

EXPLORING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MULTICULTURAL  
EDUCATION: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

AMANDA R. CASTO. Exploring elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education: A multiple case study. (Under the direction of DR. AMY GOOD and DR. LUKE REINKE)

Schools around the world have experienced unprecedented change during the contemporary era of globalization. The student population is becoming more diverse and, consequently, teachers have been tasked with meeting a wider range of needs from multiple backgrounds. While multicultural education has been proposed by scholars as a means for meeting the needs of all learners few studies have provided an in-depth examination of teachers' understanding of multicultural education and the factors that influence their perceptions.

A multiple case study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers serving our youngest students perceive multicultural education. Educators at four different elementary school settings in the Southeastern United States were interviewed to explore their thoughts of multicultural education and its three tenets: educational equity, cultural tolerance, and social transformation. School-level factors and teacher-level factors that influence elementary teachers' perceptions were also analyzed, thus adding more context for our understanding. The participants perceive multicultural education as (1) a means for teaching global awareness and culture, (2) lessons aimed at building cultural tolerance, (3) learning about students' backgrounds, and (4) using multicultural curriculum or materials. Their comments regarding the three tenets of multicultural education, however, reveal perceptions that are likely more nuanced than

these categories suggest. Teacher-level factors, such as family, upbringing, and travel were found to have a greater influence on their perceptions of multicultural education than school-level factors. Yet, a case-by-case analysis revealed that administrators' beliefs and schoolwide multicultural initiatives also have a significant and unrecognized influence over teachers' perceptions and practices.

*Keywords:* multicultural education, elementary teachers, perceptions, school-level factors, teacher-level factors, influences

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sue Graves, and to the loving memory of my father, Allan Graves. With an abundance of humility, I hope that my work honors you and reflects the lifetime of love and support you have given me.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my best friend and better half, Brian Casto. You enlighten my heart, my spirit, and my worldview a little more with each passing day.

For that reason and countless others, this is for you.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

The contemporary globalization era (1970s to present day) has witnessed a unique social transformation around the globe (Sheffield, Korotayev, & Grinin, 2013). The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), economic competition, and global migration has altered the ways in which humans communicate, businesses and schools operate, and knowledge is valued. This era has also seen new issues in education, such as the blurring of lines between the marketplace and public education (i.e., the school choice movement), an increased emphasis on testing and student achievement, and a growing need to prepare students to thrive in a globally-connected and pluralistic society (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). In the United States (U.S.), generations of Americans are experiencing unprecedented changes in their workplaces, schools, and communities.

Globalization has also altered the fabric of the American society. In 1970, which arguably marks the onset of the contemporary globalization era, the immigrant share of the total U.S. population reached a historical low at only 4.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In less than fifty years, the immigrant population nearly tripled to 13.5% with the sharp increase of migration from Latin American and Asian countries (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). Today, the United States is home to more than 43.7 million people who were born outside of the country (Lopez, Bialik, & Radford, 2018).

Schools are also becoming increasingly more diverse, a pattern that is projected to continue into the foreseeable future. In 2000, 61.2 percent of U.S. public school students were categorized as White, 17.2 percent were Black, 16.4 percent were Hispanic, and

four percent were Asian/Pacific Islander (Hussar & Bailey, 2018). Yet, in 2015, the percentages of White and Black students dropped to 48.9 and 15.4, respectively, while the percentage of Hispanic students climbed to 25.9. In 2008, the percentage of Asian students grew significantly enough that they began to be classified separately from Pacific Islander students; in 2015, they alone accounted for five percent of all students.

The demographics of the U.S. K-12 student population are morphing rather quickly, yet schools have been relatively slow to react to such change. Today's schools are, in many ways, strongly remnant of the monocultural education system which existed fifty years ago when immigration of foreign-born students was at an all-time low: the teaching workforce is predominantly White, students are exposed to K-12 curricula normed for White middle-class America, and students' race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status widely dictate the quality of education they receive.

The teaching workforce has changed minimally over time despite the transformation in K-12 students' demographics. In 1987, approximately 87 percent of public school teachers were White (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). During the past 30 years, that number only dropped to 80% while the number of non-White students has grown to nearly 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). As a result, the K-12 teacher workforce is becoming less and less representative of the diversity in its schools.

