

The space between: How an English Department supports a school's diversity mission.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Robert and Shirley Conner for their never-ending faith in me; to Leja Wright, for your love and support; to Indigo Conner and Jade Langston for being two of the best kids ever; and to Karen Hagen whose spirit sits next to me daily.

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“Without community, there is no liberation.”

— Audre Lorde

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This bundle of paper has been a long time in the making.

University of Washington

**Abstract**

The space between: How an English department supports a school's diversity mission.

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The purpose of this study was to examine how an academic department at Cardinal Academy, an independent school, supported the diversity mission of the school through instruction. The study looked at multiple types of diversity, including learning styles, socio-economic status, gender(s), and family structures. Surveys, interviews, and observations with three teachers in the English Department determined the ways in which their instruction supported the diversity mission of the school by using a conceptual framework rooted in culturally responsive pedagogy. The study also examined factors in effective teaching generally and literacy instruction specifically, in order to develop a more comprehensive profile of teaching to and through diversity. Results from the surveys, interviews, and observations revealed four major categories: responsive

environments; student centered and teacher access; relationships; and impacts of world views. Within these four themes, three strategies of instruction that were key to supporting and implementing a diversity mission were apparent. Teachers who provided multiple opportunities to create relationships that were meaningful were able to create bonds that helped facilitate instruction. These teachers provided a space in which students seemed comfortable and appeared to feel ownership. Another strategy that supported the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy was teachers allowing students to be experts in learning. This provided students with a variety of opportunities to share their varied perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of course materials. Adjusted instruction was the final strategy that supported the diversity mission because it allowed teachers to work with students emotionally, socially, culturally, and academically. These three strategies can be powerful tools in supporting diversity missions of independent schools. They expand classroom instruction and the efforts of schools to actualize their missions.

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## Chapter I

### **Introduction to the Study**

As a secondary English teacher who was in the role of Director of Diversity I became intrigued by classroom teachers and how they take responsibility for promoting diversity through course materials and student experiences. The most robust environment for that is through literary coursework and so this study looked at three literary teachers at Cardinal Academy, their characteristics and approaches and qualitative outcomes associated with each.

Cardinal Academy is a private school located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood and is situated between booming businesses and a private university. The school's administrators describe it as an urban campus that operates out of five buildings within a one-block radius; it consists of middle and upper schools, which house 240 and 415 students, respectively. As the school grew in size and prestige, it became increasingly important to determine if the diversity mission was being attended to through support roles and within the curricula of the school, and, if so, how. Part of the mission of the school states:

We prepare our students to participate effectively in modern society. We, therefore, seek a diversified student body and faculty. We offer a demanding college-preparatory curriculum integrating the arts and emphasizing a global perspective. We utilize the resources of our urban environment to extend our classrooms, to enhance our programs, and to engage our students in public service. Most of all, we seek to graduate motivated young men and women of talent and integrity who are prepared to contribute productively to a changing world.

To this author, as teacher and the Director of Diversity at the time the research was conducted, it seemed important that this mission, definitions of the language it contains, and Cardinal Academy's most current goals of diversity should be in alignment with the

instruction that is provided. The school's board, administrative leadership and faculty and staff believe that a diverse community is essential to quality education. The Board of Trustees defined diversity for the school community as including and embracing a "spectrum of differences in learning style, race, color, creed, ethnic and national origin, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, and life experience" (Diversity Section, 2011 Self Study, para. 2). There has been an increase in the total number of students in the upper school over the past four years and an increase of diversity in areas of socio-economics, race, ethnicity, and learning styles. The Director of Diversity promotes a line of inquiry that examines the ways in which teachers in different departments advance both the diversity and general mission of the school, and the ways in which these intentions have been translated into successful instructional actions over time. This research project investigated how a school and some of its teachers supported the diversity mission, and the extent to which the English Department addressed difference in classroom interactions.

### **Educator's Role in Promoting Equity and Social Justice**

In order to create social justice and equitable classrooms, teachers need to be able to motivate and engage all students and create more relevant curricula for the entire student population, versus models built on a one-size-fits-all approach to learning absent of individual experiences (Alvermann, 2001; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Ruddell (1999) called these educators meaning negotiators. Meaning makers move literacy instruction beyond skills and reader response and create a learning environment that allows students to engage their prior beliefs, experiences, and knowledge, which are often influenced by the text, the task given, and sociocultural significance (Ruddell, 1999). Hirsch (1987) claimed that the function of literacy is to make those who engage in literacy acts masters of knowledge and communication.

Secondary English teachers spend approximately 82% of in-class time discussing literary text; it is therefore important for them to address content and context in a manner that is accessible to all students (Stotsky, 2010). Greene (1978), Banks (2001) and Ladson-Billings (1992) explained that teaching on multiple levels, including personal and cultural, improves the motivation and engagement of diverse students, student-teacher relationships, and academic performance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Postmodern constructivist educational theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. This theoretical framework views educational experiences as existing within the context of social interactions, where teachers connect the personal experiences and understandings of their students with the information and skills those students need to learn as defined by the curriculum (Newton, 2004). There are, however, some contradictions and barriers between this theoretical basis and the actual practice of it in a classroom setting. These contradictions were explored by examining actual teaching practices, and how they respond to and support student diversity, motivation, and the mission of the school within the conceptual context of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is viewed as an aspect of postmodern educational theory because it aligns with Newton's (2004) four characteristics of postmodernism. According to Newton, postmodernism seeks to go beyond modernist thinking; attempts to recover suppressed viewpoints, the suppression of which is used as a form of control; considers truth claims as perspectives influenced by culture, ethnicity, race, religion, and geography; and pursues approaches to text interpretation as an interaction between text and reader.

Culturally responsive teaching, also identified in educational scholarship as culturally responsible pedagogy (Huber, 1991), culturally appropriate pedagogy (Tiedt, 1995; Jurich &

Vandergriff, 2007), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), uses the cultural knowledge, experiences, and learning styles of diverse cultures to make learning more meaningful and effective for ethnically, racially, culturally, and socially pluralistic student populations. It is based on the idea that students can have richer and more successful educational experiences in the classroom when teachers acknowledge their cultures, identities, and experiences as being important, and allow students to participate in constructing knowledge or context around the literature presented in coursework/curriculum (Gay, 2010).

In developing the conceptual framework to explore how teachers exemplify the diversity statement of Cardinal Academy, themes of cultural relevance and responsiveness as articulated by Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009) and Gay (1994, 2010) were used. Pertinent themes included identity and motivation, developmental appropriateness, knowledge construction, in-school relationships, and teaching the whole child. These characteristics of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness framed the researcher's consideration and analysis of the components of instruction that supported students' learning and the diversity mission of the school during the research period. The use of culturally responsive teaching as a theoretical framework for this research allowed multiple facets of teaching to be examined as they pertained to the school's diversity mission.

Because there is no neutral position to validate, the postmodern constructivist framework of culturally responsive teaching, which allows a researcher to critically explore social dimensions of practice and to take into consideration subjective content, was also employed by this researcher (Howe & Moses, 1999). Application of culturally responsive teaching was also aligned with the mission of the school, in seeking to support students in their academic settings and to integrate aspects of their identities into a school community, offering another strength to its use in this research.

Gay (2010) contended that culturally responsive teaching is effective teaching because it bridges home and school experiences, acknowledges student heritages, and uses a variety of instruction strategies towards a more individually congruent/relevant approach to education. Culturally responsive teaching is also comprehensive in that it teaches the whole child, beyond developmental staging, and is focused on cultivating multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory learning experiences (Gay 2010). Ideally, culturally responsive teaching reflects the social realities of students' lives, and possibilities for change by incorporating concepts of cultural diversity, human/civil rights, and gender and racial equity as relevant to the student developmentally, and the curriculum (Banks 1986; Gollnick & Chinn, 2012).

### **Statement of Problem**

Culturally responsive teaching is particularly difficult for teachers who work in independent schools that represent racially and culturally homogenous student populations, but who may differ in learning styles. While independent school teachers may have more autonomy than teachers in public education, this autonomy does not mean their text choice or praxis is conducted in a manner that is what Kumashiro (2000) called anti-oppressive. Anti-oppressive teaching works against placing the "other" in opposition to what is considered "normal," encourages students to view the world from multiple perspectives, and expects them to participate and excel in learning. Thus, autonomy in this context presents the opportunity for independent teachers not to engage in culturally relevant teaching, and a school's culture may also complicate their efforts to do so. For this reason, teachers' pedagogical styles become key factors in implementing the mission of a school as it pertains to culturally relevant teaching. If teachers are working towards an inclusive environment in

their classrooms, their practice must be viewed critically in order to positively impact student academic and social success.

While culturally responsive teaching is important in all educational settings, a lack of this approach in a predominately White, wealthy, school community does a disservice to both students from diverse cultures and those from the dominant cultures that make up the majority of these schools' student body. Students who come from different cultural backgrounds, have learning style differences, or who struggle with academic and/or social issues are not supported by classroom practices if teachers are not responsive to their individual identities, while culturally relevant teaching styles are attuned and inclusive of these factors.

Within most educational programs, whether private or public, inclusion is a key diversity mission component; therefore, teachers should not separate understanding and social context from the goals of their classes and departments. If the academic departments of the school, as represented by individual teachers in classrooms, are not actively promoting the diversity mission of the school, this is an indicator that a core community value, as defined by the school's leadership, is not being honored and that there is a disconnect between policy and instructional practice.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study was designed to examine the extent to which the praxis of teachers in an academic department at an independent school adhered to that school's diversity mission statement, which extended beyond race and ethnicity. It explored the way in which teachers approached multiple types of diversity, which included learning styles, socio-economic status, gender(s), and family structures. The units of analysis were English teachers at Cardinal Academy, and their efforts to approach diversity as a means to improve instructional practice and enhance student learning.

The notion that institutions with predominantly White student populations do not need culturally responsive teaching for and about diversity is pervasive, since most of the students, teachers, and administrators come from similar ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. This study examined instructional practices in a context that benefited students from both dominant and non-dominant populations. It explored the ways in which English Department teachers implemented connections between the general and diversity missions of the school, and how the student and adult populations who made up the school community affected the implementation of the mission in that they were largely members of the dominant culture. As Watt (2003) suggested, teachers are less inclined to do more in the classroom than what most schools require. This contention was the impetus for examining the ways in which culturally responsive teaching appeared in an outwardly homogenous population, and if effective teaching routinely addressed the multiple identities of students. Through addressing diversity in instructional practice, the researcher hoped to render aspects of teaching that work well and those that are less effective.

Many of the diversity research projects conducted by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) focused on recruiting diversity directors and retaining people of color on faculties and among student populations. Conversely, its research on curriculum and instruction often attended to learning styles instead of broad conceptions of diversity as outlined in Cardinal Academy's mission statement. Furthermore, broader bodies of research attended to diversity through specific lenses. For example, Olsen and Land (2007) studied English language learners, and focused on the professional development of the teachers while Lee (1999) examined African Americans and scaffolding literary practice. Other researchers (Au, 1993; Moll, 2000; Rivera & Zehler, 1991) also focused on students of color but frequently within public rather than private schools. Examining broad-based perceptions of

diversity within an independent school was meant to expand these discussions about culturally responsive teaching. The aim of this study was to investigate the ways in which related educational missions are deliberately supported through instruction in institutions to which students and families apply and at which they often pay to attend. Independent schools have a distinct application process and tuition, and their members are seeking a specific educational experience. Therefore, when these institutions have mission statements that endorse diversity, those statements should be explicitly evident in classroom instruction.

### **Formulating the Research Questions**

This study sought to answer how teachers in the English Department of an independent private school use culturally responsive teaching to implement the diversity and general missions of the school? This research question was broad and was supplemented with specific and related research questions that sought to look at the strategies teachers used in the classroom, and because the study was examining support of a diversity mission, thought it important to look at culturally responsive teaching and where not present effective teaching.

These questions were examined in terms of how they complimented the primary research question. The first and second questions speak to *developmental appropriateness* and *knowledge construction*; they help identify strategies that are effective in the classroom. This line of questioning corresponds with culturally responsive pedagogy in terms of recognizing students' social contexts as well as how teachers work against them. The second question addresses *content integration* and *knowledge construction*; it focuses on choices teachers make in regard to student diversity and how teachers' interactions with students affect instruction. The third questions attend to *identity, motivation, and in-school relationships* by addressing ways in which student identities and teacher perceptions help

shape instructional and learning engagement. These questions speak to providing counter narratives.

### Summary

This chapter outlined the purpose of this study, which was to explore what strategies are present and necessary in supporting and implementing the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy. It also delineated the study's research questions and supplied background on diversity work and the challenges to that work in independent schools.

In the chapters that follow, sequentially: the theoretical framework is explained; a limited review of relevant literature is presented; the results are summarized; the findings of the study are discussed, along with limitations; and recommendations are presented.

## Chapter II

### Selected Review of Related Research and Scholarship

Across the United States, independent schools are striving to become more representative of broad-based diversity (NAIS, 2010). This focus on diversity has forced schools to begin to look at how they define diversity, and how that diversity is supported in the day-to-day business of their institutions (Banks, 2015). One challenge is the tendency of schools to limit diversity to local representation (Banks, 2015). Diversity work in independent schools should not only be about student and staff demographic statistics; it should be about how an institution supports those who are present in the school and in the community, which is an issue of equity (Banks, 2015).

Hall and Stevenson (2007) conducted a study that focused on five diversity practitioners in independent schools. According to their findings, the principles of equity and justice issued by the NAIS in 2012 have not been addressed sufficiently in independent schools. Furthermore, their findings indicate that the role of Diversity Coordinator or Director of Diversity in independent schools is often a tokenized position. Work associated with these diversity practitioner roles often challenges the dominant culture of the school, and is done in isolation from the routine work of teachers and administrators. The latter is an especially critical oversight because administrators and teachers shape and support school culture, and thus diversity efforts (Hall & Stevenson, 2007).

Independent schools are distinguished by their demographics, as well as by being fiscally autonomous. Because of this, the responsibility of following the guiding missions of the school rests solely on the institution and its administrators. There are challenges associated with this self-directed assessment process in terms of its applicability to assessing diversity efforts (Oates, 1981; Parkman, 1963). Independent schools receive external review through

accreditation processes every seven years. The NAIS (2010, n.p.) accreditation materials state that “the self-study is evaluative as well as descriptive, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and assesses both the school’s compliance with standards and the congruence between its program and mission.” Within this process, the work of inclusivity and diversity has only recently shifted from being integrated throughout all aspects of accreditation and self-assessment, to being placed in a separately identified part of the school’s self-study assessment (NAIS, 2010). That is, that diversity efforts at independent schools were only recently measured on their own merits versus adjunctive components. Congruent with this, Lewis’s and Wanner’s (1979) findings suggest that independent school education reinforces the dominant society culture by sustaining upper middle class and upper class values. Adkins (2008) suggested that defining diversity for a specific community is essential. In doing so, efforts must be undertaken to ensure that the diversity represented includes support for students. The dangers of any diversity work, however, is that in small communities, such as independent schools, with homogenous educators there is a tendency to assume that all students have the same point of view as those who create and direct the community. Equity pedagogy removes this danger by ensuring that teachers recognize participants in the community as individuals, as opposed to solely viewing them as members of groups (Banks, 2015). Glasgow (2013) recognized that teaching in independent schools has advantages, which include class size, student/teacher relationships, and autonomy within the subject areas. While these advantages are substantial enough to keep many teachers engaged in their work, the disadvantage is that the school population often does not reflect diversity efforts.

### **Diversity in Educational Systems**

Baez (2000) implied that the work of diversity often includes contradictions that undermine the attainment of social justice. He explained that because diversity is often ill

defined, it allows institutions to focus on external factors, such as demographic data, without looking at much-needed changes within instructional dynamics. According to Baez (2000) recent studies “provide proof of what educators already knew intuitively from personal experience that diversity has educational value” (p. 46). While educators may intuitively know that diversity has value, they may not know how to capitalize on it in instructional strategies. This pushes diversity work into new areas where the focus is no longer on “why diversity is important, but on how it is important” (Baez, 2000, p. 45).

Faist (2012) suggested that diversity is front loaded with attributed meanings. Therefore, the way in which it is perceived and evaluated is often attached to cultural differences that are subjective within the organization. Diversity is “constructed by social agents by drawing demarcation lines between classifications with social meanings” (Faist, 2012 p. 300). Thus, a diverse population allows social agents to recognize the social mechanisms, or the recurring processes and pathways used in the classroom, to blur boundaries, or to shift boundaries (Faist, 2012).

Until recently, most diversity initiatives have focused on organizational change as they impact individuals. Faist (2012) contended that if educators are to go beyond organizational structure, and begin to affect individuals within the organizations, diversity discourse must bring marginalized groups into the conversation on all levels. Although diversity is often conceptualized and instigated by individuals removed from local sites of practice, the onus of implementation lies with those who are most familiar with the inside social mechanisms, such as instructors in educational settings (Faist, 2012). Historical efforts to recognize diverse populations at schools have been surface-level in part because schools must appear to accommodate diverse beliefs, values, and orientations in order to serve these populations (Levin, 2008).

## Challenges to Diversity in Educational Settings

Hanna (1994) explored the complications that diversity work presents. While she recognized the necessity of more diversity initiatives, she acknowledged that these become problematic when the various roles people play shift among multiple identities. She explained that,

Student-teacher and student-student misunderstandings and confrontations are, of course, common; cultural diversity complicates (and may increase and/or magnify) some types of academic and social problems because of the clash of attitudes, values, and behavior. Such cross-cultural misunderstandings and different behavior patterns reinforce existing prejudices against minorities and majorities. Misunderstanding and dislike of different behavior may also alienate individuals and groups and foster the inability to develop trust and rapport (Hanna, 1994, p. 73).

Hanna (1994) also noted that challenges to supporting diversity stem from unintended offenses, debates about cultural property, socioeconomic mobility, lack of evidence that equity pedagogies work, and cultural variations. But she did not fully explore the importance of addressing these problems through curriculum and instruction. The notion that equity pedagogies do not work based on Hanna's findings (1994), stem from an inability to recognize that they may work best in classroom environments that manifest diversity-support strategies regularly and consistently (Greenberg & Schaffer, 1991). According to Greenberg and Schaffer (1991) educational equitable environments should include the following components:

- Multicultural curricula and material
- An inclusive climate emotionally, academically, and visually
- Range of instructional strategies to meet various learning styles

- Use of outside resources from various communities
- Extra curricula activities that support the formal curriculum and provide new experiences through a multicultural lens
- Recognition of multiple intelligences
- Active outreach and involvement of all parents

Taylor, Fitz, and Gorard (2005) suggested that two issues of equity are important to the implementation of diversity strategies. The first is that diversity practitioners and teachers must make sure the impact on educational standards affects all students and groups. The second, while closely related, has complications. With an increase in diversity, schools must be careful not to employ practices that may increase segregation of students from different backgrounds. Taylor, Fitz, and Gorard (2005) cautioned that: “Not only does the increasing or decreasing segregation of children from different social backgrounds have a direct influence upon the relative performance of schools as measured by public examination results, it also has important impacts on social mobility, citizenship, and social exclusion/inclusion” (p. 57). Afolayan (1992) recognized that the implementation of diversity initiatives and missions in school settings is difficult, but that it must be done. He explained that

Education is a continuous process of learning those useful skills through which a human being can function successfully. Those skills must include learning how to respect, appreciate, and understand the similarities and differences embedded in human existence. Therefore, the curriculum must be effective and valid so that it brings the past, present, and the future together while relating to real, human experiences with which teachers and students can identify. (p. 24)

## **Relationships Between Text Analysis, Diversity and Effective Teaching**

Researchers have indicated that students who are taught from perspectives that engage them using texts as cultural artifacts (Lee, 2007; Boykin, 1986), and students who are treated as holders of culturally valued knowledge (Hollins, 1996), are more likely to perform better academically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Banks (1997) asserted that current textbooks need to include more accurate depictions of history. Literary texts chosen by independent school educators can reflect accurate depictions, but teachers have to be willing to engage in developing critical awareness of the perspectives that create the realities/meanings of historical texts. Kneebone (2007) suggested that it is important for educators to “remember that they are working within certain, often invisible, cultural norms, and often help to reinforce these norms (p. 82).”

