Equitable and inclusive classrooms: A case study exploring student experiences on culturally responsive teaching

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Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was birthed from the framework of multicultural education. Multicultural Education is a broad framework that focuses on equity amongst race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomics, disabilities, and other groups who identified as marginalized. Culturally responsive teaching encompasses the ability to acknowledge cultural differences, expand diversity of thought, all while having a caring relationship with students. The literature says that both of the multicultural education and CRT, help foster inclusive classrooms and spaces on campus. CRT also notes that a teacher’s ability to care about students influences positive outcomes for learning. For the last 30 years, CRT has been studied from the perspective of K-12 students. While this research is important the researcher argues that culturally responsive teaching is needed at the university. All research questions for this study were created through the lens of multicultural education, CRT, and Nodding’s Caring Theory. Since CRT is typically examined with minority students only, the researcher explored both minority and White students at Mississippi State University to understand if the techniques were equitable and inclusive for all learners. A total of eight focus groups were held between Fall 2017 to Fall 2019 with 39 total participants, undergraduate
Participants included mostly minority students (n=21) and females (n=21).

While there were some major differences between undergraduate and graduate CRT experiences, there were more commonalities that arose when theming occurred. Students from all focus groups were able to identify at least five out of the six characteristics of culturally responsive teaching; however, minority students were able to talk about feelings of exclusion inside and outside of the classroom, as it pertained to the racial and ethnic identity. Minority students were better able to identify what culturally responsive teaching means and what it looks like in practice. Minority students were also more reflective in their responses around feeling included and excluded both inside and outside of the classroom. All students wanted a teacher that cared for them and to make the course material relevant to their lives.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late parents Melissa Greenfield and Carl Harvey Russell Jr. Although you are unable to see me walk across the stage to graduate in the physical, I know you are forever guiding me. This is for you both.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This experience was far from easy. I have lost both parents and dealt with mental health issues while taking the path less traveled. Sometimes I fell down, but my tribe picked me back up. They carried my burdens and encouraged me to keep fighting.

To my tribe, I want to thank you for lifting me up and praying for me on this journey. You have been inspirational, loving, and motivating. Every time I called, you had the right words to say. Every time I cried, you gave me a shoulder to lean on. God has truly blessed me with some amazing people, I want to give a special thanks to Lynda Russell, Tinesha Harrison, Barbra Harris, Tres Russell, Karece Ganus, Shandrea Stallworth, Johannah Hamilton, Maurisha Ross, Bridgett King, Tifni Jennings, Scott Willard, Bill Swinford, Alexandria Grayson, Yarscontti Stephenson, Kendirck Vann, T.J. Bradford, Lori Garkovich, Shawn Gardener, Brittney Radford, Nick Wilson, Sadqia Reynolds, Braea Tiflord, Brelin Tilford, Diana Seay, Xavia Gantz, Ashley James, Mary Jo Linker, Sylvester Miller, Ryan Locke, Norman Barclift, Ashlee Johnson, Naomi Earp, Tyson Williams, Philomena Satre, Joe Gutmann, Laura Rothstein, Ganus Family, mentors, BGPSA Family, and MANRRS family. You have shaped me into the woman and scholar that I have always aspired to be, and I thank you for staying by my side through the storm. I am happy to report that it is over! The marathon continues.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Since Brown v. Board in America, Affirmative Action has served as a pivotal part of the public education system as it relates to equity and diversity. Rankin and Reason (2005), stated that over the last decade, racial segregation in American High schools increased (Orfiled, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997) at the same time that postsecondary education became more racially diverse (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002). Throughout American history, the educational system has favored White students in the benefits they receive from policies and landmark decisions such as Jim Crow laws that highlight “separate but equal” (Chun & Evans, 2016; Orfield, 2001). When “separate but equal” was deemed unfair and inequitable Affirmative Action through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 served as a way to diversify higher education through policy change. Insensitivity towards groups that historically have been marginalized based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other cultural characteristics has become a prominent issue on college campuses because students are no longer willing to allow their college careers to be impeded by a hostile or uncaring environment (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Rankin and Reason (2005), also mentioned that “intentional, educational interventions related to the changing racial composition of college students would likely influence how the climate of an environment changes” (p. 44). Williams (2013), highlights the Affirmative Action and Equity Model was initially used in trying to address the representation of diversity in the classroom. Table 1 examines the reasoning for the Affirmative
Action and Equity Model is to address actions following Brown vs. Board of Education from the 1950s-1970s. One of the significant limitations of this model is the lack of engagement and inclusivity that a student would need in order to be engaged in the classroom. Affirmative Action and Equity Model has been used as a tool to navigate school and university policy around diversity and equity. According to Williams (2013), this model does not address the change that needs to happen in the culture and the norms that have excluded minorities for so long.

Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004), “stress the importance of actual experiences with diversity through cross-racial interaction in classrooms, intergroup dialogues that bring students from diverse backgrounds together to discuss racial issues, and participation in multicultural campus events” (p. 18). Diversity has served at the forefront of college and university’s missions, but research tells us that there is a lack of authenticity when it pertains to the “commitment to diversity and multiculturalism” (Chun & Evans, 2016, p. 17), which leads to the failure of actual inclusion efforts for minority students (Jayakumar & Museus, 2012). Public schools should create spaces with the opportunity to have meaningful experiences as it pertains to racial integration so that students can truly learn the differences and similarities within each other, for diversity to work in the classroom (Gurin et al., 2004).
Table 1  The Affirmative Action and Equity Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Launching Point</td>
<td>1950’s, 1960’s, and 1970’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Focused institutional effort designed to enhance the demographic diversity of the intuition’s faculty, staff, and students, and to eliminate discriminatory practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers of Change</td>
<td>Civil Rights movement- shifting laws, policy, social movement.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Dynamics of Change</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Diversity Rationale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social justice (historical rationale)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educational benefits of diversity (contemporary rational)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals of Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased compositional diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduced incidents of racism, sexism, and intolerance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target of Efforts</td>
<td>Federally protected groups of students, faculty, and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Elimination of exclusionary barriers, remediation, casting a broad search net, process improvement, diversity as a plus factor among many used in competitive decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Change</td>
<td>First Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy of Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Technology</td>
<td>Affirmative action offices, plans, and policy statements; race-sensitive admissions and financial aid programs; and equal opportunity programs like Upward Bound. Talent Search, etc..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Williams (2013, p. 137)
Social scientists have presented on how White students tend to have different experiences than those of their minority counterparts (Ware, 2006). Some of the differences highlight the experiences of inclusion on campus and the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching ensures that educators understand and meet the needs of diverse student groups and cultures (Fitchett, Starker, & Slayers, 2012). The lack of culturally responsive teaching training often leaves the educator to introduce students to their own biases without knowing how they negatively affect their students (Siwatu, 2007). Rankin and Reason (2005), noted that when there were intentional multicultural experiences for students, the outcomes for learning were higher. Based on Ware (2006), it is essential and necessary for students to gain a positive experience in the classroom so they can feel included and comfortable in an open learning environment. If culturally responsive teaching is applied in the classroom, students are more likely to be engaged and have positive and improved learning outcomes from the course (Siwatu, 2007). The literature tells us that “culturally responsive pedagogy is more than just good teaching, it requires practitioners to advocate for social justice, maintain a socio-political consciousness, and possess an eagerness to work with students of diverse backgrounds” (Fitchett et al., 2012, p. 4). According to Rankin and Reason (2005), learning environments that included exploring a variety of cultures, lead to “positive educational outcomes related to race” (p. 45).

There are several ways an educator can apply culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms. One of the significant ways is to have an educator who demonstrates cultural competency, “cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or profession and enable that system, agency or profession to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross, 1988, p. 1). Based on the definition of cultural competency, this can be applied through the system of the university by way of
administrators and educators. The educator must also possess emotional intelligence, which seeks to understand how one’s actions and emotions can affect others around them as well as being self-aware of their own emotions and actions (Coleman, 2008). Emotional intelligence forces a person to look at themselves and how their actions contribute to the emotions of another’s (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence relates directly back to culturally responsive teaching because the educator is aware of their own bias and actions that may offend or bring discomfort to others in a learning environment.

**Background**

It is equally important to note that in the 21st century, universities have pushed to recruit minority students into their respected institutions (NCES, 2002). For the purposes of this research, public universities will be referred to as four-year colleges and universities. Mussu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker (2016), reported on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, that in 2013 42% of the population of students enrollment was of White racial backgrounds, while 34% made up minority students at public colleges and universities. In the report, the authors noted that the Department of Education highlighted,

between 1990 and 2013, total fall undergraduate enrollment of some racial/ethnic groups grew faster than of other groups, and the racial/ethnic distribution of students therefore changed. The largest increases in undergraduate enrollment were observed in Hispanic and Black students (Mussu-Gillette et al. 2016, p. 5).

While the effort of recruiting a diverse population for public universities and colleges across the nation is essential, it would also be relevant to point out that retention tends to be the harder part of adding diversity as a critical component to the value of the university. It has been reported that
African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans are less likely to finish their degrees than White students (Seidman, 2005). In order to retain students, Umbach and Kuh (2006), states that:

Institutions must intentionally create opportunities for interaction, present diverse perspectives in the classroom, and find other ways to communicate the value of diversity and support the academic and social needs of students from different backgrounds. In the context of liberal arts colleges, most of which tend to be relatively small, apparently, the magnitude of the number of students from different backgrounds does not matter as much to deriving the benefits of diversity experiences as does the quality of interactions across differences that the campus environment encourages and nurtures (p. 16).

While diversification through education has its positive attributes, Gurin (1999) notes that diversifying without intentional education on the issues of that targeted group could result in “negative interaction” and “consequences” (p. 387). It was predicted by Carnvale & Fry (2000) in a report for the Educational Testing Services that by “2015… 80% of the anticipated 2.6 million new college students will be African American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian” (p. 1).

The lack of cultural training can have a negative effect in the classroom, and educators can introduce students to their own bias (Siwatu, 2007). Introducing those biases in the classroom can lead to stereotyping students versus educators understanding who their audiences are. It is crucial and necessary for students to gain a positive experience in the classroom so they can feel included and comfortable in an open learning environment (Ware, 2006). An intentional effort to incorporate cultural awareness in training is vital so that a person can find an understanding of one’s self before navigating the complexities of another person’s culture (Howard, 2001). Mainly, the pervious statement intends to relate that people are complex and complicated, and in order to learn about another person or student's culture, you must first know about your own culture.
**Statement of the Problem**

With a continuous increase of diversity in public institutions, it is necessary to be intentional about educating faculty and staff about the issues that are associated with underrepresented students (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Williams, 2013). Data has shown that over the last decade, there has been a 19.4% racial diversity increase overall at Mississippi State University, and a 4.4% increase in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (Mississippi State University IRE Report, 2019). Educators and researchers at Mississippi State University should try to understand the experiences of both minority and White students to foster inclusivity in the classroom.

Student voices and experiences support the need for the concept and practice of culturally responsive teaching. More research is necessary in order to understand the perceptions and experiences of students in the classrooms surrounding CRT. With more research, educators will have the ability to structure teaching according to students' backgrounds so that culturally responsive teaching techniques are fostered. Chun and Evans (2016), explain that “At stake is the relevance of a college education to students’ ability to successfully navigate the complexities of multicultural working environments” (p. 7).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to compare self-identified minority and White students’ experiences related to CRT on Mississippi State University’s campus. In doing so, it is the researcher’s goal to define how culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education can provide institutions, administrators, and instructors with recommendations on making classrooms more equitable.
The researcher will seek to compare student experiences by race for recommendations to professors to develop more inclusive classrooms. The two groups that will be compared are self-identified minority students and White students at Mississippi State University. The research will give college students a voice in sharing their experiences around CRT. The following objectives guided this study:

1. Describe culturally responsive teaching techniques used to engage the minority and White students.

2. Describe teaching habits that hinder student learning.

3. Describe the influence culturally responsive teaching has on student learning and engagement.

4. Identify the experiences of White undergraduate students around culturally responsive teaching.

5. Describe the similarities in experiences around culturally responsive teaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.

6. Describe the differences in experiences around culturally responsive teaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.

**Significance of the Study**

While colleges and universities have tried fostering more inclusive campus and social environments, there is a lack of intentionality around culturally responsive teaching in the classroom (Chun & Evans, 2016). Literature has demonstrated that colleges and universities lack intentionality and assume that because you have a diverse population that you also foster the benefits of an educational environment that encompasses diversity (Chang, 2007; Chang, Chang, & Ledesma, 2005; Chun & Evans, 2016). The significance of the study met the desired outcomes so that the data can be transferred to educators at universities to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. All data is based on the students’ experiences and how they desire a
classroom to look when culturally responsive teaching is present. It is important to note that while this study will explore the students’ experiences the study does not highlight the entire story of culturally responsive teaching, thus making the recommendation only from the student perspective.

**Assumptions**

The researcher assumes that the outcomes, with the combination of both culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education, will include the following: 1) positive teacher-student relationships, 2) student responsiveness, 3) increase peer to peer interaction, and 4) promote diversity. These assumed outcomes would come from having equitable and inclusive classrooms and campuses with the changing demographics in the United States.

**Limitation for Study**

There are a few limitations to this study. The first limitation is that the results cannot be generalized for a broader population. These results cannot be generalized since the responses may could vary based on institution and regional location. This case study should help guide and tell the story of the students who were a part of the focus group, and not an absolute solution to how to implement culturally responsive teaching.

Due to the nature of qualitative research another limitation is the potential for the feelings of the researchers to influence the case study. To dispute this limitation the researcher talks about their bias in Chapter 3 so that the reader can understand the background that could come into play. The researcher was sure to include their work in the space of diversity, equity, and inclusion; extra circular activities; and their own cultural influence.
Lastly, case studies can very time consuming. The process of constructing the questions, running a pilot focus group, conducting regular focus groups, transcribing, theming, peer debriefing, member checking, can be long in nature. The researcher did find a way to cut the time needed to transcribe by using an electronic system that assisted in the accuracy of responses from the participants.

**Operational Definitions**

**African American:** A U.S. American who was born descents of the African diaspora. Black has also been used interchangeability to identify this term. African American was termed by Jessie Jackson in the 1980’s and has been more widely used in the 21st Century (Rankin & Reason, 2005).

**Campus Climate:** Refers to an assessment given by colleges or university to gage the experiences of students in the academic environment. The components that are associated with the assessment deal with behaviors and norms of students, employees, faculty, and student-based needs. This measure is heavily used for recruitment, retention, policy, and social change on campuses (Rankin & Reason, 2005).

**Culture:** Is the belief or norms held by a certain group (Diller & Moule, 2005).

**Culturally responsive teaching (CRT):** A teacher’s ability to “use the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

**Diversity:** The process of incorporating differences from underrepresented and or marginalized groups (Williams, 2013).

**Equity:** The presences of fairness where everyone is on the same level or playing field (Williams, 2013).
**Inclusive:** When all students, regardless of identity, feel a part of the culture and or environment (Williams, 2013).

**Intersectionality:** An overlap of identities based on social categories such as gender identity, race, sex, and disability (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Minority:** Traditionally marginalized or underrepresented groups in the United States. Examples of these groups are race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality (Williams, 2013). For this study however, the term minority will only be referring to race due to the participant population.

**Multicultural Education:** A broad educational reform to include racial and ethnic groups, gender, and cultural characteristics that result in high academic success for all students (Banks & Banks, 2010).

**Predominantly White Intuitions (PWI):** “describes intuitions of higher learning which Whites account for 50% or great of the student enrollment” (Brown & Dancy, 1966, p. 1).