Secondly, K-12 curricula is still heavily monocultural, based on the White middle-class experience and an Anglocentric perspective (Banks, 1999; Wiggan, 2012). However, as stated previously, the number of students who share that experience and maintain that perspective is shrinking. Newling (2001) eloquently captures this quandary by stating, "Certainly the White experience is part of the fabric of society and deserves to

be in the patchwork quilt, but it is no longer the whole cloth,” (p. 10). While efforts to make curricula more diverse began in the 1970s, they have resulted in minor changes to textbooks and instructional resources over time, superficially incorporating more ethnically diverse persons and places (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Meanwhile, the biased curricula found in most schools which perpetuate hegemonic grand narratives – both historical (e.g., Manifest Destiny) and present-day (e.g., meritocracy) – have been, for the most part, ignored and left unaddressed. Other social justice issues, such as racism and sexism, have also been left out of discussions concerning curriculum reform, thus perpetuating the ethnic, gender, or heteronormative stereotypes and racially discriminatory practices institutionalized in the United States (Banks, 1999).

Historically, educational inequity has been a grave issue in the United States. Racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional in the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*; however, it would take decades for racial integration in schools to be widely acknowledged, accepted, or even practiced, if at all. In some cities, integration would appear to take place while the reality was quite the opposite (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Additionally, several metropolitan pockets of the country have experienced both racial desegregation *and* resegregation during the contemporary globalization era as the nation has grappled with the effects of a rapidly diversifying tapestry. To compound the issue of resegregation, the income-achievement gap grew significantly during this era, creating another thick layer of inequity based on social class (Reardon, 2011).

While a student’s race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status should not dictate the quality of education he or she receives, institutionalized systems of discrimination based

on these qualities have played a substantial part in determining such access across the United States (Emmons & Ricketts, 2016). The disparity in access to a high-quality education has been exacerbated by the effects of neoliberal policies guiding the contemporary globalization era, such as school competition, standardized testing, and academic tracking (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). Although neoliberal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Race to the Top initiative (2012) have proposed to raise student achievement, they actually had “an adverse effect on minority students because they are often in schools that are already of a lower quality, with less qualified teachers, who are burdened with the task of teaching to the test” (Wiggan & Hutchinson, 2009, p. 28). As a result, the disparities in access to a high-quality education between low-income African American and Latino youth and their affluent peers have only increased.

As more students from non-White and socioeconomically disadvantaged families are attending U.S. schools, the U.S. education system of the past 50 years is proving to be ineffective at meeting the needs of its increasingly diverse society. The challenges associated with the byproducts of globalization have, in many ways, contributed to a growing need more multicultural education reform in the U.S. education system. According to Banks (1993), multicultural education is comprised of five dimensions: diverse content integration, developing students’ awareness of the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. Together, these dimensions are aimed at ensuring every K-12 school is serving all students equitably, preparing students to live in a democratic and

pluralistic society, and challenging discrimination by building an awareness of social justice issues (National Association of Multicultural Education [NAME], 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The U.S. education system has experienced a cultural transformation during the contemporary globalization era due to an unprecedented growth in technology, economic competition, and migration. This has created a noticeable sense of urgency to prepare students to live in a more globally-connected and pluralistic society. Multicultural education reform, which is the reconstruction of goals and values driving the U.S. education system to prepare students for a more pluralistic society, has been suggested by experts in the field as a universal solution for such an issue; however, it has been historically overshadowed by other reform policies focusing on “academic excellence” in the United States (Grant & Sleeter, 2011).

In recent years, significant attention has been given to multicultural education reform movements across other international jurisdictions with centralized control over education (e.g., South Korea, Finland, and Singapore), however it has made less progress in the United States (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In the United States, multicultural education is being initiated in isolated pockets around the country as states, local districts, and individual schools have been faced with the task of reforming their systems to meet the needs of more diverse, twenty-first century learners. In addition to the inconsistency in U.S. multicultural reform efforts, few studies have investigated teachers’ awareness of multicultural education and its overarching goals. This is critical because teachers’ perceptions are arguably related to how they will implement multicultural education (Aydin and Tonbuloglu, 2014). Nieto and Bode (2008) also argue that, as products of

educational systems steeped in racism and exclusion, teachers' practices unknowingly stand to perpetuate similar historically harmful practices to students. Therefore, understanding teachers' perspectives is essential to understanding how multicultural education is progressing from the ground up and how its implementation is impacting the U.S. elementary setting. Since little is known about teachers' awareness and perceptions of multicultural education, this field of education lacks a clear picture of how this movement is progressing in the contemporary globalization era.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to their personal and professional experiences as well as respective school-level factors. Our knowledge of teachers' attitudes and understanding of multicultural education is rather limited due to the dearth of literature on this topic (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018). Yet, teachers' perceptions, which shape the formal education of their students, are a critical factor influencing the extent to which they implement effective multicultural teaching (Costa, 1997; Sharma, 2005). The following research questions will be addressed in this study to gain a deeper understanding on this topic:

1. What are elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and its overarching goals?
2. In what ways do school-level factors (e.g., school policies, school leaderships' perceptions, school demographics, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?

3. In what ways do teacher-level factors (e.g., personal background, teaching experience, professional development, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by the social theories of critical pedagogy and social constructivism, which provide a progressive lens for analyzing teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in a rapidly changing educational context. Critical pedagogy theory guides the philosophy of multicultural education (Nieto & Bode, 2008) and is concerned with changing the status quo in education by raising questions about power, privilege, and inequity (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Critical pedagogist Paulo Freire notably articulated concerns of critical pedagogy in his 1970 manifesto, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In reproach to the traditional "banking" concept of education in which the teacher deposits information into the students, Freire called for a new problem-posing pedagogy that engaged students in critical thinking. Henry Giroux later developed Freire's theory and contributed his own philosophical ideas, such as *language of possibility* and *insurgent multiculturalism* (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Giroux, 1997). The framework of this theory is significant to this research as it postulates the implementation of multicultural education in schools as politically necessary for developing critical thinkers who can analyze and act upon the social injustices in the world (Giroux, 1997).

According to critical pedagogy theory, multicultural education reform requires the collective action of progressive educators questioning institutionalized traditions that have historically served the privileged while simultaneously marginalizing all others (Burbules & Berk, 1999). While collective action is more likely to have happened during

the contemporary globalization era, as notions of traditionalism and nationalism have been increasingly challenged (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), it has yet to become a sweeping movement. Multiculturalism is typically perceived by conservatives as a threat to national identity. As a result, their political agenda creates substantial barriers to the multicultural reform agenda set by progressives and educational activists (Giroux, 1997; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). In its attempts to preserve the ideology of political correctness the conservative political base tends to downplay or ignore issues related to cultural inclusivity (e.g., immigration reform; Gough, 2014). For multicultural education reform to transform schools and societies this type of thinking must be continuously called out and repudiated.

Critical pedagogists believe multicultural education should provide all students with “the self-definitions upon which they can recognize their own complicity with or resistance to how power works within and across differences to legitimate some voices and dismantle others” (Giroux, 1997, p. 250). At a practical level, the multicultural curriculum should facilitate critical thinking and learning that takes macro-level factors (i.e., cultural, political, and societal dynamics) and micro-level factors (i.e., the daily lived experiences of teachers and students) into account to better serve the students, teachers, and community at large (Giroux, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

This study is further guided by the theory of social constructivism. Teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education do not develop out of thin air. Rather, they are cumulatively developed and influenced by various factors, including school-level policies, students’ and teachers’ demographics, previous schooling experiences, and personal beliefs. According to the social theory of constructivism, perceptions are

developed from an individual's interaction with their social world. Social theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978) theorized that an individual's language and culture are the lenses through which humans perceive reality; this reality is arguably shaped by socio and political contexts. According to Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2012),

any sophisticated theoretical framework must necessarily take into account not only issues such as teachers' knowledge, skills, dispositions, cognition, and beliefs but also factors such as educational, social, cultural, and ideological movements as well as major swings in the political pendulum (p. 1).

Therefore, the many macro- (school-level) and micro-level (teacher-level) factors that shape teachers' perceptions of multicultural education are just as important to study as the perceptions themselves.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are two primary reasons why this study is uniquely significant. First, there is scant research of elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in the United States employing case studies as a methodology. Case studies can provide a thick description and reveal knowledge about a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Instead, the limited body of peer-reviewed research on elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education has relied heavily on surveys and quantitative observational instruments (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018; Canfield-Davis, Tenuto, Jain, & McMurtry, 2011; Haberman & Post, 1990; Saldana & Waxman, 1997). While these larger scale studies may offer more opportunities for broad generalization, this unique

study provides the thick descriptive analysis of a topic that is currently absent and needed in the field.