Effective literacy instruction acknowledges student differences that can include race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other cultural factors (McKenna & Robinson 2002). Teachers who use a variety of texts to address difference offer more opportunities for students to view themselves as successful, as well as allow them to take more risks by engaging in classroom discussion. These findings coincide with Rosenblatt’s (1988) transactional theory in that the texts, and how students interact with them, increase understanding of different roles in students’ own learning processes.

In Rosenblatt’s theory, reader experience with text gives the text nuanced meaning, and helps scaffold strategies such as prediction, questioning, and extrapolation. Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, and Brown (1992) expanded Rosenblatt’s transactional theory to classroom instruction. By expanding the theory into a transactional strategy for instruction, they were able to demonstrate the feasibility of students using multiple comprehension strategies while interacting with texts and each other.

## **Effective Instruction and Classroom Environment Impacts on Diversity and Literacy**

While there is no single definition of effective teaching among scholars, there are some common attributes. These include employing a variety of strategies, encouragement, support, and indicators of academic growth. Behaviors of effective teachers most consistently recognized by researchers include management, instructional behavior, classroom organization, and high expectations for achievement (Giovannelli, 2003; Davis, 1998; Doyle, 1990). Effective teachers lead all students to proficiency in a particular subject matter. They use multiple strategies to accommodate the needs of diverse students in the classroom (Slavin, 2000). Allington (2002) argued that effective teachers produce better achievement because they are engaged in active instruction. Active instruction occurs when teachers routinely model direct and explicit demonstrations of the cognitive strategies being taught.

Instruction that is equitable is complex; it demands that teachers are knowledgeable of, and responsive to, many forms of diversity (Banks, 1997). According to Boyd et al. (2006) the “fundamental purpose must become one of making sure that no student is excluded from full participation in classrooms and in the learning activities contained therein regardless of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences” (p. 330).

Alvermann (2002) argued that effective literacy instruction includes multiple factors, such as students’ perceptions of themselves as readers and writers, the background knowledge they hold, their own interests, and their levels of motivation. This claim applies to almost all areas of study and instruction. She contended that teachers must use multiple “texts,” which include televised media, computers, and print (Alvermann, 2002). The use of these diverse forms of literacies should be transparent and purposeful. For example, teachers can enhance reading practices by expanding what is considered text, and how a text is used inside and outside of the classroom (Alvermann, 2002). By using multiple texts, teachers can improve

their understanding of how students interact with these expanded forms of text and relate these insights to more traditional forms of text (Alvermann, 2002). Through connecting outside practices to in-school practices, teachers are able to improve instruction by supporting learning in multiple contexts.

The ways students see themselves in the classroom are, in part, directly related to how instruction explores the experiences of both teachers and students. Teacher beliefs and experiences shape their literacy instruction. Socio-cultural theories of literacy used in research designs often deal with the cross sectioning of life experiences (Moje, 1996). The content that literature addresses can help students see their own experiences, and those of their peers, in a new light. Thus, if literacy consists of social practices, and people engage in these practices with purpose, then literature is a means for understanding the self.

Moje (1996) explored the perceptions of both teachers' and students' experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning. She contended that researchers need to question more rigorously how teacher beliefs and experiences affect their literacy instruction. Often these experiences shape student identity and address cultures that are not linked to race or ethnicity. By using aspects of student experiences in instruction, teachers can engage them on broader levels because students are allowed to bring their out-of-school experiences into understanding various kinds of academic knowledge.

Wray and Medwell (1998), in a study commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency in the United Kingdom, found that effective literacy instruction consisted of real-world application, teacher modeling, clear expectations, and mixed instructional methods using group exercises, class discussion, and giving individual attention to students. These attributes also correlate with culturally responsive teaching constructs (Gay, 2010). Pressley, Rankin and Yokoi (1996) found similar practices as being key to effective literacy instruction. All of

these scholars presented findings that linked effective instruction to increased motivation and engagement.

Fecho (2004) proposed that English classrooms should teach across cultural boundaries. To do so, educators should conduct inquiries that encompass the social worlds, literature, and languages of students. This type of pedagogy demands that teachers engage in the same cultural work as students, and that they ask difficult questions of themselves just as they do of students. By engaging in the same type of cultural work as their students, educators are reminded that they “are working within certain, often invisible, cultural norms (Kneebone, 2007, p. 82).” Understanding and respecting different positionalities of students offers better opportunities for their voices to be acknowledged and explored.

Another important characteristic of effective teaching is classroom management as it affects the other components. If teachers cannot manage their classes, instruction suffers and teacher expectations, which include how students are to behave in class, become non-existent. Walls, Nardi, von Mindem, and Hoffman (2005) studied 90 teachers to determine characteristics of effective teaching. The twenty-two most effective teachers in this study managed their classrooms and cared for students in ways that promoted academic success (Walls et al., 20015). They also used class time effectively through transactional interactions with their students (Everston, Sanford, Clements, & Wrosham, 1982; Everston & Smylie, 1983; Palinscar & Brown, 1998), guided practice, and communicated expectations to students, which yielded high achievement results. As a result, consistent use of strong classroom management, varying instructional strategies, clearly articulated expectations, and classroom organization form a working definition of what effective instruction looks in practice.

Classroom management is often associated with the prevention or correction of behavioral issues, or with current discipline issues. However, beyond this, the role the

classroom environment plays in the effective implementation of equity pedagogies is pivotal. Mednick (2008) noted that teachers often engaged in classroom conversations that left students of color or lower economic status feeling marginalized:

The white middle class children often talked about books they were reading with their parents, structured after school activities, and expensive family vacations in conversations that excluded their low SES [socio-economic status] peers. In contrast, the low SES children talked about neighborhood and family events and were more likely to interact with humorous, physical actions such as bumping into each other, which often led to reprimands from the teacher (p. 28).

The environments that teachers help create and support demonstrate their levels of commitment to diverse classroom communities. Students do not abandon their cultures and identities when they walk into a classroom. In fact, often their identities are shaped, supported, or silenced in the environments where their role and participation should be most valued (Sturtevant, et al., 2006). Horvat and Antonio (1999) examined how class instruction confirmed student status as “other.” They found that it is not content or subject matter that has the greatest impact on the students, but the attitudes of the teachers and how they deliver information. The researchers observed that teachers often perpetuate a racial and/or cultural superiority or hierarchy through approving statements that support the dominant culture. If those who work with diverse students do not understand or know how to capitalize on their experiences and beliefs, efforts of inclusion remain symbolic and unexplored. According to Levin (2008) this lack of accommodation is an issue of how teachers respond to diversity when it is present in the classroom.

The areas of equity, which are partial effects of diversity, within a school setting often hinge on curriculum, instruction, and school environments. These areas, while framed by

administrators in independent schools, must be activated and often adapted by teachers in the classroom. If teachers are responsible for the resources and tools that meet individual student needs, they must also understand that the work can be complex and ever changing. Banks (1997) called this understanding, and its associated practices, equity pedagogy, which requires teachers to know the cultural groups, individual characteristics, and histories of diverse students. He explained further that this understanding

can provide a foundation to help teachers design and select appropriate instructional materials for their students, make informed decisions about when to use culturally sensitive pedagogy, and decide when to focus on the individual characteristics of students. (p. 86)

Research also indicates that culturally responsive teaching uses prior personal and cultural knowledge, learning styles, and experiences to maximize student growth and learning (Gay 2010), which are all components of effective teaching and equitable pedagogies. Schneider and Shouse (1992) studied a group of African American eighth graders and concluded that, while the students felt supported by their teachers and praised for their contributions in class, they had weaker social relationships. This lack of interpersonal connection impacted student motivation, learning effort, and performance. The strength of the social relationships is contingent less on student contribution and more on whether educators understand family dynamics, cultural positionality, and personal struggle.

Research about diversity and independent schools tends to focus on identity and socialization only (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2010; Wortham, 2003; Lee, Smerdon, Liro & Brown, 2000), rather than curriculum in a particular academic subject area. Although identity and socialization are important to success in an independent school (Alexander-Snow, 1999), they do not address the extent to which or the techniques through

which teachers are inclusive in their classroom practice. These are other contributing factors to students' success.

### **Scholarship Synthesis**

Most characteristics or principles, of effective teaching are aligned with culturally responsive teaching that places emphasis on the classroom experience. Smittle (2003) identified six of these, which include commitment to teaching a diverse population; command of the subject matter; addressing behavioral issues that affect learning; providing responsive learning environments; communicating high standards; and consistent evaluation. These characteristics coincide with the six attributes of culturally responsive teaching (empowering, transformative, validating, comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and emancipatory) described by Gay (2000; 2010). Walls, Nardi, Minden, and Hoffman (2002) identified five categories of effective teaching (rules and grades, emotional environment, student participation, teacher skill, and teacher motivation). These, too, are similar to attributes of culturally responsive teaching, although they are not defined thoroughly. Factors in effective literacy instruction also correspond with the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. They include self-efficacy, student interests, teacher understanding, student connections to the world, text selection, and teacher-student relationships.

In Table 2.1 the characteristics and factors of effective teaching, culturally responsive teaching, equity pedagogy, and effective literacy instruction that functioned as the conceptual framework for this study are compared. Each characteristic or behavior is aligned with corresponding attributes to show, conceptually, the way in which an academic department might use them to design instruction that exemplifies a diversity mission by supporting all students, not just those from the dominant culture. While each of the models can be used

independently, they are most effective when used in combination to address all students in the classroom, collectively and individually.

Table 2.1 *Comparisons of Effective Teaching Characteristics and Culturally Responsive Pedagogies*

Principles of Effective Teaching (Smittle, 2003)	Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010)	Equitable Classroom (Greenberg & Schaffer, 1991)	Factors in Effective Literacy Instruction (Alvermann, 2001)
Communication of high standards	Empowering—teacher encourages academic success, and lends support	Inclusive climate and visual environment	Self Efficacy—understand how students perceive themselves as readers and writers
Consistent evaluation	Transformative—teacher understands existing strengths and expands on them through instruction	Variety of instructional strategies	Student interests taken into consideration
Commitment to teaching a diverse population	Validating—teacher uses cultural knowledge and student experiences to enhance instruction	Multicultural curricula	Teacher understands the background knowledge students hold
Addressing issues that affect learning that are not cognitive	Comprehensive—the whole student is addressed	Utilization of outside resources and active outreach to parents	Students make broader connections to the world around them
Command of the subject matter	Multidimensional—teachers are dynamic and understand the subject matter and contexts of the classroom; they foster relationships with students	Availability of extracurricular activities to enrich curriculum	Text selection—text seen as dynamic and variable (i.e. novels, papers, magazines, online texts)
Providing a responsive learning environment	Emancipatory—teacher changes the dynamic of	Recognition of multiple intelligences	Teachers get to know students in

	authority		a manner that attends to their everyday lives, both inside and outside of school
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As indicated in Table 2.1, both culturally responsive teaching and effective teaching support student learning in ways that communicate care, personal understanding, and a broad socio-cultural and academic knowledge of students. These characteristics are strong in a general sense and when applied to a specific subject matter, such as English/Language Arts, they become highlighted.

**Diversity and the English Language Arts Classroom**

The challenges educators face in their efforts to attain high-level student achievement have a good deal to do with engagement and motivation (Alvermann, 2001). Motivation for and engagement in learning are addressed through processes that allow students to participate actively in literacy acts and collaboratively in decoding text; releasing their imaginations to stimulate reflectiveness; using multiple means of teaching that align students’ experiences with the symbolic development of texts; and using literature that orients the self to the outside world (Greene, 1968, 1993; Kamil, Borman, Dole, Salinger & Torgeson, 2008).

Moje et al. (2008) studied youth in urban communities and the types of texts they found motivating and that prompted reading and writing. They found that students were interested in texts that represented their experiences, or that allowed them to bring their experiences to the texts to understand them more deeply. These researchers also addressed how students read texts and how their social worlds are constructed. The intersection of student motivation with chosen texts has larger implications for contextual conversations because it increases engagement by challenging students to work through their own

knowledge, interests, and experiences based in social, cultural, and subject influences (Moje, 2000).

While many English teachers are at the forefront of implementing curriculum that supports a broader spectrum of cultures (Fecho, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Michie, 1999), many challenges exist. Most problematic is that educators who choose to teach new and diverse texts often do so without fully understanding historical contexts, cultural norms, or how being unable to deliver this information inadvertently supports social and economic inequalities.

According to McDermott and Vareene (1995, p. 327), “A disability may be a better display board for the weaknesses of a cultural system than it is an account of real persons.” They argued further that content areas are cultures in which students enter during the day in which they must apply practices that mostly pertain to the content area. Because literacy work in science does not utilize the same skills or knowledge as those in literature classes. Therefore, students may be engaged and motivated in science because they understand the culture and master scientific skills. However, these competencies may not transfer to the literature classroom. Depending on the dynamics of classroom contexts, students may view themselves as successful or not, as a reflection of capability rather than capacity. Capability is a feature that can be improved or developed while capacity deals with the ability to receive or hold. In referring to contexts within a classroom, a larger capacity holds more benefit.

Jacobs (2008) suggested that because the problem of engagement for adolescents stems from a lack of interest or motivation, literacy practices should include active roles based in inquiry. She also proposed that socio-cultural systems within classrooms should be forums in which students can be successful. Situating students in practical and purposeful activities (Alvermann, 2001; Greene, 1993) leads to engagement. Likewise, Cook (1996) argued that an

English/Language Arts classroom should encourage participation and solicit active involvement, regardless of the various levels of mastery of the English language. Every class should provide multiple contexts, including cultural and historical contexts, and should be accessible to all students, albeit the access points may vary.

Part of the issue in classrooms is teachers do not teach disciplinary literacy. Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) contend that disciplines are their own cultures of practice and by not teaching the specialized ways of reading and understanding, students are set up for failure. Some literary practices attend to students by teaching strategies, while others focus on what Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) call the “transformation of human experience through language and literary technique. For these researchers, literary evaluations deviate from the analysis of data, similar to what one might find in a history or science class, and the evaluation focuses on the aesthetics and authenticity of experience. Instructors who only focus on general reading strategies often miss students who are struggling but are still capable of discipline specific instruction and could benefit from their peers (Fang & Coatoam, 2013).

Moje et al. (2008) assert that teachers who engage in literacy instruction that focuses on student knowledge, identity and understanding tend to teach more holistically. Not only that, but teachers who engage in this type of discipline-focused instruction, teach students what privileged discourses are, and by doing so expands their understanding. This type of instruction focuses on the different types of knowledge and ways of knowing, doing, believing, and communicating that allow students to participate in social and cultural practices while being critical of the world they are being asked to engage with.

Hinchman and Moore (2013) argue that teachers can “design instruction that provides multiple entry points to reading complex texts closely (445).” By designing instruction with

multiple entry points instructors provide opportunities for students to read and engage in work that is interesting and applicable to their lives and the world around them.

### **Summary**

Independent schools tend to be more homogenous and reflective of the dominant culture in the United States. Even with the shifting diversity in the country, independent schools are not always able to garner substantial populations of students of color or varied socio-economic status. Yet, diversity mandates are becoming increasingly enmeshed in their mission statements. The ways these goals and this language are actualized must be studied and understood. Research shows that the English classroom is one of the learning spaces where diversity can be explored and understood through the interpretation of texts, and that prevailing notions of power and perspective can be combatted by fostering classroom environments where students feel competent, represented, and supported.

This chapter presented a review of selected research and scholarship pertinent to this study. These selections addressed multiple kinds of diversity, diversity and instruction, and diversity and the English classroom. Each of these topics was outlined in order to clarify some of the issues relevant to implementing the diversity missions of independent schools. There is still much to learn about how diversity issues are implemented.

Studies of diversity in classroom instruction, often addressed through equity pedagogies, have focused on its worth and usefulness to students of all walks of life. While most educators would likely agree that more diverse schools are needed, the question is how to achieve them. The debate often defines diversity as striving for the elimination of Western traditions, or the white-washing of difference (Baez, 2000). It also sometimes puts forward the belief that diversity benefits teachers who employ equity pedagogies, and that students learn better from these methods. The research literature has not reached a consensus on how

diversity practitioners or teachers implement diversity missions best in independent schools.

What is certain is that diversity in private schools must be addressed with the understanding that particular issues may diverge, but the outcomes for students can be quite similar.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers in an academic department of an independent school support the diversity mission of that school through everyday instruction. The methodological procedures used to pursue this purpose are described in this chapter. They include methodological rationale, research design, research questions, participant recruitment, participant information, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

### **Research Design**

#### **Selection of a Qualitative Research Approach**

Qualitative research seeks to understand and cultivate meaning of a phenomenon or construct from the lived experiences, perceptions and other subjective features of the research participants. It is a naturalistic undertaking that can encompass many types of data gathering processes such as interviews and observations or other processes that situate the researcher in the world, or near the world, of the participants (Creswell, 2017).

Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to focus on context and to analyze information by “understanding behavior from the subject’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). These methods are commonly inductive in nature, and allow for the expansion of research questions based on the emergence of themes as data are collected, versus the deductive nature of quantitative research analysis (Creswell, 2017). Because of this, the data derived from qualitative research are “rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (Bogden & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). In the absence of appropriate statistical applications, analysis of qualitative data is grounded in the theoretical basis that forms the research method (Creswell, 2017). Moreover,

qualitative research acknowledges the human condition, the inherent subjective nature of human experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the search for a quantifiable “truth” in the analysis of data is replaced with disclosing the information and knowledge gained, and how they can be placed into context within the larger integrative framework (Creswell, 2017).

Because of the nature of the research questions, and the potential nuances inherent in an examination of individual influences within an educational system, a qualitative research approach rooted in ethnographic processes was selected. Ethnographic methodological choices are well suited for educational research, where multiple points of subjective data are useful in integrating individual experiences and perceptions (Mertens, 2014). Qualitative research methodologies also allow for triangulation of multiple data sources such as interviews, observations and documents, to more fully address the nuances of research questions, and to provide a measure of validity in the conclusions derived from the data analysis and applications to larger systemic frameworks (Mertens, 2014).

### **Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research**

A prominent emphasis in qualitative research is that the researcher plays an integral, transactional role in collecting and interpreting data. Thus, the researcher becomes an instrument in the collection and analysis processes (Creswell, 2017). The relationship between the researcher and research participants can be beneficial to the analysis and interpretation of results in that the trust built with the participants allows for thick and rich description of the context and details. The researcher’s relationship and proximity to the data inform the analysis processes (Chenail, 2011; Denzin, 2011). This relationship and the transactional processes between the researcher and participants shape the research environment and have effects on the researcher’s ability to be objective (Chenail, 2011). The researcher must build trust with participants without allowing social interactions to unduly impact the processes,

while recognizing that these same factors help the researcher to be more responsive and receptive to cues and emergence of themes (Denzin, 2011).