**Race:** Traditionally defined as the physical characteristics of a specific ethnic group. This has been proven to be hard due to the increase of the mixing of ethnic groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Underrepresented Minority:** Persons who identify as African American, Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander, not limited to people with disabilities and other disadvantaged backgrounds (National Science Foundation, 1996)

**White Students:** Racial classification that traditionally refers to European heritage. It should be noted that a White-students can also be apart minority or underrepresented groups.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter includes related literature that pertains to this study. With close examination, the researcher has identified a theoretical framework and related studies that are centered on student interaction in the classroom about culturally responsive teaching. The researcher will highlight culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and caring theory. Through the literature, the researcher will illustrate how all three of these frameworks lead to equitable and inclusive classrooms at the university.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that guided this study was Geneva Gay’s CRT Pedagogy (2010). The overall goal is to improve the success of ethnically diverse students through culturally responsive teaching and for preparing teachers in pre-service education programs with knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to succeed within this goal. Gay (2010), also notes that teachers are not knowledgeable in areas when it relates to the cultural backgrounds of students. Gay (2010) explains that teachers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), do not know enough about the contributions of different ethnic groups, making it harder to teach students who come from different backgrounds, because they cannot connect the science and the history behind it. Another focus of CRT is on designing culturally relevant curricula, meaning
that teachers should be able to revise material from textbooks so that they better represent cultural diversity. Creating a classroom climate that is conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students, is another component to culturally responsive teaching (Jennings et al., 2014). Other components include cross-cultural communications and cultural congruity in classroom instruction. Since culture influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors of students, it is essential to understand how to communicate and deliver information in the most effective way. Hammond (2015), defines culturally responsive teaching as:

> An educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning-making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves the use of cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning (p. 15).

Gay’s (1993), CRT pedagogy encompasses six characteristics that include validating, comprehension, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. The characteristics described by Gay (1993) are examples of what culturally responsive teaching should look like in practice (Vincent & Kirby, 2015). Validating is a teacher acknowledging students’ cultural heritage and how their heritage affects the students as a learner. Comprehension is when a teacher strives to develop the student by using culturally diverse situations to teach content. The students are held accountable for their learning as well as their peer’s learning during these teaching moments (Vincent & Kirby, 2015). Multidimensional is demonstrated when a teacher incorporates all aspects of the classroom to showcase cultures (teacher to student relationships). Empowering is when the teacher is an enabler of the students’ success; however, the teacher is aware of the potential risks involved in learning and provides opportunities for success along the way. A transformative teacher not only respects and
acknowledges other cultures, but they use those cultures for essential resources when teaching. Transformative teaching does not negate academic success but instead makes academic success an attainable goal for every student. In other words, the teacher recognizes strengths in culturally diverse students and teaches them to be proud of their cultural background rather than ashamed. Emancipatory teaching breaks away from mainstream thinking and teaches students to apply new knowledge to problems and experiences. Teaching students this new way of thinking encourages them to find their voice and take responsibility for their learning (Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

Alongside CRT, multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2010) and caring theory play a role in how an educator can achieve the outcomes of a classroom that exhibits an equitable and inclusive classroom on university and college campuses. Gay’s (1993; 2010) research demonstrates that Multicultural Education is a broad range of tools that leads to culturally responsive teaching. Based on the literature, CRT was founded based on the principles of multicultural education and supported the techniques that Gay (2010), has charged teachers to implement. Caring theory seeks for the teacher to foster relationships with students with the outcome of the student being more responsive in the classroom. Gay (2010) also highlights that in order for CRT to work a teacher must care about students too.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Research suggests that there is a responsibility to train teachers to work more in sync with students who come from various backgrounds (Gay, 2002). When preparing teachers to be culturally responsive in the classroom, Brown (2007), reported five important areas 1) developing a culturally diverse knowledge base, 2) design culturally relevant curricula, 3) demonstrate cultural caring and build a learning community, 4) build effective cross-cultural
communications, 5) and deliver culturally responsive instruction should be addressed to equip teachers with the necessary skills to teach in a diverse classroom.

**Motivation**

Culturally responsive teaching includes four critical motivational conditions that explain the success of an inclusive learning environment between students and teachers; 1) establishing inclusion, 2) developing attitudes, 3) enhancing meaning, and 4) engendering competence (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Teachers play an essential role in the success of students in a classroom and are significant in fostering an engaging learning environment (Ogbu, 1995; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). The culturally responsive teaching framework encompasses the “dynamic mix of race, ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and families that contribute to every student’s cultural identity” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 1).

The first motivational condition is establishing inclusion, which is defined as “creating a learning atmosphere in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 15). This motivational condition focuses on the ability of the teacher to find common ground with students. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) explain that establishing inclusion could be in the form of a teacher forming small groups on the first day of class to foster discussions on a topic, such as research, and have learners talk about their experiences within the topic. The teachers would have the groups share their experiences, expectations, and concerns while the teacher writes them down. By doing this activity, the teacher can gain an understanding of the learner’s perspectives, and it allows bonding experiences amongst peers (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).
The second motivational condition is developing attitudes, which is “creating a favorable deposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 15). By expanding on the activity from establishing inclusion motivational condition, developing attitudes can be incorporated by just adding an activity that “engages students’ choice, increases the relevance of the activity, and contributes to the favorable disposition emerging in the class” (p. 15). Having students chose the topic they want to study allows the learner to become invested in the educational process.

The third motivational condition is enhancing meaning, which means to “create challenging, thoughtful learning experience that includes student perspectives and values” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 15). To exemplify this motivational condition students would research the topic they found most compelling, and once the data was collected they would discuss and engage in collaborative learning so that they could synthesis the information in a way that demonstrates the challenge of comprehension for the topic (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). This in-depth understanding provides an experience that connects the interest of the students’ topics. When students have a stake in their research, they are more likely to find a connection between theory and practice.

The last motivational condition is engendering competence, which “creates an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 15). To conclude the example given by the authors, students would reflect on their experience with conducting research and then share their reflections amongst their peers. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) explain that “self-assessment helps the students to gain from an authentic experience, and an understanding of something they may value” (p. 16).
These four motivational conditions exemplify the fundamental interactions and connections that people have with one another (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). If teachers are intentional with the interactions they implement in the classroom, the four motivational conditions will contribute to student engagement (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

**Caring**

The concept of caring about students has been supported throughout the literature by both Gay (2010) and Shevalier and McKenzie (2012). Gay (2010) notes that caring is one of those things that most educators agree is important working effectively with students, but they are hard pressed to characterize it in actual practice, or to put a functional face on it that goes beyond feelings of empathy and emotional attachment (p. 48). Gay (2010), also deems caring as an “essential part” of truly fostering CRT. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012), looked to address the gap of culturally responsive teaching but applying Nodding’s Care Theory to frame culturally responsive teaching as a question of ethics, inquiry, and caring. The theory is applied to urban education. The two components of Nodding’s care theory are *Caring About* and *Caring For*. *Caring About* is the ability to turn one's attention to the lives of others and spurs one to seek justice for them, even for distant others, one does not know and shall never meet. *Caring for* focuses on face-to-face relationships, where one focuses attention intensely, experiences the issues, sees the consequences, and understands how one’s caring affects others. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012), explain that the goal for culturally responsive teaching strives for the “Care for” verses “Care about” component. As a part of Nodding’s care-based education model, he explains that there are four aspects: 1) caring for students; 2) goodness as people; 3) nurturing their social, emotional, and academic growth; and 4) helping them understand happiness. Research says that effective teachers who possessed
interpersonal and pedagogical competencies helped student succeed in the classroom. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) summarize that there is a link between care-based theory and culturally responsive practices. Teachers who reflect on the model and competencies create an inclusive classroom environment, and everyone feels comfortable having an open and honest dialogue. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) conclude that research does support the idea that culturally responsive teaching makes a difference in urban schools; however, it is not clear that preservice teachers understand the dimensions of grasping the concept of “caring for” instead of just “caring about.” Gay (2010, pp. 51-52), highlights a profile of what culturally responsive teaching includes in the following list:

- Providing spaces and relationships where ethnically diverse students feel recognized respected, valued, seen, and heard;
- Fostering warmth, intimacy, unity, continuity, safety, and security;
- Knowing culturally diverse students thoroughly personally and academically;
- Cultivating a sense of kindness and reciprocal responsibilities among culturally diverse students;
- Responding to the needs of diverse students for friendship, self-esteem, autonomy, self-knowledge, social competence, personal identity, intellectual growth, and academic achievement;
- Being academic, social, and personal coordinates, advocates, resources, and facilitators for culturally diverse students;
- Acquiring knowledge of accepting responsibility for culturally diverse students that go beyond the school day and its organization parameters;
- Helping students of color develop a critical consciousness of who they are, their values and beliefs, and what they are capable of becoming;
- Enabling ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as being receptive to new ideas and information;
Building confidence, courage, courtesy, compassion, and competence among students from different ethnicities and cultural communities;

Being academically demanding but personally supportive and encouraging;

Allowing for the active assertion of student interest and curiosity;

Creating habits of inquiry, a sense of criticalness, and amoral edut among students to care for self and others;

Treating everyone with equal human worth;

Acknowledging social, cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistics, and individual differences among students without pejorative judgments;

Promoting cultural, communal, and political integrity and solidarity among different ethnic groups;

Dealing directly and bluntly with the vicissitudes of racism, and the unequal distribution of power and privilege among diverse groups;

Preparing students to understand and deal realistically with social realities (what is), along with possibilities for transformation (what can be);

Teaching ethnic, racial, and cultural knowledge, identity, and pride;

Providing intellectually challenging and personally relevant learning experience for socially, ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students.

**Teaching Interactions**

Villegas and Lucas (2002) proposed a framework around culturally responsive teaching that offers an opportunity to test the commitment of educators. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), there are six characteristics that define culturally responsive teaching. The first characteristic is sociocultural consciousness, which means to have an understanding that people’s way of thinking, behaving, and such factors deeply influence race, ethnicity, social class, and language. In order for sociocultural consciousness to occur, teachers must first know how they identify in the given categories in order to be the most effective teacher. The second
characteristic is an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds. This characteristic focuses on teachers who see their students in an affirming way and acknowledge the existence and validity of plurality ways of thinking, talking, behaving, and learning. The third characteristic is commitment and skills to act as agents of change. Teachers’ jobs are to facilitate growth and development of their students, and with being a change agent, they are actively working to enhance the quality of education and their students’ lives. Characteristic four is constructivist views of learning, which means that teachers find understanding in the way that students’ process and interact with new information. The bias of this characteristic is for teachers to examine the cultural and external values that students bring to the classroom when they learn and share their ideas. The fifth characteristic is learning about students. In order to bridge preexisting information with new information taught, teachers must learn the experiences of their students so they can not only teach but also relate the information to their students. The last characteristic is culturally responsive teaching practices. Exhibiting culturally responsive teaching practices involves, including all students in the construction of knowledge, building on students’ personal and cultural strengths, helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, using varied assessment practices that promote learning, and making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students. Villegas and Lucas (2002) explain that this proposal can be changed and altered according to the environment, but the foundation is what exposes the commitment of the teacher’s willingness to step out of their comfort zone.

**Diversity**

Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, and Parente (2001), look to answer the question: Does racial and ethnic diversity promote student learning? This study was put to an empirical
test to determine whether and to what extent the racial/ethnic diversity of students in a classroom relate to student learning. A survey was conducted to the National Science Foundation, funded by Engineering Coalition of Schools for Excellence in Education and Leadership, with a sample of 1,258 engineering students. The survey focused on the classroom activities and outcomes of the survey. The survey had three sections which included personal information, characteristics, and activities of the course in which the students were enrolled, and the last section asked students about the extent to which they believe they have made progress in various learning and skill development areas as a result of taking that particular course. The results showed that diverse student bodies and classrooms are more educationally productive than those that are less diverse or not diverse at all. Terenzini et al. (2001), explained that campuses with “warmer” climates allow for socialization and discussion about racial issues, and have a higher tolerance for diversity issues.

**Multicultural Education**

The idea that every student should be included in the educational environment has been a construct since the integration of schools. Banks and Banks (2010) have made strides in the scope of multicultural education and research to identify ways to increase equity and inclusion in all aspects of education. Multicultural education “incorporates the idea that all students-regardless of their gender, economic class, ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics-should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 5). It is important to note that there is not just one standardized practice of multicultural education, but instead various ways related to “educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language, minorities, low-income groups, and people with disabilities” (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 6). The multicultural education model
has been utilized since the 1990’s in order to create inclusivity. Table 2 highlights how learning and inclusivity marry together in the framework (Williams, 2013).

While there is no one standard practice for multicultural education, there are five dimensions, which include content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Table 2    The Learning, Diversity, and Research Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Learning and Diversity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Launching Point</td>
<td>Late 1990’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Focused agenda centered on integrating diversity into the curriculum and promoting research on diversity issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers of Change</td>
<td>Changing demographics, globalization, workforce needs, persistent inequalities, legal and political dynamics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dynamics of Change</td>
<td>Educational value</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Primary Diversity Rationale</th>
<th>Goals of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intergroup relation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cognitive complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scholarly understanding of diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Target of Efforts           | All students irrespective of backgrounds                                         |
| Character                   | Diversity as important resource for student learning                             |

| Strategy of Change          | Centralized diversity requirements; diversity elective courses; and diversity programs like intergroup relation offices, dialogue programs, living-learning communities, and study abroad programs; also, service-learning efforts, ethnic studies, gender studies, international affairs offices, etc. |

Williams (2013, p.149)
Content integration is a dimension of using examples during instruction that stem from a variety of cultural perspectives related to concepts, principles, theories, and constructs taught in the classroom. Banks and Banks (2010), notate that incorporating the content integration dimensions in certain course subjects is more straightforward than others. Some examples of courses that Banks and Banks (2010) identified that are easier include, social studies, language arts, and music. Despite these courses being easily applicable due to the association of content, math and science can also have content integration through examples of diverse leaders in the content area.

The knowledge construction process is a dimension that teachers can incorporate, which instructs students in a way that helps the learner apply a higher level of thinking. The components that Banks (2002), includes are understanding, investigating, deciding, and identifying ways that critique the social positioning of groups through the way knowledge is presented. An example of knowledge construction being applied in a college government class could be the history of systematic racism as it pertains to racism. This social issue has affected and is affecting marginalized and underrepresented groups throughout the United States of America. An educator’s ability to connect the issue of voting to current issues in voting rights at the state level could lead students to have a higher level of thinking to critique and analyze parallels between the past and how it has affected policy.

Prejudice reduction is a dimension tool that describes lessons and activities that teachers implement to assert positive imagines of ethnic groups and improve intergroup relations (Banks & Banks, 2010). Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Gresson (1996) found that students tend to come into classrooms and have misconceptions or stereotypes about certain ethnic and racial groups-based
on home, social, and peer influence. By incorporating prejudice reduction in courses, educators can shed a more positive light on groups who have historically been marginalized or underrepresented. The exposure of a positive association with marginalized or underrepresented groups can help construct a more accepting attitude and understanding of the targeted groups.

Equity pedagogy dimension is modifying teaching styles and approaches with the intent of fostering achievement for racial, cultural, gender, and social-class diverse groups (Banks & Banks, 2010). The tool of equity pedagogy would require teachers to examine the current techniques they have been using in the classroom to ensure they foster multicultural issues and concerns. Through this level of analysis and implementation, a gap can be closed with academic achievement. While this tool is demanding and can be time-consuming, it is typically personalized with different ethnic groups.

