2011; Thapa et al., 2013).

**Lack of minorities.** Statistics show that 83% of K-12 educators in public schools are White and only 7% of educators are Black or Hispanic (NCES, 2013). The disparity between the demographics of educators and a growing minority student population may factor into the existing achievement gaps for these subgroups of students (Gay, 2013; Gosse, 2011; Mthethwa,
2013). One of the ongoing arguments supporting more minority educators is the belief that the students will perform better when they see a teacher who looks like them and is more apt to share similar real world experiences of a diverse classroom, specifically as it relates to ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and socioeconomic status (Majzub, & Rais, 2010; Silverman, 2010; Split et al., 2011; Young et al., 2010). While the debate is ongoing regarding the actual academic impact of having educators who reflect the diversity of their student population, it is certainly beneficial that teachers understand how to relate to all students, especially those who are different than themselves. Gay (2013) contends that educators should understand how to be culturally responsive in their own classrooms and receive adequate training to handle cultural diversity. Yet, there still exists a lack of meaningful and relevant courses and field experiences addressing the issue of multiculturalism for both pre-service and existing educators. Consequently, the inability of a teacher to relate to the cultural experiences of diverse students on an ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, or language level can result in ineffective learning experiences for those students resulting in low academic achievement (Gay, 2013; Young et al., 2010).

**Lack of male teachers.** Male teachers are another widely underrepresented group of K-12 educators, especially in the elementary grades. According to statistics from NCES (2013), male teachers comprise 23.7% of educators within all public elementary and secondary schools. Some studies suggest males are discouraged from entering the teaching profession for reasons such as gender bias, low pay, and wasting their ability (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Research investigating the predominant effectiveness of male teachers versus female teachers on male students’ achievement and the positive influence of a male role model in the classroom provides mixed results (Carrington & McGhee, 2008; Gosse, 2011; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Rezai-Rashti &
Martino, 2010). A study on the importance of role modeling in teaching and learning reported participants for both genders agree on the positive impact while expressing a belief that a good role model enhances learning (Majzub & Rais, 2010). Conversely, Rezai-Rashti and Martino’s (2010) study contends that a discussion on the lack of representation of male teachers, especially minorities, is not adequately addressed when viewed through the simplistic lens of role modeling.

Cushman’s (2010) study on whether male primary school teachers helped or hindered student performance found students held stereotypical views of males related to sports and games and students tended to view a male teacher as a man, rather than teacher; such attitudes marginalize girls and non-sports minded boys. Students had little preference regarding the gender of the teacher; instead, they desired teachers of quality who demonstrated fairness, developed relationships, and made learning engaging (2010). The male teachers in Cushman’s (2010) study revealed a consistently traditional viewpoint of a dominant male role and mentor; yet, teacher quality, regardless of gender, has shown to have a more positive influence on student performance.

Although a small number of teachers reported they taught differently based on student gender, most believed teacher gender was irrelevant as long as they were effective and therefore could not support that educator gender significantly mattered in overall effectiveness (Cushman, 2010; Lam et al., 2010; Split et al., 2011). While recruiting nontraditional educators is a progressive step toward diversifying the profession, some researchers contend empirical evidence thus far has failed to definitively answer the questions regarding whether diversity amongst staff members signifies openness to diversity or if male teachers are more effective for
male students have yet to be answered empirically (Lauring & Selmer, 2013; Majzub & Rais, 2010).

**School Climate**

Research supports a positive school climate provides a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students and is beneficial to academic performance (Craig, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2009; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). Though there has yet to be a consensus on a single definition for school climate, it can be described as the working and learning conditions of the school environment influenced by leadership, staff, organizational culture, and community. School climate can be measured by the amount of academic, social, and collegial support. Inclusiveness can be defined as a school climate that actively welcomes, accepts, supports, and represents all its diverse members—students, families, staff, and community members—and creates a sense of belonging to facilitate learning for all while providing embedding multiculturalism into differentiated instruction that meets the needs of each individual (Dessel, 2010; Gay, 2000; Thapa et al., 2013).

The responsibility for creating an inclusive school climate belongs to educational leaders, administrators, and teachers within the district and its schools as well as the community leaders and legislators responsible for enacting education policies and laws. Educators must believe in the worth and ability of every student, while valuing each individual and holding the same high expectations for every student (Nieto, 1999). Implementing a diversity plan is accomplished by educators who have positive views of diversity and seek to improve the intellectual, social, and emotional environment for all students, families, and staff (Gay, 2000; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009; Tremblay, 2013). When a school is not reaching student performance goals, it may indicate that a change in the school climate is necessary. According to Cox (2000), a school
district and individual schools within that district are organizations with their own unique culture. Culture is defined as a specific set of beliefs, values, and attitudes held by those in the organization (Cox, 1994). The established culture of the district has a relatively strong influence over each school under its umbrella; even so, each school will still possess its own distinct culture shaped by the influence of the surrounding community’s unique characteristics as well as the educational leadership and teachers within the school and the student population. Additionally, legislation has historically had significant impacts on the state of school culture and climate.

As the achievement gap widens and diversity among students grows, leaders in school districts across the nation have responded in various ways to managing the impact of diversity issues. One specific practice a number of K-12 school districts have begun is the establishment of diversity committees made up of volunteer educators and other staff members. Diversity committee volunteers examine the current state of diversity within their district along with beliefs, attitudes, and practices in order to improve overall inclusiveness (Birmingham City School District, 2014; Broward County Public Schools, 2014).

District leaders and educators work together on designated diversity committees to establish or improve upon an inclusive school climate, examine curriculum to eliminate biases and increase diverse representation, attract non-traditional educators to the profession, and enhance school and home communications in order to improve student achievement. Leaders often are challenged in leading changes toward diversity by their own lack of interaction with others who are different from themselves (Young et al., 2010). Thus, educators who volunteer to be a part of the diversity committee may bring experiences and perceptions about diversity that will assist leaders in executing the diversity plan. The ability of educators who can reflect upon
their own beliefs and practices in their interactions with people who are different from themselves in order to create positive changes that benefit the school climate is vital to change (Craig, 2012; Osman, 2012).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Gay (2000) defined cultural responsiveness as the educator’s ability to utilize “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). She argues that this style of teaching is both affirming and validating to multicultural students. Gay (2000) contends that culturally responsive teaching responds to the individual needs of students resulting from diverse cultural experiences and background knowledge. In a culturally responsive learning environment, the goal of the educator is to bridge learning gaps by providing meaningful connections between students’ experiences and academic learning. Accomplishing this goal requires multicultural aspects embedded into differentiated instruction based on individual student learning needs, abilities, and styles. Educators who have limited cross-cultural experiences outside of the classroom are challenged to proactively embed cultural connections within their instructional strategies in response to an increasingly diverse student population. Much like Vygotsky (1978), Gay (2000) asserts that learning is promoted when teachers assist students in making meaningful connections between their background knowledge and learning, even when it involves bridging cultural gaps. When teachers intentionally expose an entire class of students to different cultural experiences and traditions, it validates and builds an understanding of other cultures. Educators who volunteer to improve inclusiveness recognize that effective solutions to managing diversity extend beyond awareness to actual implementation of strategies that are relevant to student learning.
Implementing Diversity Plans

Districts are led by an elected school board who hire a district superintendent and tend to follow a typical top-down leadership style with a specific set of achievement goals and mission statement. Schools are led by building administrators (principal and assistant principal) and leadership teams (senior educators), each with its own unique leadership style and culture. Implementing change in any form within a school environment can be challenging as educators must adhere to specific laws, rules, budgets, and other organizational constraints which may hinder effective progress and the speed in which it is accomplished. Furthermore, today’s high stakes testing environment in K-12 public schools has placed a priority on standardized test scores as evidence of student learning and teacher effectiveness.

The directive to create an atmosphere of inclusiveness in the school climate typically comes from the district superintendent while being implemented at the school level by the principals, teachers, and other staff members. A minority number of K-12 school districts have a documented diversity plan with specific objectives to be implemented within a certain timeframe following defined steps (Meusch, 2010; Young et al., 2010). The success of an effective diversity plan depends on a variety of factors such as clear communications between leaders and educators regarding the plan, group buy-in for the plan, available resources to support initiatives, and sufficient priority given to the goals of the plan (Butcher, 2014). A significant barrier in implementing diversity plans is the level of priority the initiative is given at the district level by the superintendent and other leaders. When administrators believe the district does not actually support the plan, they assume it is just another initiative that the district will eventually drop; therefore, the principals do not invest much time, effort, or resources into supporting it at their own schools. One study reported administrators’ initial excitement over the approved plan in
hopes of obtaining resources for their diverse student populations; however, failure on the
district’s part to effectively implement, measure, and require accountability for the plan sent the
message that it was not a priority at all (Young et al., 2010). Additionally, administrators may
lack a clear understanding of the district’s philosophy of supporting diversity; yet, they neglect to
seek clarification and instead rely upon their personal philosophies of supporting diversity
(Young et al., 2010). Differences in personal approaches to diversity create varying levels of
inclusiveness and changes to school culture across a single district. Furthermore, administrators
may have difficulty communicating with teachers, students, and parents concerning diversity
initiatives because of their own lack of understanding of diversity (Causton-Theoharis et al.,
2011; Young et al., 2010).

Despite challenges to implementing diversity plans, research has also shown that leaders
and educators are instrumental in leading change for diversity and inclusiveness in the school
climate when they possess certain characteristics which include (a) Cultural intelligence; (b)
transformational leadership skills; (c) ability to build authentic relationships; and an (d) openness
toward diversity (Keung & Rockinsaw-Zapkiw, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Michael-
Luna & Marri, 2011; Reihl, 2000). Additionally, effective change occurs when educators are
able to build trust, engage personal culture, confront issues of social dominance and social
justice, transform instructional practices, and engage the entire school community (Howard,
2007). When educators are culturally competent and explicitly model positive attitudes toward
diversity, students learn to emulate these same behaviors and acceptance toward differences
among fellow students, regardless of whether those differences are related to ethnicity, culture,
SES, gender, or ability (Katz, 2013; Thompson, 2010).
Diversity Training

To address the growing diversity challenge in K-12 education, most universities offer a course in multicultural education to prepare future educators to teach students of diverse ethnicities, cultures, languages, and socioeconomic status. The effectiveness of such program offerings has received mixed results when researchers examined pre-service teachers’ cultural intelligence levels, understanding of diversity, and perceived ability to teach in a multicultural setting; most participants felt unprepared to teach in schools where minority students make up the majority or schools with a high level of students in poverty (Colon-Muniz et al., 2010; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Gosse, 2011; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011; Silverman, 2010).

The words “diversity” and “multiculturalism” can be quite ambiguous at best. The terms are so broad, it is impossible to believe that every educator could hold the same definition of each word. In the compliance standards for teacher accreditation, the specific meaning of the term diversity is given as “differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area” (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2006, p. 3). Specific reference is given to English-language learners, underscoring the importance of addressing students of diverse linguistic backgrounds (NCATE, 2006).

Researchers who examined the perceptions of pre-service teachers in regard to diversity and multiculturalism found most participants believed ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status are irrelevant to discussions regarding student learning and prefer to remain “colorblind” rather than focus on factors of diversity (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009; Gay, 2010, p. 145). By taking this stance, these pre-service teachers feel they are avoiding discrimination when in actuality
they are perpetuating it by failing to reflect upon and examine the impact historical inequities have had on education for diverse students (Gay, 2010; Riley & Ettlinger, 2010).

To maintain state certification, educators are typically required to pursue professional development and continuing education coursework. Teachers make choices based on available courses offered through the local district or a university of their choosing. Effective ongoing professional development is dependent upon the self-reflection and motivation of each individual teacher; there is no requirement for educators to take a course on diversity or multicultural education. Even when educators choose to pursue training, there appears to be a lack of relevant courses to meet the specific needs relevant to the diversity at their schools. Cox (2001) suggests “avoiding canned training programs in favor of training that is customized to fit the organization and recommends tailoring topics to fit the diversity dimensions that are most evident in the organization” (p. 151). Thus, it would be more beneficial and meaningful to develop personalized training that is specific to the types of diversity a particular school district is experiencing. The study site for this research was specifically chosen because the participants have developed and implemented a customized approach to diversity training in their school.

Summary

Current demographic statistics and future projections related to student population predict that minority students will take over majority status in K-12 public schools by the year 2020 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Consequently, school leaders and educators face the challenge of transforming their school climate into an inclusive learning environment to meet the social and academic needs of diverse student groups while also seeking to recruit nontraditional educators, in regard to ethnicity, culture, and gender (Cushman, 2010; Gosse, 2011; Hightower-Weaver, 2011, Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Leithwood & Janzti, 2005; Wang et al., 2011).
There are common issues attributed to diversity which school systems are seeking to improve. These include a) The achievement gap related to poverty, gender, ethnicity, and disability (Cushman, 2010; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Split et al., 2011); (b) lack of community and positive school culture (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013); and (c) conflict between staff, students, parents, and community (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Sherman et al., 2010).

The role of school leaders and educators related to diversity include (a) Creating a school culture that fosters new meanings for diversity; (b) promoting inclusive school cultures and instruction; and (c) building relationships between school and community (Gay, 2000; Young et al., 2010). However, to implement intentional change and build an inclusive school culture, educators must have a positive mindset toward diversity (Bandura, 2001; Gay, 2000; Kirkham, et al., 2005; Page & Czuba, 1999). Furthermore, Schugurensky (2002) argues that success in sustaining an inclusive climate is reliant upon a supportive environment created by a collective group of individuals committed to the same goal, which represents the model used by AISD’s diversity committee.

A variety of literature exists on the effects of diversity on school climate and teacher self-efficacy (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013) and academic achievement and school community in multicultural settings (Cushman, 2010; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Split et al. 2011). In addition, there are studies examining the relationship between cultural intelligence and transformational leadership (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013; Onorato, 2013). Yet research is limited regarding the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators who volunteer on a diversity committee.
Due to the rapidly increasing diversity of communities and schools, it is important to understand the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators volunteering to improve the inclusiveness of their school climate. Investigating the perceptions of the participants regarding their role on the diversity committee will provide valuable insight into the motivation of individuals who volunteer as well as their beliefs on the level of impact they have on the school climate. Findings may provide ideas on how to solicit and train future and current educators to participate in creating an inclusive school environment for a diverse student population. A sense of belonging and acceptance are characteristics of an inclusive environment which benefits team cohesiveness, an important factor in achieving goals related to academic achievement and positive school climate (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Sherman et al., 2010). Inclusiveness also creates a sense of community and positively impacts teacher job satisfaction (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2013; Young et al., 2010). Additionally, teacher preparation programs could benefit by using the findings of this study to enhance diversity and inclusion training and field experiences for pre-service teachers, who lack diversity preparedness and motivation (Colon-Muniz et al., 2010; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Gosse, 2011; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011; Silverman, 2010). Ultimately, it could be beneficial to use this study’s findings to impact the school climate in such a way as to positively influence the academic achievement gap across student subgroups.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives and experiences of educators in their role as volunteers for the school district’s diversity committee in a large metropolitan suburb located in the southeastern United States. Using a phenomenological approach, the study investigated the participants’ experiences by allowing them to share their perceptions, beliefs, and practices. This research is important because diversity continues to present challenges to K-12 public schools in the areas of (a) School climate (Geiger, 2012; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Owens, 2010), (b) student achievement (Cushman, 2010; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Split et al., 2011), (c) school and home communications (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Sherman et al., 2010), (d) sense of community (Lauring & Slemer, 2013; Sherman et al., 2010), (e) nontraditional teacher recruitment (Cushman, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2011), and (f) pre-service teacher preparation (Siwatu & Polydore, 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used for this study. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological approach focuses on describing the shared experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon and identifying what they have in common to get to a universal essence. The phenomenological approach is suitable for this study because it gives participants an opportunity to voice their lived experiences and perceptions on the shared phenomenon of volunteering on the school district’s diversity committee. Qualitative research provides the researcher the opportunity to analyze the perspectives of participants in such a way as to communicate a rich description of their meaning to others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Creswell
(2013) states that in order to “fully describe the participant’s view of the phenomenon, the researcher must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences” (p. 81). I have never volunteered on the district’s diversity committee, but as an educator at the study site, I bracketed out my own experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the role of educators on the diversity committee in the district to ensure I presented an authentic description of the perceptions and experiences of study participants.

**Research Questions**

To understand K-12 educators’ perceptions and experiences regarding their role in volunteering for the school’s diversity committee at the All Inclusive School District, five research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1. What are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as a volunteer on the district’s diversity committee?

RQ2. What are the significant beliefs and perceptions shared by K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee regarding the impact of diversity and inclusiveness on school culture and the learning environment?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and schools?

RQ4. What are the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators on the diversity committee?

RQ5. What are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?
Participants

The goal of qualitative research is to describe the authentic experiences of individuals experiencing a phenomenon through their own perceptions (Creswell, 2013). This study sought to give voice to the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committee, so selection criteria for volunteers will be specific. Creswell (2013) stated that selecting participants who share an experience or phenomenon must be done in a purposeful manner as opposed to random selection. Because I intended to investigate the perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as volunteers for any of the district’s diversity committees, it would not have benefited my research to have educators who did not volunteer on the diversity committee. Criterion sampling focuses on selecting sites or participants who meet some criterion related to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Thus, this study employed a criterion sampling strategy which identified 17 educators (teacher, administrator, or paraprofessional) who volunteered on a diversity committee at either the district level or the school level.

Initially, an email was sent to all 17 potential participants providing basic information about the study and the criteria for participating. Affirmative responses were received from three educators. My original goal was a minimum of ten participants; however, because only two diversity committees existed rather than one at each of the 33 schools, the pool of potential participants was much more limited than initially thought. Sample size is important to the study and a small sample is sufficient for a phenomenological approach. Creswell (2013) suggests that in a phenomenological study, “data collection consists primarily of in-depth interviews with at least 10 individuals” in order to obtain ample data with which to identify themes and garner abundant details for rich descriptions of participants’ lived experiences (p. 16). Thus, I sent all
potential participants a second email invitation with a link to the guided reflection survey prompts; six more participants agreed to join the study. A total of nine participants started the study; eight participants completed the study in its entirety. One participant chose to withdraw from the study for undisclosed reasons after an initial interview and responding to the guided reflection survey; none of the data collected from this participant was used during data analysis. The eight study participants all volunteered on the same diversity committee at their K-5 Title I elementary school; being a designated Title I school indicated that the majority of students at the school received free or reduced meals. Participant demographics included two male educators (African-American and Caucasian) and six females (four African-Americans, one Caucasian, and one African-American/Puerto Rican). Participants were all K-5 educators whose years of teaching experience ranged from less than one year to over 30 years. There was one academic lead teacher, one special education teacher, and six general education teachers. The study site employed the practice of inclusionary instruction where students in special education receive instruction in the general education classroom by both a general education and special education teacher rather than being taken to a special education resource classroom.

**Site**

The study focused on K-12 educators who volunteered on a diversity committee at either the district level or the school level within the All Inclusive School District (AISD), a K-12 public school district located in a large metropolitan region in the Southeast. In 2013, student enrollment was slightly over 25,000 students with 20 elementary schools (grades K-5), eight middle schools (grades 6-8), and five high schools (grades 9-12). In 2013, student demographics included Black (51%), White (31%), Hispanic (12%), Multi-ethnic (4.41%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.49%), and American Indian (.10%). Language is quite diverse with students
speaking over 40 different languages. In regard to socioeconomic status, a majority of students (61%) qualified for the free and reduced meal program which places them in a low-socioeconomic status.

According to 2010 Census data, the population in the county has shifted from a significantly high White majority (77.28%) to slightly above half (52.46%) during the past decade. During the same time period, an even greater increase occurred within the district’s schools as minority students became the majority student population (Black, 50.93%, White, 31.26%; and Hispanic, 11.6%). These statistics closely represent the increasing number of minority students predicted to take over majority status in the nation’s public schools by 2025 (NCES, 2013). A steady influx of immigrants from South America, Africa, and Europe into the county district has increased the number of students whose native language is not English. In fact, the school district has identified 40 different languages spoken by students of immigrant families. In addition, almost half of the district’s schools have been designated as Title I schools, signifying a majority of the students participate in the free or reduced meal program, an indicator of low socio-economic status. The number of students with disabilities has continued to increase with 10% of students being served in special education (SPED), 16.7% in an early intervention program (EIP), 15.8% in remedial education (grades 6-8), and 12% in gifted education (grades K-12).