### **Use of an Ethnographic Qualitative Research Method**

Ethnographic qualitative research methods allow for the examination of “shared patterns of behaviors, beliefs and language” (Creswell, 2017 p. 90) within a particular group of participants in a common environment or culture, such as an educational setting. These examinations include identifying patterns and expressions of shared patterns in behaviors such as classroom activities, or thoughts such as subjective perceptions of meaning (Creswell, 2017). Ethnographic research encompasses both inductive and deductive processes. Deductive processes include use of a theoretical framework (in this case culturally responsive teaching) to focus the attention of the researcher. Using inductive processes such as detailed observation and finding patterns throughout the collection and analysis phases of research informs the emergence and development of new insights and themes (Creswell, 2017).

This researcher was specifically drawn to the use of ethnographic processes for two reasons. First, ethnography allows the researcher to become embedded in the participant-environment, and offers opportunities to gather perspectives and experiences, I facilitated viewing diversity instructional strategies used by participants (who were also peers) in the general education system, their classrooms, and engagement with students. Second, the naturalistic observation processes allowed this researcher to experientially identify how participants embodied the diversity mission of the school in their approaches to instruction and interactions with students. Both of these reasons were supported by the field-work inherent in ethnographic research processes, and were further complimented by examining artifacts and other data sources to assist in identifying patterns (Creswell, 2017). An

ethnographic methodology also exposed the researcher to the potential strengths and challenges of being an insider in the research site.

Having an emic perspective and being an insider within the research population and site allow researchers to use their own experiences and understandings of the research setting to contextualize the data. Challenges occurred in the process because of the researcher's occupational role which potentially increased the participants' perception of the researcher as an evaluator instead of an observer. In fact, I experienced difficulties in maintaining neutrality due to my experiences as an educator, and as an advocate for diversity processes in educational settings. However, qualitative research methodologies include reflective processes, social interaction, context, and researcher positionality as recognized and valued mechanisms in the process (Roller, 2015). To the extent possible, I used transparency related to awareness of biases and their role(s) in the research processes and outcomes in interacting with both the participants and the emergent data.

### **Research Questions**

This study examined the ways teachers at an independent school exemplified and promoted the school's diversity mission in their classroom instruction. Because of the potentially varied and subjective interpretations of diversity in educational settings, and thus diversity missions in schools, it was important to include the specific diversity mission statement that was used to evaluate and contextualize the findings from this research. The values and beliefs about diversity articulated in the mission statement for Cardinal Academy are:

A diverse school community is essential to education. We further believe that such a community includes and embraces a spectrum of differences in learning style, race, color, creed, ethnic and national origin, gender, sexual orientation, socio-

economic background, and life experience. We therefore foster and encourage respect for human differences, growth of the individual, and diversity within the school population. (Diversity Section, para. 1)

With a focus on the diversity mission, the primary questions examined in this study were:

- What strategies do English teachers use in the classroom to demonstrate the implementation of the diversity mission?
- If teachers are not culturally responsive, is their teaching effective?
- How do teachers motivate and engage diverse students in and outside of the classroom?

Aspects of the school's diversity mission specific to fostering and encouraging respect for human differences place emphasis on relationships. Consequently, a relational frameworks specific to teacher-student dynamics served as the basis of exploring how teacher participants created, maintained and were influenced by student relationships.

Related questions explored were:

- How does student interaction influence the instruction of teachers in the English Department?
- How does self-selecting class texts impact the diversity practices of teachers, and how are these texts used to exemplify diversity issues?
- How do teachers construct relationships with diverse students?

### **Setting of the Study and Selection of Participants**

This study took place at an independent school, Cardinal Academy, located in an urban area of the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. This setting was selected due to a combination of factors including administrative staff's ability to independently approve the use of the school for the research project and the school's geographic proximity and

accessibility to the researcher, who as a component of the methodology, needed to be embedded in the school during the research period.

Permission to conduct the study at Cardinal Academy was acquired from the chair of the English Department and the Head of the Upper School, as well as the Institutional Review Board at The University of Washington. All participants were provided an informed consent statement that explained the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data, the risks and benefits for the participants, and the contact information for the researcher and the researcher's advisor (see Appendices D, E, and F). Participants were assured confidentiality during and after the study through the use of pseudonyms. The participants and the researcher signed the informed consent statements, and a copy was provided to the participants.

### **Demographics of the Study Setting**

During the research period, Cardinal Academy served a population of 778 students in grades 6-12. Of these, 458 were in the upper school, or grades 9-12. Of the student population during the research period, 51% identified as female, 47% identified as male, and 2% identified as gender neutral. Ethnically, 72% identified as European American, 15% were African American, 6% were of Asian ancestry, 4% were Latino, and 3% identified as "other". Within the upper school population 32% of students had learning disabilities, which included neurodevelopmental disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dysgraphia, and other executive function disorders that disrupt working memory and processing.

The demographics of Cardinal Academy during the research period demonstrate that there was limited racial diversity and diversity of students who identified outside of the gender binary. It was unclear how many students identified as gay, lesbian, or transgendered

although those diversities were reportedly represented within the student population. Greater diversity was represented in areas pertaining to gender and learning disabilities.

### **Selection of the English Department in the School Setting**

Literacy processes specific to reading, comprehension, and interpretation of texts provide opportunities for teachers to support the diversity missions of their schools. This can be done by engaging students in constructing meaning from their experiences, perspectives and associations with selected texts in tandem with similar experiences provided by authors, peers, instructors and others (Hirsch, 1987; Ruddell, 1999). For these reasons, the English Department at Cardinal Academy, and its contributions to the diversity mission of the school, were selected as the focus for this study. Year-long classes in the English Department were selected, as opposed to shorter single trimester classes, because these classes allow students and teachers to have persistent contact, provide better opportunities for observation, and generate robust data specific to the research questions.

The teacher participants were responsible for selecting the texts that they used in their classes, as long as the selections were consistent with the content focus of the grade level as indicated by the school's administration and curriculum standards. For example, the tenth-grade class focused on Western, modern literature and used some novels that were the same across teachers, but not every class used all of the same texts all year. The eleventh-grade classes, with honors and non-honors distinctions, concentrated on American literature with some overlap between classes/instructors. For example, each of the eleventh-grade instructors used the same texts for their summer reading requirements.

The overlap in text selections provided opportunity to observe how individual instructors' approaches to teaching varied across contextual differences in the material. The variances in text selection also provided opportunities to gather more robust data

concerning the nature of text-selection, and its place in the context of student needs, comfort level of the instructors, and culturally responsive teaching variables.

### **Selection of Participants**

Purposeful, intensity sampling was used in the selection of the teacher-participants within the English Department at Cardinal Academy. Intensity sampling is a subjective method widely accepted in qualitative research, that allows researchers to identify “excellent examples of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 234) thus allowing for depth and richness of data in a small number of representative cases. In this research, participants were selected based on perceptions of their supportiveness, and/or embodiment in their instructional practices, of the school’s diversity mission.

The selection process began by asking for nominations from three separate communities within the Cardinal Academy setting including three administrators who were responsible for teacher evaluations and disciplinary issues; six teachers each from the History and Science departments; and three parents whose children had graduated from the school in the previous two years and were familiar with the teachers at the school. Each member of the three communities of practice was asked to nominate three teachers within the English Department who they felt effectively supported the diversity mission of the school in their instruction. The researcher then chose three of the nominated instructors who received the most nominations from the community. Those three instructors were then asked to participate in the study.

### **Participant Demographics and Profiles**

All three teacher-participants were members of the English Department with full-time teaching status at the school. They each taught students who were in year-long classes during the 2013-2014 school year. Their experience levels providing instruction in high school

settings ranged from two to nine years, and eight to twenty-five years of instruction experience overall. Two participants were female and one was male. All three participants identified as European American or White. The participant profiles are summarized in Table 3.1. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the teacher participants and the school.

Table 3.1 *Profiles of the Participants*

	<b>Joy Harper</b>	<b>Natalie Jacobs</b>	<b>Sam Ackers</b>
<b>Years of Experience in Education</b>	14	25	8
<b>Years at Cardinal Academy</b>	7	10	2
<b>International Experience</b>	2	0	1
<b>Levels Taught</b>	High School	College/University, High School	Community College, High School
<b>Economic Background Growing Up (self-identified)</b>	Working Class	Upper Middle Class	Wealthy
<b>Marital Status</b>	Divorced	Married	Single
<b>Race/Ethnicity (self-identified)</b>	White	White	European American
<b>Advanced Education</b>	Master of Education, University of Washington	Master of Arts (English), Ph.C. (Literature), University of Washington	Master of Arts (English), Georgetown University

Joy Harper was a seven-year veteran teacher at Cardinal Academy and was also the Chair of the English Department during the research period. All of Joy’s experience as an instructor had been at the high school level. Before joining the Cardinal Academy faculty, she taught for five years in public high schools in the same region as Cardinal Academy, and

at a school in San Salvador. Joy has a master's degree in education and maintained her teaching certification, even though it was not required for employment at Cardinal Academy.

Harper grew up in a city south of Seattle, and indicated that she understood what it is to be considered “other” based on growing up with a low-socioeconomic status. Her personal experiences being poor, informed her decisions about where to teach and gave her pause when she approached material. She was motivated by “making sure [she] approaches her classes with an emphasis on social justice which often means bringing in multiple perspectives”.

Natalie Jacobs was a ten-year veteran teacher at Cardinal Academy. In the three years prior to the research period, she maintained part-time status at the school in order to teach at both college and high school levels, and she returned to Cardinal Academy as a full-time teacher for the 2013 – 2014 school year. She is a published poet and has been an instructor for more than 15 years.

As a native New Yorker, and as a self-described “white woman who wants to make sure these kids get this stuff right before they go to college,” Natalie often focused on gender equity, and on intersectionality issues. She attributed these emphases to being raised in a multicultural house, with adopted siblings and extended family who did not share her race or ethnicity.

Sam Ackers had been at Cardinal Academy for two years at the beginning of this research period. He previously taught English and Drama for six years at a community college in the same region. He had a background in theatre, and was still active in the local theatre community.

Sam's family traveled often when he was a child, and even as an adult Sam prioritized traveling as a means to broaden his understanding of the world. As a White male,

Sam said he understands the students who he teaches at Cardinal Academy because of his similarities with their backgrounds. He mentioned that these similarities are not without drawbacks, but that he understood the limitations of the dominant culture, and is thus able to facilitate students' understanding of those limitations and various differences. This was important to Sam as he approached literature more classically and focused on the existing literary canon, which is predominantly grounded in the culture he identified with.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

In qualitative research the researcher is an instrument in the process. Because of this, it is important for researchers to be transparent and reflexive about their positionality as a measure of validity and quality control (Creswell, 2017). In an effort to address both transparency and reflexivity, I considered it necessary to discuss my roles at Cardinal Academy during the research period; including acting as the Director of Diversity for six years, and as a faculty member of the English Department for 14 years. In keeping with the theoretical basis of qualitative research, I did not try to neutralize my role as an instrument in this research, but rather tried to provide transparency so that the consumers of this research would be well informed of potential biases.

My role as an instructor in the English Department provided an opportunity to reflect on the working relationships that had been established with the participants in this research, who were also members of the same department at Cardinal Academy, and how the role of researcher may have cultivated a power differential between the researcher and the participants. Throughout the process I also was cognizant of how my relationships with each of the individual participants varied, including length of time and shared interests or goals.

A strong and collegial relationship existed between Joy Harper and me. She had been the chair of the department for seven of the 14 years that I had taught at Cardinal Academy. I

also worked closely with Natalie Jacobs on inclusion, the literary canon at Cardinal Academy, and creating protocols within the English Department to address students with various learning challenges. Due to the relative newness of Sam Ackers to Cardinal Academy, my working relationship with him was less established, and interactions were largely centered around discussions of Sam's perceptions of, and adjustments to, the culture of the school. These relationships, and the potential for power differentials inherent in the roles of researcher and participant, were foregrounded as I approached the participants to discuss the study, and to be clear that this research was not evaluative. I was explicit in explaining that the research did not include repercussions on the participants' positions at the school. Instead, it focused on exploring how their teaching approaches and perceptions supported the school's diversity mission.

Prior to the research period, I had been the Director of Diversity at Cardinal Academy for several years. This role included addressing issues and developing programming about diversity, support of diverse youth, and making sure that the diversity mission was an active part of the school's culture. These values and priorities were driven and supported by my own personal interests and experiences including being the only Black, and openly gay academic teacher at Cardinal Academy. These personal factors, combined with having been a student at independent schools through nine grades, helped me understand the potential needs of students who may have felt unrepresented at Cardinal Academy; and to address those needs through my role as Director of Diversity by identifying ways to expand instruction to reach more of the student population; and to assist teachers in cultivating relationships with diverse students.

## **Procedures**

Data collection occurred between March 2014 and June 2014. The timetable for conducting interviews was contingent upon participant availability. I collected data in the same sequence for each participant including initial interview, observation, second interview, and document collection.

Data collection processes included semi-structured interviews with each participant, observations of the teacher-participants in their respective classes, and finally a review of documents provided by each teacher participant. These varied data sources and collection processes satisfied triangulation criteria, to best support the identification of relevant themes and the validity of the findings that emerged.

Following the teachers' agreement to participate in the study I met with each participant and explained the conditions of participation, including the purpose of the study, participant and researcher responsibilities, research questions, and the multiple roles of the researcher as Director of Diversity, a faculty member in the English Department, and research investigator. These explanations were provided in an effort to keep the participants from feeling vulnerable and intimidated during the research process. The participants were then asked for times of availability to schedule the initial interviews.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The three participants in this study were interviewed twice during the research period. The first interview took place prior to the observation period. These initial interviews were conducted to determine the participants' views of the diversity mission, strategies they used in their classes to support the diversity mission, and how students gained access to them. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C) used in the first interview, were based on Magolda's (2010) theory of self-authorship, which deals with the ability of individuals to

define beliefs, identities, and social interactions including how do I know, who am I, and how do I behave. This theory facilitated an understanding of the pedagogical choices that the participants made in approaching instruction, and the extent to which they were similar to culturally responsive teaching. Additional questions were used as necessary and as suited to the conversational flow of each interview.

Second interviews, again using open-ended questions, were conducted with each participant following the observation period to clarify information obtained in the first interview and during observation. They provided opportunities to learn more about differences among participants described and observed classroom techniques, and how classroom discussions were relevant to the text selected for that portion of the course when those reasons were not readily identifiable during the observation process.

### **Observations**

The second data collection technique was direct observations of how the participants incorporated content and techniques in their instruction that exemplified the diversity mission. Each teacher met with the researcher to discuss which classes would be observed. This allowed the teacher to choose the grade level and the week of observation. Observations were conducted for three consecutive days, including two single block (50-minute) periods and one double block (90 minute) period. Classes observed were: Sam's English 10, Natalie's Honors English 11, and Joy's 11<sup>th</sup> Grade American Studies, which was a project-based English and History combined class.

Observations focused on specific behaviors that aligned with the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching and the principles of effective teaching that were embedded or implied by the school's diversity mission. These principles included communication of high standards, consistent evaluation, commitment to a diverse population, and a responsive

environment. Conducting observations in a consecutive sequence helped to determine if teacher practices consistently supported the diversity mission and, if so, how. A challenge to these observations was a lack of familiarity with the contexts of the different classes. To compensate, field notes were kept, using a guide (see Appendix D), and were triangulated with documents and interviews.

## **Documents**

During the second interviews, documents were requested from each participant to provide additional support and information. These requested documents included a class syllabus, two major writing and project assignments, and any additional documents the participant felt were relevant.

In all three cases, the documents were provided by the participants through email. Two of the teachers submitted more documents than were requested. Natalie Jacobs provided a graded discussion prompt, a vocabulary quiz, and a homework assignment sheet for creating a blog post. Sam Ackers provided additional writing assignments and a project assignment sheet for writing a research paper. Joy Harper provided the documents requested but no additional material.

These documents were obtained to examine how teachers promote and engage students in diversity instructional practices in how they approach their written class materials. For example, the language choices from Natalie's syllabus provided support for how she exposed students to issues of diversity while, simultaneously, providing explanations for how she approached the organizational framework of her class as illustrated by the following example:

Inside/Outside American Dreams

Once upon a time, a ragtag bunch of exiles, pilgrims, and speculators settled what

would come to be called the America. Outsiders for reasons of religion, class, or birth, these early Americans transformed themselves into colonizers and later, citizens. In a new world (so they called it) they strove to become the insiders—founders of a country with unprecedented resources and opportunities.

Immediately, however, new outsider identities were established for people not meant to be included in the settlers' emerging national vision. Indigenous North Americans, transported Africans, and, temporarily, certain nineteenth-century immigrant groups (Jewish, Irish, Italian) were marked as legal and social outsiders. And so the dream of American belonging also contained the reality of exclusion. This double reality has made America a complex place, because at its heart there exists a historical and ongoing insider/outsider conflict.

### **Data Analysis**

In keeping with established qualitative research approaches and conventions analysis of the data occurred throughout the collection processes, and in several stages in order to best attend to the fluidity of the lived experiences of the participants and the evolving and layered understandings provided by the data (Creswell, 2017).

#### **Analysis of Data from Interviews**

Interviews were audio recorded, with the permission of the participants, and then transcribed. Transcripts were then reviewed and coded to generate patterns, trends, and conclusions based on the following coding processes. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, two matrices for the teacher participants were created. Each matrix included the pseudonyms for each participant on the top horizontal axis, and the interview questions on the left vertical axis. Abbreviated responses to questions in the corresponding space were recorded. Both first and second interviews with the participants were documented in this

manner.

During the second level of coding, key phrases or quotes were identified that represented themes, as suggested by Punch (2000). This secondary coding led to generation of strategies based on the following processes. After initial responses were identified, the transcripts were re-read for related details, specific quotes, and comments. The initial responses were noted as potential strategies if at least two of the participants mentioned them in the interview and if they were mentioned in more than three contexts. The responses that created the strategies were those where at least two of the participants mentioned them and they were used in the most contexts.

Tables 3.2 – 3.4 provide a summary of the strategies, themes and responses that participants provided during their interviews. The tables are organized by research question. Organizing the interview data by research question facilitated the identification of themes and patterns within the data central to the analysis outcomes.