The last dimension is empowering school culture, which is the examination of the school culture and organization by all members of school staff with the intent to restructure institutional practices and create access for all groups. Academics, and in this instance college and universities, should foster a school environment that promotes gender, racial, ethnic, and social-class equity (Banks & Banks, 2010). The essence of this dimension is empowering students through the culture of the population to ignite an inclusive environment.

**Conceptual Framework**

Culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and caring theory are similar in several ways. In Figure 1, multicultural education is the force for CRT and caring theory resulting in a positive experience for learners in the classroom. This research argues that dimensions of multicultural education are achievable techniques that would lead to culturally
responsive teaching. Adding the dimensions of content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture would lead to the techniques necessary to ensure that teachers are more in sync with students who come from various backgrounds (Bank & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2002). The frameworks that were used are multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and Nodding’s Caring Theory. Multicultural education is the driving force, and the science behind creating more equitable and inclusive classrooms. The way that a teacher can get to equitable and inclusive classrooms is through the art and action of culturally responsive teaching and having a caring attitude for their students. A positive consequence of equitable and inclusive classrooms should lead to four outcomes: 1) positive teacher-student relationships (Gay, 2010), 2) student responsiveness (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012), 3) increase peer to peer interaction (Gay, 2010), and 4) promote diversity (Terenzini et al., 2001; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Currently, the research looks at these two conceptual frameworks separately, but this study looks to combine the two, so we can inform the practice of education on how to make the classroom more inclusive and equitable, especially with the rapid change of demographics in the United States.
Figure 1  Conceptual Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to define culturally responsive teaching techniques, and understand from the student’s perspective, how they view equity and inclusion in the classroom. Through focus groups, students were allowed to express their thoughts on questions around CRT and what that looks and feels like to them. The following research objectives were used to guide the data collection for this research:

1. Describe culturally responsive teaching techniques used to engage the minority and White students.

2. Describe teaching habits that hinder student learning.

3. Describe the influence culturally responsive teaching has on student learning and engagement.

4. Identify the experiences of White undergraduate students around culturally responsive teaching.

5. Describe the similarities in experiences around culturally responsive reaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.

6. Describe the differences in experiences around culturally responsive teaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.
Study Population and Recruitment

Mississippi State University historically is a predominately White institution (PWI), meaning the majority population is of White or European descent. Historically, PWI’s serviced White students; however, when school integration occurred, the universities had to abide by the status quo requirements mandated by the federal government (Library of Congress, 2019). With the evolution of educational institutions and societal shifts, recruitment for more diversity has attracted more racial minorities and international students to the universities in Figure 2. Mississippi State University (2019), reported that 21,974 students represented the student population in 2018. The population represented 72% of the students were White; Black or African American students made up 18.2%; Hispanics/ Latinos represented 2.8%; 1.2% of students were Asians; Native American or Alaskan Native were reported as .05%, and 2.3% of student’s identities were unknown, Figure 3 (all non-White students represent minorities). Women made up 49.5%, and men made 50.5% of the total undergraduate student population. Within the College of Agriculture, the total population of students is 2,491 (White=78.2%; Minorities 21%; Unknown=1%), which can be noted in Figure 2. In Figure 4, students are separated by race and classification in school.
Figure 2  Enrollment White and Minority Student’s at Mississippi State University
Mississippi State University (2019)

Figure 3  Enrollment Based on Ethnicity (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)
Mississippi State University (2019)
The population for the underrepresented students came from all degree programs through Mississippi State University. Underrepresented students are defined as students who have been marginalized, which includes race, ethnicity, sex, gender, culture, religion, sexuality, or disability. The underrepresented groups were collected from existing data through focus groups. Although the researcher intended to collect underrepresented students from all areas of diversity, the population resulted in minority students that identified with only race or national origin that has been marginalized. For the purposes, this study students from the underrepresented groups will be noted as minority students to capture the precise group that was studied. Despite the efforts to recruit University-wide, the majority of students reported that they were in majors within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Therefore, White student participants were recruited through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to mirror the majority of the
population in the existing data set. The White student population are students who do not identify with a historically marginalized group. The recruitment email can be seen in Appendix A.

Recruitment took part in two stages. For the existing data set that looked at underrepresented students, the research targeted students through specific student groups on campus. The groups that were contacted by email were Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS); LGBTQ +Union; the Linking Internationals in the Community programs; and the Black Student Union. To make sure that the researcher was able to get as many participants as possible, the director of the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center (HCDC) at Mississippi State University also helped with recruitment. Emails were sent out by the researcher and the director of the HCDC to students throughout the university.

The second stage of recruitment was to reach the White student population. The first wave of emails was sent to student organizations within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Initially, the White population for participation in the study student were recruited through student organizations, including FarmHouse, Alpha Gama Rho, Sigma Alpha, Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) club, Crop and Soil Club, Collegiate FFA, and Block and Bridle Club. Due to the initial lack of participation, the researcher also reached out to professors throughout the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Mississippi State University to be more intentional about recruiting the desired population. The focus groups took place in classes during a time that the professor was scheduled to be out, helping to fill a gap for the instructors. Students from the class were recruited and their participation was solely voluntary. Refreshments and food were provided at all focus groups.
The three focus groups were conducted in the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center with all minority students \((n=12)\), in Spring 2018. For the White students, there were two mini focus groups \((n=4)\), conducted Fall 2018, and two additional focus \((n=15)\) groups in Fall 2019. To capture the experiences of White students, additional focus groups were conducted to reach saturation. In total, there were 38 participants for this study, including the 7 participants from the pilot focus group.

**Research Design**

A multiple case study is the best design that helps identify group experiences around CRT at Mississippi State University (Zaidah, 2007). In general, case studies assist the researcher in exploring and understanding issues within the scope of the topic being studied (Zaidah, 2007). This method has been known to be heavily used in educational research to capture the experience of students (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). Case studies hold strength in the aspect that data is usually collected in the place or environment of interest (Yin, 1984). Case studies also help explain experiences outside of a survey or experimental design (Zaidah, 2007). Focus group interviews were selected, so the researcher could ask questions about experiences that students had around CRT model. According to Glesne (2011), focus group interviews are most useful when looking to gain multiple perspectives on a similar experience. In this case, culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Once the focus groups were analyzed, the researcher was able to compile a practical list of culturally responsive teaching techniques and how teachers can accomplish and adopt the skill. More specifically, the researcher will conceptualize how the techniques will help foster a more culturally responsive class environment and make the campus climate more inclusive for all students.
Purposeful and convenient sampling was conducted for the selection of participants. The strategies used for purposeful and convenient sampling were the homogeneity and snow ball sampling. Snow ball sampling is when participants get other participants to join the study when the initial recruitment did not draw enough subjects. Convenient sampling happened with the last two White focus groups in order to gain more participants. The two groups that included used were underrepresented minority groups and White students. Therefore, homogeneity was used so that students would feel more comfortable amongst other participants that they have a similarity to. According to Keown (1983), groups that have similarities are more comfortable and more willing to participate. The recruitment letter can be found in Appendix A.

**Instrumentation**

The instruments that the researcher used to collect data were an identity wheel, focus group protocol, and reflexive researcher journal. Instruments, which included all questions, were approved by Mississippi State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB-18-459 and IRB-17-361). The approval emails can be seen in Appendix B and Appendix C.

**Identity Wheel**

At the beginning of each focus group, students were given written questions [Appendix D] that encouraged them to define culturally responsive teaching, describe what culturally responsive teaching looks like to them, and to identify themselves based on the identity wheel. The identity wheel included: race, ethnicity, physical, emotional, developmental ability, age, soci-economic class, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, and religion or spiritual affiliation. The identity wheel was a method to identify what groups were represented in each focus group.
Focus Group Protocol

The researcher prepared a facilitator script that was used in every focus group [Appendix E]. The script has an opening statement that included the purpose of the study, objectives of the focus group, voluntary participation, notice of a written response page that included the identity wheel, and a working definition of CRT. There were 12 mandatory questions that the facilitator asked in every focus group and they were flagged as bold. There were additional questions that the facilitator could ask to encourage participation if interactions were low. The additional questions were also used if the facilitator thought there needed to be more clarification amongst student responses. The questions listed under number one, were ice breaker questions used to engage the students and to get them thinking about why they attended the university. Questions two and three were used to gauge where students felt included and excluded on campus, to better understand and identify experiences on campus. Questions four through nine were utilized to understand the perceptions and experiences around CRT in the classroom.

Reflexive Journal

A reflexive journal was used to capture observations from the researcher. The observations were behaviors, reactions to questions and responses, and anything that the researcher captured throughout the gathering and of analysis of data. A reflexive journal is an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the process of collecting data. According to Etherington (2004), it is a common practice to keep a reflexive journal, especially in qualitative research. The reflexive journal is presented in ways that make it clear how the researcher’s own experiences, values, and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interest, the way they choose to do their research, and the ways they
choose to represent their research findings (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 325)

The researcher used this instrument during focus groups and when transcribing. The researcher took notes and reflected on responses given by the participants. Through the journal emotions and reactions were captured from participants and researcher. Ortlipp (2008), notes that instead of trying to control for the researcher’s bias, beliefs, and values, the research should consciously recognize the personal connection they bring to the research.

**Pilot Focus Group**

The first focus group was a pilot conducted in Fall 2017, with graduate students who identified as racial minorities. These participants served as experts to validate the questions that would be asked to undergraduate students (n=7). The graduate students assisted with determining if the questions asked were what the researcher intended. They were also given an opportunity to give the researcher feedback on the questions that were asked. All students expressed that the questions were appropriate to undergraduate students, resulting in the focus group protocol found in Appendix E.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Consent Process**

At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher went through the protocol to ensure that the students understood their participation was strictly voluntary. The researcher also made students aware that the information collected in the focus group would be de-identified and
confidential. After explaining the protocol to the students, they were required to sign a consent form to continue with the focus group, which can be found in Appendix F.

Data Collection

After obtaining consent forms from students, and identity wheel paper was passed out so that the researcher could accurately identify which minority group each participant identified with. In each focus group, there were three researchers in total. As needed professors and other graduate students were recruited to be the moderator, transcriber, and to take field notes as needed. All recruited researchers were trained in the protocol and given the same instructions for observation. The training of the researchers consisted of explaining the purpose of the study, giving a background of what CRT is, and going over the questions. The script was given 3 days prior to the scheduled focus groups so that researchers could familiarize themselves with the protocol script and to gain clarification if there were any unanswered questions.

After all focus groups, the researchers discussed observations and impressions with one another to eliminate bias and to ensure that all observations were similar and to highlight the ones the researcher may have missed. The moderator went through the protocol and asked questions to the participants. It should be noted that depending on the population, and the moderator would be racially accepted into a group of participants. For example, during the minority focus groups, there would have been a racially identified minority researcher to ask the questions. The assumption was that this strategy would make the participants feel more comfortable responding to the question. During the focus groups, one researcher took field notes about the reactions to questions, gestures, tones in voices, and the overall experience of the focus groups. The third researcher would transcribe to capture participants' statements. Although there
was a voice recorder to capture students’ responses, the third researcher provided a reference with the audio transcription. The data was captured through voice recordings, field notes, and the researcher’s reflexive journal. The researcher would reflect during and after each focus group to accumulate the reflexive journal.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were used with both sets of populations. Davidson (2009), says that intentional of homogeneity in focus groups brings strength to the responses. The intention behind recruiting and conducting the focus groups were to have a group of minority students and White students, to provide commonality amongst the groups. Research explains that homogeneous groups tend to feel more comfortable talking in groups when they have shared experiences (Davidson, 2009). In total, eight focus groups were conducted, which included the data from the graduate pilot. Focus groups were best fit for the study due to the nature of students being able to describe their experiences with their voice.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the evaluation criteria of four elements must be present in order for trustworthiness to be established: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility -is the ability to find the truth, transferability- means that the findings can be applied in another context, dependability-exemplifies that the findings can be repeated in other studies, and confirmability-means that the participants shape the findings and not the researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Credibility

For this research, the techniques used for credibility were peer debriefing, member checking, and persistent observation. Peer debriefing was used through the process of coding, analyzing, and theming each focus group. Three researchers were used to conduct peer debriefing. Each researcher was asked to theme each focus group individually, which would lead to a debriefing to conclude a commonality in the themes. The researchers agreed and talked through each of the themes to ensure that they matched for continuity.

Member checking was used once all focus groups were concluded. The member checking was a strategy to confirm statements for interpreting the data. To better describe the process of member checking the researcher requested follow up interviews based on observations. Observations were used for each focus group by the designated researcher to describe some of the actions that were captured were tones, reactions, and body language. If the reactions to the questions or peers needed further clarification the research identified the participant to ask follow up questions. The primary researcher on the project is the one who conducted the member checking. Member checking also occurred when “mixed” focus groups occurred. Mixed focus groups would have included someone outside of the intended requirement of the designated focus group. An example of this would display a minority student in a predominantly White focus group, or a White student in a predominantly minority focus group.

Transferability

Transferability was met by describing the participants’ experiences in sufficient detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The descriptions included the transcripts from the audio recording, field notes, and students' written responses to culturally responsive teaching. By including this data
collection method, the researcher was able to produce a \emph{thick description}, which is associated with detailed accounts of the experiences of both the participants and the researcher (Holloway, 1997).

\textbf{Dependability}

Dependability was established by having committee members participate in external auditing. External auditing requires having outside researchers look at the data to examine if the same conclusion is drawn from the preliminary findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By having the committee look over the data and conclusions, this gave dependability and showed that the research could be repeated. For context, the committee consisted of four on-site members and one outside member from a separate university in the Southern region.

\textbf{Confirmability}

To ensure that the researcher’s bias, motivation, and interest were removed from the findings, the researcher used reflexivity and triangulation. Reflexivity happens by reporting bias and preconceived notions that the researcher had before, during, and after data has been collected. Malterud (2001) explains that preconceptions differ from bias when they are not mentioned. Triangulation is the way a researcher uses multiple data sources to make inferences around the findings of a phenomenon (Cater, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Perspective triangulation was used to compare the accounts of CRT with two demographically different groups. Denzin (1978) explained perspective triangulation as the way a researcher compares each participant experience to others in the same group and or compared groups.
Data Analysis

After each focus group, the audio recordings were transcribed electronically with Temi. During transcribing, filler words and repetitive words were removed, such as um, ah, and uh. These were removed to make the transcriptions more easily readable. Once all focus groups were transcribed, the researcher went line by line to analysis and theme responses based on the protocol pre-developed questions. Additional researchers were utilized for peer debriefing. The two additional researchers followed the same format as the primary researcher. Once all focus groups were themed and coded, the researchers reached a conclusion on overarching themes and the sub-themes that followed. The primary researcher was the sole coder; however, the researcher did refer to the committee to ensure that codes were appropriate and fit.

Coding is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns an attribute to visual data (Saldana, 2012). Qualitative coding captures elements to explain the narrative by concluding themes based on creative categories to analyze the connections (Saldana, 2012). Conventional content analysis approach occurred where the codes were created by way of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Pattern coding was the primary coding tool for responses of participants and behaviors that lead to the overarching themes for all focus groups. Pattern coding looks at both similarities and differences from more than one participant (Hatch, 2002). The pattern coding lead to the overarching themes and the differences that arose from the focus groups. In total, there were three cycles of coding with the first round looking at initial statements, second round looked at emotions, and the third round looked at behaviors (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). The themes that were formulated used frequency for pattern coding, which examines how often or seldom something happens (Saldana, 2012). If more than one student reflected and the responses were similar, the sub-themes were combined together to create an
overarching theme. The overarching themes were categorized based on race and gender so that the cases could be easily followed.