The district was chosen not only because I am employed there but more so because it has a diverse student population and currently implements a district diversity plan. The mission of the diversity plan is to improve diversity and inclusiveness for every stakeholder—students, staff, families, and the community. It aims to achieve this by examining current practices, communications, and curriculum for the purpose of making recommendations regarding policies
and practices that will further enhance the diversity and inclusiveness of the school system. Additionally, staff training has been implemented in some schools to foster an understanding of diversity-related issues and creating an inclusive school climate. The district also has a goal of recruiting nontraditional educators, specifically males and minorities. Action steps for these goals are carried out by the district diversity committee led by the school superintendent with additional diversity committees made up of educators within the schools. Consequently, it was expected there would be potential participants who have lived the phenomena of being a K-12 educator volunteering on a diversity committee. Although there were a limited number of studies regarding diversity plan implementation at the district level from the perspective of school administrators (Young et al., 2010), I found no research from the perspective of a classroom educator volunteering on a diversity committee.

**Procedures**

Initially, approval was sought and ultimately granted from the authorized agent located at the site where the study took place which was the associate school superintendent. The district requires anonymity as part of participation in any research; therefore, I chose the pseudonym All Inclusive School District (AISD) for the site. While awaiting approval from the study site, a formal application was made to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Liberty University prior to collection of any data. Upon receiving approval from the study site and IRB, I began the process of identifying potential participants at the study site by using criterion sampling. Participants had to be K-12 educators who volunteered on either the district or the school diversity committee. With a total of 33 schools in the district, I expected multiple diversity committees but was told by the committee chair that there were only two, one at the district level and one at a K-5 Title I school. I requested and received a list of all diversity
committee members, along with their corresponding email addresses, from the academic lead teacher on the district’s committee. I then contacted all diversity committee members who met the criteria and individually emailed them using the script located in Appendix D. The email provided my contact information along with a brief explanation of the study. After a week, I had received three responses, so I sent a second email invitation with a link to the guided reflection survey prompts. From this email, I received six more affirmative responses.

Each of the participants signed an electronic consent form attached to the guided reflection survey as well as a hard copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix E). I met with each participant to explain the purpose of the study along with my role and their role. I reiterated the actions requested from the participants, including the number of interviews and potential follow ups, guided reflection survey, observations in classrooms, schools, or diversity committee meetings, site document review, including district’s diversity plan, meeting agendas, diversity training materials, and school improvement plans.

Participants were informed of their option to drop out of the study at any time as well as to choose not to respond to an interview question, or not participate in any of the other data gathering activities. Participants had an opportunity to read and ask any questions prior to signing the informed consent. They were informed that all identifiable information would be omitted and pseudonyms used to ensure confidentiality. Participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. The district authorized agent and all participants were given an opportunity to review the report before it was finalized.

The data collection section of this document will provide more detail regarding procedures and types of data to be collected, which will include interviews, observations, guided reflection surveys, and site documents. Guided reflection surveys with question prompts were
sent electronically to participants to record any life experiences, thoughts, and feelings on diversity and inclusiveness; responses were open-ended and there was no length or number of entries requirement. Site documents included (a) The district diversity plan, vision, and mission of the diversity committee, (b) diversity committee meeting training materials, (c) school improvement plan, and (d) diversity training material, agendas, or presentations. Data collection was done in four phases: (a) Guided reflection surveys, (b) interviews, (c) observations, and (d) gathering site documents. These types of data collection sources are typical of phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013).

**Personal Biography**

I am the researcher for this study as well as the observer, transcriber, and analyst. I hold a Bachelor’s degree in K-8 Interdisciplinary Studies and a Masters in Mathematics Education. At the time of the study, I was employed as a certified K-12 educator at a Title I school in the district where this study occurred. This is also the same community where I was born and raised. As a child, I attended the elementary school where I now teach. Consequently, I have observed many demographic changes within the community and its schools throughout the years. At the time of this study, I did not hold a supervisory role over any potential participants.

I am interested in this phenomenon because I have observed not only the demographic changes to the community at large but, as an educator, I have experienced firsthand a variety of responses to the demographic changes and the impacts to the school system. Neighborhoods and communities within the school district are becoming increasingly re-segregated by ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status. Public schools have seen the population of minority students increase to half that of the majority population as a result parents choosing other education options for their children such as homeschool, charter school, private schools, or online
academies. Multiple languages are being spoken by the increasingly diverse student population but teachers are still primarily monolingual.

Several years ago, the district superintendent established a diversity committee shortly after he was hired. Volunteers from a variety of backgrounds were solicited to join the initiative and together they defined the vision and mission for the school district’s diversity initiative. The mission was broader than simply bringing awareness of the growing levels of ethnic, language, and socio-economic diversity; the purpose was to identify and implement changes to the climate of the district that promoted inclusiveness and diversity among students and staff. This resulted from a growing minority population which recently became the majority in the school district. Additionally, the committee sought to not only speak to the needs of a changing student population but to focus on the recruitment of nontraditional teachers in K-12 (males and minorities) as part of an integrated solution to creating inclusiveness in a diverse school district.

At the time of this study, I was informed the district’s diversity committee had undergone a recent turnover in committee members and was not fully functional. There was also a K-5 elementary school in the district with a diversity committee established and chaired by one of the district’s diversity team members. This school’s diversity committee had been in existence for more than five years and focused on creating an inclusive school climate and embracing the diversity of its staff and student population. Between the two committees there was a total of 28 volunteers, 17 of those were K-12 educators.

I have observed casually that a number of these volunteers have experienced some form of military life, either through their formative years growing up in a military family or as adults serving their country in the military. Often, this experience includes interaction in a more diverse community and I was curious to see if this somehow influenced their commitment to
inclusiveness and what other experiences or beliefs existed that motivated their participation to volunteer on the diversity committee. However, I bracketed out my presuppositions and personal opinions to achieve a more authentic understanding of the perceptions of participants who volunteered on the diversity committee.

To fulfill my role as an educator, I am motivated by a Christian worldview of the Great Commandment which Jesus proclaimed to be loving God first with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind while also loving our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27, NKJV). It is my love for God and His love for me that significantly motivates my love for other people. As the human instrument for this study, I assumed an interpretive role as I sought to understand and identify themes in the lived experiences of the participants based on their responses and personal reflections as well as my own observations (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). It was important that the voices of participants were heard instead of my own; consequently, I set aside my personal experiences, beliefs, and opinions as an educator within the school district in order to gain understanding only through the lived experiences of the participants.

**Data Collection**

After formal permission was granted from the Liberty’s IRB and the study site, I had all participants sign an electronic version of the consent form as well as a paper copy; I then began the process of data collection. Creswell (2013) recommends using multiple data sources, known as triangulation, to effectively enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Patton (1990) further contended that studies using “only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method (e.g., loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses) than studies that used multiple methods” (p. 188). For this purpose, I employed multiple data sources for data collection which was conducted in four phases consisting of (a) guided reflection surveys,
(b) observations, (c) interviews, and (d) site documents. My objective was to collect data in each phase to the point of saturation, which Creswell (2013) defines as “to gather enough information to fully develop (or saturate) the model” (p. 89).

The data collection strategies are ordered specifically with guided reflection surveys first in order to allow individuals the opportunity to view the proposed guided reflection survey prompts. I had originally intended to begin with interviews but because I received only a couple of responses to my initial email request inviting potential participants to join the study I decided to email the guided reflection survey prompts. This gave me a greater response from potential participants and gave them the opportunity to get a better idea of the type of questions they would be expected to answer. Because I had worked at the same school as some of the potential participants, there was already an established personal connection with an existing level of trust and rapport as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012) that helped to facilitate interview responses and the access of related data. By starting with the guided reflection survey, participants were able to view the questions prompts in order to gain a better understanding of the purpose of the study. After participants signed the electronic consent form and completed the survey, I sent a personal email thanking each participant for their time and informed them of the observations and one-on-one interviews.

**Guided Reflection Survey**

Patton (1990) states that writing allows participants the opportunity to express personal thoughts and feelings they may not otherwise state during personal interviews. He further adds that it removes any limits to the voice of participants as it encourages them to express themselves in their own manner, without regard for time or space. The guided reflection survey offered details relevant to answering each of the five research questions.
At the start of the guided reflection survey, the electronic version of the consent form with the IRB case number and dates was presented. After reading the consent form, participants indicated their consent with an electronic signature button. Participants had the option to choose not to participate by selecting the ‘I do not consent’ button, which would end the guided reflection survey with a brief message. Participants were given a guided reflection survey with prompts, which solicited responses to questions about their experiences, motivations, and beliefs of diversity and inclusiveness as it pertains to their perceptions regarding their role as a volunteer on the school’s diversity committee (see Appendix B). This instrument provided supplemental information not obtained during the interview process. Participants were asked to reflect upon any experiences they believe influenced their motivation to volunteer for the committee and their perception of the impact of their role on the diversity committee. Participants responded to open-ended questions by typing in their responses; there was no character limit assigned to responses. Participants did not have to respond to every prompt and there was no length or number of entries requirement.

**Interviews**

According to Patton (1990), the purpose of interviewing is to discover the thoughts and perspectives of another person and “find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 278). One-on-one interviews will be advantageous when dealing with participants who may be less inclined to speak openly in a larger focus group of other participants (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of one-on-one interviews in this study is to hear participants describe the phenomenon of volunteering on the diversity committee in their own words. I collected data from the responses that were relevant to each of the five research questions.
Though it is possible to form interpretations on observations of actions and interactions, it is quite impossible to observe feelings, thoughts, and fully interpret the perceptions and intentions of an individual without asking them by providing a “framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 1990, p. 290). Because the richness of the interview data is often highly dependent upon the skill of the interviewer, I prepared by first reading interviewing techniques from Patton’s text and practiced my interview skills on colleagues.

Patton (1990) explains that the “truly open-ended question does not presuppose which dimension of feeling or thought will be salient for the interviewee” (p. 296). In qualitative interviews, open-ended questions are necessary to enable individual variations and allow interviewees to command the direction and depth of their response using their own words as opposed to dichotomous or leading questions which limit responses. Furthermore, a standard open-ended interview identifies a specific list of questions in advance of the interview and is the same for all participants. There are several strengths associated with this interview strategy: (a) The list of questions is made known in advance, (b) variations among interviewers is minimal because all participants are asked the same questions, (c) interview is focused to maximize interviewee’s time, and (d) data analysis is made easier because responses to the same question can be located more quickly (1990).

In addition, probes and follow up questions allow the interviewer to go deeper with the participant’s response and should be conversational and natural (Patton, 1990). Detail-oriented probes can help fill gaps in responses and follow initial responses, while searching for more details from the interviewee--e.g., “who,” “what,” where,” “when,” and “how” (Patton, 1990).
participants because time constraints were an issue. I used open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) integrated with detail-oriented probes to glean additional information from interviewees, when necessary. Otherwise, I used what Patton (1990) identifies as elaboration probes, gentle head nodding and subtle “uh-huhs” to encourage the interviewee to keep talking. If I needed clarification, I simply asked, “what do you mean?” or “would you please explain?”

Interviews were conducted with each participant in one 20-30 minute session and took place in the participant’s classroom, either before or after regular school hours. All interviews were conducted in person. I took written notes during the interviews as well as audio recorded each one. Audio recording was done on two separate instruments, an android device and an iOS device, using a voice recorder application. Prior to beginning the interview and immediately following, the audio was checked to ensure the recording occurred and is usable. Audio files were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and stored on the devices under password protection. All recordings were deleted after being transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. Interview questions are located in Appendix A.

Observations

Observation is one of the key tools in qualitative research and is based on the research purpose and questions. It involves the researcher observing the phenomenon in its field setting, making use of all five senses, while recording notes related to the research (Creswell, 2013). Observing for scientific inquiry requires careful preparation and training so that the researcher trains the brain to concentrate and learns to write descriptively, while separating the detail from trivia (Patton, 1980). According to Creswell (2013), there are four types of roles the researcher may take during an observation (a) complete participant—researcher is fully engaged; (b) participant as observer—researcher is participating in activity at site while also observing; (c)
nonparticipant /observer as participant—researcher is an outsider, with no interaction with group, and takes notes from a distance; (d) complete observer—researcher is neither seen nor noticed by participants. Observations can provide information which indicates degrees of support or conflict with data gathered from other sources. For instance, a participant may state in an interview that she believes inclusiveness is important to support the learning of all students in her classroom. An observation in the participant’s classroom provides access to students’ seating arrangement, group assignments, learning activities, and participant’s interactions with students, all of which will reveal to what extent the participant practices inclusiveness in the classroom at that specific time.

A component of observing is the task of taking field notes. Patton (1990) contends that an observation is quite meaningless without field notes to describe what one has observed. Field notes have multi-dimensional characteristics; they are both descriptive and reflection. Descriptive field notes describe the elements of the observation, such as physical setting, people, and activities in a highly detailed manner using words and language which illustrates the observation rather than interprets it (Patton, 1990). For example, a basic description of people at a bus stop using interpretive words might read like this: “There were several poorly dressed boys freezing as they waited at the bus stop,” whereas field notes using descriptive words might read like this: “It was a cold and rainy day in October. Three boys dressed in short sleeve shirts without jackets or hoods stood in the cold and rain huddled closely together at the bus stop.” In the interpretive example, “poorly” is an interpretive word applied to the clothing, whereas the descriptive example describes the actual clothing, thus presenting a better description of the activity being observed.
Reflection field notes contain the researcher’s personal feelings, reactions, and reflections related to the observation at the time they occur during the observation and should include both “the nature and the intensity of those feelings” (Patton, 1990, p. 241).

In this study, I assumed a nonparticipant/observer as participant role where I observed as an outsider, taking field notes from a distance without interacting with or involving participants. I observed participants in their classrooms for approximately thirty minutes each. I was able to observe all eight participants at least one time. Ideally, I would have preferred to observe at least one diversity committee meeting but the meeting times occurred once a month during the middle of the day while I was teaching and I was not able to attend. Also, most of the meetings were postponed as a result of unexpected school closures related to winter weather during the time this study took place.

During my observations of participants in their schools and classroom, I was able to observe and describe activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, and interpersonal interactions. Creswell (2013) recommends starting from a broad approach and then placing focus on the research questions. Thus, I initially noted the organization and layout of the classroom. Next, I counted the number of students in attendance and noted their ethnicity and gender. I noted the type of instruction the teacher was leading and noted the interactions among participants and students. I listened to discussions and observed as students completed tasks. I noted the number of times the teacher called on students based on ethnicity and gender. I noted any special locations for exclusion of any student from the main group and if there were actually students in the isolated location during the observation time period. Finally, I used the research questions to guide my observations more precisely as I aimed to gather data for each of the five research questions using this data.
Creswell (2013) recommends using an observational protocol for writing notes about what is being observed in the field. There are no strict requirements, but the basic observation form is divided into two columns, one for descriptive notes and the other for reflection notes. Descriptive notes summarize activities in chronological order while providing details to describe the where, what, who and when of the field observation. Reflection notes share the researcher’s reflections, thoughts, and feelings on the observation, related activities, and participants (Creswell, 2013). Patton (1990) emphasizes the importance of summarizing notes immediately following the field observation while thoughts, feelings, and events are fresh in the researcher’s mind. In this study, I utilized an observation protocol to record descriptive and reflection notes during the duration of the field observation and immediately following (see Appendix C).

**Site Documents**

The fourth phase of data collection was the examination of site documents, which provided additional details about the phenomenon being studied. According to Patton (1990), documents will vary and could be any written form of information that may offer additional details relevant to the research such as program records, correspondence, financial and budget records, organizational rules, regulations, memoranda, and any other document type (Patton, 1990). Two important purposes are served by documents: (a) They provide a basic source of information on program decisions, background, activities and processes; and (b) they can generate further questions the researcher can implement in additional interviews and observations (Patton, 1990).

For this study, a number of site documents were collected and examined. These documents included (a) the district’s diversity plan, (b) the school improvement plan, (c) training agendas and presentation materials, and (f) samples of parent communications in English and
Spanish. Data from these documents provided information relevant to research questions three, four, and five. Documents were examined and compared to data gathered during the other three phases of data collection to see what additional information is available, to see how data aligns or conflicts, and to what extent in specific areas. Access to public documents was sought online at the district’s website. Additionally, printed copies of the training agendas and presentation materials were provided by the school’s diversity committee chairperson.

**Data Analysis**

Patton (1990) stated the “the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings” (p. 371). Yet, the wealth of data gathered during the collection phase cannot be properly mined without a sufficient plan for the data analysis framework. Accordingly, the analysis framework for this study followed a modified version of Moustakas’ Seven Steps of data analysis: (a) listing and preliminary grouping; (b) reduction and elimination; (c) clustering and thematizing; (d) final identification of themes; (e) construction of textural description; (f) construction of structural description; (g) construction of overall textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience (1994).

I started by organizing the data from the interviews, observations, personal reflection surveys, and site documents; multiple copies of each were printed or photocopied. Next, I read through the copies to ensure completion; any items or notes left for follow-up were completed appropriately. I followed Patton’s (1990) recommendation to maintain four copies of all data, with one copy for safekeeping and three other working copies for such things as writing on, cutting and pasting, and highlighting. I used both paper and computer files as I worked with data.
Next, I followed Creswell’s (2013) recommendation to read carefully through the data to gain a full understanding of the data “as a whole unit before breaking it into parts” (p. 182). Another part of this initial process is memoing, which is described as writing brief notes or memos on the actual data transcript, artifact, or field notes to begin categorizing data (Creswell, 2013). As I read through the data, I wrote margin notes as ideas came to me.

Following reading and memoing, I began to describe, classify, and interpret data. Creswell calls this phase as the process of forming “codes” or “categories” and emphasizes its importance as “the heart of qualitative analysis” (2013). At this stage, Moustakas (1994) advocates “epoche,” a setting aside or bracketing of any prejudgments held by the researcher; this allows the researcher to look at the data with a fresh approach. Even though I have never volunteered on the diversity committee, I bracketed out my personal perspectives by describing my own opinions and beliefs (as discussed in my personal biography section), so I was able to appropriately describe the personal experiences of participants. I then read through and labeled data in order to classify and group it into topics. As I read the data, I used different colored highlighters and pens for marking significant statements and formed the initial codes for classifying significant statements into themes or meaning units. The process of listing the significant statements relevant to the phenomenon is known as horizontalization of data (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, I synthesized the themes into a description of the participants’ experiences. There were two different descriptions of participants’ experiences with the phenomenon: “what” was experienced, known as the “textural description,” which includes verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013, p. 193); the second description is “how” the experience happened, known as the “structural description,” where the researcher “reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon
was experienced” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). In this manner, I wrote both a textural and a structural description of the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon of being volunteers on the diversity committee.

After completing each of these steps, I wrote the essence of the experiences, incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. The essence is referred to as the “culminating aspect of the phenomenological study,” a long paragraph written to explain the “what” was experienced and “how” it was experienced (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). Thus, I concluded my analysis by integrating my textural and structural descriptions to form a composite description of the meanings and essence of participants’ experiences with volunteering on the diversity committee.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the extent to which the information reported can be trusted. The inductive and interpretive nature of this qualitative study requires the employment of trustworthiness criteria that lends credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). Credibility speaks to the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation of participant’s meaning (Creswell, 2013). Transferability refers to readers’ ability to read the present study and compare its context to other potential contexts for potential replications (Creswell, 2013; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Dependability is referred to as the ability to replicate a qualitative study using documentation from the research (Creswell, 2013). Confirmability includes allowing participants of the study to review and judge the credibility and accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2013) as well as documenting researcher’s impressions and bracket out any previous experiences that may inhibit objectivity or neutrality (Gay et al., 2006). Trustworthiness is referred to by Creswell (2013) as “a process of validation” involving different
strategies that document the “accuracy” of a study and recommends researchers employ multiple strategies, with a minimum of two, in their studies (p. 250). This study employed validation strategies of triangulation, member checking, and providing rich, thick descriptions.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation, the use of multiple data sources and collection methods, supports the credibility of a study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990). This study used multiple sources of data and data collection methods, including (a) Interviews with multiple participants, (b) available site documents, (c) guided reflection surveys, and (d) observations.