Table 3.2: *Strategies, Themes and Responses for Joy Harper*

Main Research Question	Response
What strategies do teachers use in the classroom to demonstrate the implementation of the diversity statement?	<b>Remain student centered</b> <b>Walk in thinking I have a diverse population</b> <b>Let students lead discussion (informally)</b> <b>Create different access points in instruction</b> <b>Create multiple layers for assignments</b> <b>Create availability outside of the classroom</b> <b>Allow for outside experiences to enter discussion</b> <b>Make students access me</b>

	<p><b>Shut up and listen to students</b></p> <p><b>Discuss various world views</b></p>
<b>If teachers are not culturally responsive, is their teaching effective?</b>	<p>Limited effectiveness if not responsive to diversity within classroom AND student population</p> <p>Allow world views to change</p>
<b>How do teachers motivate and engage diverse students both in and outside of the classroom?</b>	<p>Listen and shut up</p> <p>Ask them to participate</p> <p>Locate their strengths and weaknesses and ask them to engage in their education (often done outside of the classroom)</p> <p>Ask kids to help communicate to their peers</p> <p>Asks kids to take transferable risks (performance to academics)</p> <p>Show them access points</p>

Table 3.3 *Strategies, Themes and Responses for Natalie Jacobs*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
What strategies do teachers use in the classroom to demonstrate the implementation of the diversity statement?	<p><b>Remain student centered</b></p> <p><b>Walk in thinking I have a diverse population</b></p> <p><b>Let students lead discussion (formally and informally)</b></p> <p><b>Create different access points to texts, to teacher—inside and outside classroom</b></p> <p><b>Create dynamic assignments</b></p> <p><b>Allow for outside experiences to enter discussion</b></p> <p><b>Discuss various world views</b></p>
<b>If teachers are not culturally responsive, is their teaching effective?</b>	<p>Being responsive to everything— allows for all forms of difference to be recognized and heard.</p> <p>Allow teacher views to change</p>
<b>How do teachers motivate and engage diverse students both in and outside of the classroom?</b>	<p>Make the material relatable to their lives</p>

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Talk with them about what's not working  
Give them room to fail and succeed  
Show them access points  
Share my experience  
Continuously remind them they matter

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Table 3.4 *Themes and Responses for Sam Ackers*

Research Question	Response
What strategies do teachers use in the classroom to demonstrate the implementation of the diversity statement	<p><b>Acknowledge the differences in the community</b></p> <p><b>Push them to talk about their own experiences</b></p> <p><b>Teach students how to question their sources</b></p> <p><b>Give them a toolbox and let them arrange the tools</b></p>
<b>If teachers are not culturally responsive, is their teaching effective?</b>	<p>If teachers are responding to the needs of their students academically then teaching is effective</p> <p>Allow student ideas to morph</p>
<b>How do teachers motivate and engage diverse students both in and outside of the classroom?</b>	<p>Allow students a voice in the classroom</p> <p>Physically structure the room where students must engage</p> <p>Be consistent in rules and expectations.</p>

### Analysis of Classroom Document Data

The major writing assignments, classroom project assignment sheets, and syllabi provided by each participant were analyzed by aligning the type of document with the main themes obtained from the teacher interviews, and observation notes. Within the documents, language, or examples that illustrated how the documents supported the application of the strategies and the actions of the participants, were located and triangulated with the other data sources. The matrices derived from this process helped to identify similarities and differences in instruction, and to summarize the characteristics of practices that supported and exemplified the diversity mission of the school.

## **Analysis of Classroom Observation Data**

The coding of observation field notes from classroom observations included levels of coding similar to those of the interviews (i.e. reducing data, mapping themes, strategies, and drawing conclusions). In the first level of coding, the observation notes were organized into small portions of text to find concepts. These clusters were labeled with descriptors and organized by conceptual similarities in preparation for the second level of coding.

The field notes were then cross referenced with the interview notes to find commonalities that aligned with what the participants said they did with what was observed during classroom instruction. The topics that appeared across multiple sources and across participants were coded in a manner that allowed the researcher to identify themes and strategies that were targeted for further analysis.

I looked for the six principles of effective instruction as outlined by Smittle (2003), elements of cultural responsive teaching described by Gay (2010), and the factors of effective literacy instruction outlined by Alverman (2001). Many of these principles, elements, and factors overlapped and all areas applied to the diversity mission. Effective instruction and literacy instruction addressed the learning styles and life experiences of students, while culturally responsive teaching addressed a broader spectrum of life experience, including sexual orientation, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity. I then cross-referenced the responses given in the interviews, and used them as a guide for clustering the field notes and triangulating data points.

Data display matrices occurred based on categories of similar themes throughout the field notes, and conclusions were drawn based on the similarities and differences that emerged during the display phase. After coding the field notes, another display was

created to link the field notes to the interviews.

Finally, I chose to use a process of member validation to further validate the findings derived from these analyses. This was done by providing the participants with only their sections of the outcome analysis charts, and then asked to review these findings, and to share their perspectives of any comparisons or discrepancies with the researcher's representations of the observations, interviews and/or document interpretations.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a research plan consistent with a qualitative methodology to explore how teachers in the Cardinal Academy English Department implement the school's diversity mission through instruction. Profiles of the three teachers who participated in the study were constructed. A detailed research plan was presented, which included descriptions of the methodology and the concepts that guided the methodology to yield an investigation that explored the essential characteristics of teaching that supports a school's diversity mission.

Three teachers in the English Department at Cardinal Academy, an independent school, were interviewed and observed; sample class documents, including syllabi, major writing assignment, and project assignment sheets were analyzed from year-long classes spanning grades 10 and 11. Data triangulation was used for interviews, observations, and document analysis to enhance the validity of the findings, in addition to member validation from each participant.

The raw data were coded at multiple levels to generate matrices of the transcribed participant interviews, researcher observation field notes, and documents supplied by the participants. The matrices contained the questions asked, and the abbreviated responses obtained through each participant interview in addition to relevant supporting and/or

conflicting data from the additional data sources. Within these, key phrases were explored for thematic representation.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

Using the data collected from the interviews, observations, and document analysis methodologies detailed in Chapter 3 of this qualitative study. This chapter describes how the three participants conducted instruction and looks at them as case studies. Within each case study there are four sections, knowledge construction, adjusted instruction, cultivating relationships and expanding world views. Each section emerged from the data collected and were informed by culturally responsive teaching, effective teaching and literacy instruction as discussed in Chapter 2.

While each of these strategies, and their respective role(s) in the research questions, exist independently, they are most notably aligned with the construct of culturally responsive teaching when there is a convergence of multiple supporting themes specific to each teachers' behavioral and/or philosophical and practice approaches. The supporting themes emerged as creation of classroom culture, student access to teachers, and understanding students whole identities. Within each section, the convergence of these strategies is discussed where their praxis intersects or deviates, and how each is consistent with the scholarship that informed the construction of culturally responsive teaching.

One of the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy is transformation. Culturally responsive teaching “recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishment of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process” (Gay, 2010, p. 33). Furthermore, “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically

diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students” (Gay, 2010, p.29). Teachers who embody this approach understand that the goal is to educate students in a manner that maintains high expectations for achievement, and is conveyed through care for the whole student by valuing all aspects of the individual. Therefore, culturally responsive teachers are consistently aware of their own attitudes and behaviors around how they value students as persons as well as their intellectual abilities (Gay, 2010). The results of this research are presented in case study format specific to each of the three Cardinal Academy teacher-participants: Sam Ackers, Joy Harper and Natalie Jacobs; and are organized by demonstrations and/or the definitions of each strategy from different vantage points that are relevant to the strategies and their intersections.

### **Case Study One: Sam Ackers**

#### **Knowledge Construction**

Sam Ackers said that he understood knowledge construction as imparting skills. When asked what imparting skills looked like in actual practice, he answered, “Whatever subject we're exploring, I make a point of looking at it from multiple angles and I think that I make [that] clear, even if I will do a 180 on myself. Okay there's this and then I'll say, ‘Yeah, I know I just said that.’ There's this other view that actually got me thinking here and what about this, and I think that it [is about] just putting out a range of ideas and in sync. There's a lot of ways to look at this and hopefully I'm encouraging the same, that all of you are welcome here.”

During observation Sam facilitated a discussion about the novel *1984*, by George Orwell. On the first day of observation he did what he called “unpacking kids understanding.” Here he revisited the question, “Does objective reality exist?” Sam asked the question in three different ways, including: “If everyone believes it, what makes it true?”, “How do we deal with the truth?” and “What is proof?” Each time he posed a version of the question, he asked a different student to provide an answer. Their responses were then rephrased by Sam to confirm the students’ statements. He asked, “So, you’re saying that truth is not real, so why should we seek it?”, “Do you mean to say that proof is not tangible, and therefore not real?”, and “Are you saying belief and faith are the same thing?” He also reviewed the concepts of sanity, interpretation, and shared experiences that had been discussed in class previously. He said in his second interview that he likes to “check in with students about what they understood after having time to think about it all.” Sam considered this as helping students construct knowledge by refining the skill of asking questions and seeing things from multiple perspectives.

He also acknowledged difficulties in planning instruction that allowed students to impact the outcomes:

One of the things I love about teaching is that I walk in and we go. I probably do less planning than I should. I do planning with the idea of where I want to go, but then I walk in a room and get something going and see where the students take it. I love to build how we, in the moment, make something important and meaningful happen, rather than I got this plan and I’m going to stick to it no matter what.

## Adjusted Instruction

In characterizing adjusted instruction Sam said,

Adjusted instruction is normal instruction. That's what I think instruction should be. It's instruction that responds to the needs of your individual students and not just the needs of the [whole] class. Every student needs something different to find success beyond that classroom. There's no one lesson that every student needs. Adjusted instruction is about finding the lesson that a student needs, and teaching it.

The essay assignment on the novel *1984* provided options for students to consider in constructing their responses. The prompts encouraged students to consider:

Is ignorance bliss? That is, if you are powerless to fix a problem (i.e. the problem of living under a repressive government or the problem of having lost a loved one), are you better off not knowing that the problem exists? If so, why? In what way are you better off not knowing? If not, why not?

All students in Sam's class had to answer the same prompts but he allowed them to use approaches of their own choosing. For example, the essay assignment on *1984* continued,

You will have the entire class period on Friday to write your response. You are also welcome to bring any notes, outlines, or texts to class with you.

Furthermore, if you wish, you can come to class on Friday having already completed your essay. Essentially, as long as you do your own work, you can prepare for and complete this assignment as you see fit.

Sam provided options by allowing students to complete the assignment using

approaches that varied in length and in the amount of time required for completion. According to the scholarly explanations this type of adjusted instruction is a way to respond to one aspect of diverse students varying needs for formal or informal structure and support in completing academic work. This seemingly one-dimensional approach to adjusted instruction paralleled Sam's perception of his role as a "facilitator more than anything" whose presence sets the tone and rules of engagement in the classroom and expects students to engage somewhat autonomously in constructing their own educational experiences and outcomes.

### **Cultivating Relationships**

During the observation period, Sam explicitly made one statement regarding being available to students, and there were no one-on-one exchanges with students after the three classes that were observed. Sam was not a strong proponent of disclosing personal information with students. He worried about maintaining proper boundaries and saw boundaries as having a role in students' respect for his authority. He said, "it's my job to make sure that [students are] aware that there are expectations."

In spite of his concerns regarding boundaries, Sam indicated he wanted, "to have a real conversation with the students; but it's tricky because everybody else is coming in for the next class and students are piling in and waiting to ask questions." Unlike Joy and Natalie, who offered students many access options, such as email conversations, coffee dates, and social media, Sam preferred only face-to-face contact. He explained this preference as follows:

There're just so many things that I'm not picking up on in emails, and some of them are business-like. Students can access me usually a few minutes before

school, between classes, and then [during] free periods. I don't give students my phone number but I let them know that I'm always willing to talk to them in terms of setting up meetings. Usually in person is the way that I try to do that. But I will definitely respond to emails and engaging email conversations.

The following statement was included in his syllabus, and appeared contradictory to his verbal declaration that he preferred face-to-face interactions with students:

The best and most efficient way to reach me is by email. If possible, please try to use this form of communication. For additional, in-person help and clarification with assignments, I'll be in my room (V2) at 3:00 on Mondays and Wednesdays. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that may arise.

Sam explained that the only explicit communication he made with students concerning his availability outside of class was to mention that he is available for extra support in the syllabus. When asked why he only referred to his out-of-class availability through the syllabus, Sam said, "I feel confident that my students know I am here to support them and how they can reach me if they need to."

Sam also said that "lending support to students means that I am there in the moment." For Sam this translated, in part, to the physical layout of his classroom. His classroom used a horseshoe physical arrangement format to help facilitate conversations and engagement. Students were allowed to choose their own seats. For him "part of supporting students is to let them make choices. I want them to look each other in the eye. I want them to see me physically stepping up to them and saying, 'Yeah, I'm here for you,' in a way I wouldn't be able to do in a classroom of rows."

While Sam was reluctant to self-disclose, he tried to build relationships with his students by “taking an interest in them and by listening, and encouraging them to speak and share their ideas.” He thought that a rich diversity of opinions and experiences was challenging in an independent school like Cardinal Academy. Sam used his interactions with students as opportunities to gather information that might enhance their engagement with class material. He tried “to have private conversations with a student, learn something about that student as an entry point into making a connection between what we’re doing with the course and that student, and I’ll use it as a jumping off point.”

His relationships with students did influence Sam’s instruction. He said, “They don’t just influence my instruction, they spear it.” One example, during observations revealed Sam using his relationship with a student to re-engage him in a discussion about George Orwell and *1984*. He asked the student: “Did the baseball game change when scouts watched the game? If it did, what about the game changed?” This question was important to him because, “it is something [the student] shared with me and being watched bothered him. It was a way to get him into the text.” On a different occasion, he complimented three students who were in the spring theatre production before class discussion began. This was his way of

letting them know I support them. When I go to their shows it makes them feel supported by me; makes me human. It also builds up trust so that when we get to hard stuff they trust me. It goes a long way when you are dealing with difficult texts.

## Expanding Worldviews

As an example of expanding worldviews, Sam advised students “to understand that you’ve got to take a stance and participate in the place you live.” From his point of view, students are afraid of being the only one with a particular viewpoint in a “seemingly liberal place. We’ve got to be able to have conversations, be open and not worry about being the outsider, and being the one who doesn’t go the same way . . . In the class [we] look at that, then look at the other side; just explore it all.” To motivate students to examine complexities, Sam reviews what's going on in the media and what's happening that might relate to this; how can we look at it [from] another perspective.

I ask the students to bring in their own experiences. That means that my classroom is full of a range of experiences and cultures and ideas. If we're only seeing things one way, if we're only getting one point of view, then I got to ask them questions; ‘What about this, what about the other side?’

On the second day of observation, Sam conducted an open dialogue with students about the use of technology inside and outside of the classroom. He focused on social media and the ways in which Facebook and Instagram are similar to “Big Brother” in *1984*. He warned, “Here’s a big one,” and continued speaking about technology and how it “lets us change the line of what we think is proper. Because we see on reality TV where everyone is out there, we think we have to be out there.” Sam invited student participation by asking, “What do you think? Was it okay for the football players in Ohio to record a girl being assaulted? How many of us watched?” Each time he mentioned a complexity, he prefaced it

by saying, “Gonna dig into a huge issue from the reading,” or “Here’s a big one.” He used these cues “to let kids know that they may be uncomfortable. [They] allow them to decide early on how they want to participate.”

On the third day of observation, Sam began class with, “I got one for you: Is all truth cultural?” He allowed students to discuss the question in small groups for ten minutes and then opened it up to the entire class. He asked about religion and looked first at two students of color, an African American and a Korean American. Later he explained why he gravitated to them, reasoning that “students that come from a different cultural perspective tend to be willing to discuss their ‘outer views’.” These “outer views” to Sam meant “simply the views from those who see themselves as other.”

Sam shared his own ideas when working with some of the small groups, and helped clarify confusion around utopian and dystopian societies. Later he asked students to create a utopian society using concepts and constructs they live with in their various communities, such as rules, culture, and moving among communities. Sam also asked some questions that he later clarified, such as, “Is [*1984*] a story of success or failure?”, “In what way are the people in the book better than we are?”, and “How much trust do we have?” He later noted that the questions were intended to help students with the construction of their utopian societies, but that he “failed to bring the questions and the assignment into congruency.” In his opinion, this disconnect left the students “floundering around the assignment.” He concluded that he would need to “rework the assignment to make sure students have a clear understanding” of the task. Sam’s reflection on this assignment was congruent with his statements that he

perceives the role of an educator as requiring continuous reflection, flexibility and adaptation. “As a teacher you’ve got to recognize that there’s not one way to do it...I certainly know that, and I’m learning...I’m always trying to respond.”

### **Case Study Two: Joy Harper**

#### **Knowledge Construction**

Joy approached knowledge construction by allowing students to be content experts and fill in information around texts and ideas. In one observed example, a student provided a legal context that pertained to a group civil disobedience project that was the focus of coursework in Joy’s American Studies class during the observation period. Joy asked, “How did you know that case would work in this instance?” After the student’s reply she said, “Clearly I need to read more Huffington Post because that info is a game changer.”

Joy discussed the importance of students constructing knowledge in this and other ways, while dualistically cultivating a supportive peer environment by allowing the “higher level kids to pull up the students who struggle a bit more.” To do so, she created opportunities for students to inform each other about the things that they know about, in relation to the course materials. One of the observed civil disobedience project groups had a scenario about a school building on Navajo burial grounds. A young woman in this group, who no one knew had First Nations ancestry, began informing her peers about why it was important that sacred spaces exist for her as a modern First Nations person. Her group asked questions of her and were able to gain a larger understanding.

## **Adjusted Instruction**

In her interview Joy stated, “You have to do away with the notion of standardizing everything, and instead treat students as unique thinkers and beings for whom growth is going to mean different things.” Joy believed that adjusting instruction meant being responsive to students’ academic needs, not just their social and emotional needs. She offered the following explanation in relationship to adjusted instruction as it pertained to assignments:

For some kids, I’m asking them to think about all of the questions as layers of the main question, or as just a kind of extension from each other. There might be another student for whom that multi-layering of essay prompt questions is overwhelming. I need to adjust for that kid and say, ‘Just focus on this. Let’s talk about this . . . Do you have any ideas in mind that you think might fit this? Let’s put the prompt aside for a minute.’ [I] talk to the kid about that idea and say, ‘Okay, that really addresses this question. Let’s just focus on that one in and of itself.’

Joy’s civil disobedience project placed students in small groups and gave them scenarios that occurred in a school environment similar to that of Cardinal Academy. Each scenario was layered with what she called “fake world problems with real world implications.” The civil disobedience scenarios were vague and no one right way for addressing the task was provided. Instead, Joy gave general instructions to her students that included a general task that was scaffolded with different layers of deliverables to ensure the students were on track, and working together as a group. The task for the project read:

Plan and present an act of civil disobedience as part of an overall negotiation strategy to address a social, moral, and constitutional injustice in an effective way; by effective, we mean ‘what you propose has a reasonable chance of working in the real world,’ as opposed to what looks good in an academic setting.

Deliverables for the project included a group Myers Briggs personality assessment, a status report with roles for group participation defined, a proposed schedule for the presentation, and individual response essays.

This researcher observed that as students worked in their groups, Joy went from group to group speaking with students about their progress, and addressed each student within the group differently. When asked about the intent behind this observed approach of interacting with each group member differently, she responded, “While some of their roles are the same, the way students understand the role and work within the group dynamic is different. I had to make sure that each student was moving forward and progressing with their own thinking, but also within the group.”

As students were presenting their civil disobedience projects several days later, this same approach was observed in the way in which Joy’s questions shifted with each student presenter following their group presentation. To the group that had been assigned the scenario of addressing artistic freedoms, Joy asked of one member, “Do you think the young woman was kicked out because she was wearing the dress or because she was holding her girlfriend’s hand?” To another student she queried, “If it is about the dress, what about it is difficult for the faculty member kicking her out of the dance?” When asked to explain the shift in focus between students, Joy said, “One of

those students is so concrete he can't get past the dress, so I ask him to think about the dress. The other student can go deeper faster, but it doesn't mean [that the first] won't eventually get to the same spot with help."

Another approach towards adjusted instruction was observed in one document that Joy provided for an essay assignment that had five prompts for a student to choose from. These prompts ranged purposefully in difficulty and complexity:

- □In this essay, you are selecting one or two characters in order to argue how those one or two characters are meant to be cultural, political, or social symbols....
- Consider...Miller's idea of the Tragedy of the Common Man refusing to remain passive in the face of challenges to their dignity, especially by acting out in violence. Do the authors justify violence as a means of attaining heroic status?
- How do one or more of the characters from the novels we have read represent the idea of enlightenment attained through access to or embodiment of the Emersonian over soul?
- How and why do one or more of the characters from the novels we have read become that which they resent being labeled as by their societies?
- Create an original thesis, an argument about one of the core texts, using at least one of the [supplemental] essays through which to view the idea, or through which to contend with a text.