Additionally, all responses were de-identified and provided an identifying code so only the researcher could track comments and individual cases of participants. Table 3 reflects how those identifying codes were created to reflect focus group number, the participation number given to each student, racial identifier (White/minority), gender identifier (male/female), and their classification (undergraduate/graduate). The responses were coded this way so that the participant quotes could be easily identifiable based on the objective.

Table 3  Identifying Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group- FG</th>
<th>#- Participant Identifier</th>
<th>M- Minority</th>
<th>W-White</th>
<th>M-Male</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F-Female</td>
<td>UG-Undergraduate</td>
<td>G-Graduate</td>
<td>#- Participant Identifier</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FG-#-Race/Gender-Classification</td>
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<td>Examples of Codes:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2-MM-UG</td>
<td>Focus Group 1- Participant 2- Minority Male- Undergraduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>P-7-MF-G</td>
<td>Pilot Focus Group- Participant 7- Minority Female- Graduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-5-WM-UG</td>
<td>Focus Group 4- Participant 5- White Male- Undergraduate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Bias**

Some of the bias that the researchers had was based on demographic background and involvement with promoting diversity. The researcher identifies as an African American woman, which can be seen as unfavorable since one population includes the underrepresented groups. The researcher has also attended three other Predominately White Institutions and is still a
student. The researcher also serves as a national officer for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS). The researcher has been a part of the organization for seven years and has been active in three chapters at PWI’s. Based on personal experiences, the researcher has dealt with the feeling of being excluded inside and outside of the classroom; thus, relating to some of the examples given in the focus groups.

Through her work, the researcher has advocated on a local, state, and national level, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. The researcher also currently serves as a fellow for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights (OASCR). She has served on the first-ever American Diversity Month committee for USDA-OASCR. The research that the author has produced has been solely around culturally responsive teaching and inclusivity in the classroom. With peer debriefing, the researcher was able to flush out the questions to ensure that there were no biased based on personal experience. Also, while conducting focus groups with both underrepresented and the White populations, there was equal representation of racial groups in both. The researcher was sure to do a peer brief after each focus group as well as when the themes were formulated.

The other researchers were graduate students (3), professors (2), and a representative from the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (1). The bias with graduate students is that they teach courses, but they are also still students. One of the graduate students is also an international student who is also a minority. The professor’s bias is that their perceptions are based on what they expect as a teacher and their content knowledge on education and how instruction should look in practice. One of the professors is also a minority and from a different country. The bias of the representative from the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion
was that they had a stake in the information that was given. The work they do is embedded in the advancement of diversity and inclusion, inside and outside of the classroom. Outside of the primary researcher there were five women and one male, which can also serve as a bias when considering perceptions of the observations.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will identify the findings through the responses by participants. Each objective will be supported by quotes as well as common themes that occurred amongst minority and White students. Graduate students' responses were removed for objectives that specifically identified undergraduate experiences. The researcher would like to note the culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and caring theory help guide the themes for the objectives. After addressing each objective an “additional findings” section was created to theme out the graduate student responses. This section was created to highlight the graduate students in the study, even though they were an unintended participation group overall. The researcher did find similarities amongst White students and minority students, as well as undergraduate versus graduate students, which will be addressed at the end of the chapter. The researcher would like to note that while the initial intention was to have each student as a case, the groups resulted in being more homogenous than anticipated. Through the analysis process cases organically grouped together based on race and gender due to the similarities in responses.

The purpose of this study is to compare self-identified minority and White students’ experiences related to CRT on Mississippi State University’s campus. In doing so, it is the researcher’s goal to define how culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education can
provide institutions, administrators, and instructors with recommendations on making classrooms more equitable.

The researcher sought to compare student experiences by race for recommendations to professors to develop more inclusive classrooms. The two groups that will be compared are self-identified minority students and White students at Mississippi State University. The research will give college students a voice in sharing their experiences around CRT. The following objectives guided this study:

1. Describe culturally responsive teaching techniques used to engage the minority and White students.
2. Describe teaching habits that hinder student learning.
3. Describe the influence culturally responsive teaching has on student learning and engagement.
4. Identify the experiences of White undergraduate students around culturally responsive teaching.
5. Describe the similarities in experiences around culturally responsive teaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.
6. Describe the differences in experiences around culturally responsive teaching on Mississippi State University’s campus in the classroom for minorities and White undergraduate students.

Results

The following results will be present by research objective. Additional findings will also be presented at the end of the chapter to better describe the individual cases of this research design.
Describe Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques Used to Engage the Minority and White Students

The following quotes will highlight how the student’s described teaching techniques that align with culturally responsive teaching. Participants were able to align with five of the six characteristics that Gay (2010) established, including validating, comprehension, multidimensional, transformative, and emancipatory. The responses were pulled from all groups of students to show the overall CRT techniques a teacher should possess. As a refresher, the researcher will give the definitions to each of the characteristics noted in this study.

**Validating**

Validating is a teacher acknowledging students’ cultural heritage and how the heritage affects the students as a learner. A minority student identified a time when the teacher understood that the class was not of their heritage, but also wanted the students to understand that the content was relevant and taught with the facts while including the culture that was represented in the course.

The researcher observed that this student’s facial expressions were of excitement and used her hands often to explain how much she enjoyed the course. She was able to give several examples of how this particular professor was culturally aware of the makeup of the class (predominately African American) while the professor was White. The following quote supports the aspect of culturally responsive teaching that engages:
**Minority Female**

4-2-MF-UG- “I liked how he [the instructor] would talk about historical events or just like influence. He would ask how it impacts us because he was White, but the class was black…it was an African American music class, and he would ask us our experiences, and then he would come back and talk about his objective view of what was happening at the time.”

The researcher noted that this was an interesting experience and thought this had to be a cool class. The student was also particularly excited to share this experience, as this was her first time having a teacher who was so engaging in the material and content.

5-2-MF-UG- “When the teacher engages with us, I like it more because they want our opinion on the subject or how we think or even getting us to talk with each other, so we're not lonely in the class. I like very engaging teachers, not just I am teaching …When a teacher takes your culture integration with teaching and giving examples in class as well as assignments that cater to you or, on the other hand, does not single you out.”

The research reflected on instances where they had experienced similar times in classrooms when they felt included and excluded outside of the classroom.

**Minority Male**

2-4-MM-UG- “He [another instructor] will say something about another country if he knows one of the people in the country that are in the class, he will ask them “how do you feel about this?” or “is this true?”…and they will be able to tell him.”

Based on the researchers observations 2-4-MM-UG enjoyed this class in particular because he was able to learn about cultures that were different from his own and the aspect that he was able to engage in the material outside of just a textbook.

**Comprehension**

Students overall felt that when a teacher could incorporate different cultures in the content, they were more engaged. It is important to note that when students felt they could
collaborate and talk to peers in the classroom about the content, the material made more sense. This would also be considered accountability for their learning and their peers’ learning as well (Gay, 2010; Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

White Female

4-1-WF-G- “One of my teachers is the one that is from another culture. So, I mean, he engages with all the students and includes all of them and interacts with us all equally.”

5-2WF-UG- “I do have a couple of professors who are really good about when they give examples…the examples are important and not singling out people cause I’ve had some professors who are trying to be inclusive, but then it feels really awkward.”

5-1-WF-UG- “If we’re talking about something within America, we’ll talk about similar situations in different countries or how it affects different groups within those countries. But even something like recognizing that not all your students are farmers from the Delta. You know, just using different examples of weeds that can just kind of make it seem more general. Small things like that just, recognizing that students are from other places and then talking as though other places exist.”

Minority Male

3-2-MM-UG- “This may be my major, but when they teach all races and all that…we talk about specific things that we have to write about, and it’s always diversified.”

Minority Female

2-2-MF-UG- “One day we walked into class, and we had to pair up with somebody we didn’t even know. So, it was like people black and White were all in a group together, and we had to get up and speak. So, to kind of makes, you feel like if I had to do this with them…then we just had to get up and speak with different people in the class we never used to talk to, but we had to gain trust to be like okay if we can meet them one day and do this, we probably can do anything.”

Multidimensional

This characteristic means that the teacher incorporates all aspects of the classroom, including, but not limited to students’ backgrounds, their own personal backgrounds,
ethnic/racial identifiers, and cultural differences to bring light to different cultures in the classroom (Gay, 2010). This helps the student relate to the professor and makes the learner aware that the instructor is cognizant of the diversity in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

Minority Female

4-2-MF-UG- “I think just recognizing the diversity in the classroom and not just leaving it as... oh we have different students in here so we are diverse....actually just engaging and celebrate the diversity by talking, by learning from each other. That’s what the college experience is supposed to be about.”

3-1-MF-UG- “For me, it was an animal behavior class, and a landscape ecology class taught by the same professor...it was not cultural as in my race or ethnicity, but really background and where you grew up. So urban versus rural environments...and how do we adjust our management practices, what we’re doing for those people, and I think that is culturally responsive, which is nice because most people don’t do them.”

White Female

4-1-WF-G- “They [instructors] related to everyone in the classroom.”

5-1-WF-UG- “When you know a professor a little more... like right now, I’m in weed science, and it’s not my passion, but I liked the professor, and I don’t know him super well, but he took the effort to learn all the students’ names.... It is a mid-size class, but he knows our names so that he can talk to us.”

5-1-WF-UG- “When teachers recognize, there are different kinds of people in the class. So just in general language use. I have had one professor... very clearly assume that the norm is White students in his language, and he makes that clear.”

6-1-WF-UG- “They [the instructor] weren’t necessarily diverse in a literal way, but she was good at challenging us to think about things differently than we usually did. Most of us had basically the same exact background, and she’d be like, “okay, but think about this.” So, she kind of forces you to have a diverse mindset. That was honestly really valuable.”

White Male

6-3-WM-UG- “I think maybe just kind of when teachers are unbiased, like when they teach you all sides of the spectrum. It could teach you from a business
standpoint or an agricultural standpoint or whatever type of standpoint that you might be a part of.”

**Transformative**

The transformative characteristic not only acknowledges different cultures but respects them and uses them as a resource in the classroom. The reliance on using the variety of cultures that exist in the classroom does not weaken or negate academic success, but it does make the success of a student more attainable. The instructor does not ignore the cultural differences, but instead embraces them and encourages more learning around diversity (Gay, 2010; Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

**Minority Female**

4-2-MF-UG- “A lot of times he [instructor] would talk about diversity and inclusion…he would hear us and say well it’s not as bad as it used to be…and he’d just say the facts like this is slavery, and this is how music started, and he would just state the facts. I really love that he brought in one of his students to teach us beats and patterns. We had a Jamaican artist, and we learned folk songs. He gave us opportunities from actual African American people and people from the African diaspora, and we just learned about music, and it was, I think, one of the best classes I’ve had.”

The researcher thought that this class had to be exciting based on the diversity that was included in the classroom. 4-2-MF-UG spoke about the African music class several times as it related to CRT and smiled when she described the class above.

**White Female**

6-1-WF-UG- “I have a weed science class with Dr. (removed name), and I feel like he does a good job with mentioning different parts of the country…he will compare different weeds from different countries.”
According to the reflexive journal the research expressed that this 6-1-WF-UG’s example was different when considering CRT. While the concept of studying weeds is important, the researcher never thought to use plants as a source of diversity within the classroom.

**Emancipatory**

This form of teaching allows for outside of the box thinking and applies new and alternative ways to talk about problems, solutions, and experiences. Teachers encourage students to think outside of mainstream opinions and form their own thoughts and voice while taking responsibility for their own learning (Gay, 2010; Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

**White Female**

4-1-WF-G- “I would say if the teacher is willing to change how they would normally teach to help the student learn better than that is culturally responsive to me.”

**Minority Female**

2-2-MF-UG- “She [instructor] makes the class fun because she takes you out of your comfort zone, but it’s nothing that’s just hard. Like the class isn’t hard, but the comfort zone part is the hard part. She makes you get out of your comfort zone to do different stuff.”

**Describe Teaching Habits that Hinder Student Learning**

The themes that arose from both White and minority students were professors who read from PowerPoint and the lack of a caring attitude towards the students. Students seemed to be less engaged or shutdown in the classroom when a professor did not go above and beyond in their role as a teacher and when professors were not creative in their teaching methods.
**Reading from the PowerPoint**

Student’s disclosed that professors who were monotone and read from PowerPoint slides seemed less knowledgeable of the material, and this made them shut down as a learner. It was described to be a waste of time to come to class if everything the teacher was presenting was already on the slides. The researcher noted that all the students below that mentioned teachers who read off of PowerPoint slides, were less enthusiastic and spoke in lower voice. There was no excitement present and very bland in the responses that were given. It was clear that no student that reading from a PowerPoint was CRT or apart of good teaching.

**Minority Male**

7-1-MM-UG- “Most of the time, everyone shuts down at the same time. When he talked about the teacher going through the PowerPoint slide fast….once a teacher does that three or four times, you know a lot of people will stop writing.”

**Minority Female**

5-2-MF-UG- “I do not like a class where a teacher just reads off the slides. If you have a PowerPoint slide, that is totally fine…but when they engage with us, I like it more cause they want our opinion on the subject or how we think.”

5-2-MF-UG- “I think I really check out of classes, where teachers literally read everything you have to know is on the PowerPoint, and the PowerPoint is posted.”

**White Female**

5-1-WF-UG - “I like it when professors have the slides up, but then when they are also reading extra information. I like it when they are supplementing what they are talking about with examples.”

**White Male**

7-7-WM-UG- “When the teacher goes through the slides too fast, and you can’t take notes.”
7-4-WM-UG- “When they [instructors] post a slide on there [PowerPoints], and then they go in their class, then they just read them… I could have been done and gone home.”

Lack of Caring Attitude

The theme of professors not caring about students came up in every focus group. Students were able to notice a difference when a professor cared about student learning, the content, and having an actual relationship with the students. Students revealed that when a professor appeared to not care about them, their course load, personal issues, or their learning, they shut down and lost respect for the professor. There are also cases where participants distinguished when a professor showed that they cared. The researcher noted that students were more excited to talk about these experiences, and although the course work may have been difficult, it made it easier to get through the course when they felt supported.

White Male

6-1-WM-UG- “It’s like sometimes they [instructors] do not care about what you are doing outside of the classroom and just pile on work after work, and you’re just like, I can’t do all this at once.”

6-2-WM-UG- “I shut down after the first test of the class if I absolutely bombed it, and so your just kind of lost in the material. So, then the new material, you don’t understand any of it… and like let’s say the teacher didn’t offer help or you didn’t go to their office hours to get help, you just kind of said I don’t care, so forget it. I’ll take it another time.”

6-1-WM-UG-“I had a professor who really didn’t recognize that students learn at different rates, and so, some students would be studying and going to tutoring….and maybe they’d be going to ask him like, oh, how can I make my B to an A? But then some students were doing all the same things with a lot of effort and would ask how do I get my C to a D, and he would not recognize the difference in those scenarios and would have the same thing like well guess you should have done all you can, to both students.”
6-5-WM-UG - “My biggest thing is when a teacher shows me they don’t care. They make it blatantly obvious that they’re just here for a paycheck. I’m just here for an education, so why should I put any more effort in than you do?”

_Minority Female_

4-2-MF-UG- “I can give you the class where I just didn’t understand it at all. And then one day she was like does anybody understand, and the whole class said no. She was like ok, great, and kept going. We never paid attention in class after that.”