Secondly, the data collected in this study is significant as it illustrates the multicultural education reform efforts some elementary schools have made in recent years. Four unique cases were studied to uncover the various ways schools are attempting to meet the needs of an increasingly diversifying student body in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how those efforts are influencing elementary teachers and their thoughts regarding multicultural teaching practices. The insights gathered from interviews with elementary school administrators and teachers were used to examine the extent to which school-level variables influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. The findings from this study are significant because they can provide all stakeholders in education—from classroom teachers to policymakers—more insight into the various contextual factors that contribute to multicultural education in elementary school settings.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Contemporary Globalization Era* - According to Wiggan and Hutchinson (2009), globalization is the “social and economic process that is identifiable by growing levels of financial and technological integrations and interconnections in the world system” (p. 2). The contemporary globalization era refers specifically to the latest wave of globalization that began in the 1970s as a product of the rapid development of technology, economic competition, and global migration.

*Curriculum* – This word represents the information, knowledge, and skills that are transmitted through instruction (both intentionally and subconsciously) by teachers and students (Beyer & Liston, 1996).

*Multicultural Education* - This term is a multi-layered and multi-faceted concept in education. Here, this term will be defined using the definition supported by NAME: “a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity...” (NAME, 2019, para. 1). Furthermore, multicultural education

...affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice. (NAME, 2019, para. 1).

*Multicultural Education Reform* - In this paper, this term is defined by the intentional examination and reconstruction of current goals, values, and purposes of the education system to effectively teach and prepare students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to thrive in a pluralistic society (Banks, 1999).

*Pluralistic Society* – This concept is defined as a society, comprised of various intersections of race, ethnicity, age, gender, and socioeconomic standing, in which people have differing beliefs or opinions yet exhibit tolerance towards others’ that are different from their own.

*School-Level Factors* – This term refers to the characteristics unique to a school that may influence a teacher’s teaching philosophy, beliefs, or practices, including location, school policies, schoolwide professional development, school leadership, and student demographics.

*Social Justice* - This definition is operationalized as it is defined according to Nieto and Bode (2008): “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (p. 9).

*Teacher-Level Factors* – This term refers to the characteristics unique to an educator that may, explicitly or implicitly, contribute to their teaching philosophy, beliefs, or practices, such as: the individual’s personal background, teaching experiences, teacher preparation experience, and independent professional development.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

While case studies can play an important role in advancing the field’s knowledge base, there are some limitations to this methodology (Merriam, 1998). The research for this dissertation study is analyzing the school-level factors and teacher-level factors contributing to elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education at four distinct schools. Case studies are parts of a whole and should not be overgeneralized or misconstrued as the whole story (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Therefore, the findings across the four school settings are not generalizable outside of their contexts. Instead, these findings work together to create a rich description of how elementary teachers with various personal and professional experiences view multicultural education, which may provide relevant insights to the field of elementary education in the United States.

One delimitation of this study is the selection of public charter schools as the setting of this research. Public charter schools are tuition-free and open to all students in the state; students who attend these schools do not necessarily live in the surrounding neighborhood nor school district. Students’ parents apply to the school during an open enrollment period and acceptance is based on a randomized lottery system. The teaching

faculty of public charter schools are different from traditional public schools in that only 50 percent of all teachers in a charter school must be licensed as long as all teachers are college graduates who meet the NCLB requirements of highly qualified staff. Finally, teachers in these public charter schools are not required to use district-mandated curriculum resources.

Another delimitation of this study is the exclusion of teachers of middle and secondary grades. Elementary grade levels were selected specifically for this study to identify the factors unique to elementary teachers. Although understanding teachers' perceptions of multicultural education at all grade levels is important for gathering a more comprehensive understanding of multicultural education reform, middle and secondary grade level teachers were excluded to control extraneous factors related to differing school policies and teachers' professional development and preparation.

Elementary teachers and administrators from four contextually unique schools were invited to participate in face-to-face and virtual interviews with the researcher towards the final weeks of school during the month of June. The case study sample consists of four administrators and twenty teachers (one administrator and five teachers from each school). The analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers attained answers to all research questions, while the interviews with administrators provided additional information that was analyzed for the second research question. Finally, school documents (i.e., mission statement, vision statement, school improvement plan, student demographic data, curricular resources) were analyzed as a method of data triangulation.