### **Cultivating Relationships**

Joy described herself as a student-centered teacher who pays attention to

students as individuals. She noted, “I try to make connections with [students] in order to push them intellectually . . . and emotionally in order to help them produce good writing and to become effective readers, thinkers, and speakers.” Being student-centered also meant engaging with individuals, because

every individual is different, and if you don’t learn their individual interests, their individual strengths and weaknesses, and their individual lives beyond the school and at school, then you can’t really help them to grow and to learn in a way that is the best fit for that individual kid.

During observation part of what seemed to help cultivate student relationships was the freedom Joy allowed her students, and for them to know the different ways they can access her. She commented,

If you give students freedom, it takes away from this idea that I’m the ogre in the room waiting for them to fail behaviorally or academically. I give them freedom to make choices, and that gives them a sense that I trust in them which allows me to move more freely, especially during group projects.

While observing I noted that Joy’s students were responsible for creating their group’s workspace and informing her where they were located. One group was in the library and the other two groups stayed in the classroom. Students always sat in a circle. Joy said that students “have access to me in the classroom, which includes access to me as a participant in the group.” She explained further:

They have access to me in one-on-one interactions within the classroom, when they’re working on assignments and I can rotate throughout the room. They have access to me by making meeting times with me one on one, and they have

access to me just personally by the nature of how we operate our school, which is to see kids in different aspects of their lives by going on trips, going to their performances. They have access to me in a lot of different ways, a lot of different arenas, which is critical.

This idea of access was important in building relationships because Joy felt that some students have outside issues that affect their academic performance. By giving students a variety of ways to access her, she was able to address what they needed emotionally, and academically. Access to teachers outside of the classroom was a way for Joy to teach the whole student, and through that, facilitate academic success.

When asked about students who may not have the means or ability to ask for access to her, Joy commented on the importance of being aware of those students:

As educators, especially in an urban-type of school where a lot of privileged kids attend, [teachers need] to be aware of the kids' stories in order to know who might have difficulty accessing you because of cultural differences, because of socioeconomic differences. They might perceive you as an authority and they [might not] think you have anything in common . . . It's really important for us to assert that there is access to us. It becomes our responsibility to know those kids' stories, in order to know who might have trouble accessing us, in order to assert that they can and should access us.

Joy asserted herself into students' lives in the following ways:

Sometimes that's like, 'You and I are going to talk today.' Sometimes that's like, 'We're going to work on your essay.' Sometimes that's like sending an email saying, 'This is what I'm noticing.' It's like being a little more aggressive.

Sometimes you have to demand that those kids access you and realize that might not be where they're comfortable, but that they need to learn to be comfortable with accessing you in order to really function in a school where a lot of kids walk in the door knowing how to do that.

During the three-day observation, 10 of the 20 interactions Joy had with students during instruction ended with her making plans to meet with the student outside of the classroom. In three of these interactions, the researcher left the setting because the nature was personal. Joy said, "Almost all of the super personal interactions during class [are] larger access point[s] for me to get to know students." In describing the broader nature of her interactions with students, she said, "Most of the time it's boy or girl trouble, and sometimes it's home." She recalled a student who reacted to being perceived as African American, when he was Eritrean. She remembered conversations such as these "the most because they are the ones that remind me how much kids just need to be heard and supported without all our adult voices telling them what to do or how to do it."

Joy's syllabus for her team-taught American Studies class mentioned access in a general sense. It stated: "We are available for extra help by appointment because of the rotating nature of our work spaces, so feel free to schedule time for revision conferences, questions, or help at any time by emailing one of us." Joy thought that most of the students contacted her, as opposed to her male counterparts, because her co-teachers "miss the necessity for nurturing." Joy thought this was less about gender differentiation and more about the personal risks educators are willing to take. She elaborated that, "Some teachers are willing to open themselves up more than others. I

will hug students if that's what they need. It opens me up for all kinds of things but I trust kids understand I'm coming from a good place.”

Joy also believed that students' willingness to respond to her in the classroom is a result of her making an effort to get to know them. She said, “Some kids . . . need to see themselves reflected in the assignment, or that the assignment reflects them on some level. The only way to do that effectively is to get to know who they are.” She made additional comments that elaborated on her belief that when teachers and students share personal experiences, in and out of the classroom, it helps everyone understand how and why different experiences shape a person's perspective. To develop these kinds of relationships, she suggested,

Making your students aware that you, too, feel like an outsider in some way in some aspects of your life. There are [many] aspects of diversity and difference. Helping them understand that you might feel like an outsider and alien in some aspects of your life is important so that they can see that people with differences can come together in an intellectual endeavor. That's something that I definitely try to underline in my personal stories.

Joy, who once taught in a school in Central America, learned from that experience how to “engage with kids who were vastly different than me in terms of their belief systems, and in terms of their cultural and racial identities.” She made numerous appointments with students during observation, telling one student, “After school we can finish our discussion around Kendrick Lamar and why I think he's a revolutionary.” Finding ways to have conversations with students, in and out of the classroom, meant sharing parts of her private self with students. As she explained,

I learned how to have great conversations with them. That's definitely important to my teaching overall—how to make sure that kids know that I have opinions, but I also respect yours, and don't need you to agree with mine in order to be a successful class.

Joy realized that she cannot fully understand all the cultural references or social barriers of her students. She can, however, “shut up and listen.” She elaborated:

I can observe and learn as much as I can in order to not assume I know who he is because he is from a particular group or culture. I just talk to him. I think teachers don't often listen. We do a lot of talking, but I think we have to spend [more time listening]. If you want to know a kid and how his experience is so vastly different from [ours], you got to take the time to actually listen and help him tell [his] stories, and let him know you're actually listening to the stories when he's talking. That takes a lot of hours, but that's what I'm willing to do.

During the second day of observing Joy's class, two student groups presented their civil disobedience projects. As the presentations proceeded, Joy interrupted members of the group and bantered with them; she referenced the school community several times. Although she sometimes was contentious in addressing students, they responded to her questions and comments. In response to students who accused her of being antagonistic Joy said, “I'm not trying to be antagonistic; I'm trying to help you. What is it you want? I'm not going to tell you this is going well for you. It's not, and your group has a lot of work to do.” Joy contended that her teaching style was “a different type of caring,” and students “respond because they know I'm pushing them to be their best selves and they trust me.”

## Expanding Worldview

In declaring her views about and commitment to human diversity, Joy said, “I think my major cultural references first come from my upbringing, and then from reading. If I get to influence how students see the world, I’m going to find books that prepare them to meet people outside of themselves.” She used Richard Wright to further clarify her position:

Richard Wright in *Black Boy* writes about how he basically came to know these different types of people through his own reading experience. He started to become really bewildered by the fact that when he started working as a teenager in Memphis, he's like, ‘Yeah, I know that type of guy. I read about him.’ He loves the fact that he realizes he's gotten to know these types of characters in the world through reading about them.

In connecting the importance of diverse representations to the students and instruction in her classroom, Joy said,

I think you can get to know people through reading about people you would never meet otherwise. Maybe that doesn't replace actual experience, but there are some kids that go to our school who would never know certain types of people were they not to read about those people and to be able to explore them as real people.

Joy did not ask students “to view the world in any particular way because that would be forcing [her] world view on them.” To her this was not an appropriate thing for teachers to do. However, she did think that students should “incorporate into their world view a sense of responsibility to themselves and to the larger community,” and

that students' worldviews should be challenged. She reasoned further that,

I challenge their worldview because I don't think they believe what they actually say they believe, which is how kids walk into a classroom articulating a worldview. It's really their parents' worldview. Yeah, maybe that's going to affect or influence theirs ultimately, but they need to decide if that is truly their worldview before solidly arriving at it.

The idea of exposing students to the complexities of life came up 12 times during the observation period, as Joy went from group to group assessing progress and asking pointed questions based on complexities during the civil disobedience presentations. On the first day, she asked students if they had examined the scenarios from different perspectives and explored alternative outcomes as the racial implications and social backgrounds of the participants changed. She questioned one group about what it meant "to be bi-racial anything, let alone black and white?" As she walked away from the group she looked over her shoulder, stopped in the doorway and said, "And what does it mean to always be on the outside of some place that constantly says you're on the inside?"

The members of another group were asked about their understanding of immigration policies as the ethnic heritages of immigrants varied. The third group was asked to look outside of the liberal perspective they were holding onto. Joy challenged, "Could we not be so kumbaya? The scenario is talking about a mixed girl who reads African American. You mean to tell me that no one has any racist stuff to say? You want me to believe that a predominately White school is going to let the 'black kid' off for wearing a confederate flag?"

During the second and third observations, Joy used the civil disobedience presentations to extend student thinking about complex issues surrounding the collision of race, sexuality, and free speech; culture, religion, and identity; and religion, geography, and cultural appropriation. In one scenario, a school is constructing a new STEM building and the construction workers find a Native American burial ground. For their act of civil disobedience, students band together with a local tribal group to stop the new construction. Some of Joy's students argued that, as their act of civil disobedience, they wanted to place a plaque on the new building. She questioned the students from a contentious position, asking, "Really? All the tribe wants is a plaque? Why are you wasting my time with a plaque?" As students reviewed their notes, she continued, "If your act of civil disobedience is to have a powwow and ask me to hang a plaque, what is the purpose of getting the tribe involved in the first place? Don't they care about the spirits of their dead?" She considered this type of questioning important because, "These White kids didn't even look at the spirituality of the Native Americans. How could they disregard the core of a people's belief?" Explaining further she noted,

I had multiple conversations with the students about looking into the beliefs and spirituality of the tribe who is affected and they continuously resisted with the idea that reason and progress will win out. Progress and reason bulldoze over people but their own upbringing gets in the way. This is why we do this project— to make them see that the world is bigger and more complicated than this bubble we call Cardinal Academy.

The documents Joy submitted all had varied layers of complexities about

diversities and other social issues. Layers of complexities was a term Joy used frequently, and discussed as being building blocks of sorts. Each assignment has multiple layers in order to reach all students. With each layer comes a new complexity to the questions being asked or the prompt. The written assignment for the civil disobedience project asked students to look at how their own personal beliefs about issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender were affected by their attempt to create an act of civil disobedience.

While the Civil Disobedience project is a culminating project, Joy's earlier assignments challenged students to explore the intersectionality of the personal and social. First, it asked whether a change presented in one text was social or personal. Another layer was then added onto the initial question. It raised issues of culture, social symbols, and politics. The final layer of complication brought an outside text into the discussion. Joy used these types of questions frequently in instruction because, in her estimation,

Students aren't one-dimensional beings. They have complicated lives, and those lives are impacted by all the social constructs. It's a private school; kids know how to bring money into the classroom; they know how to use subtlety and they know how to use power. And even though they know how to use those things, [it] doesn't mean they understand [them]. I'm trying to help them peel back the layers of the onion to find out what makes their eyes burn and tear up.

### **Case Study Three: Natalie Jacobs**

#### **Knowledge Construction**

Natalie Jacobs believed knowledge construction "must be an active process

that everyone in class takes part in.” She used her classroom as a platform “to launch students into the pool of themselves.” When asked to clarify, she said, “Constructing a knowledge base is easy when everyone is engaged in the process. It’s when it’s a top down [approach]—‘I’m almighty teacher, you know nothing’—that knowledge construction stagnate[s] because it’s no longer a process.”

During observation Natalie asked questions of students, and a dialog began forming the base of the discussion about the novel *Fledgling* by Octavia Butler. Broad questions were asked that were essential to the text such as “What does it mean to be an outsider?”, “Is it possible to fully assimilate into a culture?”, and “Can anyone talk about being stuck between two places abstractly like around gender or race or class?”. Natalie allowed students to answer without swaying opinions or pushing students to think about them in any particular way.

Natalie said that allowing students to physically arrange the classroom was more conducive to them engaging in instruction, and “not getting lost behind someone.” She added, “Part of me being responsive is to create entries for students and the only way to do that is to get them to engage with each other in a manner where I don’t have to police them.” The physical arrangement of the classroom helped facilitate implementation of the diversity mission. Natalie was clear that students needed to be able to participate verbally and non-verbally. Part of non-verbal engagement was being able to look someone in the eye and shift bodies in a manner that was visible to peers. A semi-circle, horseshoe set-up provided those opportunities.

### **Adjusted Instruction**

The salient feature of Natalie’s adjusted instruction was layeredness. She

explained that, “If I have a unit I’m doing, if there’s going to be a variety of ways into the material, I’m going to think about five to ten things that we can [do to] enter into it.” Natalie saw entry into the content of instruction as one layer, as well as the actual teaching of it. She said that “talking to the students about how they feel about texts, or looking at the different ways we engage the text, is another layer of adjustment.”

However,

within the teaching, I have to deal with the whole person. It’s about the composition of the class. It’s an honors class, whatever that means, but there’s a range of learning . . . preferences, learning disabilities, motivational, behavioral [styles] you name it. I’m going to have to be responsive as I get to know the kids and know them as whole people, and encourage their strengths and practices.

That’s the layers of them, and that’s the layers of the classroom community.

During the first of the three classes observed, Natalie allowed students to make broad statements about the novel *Fledgling* by Octavia Butler. Students were asked to talk about the themes they had discussed during the previous week as Natalie queried, “What do you make of themes we’ve been discussing?” When one student got what Natalie calls “lost in the mix” while responding, she reinserted herself into the conversation by refocusing the student with, “let’s not talk about our various injuries to our bodies. Let’s go back to what role fear plays in the novel.” Natalie continued to focus on the discussion question: “Is Shori a figure of excessive exogamy?” She went on to ask three additional versions of the same question:

- Can Shori marry outside of her species as much as she wants?

- If Shori, the “new age” vampire, can mate and colonize the bodies outside of her group, what does that mean for her group?
- How does Shori’s exogamy differ from polygamy or polyamory?

When asked why she posed four variations of the same question, Natalie said, “It’s important to make sure that I ask the questions in a manner that all students will understand, in order for all students to have the opportunity to answer it.” This instructional strategy was observed in seven different instances over the three-day observation period. While not all the instances involved questions, Natalie’s practice of reframing statements was a common feature of her teaching. Other samples of this instructional style are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Examples of Natalie’s Reframing of Instructional Practice*

Observation	Description of layering/rephrasing strategy
Day 1 single block	Asked question two different ways: <input type="checkbox"/> Does the end justify the means?
Day 1 single block	Restated student comments for clarity: <input type="checkbox"/> Are you saying that you can’t come back to a position of
Day 2 double block	Asked question in rapid succession, altering it slightly: <input type="checkbox"/> How did you feel when writing the poems?
Day 2 double block	Question from student-led to open-ended questions: <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think, folks?

Day 2 double block	<p>Questions for clarifying expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you all understand what I'm asking of you?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are there questions about how I constructed the question?</li> </ul>
Day 2 double block	<p>Questions requesting feedback on providing better support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How can I help you be better folks?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What am I missing here?</li> </ul>
Day 3 single block	<p>Statements about levels of required task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> You have a paper due next week.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Don't forget you have a lot to work with that writing</li> </ul>

### **Cultivating Relationships**

In response to questions about access inside and outside of her classroom, Natalie explained:

I think there are some teachers here who feel that there is a classroom and that there are more boundaries. I think there are boundaries as a person, but come and see me, find me; connect with me, talk to me over email. If you're my Facebook friend, you can talk to me over Facebook. I have that policy where I won't friend them, but they can friend me. Message me on Facebook; if you're not my friend, you don't need to be.

She explained that the use of many avenues to allow students access and letting students know that she is available are important:

Through social media, email, class, [and] extra-curricular activities, I have tutored and, quite frankly, [done] a lot of after-school support for writing. That's always an announced thing, that I'm available, whether it's in my syllabus or something that we talk about in the classroom, like 'When can you

come and talk to Natalie?’

During observations, Natalie told students on six different occasions that they could find her in the library and offered specific times for when she would be there. A chorus of voices said that they would be looking for her. All of the class documents she submitted included statements that reminded students to make appointments with her if they needed support. Her syllabus stated:

Remember: if you need support, don’t hesitate to ask. I will be in my office every morning and after school most days of the week. Feel free to stop by or leave me a message. If I’m away from my desk, email is the best way to reach me. In my experience, 80% of life’s problems are caused by lack of communication. USE YOUR WORDS, HONORS ENGLISH ELEVENTH GRADERS. I am here to help you succeed in this class.

Natalie’s blog post assignment sheet supported her syllabus statement. The concluding note stated: “If you don’t understand something, come find me. You know where I hide.” On the assignment sheet for *Gatsby* she wrote, “Often the sum of good writing comes from having a good conversation. If you need to hash out some ideas, set up an appointment with me or find me in the library during lunch or breaks.”

Natalie offered the broadest range of access and said that her ability to reach students, especially those outside of the majority population, stemmed from being able to “teach them how to access me and that if they don’t learn how to access me, the complex world they live in becomes more difficult to navigate because they will need to learn how to advocate for themselves.” According to Natalie, building relationships with students involves “giving them opportunities to have a voice and let me know how

they want to get to know me, how they want to present, how they want to connect or not connect, and then we build from there.”

Natalie shared a wide range of personal experiences with her students. The book, themes, concepts, issues, or ideas the class was studying prompted these. She explained:

Sometimes I talk about the way I was alive in the 1980s, when HIV/AIDS came into consciousness and what it was like to live through that epidemic when it was a horrible unknown. I had friends who died, you know. Women and men. Yeah, I will bring that in and I will talk to them about why I can't watch something like AIDS documentaries.

Natalie thought sharing these types of personal experiences was a model for students to emulate so they could present their own experiences in the classroom. She said,

There are things I can't look at without understanding that there's a piece of me in that story that will always be there as it brings forward new histories. I will use my history. I also just use the fact that I was alive at different points and talk about what it meant to be a kid when the Vietnam War was going on; to see it on the news.

During the first day of observation, Natalie shared with her students a personal experience placed in the context of a discussion about gender. She told them that, when she was growing up in the 1980s, people thought she was a boy: “I had not developed yet and my friends were drag queens, butch lesbians, feminine gay boys, and I fit into the mix with my spikey mullet. I would get mad because people would call me ‘son’ or something like that.” She added that she had to “come to grips” with

how people perceived her and that “being strong and confident in who we are is what makes people want to get to know the real you.” Furthermore, she believed that including stories like this one was pertinent because

there are a few kids battling to find out who they are, and I know because they told me. If those kids are battling it means they all are and I want to respond to that. I use the relationships I build with students to generalize information, to make it more palatable by connecting it to them, which in a sense means I have to connect it to me . . . I have to expose myself to my students.

On the first day of observation, Natalie was playing “Let’s Stay Together” by Al Green, an African American soul singer, as she connected her laptop to the Smartboard. She told students as they entered the classroom that she would give them “mad props” if they could identify the singer and tell her how the song was related to the day’s discussion. On the second day, she played “Kill the Poor” by Dead Kennedys, a White American hardcore punk band, and on the third day she played a song chosen by a student. The student approached Natalie a few minutes before the other students arrived, and Natalie quickly changed her initial choice from Dizzy Gillespie’s “Salt Peanuts” to Marilyn Manson’s “If I Was Your Vampire.” Natalie made the change because “the student never speaks up in class, [although] he is a strong writer and turns in work . . . I play music for him, this is how he and I communicate.

### **Expanding Worldview**

Like Joy, Natalie wanted to make sure that diversity was explicitly present in her classroom dynamics. Sometimes it was about race and ethnicity, and sometimes

about sexuality and gender identity. Natalie explained that, in selecting literature, she chose “stories that kids are going to see themselves reflected in in some way.” She allowed students to discuss their self-identities and how their experiences in the world help them to better understand who they are becoming. Natalie clarified these efforts in the following comments:

If I'm putting together the class, it's like I need diverse representation. I want that. Then, obviously, it's making a safe space so that students feel like they can represent their complexity; they can be authentically who they are or who they want to be; that they can tell their stories and feel like there's some way of connecting to the community, so that there isn't a dominant mode in the community that they feel like they have to adapt to or fail, and repress themselves.