4-3-MF-G- “I had one professor in Brazil. My class was more girls than boys…I don’t like him because every class, he starts to joke… because the major was the culture of machines…every class he did like a little joke…when a girl tried to ask a question he said, “okay,” but when it’s a boy, he starts to talk and more of it, I don’t like it.”

The researcher’s internal reaction to 4-3-MF-G’s statement was disturbing being a female.

Initially, in the focus group this particular student was very shy and didn’t speak up, but it was obvious that this story struck a nerve because, she reflected on this matter more than once in her focus group.

2-1-MF-UG- “I have a German class where she talks at us instead of engaging us in discussion…and then sometimes even when you engage in the discussion she’ll kind of prioritize what she’s saying instead of letting us get in our input. But, I think she feels like that because she’s an expert in that subject and all that good stuff.”

2-3-MF-UG- “I try to avoid those teachers that teach, especially in math, because you to have to know all this stuff, and it builds on each other. I can’t ask questions, or if I feel like I can’t come to you and say hey, I missed that, I won’t even take your class.”

2-4-MF-UG - “Anytime the teacher doesn’t include you in the class. What I mean by that is when teachers come in, they just talk, they just lecture. No interaction with the students, they just come in, talk, do their job, and they leave.”

_Minority Male_

7-8-MM-G -“They don’t care about their students. They just here to get a paycheck.”
The examples given above by 7-8-MM-G, made the researcher think about the purpose of teaching and if they had ever felt this way as a student, and the answer was yes. The research had also heard this echoed in previous focus groups that are highlighted throughout this section.

Describe the Influence Culturally Responsive Teaching has on Student Learning and Engagement

Students shared what happens in both a positive and negative light when culturally responsive teaching is present and how it either engages them or shuts them down as a learner when it is not present. The following are quotes from students supporting each side of the described influence that culturally responsive teaching has on them as a learner.

The lack of openness was brought up negatively from the student perspective when a teacher was not displaying culturally responsive teaching. Students reported negatively that professors who were biased, not open to different perspectives, and did not consider other students learning styles, were signs of negative influence in a classroom. The following quotes support professors not being open to different perspectives:

6-6-WM-UG -“I got in a little argument my freshman year with my sociology professor. It was an opinion based question that he asked to the class he pretty much told me I was wrong…and, so that’s whenever I got, I don’t know, I didn’t get heated, but I let him know that if he wants to know my opinion, you are telling me it’s wrong. Especially if you ask for it.”

The student finished his statement with how he felt internally when CRT was not present:

“I mean if he does not want to know it, then just keep his mouth shut and stand in front of the class. That’s how I look at it.”

A student also followed up by saying when culturally responsive teaching isn’t present, “it’s just kind of like you don’t want to be there” (6-1-WM-UG), and that it makes the rest of the class shut down as well. Students also noted that the rest of the class typically shuts down when
culturally responsive teaching is not present. When professors were open, students reported a more positive experience and how it was helpful. The researcher inferred that open meant a teacher was willing to work with students inside and outside of the classroom. It was inferred that the open meant that teachers were welcoming of differences in opinions. 2-3-MF-UG stated, “If I needed to meet with them outside of class, they will get back with me very quickly.” This is connected the aspect of a caring teacher that the researcher highlighted in chapter two according to Gay (2010).

In a more positive aspect, students expressed that professors who demonstrated CRT in the classroom were more relatable and took students out of their comfort zone. The following quotes support how CRT can positively affect a student getting out of their comfort zone:

6-1-WF-UG- “A professor actually said, “I want to push you out of your comfort zone, and we are going to have mandatory professor check-ins.” He had everyone come in to introduce ourselves, ask us how we were doing mentally, and is there anything he could do to make the class more fun... I normally don’t always feel comfortable talking to my professor one-on-one. He’s like, I just want to get to know my students, and I feel more comfortable with him in class, and I’m not afraid to ask questions.”

The same student followed up with another example of when a professor got them out of their comfort zone and how it impacted her choosing her major. Through her example, she said that “if someone needed further explained, she [instructor] was willing to hold back the class a little bit so that everyone was on the same page” (6-1-WF-UG). This student later used the phrase “It was really cool,” concerning the teacher showing her ability to get students out of their comfort zone and willing to ensure that all the students understood the information. Another positive example of getting students outside their comfort zone is below:

2-2-MF-UG- “One day we walked into class, and we had to pair up with somebody, that we didn’t even know. So, it’s like maybe people, black and white, all in a group together and we had to get up and speak. So, it kind of makes you
feel like if I had to do this with them because I think you and I were on a team together. And then we had to get up and speak with different people in the class we never used to talk to, but we had to gain the trust to be like okay if we can meet them one day and do this we probably can do anything.”

Another positive experience of culturally responsive teaching is through mentorship. A participant highlighted the importance and how they are more likely to interact in the class when the professor had a positive relationship with their students. Participant 5-1-WF-UG stated, “In Poli Sci [Political Science], you get to know them [instructors] more, and you can ask questions, or it could be more of a mentorship, almost.” Another example where students felt like professors were culturally responsive is explained in the following quote:

1-1-MF-UG- “I had to take English Comp two, and I had a really good professor. She made everyone in the class feel included, every single race, just because she was herself…she was very helpful. She helped me to become a better writer. I know she helped a lot of other students, and the things that we had to do in class was peer review each other’s work. That helped us learn other people’s names in the class… It gave us an opportunity to at least get to know their faces if we ever saw them around campus.”

Identify the Experiences of the White Undergraduate Students Around Culturally Responsive Teaching

A few overarching themes arose from the White students. Graduate student's responses were removed from this section to focus on the population of undergraduate students. A typical response was that students felt included everywhere on campus and did not face exclusion individually. The only time students felt like they were excluded was their freshman year when they did not know anyone or in a bigger classroom. The most common themes that were found amongst this population were that students did not like big sized classes and technology was a hindrance of peer to peer interactions. Also, connecting back to objective one, white students in general defined CRT as teaching in a way that everyone can learn and comprehend, as well as,
being inclusive if learning styles and background. The students used the following words or phrases that describe what CRT looks like: relevant examples, being a good person to all, unbiased, helping outside the classroom, and adaptable. There were at least three responses that highlighted that students had not heard of CRT or did not know what it meant.

When asked about when White students felt excluded 7-4-WM-UG stated “in bigger classes” but followed up with “I just worry about myself” when asked if they had witnessed other students shut down in the classroom. Other students echoed the thought on bigger classes in the following statement:

5-1-WF-UG- “I’ve had big classes…One hundred fifty student classes with professors who just aren’t helpful and are almost aggressive. The professors who brag about how low their test averages are….so a lot of people just wouldn’t try. So if they missed class they’d be like, okay well we know the test average is going to be 60 anyway, so why would I put the effort in to that? And then they’d stop coming, and they would study hard, and it just made them bitter towards the subject.”

The student described watching other students in general stop showing up in a classroom when the teacher did not display culturally responsive teaching. This student, in particular, talks about teachers not being helpful or potentially available for real comprehension of the material. The student later explained that when a professor was not displaying CRT, they lost respect and shut down as a learner, “I had a situation where I just sat there, and I did pretty well in that class, but I just didn’t want to listen to him because I didn’t want to respect him” 5-1-WF-UG.

According to the reflective journal, the researcher noted that it seemed the White students were not aware or didn’t notice minority students shutting down on campus or in the classroom.
Describe the Similarities in Experiences Around Culturally Responsive Teaching on Mississippi State’s Campus in the Classroom for Minorities and White Undergraduate Students

For the purpose of this objective, all graduate responses were removed for the comparisons. The following comparison represents the minority and White undergraduate students in the focus groups. After pattern coding, the similarities resulted in 3 common areas 1) wanting teachers that care, 2) feelings of exclusion when there is a lack of commonality, and 3) wanting relatable examples to connect material.

**Caring Attitude**

Wanting a teacher who cares was primarily talked about in the classroom but expanded outside of the classroom. Students want a teacher who takes into consideration that students have a life outside of the classroom. 1-5-WF-UG explained an instance where her dog was sick, and the professor made concessions about her missing class,

“you can get an excused absence, or I know these certain scenarios aren’t covered by school policy if you have a pet and they’re sick. Obviously, you have to take them to the vet…. Just because it’s not a like a human doesn’t mean they don’t have to be taken care of. She was just aware of different things that affect students and then helping them make allowances for those things. I thought those were really important things.”

The teacher’s ability to show they listened and found understanding in the instances that were important to the students resorted to the participants’ examples. To echo the thought of teachers caring 2-2-MF-UG said, “That’s the main thing…some teachers will ask you, hey, how was your weekend? If you can’t do that at least some of the time, then I feel like it puts a gap between you and the students.”
**Lack of Commonality**

Throughout coding, both minority and White undergraduate students spoke about feeling excluded when there was a lack of commonality. The responses were centered on peer-to-peer interactions. Students said to combat this, they made themselves available and just went to talk to people in those uncomfortable situations.

1-4-MM-UG “So, I just started talking to people. I found out that me and a guy…both of our parents were both Navy vets we all reminisced and everything. And then I was able to actually… I took it a step further. I got to know some of the professors personally and everything.”

The researcher felt like 1-4-MM-UG had a genuine experience around connecting with other students to find the common ground to connect on.

7-6-WM-UG- “I’ll talk to anybody…. I just sat down and struck up a conversation when somebody, you know…One time I saw somebody had something from somewhere in Florida, and I knew where it was. Somebody once said strike up a conversation on anything…. maybe you get a best friend.”

Through observation 7-6-WM-UG, the researcher did wonder that if white students could just talk to anybody, why in other instances did minority students feel like their peers were not culturally responsive?

1-1-MF-UG- “I learned how to become a social butterfly. So, I had always had to take it upon myself to be the bigger person in all situations. So, I’ll walk over, and I’ll speak, or I’ll start a conversation.”

As noted in objective one, relatable examples and connecting the content to the learning was deemed necessary by the students. Students were more engaged when a professor would make the material relatable to aspects of students in the classroom or based on the experiences that the professor had. Some of the examples students gave were giving a relevant example, talking about the instructor’s own experiences with content, relating examples to world issues,
talking about the content globally, and showing the representation of diversity. A minority student notes this in the following quote:

1-1-MF-UG- “I’m going to say making sure that each student feels included in the subject matter. For example, you know black people don’t wheelbarrow, but there is a question, and you get an answer to wheelbarrow questions that every student knows. They are like all the White students [who know the answer]. No, that’s not culturally inclusive. I feel like my cultural inclusion would be asking something that every single race would be able to answer so that everyone will have the chance to compete for the grade or even feel included and feel special like they are actually learning something from the class.”

This student went into deep reflection, and you could feel her experience through her words. She was able to elaborate on her experiences in-depth, and that provoked other students to talk about their experiences around the lack of commonality in the classroom.

Describe the Differences in Experiences Around Culturally Responsive Teaching on Mississippi State’s Campus in the Classroom for Minorities and White Undergraduate Students

While there seemed to be several similarities amongst both populations of learners, there were also differences. Amongst minority undergraduate students, three common themes were discovered. Minority student's themes are as followed feelings of exclusion, the feeling of inclusion, and overall classroom experiences. Minorities also have said that they shut down in the classroom when professors single them out to be the representative for their race or when they feel inferior. Minority students reflected on instances and times where they felt excluded based on their race inside and outside of the classroom. To ensure that the objective was met, minority graduate students' responses were removed from the minority undergraduate findings.
Inclusion

Students reported that they felt most included in student organizations, intentional inclusive spaces, and departments. The organizations and spaces that students highlighted as being places where they felt included were Men of Excellence (MOX); Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Science’s (MANRRS); Holmes Cultural Diversity Center (HCDC); Black Student Union (BSU); and Resident Life (Res Life). White students reported that they felt included everywhere on campus. The examples that White students gave were centered on not feeling included when they were in larger classrooms, and when teachers did not intentionally interact with them. When asked what specific areas of the university do you feel included, minority students responded in the following way:

Minority Female

1-1-MF-UG- “I can say the HCDC culture and diversity center is the place where I feel the most included.”

1-4-MF-UG- “…definitely HCDC is where I feel the most at home. I joined MOX because when I came here, I literally knew nobody, but I can tell you just about everybody in there now. They make you feel at home… and other organizations like MANRRS.”

2-4-MF-UG- “I feel very included in here [HCDC]. Everyone is so welcoming… and friendly, there are no little I’s or big U’s. In here, everyone is based on the same level. Everyone comes in here, they speak. It’s just a friendly environment. A safe place for all people.”

3-4-MF-UG- “I had joined BSU. Once I got there, I felt really at home with the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center.”

2-2-MF-UG- “I spend most of my time in McCain [building on campus]. Just in general, I feel we have a diversity suit there, and for my major, we have a bungalow…so it just feels like we can go in there anytime, no matter what.”

3-2-MF-UG- “So this is my first year here, and it was tough for me to find someplace where I felt included, and the only place so far that I’ve found was
with the organization, Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related sciences. And that’s pretty much where I found my home.”

Like previous examples 2-4-MF-UG was excited when talking about the Holmes Cultural Diversity center. This center seemed to be a safe space for students to learn, socialize, study, to be their authentic self. The researcher reflected on those safe spaces being a minority at three PWI’s and how good it felt to have their culture celebrated throughout the year.

**Minority Male**

1-3-MM-UG- “I’ll say HCDC and Reslife because I was a part of CORE during my sophomore year, especially HCDC. You’ll meet people just from the same hometown as you. You’ll meet people you went to high school, and middle school like it goes way back. So I would definitely say both of those and Reslife... They made sure you were included in many different activities that they have at that residence hall, and they made sure they find a different way to bring all the students on campus together.”

Minority students said that “hospitality” and “feeling welcome” were the aspects that made them feel included in the spaces mentioned. Participant 1-4-MF-UG explains the feeling of hospitality as “…I’ve always been told that if, I act like me, that I will end up gravitating around people that act like themselves as well”.

**Exclusion**

Minority students expressed feelings of not belonging in both the campus and classroom space. They often spoke about awareness of being one of the only racial minorities in an environment and it not being a comfortable environment. Despite their lack of feeling uncomfortable, they still talk about perseverance and pushing through to reach their academic goals. As an on-campus experience of feeling excluded students spoke about instances where they were the only black person:
**Campus**

**Minority Female**

1-1-MF-UG- “You can definitely feel a difference… me coming to Mississippi State transferring and doing all of them Ms. MSU pageants and there’s only like me and another black girl who’s in a White sorority/ So it’s like I don’t really have anyone to talk to and, I kind of felt excluded in that sense just because I felt like I was like the only black girl and I wasn’t really qualified to do the pageant, I didn’t grow up doing them. I just did modeling, and it just kinda made me feel inferior to the other girls a little bit.”

According to the reflexive journal the researcher noted that 1-1-MF-UG was anxious to talk about her story, but excited to share. The tones her in voice we higher which signaled these emotions

2-4-MF-UG- “I would say with some organizations or general events…you can definitely tell that most of them aren’t very diverse.”

3-1-MF-UG- “I get excluded from a lot of things because my department is mostly White males. And so I ask the question a lot like, “why am I here”? because I’m not a part of the culture within that department. It was really hard.”

**Classroom**

**Minority Male**

1-4-MM-UG- “So besides me being the only black person there [in class], I was new to all the software they were using… it was a lot different than what I was just always used to, like hard coding in Python. They were making maps using this, and I had to figure it out. Sometimes when you’re a new student, everybody either likes you or everybody want to keep a distance. So I was the one where they kept their distance, so I was like I ain’t got nobody in my corner. Just that sense of being alone, I guess. But I go with it.”