**Member checking**

The strategy of member checking was used to ensure confirmability. Member checking seeks input from participants’ on their view of the credibility of findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I requested two participants review the transcripts and preliminary analyses of the data and provide feedback to critique my analyses and identify any potential discrepancies. Both participants signed and returned the member check form stating their agreement with the accuracy of the transcripts and my interpretation of the data (see Appendix G).

**Thick descriptive data**

My third strategy for ensuring credibility, dependability, and transferability is providing data using rich, thick descriptions. Thick description is defined as abundant and interconnected details used to describe settings, a case, and themes as well as the use of quotes and strong action verbs (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). I followed these recommendations by using an abundance of details when describing field observations, settings, interview data, and site documents as well as using verbatim quotes in my research.
Clarifying researcher bias

It is important to both the credibility and confirmability of a qualitative study that researchers disclose at the beginning their past experiences, potential biases, and their position concerning the research topic (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I disclosed my experiences, potential biases, and perspectives related to the phenomenon of volunteering on the diversity committee in the researcher biography section. Researcher accountability is important to this study and I held myself accountable through self-disclosure and proper bracketing of personal views so that those participating in or reading the report are aware of potential bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important to this study. All potential research participants were given a consent form to sign and were informed that they may choose to withdraw at any time. Anonymity is vital to collecting authentic data from participants; therefore, the participating district, schools, and educators are known only to the researcher and the final report will have pseudonyms to protect their identity. No identifying information is included in any transcripts and tapes were erased after transcriptions were completed. Secure data storage is also important to the study. All computer files were backed up regularly on a jump drive and all electronic data stored on computers was password protected. Audio files were stored in a password protected device. A list of pseudonyms assigned to participants was kept in a separate password protected file. Research data was stored securely in a locked file cabinet and only the primary researcher had access to the records. Consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet separately from research data. All computer and audio files with participants’ personal information were password protected to avoid unauthorized access. Once pseudonyms were applied to the transcriptions, original audio recordings were erased. After a time period of three
years, all research documents will be shredded. Interview transcriptions and reflective survey responses will be deleted or shredded. The master list matching pseudonyms to participant names was kept locked in a file cabinet in the principal investigator's office and destroyed once all data was prepared for data analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the results and findings of the data analysis for this phenomenological study, which explored the perceptions and experiences of eight K-12 educators who volunteered on a diversity committee at a public school district located in a large metropolitan community in the Southeast. An introduction to each participant is provided, followed by a synthesized analysis of the participants’ accounts pertaining to the phenomenon of being a diversity committee volunteer. The analysis is presented and arranged thematically as described by the shared experiences and significant statements of the participants. Lastly, the central research questions and the four sub-questions are answered in rich detail, which resulted from a rigorous data analysis approach utilizing Moustakas’ (1994) modified procedures.

The study sought to understand how these educators experienced the phenomenon of being a diversity committee volunteer. The central research question that guided this study was: What are the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer for the district’s diversity committee regarding their role in improving the diversity and inclusiveness of the district? Participants were selected using a criterion sampling strategy that included only K-12 educators (teachers, administrators, or paraprofessionals) who volunteer on the district or school’s diversity committees; all other diversity committee volunteers and K-12 educators not on a diversity committee were excluded. Data was obtained from individual interviews and guided reflection surveys which elicited participants’ voices regarding their perceptions and experiences. Additionally, triangulation was achieved through gathering data from classroom observations and site documents, which included the district and school improvement plans, diversity committee goals, and training materials for staff meetings. This data established a
framework from which the diversity committee volunteers operated. The results of the study are presented in narrative text arranged by themes. Lastly, each theme concludes with the corresponding answers to the central research questions and the four sub-questions. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as volunteers on the district or school diversity committee?

RQ2. What are the significant beliefs and perceptions shared by K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee regarding the impact of diversity and inclusiveness on school culture and the learning environment?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and schools?

RQ4. What are the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators on the diversity committee?

RQ5. What are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?

Participants

Prior to collecting data from participants, approval was granted by the research site (Appendix F) and Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix E). After permission was granted from the Associate Superintendent of Schools, I was given access to the list of diversity committee volunteers by an instructional lead teacher on the district’s diversity committee. There were two committees, the district committee and a Title I elementary school’s committee, whose combined 28 volunteers included educators and other staff, parents, and
various business and faith community members. This study focused on the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators on the diversity committee, so only those volunteers meeting this criterion were selected as potential study participants. There were 17 possible candidates who met the selection parameters; all were sent the same email invitation (Appendix D) to join the study. A total of nine participants agreed to take part in the research, although one volunteer later chose to withdraw.

Data was collected from eight participants; all were certified educators who volunteered on the diversity committee for their K-5 elementary school. The school was designated as a Title I and consisted of a majority-minority student population, including African-American and Hispanic students. Caucasian, Asian, and Pacific Islander students represented a much smaller minority. At the start of the guided reflection survey, an electronic version of the consent form containing the IRB approval number and valid research dates was presented to participants. The survey began once participants provided their consent electronically. If consent was denied, then the survey automatically ended with a brief end-of-survey message. Seven of the eight participants completed the guided reflection survey journal. A paper copy of the consent form was also signed and collected from participants during the individual interviews phase. All eight participants were interviewed and agreed to be audio-recorded. They were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The chairperson of the school’s diversity committee had more than ten years of experience on the committee and presented workshops on diversity topics at conferences around the nation and local universities. Three participants had volunteered from two to five years and the remaining four participants were in their first year on the school’s diversity committee. Of the eight participants, six were general education teachers, one was a special education teacher,
and one was an instructional lead teacher. Five of the volunteers were African-American (one male, four females), two were Caucasian (one male, one female), and one female participant considered herself to be biracial, of Puerto Rican and African-American descent. There were a total of six female and two male participants. All eight educators volunteered or were selected to volunteer on their school’s diversity committee by the chairperson, who was also the school’s instructional lead teacher. In addition to chairing her school’s committee, the instructional lead teacher also volunteered on the district’s diversity committee. At the onset of the study, two schools and the district were represented by participants; however, the lone volunteer from the second school withdrew from the study after completing the guided reflection survey, but prior to completing the individual interview for undisclosed reasons. Consequently, none of the data collected from this participant was used in this study. Thus, all remaining participants in this study worked at the same K-5 elementary school and volunteered in some capacity on that particular school’s diversity committee. The school was one of 33 schools in the district and was designated as a Title I school based on the majority percentage of students receiving free or reduced meal benefits. All participants were given randomly assigned pseudonyms which were chosen using the first eight letters of the alphabet.

Andrew

Andrew is an African-American male teacher in his fifties who teaches kindergarten through fifth grade and has served as a diversity committee volunteer for four years. He is a special education teacher for students with specific learning disabilities and students who are on the autism spectrum but considered to be high functioning. His teaching responsibilities include serving as both a resource teacher for K-2 students in his own classroom and as an inclusion teacher for students in third through fifth grades in their regular education classroom. Andrew is
a second career educator who retired from the U.S. military and decided to give back to his community through teaching. His military experience gave him opportunities to interact with people and cultures from all over the world, which influenced his understanding of diverse cultures within the school environment. Andrew described his experiences in the following manner:

Prior to devoting the rest of my life to teaching and nurturing our youth, I devoted over 20 years to the Army. It was a very challenging and rewarding job. I got to travel all over the world and see a lot of things that some people only dream about (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Barbara

Barbara is an African-American female teacher in her thirties whose career choice was highly influenced by her mother and father. Both parents were educators and her father also served as a school superintendent. She grew up in a small southern town where she taught first and second grade for three years prior to moving to the larger metropolitan community in the southern state where she now teaches. This was Barbara’s first year as a diversity committee volunteer at the school where she has taught for the past 10 years. She was selected by the diversity chairperson to serve on the committee and enjoys her role in training other educators, as she affirmed: “I find it rewarding to share different topics, articles, quotes, and videos because it leads to more effective learning environment” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Carol

Carol is a Caucasian female teacher in her forties who became a certified K-5 educator after spending several years as a certified paraprofessional. She holds a Master’s degree in
education and teaches in a general education classroom at a K-5 elementary school. At the time of the interview, it was her first year volunteering on the school’s diversity committee. Teaching in a high poverty school has its challenges but Carol has come to embrace it over the years as she admitted, “I started working here because we lived in the area, it was close by. Now I stay because I love these kids” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Deborah

Deborah is an African-American female in her thirties who grew up on the West Coast and who “always knew [she] wanted to be a teacher” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She was in her ninth year of teaching K-5 elementary students. At the time of the interview, it was her first year at the school where she also serves as a volunteer on the diversity committee. Though she was often the only minority student during her teacher preparation program, she claims to have never felt as if “gosh, I’m a lot different than other people in my classes” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Deborah has also experienced being the only minority teacher at one of her former schools but never felt discriminated against or treated differently because of her ethnicity. She described her experience in this manner, “I was the only African-American teacher on the campus but I never felt different or ‘any way’” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Evelyn

Evelyn is an African-American female educator in her fifties who holds a PhD and has taught K-12 for over 25 years. She grew up in a small southern town but has lived and taught in schools in the U.S., Germany, and Panama. Living and teaching in different cultures allowed her the unique opportunity to interact with a range of diverse people and experience a variety of cultural traditions, beliefs, and values within each community. These experiences shaped her
practices and beliefs as an educator, as she indicated: “I have always started a diversity committee at every school where I teach. Diversity is my passion!” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She is the instructional lead teacher at her K-5 elementary school and serves as the chairperson for the school’s diversity community as well as volunteers on the school district’s diversity committee. Evelyn is a frequent presenter of diversity related topics at conferences and workshops around the country and local universities’ teacher preparation program.

**Fiona**

Fiona is of African-American and Puerto-Rican heritage and grew up in a large, diverse urban city. She is in her forties and has taught K-6 grades for over 16 years in major cities in the North and the South. Fiona holds two Master’s degrees, one is in Urban and Multicultural Education and the other is in Educational Administration. In addition, she holds an endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and is bilingual in Spanish and English. She has served two years on her school’s diversity committee. She describes herself as passionate about teaching and respects the diversity of her students:

As a teacher, you can expect me to treat all students with respect. I have a positive attitude, and delve into teaching with enthusiasm and passion. I also have high expectations for all students, and I strive to foster a supportive and engaging learning environment. It is also my desire to provide a quality education to all students and to help them to become productive members of our ever-changing society (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).
Gillian

Gillian is an African-American female teacher in her fifties who has taught music to K-8 students for over 35 years. She has a Master’s in music education and holds an endorsement in bilingual education. One of her greatest academic achievements was being selected as a Fulbright scholar, which allowed her the opportunity to participate in an internship study in Germany. Gillian is fluent in three languages: English, Spanish, and German. She spent her teenage years in foster care after her aunt, who was her primary caregiver, unexpectedly passed away. This experience granted her a unique compassion for at-risk children and helping them feel accepted which Gillian described as, “I like to make sure everyone feels like they’re a part. I make sure every child knows it will be all right, regardless of their circumstances” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Gillian has served on the diversity committee at her school for five years.

Ian

Ian, a Caucasian male teacher in his twenties, was in his first year of teaching K-5 elementary school and holds a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education. He grew up in the South in a “traditional Southern Baptist White neighborhood where I did not see any black kids in my school until second grade and then it was only a couple” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Interestingly, one of his students expressed to Ian that he was “the first White man I ever met” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). The majority of his students are African-American and Hispanic. Ian was selected by the diversity committee chairperson to serve on the committee because of his status as a non-traditional K-12 educator based on his ethnicity and gender. At the time of our interview, Ian was in his first year of serving on the diversity committee.
Themes

The process of identifying themes began following data collection from multiple sources, including interviews, guided reflection surveys, and observations. A more detailed account of the analysis process can be found in Chapter Three, but a brief synopsis is provided here. Transcripts from each source were read completely through several times before starting the process of horizontalization, the first step in Moustakas’ modified analysis approach, (1994). Significant statements were identified, and then analyzed for relevancy to the topic. The next step, reduction and elimination, removed any overlapping, repetitive, and ambiguous statements (1994). From there, statements were read again and coded to identify common phrases, words, and sentences as essential components and patterns essential to the phenomenon were observed (Moustakas, 1994). Table 1 presents the enumeration of horizons of open codes for emerging themes.

**Table 1**

*Enumeration of Horizons of Open Codes for Emerging Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open-Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic of Diversity and Inclusion = Fear, Uneasiness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ambassadors of Diversity and Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates for Support from Administrators and Colleagues</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate about Classroom, Teaching, and Diversity</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Diversity Issues</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassadors of Diversity / Trainers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Personal Racism and Discrimination</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bridge Builders Influenced by Personal Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees Injustices, Prejudices, Discrimination, and Biases</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desires to Have Conversations to Address Social Injustice — “Right the Wrong”</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a Minority Group or Possesses Some Aspect of Diversity, Related to Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Success Stories | 36 |
Training: Pre-service and Professional Learning and Development | 27 | The Teacher Becomes the Student |
Purposely Seeks to Gain an Understanding of Other Culture | 36 |
Intentionally Pursues Personal Relationships and Connections with Students and Others | 46 | Champions of the At-Risk Student |
Sees the Best in Everyone / Opportunity for All | 13 |
Recognizes Very Specific Needs in Students – Holistic Education Approach | 21 |
Goes after the “Different One” / the “Lost Sheep” | 33 |
Recognizes Differences / Diversity | 27 | Cultivators of an Inclusive Community of Learners |
Recognizes Similarities | 3 |
Intentionally Creates Inclusive Environments | 41 |
High Expectations for All Students | 12 |
Supportive of All Students | 11 |
Believes Diversity Significantly Impacts Learning Environment | 11 |
Passionate about Inclusive Education | 10 |

Codes were added and revised throughout the analysis process as significant statements were examined for clusters of meaning. This process was repeated several times as smaller codes were combined into larger categories until a number of codes were eliminated or clustered into broader categories (Appendix I). From there, five essential themes emerged regarding the experiences and perceptions of eight K-12 educators in their role as diversity committee volunteers. The five themes were (a) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; (b) Bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; (c) The teacher becomes the student; (d) Champions for the at-risk student; and (e) Cultivators of an inclusive community of learners.

The following section provides an in-depth narrative of each theme and its related sub-theme. In addition, answers for the central research questions and the four sub-questions are noted with the corresponding themes. A detailed answer summary for each research question is provided in the research questions results section following this section.
Ambassadors of Diversity and Inclusion

This was the first theme to emerge from the data analysis; it provides answers for research question one, four, and five. Two distinctive sub-themes were identified within the main theme. In their role as diversity committee members, participants had specific tasks assigned by the chairperson; however, their commitment level extended well beyond volunteering to that of a passionate ambassador who advocated for diversity and promoted inclusionary learning environments. This passion motivated them to press forward in addressing obstacles and barriers to diversity and inclusion.

Facilitates with Enthusiasm. The primary responsibility of study participants in their role as diversity committee volunteers was to train fellow educators in inclusiveness by sharing a variety of diversity related topics once a month during their weekly grade level team meetings. Topics were selected by the school’s diversity chairperson and distributed to all committee members shortly after the start of the school year. After sharing the materials, which ranged from videos to role-playing games, participants facilitated an open discussion regarding that month’s topic. That was the extent of their facilitator role. But for all of these participants, being diversity committee volunteers was much more than a title or presenting diversity material once a month to team members; it was the essence of what they stood for and who they were individually and collectively. Gillian reflected in her journal that “I’ve always had that ambassador quality in me” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants pursued teaching others about diversity with enthusiasm, as Evelyn expressed, “It’s my passion! I love to teach people about diversity and open their minds. That’s it; I just keep pressing on to educate as many educators about diversity as possible” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). While most participants were uncertain of the
actual impact of the diversity committee as a whole, they all conveyed a sense of “the starfish principle” in that their energy was focused on changing the life of one student at a time. With that goal in mind, they were unhindered by the actions and attitudes of others in their pursuit of implementing inclusive practices in their own classrooms. Most participants felt they made a greater impact as individual educators and were satisfied they were making a significant impact in their own classrooms.

Expanding their own understanding of diversity and modeling inclusion for others in the learning environment were natural occurrences in their daily teaching practices as evidenced during my observation of participants’ classrooms. They included all students in the learning process; there was no evidence of specific students being excluded. Instruction was differentiated to meet the needs of all learners and participants displayed a respectful tone of voice when interacting with students. I observed that when participants asked questions during whole group instruction, they called on students of different genders and ethnicities a fairly equal number of times. Participants modeled their beliefs toward diversity and inclusion within their sphere of influence. Carol offered the following explanation for managing diversity in her learning environment:

Diversity creates opportunities for differentiation. As a teacher, I have to meet every child where they are, the ones who aren’t quite there yet, taking them one step forward. And challenging those PC students, keeping them moving forward. I try to call on everyone, not just the ones I think will know. I also try to ask questions that I know my low ones can answer. If they don’t know, I give them an opportunity to ask for help (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).
Participants believed and accepted that the educational system and those people working within the system may hold biases, hidden or not, which motivated the efforts of some participants to lead the efforts in implementing changes in the school climate. Fiona expressed her motivation in this manner, “People need to be aware of hidden biases, then they can come in and accept people who are different. I joined the diversity community because it is paramount that educators be aware of cultural differences that can impact student achievement” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Barbara revealed that she found sharing different topics, articles, and quotes with her colleagues related to diversity “rewarding” because it leads to a more effective learning environment (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). During our interview, Fiona shared her view on diversity, “In terms of teaching, diversity is considered a good thing” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Even those participants who were purposely chosen rather than initially volunteering for the committee exhibited characteristics of openness toward diversity as a core element in their personal teaching philosophy. Carol reflected in her journal, “Diversity is what makes life interesting and we can all learn from each other” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Ian, expressed his openness in this manner, “I am being exposed to different cultures and aspects in school. Learning new things about people is cool! You know, I really think it’s cool to learn stuff about other cultures. I want to learn and experience other cultures” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Overcomes Obstacles and Barriers.** Yet, there were obstacles they felt had to be overcome: teachers who “did not understand” or “refused to understand” their different students, lack of administration buy-in, and biases brought into the learning environment by students (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). All but one of the participants
believed that other educators in their school and district, especially administrators and leaders, could provide more support than what was offered. As Evelyn reflected in her journal, “We have to get the school administration to buy in to what we are trying to implement. Training needs to occur at principals’ meetings and year round” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). In her guided reflection survey, Gillian wrote, “Support from administration and colleagues is very important. It really takes us all working together as a family to reach our kids” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Gillian stated, “The biggest obstacles are teachers who don’t care to get to know our students” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Fiona believed it essential that “People need to be aware of hidden biases, then you can come in and accept people who are different” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She went on to further explain an attitude she commonly finds in the South:

You know one thing I cannot stand is this whole “God bless ‘em” mentality…it’s like saying the child is never going to get it. You are limiting the child when you say “bless their heart” because what is really being said is they can’t do it (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants also expressed an awareness of hidden aspects of diversity and had the ability to see the “unseen” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They informed others on the subtle differences within seemingly similar populations of students. For example, when I observed Deborah’s classroom, she had 19 students; two were Hispanic and the rest were African-American. She said that because most of her students “look the same ethnically,” they do not see themselves as being diverse or different in any way, but Deborah believed otherwise (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). As she pointed out,
“I have to take into consideration all aspects of diversity for my students’ learning. What is their family life at home? Like, some may have a Mom & Dad at home asking, ‘Can I help you with your homework?’ Others may not, so am I instructing them enough so that they can do it alone. So, for me, the big gaps are concerning, the differences in their home life and families” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

During my observation of Fiona’s classroom, there was a range of ethnicities represented but the majority of students were African-American. Fiona’s view of the diversity in her room included socio-economic factors, gender, and ethnicities. Her students included “children who are transient, who live in the hotels, we see people who are professionals, it’s pretty diverse. I have students who speak Spanish; I have students who live in hotels and children who live in homes. I think it impacts the learning environment because not everyone is aware of how to meet the needs of certain children” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She expressed her belief that “Engagement is key. Teachers need to be shown how to engage students” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). These examples provided a shared perspective of nuances in diversity that participants believed others in the learning environment, especially students but also other educators, did not readily perceive.