Natalie placed a great deal of significance on exposing students to the complexities of life and the societies in which they live. Natalie thought the texts she used offered a broad range of representation of the “American lit experience. There is diversity of racial and ethnic communities; there are diverse stories that have to do with sexuality. There is diversity of perspective with the dominant American tropes of ‘The Dream.’” She considered asking students to “deal with complexity” as one of her main priorities. She believed that complexity does not “necessarily have to mean complicated or hard. It’s taking an idea or a text and being able to frame it in different ways that show the facets or the layers, and understanding that the pursuit of complexity is a really important human endeavor.” Expanding on the idea of complexity as a human endeavor she explained further that

If you have people that you love, if you have good family, if you have partners, if you have friends, you have complex discussions. That helps you be a human being. A lot of times, school is the only place where some people really get encouraged to have those difficult, complex discussions. I would say understanding, welcoming, and having the skills to parse out complexity is primary; that responsiveness is part of that; that you actually have to listen, study, learn, and consider things that are familiar and friendly, and things that are different and unfamiliar and may be strange and maybe even distressing. That's what complexity is.

The class observation indicated that students were having difficulty going beyond the surface of the text. Natalie, yelled, “This isn’t some White girl from Capitol Hill people! She’s a young African American girl, folks. She’s a vampire. How different is her world now? What difficulties is she having outside of being a vampire?” Here she was referring to a character from the novel by Octavia Butler. She commented further on the difficulties students were having in the discussion. After the observation, she thought, “They did not know what to do with the vampire story. Then you add that the vampire is this 11 year-old African American girl, and their paradigms have to shift.”

Natalie also focused on knowing her students “from the inside out,” and on them knowing themselves. This required them to be self-reflective. As she explained: “When students engage with me I’m asking them to bring themselves. I’m asking them to do different types of assignments and to reflect differently about themselves, the material, and the world.”

On the first day of a discussion during the observation period, students were asked to share pantoum poems they wrote about a major theme they saw in the novel. A pantoum consists of a series of four-line stanzas (quatrains), with the second and fourth lines of each quatrain repeated as the first and third lines of the next quatrain. Instead of requiring the students to create the lines of the pantoum, Natalie allowed them to use the Butler text to find the lines of the quatrains. After the poems were read, Natalie began to discuss the issues presented in them. She noted that in several poems the race of the vampire informed the survival of the vampire. She shifted the conversation to age and gender during the discussion portion of the learning exercise, and noted that several students “squirmed for an hour because the conversation was pushing them out of their comfort zones.” Ten times over the course of the three-day observation period, Natalie informed the students that the novel was representative of modern issues that “plague” the students’ generation. She focused on sexuality the most, pointing out the “double standards that the novel exposes.”

Class documents submitted by Natalie had various layers of complexities. Her graded discussion questions included dominant/non-dominant cultures, feelings related to entering new communities, traditional and stereotypical gender roles, family or clan dynamics, hybridity, polyamory, racialization, and colonization. Some of the questions were:

- Is Shori a figure of excessive exogamy (as compared to Dracula)? Argue both/all sides.
- Does Shori deracinate her human symbionts? Can hybridity be a way of understanding her relation to her symbionts?

- Being another species, and as compared to humans, do the Ina represent a kind of racialized difference? Argue both/all sides.
- □What is the nature of the blood-venom bond between Ina and Symbiont? Does it lead to forms of domination and subordination?
- □Does Shori challenge traditional/stereotypical gender roles (as compared to Dracula)?
- How does the Ina-Symbiont family/clan system act as a critique of heterosexual romantic love and monogamy?
- □Hybridity, polyamory, mutualistic symbiosis. How do these terms define Shori's form of vampirism?

A writing assignment for the novel *The Great Gatsby* also revealed Natalie's position on teaching multiple perspectives as essential to promoting Cardinal Academy's diversity mission. Instructions for the assignment directed students to

Write a causal analysis in which you answer the question, Who Killed Jay Gatsby? Please choose one of the below causes of Gatsby's death and use it to direct your analysis. A cause typically builds in effect and intensity before it snowballs into a full-blown event, so you should spend some time thinking about the way your cause builds, intensifies, and ultimately causes Jay Gatsby's death.

After these instructions, some possible causes of Gatsby's death were listed. Among them were poverty, alcoholism, gender, class structure, working class identity, class discrimination, and the pursuit of the American Dream. Natalie's syllabus also stated that the purpose of the class was to unearth the dichotomy of the insider/outsider

through literature. It read:

As you can probably tell by now, this class will give you the opportunity to think deeply about our complex ways of belonging or not belonging to America—of being American, Other, or something else entirely. Is it better to belong or not belong? Under what conditions do people get to choose? Where (here, there, beyond) are you? Texts for this class (books and film) include *The Sparrow* (Mary Doria Russell), *Badlands* (dir. Terrence Malick), *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald), *Into the Wild* (Jon Krakauer), *Do the Right Thing* (dir. Spike Lee), *Fledgling* (Octavia Butler), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Junot Diaz), *Transamerica* (dir. Duncan Tucker), and *Lost in Translation* (dir. Sofia Coppola).

### **Summary**

This chapter included the presentation of findings derived from the data collected in this study, and is organized into the three strategies that emerged from the data analysis -- knowledge construction, adjusted instruction, and cultivating relationships. While expanding social views is an outcome of these strategies, I mention them because of their importance as an everchanging component of instruction. The research exposed that these strategies had an interconnectedness, and that those connections, or overlap, in some instances were seemingly inseparable. The connections illuminated in these findings are congruent with the symbiotic components of culturally responsive pedagogy, as a construct that engages a broad range of students and responds to their needs by attending to them on multiple levels. These levels include understanding where a student is socially, emotionally, and academically,

while recognizing that students are positioned in multiple contexts. Thus, the thematic findings and their connectedness provided a layered understanding of culturally responsive teaching and how the instruction and perceptions of Cardinal Academy's English Department instructors support the diversity mission of the school through individually and the department as a whole.

### **Knowledge Construction, Adjusted Instruction and Cultivating Relationships**

Knowledge construction and adjusted instruction build responsive learning environments, along with cultivating relationships by being accessible and open to who students are. The English Department environments that supported the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy were the ones where there was shared knowledge construction, and students were met where they were. This was demonstrated through an openness to shared knowledge construction and a willingness to cultivate relationships with students in these attitudes and actions. Cultivating relationships allowed the teachers to develop a better understanding of students' learning limitations, opportunities, and capabilities that are required to effectively adjust instruction. These three strategies, while valuable individually, were more viable when employed together.

### **Cultivating Relationships, Adjusted Instruction and Expanding Social Views**

The data collected in this study suggested that relationships, between instructors and individual students or student groups and between individual students and student groups, preceded learning. Cultivating relationships means communication between teachers and students is paramount; students are active participants in their own learning; and instruction helps students develop key skills such as creative thinking and self-advocacy. High achievement is more viable when there is a strong relationship

between students and teachers. Each of the instructors who participated in this research mirrored this understanding, if not explicitly in their interview statements, then in their observed actions in and out of the classroom environment.

Developed relationships allowed teachers to know students beyond the classroom, to have awareness and understanding of students across multiple contexts which enhances their ability to understand the students' present social views as antecedents to expanding them. Thus, cultivating relationships was key to enacting the diversity missions of schools, but cannot be fully realized without the cultivating a relationship that allow the instructor access to the student beyond academic contexts.

Expanding social views was a theme that emerged from the data. This theme added dimension to the strategies by recognizing the power of shared experiences between teachers and students, and students and students. One participant was more cautious about sharing personal experiences with students, but all three agreed that shared experience helps students connect with lesson content and to the lives, experiences, and perspectives of people beyond the boundaries of their own personal lives. These connections help support a school's diversity mission because they expose students to a variety of experiences and ideas.

Furthermore, these teachers who work explicitly to expand social views consistently engaged in reflexive processes regarding their own values and biases, in order to effectively work with, and for, all students. Expanding social views allowed participants to put into context the social lives of students while addressing literary texts and changing historical perspectives to examine who they are, what they believe, and why they believe it.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations**

In this chapter, I provide my discussion, conclusions and implications for further research and practice. The conclusions are based on the findings and my understanding of the three participants' practice.

In my study I focused on three instructional strategies that emerged in support of the diversity mission of an independent school which include shared knowledge construction, cultivating relationships, expanding world views and adjusted instruction. Following these assumptions, my key conclusion that is is that teachers who respond to their students recognizes who they are, and what is going on in the world they live in, cultivate to more engaged students who are willing to have challenging conversations that stretch them socially, emotionally and academically.

In this chapter I restate the guiding research question based on the constructivist lens of culturally responsive teaching detailed by Gay (2010). I also summarize key insights derived from the findings. The study sought to add to the knowledge base around independent schools and diverse student populations by exploring how an academic department supports the diversity mission of the school through instruction.

Participants for this research were identified through nominations from peers, administrators and parents at Cardinal Academy. Identified participants were subsequently interviewed, and then observed for three consecutive days. Access to classroom documents was also provided by the participants for incorporation into the data analysis.

The analysis of data collected used matrices to locate strategies and themes that emerged from the interviews and observations. As strategies emerged they were entered into the matrices along with the reoccurring words or phrases that helped identify each strategy. Eventually three strategies emerged and were derived from the analyses. They inform the discussion of the research findings.

The review of related scholarship, and its applications, specified background information, definitions and prior research of the constructs of effective general and literacy instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and the myriad interactions among these constructs. Early assumptions that informed the research questions were based on the theoretical framework that focused on the asserted connections and influences between culturally responsive teaching and effective teaching. Within this framework, effective teaching and culturally responsive teaching are interconnected because of their overlapping interests, such as empowerment of the individual student and the larger educational community. Because of the overlap, and at times indecipherable differences between the implementation of the two constructs, it was difficult to pinpoint the exact way in which culturally responsive teaching manifested separately from effective teaching in the classrooms of the three participants in the study. However, in support of the diversity mission of the school, the culturally responsive strategies of promoting student participation in creating the classroom climate, adjusted instruction, and allowing students to develop their identity as expert-learner were most observable in the processes of the more experienced teachers in this study.

## Discussion

In analyzing the data related to classroom applications of culturally responsive teaching, effective teaching and effective literacy construction three strategies emerged. These were knowledge construction, adjusted instruction, and cultivating relationships, A theme, and in some ways a result of, that seemed to connect the strategies was expanding social views. Each theme provided rich contrasts in classroom culture, instructional strategies, and student centeredness--factors that are central to culturally responsive and effective teaching. One example was how the teachers created a “safe space” comprised of layered expectations for classroom participation based on students’ individual needs, and provided students greater access to them, as both instructors and as people, which had varying impacts on both the student’s and the instructor’s role in the school’s overall diversity mission.

It may be tempting at Cardinal Academy to view those who do not take these steps as less successful because those are the expectations administrators have for every teacher, although it is not always communicated clearly. It is more helpful, however, to examine classroom culture and approaches to adjusted instruction and knowledge construction as stronger indicators of how an academic department supports a diversity mission. This support begins with the willingness of teachers to expand their own thinking by allowing students to be experts at times, and by looking for moments in which various differences, such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexuality, and social class, intersect. These factors were present in each of the three identified strategies that emerged from this research, and are expanded on in the subsequent sections.

## **Knowledge Construction**

Allowing students to construct knowledge in the classroom supports Greene's (1993) belief that what makes a strong literacy act is allowing students to decode texts and information collaboratively, which enhances student imagination and opportunities to reflect on the assignment, the issues the assignment presented and their own relationship to the assignment. In this research, knowledge construction techniques were visible in multiple facets of the education environments, although not all of the teachers approached knowledge construction the same way which garnered different results. Though each classroom activity differed, Joy and Natalie participated in formal and informal conversations within the classroom to help build a shared knowledge of concepts within the context of the class.

The results of this study supported other studies such as those conducted by Lewis and Wanner (1979), Glasgow (2013), and Hanna (1994) because the data revealed that classroom and school climates are key factors in promoting diversity because students who do not feel comfortable in these settings tend to retreat from them. In this study, the creation of comfortable physical arrangements, while maintaining a balance between student and teacher, prompted more engaging participation in which more voices in the class were heard. The ability to evince diverse opinions reflected teachers' willingness to allow students some flexibility in process, style, and freedom of thought while remaining focused and on task. Joy's and Natalie's classroom set-up and discussion style exemplified these results.

Whether the teachers asked questions in a variety of ways, or incorporated information that reflected different lenses, the social realities of students were

illuminated. The approaches to teaching evident in this study were consistent with Gollnick's and Chin's (2012) conceptions of culturally responsive teaching. When the knowledge, experience, and leadership of students are incorporated into teaching as learning, as the participants in this study demonstrated, new ideas are shared and different voices can co-exist.

Entering Natalie's class, students often heard music playing. They were allowed to arrange the tables in any configuration they chose, as long as they could see the Smart Board. Students sat on tabletops and in chairs, and were allowed to eat and drink in the space. Natalie stated that these allowances were more conducive to student engagement and "not getting lost behind someone." The students appeared comfortable in the informal structure and it enhanced their engagement in learning. During one observation period, a student in Natalie's class got up and moved to another seat. Natalie observed him for a period of time, asked him a question and he was able to respond thoroughly. Natalie's consideration of the social aspect of learning, paired with her reflection on how students positioned themselves in the physical space, and her curiosity regarding their experience in the space, allowed them to be more engaged, and for Natalie to focus on higher-level tasks rather than classroom management.

When asked how the physical arrangement of the classroom helped facilitate the strategies used to implement the diversity mission. Natalie was clear that students needed to be able to participate verbally and non-verbally. Part of that non-verbal communication was being able to look someone in the eye, and shift bodies in a manner that is visible to their peers. A semi-circle, horseshoe physical configuration helped provide that space. This type of classroom dynamic counters Lewis' and Wanner's

(1979) assertion that independent school environments generally reinforce the dominant culture in society. By allowing students to define the physical space of their classroom, each of the teacher-participants was establishing an environment that worked against the status quo which has rows of students facing forward, and an implicit encouragement to only engage with the teacher.

Students in Joy's project-based American Studies class were encouraged to dialog with each other to solve real-world problems. She facilitated discussion as she moved from one group to the next while asking probing questions, which challenged students to examine problems from multiple perspectives. Opportunities for students to ask questions of one another and their teacher created a sense of comfort and openness in the classroom. This endeavor was not always met with students being on task but the students were engaged at much higher levels, because they were encouraged by their teacher to view the material, or ask questions of the material and each other, using multiple lenses. This was evidence as students entered and exited conversations with intensity levels they did not have when Joy was merely giving background information on projects. Students asked questions of each other, and of Joy, in a manner that complicated their stances, but delved into identity, class, and race. Students were receptive to their peers because this work exposed them to new ways of acquiring information, voicing their own ideas and opinions, and receiving feedback. These classroom climate features and instructional strategies promoted a type of diversity that involved learning styles, perspectives, and sources of knowledge.

The project that Joy's students engaged in during the observation period underscored Faist's (2012) assertions that engaging all group members in dialogue is

essential to diversity efforts, in that the project demanded students to perceive and evaluate cultural differences in ways they had not previously considered. Students were valued in this assignment for whatever kind of cultural knowledge they had to contribute, which supported them individually and as a group to have their voices heard (Hollins, 1996). It allowed students to see the demands of social justice, and unintentional slights within daily interactions that are rooted in ignorance (Hanna, 1994). The project also challenged students to look at texts as cultural artifacts, and thus as something important and necessary to the conversations they were having about culture and social justice.

As another component of knowledge construction, some of the participants used broad questions to help students form generalizations about specific issues of concern. For example, in discussing Orwell's *1984* Sam focused students' attention on larger themes such as sanity and the existence of a presumed objective reality, and engaging in dialogue that elicited abstract and theoretical reactions. While this allowed students to help construct knowledge about those two concepts, the conversations did not encourage them to go beyond the theoretical into personal experience, or work with other themes in the text that were perhaps closer to their everyday lives. This is an example of different approaches to knowledge construction used by teachers with varying degrees of efficacy in promoting the diversity mission of the school. Examples such as this one move away from culturally responsive pedagogy because they do not: require students to be reflective about their own social and cultural environments, engage on personal levels, and promote transformative social possibilities (Gay 2010).

Natalie used more purposefully layered questions in formal and informal classroom discussions, which had different structures but asked students to be reflective

of their multiple worlds. She was deliberate in her delivery and the ways in which the questions were presented. Some questions raised new topics while others were discussion openers, information synthesizers, or clarifiers. She focused on topics that dealt with gender, race, customs, and traditions, and specifically probed the ways in which these issues were presented in literary texts and in the lives of the students. By connecting curriculum content with students' lives outside of school, and by involving students in the content of texts on multiple levels, this teacher demonstrated critical elements of culturally responsive and effective teaching (Alvermann, 2001; Gay, 2010).

The teachers believed that they allowed students to be themselves in the classroom in their self-presentations, but Sam did not expand upon student identities. Unlike Natalie and Joy, Sam's attention to promoting student self-reflection was undetectable. This is not to say that Sam did not ask probing questions of students. Nor does it suggest that his students were not engaged in class discussion. What was not observable in Sam's classes, but were apparent in Joy's and Natalie's classes was inviting students into the dialogue through their own experiences. Instead, his form of questioning students and the text, left students without clear entry points for empathizing with text issues and their classmates. Even the physical organization of the classroom made it difficult for students to see each other. Their backs were to each other, and the in-class dialogue was never informal enough for students to enter with their full selves.

This study also found that teachers who allowed students to help construct knowledge created opportunities for different viewpoints to be examined. In so doing, a variety of student experiences were included that pushed the boundaries of the dominant culture. By creating these points of entry teachers avoided leading students to an "one

only” set interpretation or understanding of texts, and allowed them to influence each other.

### **Adjusted Instruction**

Successful support of the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy was accomplished through adjusted instruction as well. Adjusted instruction, also known as differentiated instruction, in the context of culturally responsive teaching is the process of adapting teaching to address diversity in student needs (Gay, 2010; Gibson, 2008). Adjusted instruction in English and Language Arts classes typically address the disparity of skills and knowledge to enhance learning outcomes. However, in this study, adjusted instruction also was used to support and implement the school’s diversity mission.

One component of culturally responsive teaching is understanding students’ abilities, and expanding them while lending emotional support in safe learning environments. This includes taking into consideration student interests, abilities, knowledge, and skills. All three teachers who participated in this study adjusted instruction in varying degrees to accommodate these student attributes. They each had their own ways of addressing adjusted instruction, such as consistently evaluating and re-evaluating students’ needs and development. This allowed them to adapt and meet students where they were situated, academically and emotionally.

Teaching was most effective when student-teacher relationships were used as access points. In one example, Joy took the time to meet with an African American male student who was having difficulty to discuss the novels they were studying and an upcoming essay assignment. The student benefitted from the extra time provided by Joy beyond classroom discussions, and by her willingness to adjust essay topics based on his

level of understanding and comfort with the material. Moments like this illuminated how a diversity mission is supported through teachers' willingness to alter assignments and provide more contact time with students to facilitate understanding. In their research Gutherie, Schafer, Wang, and Afflerbach (1995) explained the interconnectedness of students' social and classroom engagement with learning outcomes, specific to reading and text analysis. The results of this study are consistent with their explanations. As Joy changed the rules of engagement to fit the students' needs, new pathways for learning and engaging with the material were created that may have otherwise been mitigated. Behaviors like these were observed on many occasions in Natalie's and Joy's approaches to adjusted instruction.