1-3-MM-UG- “He [the instructor] just says certain comments about certain things in class that makes everybody feel uncomfortable, and he’ll start ratting off on the side about his personal life. Like one time, he was talking about religion, and he was talking about what he believed in, and he was saying like… if you’re not doing good on earth…how do you expect that person to be in a better place? And everybody in class got really, really offended by that and somebody stood up and told him like, “Hey, that not cool” cause everybody ya know, he sent an email out to everybody apologizing, it wasn’t cool.”
2-1-MM-UG- “Classes where you have a majority… if there’s three black girls in my biochemistry class, and there are no black males.”

Minority Female

1-1-MF-UG- “I think I shut down as a learner…definitely, if a student feels like they’re inferior to the other students…If they don’t like the color that you are, they feel like they have some type of misconception about you, and they don’t want to help. It’s like, you’re my classmate, you know.”

2-4-MF-UG- “Certain classes where basically, it’s either you in there by yourself or you have one or two people in there that look just like you, and it just sometimes is not a comfortable environment, but you just have to remember what you’re there for sometimes.”

2-2-MF-UG- “I’ve had a teacher talk down to me and it doesn’t feel good.”

2-4-MF-UG- “People will just look at you. Some of them will really just look at you and won’t speak. That’s a big problem I find. At least if you going to look at me, open your mouth, and speak. Sometimes you will speak to people, and they will turn their heads and won’t speak back. And then you can tell, especially in one class I have. We were getting ready to do group work you know everybody has their friend in class but when you’re the only one in class….I mean no one really just jumps and says, “Hey, you be in my group.” You have to wait until everybody finds their group, and then the teacher will sometimes say okay this group needs another person, so then you will have just to be put into that group.”

3-2-MF-UG- “It’s just a lot of microaggressions within my department. The people within my department give you looks and then a lot of times being the only black person in the class or being the only black female in the class.”

3-4-MF-UG- “A lot of people have been uncomfortable because of my race. So, if I get in a group with a lot of White people in my department, sometimes they’ll just sit there and be quiet. So, I try to initiate conversation… and they will say about two or three words and then go back to silence. So it’s really uncomfortable, and you keep trying to push the conversation, but after a while, you just gotta face that you here for one reason, and even though you try to make a connection with them, but if you stuck in that way, there is no way of actually communicating.”

3-3-MF-UG- “I didn’t have a problem with my English Comp two teacher…she failed me out of the class, and I think it’s because I was black.”
Minority students also talked about having to adapt to the predominant culture. One student speaks about how they initially had feelings of having to fit in, but just reminded herself that she could be herself regardless of the space:

1-3-MF-UG-“I know in a few occasions I have to tell myself, it’s okay to be yourself in whatever setting you are because sometimes when you’re in a setting that you’re not so used to, you feel the need to just adapt to their culture and not stick with their own….just be yourself, you don’t have to talk as proper as they do, you may not do the same things, or you may not do your hair the same way. Just be yourself because you know they will like you or not.”

Representation of examples in the classroom is essential, but the representation of minority professors was also brought up in several instances when students said they felt included in the classroom.

2-2-MF-UG “In my engineering administration class and we actually have a black professor teacher, and it’s like, I mean I really never had a black professor. I think it’s like my first semester….it’s just the fact since she is black it just makes us feel like in general that the whole class is diverse.”

2-3-MF-UG “This is my first time having a black professor, and I absolutely adore her.”

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multicultural Education

Since the framework of multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and caring steered the objectives, this theme did come up amongst all groups. It is important to note that White students and minority students answered these questions similarly, but they had a major difference in responses. White students explained that a classroom with culturally responsive teaching present would take form in treating everyone equally and fairly. Minority students gave a more in-depth description of what those classrooms would look like and feel like. Minority students noted the following:2-4-MF-UG- “I feel like it would be a very diverse environment… you have people from
all races, backgrounds, sexual orientations….you have LGBT in there, you have students from foreign countries, you have Whites, you have blacks, you have a lot of different opinions and everybody’s opinions are recognized, is respected.”

2-2-MF-UG- “With our class, we have different races. That’s about the only class that we actually have a lot of different races in one room. So, that’s about really the only class.”

Minority students, also felt as though they were expected to know information already, thus expressing their frustration:

2-4-MF-UG- “Some of them feel like the information should be easy for us to retain, but you have to think, you’ve been teaching for how long? You’ve taught the same material, you’ve been through college. This is my first time, probably even hearing this material. How am I supposed to catch on just as fast as you do? So, I don’t think they understand it.”

When culturally responsive teaching was not present in the classroom, minority students mentioned that it felt “cold,” “stupid,” and “awkward.” They explained that those are classes they do not enjoy going to, and when they are there, they do not want to be there. A minority female talks about feeling excluded as the only minority female in the department. She reflects on times in class when a professor was not culturally responsive in the following response:

3-1-MF-UG- “During class, academically, teachers were not being aware that some of the things that they said might be offensive to people who are not White. When teachers use examples, they can just be insensitive and unconscious about what they’re saying and how they’re coming across. Socially, I’ve been excluded from the department. Like being a transfer and not having the same experiences growing up, and then having peers who aren’t aware that everybody doesn’t have it easy like them. So not being aware of that. They talk about how they have land passed down throughout their family and…I’m not worried about getting a job because I’m just going to work on my family’s land or I’m already set for life. They’re not aware that other people don’t have it as easy because it was never set up that way for others, and there was never the opportunity to be that way.”
To provide a visual representation of the relationships between White and minority students Figure 5, highlights both groups. A Venn diagram was found appropriate to visually show the similarities and differences of each group. This diagram solely examines the comparison of undergraduate students. The themes that arose from White students were that they felt included everywhere on campus and they felt excluded in bigger classrooms. The minority student’s themes around CRT were that they felt included in specific organizations or intentional inclusive space and identifies races in the examples provided of exclusion inside and outside of the classroom. All students said they desired the following: a teacher who cares about them, lack of commonality made students feel excluded, and they wanted a teacher who have relevant examples to connect materials.

Figure 5 Comparing and Contrasting Undergraduate White and Minority Students
Additional Findings

Participants Definition of CRT

Students were asked to fill out an identity wheel along with questions that surveyed their pre-knowledge of CRT. The following two questions were received prior to the operational definition of CRT, 1) What is your definition of culturally responsive teaching? and 2) What does culturally responsive teaching look like to you. In general, the minority students were better able to articulate responses for these two questions. Each of the responses were separated based on ethnicity and gender. The responses highlight minority males, minority females, White males, White females, and the two unidentified students’ responses to the two questions around CRT. The responses were only coordinated to the responses from the identify wheel, thus making it impossible to track students based on their responses. Themes of student responses of how they defined CRT can be found in Table 4. The themes were coded based on the frequency of the given responses. If the response was reflected by the participants more than twice than a theme was formulated.
### Table 4  Themes of CRT Definitions by Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>What is your definition of CRT?</th>
<th>What does CRT look like to you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Minority Males    | • Making people feel comfortable  
• Using examples relative to  
• Diversity in teaching/diverse backgrounds                                                       | • Adaptability  
• Inclusive  
• Objective Teaching  
• Conscious of other cultures                                                                 |
| Minority Females  | • Considers all cultures when teaching  
• Being aware of all cultures and ethnicities  
• Using relevant examples                                                                       | • Diversity in material  
• Inclusive  
• Respecting differences  
• Conscious of students’ cultures                                                                   |
| White Males       | • Teaching in a way that everyone can learn  
• Teaching based on people’s background and from different cultures around the world          | • Relevant examples  
• Being a good person to all  
• Not sure/ haven’t heard of it                                                                     |
| White Females     | • Cultural sensitivity  
• Inclusive of learning styles/backgrounds  
• Objective Teaching  
• Conscious of other cultures                                                                       | • Helping outside of the classroom  
• Adaptability  
• Unbiased                                                                                           |
| Unidentified      | • Cultural sensitivity  
• Objective in teaching                                                                               | • Treats everyone equally  
• Gives everyone a chance to learn                                                                   |

### Specific Program

There was one additional theme that was highlighted throughout the focus groups amongst White undergraduate students and undergraduate minority students. The theme that was not tied directly to CRT; however, there was a level of commonality amongst undergraduate students that brought them to the university. The theme was a student’s decision to come to Mississippi State is related to financial, family, and specific programs.
The last similarity was the reason students decided to come to Mississippi State predominately because of specific majors and programs. Students from both compared groups supported these reasons through the following quotes:

6-2-WM-UG- “I wanted to do AG, so pretty much just came here.”

6-3-WF-UG- “The college of AG and life sciences is really prestigious to me. Like it, just kind of blew me away. So that’s why I chose here. I almost chose Alabama, which makes no sense at all, considering I’m an AG major.”

6-2-WM-UG- “I came up here, and I think they have a better AG program. I think their research facilities are better.”

1-4-MM-UG- “Software engineering. So if you wanted to be an engineer, this was the place to come to s what I had been told.”

3-1-MF-UG- “Enrolled in Tuskegee University and Mississippi State. My own program allows me to attend Tuskegee for three years and then my last year at Mississippi State to diversity my experiences…. I think compared to a lot of other schools, Mississippi State has had the best program for my major, and that’s just what it boiled down.”

3-3-MF-UG “Mississippi State has a good engineering school… and I wanted to go somewhere where my needs were going to be validated.”

Other sub-themes that came up from these two groups for attending Mississippi’s State were cost and family. For the cost, 1-4-MM-UG said, “Tuition was low,” and other students said that their decision rested in legacy (6-2-WM-UG) “My whole family went here and I’ve just always been a diehard fan.”

**Graduate Students**

Initially, undergraduate students were the focus of this case study. Due to the researcher using the pilot focus group (which was made up of minority graduate students, and another graduate student), the researcher wants to ensure to highlight the graduate students as well. The researcher will compare the similarities in differences between undergraduate and graduate
student’s experiences around culturally responsive teaching. The commonalities that arose from graduate students were similar to the undergraduate students in themes of making the content relative and caring attitude, which included teachers being available.

**Caring Attitude**

Throughout this chapter, the students have demonstrated that it is essential that professors exude a caring attitude about their students. The following quotes highlight and support this skill when teaching students:

P-3-MF-G- “But her research is in [specific area], and she is very vocal about her research, and she is willing to spend time, like “hey come to my office and talk to me.” She even invites me to events on campus, and the black studies conference. She was like, “Hey, you really need to go to this.” She told me to the three-minute thesis, and she told me to apply to the anthropology Ph.D. instead of sociology…”

P-5-MF-G- “She lets us talk about it and lets us discuss. She not like, “no, that’s not right,” she like… “Ok I can see this” and has another example for other classes…so, I think that is why she’s probably my favorite in all of her classes.”

P-1-MF-G “So, first of all, I have a great advisor, and I am really thankful for her because I think had it not been for her I may not still be here, I mean, let’s call a spade a spade.”

When professors were not available to graduate students spoke about losing focus, feeling hopeless, checking out, and not feeling supported in their department. P-1-MM-G expressed this by saying

“I just don’t feel like I have been guided effectively. So, as a result, I was just like screw this, screw this research. Then, I was like I can’t because I have to you know collect my data in the summer, so I gotta get on it. So, it just was a challenging process because I felt like when I needed a voice and an ear to say, “you can do this,” I wasn’t given that.”

In essence, they felt like they have not gotten the guidance graduate students felt that they should have, and it was noted that this made the student feel frustrated and
hindered their research. The same student followed up talking about a time when they went to a professor to ask a question to modify their project, and the teacher essentially told them that they would not grasp the concept and get the assignment correct.

*Making the Content Relevant*

This is also a theme that has come upon several instances with all students. A professor’s ability to be creative, and make the content reflect the diversity, makes students feel engaged in the classroom. Graduate students share this commonality in graduate courses as well.

P-6-MF-G “I would say, I don’t know if this is the proper term, but narrow-minded in the context that, if you are not aware of any researcher outside that don’t look like you, the likelihood that you would include them in your class, in your PowerPoints, in your references…it just doesn’t make sense.”

P-2-MF-G “So I guess, in my degree and in my school, the biggest thing we focus on as far as cultural responsiveness is using examples that apply to everyone in the classroom. Um, I am a minority, and there aren’t a lot of minorities in my field, but still being able to pull out people who are women or who are African American that have done the things we see ourselves doing so we have something to relate to.”

P-5-MF-G “It’s not just for learning one theory or one concept, but it’s exposing students to different points of view, different ways in which poverty interacts with different areas, not only your biology but also to the ecosystem.”

P-2-MF-G, “I think surveying the classroom. So, I’m taking this statistics course where the professor has been around for years, and it finally clicked for her to tailor her examples to the make-up of the classroom. So, she started to learn that a lot of the students that were taking her exams were from the AG department. So, instead of giving examples based off of some out of this world thing, she brings in food and crops and real-world applications for us.”

The two additional themes that emerged from the graduate students that differ from the undergraduate student were professors assuming students should already know the material and split level courses are not tailored towards graduate students.
**Assumption of Knowing Material**

Students talked about professors assuming that since they are enrolled in the class that they should understand the course and the content already. This theme was mentioned once with undergraduate minorities but did not emerge as a theme. The graduate students support this theme in the following quotes:

P-2-MF-G “So, a lot of people automatically assume that when you’re enrolled in a course, you have an understanding of what the course is, and the biggest thing that I know I had to learn is that everyone is taking the class because they don’t know the information. But sometimes there’s not that background to familiarize yourself with it, so you kind of feel like you’re behind, even though you’re not.”

P-1-MM-G “I think that sometimes, there is an assumption that you should know everything…and I don’t know if it’s just in this department or in this school, but I know that when I take classes in other schools, it’s a little different, or maybe it’s the course itself, but I think that some of them already think you know the content…So, after about, I think it was two semesters here, you know every, it seemed that every class I was in, I was hearing this recurring theme of “you should know this, you should know, you should know, you should know”… and I began to really second guess.”

**Split Courses Are Not Tailored**

In graduate school, there are split level courses that have both undergraduate and graduate students. The graduate students typically have an additional project or test in conjunction with course work. Graduate students speak about how these courses are not geared towards graduate student success or learning. Students speak about their experiences in the split level courses and the impact that it has had on them as a learner:

P-2-MF-G “In going back to those professors, I think a lot professors, there are some that still rely on regurgitating of information, and then when you’re struggling with regurgitating because you’re in graduate school and you're expected to think critically…If it’s split level course you don’t want to put too much pressure on your undergrads, but then in your syllabus, you say that graduate students are expected to produce graduate-level work, and then you’re asking those questions to help you produce graduate-level work because you're
giving just enough information...how am I supposed to think critically if your giving bare minimum?"

P-6-MF-G “I think split level class are good if done right. But I think right now, my ethnography class is split level, and I always pray like please don’t partner me with an undergrad student, cause they don’t read...then it frustrates me because I am explaining the book to them, and they were supposed to read. And so....if it is split then put the graduate students together or put the graduate student is by themselves, let them work alone, or give them a role where they can be like your protégé, opposed to just a regular traditional student.”

P-3-MF-G In a lot of our split-level classes, there is no flexibility. In, that we are expected to learn the same way the undergraduates are, and then the teacher is just gonna throw two or three extra projects for you as the grad student to do to prove that you’re a grad student...but you just made me sit through the same lecture you gave to an undergraduate student.”