Even so, they believed that their role was to influence other educators in regard to openness and inclusion. As Evelyn previously stated, “I just keep pressing on to educate as many educators about diversity as possible” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Bridge Builders Influenced by Personal Experiences**

This theme emerged mostly from the guided reflection journal surveys participants completed at the beginning of the data collection phase. This theme provides answers for
research questions one and three. Two distinctive sub-themes were identified within the main theme. With the exception of Deborah, everyone else shared at least one example of being personally discriminated against at some point growing up or in the workplace. Participants also described positive experiences which included support and encouragement from unlikely sources. Whether African-American or Caucasian, male or female, they all had a story and how it impacted their lives. Some participants attributed their motivation to volunteer on the diversity committee as a result of both negative and positive encounters with other people’s responses to their differences. The events they shared, some occurring in childhood and others over the course of their adult lives, were highly significant to participants in ways that have continued to shape their actions and feelings, especially toward those they interact with in their schools.

**Chooses to Break the Cycle of Bias.** Participants did not believe that the negative incidents caused them to focus ill-will toward the persons responsible as much as they allowed it to motivate them to ensure no one else had to experience the discrimination and exclusion they felt. Gillian revealed an incident in her journal that occurred when she was one of a few minority teachers at her school years ago; she had parents of students who would hang up on her or call her “the ‘N’ word” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She stated, “As a result of my experience in these diverse settings throughout my life, I have made it a personal mission to make both my students and my co-workers, especially those new to our school, to feel welcomed and important” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). The two Caucasian participants also revealed experiences of discrimination which impacted their views and interactions in a positive manner. Ian teaches at a school where the majority of students are African-American. Being a White male raised Southern Baptist, where there was not a lot of
diversity, he has had some experiences with his students regarding stereotypes and biases that he has had to combat. For instance, Cody described this encounter with a student:

But here [in my school] one of my students told me I was the first White man she had ever met and interacted with…she told me she does not like White men. A lot of their parents teach them that, so I try to make my students feel comfortable (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Carol’s negative experience occurred when she and her family moved to a new community. It was an eye-opening experience for her and it has shaped her beliefs about diversity. She described it in this manner:

In America people are sometimes treated differently because of their skin color. This was not an issue for me as I was growing up but became an issue when I, a White female, went to live in a predominantly Black culture. The roles were reversed, and I was treated differently because of the color of my skin. This opened my eyes to the issue of diversity and the need for everyone to be treated equally no matter what. While in this culture, I was able to see people through the eyes of my children. They were 1 and 4 years old at the time. They saw people and did not classify them as Black or White. They saw them all as people who happened to be black, dark brown, brown, tan, or peach. Seeing things through a child's eyes is always eye opening. The previous experiences, plus many others have influenced my beliefs regarding diversity (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

There were also several participants who shared positive experiences such as being supported and encouraged by someone from another ethnicity or culture. Even though Deborah was the only minority teacher when she lived and worked in another state, she “never was made
to feel different, or any kind of way” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).
Ian described his positive experience as a motivation, “When I was in college, I had a professor who went out of the way to see me succeed. They knew White males didn’t enter the profession, and it was really cool to have support. My support came from my teachers, so I want to do the same for my students” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Develops Keen Sense of Compassion and Empathy.** For some of the participants, their own experiences with discrimination and bias helped them develop a heightened sense of compassion and empathy toward others who may be viewed as outside the norm of a particular group. They displayed a high regard for differences others might have overlooked and a keen awareness of social and educational injustices which motivated them to action. They quickly recognized biases in others and reacted immediately to situations where students who may be considered different were left out, singled out, or made not to feel a part of the group. Andrew wrote in his journal of a time period when his child experienced negative treatment in school, “My child went to a school that did not cater much to my child’s kind and things were drastically disturbing for them. Luckily, there were one or two teachers that helped to ensure their success” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Andrew teaches students with specific learning disabilities in an inclusionary general education classroom and has worked to overcome barriers in the thinking of some general education teachers who would rather exclude these students from their learning environment. Andrew had to break down barriers of exclusion of students with disabilities when inclusionary practices first began in general education classrooms. He found that not only were the students made to feel unwelcome in the general education classroom, so was he. He described his experience in the following story:
When I first started out in this [teaching special ed] I saw exclusion practices more than I do now. Inclusion [classrooms] has been around for a bit now, but when I first started out, I had the teachers who had been doing stuff their way for 30, 35 years and they didn’t want anything to change. I had established at this point in time, you know how inclusion works. It’s gotten better, though, it’s gotten better. I was working with a [general education] teacher, you know, it was early in my career, like my first or second year. So she wanted to treat me like I was one of the special education students and you know, you have to tell them, you know, look this is how it is. This is the new way it’s going, so you can get on board or move on (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Incidents similar to what Andrew experienced are not uncommon for special education teachers in inclusionary environments. His experience with his own child and his students created a sense of empathy and desire to protect their opportunity to learn, which compelled him to break through the obstacles to inclusion he has encountered throughout his teaching experience.

The Teacher Becomes the Student

This theme provides answers for research questions one, three, four, and five. Two distinctive sub-themes were identified within the main theme. Although one important responsibility participants shared in their role on the diversity committee included training other educators to understand diversity, no one except Evelyn believed they were an expert on the topic. Instead, their passion and openness toward diversity motivated them to purposely commit to continuing education in order to understand as much as they could about the students they taught.
Lack of Sufficient Training Experiences for Diversity. The overall consensus among participants in this study indicated diversity training was minimal or non-existent in their general education teacher preparation program. Training in diversity-related topics is usually limited to a single course offered during the general education teacher preparation program at most universities. Only specialized degrees or endorsement programs, such as special education, gifted education, urban education, or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), are given significant coursework and field experiences. Lack of training regarding diversity-related issues is an increasing concern affecting both pre-service and existing educators (Colon-Muniz et al., 2010; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Gosse, 2011; Michael-Luna & Marri, 2011; Silverman, 2010).

While new teachers are expected to step into the general education classroom ready to manage a wide range of diversities among their students, the level of preparedness training they receive is inadequate. Evelyn stated, “Training is not a one shot deal”; however, this seems to be a typical approach for most teacher preparation programs (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). At best, a single course on multiculturalism, special education, or social justice issues may be offered to satisfy state certification requirements but may not include field experiences in actual diverse settings. Such a minimalist approach would hardly be considered more than an introduction to diversity. Consequently, prior research has indicated an overall feeling of unpreparedness expressed by new teachers, who experienced difficulties relating to students outside of their culture or norm (Allday et al., 2013; Colon-Muniz et al., 2010; McHatton & Parker, 2013; Polat, 2011; Silverman, 2010). This point was validated by Ian, when he shared the following description of the differences between him and the students he teaches:
Well, teaching at a majority-minority school, I see things I am not accustomed to, things I haven’t been exposed to because my upbringing was different . . . I was raised different than my students have been. I was raised in a traditional Southern Baptist white neighborhood. I did not see any Black people in my school until second grade, but then it was only a couple. I can’t say there was a lot of diversity (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Consequently, an inability to relate to or understand the experiences and cultures of students who are different than themselves may lead to ineffective teaching practices by new teachers or even discrimination and exclusionary practices (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009; Gay, 2010; Riley & Ettlinger, 2010).

Even though participants in this study are expected to lead diversity training sessions during collaborative team meetings and occasional staff meetings, two of the first year volunteers indicated they felt inadequately trained, not for their personal classrooms, but to teach other educators about diversity issues. Deborah expressed her belief as, “It [diversity training] should be more detailed. I was just handed a folder and told to do an activity each month” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Carol simply stated, “I got a folder and was told to go over this stuff in the folder with my team once a month. There was no training. I don’t know what the mission of the diversity committee is” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Lack of training for the new first year committee volunteers was attributed by the chairperson as a result of her being given additional responsibilities that belonged to two other support staff members whose positions were eliminated. In previous years, there was more time spent in committee meetings and training; however, none of the other participants expressed this as an issue because they had been teaching at the school long enough to understand the role and
responsibility of the diversity committee. For Deborah and Carol, it was their first full year teaching at the school, so they had a different perspective than other participants.

**Takes Personal Responsibility for Continuing Education.** When existing pre-service training and professional development courses were found to be insufficient, the participants took it upon themselves to learn how to be more effective teachers to their diverse populations. Some participants handled their own lack of diversity training in various ways such as earning advanced degrees or endorsements related to diverse populations; others participated in continuing education, professional or personal, during the summer to help them understand their diverse student population. For instance, during my interview with Fiona, she described the following training experience:

I took the course offered over the summer to teachers about teaching students who are in poverty, but it really was inadequate. It talks about the class system and how upper level and lower classes interact. Something which I really like better is *Teaching with Poverty in Mind;* it was my summer read last year! It is so powerful! (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

She then proceeded to pull out a well-read copy of the book from her desk while she talked about it. Throughout the interview process and in her guided reflection survey responses, Fiona articulated an advanced level of understanding regarding diversity topics and inclusionary practices. She is one of three participants who had taken more in-depth diversity coursework related to either a specialized endorsement or a Master’s-level field concentration. Fiona holds two Master’s degrees; one of those is in Urban and Multicultural Education with a concentration in inclusion, which led her to declare: “I have a broader understanding than most” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Andrew has earned certifications in several
special education fields, including reading and math. He also received certification in managing students with behavior disorders.

Gillian earned an endorsement in bilingual education and spent time living in Germany as a Fulbright scholar. Besides English and German, she also speaks fluent Spanish and often converses with her Hispanic students in their native language. She stated that she regularly incorporates a variety of multicultural traditions and music selections into her weekly lesson plans. I observed her speaking Spanish to students, and her classroom displayed books about music in a variety of cultures. Gillian explained, “Although my pre-service educator training was limited, over time as I became interested in an ELL endorsement and was awarded a grant slot for bilingual education, those multi-cultural course were very in-depth” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She also earned an endorsement in gifted education, an area of diversity not immediately recognized.

Interestingly, participants also became apprentices of their own diverse students, attempting to learn salutations in the languages of their students’ native tongues and becoming familiar with cultural traditions, gender roles, and religious practices. Ian stated, “Like, I never even heard of Kwanza until I saw a Kwanza presentation here. It was cool to see! I am being exposed to different cultures and aspects in school. Learning new things about people is cool!” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Barbara shared her approach:

It is important for me to understand my students. We take time getting to know each other, their background, their lifestyle, agree to disagree. We take time to celebrate their holidays, different holidays, so we all can see how different cultures celebrate. We watch videos about other cultures and their activities. It helps familiarize students with other
cultures, makes them feel comfortable with each other (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants expressed a deep desire to not just teach their students but to learn from them in order to get to know and understand their students. They openly acknowledged their lack of understanding of people different from themselves and approached learning about new cultures and languages intentionally and with enthusiasm.

**Champions of the At-Risk Student**

This theme provides answers for research questions one, two, and three. Three distinctive sub-themes were identified within the main theme. These participants intentionally sought to create a sense of belonging for all their students but seemed to have a keen eye out for the one “lost sheep,” a student hiding quietly in plain sight in their classroom or even one who loudly misbehaves to cover academic weaknesses. Even befriending new colleagues was an intentional act for a couple of participants (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Seeks Out the Isolated Student.** Andrew recounted a story during our interview about one of his first students who had severe behavior disorders which manifested in self-destructive ways. His parents were not sure if they wanted their son in Andrew’s class, so they initially arranged an observation of the classroom. Andrew met with the parents who observed what he described as “a relatively calm environment where each student was sitting at his desk doing his work” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Andrew asked to talk one-on-one with their son and when they agreed, he walked him on a tour of the school. During the course of the tour, Andrew was able to create an open dialogue with the student where he ascertained that the boy “just needed a place, you know what I mean, “a place,” he needed a
place. He stayed with me for four years, one extra year because his parents weren’t ready for him to go to high school” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). This story was so significant to Andrew that he shares it often and even kept a letter the boy’s mother wrote as a personal recommendation that he takes it out to read on occasion. In her guided reflection journal entry, Gillian describes how she seeks after new members of the school:

As a result of my experience in these diverse settings throughout my life, I have made it a personal mission to make both my students and my co-workers especially those new to our school to feel welcomed and important. Often, I reach out to the child that is the only one from his/her ethnic group and make sure that the other students include them in their groups for discussion times and projects (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Recognizes Specific Needs Related to Diversity in Learning Environments.**

Participants recognized diversity in terms of issues related to poverty, special education, language barriers, and cultural differences. Fiona and Gillian’s exposure to a variety of cultures as well as their advanced education in multiculturalism and working with students in poverty helped them recognize and adjust to these differences to create a more inclusive environment.

Fiona shared that in the African culture, the male student must first like you before they will learn from you. Consequently, she made it a priority to establish a positive rapport and develop mutual respect with the student rather than dismiss the behavior as disrespectful without trying to understand it from a cultural standpoint (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Gillian, the music teacher, understood music and language in a variety of cultures and integrated that into her lessons. She shared her goal:
I try to connect with students. I speak Spanish to my Hispanic students to help them feel accepted and to help them feel connected. I know my Islamic and Hindu students are open to movement and dancing, so I incorporate their music into my lessons. They perk up when they hear “their” music! (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants were motivated and inclined to investigate the reasons behind behaviors to see if a solution could be provided. These educators did not just serve their students academically, they chose to serve their students holistically, to make sure individual students were socially, emotionally, and physically in a safe place. They concerned themselves with the stability of students’ home lives, whether they had enough to eat or appropriate clothing. As Fiona explained:

I think it [diversity] impacts the learning environment because not everyone is aware of how to meet the needs of certain children. You know, we talk a lot about “they don’t do this, they don’t do that.” When we may not be aware of why they can’t do that or why they can’t do their homework, what’s going on, you know. We had a situation with two students, who really didn’t do their homework much and we was getting on to them and come to find out, I think it was the month before that they had moved into the [extended stay] hotels and the parents didn’t tell the teachers and they were just sneaking off after walkers and hiding in the bushes and walking down to the hotels, so the month before they had moved. So I think there’s a lot more going on with our kids sometimes than we realize. And even how important snack time is. Some days I am like, why, why are we running towards snack? Well for some of them, that’s the only time they get something
extra throughout the course of the day (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Cultivates Relationships.** Participants intentionally built relationships with students and their families. They shared the belief that making personal connections with those who are different from them is important in demonstrating they cared about students as individuals. Participants expressed their belief that this practice was instrumental in effective teaching and learning. Some do this by developing common ground, such as Fiona’s practice of learning salutations in the student’s native language so she can validate the student in class and in front of other students. Gillian reiterated this point, “Since I am bilingual, I make it a point to speak to students in their native language with simple greetings and ask them how to say hello, thank you, etc. and ways holidays are celebrated in their families” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Gillian also connected with her students outside of class by selecting a small group of students to eat lunch with her in the classroom on a weekly basis. Likewise, Ian discussed how he occasionally stepped outside of positional role and “acting goofy” so his students would see him more than just an authority figure (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Cultivators of an Inclusive Community of Learners**

This theme provides answers for research question one, two, four, and five. Two distinctive sub-themes were identified within the main theme. Participants shared a common perception that diversity exists in many forms; therefore, inclusiveness is a vital and necessary approach for learning to take place. They believed students must be comfortable with each other before learning could take place. With regard to creating effective learning environments, these educators purposely created a sense of belonging for all members. Common characteristics of
how participants approached this included nurturing, supporting, encouraging, promoting, developing, and helping students through a holistic approach to learning. Participants made connections and built relationships with students; they asked students’ questions about cultural celebrations and validated them by participating in any events they were invited to outside of school; some participants learned to speak simple phrases and salutations in students’ native tongue; and just by being “goofy” as Ian stated:

But here [in my school] one of my students told me I was the first white man she had ever met and interacted with…she told me she does not like white men. A lot of their parents teach them that, so I try to make my students feel comfortable. Being goofy! I interact with them in a playful way, you know, just goofiness. I want to be seen as more than an authority figure (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Understands the Impact of Diversity on the Learning Environment.** Participants held a strong personal belief that diversity is positive in and of itself, but responses to diversity by others can create segregated and hostile environments which negatively impacts learning. However, they believed the impact of diversity to the learning climate could be mitigated through educating and modeling for others the consistent use of inclusionary practices by all members of the environment. Not only did they demonstrate openness to diversity and implement inclusionary improvements to the atmosphere of learning, but they also became agents of change to shape the thinking and actions of students in their responses to diversity. It was not just other teachers that participants were educating about diversity issues, but also the students who brought their own set of prejudices into the school. They purposed to create an inclusive community of learners who knew the importance of validating diversity and behaved in such a way as to make everyone feel an accepted part of the group. Barbara shared this story in
her guided reflection journal about how one parent instructed her child and Barbara tried to influence the student to think differently:

A few years ago, I had a Caucasian student say her mom told her she wasn't allowed to sit next to any “black” boys. I was shocked this behavior existed in our community, especially with the majority of the school's population being African American. This behavior opened my eyes to differences that still exist in our community/world. So, I explained to the student it didn't matter whether she sat next to a white boy, or black boy, they were both the same. Which then led to a conversation about how deep down inside, we are all the same (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants shared a belief that students had to be comfortable with each other before learning could take place. Deborah articulated it plainly, “Learning cannot take place if they’re not comfortable. Their differences with other students affect their learning.” Barbara addressed this issue with students when she shared videos that show ways other cultures celebrate certain holidays, “It helps familiarize students with other cultures; makes them feel comfortable with each other” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Models Acceptance of Differences and Similarities.** Developing strategies and using resources introduced students to other cultures and opened their eyes to both differences and similarities. Participants shared some of the strategies they use to intentionally model an inclusive environment for their diverse population. Gillian depicted specific methods she used:

While serving on the diversity committee we have used our spotlight on culture bulletin board and children’s literature to help bridge the gap between our understandings of those who are different than we are. I expose students to a variety of cultures. I teach on a
different country and culture, so that students are hearing music from different cultures (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Barbara helped her students understand the different cultures represented in the classroom by showing videos of various cultural activities to familiarize students and create a sense of community (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Research Questions Results**

All of the research questions were answered through one or more of the five themes described in detail in the previous section. The five themes were (a) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; (b) Bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; (c) The teacher becomes the student; (d) Champions of the at-risk student; and (e) Cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as volunteers on the district or school diversity committee?

RQ2. What are the significant beliefs and perceptions shared by K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee regarding the impact of diversity and inclusiveness on school culture and the learning environment?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and schools?

RQ4. What are the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators on the diversity committee?

RQ5. What are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?
Research question one was the central question of the study and asked what are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators in their role on the diversity committee. This question was answered as a result of all five themes identified by participants: (1) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; (2) Bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; (3) The teacher becomes the student; (4) Champions of the at-risk student; and (5) Cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Participants conducted training and advocated for diversity and inclusion. Their own experiences being discriminated against influenced them to bridge the gap for others, causing them to go after those group members outside the dominant majority in their learning environments. As educators and diversity members, they modeled acceptance and validation of differences through connections and relationships. They were K-12 teachers who were also lifelong students, self-motivated to deepen their understanding of cultural and language differences, poverty issues, and differentiated learning.

Research question two concerned the impact of diversity and inclusiveness to school culture and the learning environment. Theme five, cultivators of an inclusive community of learners, answers this question. Participants believed that diversity has a direct impact on the learning environment, both positive and negative. They believed that “diversity is a good thing” and “we can all learn from one another” but that biases and negative perceptions produce responses to diversity that exclude others outside of the norm for a particular group; this negatively affects learning (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They observed that both students and teachers could hold biases, hidden or deliberate, that affected the learning environments. Participants agreed that before learning could take place, learners must feel comfortable with each other. To address this issue, participants on the diversity committee promoted acceptance and validation of differences through monthly trainings, videos and books
as well as by celebrating diverse cultural traditions within their classrooms. Additionally, they modeled inclusion in their teaching practices and interactions with other members of the learning community for students, staff, families, and community members. Participants shared the belief that connecting and building relationships with students would provide feelings of acceptance and validation, which would positively impact the learning environment (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Research question three explored the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and school. Three themes answered this question, which were theme two, bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme four, champions of the at-risk student. Participants as a whole believed they had more effect in their educator role than in their role on the diversity committee. This perception may have developed because they spent much more time in their own classrooms, interacting with students and colleagues in that manner than they did in their role as diversity committee volunteers, which was only facilitated monthly. Yet, themes two, three, and four describe in their words the extent of their impact on the learning environment. What participants failed to recognize was that their impact was not based solely on their tasks and accomplishments as part of the committee but their influence was felt in their interactions with others within the school environment on a daily basis. As Cox (2001) asserted, their interactions with and reactions to other members of the organization in regard to diversity were influential and had a definitive impact on the performance outcome of the whole. Their cultural responsiveness and diversity minded core beliefs and attitudes came across in all that they did; they did not simply turn on their values when they were in the role of diversity committee volunteer and then turn them off when they
Research question four asked about the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators on the diversity committee. Three themes answered this question, which were theme one, ambassadors of diversity and inclusion as well as theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme five, cultivators an inclusive community of learners. Theme one identified their perceptions of inadequate or non-existent training on diversity issues relevant to today’s classroom population. Professional development offered at the district level was considered to be inadequate (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). These factors led participants to take charge of their own learning through reading on specific elements of diversity and obtaining advanced degrees and endorsements including special education, gifted education, bilingual education, and urban and multicultural education. Participants also believed that administrator and colleague buy-in and support were important to the overall mission of the diversity committee but inadequate at the time (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Theme five revealed barriers to an inclusive environment which existed in the form of hidden and blatant biases as well as stereotypes, such as those held by educators and those brought into the school by students.