Sam's efforts to adjust instruction focused on requirements and processes (such as providing time in class for students to work on assignments), more than on individual student abilities or issues. Although he claimed his efforts to adjust instruction to address the diverse needs of students, and were helpful in some ways, these examples were not congruent with adjusting instruction in the original intent of the construct as explained by Gay (2010) within the purview of culturally responsive teaching. They did not result in fully addressing student needs, or supporting the diversity mission of the school beyond a surface level, although they did alleviate minimal stress levels of the students regarding assignment criteria. The layered questions, time spent with students outside of class, and slowing down of instruction provided by Natalie and Joy offered relief to students in more specific and broader ways because their interactions engaged the students on a personal level.

## **Cultivating Relationships**

Smittle (2003) viewed relationship building as a key component of creating a responsive learning environment, and argued that without a trust and understanding, effective teaching cannot be achieved. Cultivating relationships with students has many benefits for supporting effective instruction generally and culturally responsive teaching specifically. Greene (1993) identified these relationships as primarily concerned with demonstrating care for the students, and noted that once students know teachers care about who they are and what they have experienced, they are more likely to respond to classroom instruction positively and thus learn more effectively. Gay (2010) explained that one of the key characteristic of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is validation. This is achieved by teachers acknowledging, and approving students' cultural knowledge and experiences. This technique requires rapport between the student and instructor to allow these experiences and acknowledgements to emerge (Gay, 2010).

Each of the teachers interviewed and observed in the study indicated that focusing on the students and building relationships with them were the most important aspects of effective teaching and supporting the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy. They worked hard at cultivating positive relationships with students, though their individual approaches to varied in how they described their approaches and what was apparent during observations.

In this study, two of the teachers, Joy and Natalie, were able to cultivate positive relationships that allowed for observable greater trust and effectiveness when they were engaging with students on academic issues. Both recognized that their individual ways of cultivating relationships, which centered primarily on providing increased accessibility in

and outside of the classroom, came with a potential risk to their personal boundaries. Natalie kept hours beyond those required by the school, and made herself available to students in person and through email and social media beyond her posted office hours. Joy had extended hours too, and actively sought out ways to approach and engage with students who were not confident and comfortable to approach her. These factors helped to support culturally responsive teaching in their respective classrooms by allowing students multiple avenues of access, which is thought to enhance empowerment for the students by shifting the dynamics of authority within the student-teacher relationship (Gay, 2010).

Sam also verbally prioritized cultivating relationships with students as a means of enhancing instruction and supporting the diversity mission of the school. However, he provided the least amount of explicit access for students, and the observations revealed notable differences in his relationships with students compared to the other two participants. This reduced accessibility served as a barrier to cultivating a culturally responsive teaching environment in which teachers encourage and empower students academically. While the idea of increased access to teachers goes beyond traditional principles of effective teaching, where teachers are expected to focus on communicating standards, rules and grades, culturally responsive teaching and literacy instruction are aligned in their emphasis on empowerment as it pertains to individual student perspectives and perceptions (Alverman, 2001; Smittle, 2003; Walls, Nardi, Minden, & Hoffman, 2002). In keeping with this, students who appeared more comfortable and confident in their academic environment seemed to have more access or engagement with Sam. This was also observable in regards to the limited number of students who

approached him for help as the curriculum became more difficult, compared to the increased engagement and approaches for help when the curriculum became more difficult in Joy's and Natalie's classrooms.

Cultivating relationships also helped to facilitate adjusted instruction. Teachers who adjust instruction based on how well they know each student provide pathways for communication that address expectations and standards of success, instead of arbitrary or unrealistic definitions. The results of this study suggested that teachers who develop and use student-teacher relationships in a variety of ways made more meaningful adjustments in instruction because they attended to the student on multiple levels.

### **Expanding Social Views**

Expanding social views was another facet of culturally responsive teaching and support of the diversity mission at Cardinal Academy demonstrated by the teachers in this study. This was accomplished through the layered interpretations of texts and the varied perspectives of the students. This is congruent with Bahktin's (1982) suggestion that meaning is created, and that there is no one absolute truth in a text. Instead, there are always multiple, connected truths which are constructed by the reader (Bahktin, 1982). Within this construct, supporting the diversity mission would suggest that teachers encourage students to explore new understandings while varying their attention to emotional support and validation of the students' experiences and perceptions. This idea, and how it contributed to implementing the diversity mission of Cardinal Academy, were readily apparent in the teaching styles of two of the participating teachers.

One example of expanding social views was observed in Natalie's approach to the interpretation of text. In *Fledgling* (Butler, 2007), Shori, an African American vampire,

encounters many difficulties. Instead of talking about the difficulties themselves in class discussion Natalie asked students to discuss the factors that complicated the difficulties, such as gender and race, and how their own knowledge of racial stereotyping affected their perceptions and explanation of the text. This purposeful questioning allowed students to examine their own social constructs; discuss issues relevant to their lives; and expand their apertures. Natalie also consistently facilitated authority changes, shifting the power dynamic from her role as a holder of “fact” within the interpretation of text, to the students as their own authorities in the interpretation and construction of meaning. She did this during discussions in response to the environment and subject matter, while also validating students’ emotional and intellectual responses, backgrounds, and identities.

This type of instruction and use of authority changes in text interpretation are consistent with components of culturally responsive teaching that validate students as holders of cultural knowledge (Gaye, 2010; Greenburg & Schaffer, 1991). In contrast to making assumptions about students, their perspectives and experiences, Natalie and Joy allowed students to explore the possible factors, complexities and layered perspectives within situations presented in texts. In doing so, they were able to effectively encourage students to think beyond their own potential experiences and allow them to share their current perspectives.

In these instances of authority changes, the teacher explored deeper issues of equity, simultaneously making students uncomfortable and feeling safe. In one instance, Joy challenged students to understand that their civil disobedience scenario was deeper than discussing someone’s desire to be out with their sexuality. Natalie attended to an

authority change when she persisted with a line of questioning that made several students uncomfortable, and she effectively shifted authority back to them in an effort to maintain an environment of safety and empowerment. In both instances, students began to have side conversations (mostly about the issues) and became louder in their discussions. Joy was able to bring the group back to the topic by reminding them of the work they had to do, while Natalie responded to the noise level with, “Hey, let’s get focused again. You are too loud. I know this stuff is difficult but we have to talk about this to understand.”

Although Sam engaged in classroom interactions that explored general issues that likely affected students, he rarely facilitated authority changes in the interpretations of text compared to the other two participants. Instead, his discussions focused on the content and contexts presented within the text, and generally confirmed his role as the authority figure in the interpretation of texts. The absence of these types of exchanges suggest that Sam was not probing issues with students that were uncomfortable to them or required additional support and facilitation in constructing their interpretation of the text.

Purposeful questions also were used by the teachers to expand students’ social views in a manner similar to knowledge construction. The questions posed did not focus on issues specific to diversity so much as they provided opportunities for students to share their various perspectives and experiences, and their interpretations of the content of texts within the curriculum. The range of questions posed within a class discussion also signaled the teacher’s intentions and expectations for the types of thinking and language students were expected to learn and use. An example of this was Natalie’s question, “Did the work of your peers give you a new perspective?” This is consistent

with Hanna's (1994) suggestion that the types of questions asked in academic discourse indicate to students the structures expected around the use of language and the type of discussion. Beyond observations of their engagements with students in their classrooms, documents provided by Joy and Natalie supported the use of purposeful questioning in the way they presented directions for written essays, using varied levels of questions, prompts, and language usage that were developmentally appropriate for the nature of the course, and for challenging their students' in their interpretations of assignments. By comparison, Sam's documents tended to cater to one level of student and used simple language. Though this potentially aided in students' interpretation of the assignment expectations, it suggested that Sam was less willing to push his students towards higher or expanded levels of thinking.

### **Interactions Among Strategies**

Three strategies that emerged from the data (knowledge construction, adjusted instruction, and cultivating relationships) and the three themes, (classroom culture, student access to teachers, and student centeredness) were interactive. For example, classroom culture has an effect on how relationships were maintained and cultivated. If students do not feel comfortable they do not fully engage in class discussion, or allow instructors to learn and utilize their individual values and experiences. These, in turn, have an impact on students' ability to learn, and to share and experience alternative worldviews. The social nature of learning and student-centered instruction evident in Natalie's classroom culture, allowed students to share information about themselves as individuals and as members of different cultures and groups in a safe and engaging learning environment.

Other ways that the teachers in this study promoted and exemplified diversity using overlapping thematic elements were including their own and students' personal experiences in instruction; layering complexity in learning through class discussion and written assignments; and expecting and assisting students to go beyond their existing levels of comfort. Often, these processes and events led to a deeper understanding of the students, and opportunities to expand knowledge bases. This included self-selecting materials that were, at times, difficult because they presented perspectives, experiences, and groups beyond the students' own personal identities. An example of this was Joy's use of a hip-hop song by Kendrick Lamar to discuss the problem of a single story and to illuminate individual differences in perceptions and the construction of reality. She also used other materials that broadened students' knowledge and frames of reference, such as a TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche entitled "The danger of a single story," and writing by Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner.

This study also demonstrated the interactive and comprehensive nature of salient elements of effective general and culturally responsive teaching in promoting diversity and supporting the mission of Cardinal Academy. All three strategies that were identified as salient to culturally responsive teaching and effective teaching were generally identifiable.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The results of this study have several implications for students, teachers, and administrators who believe in the importance of diversity in teaching and learning. The findings can help address many of the complex issues associated with diversity work, through classroom instruction, student-teacher relationships, and the various elements of

culturally responsive teaching. This means that diversity practitioners may be in a better position to assess the feasibility of their missions within their organization, determine whether their ethos and efforts are congruent, and how to permeate all levels of policy and instructional practice.

The results of this study also show that more work needs to be done, specifically in independent schools around professional development and teacher education. Because certification is not required of all teachers, a teaching community at an independent school looks different than one in public education. Life experience and job history are seen as determining factors for teachers, which means some teachers might have taught on the community college level, but have no expertise outside of subject matter. Without some of the professional development that practitioners receive through teacher education programs, culturally responsive teaching is something independent school teachers may not be well grounded in culturally responsive ideologies and methodologies.

This study also suggests that most equity and inclusion work occurs in the classroom, hallways, and on sports fields, which is counter to confining it to administrative and organizational systems. In effect, these findings show that to best address equity and inclusion in academic settings, attention is required in all facets, from the language used to communicate academic assignment criteria, to providing support to teachers who want to engage students outside of the classroom. This study revealed that teachers who are willing to interrogate their own subjectivity (similar to the ways Joy and Natalie do) are able to connect to more students because they have tried to dismantle the “constellations of power that are most protected and normalized” (Daniels &

Varghese, 2018). It also reveals that while teachers who situate themselves in culturally responsive teaching cannot always be engaged in it.

This research also provides a beginning framework that could potentially lead to developing intervention strategies to address diversity practice and classroom instruction. Department chairs and other administrators can use some of the methods identified in this study to convert policy mandates and value beliefs about diversity into practical instructional applications. One of these is the classic notion of teaching the whole child by addressing academic, social, emotional, and cultural knowledge and skills. Another is being explicit about the types of diversity that are the targets of concern at a given time, and being deliberate about using contextually appropriate and explicit instructional strategies to address them. A third method of effectively addressing diversity through instruction in schools is incorporating it into the normative operations of classrooms, protocols, and practices such that it is habitual and “nothing special.”

From the data collected and analyzed in this research, it is apparent that for the participating teachers effective teaching and culturally responsive teaching are correspondent. The strategies that the participants used to support the diversity mission through instruction showed that access to teachers who focused on building strong student-teacher relationships, and who created responsive environments, generated more opportunities for student success in and out of the classroom.

### **Limitations**

Four major limitations were apparent in this study. First, the research was conducted in one school setting, and was limited to three participants, thus limiting the

generalizability of findings to broader educational settings. Second, the findings are interdependent with the nature of the school's diversity mission and desire of the participants to support it. As such, the findings are limited to educational systems whose diversity missions and desires are congruent with those of Cardinal Academy. Third, the research site was a private, independent school. The findings may not apply to other academic environments such as public schools. Fourth, the research was limited to participants in the English Department, reducing the generalizability to other academic departments within the school.

Another difficulty in trying to generalize these findings stems from the fact that not all schools have diversity missions, and those that do may center them on different contributing factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, immigration, language, and individuality. However, what can be generalized is what is necessary from the institutions' vantage point, such as explicit communication of the diversity mission, and from the perspectives of classroom teachers providing both culturally responsive and effective methods to meet the needs of students. While the special practices of the English Department instructors at Cardinal Academy cannot be generalized across all curricular areas, the strategies that emerged from the data can be generalized across other departments.

The findings of this study are also limited by the demographics of the participants, all of whom were White high school teachers in an educational environment that includes 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The research may have yielded different results with a larger number of participants, especially of different ethnic, racial, and cultural identities, and with different types and years of professional experience. Outcomes of this research may have

also benefited from more personal knowledge of the participants and more engagement with students to help further validate the outcomes.

### **Challenges to Reliability**

One of the main challenges to reliability is the ability to replicate this study. It would be difficult to replicate this study because it was designed for a particular independent school, familiar to the researcher who was employed at the school for several years. Another challenge to replicability is that Cardinal Academy was explicitly and implicitly invested in diversity missions, and how they cared for their students across all levels and departments within the school. It may be difficult to assess such orientation in other settings, and most certainly would be different. The diversity statements of independent schools are influenced by localized institutional variables, and are likely to vary widely. This also means that each educational organization will have to decide whether issues of equity and inclusion are window dressing or are truly core, implemented values of the school. This variance also hinders replicability of this study because of its subjectivity. Another study will likely not yield the same results because of differences in location, data collection, analysis and interpretation, the characteristics of the researcher and researched, and because qualitative research methodologies are inherently contextualized locally.

### **Recommendations**

More research is needed to characterize various components of culturally responsive teaching in actual practice to complement its existing theoretical bases. More research conducted to characterize the manifestations of the various components of culturally responsive teaching will help diversity practitioners and schools to better

design and monitor implementation, and to enforce accountability at administrative and classroom levels. It is important for the diversity missions and practices of independent schools not be separated (or contradictory) in theory and process.

Another recommendation for future research is including more participants to evaluate diversity practices in instruction. This may generate results that are more generalizable to other academic populations. This could be accomplished by expanding the study to all academic areas of study that are common in most schools. English classrooms may enact culturally responsive teaching differently from Science classrooms. If this were found to be true, the composite results could create a more nuanced, authentic, and comprehensive profile of culturally responsive teaching in practice that might heighten its achievement benefits for students.

Finally, examining the diversity missions of schools and their implementation should include support for teachers, administrators, and supervisors. Supervisors and administrators should be equipped and enabled to guide teachers whose cultural competencies within classroom instruction are limited, or who are in need of additional support for other reasons such as increasing their comfort in developing relationships with students while setting appropriate boundaries. When the necessary competencies for enacting school diversity missions are lacking, staff members should be provided with professional development support to enable them to reach competence in these areas, and facilitate ongoing growth and development. Administrators and instructors also should be held accountable for practicing their schools' diversity values and policy commitments in all endeavors.

## **Conclusion**

Evidence from this study confirms that culturally responsive teachers are vehicles for enhanced learning. It is also apparent that teachers who are successful at implementing culturally responsive teaching methods promote diversity, and allow students greater access to multiple realities, in and out of the classroom. When it comes to supporting the diversity missions of schools, the practical and process oriented findings of this research are consistent with the theoretical findings of previous research related to culturally responsive and effective teaching in the identification of adjusted instruction, knowledge construction, expanding social views and cultivating relationships as core strategies in support of these constructs. Each of these strategies must be represented for individual teachers to successfully support a diversity mission.

Allowing students to co-construct knowledge in classroom settings is a means of supporting diversity in the classroom at a high level. Teachers who allow students to be experts add to the knowledge base of both teachers and students and, in many instances, encourage students to share aspects of themselves with their peers. This sharing is essential to building intellectual communities grounded in multiple perspectives, orientations, and experiences. The co-construction of knowledge between students and teachers also humanizes teachers by showing that they do not have infinite pools of knowledge, they are fallible, and they are willing to learn the attitudes and attributes created in classroom ambiances that are highly conducive to cultivating an ethos of diversity.

A significant amount of energy, time, and skill are involved in adjusting instruction to accommodate diverse student populations. These challenges (and the benefits they generate) increase as the range of diversities expands, and are present in all teaching-learning situations, even at apparently homogeneous private independent schools such as the one in this study. Though demanding, adjusted instruction is essential to culturally responsive and effective teaching and is most successful when relationships with students are prioritized. While a strong student-teacher relationship is important, all of these relationships are not deeply personal. In fact, most are not. But the teachers who were most effective in supporting the diversity missions of Cardinal Academy were those who understood the whole student, which included family culture, school culture, learning deficits, and at times, social and personal challenges. This knowledge allowed teachers to slow down, speed up, add, or remove layers to their instructional interactions.

Most schools and teachers do not intentionally create barriers to students' diversity. In fact, the teachers in this study seemed to want to tear down those barriers as they saw them. However, there is an incongruence between the desire to support diversity, and the abilities necessary to do so. This was observed in the contradictions between what was stated and what was practiced among the teacher-participants. As is the case in most situations, there were laudable points for participants in this study in their efforts to exemplify diversity in teaching, and there were areas of challenge or need for further development. Exposing students to diverse sources of knowledge and honoring their individual diversity were the most prominent and consistent elements. The hesitancy, however, to deal explicitly with classic variations of diversity, such as race, class, ethnicity, and language was evident in that these were less present or

less attended factors among the participants in this study. All three participants touched upon them in their teaching to varying degrees of comfort and action, but more could, should, and needed to be done. Thus, this study reaffirmed observations made by many other researchers and scholars that dealing effectively with diversity in its multiple manifestations is still a long way from resolution, or from being a moot issue.

The ways in which an academic department supports and implements a diversity mission is varied, and if done well, is consistent and fluid with effective teaching which is culturally responsive. This study illustrates that teachers who allow students to (1) help in the construction of knowledge through their own experiences, (2) differentiate and adjust instruction based on need and student understanding, and (3) work to build strong relationships with their students are the teachers who best support a school's diversity mission.

While most teachers know how to talk about supporting and implementing diversity initiatives, the disconnect between rhetoric and action is apparent within the English Department at Cardinal Academy and is likely recognizable in other departments within the school and other educational institutions beyond the school. This disconnect is where diversity missions and instruction must begin to align. Without a solid base of support and implementation, the diversity missions of educational institutions will continue to remain talking pieces and admission points rather than being the anchors of learning and inclusion enacted.