Figure 6 summarizes the similarities and differences in both graduate and ungraduated students so that the reader can conceptualize the visual of each group. The differences amongst undergraduate students are CRT were they payed less attention to bad interactions with professors, more involved on campus, and they lose respect for teachers when they aren’t CRT or open. Graduate student were very aware of micro/passive aggression, experiences good and bad impacted academic, and split level courses are not tailored towards graduate students. The similarities between both groups are that they wanted a professor who had a caring attitude, to use relevant examples, and be creative with the presentation of instruction.
Figure 6  Comparing and Contrasting Undergraduate and Graduate Students
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to define culturally responsive teaching techniques, describe the influence that culturally responsive teaching techniques have on learners, and describe the experiences of both underrepresented students and the White population around culturally responsive teaching (CRT) at Mississippi State University. The literature on CRT currently explores how these teaching techniques influence the learner for K-12 student populations. Although CRT explains the impact and influence on learners at the primary level, there is limited research about post-secondary learners and their needs in the classroom around CRT. This chapter will provide an in-depth discussion to connect theory and literature to the themes that were found amongst each group. At the conclusion of this chapter the researcher will identify implications, study limitations, and recommendations for the practice, and recommendations for future research.

While the literature does address the teaching techniques that will best engage students through culture and diversity in the classroom, this study was used to intentionally seek out the experiences and elevate the voices of a college student at all levels. Though there were similarities amongst all students, the researcher will talk about the needs of undergraduate White and undergraduate minority students, as well as explore the needs of graduate students at the university.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that was crafted for the study saw multicultural education as the driving force. Through multicultural education, the instructor would have to foster culturally responsive teaching and a caring attitude to get the desired outcomes. This study illustrated the importance of all three components, and the most notable from all groups was a teacher who cared about them. Above all else, students were not looking for a way out of getting out of assignments, but instead wanted someone who “cared for” them inside and outside of the classroom. As a part of multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching was also highlighted several times throughout student responses. Students wanted an instructor who was creative with lessons, instead of reading off of PowerPoint slides. They wanted the content to be globally representative of the diversity and the possibilities within that area of study. Students also, overwhelmingly supported the idea of having a teacher who cares about them.

The outcomes for having a more equitable and inclusive classrooms were 1) positive teacher to student relationships, 2) student responsiveness, 3) increase peer to peer interaction, and 4) promotes diversity. All these aspects were highlighted in Chapter four based on students’ perceptions and experiences. Students noted that when they had a teacher who cared about them and cared about the material, the students had better relationships with their instructors. Also, students noted that they were more engaged in a class when the classrooms were culturally responsive and inclusive. The outcome of increased peer to peer interaction is highlighted in student’s responses when they said there was a lack of commonality amongst peers. If differences are highlighted to find commonalities in the class, then it is assumed that students would have more of a peer to peer interaction to ensure that inclusion occurs. The last outcome focuses on promoting diversity. Students noted that when CRT was present in the course, they
felt like the class was diverse. Students said teachers could have promoted diversity by providing various examples that are related to the class. According to students, a teachers ability to think outside of the box to provide diverse examples, also kept them engaged in the material.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

All populations of students that participated in this study were able to contribute to the profession for educators to gain insights on how to effectively incorporate CRT at the university level. Without students having prior knowledge of the six areas of CRT that Gay (2010), identified as being necessary for a more diverse class, students were able to talk about five of the areas. Validating was briefly talked about; however, it was not mentioned often enough to conclude that students experienced this characteristic in the classroom. The areas that students were able to identify the most were comprehension, multidimensional, transformative, and emancipatory. The area that students did not highlight at all was empowering.

Some themes arose based on specific objectives. It stands true in this study that all students, regardless of race and classification, agreed that they want teachers who care and a professor who can make the content relevant. The literature talks about an instructor's ability to care for and about students, as well as the influence that action has on students. CRT and multicultural education both highlight that caring about students makes them more invested in the class and makes them feel like they are supported (Gay, 2010). Shevalier and McKenzie (2012), address the instructors’ ability to care for students and the need for students’ emotional development while implementing CRT. Research talked about the difference in “care for” verses “care about,” with the emphasis on Noddings’ care-based education model (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Students supported this theory and model by continuously highlighting the
importance of a teacher who cared for them both inside and outside of the classroom. According to Gay (2002), “caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity” (p. 109), making it vital to the interactions with students in the classroom. As described in Chapter four, students explained that when a teacher cares, then they are more comfortable and enjoy the course more.

**Objectives**

In the following paragraphs, the researcher will address all the objectives and thoughts around the responses that students gave. The objectives were intended to describe how students identify with culturally responsive teaching, how they defined culturally responsive teaching, and what were the similarities and differences amongst White students and minority students. The goal was for the researcher to explore culturally responsive teaching and understand how it could be applied to all students at Mississippi State University.

*Describe Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques Used to Engage the Minority and White Students*

The findings from this objective were supported by both undergraduate and graduate students from all races. Students were asked to identify and describe traits that engaged them as a learner. This objective was met based on the supportive responses from all students. Without prior knowledge of the framework of culturally responsive teaching students, were able to identify five out of the six characteristics that Gay (2010) identified. The characteristics that were identified were validating, comprehension, multidimensional, transformative, and emancipatory. The researcher noticed that empowerment was not mentioned when describing techniques that students said made a professor culturally responsive in the classroom. Although, the students were able to identify five out of six characteristics that students felt that instructors
had within the classroom at Mississippi State University. Not all students identified characteristics amongst all of their professors, thus supporting the need for CRT to be taught to professors and instructors at the university level. It is of the opinion of the research that empowerment was not mentioned due to the nature of undergraduate programs. Undergraduate programs by design are meant to transfer information and to apply it to a test. In graduate school, students have more of a say in the courses they take and may feel “empowered” because they have more control over what they study. Due to the negative experiences that the graduate students had, they were also not able to identify empowerment. The graduate students noted that when micro/passive aggressions occurred in their programs, they shut down and felt excluded in their departments; thus, not being able to identify empowerment in their education.

_Described Teaching Habits that Hinder Student Learning_

All students were able to identify and describe habits that hindered them from being engaged and learning in the classroom. The general consensus included teachers who read from the PowerPoint and lacked a caring attitude. These themes were present in all focus groups. Students wanted a teacher who could be creative in their way of relaying the material, and students were more confident when a professor appeared to know what they were talking about. When a professor read off the slide, students reflected that they reverted to being on their phones or computers. They felt as if PowerPoints were not interactive, and they were less likely to pay attention, thus hindering learning. Gay (2010) says that this habit is based on communication, and, in a traditional classroom, students are expected to sit and listen. The students described that in these instances, they are passive listeners and can only speak when asked to or allowed to. To support these feelings of being passive and only being allowed to speak when questioned,
students expressed that questions requiring specific answers also make them shut down and less likely to participate in class. When the questions that professors ask require specific answers, and the students get the answers wrong, they did not want to speak up or try again. The pattern of questioning is sequential and moves to the next student requiring a factual response, thus making students feel less included in the classroom.

Although student were able to identify some of the components of CRT, the researcher believes that some of the comments are just good teaching practices. A prime example of a good teaching practice would be to not read off of the PowerPoint. Several students said that this hindered them from learning, but according to the literature this does not constitute CRT.

Students also expressed that when they felt teachers did not care about them, they were not engaged. Caring has shown up several times throughout this study, and students have said that when they felt teachers have not cared about them, it has made them shut down as a learner. Ways that students noted professors did not care about them were not being included in the class, expressing favoritism amongst students, not exploring opinions and cultures in the class, sexism, teachers not checking on students for understanding, and not having a relationship with the instructor. The theme of caring supports Gay (2010) and Noddings (2002), theory and practice that caring contributes to the enhancement of learning. Both argue that caring for students is necessary to increase productivity in the classroom. Noddings (2002), highlights that caring is an element of human life, and that everyone desires to be care for.

Describe the Influence Culturally Responsive Teaching has on Student Learning and Engagement

The way that an instructor teaches in the classroom influences students and the way that they learn. The researcher assumed that when culturally responsive teaching was present, it
would have a positive influence on learning in the classroom. The assumption was correct in that students enjoyed a class more when a teacher used the techniques suggested by CRT. When a student enjoyed the class, regardless of the rigor, the student expressed the ability to learn the material. By including CRT in the classroom this created a since of community and diversity in which have been deemed important and “essential” to implementation of CRT (Gay, 2010).

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) noted that establishing inclusion in the classroom was the first motivational factor to establishing a classroom where student could learn. Having both diversity and inclusion in the classroom could lead to having a more engaging and meaningful interactions with students. Shevalier and McKenzie (2012) concluded that teachers who care for their students help them succeed in the classroom research. Based on the literature and student responses CRT has an influence on student learning and engagement.

**Identify the Experiences of the White Undergraduate Students Around Culturally Responsive Teaching**

White students’ responses around culturally responsive teaching were embedded in not feeling excluded in bigger classrooms. They also brought up that technology hindered the peer to peer interactions. Based on responses and observations, White students did not feel like they were excluded based on identification in ethnicity or outward experiences. The researcher did want to note that White females in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and related majors experienced exclusion based on gender. White women who participated in the focus group noted that professors who did not exclude them or make fun of them because they were in STEM majors, made them feel more comfortable in the class and felt like professors displayed Culturally responsive teaching. Students also hit on the aspect of technology
interfering with peer to peer interactions. They felt like they wanted to interact with their peers, but they would either be on their phones or have headphones in limiting the human connection.

**Describe the Similarities in Experiences around Culturally Responsive Teaching on Mississippi State’s Campus in the Classroom for Minorities and White Undergraduate Student’s**

To ensure that the objective was met, all graduate responses were removed. Similar to what was found in objective one, undergraduate students wanted a professor who had a caring attitude, they felt of exclusion when there is a lack of commonality, they wanted relatable examples to connect back to the material, and an overall students shared similar reasons why they came to Mississippi State University. All students wanted a teacher who cared about them and their learning. When a teacher cares about a student inside and outside the classroom, students respect the teacher and want to learn no matter how hard they deem the material.

When there is a lack of commonality amongst students, they felt excluded and not able to connect with one another. Minorities spoke more on the lack of commonality when it relied on cultural backgrounds. All students wanted a professor to relate the material to the class. White students made a connection with regional examples and life experiences, while minority students talked about connecting material to diverse examples. Minority students explained that examples of diverse examples were being mindful of the exclusion and connections to material that minority students could not relate to. In other instances, students wanted representation in content from pictures, authors, facts, and exploring all sides of history. An example of the representation was having examples that highlight other minorities in the practices.
Describe the Differences in Experiences around Culturally Responsive Teaching on Mississippi State’s Campus in the Classroom for Minorities and White Undergraduate Students

While there were similarities amongst students, minority students were able to reflect on instances where they could identify spaces and or locations, they felt included and excluded (on campus and in the classroom). The instances they described were typically based on races and feeling like an outsider. They highlighted times where they felt like they had to code-switch—referred to as “the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction” (Scotton & Ury, 1977, p. 7), and not having the ability to be their whole selves. Code-switching is the change of linguist that pertains to the tone and vocabulary (Young, 2009). Minority students highlighted the reason why CRT is essential and why research suggests that professors should include it in the classroom (Gay, 2010).

Additional Findings

Graduate Students

The first focus group that guided this study was with graduate students. Unintentionally, graduate students ended up serving as participants in other focus groups in both the minority and White focus groups. While there was only one focus group that was dedicated to graduate students, the researcher was able to gather the information that contributed to the overall theme of culturally responsive teaching.

Multiracial Identity

To get a better understanding of a multiracial student perspective, I was able to do a follow-up interview that better explained some of her responses. The follow-up interview also served as peer debriefing. The student’s racial demographic makeup was Hispanic and White.
She tells the story of her Venezuelan mother marrying her father and assimilating to the White culture of rural Alabama. While the focus group took place in her senior year of college, the follow-up interview took place in her master’s program. I did ask her how she identified and she said:

5-2-FM-UG -“For the purposes of this focus group, yes, I consider myself a minority...because when we talk about diversity within the classroom, I consider myself Hispanic based on the examples and the way teachers and peers perceive me.”

She also spoke about times where she felt like she was too White and did not fit. During the original focus groups, she spoke about trying to be a part of the Latino Association and not feeling included. When analyzing the focus group, the researcher did not feel like they understood why the student felt this way. In the follow-up interview, the researcher followed back up to the comment, and then she noted:

5-2-FM-UG- “For the too Hispanic part, most of them were deeply rooted in their culture. Their parents made sure they were immersed in their culture. For me, mom wanted us to acclimate to fit in.....fit in with norm and the dominant White population. She did not want us to be treated differently.”

This participant shared with the researcher that her brother was discriminated against and assaulted while at school because he was Hispanic. While the participant did not have the same experience as her brother explained that her mother did not want her kids to have that experience at all. She reflected on a time in middle school where she felt like an outcast and singled out:

5-2-FM-UG- “In middle school, there was a kid who always asked for my green card. I asked my mom, and she kind of got mad. She told me to just ignore them.”

While she was from a less diverse town, she experienced more exposure to diversity when she started at Mississippi State University. For the most part, she felt included. The only instance
where she spoke about not feeling included was in the dorm. Her examples were rooted in rural vs. urban:

5-2-FM-UG- “Some African American women who were urban were standoffish because I was from a rural town.”

This follows up interview allowed the research to gain a better understanding of how multi-racial students – identify with more than one race. It is vital to research more around this topic, considering that students who are multiracial seem to identify with one race and not all of the ones they represent. Instead of assuming, researchers should inquire past initial conversations to understand individual experiences that may differ from the initial group’s responses.

**Limitation for Study**

All focus groups were able to answer and contribute to the research on how to make college classrooms more inclusive and equitable. There were a few limitations to this study. While there was an attempt to have homogenous focus groups through purposeful sampling, some of the focus groups were mixed with different races. This did hinder participation from some students because they were not amongst students who had similar experiences.

An example of this was a focus group that had predominately White males and two African American males from the same course. According to the researcher's reflexive journal, it was observed that participant 7-8-MM-G, an African American male, held back in responses through making lite of some of his responses and hesitation when answering specific questions. The researcher did conduct a follow-up interview with this participant to ensure that his voice was heard. He expressed that he did not feel comfortable as a Black person to express instances where he had experienced exclusion on campus and in the classroom, amongst White students.
who he also had courses with. When he was pulled for a member check, he was able to recall instances where he felt like he was excluded due to race in a classroom. 5-2-FM-UG- was by definition minority but identified in many instances with White students. This was addressed in the additional findings section previously, but it is essential to note that how the world perceives the identity of a person could be completely different from how the actual person identities themselves. Due to the racial divide throughout history, the research has observed that this could be confusing to someone who shares the identity of both a minority and a White parent.

Another limitation of this study is not having all the intended participants that were expected. The groups that were not captured by the data or analysis were the LGBTQ+ and those who were disabled. While two international students in the focus groups contributed to the minority graduate experience, there was still a limitation on responses from their overall experience as well.

Recommendations

Recommendations from this Study

It is the recommendation from the researchers that the results of this study be shared with all administrators and students on college and university campuses. Understanding the experience and feelings of students from all backgrounds in a post-secondary setting could benefit faculty and staff as they prepare campus initiatives and campus climate research. Sharing this research with students would create and identify the experiences of other students and limit the thought of feeling alone for like they are the only ones dealing with the noted instances of when CRT is not present.
The researcher also recommends that all professors receive training on culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and Noddings Caring theory. These three frameworks incorporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that would emerge students into a learning environment where they may not have been traditionally taught. Such trainings would also open the instructor up to unconscious biases that they are not aware of and limit exclusive behaviors, if any. One of the biggest take-away’s from this study was for professors to provide an environment of inclusivity and having the characteristics of caring teacher for the students. In conjunction with professors learning about CRT, students should also learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion through a course, to better prepare them for life after graduation. Although there were some missing links to the connection students made with CRT and how they defined the framework, it is important to think about exposing students to these concepts as well. If students are exposed to the frameworks they will too know what to look for so that everyone is held accountable.