Research question five asked, what are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate? Three themes answered this question: theme one, ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme five, cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Theme one described how participants may have found
support and training inadequate but saw it as a step in the right direction, especially having a designated diversity committee. Theme three described the importance of specific training tailored to the specific needs of a particular school and its type and level of diversity. This perception held by participants agrees with Cox’s (2001) stance that in order for training to be effective at improving the outcome produced by an organization, it must be specific to the needs of the organization. Participants were well aware of the range of diversity among their student population and felt that other educators within the school were unable to respond appropriately because “not everyone is aware of how to meet the needs of certain children” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Fiona described the lack of understanding from teachers in this manner, “You know, we talk a lot about “they don’t do this, they don’t do that. When we may not be aware of why they can’t do that or why they can’t do their homework, what’s going on, you know. That, you know, it’s not just Mom and Dad at home, someone to help them with their homework, like what, you know, mostly happens in middle class environments” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). She detailed specific areas where fellow teachers might lack understanding such as students living in poverty or a constant state of transition as well as Hispanic and African students whose cultural norms regarding relationships with peers and authority figures. Failing to recognize and address these factors could negatively influence the learning environment and were topics that participants believed should be part of diversity training (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Participants sought out specialized courses as they related to the students they instructed in their school. Theme five described how participants went about creating and maintaining inclusive social learning environments. They held the common belief that connections and
relationships were vital to reaching students before they could teach them (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They also talked about practical ways they made students comfortable with cultural differences, such as watching different cultures’ celebrations, explaining and letting students ask questions, and countering any biases brought into the group by students. Participants were models of acceptance while acknowledging both differences and similarities. As Barbara stated, “We get to know each other and share stories so that we are comfortable learning together. Learning cannot take place if they’re not comfortable. Their differences with other students affect their learning” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to describe the lived experiences of eight K-12 educators who volunteered on their school’s diversity committee regarding their role in improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school. Guided reflection surveys, observations, interviews, and site documents were utilized to make known the perspectives and experiences of the eight participants regarding the phenomenon. Five themes emerged through the use of Moustakas’ modified Seven Steps approach to data analysis. The themes were (a) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; (b) bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; (c) the teacher becomes the student; (d) champions of the at-risk student; and (e) cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Employing the data, the central questions and four sub-questions were answered in detail and summarized at the end of each narrative for the five themes. This chapter summary answers the central question and purpose of the study by describing the essence of being a K-12 educator on the school’s diversity committee.
The textural description answers the question of what the participants experienced collectively as K-12 educators on the diversity committee in the role of improving the diversity and inclusiveness in their school. When the participants talked about their role as diversity committee members, they used words such as “ambassador,” “facilitator,” and “educator” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They talked about “enjoying” their role in sharing various training resources with colleagues and facilitating discussions about diversity topics. Regarding their own training, the majority described pre-service teacher preparation courses and professional development training related to diversity topics as “non-existent” or “inadequate” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Thus, they took responsibility for continuing their own education as some participants pointed to their specialized degrees and endorsements as evidence that they “have a broader sense or understanding” of diversity than most other educators. Participants learned from their students such cultural celebrations as Kwanza and quinceañeras and then taught their other students in order to impart an appreciation of these differences. Some asked their Hispanic students to teach them Spanish or spoke Spanish to make it known that “it’s valued that he has a difference and that it’s okay” and “to help them feel accepted and to help them feel connected” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

They modeled an understanding of and an appreciation for diversity by consistently demonstrating inclusionary practices in their own learning environments through various means. Some participants spoke of their role in terms of “connecting and understanding” students by using “their native language” and “learning about new cultures” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). As one participant described it, “I purposely try to incorporate them [students] into my lessons, like their names or certain things I know about their cultures”
(Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Many participants recognized the signs of poverty, such as transitional housing, hiding living arrangements, and running for afternoon snacks. They countered these issues by providing resources, such as extra tutoring or computer access during certain times of the day, “without singling anyone out,” but making resources available to every student was described as a positive way to address poverty-related diversity issues (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They practiced a holistic approach to education beyond academics, concerned for the social and emotional aspects of students. Most of all, participants demonstrated compassion and developed relationships with students; they found ways to connect to demonstrate the similarities with each other amid the diversity.

Participants expressed frustration regarding barriers to inclusion such as insufficient training and preparation regarding diversity, a lack of administrative buy-in, encountering other teachers who “don’t have a relationship with kids,” “don’t try,” or “don’t care to understand students” or are not “aware of how to meet the needs of” their diverse students (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They observed biases, both hidden and open, from members of the learning environment, including administrators, educators, students, and parents (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They purposed to influence others’ perceptions of diversity and inclusion in their role on the school’s diversity committee.

The structural description focuses on how the participants experienced being K-12 educators on the diversity committee. Their beliefs, attitudes, and actions resulted partly from being discriminated against or being excluded at some point in their lives, such as being bused to an integrated school as a child, growing up in poverty or in foster care, or being the first nontraditional educator (by ethnicity or gender) in their school. These experiences provided the
lens from which they viewed those in their learning environments and intentionally cultivated inclusive communities of learners. Most participants spoke about their ability to see the “unseen” diversity in members of the learning environment which caused these members, usually students, to be excluded or treated unfairly; observing such occurrences motivated them to be a part of the diversity committee (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). A passion to increase their understanding of their diverse students led to participants earning additional endorsements and advanced degrees in special education, gifted education, multiculturalism, urban education, or bilingual education. This in-depth knowledge inspired confidence to share with others in their role as diversity committee volunteers and as K-12 educators.

In essence, participants possessed a heightened sense of compassion and empathy toward those who differed in any way from the dominant group, which developed from their own personal experiences of “being different” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They shared a comprehensive understanding of diversity in its broadest scope which, paired with their own encounters with discrimination, gave them a keen awareness to “see the unseen” aspects and repercussions associated with diversity (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Participants saw themselves as advocates of diversity issues who aimed to influence and shape the thinking of other group members. They were intrinsically motivated to become champions of inclusion, even for a single student who might otherwise get lost in the system. A sense of “righting the wrongs” motivated participants to become ambassadors within their existing sphere of influence (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Despite their shared belief that they received minimal support from administrators and other educators, they perceived themselves as highly effective implementing
practices that validated diversity and promoted inclusiveness in the learning environment. Extending outside of committee roles and responsibilities, their teaching practices and classrooms were models of inclusive learning communities. They did not simply talk the talk but they walked the walk; it was the very core of who they were as individuals and collectively. There was not a point where they ceased their focus on factors of diversity and inclusion; they continuously endeavored to bring about improvements in their classrooms, in their schools and district, and to as many educators as they could reach. This describes the essence of their experiences and perceptions as K-12 educators on the school’s diversity committee.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee regarding their role in improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school. As diversity committee volunteers, these educators were tasked with conducting monthly trainings during grade level team meetings utilizing materials and resources about diversity topics developed and selected by the diversity chairperson. The goal of the school’s diversity committee was to increase the understanding of their diverse population and improve the inclusiveness, “sense of belonging,” for all members of the learning community, including staff, students, families, and community members associated with the school. Study participants were selected based on their position as K-12 public school educators who volunteered on the district or the school’s diversity committee. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings, then is followed with a discussion of the findings and implications pertaining to the theoretical framework and existing literature. Study limitations and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Summary of Findings

The phenomenological study was guided by one central research question and four sub-questions designed to understand the experiences and perceptions of the eight participants who agreed to share their experiences and perceptions regarding their role on the diversity committee. Data were collected in the form of interviews, guided reflection survey journals, and observations. The data were analyzed following Moustakas’ modified analysis approach in order to capture the essence of the collective voice of participants regarding their experiences and
perceptions as a K-12 educator in their role as a diversity committee volunteer (1994). The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators regarding their role as volunteers on the district or school diversity committee?

RQ2. What are the significant beliefs and perceptions shared by K-12 educators who volunteer on the diversity committee regarding the impact of diversity and inclusiveness on school culture and the learning environment?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and schools?

RQ4. What are the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators on the diversity committee?

RQ5. What are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?

The data collected from the eight participants in the form of interviews, guided reflection surveys, and observations gave a collective voice to their experiences and perceptions from which five themes emerged. They were (a) Ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; (b) Bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; (c) The teacher becomes the student; (d) Champions of the at-risk student; and (e) Cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. All of the research questions were answered through one or more of the five themes.

Research question one was the central question of the study and asked what are the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators in their role on the diversity committee. Participants conducted training and advocated for diversity and inclusion. They were influenced
by their own experiences with discrimination to bridge the gap for others, went after those group members outside the dominant majority in their learning environments, and modeled acceptance and validation of differences through connections and relationships. They were K-12 teachers who were also lifelong students, self-motivated to deepen their understanding of cultural and language differences, poverty issues, and differentiated learning.

Research question two concerned the impact of diversity and inclusiveness to school culture and the learning environment. Theme five, cultivators of an inclusive community of learners, answers this question. Participants believed that diversity has a direct impact on the learning environment, both positive and negative. They believed that “diversity is a good thing” and “we can all learn from one another” but that biases and negative perceptions produce responses to diversity that exclude others outside of the norm for a particular group; this negatively affects learning (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). They observed that both students and teachers could hold biases, hidden or deliberate, that affected the learning environments (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015). Participants agreed that before learning could take place, learners must feel comfortable with each other; these attitudes and beliefs were supported in multiple research studies focused on the effect of a positive school climate on the learning environment (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Craig, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2009; Gay, 2010; Osman, 2012; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009; Samuels, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). To address the impact of diversity and inclusiveness on the learning environment, participants on the diversity committee promoted acceptance and validation of differences through monthly trainings, videos and books as well as by celebrating diverse cultural traditions within their classrooms. Additionally, they modeled inclusion in their teaching practices and interactions with other members of the learning community for students,
staff, families, and community members. Participants shared the belief that connecting and building relationships with students would provide feelings of acceptance and validation, which would positively impact the learning environment. Their actions supported the findings of Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) which found that culturally responsive educators create an inclusive environment when they understand the “values, norms, and beliefs of the communities, families, and students served by the school” (p. 179).

Research question three explored the perceptions of diversity committee volunteers regarding the extent of their impact on improving diversity and inclusiveness in their district and school. Three themes answered this question, which were theme two, bridge builders influenced by personal experiences; theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme four, champions of the at-risk student. Participants as a whole believed they were more impactful in their educator role than in their role on the diversity committee. As Cox (2001) suggested in his Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity theory, participants’ role in improving the inclusiveness of their learning environment culminated through a series of interactions and reactions with other members of the school climate as they facilitated diversity lessons and modeled these attitudes and practices in their classrooms. While the scope and design of this study did not measure academic outcomes by actual achievement scores, participants conveyed their sense of increased performance outcomes among students which they attributed to relationships that bridged cultural and learning gaps. Attitudinal qualities presented by participants mirrored those ascribed to culturally responsive leaders by Nieto (1999) and Gay’s (2010).

Research question four asked about the main challenges to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate based on the perceptions and experiences of K-12 educators
on the diversity committee. Three themes answered this question, which were theme one, ambassadors of diversity and inclusion as well as theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme five, cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Theme one identified their perceptions of inadequate or lack of training on diversity issues relevant to today’s classroom population. Professional development offered at the district level was considered to be inadequate. These factors led participants to take charge of their own learning through reading on specific elements of diversity and obtaining advanced degrees and endorsements including special education, gifted education, bilingual education, and urban and multicultural education. Participants also perceived that administrator and colleague buy-in and support were important to the overall mission of the diversity committee but inadequate at the time. Theme five revealed barriers to an inclusive environment existed in the form of hidden and blatant biases and stereotypes, such as those held by fellow educators and those brought into the school by students and reported in prior research (Gay, 2010; Mthethwa-Sommers, S. (2013); Neito, 1999).

Research question five asked, “What are the factors K-12 educators on the diversity committee perceive as contributors to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?” Three themes answered this question: theme one, ambassadors of diversity and inclusion; theme three, the teacher becomes the student; and theme five, cultivators of an inclusive community of learners. Theme one described how participants may have found support and training inadequate but saw it as a step in the right direction, especially having a designated diversity committee. Theme three described the importance of specific training tailored to the precise needs of a particular school and its type and level of diversity. This perception held by participants agrees with Cox’s (2001) stance that in order for training to be effective at improving the outcome produced by an organization, it must be specific to the needs
of the organization. Participants sought specialized courses as they related to the students they instructed in the belief that increasing their understanding would enable them to teach more effectively and improve academic performance. Theme five described how participants went about creating and maintaining inclusive social learning environments. They held the common belief that making connections and building relationships were vital to reaching students before they could teach them. They also talked about practical ways to help students feel comfortable with cultural differences, such as watching different cultures’ celebrations, explaining and letting students ask questions, and countering any biases brought into the group by students. They encouraged small collaborative learning groups. Participants were models of acceptance while acknowledging both differences and similarities. As Barbara stated, “We get to know each other and share stories so that we are comfortable learning together. Learning cannot take place if they’re not comfortable. Their differences with other students affect their learning” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).

**Theoretical Implications**

This study was built upon the theoretical foundations of Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning and Cox’s (1994) Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD). The basis of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory describes how student learning is affected by the social and cultural aspects of the learning environment, both in a formal school setting and in the home environment. Two fundamental components of the socio-cultural learning theory are collaboration and active learning in a social environment with peers and adults as students interpret and assimilate what they observe and learn from others. Vygotsky advocated inclusion in a diverse learning group as an effective means of promoting learning across ability levels and opposed the exclusion of students with disabilities from the mainstream classroom. He believed
the varying learning levels among students enabled those who were behind to move forward more naturally as they interacted with their peers. This theory posits that an inclusive climate theoretically promotes learning in an environment dependent upon positive social interactions across diverse cultures and abilities.

Supplementing Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory is Cox’s Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD) which explains how the type and form of diversity in a defined organizational system, such as a school, merges with characteristics of the system’s climate for diversity to impact a range of individual and collective outcomes (1994). Outcomes in the school environment are typically defined as academic performance scores for students, both collectively and individually. The IMCD framework explains how organizational culture and school climate impacted by diversity merge and interact with the behaviors of the stakeholders, to either positively or negatively impact student performance outcomes. Overall, the theory states that student performance is impacted by the behaviors of other members of the school environment as they respond to aspects of diversity and interact with the responses of others toward diversity. Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory correlates with Cox’s (1994) IMCD framework pertaining to the influence of the social environment and culture on the learning and performance of students amidst diversity. Positive interactions and an acceptance of differences in the classroom promotes effective learning for diverse student populations whose academic and behavior outcomes are influenced by their interactions with others in the school culture.

These theories were chosen as a framework for this research because one of the primary assumptions of this study was that K-12 educators volunteer on the diversity committee because they hold the belief that the learning environment and student achievement is impacted by the intersection of diversity with the existing social climate of the school and its culture (Causton-
The findings illustrated exactly how this assumption corresponded with the experiences and perceptions of K-12 public school educators who volunteer on the school’s diversity committee. Participants embraced the diversity of their students with openness and enthusiasm; they held the same high expectations for all students, regardless of obstacles. They sought out ways to connect and build relations with their students to provide a sense of acceptance and belonging in the learning environment. They intentionally built interactive and inclusive communities of learners in the midst of diverse elements. Just as Vygotsky (1978) championed for the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom as an effective means to promoting learning, likewise these educators intentionally included students with disabilities or language learners who were at risk of being excluded or neglected in the general education classroom. Participants understood the importance of language as a social instrument and cognitive tool in the learning environment and endeavored to bridge the communications gap for English language learners to increase their participation and develop their understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).

When faced with negative reactions from others aimed at their own differences, participants responded by developing a heightened sense of compassion and empathy for those who may be subjected to the same biases and attempted to influence change in the attitudes and beliefs of others in the learning environment. Their positive interactions in response to diversity mitigated the negativity of others to an extent and they were able to influence the thinking of others in the school by bringing matters to the forefront through facilitating discussions on diversity topics. This approach aligned with Cox’s (2001) claim impediments to communications and the resulting conflicts must be addressed and constructively managed in
order to reduce the negative impact to performance outcomes. Participants’ main role as part of the diversity committee was to proactively address factors of diversity by facilitating training and discussions on specific topics in team meetings. They also acted as role models in their everyday duties and responsibilities as a K-12 educator. Participants believed the extent of their impact was greater in their role as a K-12 educator compared to the group work of the diversity committee, yet they failed to recognize the effect of the unified efforts as seen collectively by other members in the school.

Participants also modeled a positive mindset toward diversity and demonstrated inclusionary practices for others in the social environment of the school. Some shared their successes resulting from purposely pursuing and connecting with those students or colleagues who found themselves excluded from the group. These successful outcomes ranged from social to emotional to academic growth. Agreeing with Cox (2001) on two points, they asserted that when diversity is managed well in the learning environment, performance is positively increased and that proactively addressing diversity through training and effective management was instrumental to the process.

**Empirical Implications**

The evolution of diversity and public education in the U.S. has been a turbulent and gradually progressive journey. Years of exclusionary practices for students outside of the cultural and academic norm have left achievement gaps and a myriad of reforms aimed at addressing the issue. Yet, despite significant legislation and various degrees of funding, standardized test scores as well as measurements of reading and math skills continue to expose significant achievement gaps between students categorized by ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, gender, and disability. School culture and educators in the classroom play a
significant role in improving student achievement (Gay, 2013; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Ornstein, 2010; Split et al., 2011).

Adding to the complexity of academic instruction, educators must be able to develop the social and emotional needs of students in their learning environments (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Culturally responsive educators create an inclusive environment when they understand the “values, norms, and beliefs of the communities, families, and students served by the school” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 179). Educators must also understand how culture is defined so that they do not encourage cultural stereotypes or uphold the erroneous belief that because a student is of a certain ethnicity, they share the same culture as all others of that same ethnicity (Neito, 1999). Economics, ethnicity, origin, language, religion, ability, circumstances, politics, and life experiences are key factors impacting the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of students.

Culture can be defined as “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (Nieto, 1999, p. 129). These nuances of diversity are important for educators to understand in order to dispel any preconceived perceptions and hidden biases of people from different cultures or backgrounds they hold which may impact the classroom community of learners (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al., 2009; Katz, 2013). Most of the participants had developed a keen sense of hidden aspects of diversity, especially as it related to issues of poverty. Also, they believed they could see the “unseen” by perceiving subtle and not-so-subtle differences in a room filled with students “who look the same ethnically” (Personal communication with participant, March, 2015).
Some participants took additional training related to diversity topics or held specialized
degrees and endorsements that gave them an in-depth knowledge of the specific group of
students in their classrooms and school. The diversity-minded educator takes on the role of the
learner as they learn from and about different cultures in their pursuit of providing effective
instruction to all students, especially in a multicultural classroom where more than one language
may be spoken; they make connections and build relationships, cognizant of the benefits to
academic performance (Valdiviezo, 2014).