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## **Appendix A**

Research Implementation

Time Schedule

Week 1: Survey Administrators, Science and History teachers and Alumni Parents

Week 2: Obtain consent forms and meet with participant teachers to answer questions

Week 3: Begin participant teacher interviews

Week 4: Conclude participant teacher interviews; begin observations

Week 5: Classroom observations

Week 6: Classroom observations

Week 7: Classroom observations

Week 8: Supplemental Interviews, Analysis

Week 9: Supplemental Interviews; document analysis

Week 10: Supplemental interviews, Triangulation

## Appendix B

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by marking your responses:

Strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Teacher Survey:

1. I adjust instruction to meet the needs of my students.
2. I acquire information about my students' academic strengths and used that knowledge to strengthen my teaching.
3. I know when my students feel comfortable in class with other students.
4. I recognize how my students' home culture is different than the school culture (i.e. norms, values, actions).
5. I work with and through disparities between my students' home culture and that of the school.
6. I use various assessments to evaluate my students.
7. My students trust me with information about their lives outside of school
8. I communicate well with my students' parents or guardians.
9. I use students' prior knowledge to inform class discussion.
10. I use my students' cultural backgrounds to inform my instruction.
11. I know when my students are comfortable sharing personal information in class.
12. I use my awareness of students' cultural backgrounds in the classroom.
13. I use a variety of teaching methods to help meet the needs of my students.
14. My students are comfortable asking for help outside of class.
15. My students feel valued in my classroom.
16. I use my awareness of students' everyday lives to help inform instruction.
17. I teach students about various cultures contributions within the context of our studies.
18. I have positive relationships with my students.
19. I examine my curriculum to ascertain if I reinforce stereotypes.
20. I use stereotypes to expand my curriculum.
21. I communicate negative things to the parents of my students.
22. I communicate positive things to the parents of my students.
23. I am comfortable communicating with the parents of my students.
24. My culture matches that of my students.
25. I use my own experiences in the classroom.
26. I engage my students in conversations about class conversations outside of the classroom.
27. I use a variety of examples from different cultures to make learning meaningful.

28. I use examples that are familiar to students who have different cultural backgrounds than mine.
29. I reference my own perspective to engage with my students
30. My curriculum matches my students' developmental needs.
31. My students help construct knowledge around texts or discussions used in class.
32. I select materials that give a broad cultural perspective.
33. I feel supported by the my colleagues.
34. I collaborate with other teachers who have different cultural backgrounds.
35. I facilitate difficult conversations with my students.

## Appendix C

### Initial Interview Questions:

1. What is your take on the schools diversity mission?
2. How do you see yourself as a teacher?
3. How do you build relationships with diverse students?
4. How do you know when you are effective in and out of the classroom?
5. Do you know the schools diversity mission?
6. What strategies do you use in the classroom to support the school mission?
7. How do your interactions with students influence your instruction?
8. How are class texts and documents used to facilitate instruction in order to supports academic success with the student population?
9. In what ways do you ask students to view the world?
10. Do you adjust instruction?
11. How do you define adjusted instruction?
12. Do you use your own experiences in the classroom? If so, how?
13. Are you able to reference different cultural experiences? If so, how?
14. How do you gauge student developmental needs with curriculum?
15. How do students gain access to you outside of class?
16. How is knowledge constructed in your classroom?

## Appendix D

### Classroom Observation Guide

Teacher Observed: \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Day: 1  
2 3 4

Class Observed: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: 9 10  
11 12

Principles of Effective Teaching	Specific Behaviors Observed	Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching
Communication of high standards		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages academic success to all</li> <li>• Lends support</li> <li>• Expectations, rules and grades clearly communicated</li> </ul>
Consistent evaluation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear understanding of student ability</li> <li>• Expands ability through instruction</li> <li>• Lends emotional support</li> <li>• Helps create safe environment</li> <li>• Students interest taken into consideration</li> </ul>
Commitment to the diverse population		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validates students cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Student experience is valued within of class and lesson</li> <li>• Teacher offers personal experience</li> <li>• Students participate</li> </ul>
Addresses issues affecting learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students allowed to make broader connections</li> <li>• Classroom management not an issue</li> <li>• Teacher addresses multiple levels of engagement</li> <li>• Teacher addresses multiple levels of understanding.</li> </ul>

Subject Matter		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher is dynamic</li> <li>• Teacher allows all types of questions</li> <li>• Texts are dynamic</li> <li>• Assignments are dynamic</li> <li>• Instruction is varied and engages students</li> <li>• Teacher is able to contextualize information for all students</li> </ul>
Responsive environment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher facilitates changes in authority</li> <li>• Teacher seems motivated and engaged</li> <li>• Teacher attends to everyday lives of students</li> </ul>

Describe a few classroom routines and procedures:

Describe ways students are allowed change the structure of the class and/or classroom (power dynamics, physical space, subject matter):

What are some of the questions the teacher asks students during lesson? How does the teacher respond to student answers or discussion?

How did the teacher grab the attention of the students at the beginning of class?begin the lesson?

How does the teacher assess student learning?

Record how the teacher talks with the students. This includes feedback, responses to disruptive behaviors, and overall demeanor

What are some of the strategies the teacher uses to promote positive relationships with students?

What does the teacher do to help develop social skills? What social skill are being developed or honed?

## Appendix E

### UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM

#### Teacher survey, interview, observation and classroom documents

Researchers: Lauri Conner, student, College of Education, 206-902-6647  
Geneva Gay, faculty advisor, College of Education, (206) 221-4797

#### **Researchers' statement**

We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the praxis of teachers in an academic department at an independent school adheres and implements the schools diversity mission statement. I will study the teachers within the English department at Seattle Academy, an independent school, in order to improve practice and to enhance student learning.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

Participants will be asked to agree to take a survey, be observed in their classroom during instruction and to interviews.

Interviews: Participants will also be asked to participate in two, but no more than three interviews. The initial interviews are designed to allow self-authorship by allowing participants to address the research questions, but also questions that address the teachers self-perception, how they foster relationships and how they know they are being effective. The most personal question addressed is around how teachers define who they are. The second and/or third interviews are designed to clarify items that emerge from observation and interviews. Interviews will be recorded, coded and a matrix will be created around themes that emerge. Interviews will take no more than an hour and a half for a possible maximum of 4.5 hours.

Audio Recording: With your permission, I would like to audio record each interview so I can have an accurate account of our sessions. You can ask that I stop recording at any time during the interview. I will be the only one who will have access to the recordings,

which will be stored in a secured location. I will transcribe each interview within 5 weeks, assign a code to the transcript and erase the recording. Please indicate whether you agree to have the interviews recorded.

Observation: Participants will be asked to allow the researcher to observe them during class instruction for a full week, which equates to four and a half hours. The researcher will be taking notes that will be coded and analyzed by creating matrixes created based on the theoretical framework.

Classroom Documents: Participants will be asked to submit classroom documents, including, syllabi, major writing assignments, presentations, and projects. The researcher will be using these for triangulation purposes and to ascertain if classroom documents support/reflect instruction.

The study will last a total of 10 weeks with a three week commitment on the part of each participant.

Subjects may refuse to answer any question or item on the questionnaire, or interview and may request for the researcher to discontinue classroom observations.

### **RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

The researcher, Lauri Conner, will record all interviews with a small audio device of all teacher participants. The recordings will be kept indefinitely, but will not be shared with other researchers or invested parties such as a departmental chair. The participant will be given the opportunity to review the contents of all recordings and will be allowed to ask the researcher not to use certain responses and/or delete portions of the interview.

### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

Participants will benefit as data from the study will go directly towards implementation of professional development if warranted, as well as provide an avenue to have larger and arguably more difficult conversations within the English department. Participants also benefit as they will gain a sense of how their classroom practices impact the larger community of the school.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

All information obtained through the research conducted will be confidential and linked to identifiers. Identifiers will be removed on March 30, 2014 once research has concluded. There are no plans to release data to subjects, although subjects will be beneficiaries of the content obtained.

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, we must report that to the authorities .

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

### OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

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Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date
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#### Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

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Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
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When subject is a minor:

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Printed name of parent	Signature of parent	Date
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When subject is not able to provide informed consent:

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Printed name of representative	Signature of representative	Date
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Relationship of representative to subject

Copies to:    Researcher  
                  Subject  
                  Subject's Medical Record (if applicable)

## **Appendix F**

### **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM Department Recruitment**

Researchers: Lauri Conner, student, College of Education, 206-902-6647  
Geneva Gay, faculty advisor, College of Education, (206) 221-4797

#### **Researchers' statement**

We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the praxis of teachers in an academic department at an independent school adheres and implements the schools diversity mission statement. I will study the teachers within the English department at Seattle Academy, an independent school, in order to improve practice and to enhance student learning.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

Participant will be asked to agree to recruit the nominated faculty in her/his department.

The Department Chair will be asked to speak with the entire upper school English department to explain the research and then make contact with the nominated participant teachers. Once the chair has identified and discussed participation with nominated teachers the chair will then contact the researcher to set up initial interviews and class observations.

Subjects may refuse to answer any question or item on the questionnaire, or interview and may request for the researcher to discontinue classroom observations.

#### **RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

The researcher will use the surveys to help verify other data. Students are encouraged to answer honestly without fear of repercussions.

## **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

Participants will benefit from the study as the data will go directly towards working with teachers to change practice via professional development if warranted, as well as help frame difficult conversations within the English department. Participants also benefit as they will gain a sense of how their class actively impact the larger community of the school.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

All information obtained through the research conducted will be confidential and linked to identifiers. Identifiers will be removed on March 30, 2014 once research has concluded. There are no plans to release data to subjects, although subjects will be beneficiaries of the content obtained.

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, we must report that to the authorities .

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

---

Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date
---	-----------	------

### Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

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Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
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When subject is a minor:

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Printed name of parent	Signature of parent	Date
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When subject is not able to provide informed consent:

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Printed name of representative	Signature of representative	Date
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Relationship of representative to subject

Copies to:    Researcher  
                  Subject  
                  Subject's Medical Record (if applicable)

## Appendix G

March 30, 2014

Dear Colleagues:

I am a student in the College of Education at the University of Washington. I am conducting a research project on how the English department implements the diversity mission of the school through teacher practice.

The part of the study you are being asked to participate in consists of nominating up to three English instructors who embody and support the general and diversity missions of the school. The project will only look at teachers within the English Department and your participation is optional. Your answers will be collected on Survey Monkey, an online survey and questionnaire site. All nominations are anonymous and the data recorded will only be viewed by Alison Ray, English Department Chair.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect the benefits you normally are provided by Seattle Academy. You can refuse to participate and you are not waiving any legal right or rights by participating in this research study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call or email me at 206-676-6888 or [lconner@u.seattleacademy.edu](mailto:lconner@u.seattleacademy.edu).

Sincerely,

Lauri A. Conner  
Researcher  
Director of Diversity/11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Coordinator/  
English

**Lauri A. Conner**

12028 64<sup>th</sup> Ave South  
Seattle, WA 98178  
206.420.7669 / 206.902.6647  
lauriaconner@gmail.com

**Education:**

2018 Ph.D Candidate, Education (expected) University of Washington, Seattle  
1996 M.F.A. in Creative Writing (Poetry) University of Washington, Seattle  
1993 B.A., English Literature University of Kansas,  
Lawrence

**PhD focus:** Current work focuses on how an academic department (English) applies, supports and upholds the mission of an independent school that holds diversity as a key component of success within the school.

**Experience:**

**Head of Upper School** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA June 2016 –Present  
Responsible for all activities involving students and faculty. Maintain congruency between the school’s board-approved mission statement and all activities of the division. Act as the educational leader of the school division, responsible for its day-to-day operation. Articulate divisional programs, expectations and behavioral guidelines. Observe, supervise and evaluate faculty. Provide an environment that focuses on learning in a supportive climate. Be aware of the educational, physical, social, and psychological needs of the members of our school community and to develop plans for meeting these needs. To support the school and its leadership.

**Dean of Students** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA 2015-2016  
Worked to ensure that all students are able to access the resources available and to help support their academic and personal growth. I worked closely with administration, teachers, students and families to develop academic plans and collaborate with counselors to assess needs of students. Also deal with issues of discipline and working to align student behavior with their values.

**English Instructor** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA 2001-Present  
Teaching creative writing and literature to high school students. Teach the honors sequence focusing on American literature in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and elective courses in 12<sup>th</sup> that include Creative Writing where students create their own work and critique each other. Also began “Words on Wire” a program that expands the classroom and creative experience by skyping in nationally recognized poets. “Satire as Social Commentary” where students looked at multiple genres and how they were used to comment on modern societal problems; “Renegotiating the Social Contract” which delves into race, sexuality, gender and class and how the social contracts consistently shift; and, “Reading as a Community Act” where students looked at books with a community based message and how those messages are applied and/or overlooked.

**Director of Diversity** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA 2009- 2015  
Oversee student development around issues of difference, advocate for students and student groups, facilitate weekly student meetings, frame faculty discussions around difference and inclusion, host a community town hall, partner with NWAIS on issues of diversity and inclusion and help make community and organizational contacts.

**12<sup>th</sup> Grade Coordinator** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA 2009-2015  
Assist Upper School Head in monitoring the social and academic well-being of students. Bridging communication between school, parents, students and teachers in order to understand the stresses of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. Help oversee the Senior Project Internship program.

**Youth Board Facilitator** Seattle Foundation Seattle, WA 2006- 2015  
Facilitate the Seattle Foundation's Youth Grant-making Board (YGB) by helping introduce youth to the ways in which philanthropy can effect positive change in their community. Students participate in an eight-month board where I facilitate conversations around cultural competency, privilege, personal perspective and philanthropy.

**Assistant Director of Diversity** Seattle Academy Seattle, WA 2006-2009  
Assist Director of Diversity by overseeing faculty development, advocating for students and student groups, and facilitating monthly lecture series.

**Invictus Instructor** Rainier Scholars Seattle, WA 2004-2010  
Teach writing, literature and social issues, during a summer session, to students of color entering private schools or AP programs. Class focused helping students understand issues of race, gender, class and sexuality as means of exclusion.

**Lead Instructor** King County Renton, WA 2000-2001  
Taught writing and poetry to General Education Degree for the candidates using curriculum that focused on alternative education. Also helped create student-run newsletter that helped with writing instruction and job skills.

**English Instructor** Seattle Central Community College Seattle, WA 1996-2000  
Taught composition, research and creative writing to Seattle Central Community College students.

**Writer in Residence** Seattle Arts & Lectures Seattle, WA 1997-2001  
Taught poetry to area high school, middle school, and elementary school students.

**Executive Director** Open Minds Reading Series Seattle, WA 1994-1998  
Created reading series that spotlighted local and nationally known poets and musicians.

**Adjunct Instructor** Antioch University Seattle, WA 2000-200  
Taught creative writings to third and fourth year students attending Antioch University

using a workshop and portfolio model. Held class discussions based on issues in writing.

**Adjunct Instructor** Cornish College of the Arts Seattle, WA 1996-1999  
Taught composition and creative writing classes to first and fourth year students respectively.

**Scribes Instructor** Richard Hugo House Seattle WA 1997-2004  
Co-designed and taught poetry workshop to teens aged 14-20 during summer program.

**Instructor** Richard Hugo House Seattle WA 1997 -2000  
Taught community creative writing classes through the Inquiry through Writing program.

**English Instructor** The Bush School Seattle, WA 1997-1998  
Taught creative writing and literature to high school students grade 9 and 12.

**Journalism Instructor** Upward Bound Seattle, WA 1997-1998  
Taught journalism to high school age students and helped students produce “Achiever’s Magazine”, a publication by and about Upward Bound participants.

**Writing Instructor** Orion Youth Center Seattle, WA 1994-1996  
Assessed needs and evaluated student progress toward their General Education Degree.

**Executive Director** Raging Muse Press Seattle, WA 1994-1996  
Co-owner and acquisition editor of press that published poetry, fiction, and a monthly literary journal.

### **Awards, Fellowships and Grants**

2007 Advocate Person of the Year (Marriage Rights)

2006 ACLU Libertarian Award

2004 National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts

2001 Cave Canem Fellowship

1999 Seattle Artist Grant 1997

1998 Guest Editor, *Diverse Views*, Fall issue

- 1998 Jack Straw Artist Award
- 1998 Seattle Arts Commission Selection Panel
- 1997 Seattle Artist Grant
- 1996 Orion Arts Program Grant
- 1995 University of Washington's Minority Graduate Merit Fellowship
- 1994 University of Washington's Minority Graduate Merit Fellowship
- 1994 Grand Slam finalist, winner

**Publications:**

**Anthologies, Journals, Periodicals**

<p><i>Sou'wester</i>          "786 Aubert Avenue, St. Louis, MO"          "How she remembers the dead"</p>	<p>2010</p>
<p><u>The Ring Ear</u>, ed. Nikky Finney          "Crum Road, Lyons, MS"</p>	<p>2007</p>
<p><i>Seattle Review</i>          "Blue Sapphires and Landmines"</p>	<p>2007</p>
<p><u>Page to Page</u>  <i>Movement and A Writers Life: An Interview with Sonia Sanchez</i></p>	<p>2006</p>
<p><u>Gathering Ground</u>, ed. Derricotte, Eady and Dungy, University          of Michigan Press.          "Twelve Year Poem"</p>	<p>2006</p>
<p><u>Cave Canem VIII: 2003 Anthology</u>          "Prayers from the Mountain of Mercy"</p>	<p>2003</p>
<p><u>Cave Canem VI: 2001 Anthology</u>          "believing judas"</p>	<p>2001</p>
<p><u>Present Tense</u>          "A Father's Child"</p>	<p>1997</p>

<i>Ultra Violet</i> "Listening to Dr. Seuss"	1996
<i>Calyx</i> "A Father's Child"	1996
<u>Revival: Spoken Word from Lollapalooza</u> , ed. Torrez and Blackman, Manic D Press "How I'm Defined by American Heritage"	1995
<i>Amazon</i> "Betrayed by Dr. Seuss"	1995
<i>Point No Point</i> "Poem for Leah"	1994
<i>CATALYST</i> , No. 14 "Tell Me"	1993

**Articles and Reviews:**

<i>Black Issues</i> (June) Review of <u>Teahouse of the Almighty</u>	2007
<i>ColorsNW</i> (June) "Being Clint Eastwood"	2003
<i>The Stranger</i> (February) Review of <u>Tug</u>	1999
<i>Diverse Views</i> (February) "If We Listened, We'd Hear"	1998
<i>Seattle Review</i> , Vol. XX, No. 1 "Movement and A Writers Life: An Interview with Sonia Sanchez"	1998
<i>Wordscape</i> (February) "Finding It For Ourselves"	1997
<i>Seattle Review</i> , Vol.XV, No. 2 "Marginalization: Youth in their Own Words"	1998

**Selected Lectures, Readings and Performances:**

Seattle Book Summit	Seattle, WA	2013
Elliott Bay Book Company	Seattle, WA	2012
Powell Books	Portland, OR	2012
Richard Hugo House	Seattle, WA	2008
Orvis Theatre	Seattle, WA	2008
Seattle Poetry Festival	Seattle, WA	2007
Center for the Book	Seattle, WA	2006
Reel to Real	Seattle, WA	2006
Pulling at the Concrete	Seattle, WA	2006
Jack Straw	Seattle, WA	2005
Seattle Poetry Festival	Seattle, WA	2005
Cave Canem	Pittsburg, PA	2003
Orvis Theatre	Seattle, WA	2003
RichardHugo House Annual Inquiry	Seattle, WA	2002
Bank of America Gallery	Seattle, WA	2001
Featured Poet, Seattle Poetry Slam	Seattle, WA	1995
Member, Seattle Poetry Slam Team	Asheville, NC	1994
Winner, Seattle Grand Slam,	Seattle, WA	1994

**Radio Appearances:**

KSDT independent radio	San Diego, CA	2005
KUOW 88.9fm	Seattle, WA	2001
KSER 90.7 fm	Everett, WA	1995

**World Wide Web:**

Cave Canem

[www.cavecanempoets.org](http://www.cavecanempoets.org)

From the Fishhouse

[www.fishhousepoems.org](http://www.fishhousepoems.org)

Torch (spring)

[www.torchpoetry.org](http://www.torchpoetry.org)

**Affiliations:**

Associated Writers and Writing Program

Seattle Foundation

Cave Canem