Another recommendation that comes from this study is for professors to provide examples that represent diversity. Several students, both White and minority, undergraduate and graduate, suggested that when there were diverse examples, they not only appreciated learning about cultures that were different from their own, but they also felt represented in the course. White students noted that an example of making the curriculum more diverse and implementing CRT would be to incorporate different countries and cultures around the world got them excited about the material. Minorities said when they saw examples that represented their race, ethnicity, or culture in course material, they were more interested in the material and were able to relate the material to a level of comprehension.
The fourth recommendation from the researcher is to be cognizant of the differences in teaching graduate and undergraduate students. While there were similarities amongst graduate students and undergraduate students, there were some clear distinctions amongst the two groups. The experiences in the classroom dictated the reality of the overall graduate experience. Students noted that they felt most successful when they sensed clear support from their professors, advisors, or departments. Other students expressed that they spend most of their time in the departments were they see physical representation and where the environment is welcoming; they had a better experience. Community settings were relevant, particularly for minority students. Creating this space in departments would not only create communities but also welcoming environments, which in turn could help with recruitment and retention.

Based on this study, the researcher believes that universities should incorporate courses and workshops that accompany a certificate around cultural awareness. The formulation of the courses and workshops should focus on one’s self-identity and the cultural complexity of others. Based on the findings, students should be aware of themselves, especially at PWI’s so that deculturalization does not happen. Deculturalization is “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture and replace it with a new culture” (Spring, 2007, p. 7). Some of the topics should include “race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and or other cultural characteristics” (Howard-Hamilton, Cuyjet, & Cooper, 2011, p. 12).

Another recommendation is for students to find ways to step out of their comfort zone. Students also should expand themselves to understand cultures that may be different from their own. Expanding themselves would assist them in creating more peer to peer interaction. When common understanding happens, common grounds occur. Some examples in the way that this could be facilitated are through class and working with different student organizations. In class,
professors could make a cultural emersion assignment apart of a reflection, and student organizations that represent different groups could work/ co-sponsor events together.

Finally, the researcher recommends that instructors find creative ways to teach the material outside of PowerPoint slides. While this is not a component of CRT, there were an overwhelming amount of students who explained that this technique makes them shut down in the classroom. Every focus group highlighted that they became disengaged, and their learning was hindered when professors read straight from the PowerPoint. It is being recommended that professors mix the material with PowerPoint slides and hands-on materials. Currently, slides only cater to the audio and visual learning styles. If there were more experiential learning and hands-on activities, based on the students at Mississippi State University, there would be more engaged in the material.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

It is recommended that this research be done in a quantifiable way to support the exploratory case study that has been presented. If teacher evaluations and or campus climate surveys included questions that inquired about diversity, inclusion, and equity, the aspect of CRT, multicultural education, Noddings’ Caring theory could be examined within student populations at universities. These surveys may serve a small percentage of students, particularly at PWI’s, but the researcher believes that the support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, is needed both inside and outside of the classroom for student success.

The researcher also recommends having requirements for participants to join studies. The researcher's reasoning for a requirement for participants is based on homogeneity. It is was clear that based on the researcher’s reflexive journal that when students were in mixed focus groups,
the participants were apprehensive and held back natural responses. There was hesitation in responses and when students held back you could see hesitation in their face. To avoid the withholding of data and experiences, the researcher suggests having focus groups that are specifically targeted towards the specific group. For instance, if this study was to be done again, students should be separated into focus groups based on the ethnic group that they most closely identify with. When minority or White students were in a homogeneous focus group, they seemed to have similar experiences and thoughts and were more willing to share.

Furthermore, the continued research should seek to have students that represent other variations of diverse and inclusive individuals who identify with the LGBTQ+ community, disabled groups, veterans, first-generation college students, and religious differences. The research initially anticipated the listed groups above to be a part of the conversation around CRT, but the participants did not personally identify with these groups. Through reflexive journaling, the researcher believes that students did not identify with these noted groups because of the regional association and culture of the university. Historically, the southern region has identified with the Christian religion and LGBTQ community face challenges due to this (Leins, 2019). Disabilities, in turn, have typically had a negative association with someone’s ability to physically or mentally complete a task. The research noted that two students’ highlighted ADHD and mental disorders in their responses but did not directly identify this on their identity wheel. The groups mentioned would increase the support and awareness of diversity, create a space for inclusivity inside and outside the classroom, and level the playing field in education to establish equity for students in the classroom.
Implications

Based on this study, culturally responsive teaching in conjunction with multicultural education are both essential frameworks that should be applied not only for K-12 but also at the college level. If research around all three frameworks continued at the college level, then culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and Nodding’s Caring theory would have the potential to enhance both the students’ overall experience in the classroom and the performance of the instructor. Through this research, all students have spoken about the desired need of the characteristic of CRT, wanting a teacher who cares for them, and how this links to multicultural education in a broad sense; thus, this is the reason why it is essential to have professors and instructors on campus go through the training to become more culturally responsive in the classroom.

If more research is conducted, additional support could be given to professors to enhance their instruction and delivery. Through instructor observations, professors would be able to get feedback about the delivery of their instruction to see where they fall along with the six characteristics of CRT and the observed perception of how students interact in the class. If professors are exhibiting more of the characteristics of CRT, then students could have an overall better experience in the classroom, versus just coming to get a grade.

Conclusion

Being culturally aware and understanding the differences of others has shown to be essential to the overall success of students and a teachers’ ability to relay content to students. This case study looked at the White and minority students' experiences at Mississippi State University. The research attempted to use homogenous focus groups; however, some focus
groups resulted in having a mix in both groups. The point of the research was to compare the two
groups to understand the needs of all students in the classroom. While there were differences
amongst each group based on racial experiences and class sizes, these results accompanied
similarities as well.

Culturally responsive teaching includes techniques that should be incorporated into the
classroom in order to get the most engagement amongst all learners. While conducting the
literature review, the researcher recommended that instructors, administrators, staff, and students
emerge into a cultural awareness class. CRT is used without a foundation or a clear understanding
of one’s self, and there could be blocks that limit the execution of six characteristics laid out by

Multiculturalism is embedded in the social and systemic structure of our society.
There are personal, political, educational, and legal methods of blocking the
multicultural movement and perpetuating a sense of fear and mistrust among
those who have not been part of the dominant group in our society (p. 12).

Spring (2007) says that this typically takes place at PWI’s due to the historical lack of
mandatory multicultural education amongst faculty, staff, administrators, and students. In return,
students should be aware of the role that they play in a multicultural education environment. The
self-awareness of one’s understanding of that intersectionality can occur amongst cultures is vital
due to the aspect that you may be a minority in more than just one way. The importance of
understanding yourself can help individual’s find understanding where they may not have before,
which means that you can educate others about your preferences, particularly in the classroom.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Re: Research Study on Culturally Responsive Teaching

Dear Students,

We are writing to see if you would like to participate in student focus groups that are being conducted at Mississippi State University pertaining to culturally responsive teaching. Research plays an important role in advancing our understanding of the climate of the university and improving your experiences inside and outside the classroom.

The following information summarizes the study and what it involves:
*Describing Culturally Responsive Teaching by Comparing Minority and Majority Perspectibe to Improve Classroom Experiences:*

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to enhance the overall experience of all students inside and outside the classroom. By sharing your experiences we are able to analyze and recommend how professors and staff can make your experiences on campus more inclusive.

**Participation Requirements:**
- This study will just require you to sit in on one (1), sixty (60) minute focus group made up 6-9 of your peers.
- Once focus groups are concluded you may be contacted by the researcher for clarification of any statements made by you.

**Location:**
Lloyd Ricks Watson Building Room 115

**Times:**
November 19th 1 PM  
November 27th 10 AM  
November 28th 9 AM  
November 29th 2 PM

**Contact Information:**
If you are interested in participating in this study you can click on the following link to be added to a focus group:

[https://msu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_elZRh1cAZns4R](https://msu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_elZRh1cAZns4R)

If you have any additional questions you can contact the following researchers:

Dr. Carla Jagger  |  662-325-7634  |  cbj170@msstate.edu  
Christian Russell  |  202-417-0387  |  cbr231@msstate.edu

Participating in research is voluntary.

Sincerely,

Dr. Carla Jagger--
Christian Russell, MPA
APPENDIX B

IRB-18-459 APPROVAL
From: pm199@msstate.edu
Sent Date: Monday, November 05, 2018 13:42:06 PM
To: obj170@msstate.edu, aej327@msstate.edu, cbr231@msstate.edu, dp846@msstate.edu, hks10@msstate.edu, mdd369@msstate.edu, sds85@msstate.edu
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: Approval Notice for Study # IRB-18-459, Describing Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques by Comparing Minority and Majority Prospectives to Improve the Classroom Experience

Message:
Protocol ID: IRB-18-459
Principal Investigator: Carla Jagger
Protocol Title: Describing Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques by Comparing Minority and Majority Prospectives to Improve the Classroom Experience
Review Type: EXEMPT
Approval Date: November 05, 2018
Expiration Date: November 04, 2023

The above referenced study has been approved. To access your approval documents, log into myProtocol and click on the protocol number to open the approved study. Your official approval letter can be found under the Event History section. For non-exempt approved studies, all stamped documents (e.g., consent, recruitment) can be found in the Attachment section and are labeled accordingly.

If you have any questions that the HRPP can assist you in answering, please do not hesitate to contact us at irb@research.msstate.edu or 662.325.3994.
APPENDIX C

IRB-17-361 APPROVAL
From: epb30@msstate.edu
Sent Date: Tuesday, March 20, 2018 15:40:55 PM
To: cbj170@msstate.edu, chr231@msstate.edu, dbq10@msstate.edu, rb295@msstate.edu
Cc: 
Bcc: 
Subject: Approval Notice for Study # IRB-17-361, Describing Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques to Help Improve Learning Environments for Underrepresented Student Populations

Message:
Protocol ID: IRB-17-361
Principal Investigator: Carla Jagger
Protocol Title: Describing Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques to Help Improve Learning Environments for Underrepresented Student Populations
Review Type: EXEMPT
Approval Date: March 20, 2018
Expiration Date: March 19, 2023

The above referenced study has been approved. To access your approval documents, log into myProtocol and click on the protocol number to open the approved study. Your official approval letter can be found under the Event History section. For non-exempt approved studies, all stamped documents (e.g., consent, recruitment) can be found in the Attachment section and are labeled accordingly.

If you have any questions that the HRPP can assist you in answering, please do not hesitate to contact us at irb@research.msstate.edu or 602.325.3954.
APPENDIX D

IDENTITY WHEEL
Culturally Responsive Teaching Focus Group

What is your definition of culturally responsive teaching?

What does culturally responsive teaching look like to you?

Please fill out any of the social identity wheel below that you’re willing to share:
APPENDIX E

FACILITATION SCRIPT
Culturally responsive teaching Focus Group Facilitator Script

Opening Statements:
- Welcome students and thank them for participating in the focus group
- Participation in the focus group is strictly voluntary and will not have any impact on your grade for any course
- Introduce the purpose and objectives of the focus group, found below

Purpose of the Focus Group:
The purpose of this study is to enhance the overall experience of all students inside and outside the classroom. By sharing your experiences we are able to analyze and recommend how professors and staff can make your experiences on campus more inclusive.

Objectives of the Focus Group:
1. Identify student population needs in the state of Mississippi
2. Describe student perspectives of Culturally responsive teaching techniques used to engage students
3. Describe teaching habits that hinder student learning
4. Describe observed Culturally responsive teaching behaviors exhibited by instructors
5. Describe the impact Culturally responsive teaching techniques has on student learning and engagement

During this focus group your answers will be recorded using an audio recorder as well as transcribed while the focus group questions are being asked. However, please note that your personal information will be redacted and all responses will be kept anonymous throughout the entire research process. Once the focus group is complete, you may be contacted again by the researcher to review your comments and confirm they were recorded correctly. Additionally, if you happen to feel compelled to provide additional insights to your responses/comments you are welcome to contact the researcher and set up a meeting at your convenience.
Pass out consent form and written response page

The following page is a consent form indicating that you agree to participate in this focus group. Remember this is completely voluntary and you can leave at any time. If you agree to participate, please sign the form indicating your willingness. On the back side of the consent form are a few questions we would like to have you record your thoughts for, which may help in jumping into the focus group questions next.

For the purposes of this study we will define Culturally responsive teaching as: An educator’s ability to recognize and celebrate the cultural differences that influence a learning environment …... and understands the importance of fostering a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning.

Note to facilitator: Move into the focus group questions the ones in **Bold** are the main questions, others should be treated as follow-up questions and can be skipped if you feel the participants have adequately answered the question.

*Other questions may be asked as follow-up questions, or questions may be modified depending on responses from the first focus group*

1. **What drew you to attend Mississippi State?**
   
   a. What other institutions did you consider?
   
   b. Why did Mississippi State become your choice?

2. **In what specific areas of the university do you feel included?**

3. **When have you had feelings of exclusion while at Mississippi State?**
   
   a. What were the factors that went into you feeling excluded?
   
   b. How did you handle that situation?
   
   c. Where did this occur?

4. **How would you describe your experiences and interactions with your peers and instructors as part of the classes you have been enrolled in?**
   
   a. Have you witnessed other students being excluded in the classroom?
5. Think of a time you enjoyed a class or teacher, what characteristics did you enjoy about the class, student-to-student interactions, and/or student-to-teacher interactions?
   a. What other characteristics of classroom teaching & learning interest you/help you enjoy a class?

6. Now, when was a time you shut down as a learner/did not want to engage in the content?
   a. What occurred in that environment that caused you to disengage?
   b. Have you witnessed other student’s shut down in the classroom?

7. Going back to the idea of culturally responsiveness that your defined earlier, from your perspective, how would describe a classroom environment with cultural responsiveness is present?
   a. Identify a time when you were in a learning environment and a teacher displayed culturally responsive characteristics. What did look and feel like?

8. What happens in a classroom when cultural responsiveness is not present?
   a. What actions make you aware the teacher/student/others are not displaying culturally responsive traits?

9. When culturally responsive techniques are not used, explain how you feel in that learning environment.
   a. How has it felt when other student’s shut down in class?

10. Who is an instructor you have had while at Mississippi State, who you feel exhibits culturally responsive techniques/characteristics in the learning environment?
a. Who are other teachers you had prior to attending Mississippi State, who also displayed culturally responsive techniques/characteristics?

b. Why do you feel they were culturally responsive?

Thank all participants for participating! Ask if they have any questions about the research as well.
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM
Title of Research Study: Culturally responsive teaching Techniques in the Classroom

Researcher(s): Dr. Carl Jagger and Christien Russell, Mississippi State University

Procedures: I would like to ask you to participate in a research study. You will be asked a series of questions in the focus group for the purposes of engaging your knowledge based on each question. Your answer will be recorded, however your personal information will be redacted. The focus group should take no longer than one hour in total.

Questions: If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:
Dr. Carl Jagger at 662-325-7834 or by email at cbj170@msstate.edu
Christien Russell at 202-417-0387 or by email at cbr231@msstate.edu

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Use this section if signed consent will be obtained and delete the box below.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.
Use this section if signed consent will NOT be obtained and delete the box above.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

*The MSU HRPP has granted an exemption for this research. Therefore, a formal review of this consent document was not required.