Effective learning environments affirm and value the diversity of students through
culturally responsive teaching and instructional practices (Gay, 2013; Lam et al., 2010; Majzub
& Rais, 2010). Student performance is promoted in an inclusive school climate where diverse
students feel a sense of belonging and can engage in a learning environment consisting of
positive social interactions with peers and teachers (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Gay, 2010;
Katz, 2013; Reihl, 2000; Split et al., 2011). Participants in this study prioritized inclusive
classroom practices such as inclusion classrooms for general education and special education.
They also purposely sought to teach students specific cultural celebrations or salutations in
students’ native languages to show affirmation and make connections with the students while
modeling acceptance among peers.

Attributes of culturally responsive educators and leaders included (a) caring; (b) building
relationships; (c) being persistent and persuasive; (d) being present and communicating; (e)
modeling cultural responsiveness; and (f) fostering cultural responsiveness among others
(Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Spalding et al., 2010; Taylor, 2009). The challenge is
developing the necessary attitudes and beliefs appropriate to respond to diversity in leaders and
educators as the student population becomes multiethnic, multilingual, and economically diverse.
In obvious contrast, K-12 educators in general remain White females who have little experience with cultures and lifestyles outside of their own middle-class culture (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2013; Gay, 2010; Young et al., 2010). The majority of participants in this study were middle-class African-American female educators; some had experienced poverty and discrimination which gave them particular insight into the experiences of their students. Over time, in addition to their training, they had developed a set of beliefs and attitudes from their own life experiences that they employed in their interactions with students. Participants purposely engaged students of all abilities, regardless of differences, in the learning process; creating success moments for each student in order to build confidence and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

**Practical Implications**

**Recommendations for District Leaders and Administrators**

Participants in this study were all K-12 educators at the same school. While five administrators were included as part of the selection criteria, none chose to participate; therefore, their experiences and perspectives remain unknown to this study. Participants in this study had mixed views regarding the overall effectiveness of the district’s diversity committee, with most being unsure of the mission and perceiving the impact of the diversity committee as a whole to be minimal. This suggests a general lack of communication from various leadership levels regarding the priority of the district’s diversity plan, its specific mission, and goals as found in a number of previous studies regarding principals’ attitudes and practices concerning cultural change (Polat, 2011; Onorato, 2013; Reihl, 2000; Rothstein-Fisch, et al., 2009; Young, et al., 2010). While additional research supports the participants shared’ belief that diversity has an impact on the learning environment (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al.; Gay, 2010;
Osman, 2012; Roorda, et al.; 2011; Samuels, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). Consequently, administrators may want to reflect upon their own beliefs and attitudes about diversity and inclusiveness to understand any biases they may hold. Practically speaking, valuable insight into the effects of diversity and inclusiveness on the learning environment could be gained by comparing the performance and achievement scores between teachers who consistently employ inclusive practices in their classrooms and teachers who do not, to see if any significant statistical differences exist. Identifying what practices are contributing positively to student achievement is essential to effectively addressing the impact of diversity on the learning environment (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

**The Importance of Buy-in and Support.** Participants in this study were all K-12 educators who expressed a need for support and buy-in from administrators and district leaders. Individually and collectively they regarded the district committee’s effectiveness as less significant compared to the collective efforts of those volunteers participating on their school’s diversity committee. Participants expressed the importance of everyone, administrators and fellow educators, working together to reach students. Participants felt that some colleagues either did not adequately understand how to recognize and respond appropriately to diversity or they simply chose not to respond (Personal communication with participant, March 2015). While specific diversity training is a needed step, administrators and leaders can influence staff behaviors by the manner in which they model inclusion and responses to diversity in the learning environment.

**The Importance of Training.** Training is necessary and should be relevant to the learning environment and all its participants. Cox (1999) contended that training applicable to the specific aspects of diversity within a particular organization is most effective in producing
positive performance outcomes. Gay (2000) and Nieto (1999) advocated for teaching pre-service educators appropriate cultural responsiveness and attitudes open to diversity. When participants compared their role of diversity committee member with their role as an educator, they felt they were more effective in supporting diversity and inclusion in their educator roles; they believed the efforts of the diversity committee as a whole could accomplish more changes to the attitudes and practices in the learning environment with additional support from administrators and colleagues who have been adequately trained to manage diversity. Specific comments from participants included year-round diversity training for principals, training on the importance of diversity for all educators and other staff members; specialized training for trainers and facilitators on the diversity committee; and relevant professional development courses related to poverty issues beyond the one same course offered every year. Most participants believed they were more effective at finding their own training resources, whether through reading books, taking additional courses, or earning endorsements in specialized areas of diversity topics. They were highly motivated to gain a deep understanding of diversity and inclusiveness in order to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students. They demonstrated how to create inclusive learning environments and build communities of learners in their own classrooms. Most had experienced significant events which helped them develop a high level of empathy toward at-risk students and a keen sense of discernment for identifying those at-risk. It would benefit the district to take full advantage of the passion and expertise these educators possessed regarding diversity in education by allowing other educators to observe their classrooms and placing more emphasis on their role as facilitators of diversity training.
**Recommendations for K-12 Educators**

All participants for this study were K-12 educators at a K-5 Title I elementary school. Their years of teaching experience ranged from one year to well over thirty years, with the majority of the teachers having more than five years of classroom teaching experience. All participants shared the belief that aspects of diversity impacted the learning environment collectively and individually. Some had experiences working with students from “both sides of the track” and understood the broad scope of diversity and its impact on the learning environment (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015). They promoted the positive points of diversity as “opportunities for us to learn from each other” (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015). Inclusive environments were created by learning about and celebrating various cultural holidays and speaking students’ native languages, even if it was as simple as a salutation. Negative stereotypes were reduced by connecting and building relationships with their students while viewing them through a lens of empathy and compassion. They purposely sought those who were viewed in some form or fashion as different from the dominant group within that specific learning community. Collaborative learning, small groups, and peer groups were used to promote cognitive development.

Multiculturalism and poverty issues had significant impact to their school, so acquiring knowledge of a variety of cultural aspects is instrumental to bridging the gap for diverse students (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al.; Gay, 2010; Nieto, 1999; Osman, 2012; Samuels, 2010; Silverman, 2010; Siwatu & Polymore, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). Fiona recommended that “it is paramount that educators be aware of cultural differences that can impact student achievement” (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015). She went on to say that educators “need to be aware of their own hidden biases” and of the “nuances
that impact cultural groups” (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015). Teachers of diverse student populations can gain an understanding of culturally responsive teaching through studying the theories and teachings of Gay (2000, 2010) and Nieto (1999). Another recommendation was to join with others who are already effective in promoting diversity and inclusion in the learning environment. K-12 educators may find it beneficial to conduct classroom observations and participate in specific training modules related to building inclusive environments, recognizing and understanding poverty issues, understanding coping strategies of students at-risk, bridging the communications gap for English language learners, and including learners of all abilities in active participation using instruction relevant to their prior knowledge and background experiences.

**Recommendations for Administrators of Teacher Preparation Programs**

The beliefs of participants on the effectiveness of diversity courses taken during pre-service training ranged from minimally to moderately effective. Two participants were not offered any type of diversity training. One participant noted that “the level of pre-service education was limited during my early education but improved over time as the swing toward more diverse campuses began to be more common” (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015). Based on current trends and census data the number of diverse campuses will continue to rise; thus, new and existing educators will need to increase their knowledge of instruction for inclusionary classrooms with a range of students – regular education students, students with disabilities and giftedness, students in poverty, language learners, and multicultural learners. Unfortunately, studies have revealed that despite participating in a course in multiculturalism, pre-service teachers continue to hold limited views of diversity which affects their ability to fully address the needs of the diverse populations of their classrooms and has led
to an overrepresentation of minorities within special education (Silverman, 2010; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010).

The goal is to instruct future educators how to teach in a culturally responsive manner with an understanding of how culture impacts background, prior experiences, and knowledge in order to provide relevant instruction to their students (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 1999; Silverman, 2010; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010). Thus, a more effective approach may be to fully integrate topics of diversity throughout the entire teacher preparation program because general education classrooms consists every type of student. Additionally, several participants recommended coursework designed from a holistic approach to explain how to address social, emotional, and physical needs related to diversity which can impact students’ academic performance. It would also be helpful to provide field experiences in diverse settings under the tutelage of educators who model inclusive practices and demonstrate how to make connections and build relationships with a variety of students, especially those at-risk of being excluded or labeled with a learning disability.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study refer to certain characteristics that may impact the results in such a way as to limit the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population beyond the specific study site. Such limitations included the small number of participants, the location of the study site, and the uniqueness of the participants’ role. The majority of participants were African-American and female; there were only two males, one African-American and one Caucasian. This may have limited the range of perspectives among participants. Another limitation was that people who volunteer for a common cause, such as the diversity committee, may possess a similar set of life experiences, beliefs, and attitudes which motivate their
participation and collaboration with others in the group which would make the results not
generalizable to a larger population. The use of a single school district in a specific geographic
location limited the scope of this study; all participants worked at the same school in the district
and their perceptions and experiences may not be representative of educators in other schools
within the same district or schools in other districts.

A further limitation of this study was the dependency on the extent and authenticity of the
participants’ responses; the topic of diversity can be a sensitive or controversial issue which may
influence participants to choose their responses accordingly without completely sharing their true
experiences and perceptions. Participants worked at the same school and were known to each
other which could have influenced their responses based on a perceived lack of anonymity. In
addition, the researcher is an educator at the same school with the participants, thereby gaining
convenient access to both the study site and the participants. While this familiarity facilitated
open discussions during the interview process, it could have also impacted the level of
transparency related to what participants were willing to share.

Finally, participants were selected based on specific criteria; participants were required to
be a K-12 educator who volunteered on any of the district’s diversity committees. The number
of eligible candidates was considerably small given that there were only two diversity
committees known to the district chairperson at the time of the study, whose combined twenty-
eight volunteers included educators and other staff, parents, and various business and faith
community members. There were seventeen possible candidates who met the selection
parameters; nine participants agreed to take part in the research, although one volunteer later
chose to withdraw. All eight participants who consented to the study were K-12 educators who
volunteered on the committee at the same school; they represented almost half of all diversity
committee volunteers in the district. However, the sample was limited by excluding diversity committee volunteers who were not K-12 educators and by the lack of diversity committee volunteers who were K-12 educators but chose not to participate in the study. Those who did not meet the criteria or chose not to participate may have had different experiences than the study participants, especially related to the demographics of their student and staff population; however, the main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators who volunteered on the diversity committee because they spend more time working directly with the diverse student population in the learning environment.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the experiences and perceptions of K-12 educators who volunteered on the school’s diversity committee regarding their role in improving diversity and inclusiveness in the district and its schools. Recommendations for future research would focus first on a quantitative analysis comparing the student achievement scores between participants in this study who practice inclusion and an open-mindedness to diversity with teachers who are not actively engaged in inclusion and diversity sensitivity awareness.

Next, qualitative research exploring the experiences of five different groups of participants in separate studies or together in comparative studies would reveal similarities and differences in thinking about and responding to diversity. An examination of the experiences of two separate groups not represented within this study, administrators and special education teachers who volunteer on the diversity committee is recommended. Even though there were four administrators who served on the diversity committee at the district level, none responded to the invitation to participate in the study. This lack of response was most likely a result of a busier than normal administrative schedule this school year as principals were tasked with two
major system implementations, a new evaluation system for teachers and a new computerized
standardized testing system for students.

Only one special education teacher was part of this study, but there were just two
altogether on both the district and the school’s diversity committees. Inclusion and diversity are
highly relevant to special education and co-teaching practices, so understanding their perspective
may provide additional insight into inclusionary practices. A third group to research would be
new and/or existing K-12 educators regarding their experiences with diversity and inclusiveness
in the school climate. A fourth group that might provide beneficial insight would be the students
in K-12 schools, whether as a whole or by diverse subgroups. A fifth group highly relevant to
the topic of this study would be the parents of students, who play an integral role in the
development of the attitudes and perspectives children bring into the learning environment.
Taking a different approach, a case study at the district site might also provide insight into the
district’s diversity plan regarding the extent of its implementation and impact within the district
and its schools.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of K-12 educators who
volunteered on the school’s diversity committee for the purpose of promoting diversity and
improving inclusiveness in the environment. Eight participants who met the criteria of being a
K-12 public school educator and diversity committee volunteer were selected to contribute data
in the form of individual interviews, guided reflection surveys, site documents, and observations.
From an analysis using Moustakas’ (1994) modified approach, five themes emerged. Themes
included ambassadors for diversity and inclusion; bridge builders influenced by personal
experiences; the teacher becomes the student; champions of the at-risk student; and cultivators of an inclusive community of learners.

The findings indicated participants held strong beliefs and positive attitudes regarding diversity in their school and their role in improving inclusiveness. They modeled an inclusive learning environment by developing a climate where all group members felt a sense of belonging as part of the classroom. Some participants held advanced degrees and endorsements in various areas of diversity education, leading to an in-depth knowledge of diversity and its impact on student achievement. Experiencing some form of discrimination at different periods in their life afforded them a unique interest in building relationships and a strong motivation to recognize those who were at-risk for being excluded or stereo-typed in any way.

They each shared an understanding of diversity’s effect on the learning environment and intentionally interacted with colleagues, students, and families in such a manner as to influence others’ perceptions of diversity and inclusion and positively impact learning achievement (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Edmunds et al.; Gay, 2010; Osman, 2012; Samuels, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). Another way they accomplished this was through training others on diversity topics and facilitating discussions about differences among individuals and groups of people. Although participants felt more instrumental in their role as educators than in their role as diversity committee volunteers, it was evident that there was no clear line where one role stopped and the other began. They improved the learning environment for all members by their enthusiasm for learning about different cultures, by seeking out connections and building relationships with students who would otherwise get lost in the crowd, and passionately advocating for diversity and inclusion at all levels. Study participants were ambassadors of the change they wanted to see in their schools; it was the essence of who they were. “I’ve always
had that ambassador quality in me,” Gillian reflected in her survey, while Evelyn summed up their collective purpose, “It’s my passion! I love to teach people [about diversity] and open their minds. That’s it; I just keep pressing on to educate as many educators about diversity as possible” (Personal communications with participant, March, 2015).
References


doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.01.002


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Data

1. Please state your age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and teaching position.

2. Do you volunteer for the district diversity committee or your school’s diversity committee? If school, what is the name of the school?

3. Approximately how long you have volunteered on the diversity committee?

Experiences, Motivational Factors, and Beliefs

4. Describe your role as a volunteer on the diversity committee and how it pertains to carrying out the mission of the committee.

5. What are your personal beliefs on the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in school culture and the learning environment?

6. Share any life experiences and beliefs that you feel may have contributed to your motivation to volunteer on the diversity committee.

Influencing School Culture and Climate – Experiences and Beliefs

7. Describe the culture of the learning environment in which you teach.

8. Share specific examples of diversity and inclusiveness within your school or district and how it impacts the learning environment.

9. How have you impacted school culture and the learning environment in your role as a diversity committee volunteer?

Challenges and Resources

10. Describe any obstacles or challenges you have encountered or observed that hinder improving diversity and inclusiveness in the district and its learning environment.
11. Describe any factors you perceive beneficial to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate.

12. Share with me anything else about your role and participation on the diversity committee that seems significant to improving diversity and inclusiveness in school culture.
APPENDIX B: GUIDED REFLECTION SURVEY PROMPTS

Improving Diversity and Inclusiveness - Experiences and Perceptions

1. Describe any personal experiences you have had with diversity and inclusiveness.
   Reflect upon how any personal experiences influenced your beliefs regarding the need to improve diversity and inclusiveness in school culture and the learning environment.

2. Describe any significant events that led to your desire to volunteer on the diversity committee.

3. Describe any personal successes you have had specifically related to improving the diversity and inclusiveness of the school culture and the learning environment.

4. Describe any personal experiences you have had or observed regarding how improving diversity and inclusiveness has impacted others (students, families, and other staff members) in the learning environment.

5. Evaluate the impact you have had as a K-12 educator in your role as a diversity committee volunteer on improving diversity and inclusiveness in school culture.

6. Evaluate the level of support you receive from administrators and colleagues in improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate.

7. Evaluate the effectiveness of the diversity committee in implementing the goals of improving the diversity and inclusiveness of the district.

Education & Training

8. Describe any coursework related to diversity and inclusiveness you participated in during your pre-service educator training.

9. Describe any professional development related to diversity and inclusiveness you have participated in or lead as an educator.
10. Describe what you believe is important for a pre-service or new teacher to know about diversity and inclusiveness.

11. Describe how you think diversity and inclusiveness training could be improved for experienced educators.
APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

As the researcher, I assumed the role of a nonparticipant observer as I observed each participant’s classroom at least once. All field notes will be written using the Observation Protocol form.

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Hello Diversity Committee Member,

My name is Lisa Lindley and I am conducting a study of the perspectives and experiences of K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committees as part of my graduate studies at Liberty University. This research can provide insight into the perspectives and experiences of educators volunteering on the committee in regard to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the district.

Participation in this study is voluntary and there is no compensation for participating. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the school or district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time. You will also be given the opportunity to review my findings and provide feedback prior to my final report. All identifiable information will be omitted and pseudonyms used to ensure confidentiality. For those willing to participate, I have some additional details and a form for you to read and sign. Please contact me at llindley2@liberty.edu or via phone at 770-651-3852.

Thank you kindly for your consideration.
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Desiring Diversity: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experiences of K-12 Educators Who Volunteer for the District’s Diversity Committees
Lisa A. Lindley
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study of the perspectives of educators volunteering on the district’s diversity committees. You were selected as a possible participant because you are part of the district being studied and you volunteer on a diversity committee. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa A. Lindley, a doctoral candidate in the Education department at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research study is to gather the experiences and perspectives of 15 K-12 who volunteer for a K-12 public school district's diversity committees. The stated mission of the district’s diversity committee is to improve the overall inclusiveness of the district through embracing the diversity of its student population while incorporating changes to curriculum, communications, staff recruiting, and school climate. The data from this research will be used to inform administrators on effectively improving the inclusiveness and diversity of their school climate as well as identifying challenges to implementing changes. Improving the inclusiveness and diversity of the school climate will create a sense of belonging for students, staff, and families which will benefit academic achievement, home and school communications, and sense of community.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: (a) Be interviewed and audio-recorded for approximately 30 to 45 minutes on no more than two separate occasions, (b) be observed during at least one diversity committee meeting, (c) provide access to your school improvement plan, and (d) provide written personal reflections about your thoughts on volunteering for the diversity committee.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has a risk: If an individual, group, or organization is portrayed in a negative light, this could be harmful. However, for this study personal information will be omitted and pseudonyms used for all participants as well as the site name. This minimizes the risk.

There are no direct benefits to participants; however, district leaders and educators as well as researchers and others in the field of education will gain a better understanding of the motivations for K-12 educators who volunteer on the district’s diversity committee.
Compensation:

Participants will not receive compensation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject or the site. Research data will be stored securely and only the primary researcher will have access to the records. All computer and audio files with participants’ personal information will be password protected to avoid unauthorized access. Copies of site documents and personal reflection surveys will be secured in a locked file cabinet; after a time period of three years all documents will be shredded. Audio-recordings will also be maintained for three years and then erased by the primary researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the school district where you are employed. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Lindley. In addition, Dr. Brenda Ayres, serves as the faculty advisor for this study. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Lisa Lindley at llindley2@liberty.edu or Dr. Brenda Ayres at bayres@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ______________
February 11, 2015

Lisa Lindley

Dear Ms. Lindley:

Permission is granted for you to conduct your research study. The title of your study is “Desiring Diversity: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Experience of K-12 Educators Who Volunteer for the District’s Diversity Committees.” All information to be gathered will be done in a confidential and appropriate manner. The County School System is to receive a copy of all completed research findings.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Associate Superintendent
Student Achievement & Leadership

Leading and Learning
APPENDIX G: MEMBER CHECK

Member Check

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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The transcript of my interview was accurate.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The transcript of my guided reflection survey journal statements was accurate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The researcher’s interpretation of my experiences is credible.</td>
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APPENDIX H: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

R = Researcher
P = Participant

Demographic Data

(Skipped) Please state your age range, gender, ethnicity, education level, and teaching position.

Data gathered from guided reflection journal survey: Forty-something; African-American/Hispanic; two Master’s degrees; K-5 elementary education teacher.

R: Do you volunteer for the district diversity committee or your school’s diversity committee?
P: At the school.
R: Approximately how long you have volunteered on the diversity committee?
P: I have volunteered for three years.

Experiences, Motivational Factors, and Beliefs

R: Can you describe your role as a volunteer on the diversity committee and how it pertains to carrying out the mission of the committee?
P: Well, I think it was mostly to help others understand their hidden biases so that they are able to accept people who are different.
R: What are your personal beliefs on the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in school culture and the learning environment?
P: [As a minority teacher] I think that I have always felt supported, you know, maybe because of my degree in Multicultural Urban Education, so I had a more broad sense of what things are. But also growing up of a person whose biracial, it kind of gives you an understanding of different cultures and how things impact. I think growing up in New York also, where it’s a melting pot of everything, You get to feel okay with being different or celebrated, which is really
different. In terms of teaching, diversity is considered a good thing. In D.C. [Washington], cultural diversity existed but here in the South, here it’s different. The South doesn’t feel open, everything’s Christian, school leaders, teachers. There’s no place for students to pray for Ramadan; they still have to go in the cafeteria and watch the other kids eat. Everybody has to say the pledge of allegiance, you know, not just stand out of respect. I teach my students to stand out of respect but they shouldn’t have to say it if it goes against their beliefs, you know, like my Jehovah Witness student. I told my student they didn’t have to say it because I understood. You know, Jehovah Witnesses don’t make pledges. And the student said, you know? And I said, yes, I was raised Jehovah Witness and it made the student feel better. But then I had someone come in and say, “They need to be saying the pledge, why aren’t they saying the pledge?” The school feels people should be compelled to pledge. Another thing is when they go to music and all the music is Christian or about things they don’t believe in. And I ask them what are they studying about the specific song, is it in a historical context or what? But the student did not feel comfortable, you know, because they’re old enough to understand their religion, so they know it’s not what they believe. So I ask if they want to stay with me instead of go to music and so I let them sit in my classroom.

R: (Skipped – see previous response) Share any life experiences and beliefs that you feel may have contributed to your motivation to volunteer on the diversity committee.

**Influencing School Culture and Climate – Experiences and Beliefs**

R: Tell me about the culture of the learning environment in which you teach.

P: In my classroom there is diversity in ethnicity, gender, socio-economic; the school also as well. So I think that where the borders are, we service children who are transient who live in the
hotels, we see people who are professionals, it’s pretty diverse. I have students who speak Spanish, I have students who live in hotels and children who live in homes.

R: Share specific examples of diversity and inclusiveness within your school or district and how it impacts the learning environment.

P: I think it impacts the learning environment because not everyone is aware of how to meet the needs of certain children. You know, we talk a lot about “they don’t do this, they don’t do that”. When we may not be aware of why they can’t do that or why they can’t do their homework, what’s going on, you know. We had a situation with two students, who really didn’t do their homework much and we was getting on to them and come to find out, I think it was the month before that they had moved into the hotels [extended stay lodge] and the parents didn’t tell the teachers and they were just sneaking off after walkers and hiding in the bushes and walking down to the hotels, so the month before they had moved. So I think there’s a lot more going on with our kids sometimes than we realize. That, you know, it’s not just Mom and Dad at home, someone to help them with their homework, like what, you know, mostly happens in middle class environments.

R: So that would impact how they’re learning once they get here [to school] or even what’s going on in their minds.

P: Mmhmm [yes]. And even like, how important snack time is. Some days I am like, why, why are we running towards snack? Well for some of them, that’s the only time they get something extra throughout the course of the day, so.

R: How have you purposely tried to impact the school culture and the learning environment in your school or classroom in your role as a diversity committee volunteer?
P: I purposely try to incorporate them into my lessons, like their names or certain things I know about their cultures. Um, like we have the one student who just arrived from Mexico and I try to connect with him, speak Spanish when I can so he can understand what we’re talking about or asking him to teach me Spanish to let him know that it’s valued that he has a difference and that it’s okay. But also, like I think like when I’m doing like homework and I want computer homework, I kind of just don’t, I say if you don’t have computer access after school internet or your parents don’t let you use their computer, here are the times that my classroom’s available or I get here at 7:15, so if you need help with your homework, you need to come in. So, not singling anyone out, just letting them know that there are ways you can get around whatever situation is occurring in your household.

**Challenges and Resources**

R: Describe any obstacles or challenges you have encountered or observed that hinder improving diversity and inclusiveness in the district and its learning environment.

P: People need to be aware of hidden biases, then you can come in and accept people who are different. You know one thing I cannot stand is this whole “God bless ‘em” mentality…it’s like saying the child is never going to get it. You are limiting the child when you say “bless their heart” because what is really being said is they can’t do it.

R: Are there any factors you perceive beneficial to improving diversity and inclusiveness in the school climate?

P: It helps to have more information on how different cultures practice. For instance, you just can’t put a Hispanic male and female in the same small group because females are taught at home to be subservient to males. The female students won’t debate with the male students or look them in the eye, often times. And, um, African male students must like their teacher first,
it’s really interesting because they won’t listen to you until they know if they like you or not. So understanding different cultures is so important to creating an inclusive learning environment. You have to really know your students.

R: Share with me anything else about your role and participation on the diversity committee that seems significant to improving diversity and inclusiveness in school culture.

P: Engagement is key; teachers need to be shown how to engage students. You know, the district does this class on Ruby Payne [teaching students in poverty] in the summer for teachers but it really is inadequate. It talks about the class system and how upper level and lower classes interact. Something we did in New York, which I really like better is *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, it was my summer read last year. It is so powerful! It’s all about how we have to target the whole child, like, there’s this academic focus but no connection to the social and emotional aspects. We have to “reach them to teach them.” We need community resources to help students. You know, when we found out the story of a couple of our students and their living arrangement, we were able to understand them better and turn them around academically.

R: Thank you so much for your time! I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and views with me this morning.

P: You’re welcome. Not a problem at all. Good luck!
APPENDIX I: CODED HORIZONS

ORIGINAL CODES FOR HORIZONS AND SIGNIFICANT STATEMENT CLUSTERS

1. Topic of diversity and inclusion = fear, unease
2. Advocates for support from administrators and colleagues
3. Training: Pre-service and professional development
4. Experienced personal racism and discrimination
5. Passionate about classroom, teaching, and diversity
6. Intentionally pursues personal relationships and connections with students / others
7. Purposely seeks to gain an understanding of other cultures
8. Sees injustices, prejudices, discrimination, and biases (hidden or not)
9. Desires to have conversations to address social injustice – “right the wrong”
10. Recognizes differences / diversity
11. Recognizes similarities
12. Intentionally creates inclusive environments
13. High expectations for all students
14. Sees the best in everyone / opportunity for all
15. Has experience with other cultures
16. Part of a minority group or possesses some aspect of diversity, esp. related to education
17. Faith
18. Purposely seeks diverse populations
19. Supportive of all students
20. Recognizes very specific needs in students – holistic education approach
21. Believes diversity significantly impacts learning environment
22. Personal success stories
23. Passionate about inclusive education
24. Goes after the “different one” / the “lost sheep”
25. Awareness of diversity issues
26. Ambassadors of diversity / trainers of others

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<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Just growing up in a town where racism was alive and well, meaning it was very evident.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I would say the fearfulness of being on a committee. People are afraid they’ll have to say something. Others won’t join in the discussion because they’re uncomfortable. They are willing to show the [diversity training] video, but don’t own it.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The discussions are good discussions when their comfort level is good, you know, with people they work with every day.</td>
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<td>2, 3</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>But training really needs to occur at principals’ meetings and year round.</td>
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<td>1, 9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well, I think you have to get people comfortable with the</td>
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<td>I do diversity workshops all over, North Carolina, I’m going to Richmond.</td>
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<td>1, 9</td>
<td>The way I do my talks, I put people at a comfort level where they’re not afraid to share.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Then I ask them to share any experience, it can be positive or negative, doesn’t matter, whatever. This girl shared she was a pageant winner and had won some scholarships. But then she had one teacher in college tell her “I can’t believe you were selected to go to a pageant”. It devastated her, you know, but when she shared it with the group, she was able to move beyond that experience.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>It’s my passion, I love to teach people [about diversity] and open their minds. I speak in college classrooms, you know, I taught a parapro class.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Training is not a one shot deal.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>You touch people in different ways. I do “ticket out the door” and one time I had this participant who told me I was amazing because I opened her mind. She wrote, “I am now positive, before I was a very negative person”.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3, 5</td>
<td>That’s it; I just keep pressing on to educate as many educators about diversity as possible.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Yep, one day I plan to write a book about my diversity training.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>I was appointed to be the fourth grade team’s diversity representative</td>
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<td>This is my first year; well, I didn’t really volunteer – I was assigned.</td>
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<td>I was handed a folder and told to discuss the topics that were in the folder at our team meeting once a month.</td>
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<td>But I have experienced discrimination at work. I feel like I’ve been targeted and singled out. You know, [as a single white male teacher], people look at me and want to know, you know…which is it? . . . you know…um, so, um…well, in college you were one of two or one of three, actually. You were either a frat guy or gay. You’re a male, so you must be one of two – frat or gay. I was neither but the stereotypes are there. Oh yeah, definitely! You always get the stereotypes.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Well, teaching at a majority-minority school, I see things I am not accustomed to, things I haven’t been exposed to because my upbringing was different.</td>
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<td>Like, I never even heard of Kwanza until I saw a Kwanza presentation here. It was cool to see!</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I am being exposed to different cultures and aspects in school.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learning new things about people is cool!</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hmmm . . . I was raised different than my students have been. I was raised in a traditional Southern Baptist white neighborhood. I did not see any Black people until second grade, then it was only a couple. I can’t say there was a lot of diversity.</td>
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<td>4, 8</td>
<td>2, 5</td>
<td>But here [in my school] one of my students told me I was the first white man she had ever met and interacted with . . . she told me she does not like white men. A lot of their parents teach them that, so I try to make my students feel comfortable.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Being goofy! I interact with them in a playful way, you know, just goofiness.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I want to be seen as more than an authority figure.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I try to talk like them at times and the kids think that is funny.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I try to build a relationship with students but still being fun . . . a goofball!</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>5, 3</td>
<td>Hmmm . . . getting to know your students. You know, I really think it’s cool to learn stuff about other cultures. I want to learn and experience other cultures.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Support is big, too.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>When I was in college, I had a professor who went out of the way to see me succeed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>They knew white males didn’t enter the profession, and it was really cool to have support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>My support came from my teachers, so I want to do the same for my students.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I have fun with my students.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I was handed a folder and told to discuss the topics that were in the folder at our team meeting once a month.</td>
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<td>4, 8, 9</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>A few years ago, I had a Caucasian student say her mom told her she wasn't allowed to sit next to any &quot;black&quot; boys. I was shocked this behavior existed in our community, especially with the majority of the school's population being African American. This behavior opened my eyes to differences that still exist in our community/world. Oh how I wanted to have a conversation with the parent and inquire as to why she would tell a child such nonsense. However, I was sure that conversation would be all too interesting and not so pleasant. So, I explained to the student it didn't matter whether she sat next to a white boy, or black boy, they were both the same. Which then led to a conversation about how deep down inside, we are all the same.</td>
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<td>Page Numbers</td>
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<tr>
<td>10, 6, 7, 21</td>
<td>1, 5, 3</td>
<td>We have mostly an African American population but every student has a different lifestyle and a different background. We get to know each other and share stories so that we are comfortable learning together. Learning cannot take place if they’re not comfortable. Their differences with other students affect their learning.</td>
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<td>6, 7, 21, 12,</td>
<td>5, 3</td>
<td>Oh my . . . let’s see . . . it is important for me to understand my students. We take time getting to know each other, their background, their lifestyle, agree to disagree. We take time to celebrate their holidays, different holidays, so we all can see how different cultures celebrate. We watch videos about other cultures and their activities. It helps familiarize students with other cultures, makes them feel comfortable with each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7, 21</td>
<td>5, 3</td>
<td>I find it rewarding to share different topics, articles, quotes, and videos because it leads to more effective learning environment.</td>
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<td>7, 14, 19</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>It is so important to understand your students, just get to know them, their background and their lifestyle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10, 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I tell kids their world is bigger than their family, their socio-economic status, whatever it is.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I should have been a statistic, but I was the first in my family to graduate college.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I was selected as a Fulbright scholar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10, 26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I’ve always had that ambassador quality in me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I had two professors – the one told me, “Yes, you can do that.” The other told me I did not deserve the opportunity. I still remember both their names, Professor A and Professor B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I grew up in foster care after the death of my aunt. You get to see a lot of kids in foster care, I tried to make sure everyone felt like they were a part, you know, make a connection, so that every kid knows it will be alright. I was the encourager, the nurturer of the group.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I believe everybody’s good at something. All of us have the opportunity and ability to do or be something.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7, 22,</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A significant event that led to my desire to volunteer on the diversity committee is my experience of living in Europe with a German family and wanting to share in building positive relationships across ethnic lines.</td>
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</table>
| 22, 6, 7, 15, 16 | 4, 3 | My voice teacher in college was Jewish and she spoke German and would talk about her experience from her family having to flee because of the Nazi hate crimes against the Jews. Her level of compassion was something...
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<tr>
<th>Constraint</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
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<td>I never forgot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22, 6, 7, 15, 16</td>
<td>2,</td>
<td>Being a Fulbright scholar I meet students from all over the world and remember fondly my piano accompanist from Romania and his kindness when I shared music from Negro Spirituals of which he had never heard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22, 6, 7, 15, 16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>My foreign language teachers were both from Europe and introduced me to some unique celebrations and foods.</td>
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<td>12, 14</td>
<td>5,</td>
<td>I would describe our school culture as unique, a part of something, a potential for greatness.</td>
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<td>5, 24</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>We have teachers who are willing to reach outside their comfort zone to reach a child.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>When I find something that connects with you, I can make a difference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>When a student says, “hey my teacher gave me an opportunity, then I can be my best.”</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>We can be the best in our county even though we are seen as different or lesser, not monolinguual. The county looks at our school and says, “Wow! Look at how they are moving up in their numbers.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>12, 22</td>
<td>5, 2</td>
<td>We have students from all cultures . . . African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Indian, Asian, a lot of different cultures. That’s what makes us special. We embrace our differences, we don’t make anyone feel different or less than.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>5, 4</td>
<td>Kids venture out to do things because I told them they can do it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>We take care of each other, regardless of our differences . . . everybody . . . teachers, students, their families.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The former principal started it, supported it, stretched it, and pushed us to create a sense of connectivity. She wanted us to stand out, especially since we are a Title I school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13, 14, 21, 22, 23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It’s not about the dollars, compared to other schools, we look different. We have something special here and it shows because we are moving up in numbers, you know, our student scores and the school’s rating.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>While serving on the diversity committee we have used our spotlight on culture bulletin board and children’s literature to help bridge the gap between our understandings of those who are different than we are.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I expose students to a variety of cultures.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I teach on a different country and culture, so that students are hearing music from different cultures.</td>
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<td>6, 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I try to connect with students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7, 12, 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I speak Spanish to my Hispanic students to help them feel accepted and to help them feel connected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7, 12, 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I know my Islamic and Hindu students are open to movement and dancing, so I incorporate their music into my lessons. They perk up when they hear “their” music!</td>
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<td>2, 8</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>The biggest obstacles are teachers who don’t care to get to know our students. They don’t have a relationship with kids, you know, they don’t want to know them. They get into cliques and spread gossip instead of trying to work together to create a family and a community where, you know, where all students are treated with respect. They live in their own little world and don’t understand what our students have to deal with on the weekends or what their families may go through, you know, the struggles financially, or homelessness and things like that, cultural differences.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>I like to connect with people – do they like music? What kinds of music? I try to find similarities despite ethnic and cultural differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I had German professors who were European who gave me support and assistance to cross cultures.</td>
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<td>4, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Being a minority, I needed to be over prepared in college, to make sure I knew the answers to questions that may be asked. My faith was a big reason how I survived. I felt like I had to dispel the stereotype – “can’t” wasn’t acceptable, instead it was “in spite of” I will succeed.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Support from administration and colleagues is very important. It really takes us all working together as a family to reach our kids.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Another thing I do is host a weekly lunch date in my classroom, where I invite a select group of students to have lunch with me. I try to pick a variety of students, even those who may not, you know, be the best behaved (laughs). I want to show them I care about them as individuals, not just students.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>This is my first year [volunteering for the diversity committee]. Well, um, I was basically handed a folder and told to discuss once a month at team meetings. Nothing was really explained to me, so it wasn’t like I was trained on anything, I have no background. I would rather be given the opportunity to volunteer, not told to do it. I have no idea what the mission is.</td>
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</table>
| 10, 20 | 1, 5 | I have to take into consideration all aspects of diversity for my students’ learning. What is their family life at home? Like, some may have a mom & dad at home asking, “Can I help you with your homework?” Others may not, so am
I instructing them enough so that they can do it alone. So, for me, the big gaps are concerning, the differences in their home life and families.

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<th>I didn’t volunteer, I was basically handed a folder and told to do this.</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I always knew I wanted to be a teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I never felt “gosh, I’m a lot different than other people in my class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Even though I grew up in California, I feel we treated diversity differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I was the only African-American teacher on the campus but I never felt different or “any way”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>In California, there is a huge Hispanic population, few African-Americans, Caucasians, and Asians.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>We had this program for new teachers, it was beginning teacher mentorship, it was great, it lasted a year. It included diversity training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have always felt supported and never felt out of place because of my ethnicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>My students are mostly African-American and a few EL. I place them in heterogeneous groups to work together. I have four PC [gifted] students, some below level, and some behavior problems that affect the groups. My small groups are homogeneous. Yes, the ones I provide extra support to are all homogeneous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, 20</td>
<td>4, 10</td>
<td>Because of my students basically look the same, they have trouble understanding that they are different in other ways, like they may not have similar backgrounds or home lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I just go over the material in the folder each month and facilitate the discussion with my team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>My school but I did not volunteer, I was told.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This is my first year. I got a folder and was told to go over this stuff in the folder with my team once a month. There was no training. I don’t know what the mission of the diversity committee is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kids are kids, no matter what their color, they all want to learn – all kids deserve a chance to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, 11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learning has nothing to do with ethnicity. I have the ones that have money and those who are homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It doesn’t matter where they live, all kids are here to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I believe my class is a community and we are all here to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Diversity creates opportunities for differentiation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 12, 23, 24 | 5 | As a teacher, I have to meet every child where they are, the ones who aren’t quite there yet, taking them one step
<p>| | | |</p>
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12, 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>And challenging those PC students, keeping them moving forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 23, 24</td>
<td>5, 4</td>
<td>I try to call on everyone, not just the ones I think will know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 23, 24</td>
<td>5, 4</td>
<td>I also try to ask some questions that I know my low ones can answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 23, 24</td>
<td>5, 4</td>
<td>If they don’t know, I give them an opportunity to ask for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5, 13, 14</td>
<td>4, 2</td>
<td>I started working here because we lived in the area, it was close by. Now I stay because I love these kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>When we got ready to do the LGBT presentation, [the leader] felt like she had to come and talk to me first about one of my students, a little girl in my class. Now this person made the assumption that this little girl might be, you know, um, maybe because she dresses like a boy, she made this assumption. But she didn’t know her [the little girl] or have a relationship with her but I had a relationship with her, you know, a connection with her, so I knew she was a tomboy. She liked to dress like a tomboy. This is kindergarten and I did not even think about what the future may hold in regards to that, you know, how she may turn out but I felt like she [the leader] was doing the very thing – making an assumption – that she told us not to do and for us [diversity representatives] to tell our teams not to do, make assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15, 16, 22</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>[As a minority teacher] I think that I have always felt supported, you know, maybe because of my degree in Multicultural Urban Education, so I had a more broad sense of what things are. But also growing up of a person whose biracial, it kind of gives you an understanding of different cultures and how things impact. I think growing up in New York also, where it’s a melting pot of everything. You get to feel okay with being different or celebrated, which is really different.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In terms of teaching, diversity is considered a good thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 8</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>In D.C. [Washington], cultural diversity existed but here in the South, here it’s different. The South doesn’t feel open, everything’s Christian, school leaders, teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8, 9, 24</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>There’s no place for students to pray for Ramadan; they still have to go in the cafeteria and watch the other kids eat.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Everybody has to say the pledge of allegiance, you know, not just stand out of respect. I teach my students to stand out of respect but they shouldn’t have to say it if it goes against their beliefs, you know, like my Jehovah Witness student. I told my student they didn’t have to say it because I understood. You know, Jehovah Witnesses don’t make pledges. And the student said, you know? And I said, yes, I was raised Jehovah Witness and it made the student feel better. But then I had someone come in and say, “they need to be saying the pledge, why aren’t they saying the pledge?” The school feels people should be compelled to pledge.

Another thing is when they go to music and all the music is Christian or about things they don’t believe in. And I ask them what are they studying about the specific song, is it in a historical context or what? But the student did not feel comfortable, you know, because they’re old enough to understand their religion, so they know it’s not what they believe. So I ask if they want to stay with me instead of go to music and so I let them sit in my classroom.

In my classroom there is diversity in ethnicity, gender, socio-economics; the school also as well.

So I think that where the borders are, we service children who are transient who live in the hotels, we see people who are professionals, it’s pretty diverse. I have students who speak Spanish, I have students who live in hotels and children who live in homes.

I think it impacts the learning environment because not everyone is aware of how to meet the needs of certain children.

You know, we talk a lot about “they don’t do this, they don’t do that.” When we may not be aware of why they can’t do that or why they can’t do their homework, what’s going on, you know. We had a situation with two students, who really didn’t do their homework much and we was getting on to them and come to find out, I think it was the month before that they had moved into the hotels [extended stay lodge] and the parents didn’t tell the teachers and they were just sneaking off after walkers and hiding in the bushes and walking down to the hotels, so the month before they had moved. So I think there’s a lot more going on with our kids sometimes than we realize.

That, you know, it’s not just Mom and Dad at home, someone to help them with their homework, like what, you know, mostly happens in middle class environments.
And even like, how important snack time is. Some days I am like, why, why are we running towards snack? Well for some of them, that’s the only time they get something extra throughout the course of the day, so.

I purposely try to incorporate them into my lessons, like their names or certain things I know about their cultures.

Um, like we have the one student who just arrived from Mexico and I try to connect with him, speak Spanish when I can so he can understand what we’re talking about or asking him to teach me Spanish to let him know that it’s valued that he has a difference and that it’s okay.

But also, like I think like when I’m doing like homework and I want computer homework, I kind of just don’t, I say if you don’t have computer access after school internet or your parents don’t let you use their computer, here are the times that my classroom’s available or I get here at 7:15, so if you need help with your homework, you need to come in.

So, not singling anyone out, just letting them know that there are ways you can get around whatever situation is occurring in your household.

People need to be aware of hidden biases, then you can come in and accept people who are different.

You know one thing I cannot stand is this whole “God bless ‘em” mentality . . . it’s like saying the child is never going to get it. You are limiting the child when you say “bless their heart” because what is really being said is they can’t do it.

It helps to have more information on how different cultures practice. For instance, you just can’t put a Hispanic male and female in the same small group because females are taught at home to be subservient to males.

African male students must like their teacher first, they won’t listen to you until they know if they like you or not.

Understanding different cultures is so important to creating an inclusive learning environment.

Engagement is key. Teachers need to be shown how to engage students.

You know, the district does this class on Ruby Payne [teaching students in poverty] in the summer for teachers but it really is inadequate. It talks about the class system and how upper level and lower classes interact. Something we did in New York, which I really like better is *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*; it was my summer read last year. It is so powerful!
We have to target the whole child, there’s this academic focus but no connection to the social and emotional aspects. We have to “reach them to teach them”

We need community resources to help students.

You know, when we found out the story of a couple of our students and their living arrangement, we were able to understand them better and turn them around academically.

One of the things that I try to do is, is, especially because the class is inclusion, I try to include them in as much as what their curriculum states is what is for that particular grade level.

I know that they say you gotta show ‘em, you got to show ‘em, so I teach them as if they’re on that grade level and I just fill in the little points that they are missing.

So, as being a part of that classroom, they go through the same thing.

I don’t, when some of the stuff, I’ll pull it when it gets a little bit above their head but for the most part we are right in the class room and I see them one on one in the regular classroom.

They are made to feel a part of the class like everyone else.

Over the years I have seen it a couple of times but for the most part if you have, like, a general ed teacher that sees special ed as different then you know you got, there’s going to be some tensions because they see special ed [students] as different.

They want to sit them [special ed students] all in one spot, they want to sit them away from the rest of the kids.

They want to, um, they don’t call on them to answer the questions, they don’t put them in there at all. It has to be, I think the variable would be that particular teacher.

When I first started out in this [teaching special ed] I saw it [exclusion practices] more than I do now. Inclusion [classrooms] has been around for a bit now, so.

When I first started out, I had the teachers who had been doing stuff their way for 30, 35 years and they didn’t want anything to change.

I had established at this point in time, you know how, how inclusion works.

It’s gotten better, though, it’s gotten better.

I’ve been with a teacher, you know, it was early in my career, like my first or second year.

So she wanted to treat me like I was one of the special ed students and you know, you have to tell them, you know,
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<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4, 5, 8, 12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>This is the new way it’s going, so you can get on board or move one.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>There are some teachers that help you understand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15, 16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>You know, especially being a special ed teacher and I came out of the military, where it is different.</td>
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<td>22, 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Being a male teacher, the female teachers have taught me compassion; they’ve helped me in this female dominated society we have here in this school system, they shown me, I guess, how to be more compassionate.</td>
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<td>8, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>As far as the discriminated part, it can just be any kid, it doesn’t even have to be my kid [special ed student], it can be any kid and if the kid is giving them trouble they want to call the male. “Hey, can you come and get him?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>8, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Like when I was in, when I first started out and I had to take the class to restrain students, even though they [female teachers] had the restraining class too, they would call me to come and get the kid.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>You know, and have me restrain the kid and whatever.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>So I saw that when I first started out. Any time there were any fights, they would call me to diffuse the fight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8, 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>It was the principal, at the first school where I went to, and three or four other advisors who were male but they tended to call me first.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15, 22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>When I was in the military I had the opportunity to be a recruiter and went to the school systems. I would talk to the kids and I even had the opportunity to talk to elementary school students, I talked to college students, I talked to high school, middle school. I got a chance to interact with a lot of kids in our schools so when I came out, getting ready to come out [of the military], I was trying to see, I was taking classes, I was just taking classes! I had a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and I was thinking I wanted to do something, like I could use my Business degree to teach business classes. That was my first thought but I had a professor what taught classes with the college but also taught elementary school special ed and when he invited us over to his school, you know, one day come by. He had one, a couple of his students, the joy, and he had profound [intellectually disabled] students and when I saw the joy in their face when he talked to them and interacted with them.</td>
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| 15, 22 | 2 | When I saw that, I was like “Wow!” that’s pretty good, I like that! When I saw the difference he made in their lives and stuff. I wanted to do something where I could give
back, you know, to the community but I wanted to do something in that field, special ed.

| 22, 24 | 2, 4 | The more I got into it, special ed. In special ed, people think it can be really difficult but I’ve love every minute of it. You see a lot of kids who are special and you get that, “Umph!” They got that something special, and it keeps bringing me back. |
| 6, 7, 24, 22 | 4 | There’s this one kid I will never forget. I tell this story all the time. His parents wanted to bring him to the school but they were hesitant about it. The son had some things going on, serious things, he was a head banger, chair thrower, highly disruptive. He was in a middle school EBD program. When his parents showed up to observe my class, I asked if I could meet their son and spend some one-on-one time. They agreed and I walked him around the school campus on a tour while I talked to him a bit to get to know him. |
| 22, 24, 6, 7 | 4 | He just needed a “place”, you know what I mean, “a place”, he needed a place. The parents saw that the students in the class were all sitting in their desks, working and on task. They decided to let their son join my class. He stayed with me for four years; one extra year because his parents weren’t ready for him to go to high school. So, anyway, when he got ready to graduate [high school], his parents sent me an invitation for his graduation. Later, I asked his parents for a letter of recommendation for this job I was trying to get and his mom wrote not just a letter of recommendation, but a personal letter. I take that letter out and read it every now and then. It reminds me of why I do what I do. |
| 4, 8, 9, 10 | 2, | I have been in job situations that require you to work with all different races, sexes, and nationalities. It was imperative that everyone worked together to achieve the goal. But I have also had to deal with people that didn't want to work together because of certain biases. These experiences have impacted me greatly, in which I could have easily went in one direction, but ended up in another. |
| 4, 22 | 2 | They've even impacted my conception of what education should be for different children. They also impacted how I looked at my own education and how I will achieve it. I was afforded the opportunity to participate in and complete an education that I was not supposed to complete. I had some teachers that wanted to see me succeed and paved a way in order for me to travel to the point that |
| 21, 25 | 5, 1 | When you have diversity in the school system, there is a
<p>| | | |</p>
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<td>less chance of it being one-sided.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>My child went to a school that did not cater much to my child's kind and things were drastically disturbing for them. Luckily, there were one or two teachers that helped to ensure their success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 8, 9, 26, 25, 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Understand that each child is different and each child has different issues they are dealing with. Teach them to understand that environments change and children change, behaviors change and they need to change with them. I think they need to know that children who feel that their teachers who have nothing in common with them, or do not understand them, may be less likely to engage and stay focused in learning and more likely to eventually drop out. They should know that a diverse teaching staff represents male and female, with and without disabilities, and different ethnic groups, is highly important. I think they need to be given opportunities for continuing professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 10, 25</td>
<td>2, 5</td>
<td>In America people are sometimes treated differently because of their skin color. This was not an issue for me as I was growing up, but became an issue when I, a white female, went to live in a predominantly black culture. The roles were reversed and I was treated differently because of the color of my skin. This opened my eyes to the issue of diversity and the need for everyone to be treated equally no matter what. While in this culture, I was able to see people through the eyes of my children. They were 1 and 4 years old at the time. They saw people and did not classify them as black or white. They saw them all as people who happened to be black, dark brown, brown, tan, or peach. Seeing things through a child's eyes is always eye opening. The previous experiences, plus many others have influenced my beliefs regarding diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25, 26</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>We need to see that all people are different and unique in their own ways, but we should not treat them any differently because of that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25, 26</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>We should allow ourselves to learn from these differences and strive to treat everyone as equals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11, 13, 14, 19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>When I met my class for the first time, I do not see them and classify them according to their diversity, I saw them all as children that need to learn and grow both physically and academically and it was my job to learn the diversity of my classroom and meet them where they are in order to bring them to where they need to be.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11, 13, 14, 19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can only speak for my classroom on this issue. In my classroom we do not see students and categorize them by their academic level, behavior, special services or even the color of their skin. We see them as children and we stress that we are all the same and need to be encouraged and loved for who we are. Every student is special and is treated special. All children are different, but they do not deserve to be treated differently because of their diversity.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>Diversity is what makes life interesting and we can all learn from each other.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Diversity training was not offered.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Well coming from a different state I feel that my previous experience has more diversity than my current experience. There were students from different ethnicities. They had completely different backgrounds but the students seemed to embrace each other’s differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Just making people aware that we are all very different and showing that that is okay.</td>
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<td>10, 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Having people from different cultures sharing things. I did not volunteer; I was placed on the committee.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>My students come from similar backgrounds and seem to struggle with understanding that we are all diverse.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Everyone learns different for any number of reasons so just taking that into consideration when designing lesson plans.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I have taken a diversity professional development class and it just discussed different learning styles and cultural differences in respect to learning and response to authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Just always taking into account how diverse each student is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ethnicity, background, learning style, household.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>All of these things play a role in our kids’ diverse backgrounds.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>It should be more detailed. I was just handed a folder and told to do an activity once a month.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Diversity chairperson at every school I’ve taught.</td>
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<td>22, 26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is effective because I feel I was making a difference by educating other teachers about the importance of being culturally sound.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being able to present at diversity workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Working at various schools and seeing how teachers react to various cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Minimal impact.</td>
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<td>22, 26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>As I am part of a committee that is moving district to the awareness for the need to educate educators about the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Significant support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Seeing teacher react to certain race of students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact is minimally effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>We have to get the school administration to buy in to what we are trying to implement.</td>
</tr>
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<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>National conferences on diversity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None I have been the professional trainer myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>3, 5</td>
<td>You have to know me to teach me. Teachers have to know how to reach every child on that class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Overall well-being of each student.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact is highly effective; I know this from the feedback that is given after my presentations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact is highly effective</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A significant experience would be my first year in the county. The school that I was working at had two African American teachers for the first time in their existence. Parents called the school to transfer their child in and out of my classroom based on my ethnicity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26, 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is important for schools to have a diverse staff, and a staff that is reflective of the community in which it serves.</td>
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<td>5, 26</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>The culture of the school must also be inviting to people of varied ethnicity, race, gender, and religious affiliation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26, 23, 21</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>I joined the diversity community because it is paramount the educators be aware of cultural differences that can impact student achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Educators also need to be aware of their own hidden bias.</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Additionally, educators need to be aware of the nuances that impact different cultural groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 8</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>I think my success has been limited to my students, and those that are open minded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 8</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>A lot of individuals still are not open to listening and adjusting their thinking and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7, 24</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
<td>Children that are unresponsive and seem uncaring have made dramatic changes if you show you care about what makes them special.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7, 24</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
<td>I have been to various religious functions from different denominations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7, 8, 24</td>
<td>3, 4, 5</td>
<td>I also make it a point to ask questions and learn about their culture and or their language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7, 8, 24</td>
<td>3, 4, 5</td>
<td>I try to learn salutations and other sayings in their native language and use them whole class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Minimal impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I feel the impact is minimal because working in the bible belt individuals feel that it their right to encroach on other religions, atheist, or those who are agnostic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Too many programs involve Christian music and religious over tones.

Significant support.

I feel that the level of support could be significantly better.

I personally feel that many think they are inclusive, but they are not.

I have led many diversity and inclusiveness programs. One of my Master's is in Urban and Multicultural Education with a concentration in inclusion.

It is important to know what hidden biases you may have.

It is also important to know that different things are valued or shown differently in communities as well as groups.

It is also important to know how finances can change one's outlook as a member of a group.

It needs to be part of teacher certification programs as well as pre-service.

Diversity training was not offered.

Lack of understanding directly effects a student’s motivation and engagement.

A significant experience that I have had with diversity and inclusiveness personally is my being the first African American teacher on a segregated campus both as a child in 3rd grade and an adult teacher. As a child I was selected to be bussed to another school. The campus was very beautiful with trees and the students and teachers were very kind and friendly and helped me to feel welcomed.

However, I was an adult on a campus in Texas as their only African American teacher and although the teachers and students seemed welcoming and inclusive, the parents did not take so well. In one instance during a parent contact there was complete silence on the other end from the parent and not a sound just a hang up. Also, I heard whisperings about not needing to listen to that “N” word teacher.

As a result of my experience in these diverse settings throughout my life, I have made it a personal mission to make both my students and my co-workers especially those new to our school to feel welcomed and important.

Often, I reach out to the child that is the only one from his/her ethnic group and make sure that the other students include them in their groups for discussion times and projects.

Our school is a diverse with students that speak other
languages and are from various religious groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Paragraph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7, 12, 23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>We make sure that our instruction always includes cultural diversity and the validation of celebrations by including other languages in our song selections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>5, 3</td>
<td>Since I am bilingual I make it a point to speak to students in their native language with simple greeting and ask them how to say hello, thank you, etc. and ways holidays are celebrated in their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 6, 24</td>
<td>3, 2</td>
<td>I have learned so much from my students over the years and always reaching out to children who are in foster care since part of my life was spent in such settings after the death of my aunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7, 26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Music is a great communicator of emotions and a positive way to influence our schools culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7, 26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>We have had multi-cultural festivals and participate in community events that celebrate our diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 15, 16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A significant event that led to my desire to volunteer on the diversity committee is my experience of living in Europe with a German family and wanting to share in building positive relationships across ethnic lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 15, 16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My voice teacher in college was Jewish and she spoke German and would talk about her experience from here family having to flee because of the Nazi hate crimes against the Jews. Her level of compassion was something I never forgot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 15, 16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Being a Fulbright scholar I meet students from all over the world and remember fondly my piano accompanist from Romania and his kindness when I shared music from Negro spirituals of which he had never heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 15, 16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My foreign language teachers were both from Europe and introduced me to some unique celebrations and foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 12, 22, 18, 24, 5</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>My greatest success has been the collaboration of my colleagues helping to submit video entries to nationally recognized organizations that featured our students’ performances. Our video were selected and broadcast nationwide. The selection was in Spanish and helped improve recruitment of many of my Hispanic families. When families saw their children perform in their native language both on live television and online it helped validate their importance in our community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 22</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>Another instance of success is during the various cultural units that feature folk songs from the native culture of students from Haiti, Thailand, various regions of Africa, Spain and Europe countries of origin for our students. The dances and authentic input have helped create a special bond between our school and learning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7, 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is important to me that we allow students to feel validated and have something to offer that helps connect us relationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>We have shown how our diversity is a big plus for our school because our teachers genuinely care enough about students to get personally involved in their lives beyond the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>While serving on the Diversity Committee we have used our spotlight on culture bulletin board and children's literature help to bridge the gap between our understanding of how our background positively impacts each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Our staff is more like an extended family in how we care for each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Our families also know that if anyone is in need we rally around them to help face personal tragedies and embrace going to sporting events, Quinceañeras, funerals, weddings, graduations because of how we have made them feel a part of included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Significant impact. I feel more impactful in my role as an educator or administrator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15, 16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>My diverse background and having been part of a military family where often other military people were your only family overseas and working in various school systems throughout my 34 year career has provided me with a greater insight on how it feels to be an outsider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 8, 10</td>
<td>2, 5</td>
<td>Early in my teaching I worked in a very affluent school district, as my career progressed I learned that every school has its culture and you need to make your relationships with everyone be positive bridges between cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Poverty is not an indicator of the level of success students can achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Students and staff thrive where their input is validated and appreciated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 8, 10, 20, 22</td>
<td>2, 3, 5</td>
<td>Having a both side of the tracks view helped me to see what works best for each student is not limited to ethnicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23, 6, 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Empowering students with the proper tools for success becomes more of a passion when you learn that you can make a difference because of your rapport and level of trust established that is maintained over the years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Once you realize that you just may be that one person that is able to convince a coworker to stay the course through a</td>
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</table>
tough school year because you cared enough to listen and support them.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Believing in each other and keeping a win-win attitude can be the thing that building the strongest connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Significant support; our administrators and colleagues are highly supportive of improving diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>AISD values diversity enough to have a county wide investment in improving levels of inclusiveness in hiring a wide range of ethnic groups and has made significant improvements in helping the staff to reflect our ever changing communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>When we have community performances that feature various languages and cultures they are in attendance on weekends, late evenings and also led support by helping with costumes, stage decorations and soliciting our community partners to bridge the gap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This is reflected in sponsorships of students, which students get to participate always shows their heart for inclusiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Our school district is highly effective in reaching out to make all our parents and teachers feel included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>From the diversity of board members, staff and our student demographics it is evident that there is a higher level of sensitivity to how we show our heart for diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Committee members on the district level often visit our campuses and share openly how rewarding it is to get to be an integral part of the success of our school districts positive image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>This is also reflected on our district website with featured articles and news feeds that highlight the best example of our inclusiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Although my pre-service educator training was limited, over time as I became interested in ELL endorsement and was awarded and enhancement grant slot for bilingual education, those Multi-cultural courses were very in-depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Our committee has explored various topics and used a variety of strategies to engage in sharing the importance of diversity. We have done book studies, role-playing and scenario evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>For the most part our presentations have raised awareness of the need to be more effective in our diversity and levels of inclusiveness as we interact both personally and professionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pre-service and new teachers need to know that all students have something to bring to the table. Our society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
needs them to [accept all students].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Diversity training could be improved for experience educators by helping them to see their hidden prejudices and middle-class value system as something to overcome to change their mind-set.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Skin color and socioeconomic should not be a hindrance to their willingness to teach all to achieve greatness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moderately effective; the level of pre-service education was limited during my early education but improved over time as the swing toward more diverse campuses began to be more common.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 3, 25, 22, 26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Highly effective; as a member of the staff meeting training it is my belief that it has changed the hearts of many to begin to think outside the box as it were by getting to erode stereotypes. Our video presentations and discussion have led to a greater awareness of the positive effect of diversity on us as a staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>