## Summary

The composition of education systems around the world have shifted significantly over the past fifty years due to a rapid evolution of economic competition, technological access, and international migration. U.S. schools, which are widely influenced by monocultural curricula and hegemonic practices established more than fifty years ago, are facing new challenges spurred by the increasing diversity and pressing need to prepare students to live in a more pluralistic and socially just society. While multicultural education has been proposed as a solution, little progress has been made in implementing multicultural education reform across the United States. This multiple case study will gather a comprehensive understanding of the school-level factors and teacher-level factors that contribute to teachers' perceptions of multicultural teaching.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, an introduction to the contextualized background of this research was provided as were the problem, purpose and guiding research questions of this study. Following this introduction, Chapter Two will provide a foundation of literature reviewed for the study, including the theoretical framework being employed for this research. Chapter Three contains a descriptive overview of the methodology selected to explore teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. Chapter Four will report the findings of the data by research question. Chapter Five will conclude this dissertation with an in-depth exploration of each case, and a discussion of the findings as well as the implications of this study and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as well as the various school-level and teacher-level factors that potentially influence their perceptions. Although multicultural education reform has existed in the United States since the Civil Rights movement, few empirical studies analyzing teachers' perceptions of it have been published. Instead, the related literature focus on various and narrow facets of multicultural education, such as teachers' practices, teachers' attitudes towards diverse students, and teachers' perceptions of their multicultural teaching preparation. Little is known, however, about teachers' holistic conceptualization of multicultural education and its various components.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the history of multicultural education. Then, the three tenets of multicultural education, which stem from the three categories of interrelated goals, are discussed. The third section entails a review of the studies related to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. Finally, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study are introduced.

### **History of Multicultural Education**

The roots of multicultural education can be traced back more than four thousand years ago to the teachings of the ancient Egyptian vizier, Ptahhotep (Wiggin & Wilburn, 2009), and then again, two thousand years later, in the teaching of the classical Greek philosophers such as Plato and Protagoras (Robles de Meléndez & Ostertag, 1997). Yet, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that *multicultural education* was coined and became a widely known term. Little to no effort was spent by U.S.

policymakers on accommodating students beyond the periphery of mainstream America until the Civil Rights movement (Robles de Meléndez & Ostertag, 1997). Discourse on educational equality emerged on the national scene after cornerstone events of this era: the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court Case *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, in which segregation was ruled unconstitutional; the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which banned racial discrimination; President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which promoted educational equity for all children; and the 1966 Coleman Report, which subsequently detected a rampant pattern of inequitable practices in educational services nationwide. These events paved the path for increasing the public's awareness of issues related to social inequality and acknowledgement of the challenges endured by students from underrepresented groups.

Multicultural education became a popular concept for improving equity and cultural pluralism in schools during the 1970s (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). If the Civil Rights movement was the ignition to raising awareness of the racist and discriminatory practices that plagued U.S. schools for centuries, multicultural education reform was the fuel expected to achieve equity for years to come. According to Grant and Sleeter (2011), this movement first began with teachers, parents, and community members denouncing the racial- and gender-biased textbooks in their classrooms. Their goal was to eliminate cultural stereotypes embedded in their children's textbooks and replace the exclusively monocultural curriculum with more diverse and culturally-accurate materials. Even though texts began to include traditionally underrepresented groups (e.g., African Americans and women) the perspectives and experiences of White males continued to dominate educational materials (Grant & Sleeter, 2011).

Multicultural education began to fade from the national spotlight in the mid-1980s. After *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was published, the national conversation shifted toward academic achievement while a “back to basics” theme overshadowed discussions of equity in education (Gay, 2000; Sleeter & McLaren, 2000). While the country was focused on creating new educational standards designed to raise the academic achievement of U.S. students, resegregation and the national income-achievement gap were on the rise, quietly contributing to the mass of social issues that would continue to plague U.S. schools. Yet, as global migration patterns of the contemporary globalization era continued to transform the cultural tapestry of schools, discussions about multicultural education slowly re-emerged as more pluralistic societies formed.

There has been an increase in awareness and implementation of multicultural education as the era of contemporary globalization has progressed. In 2010, education leaders from six nations, including Australia, China, Denmark, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States arrived in Singapore for the third annual meeting of the International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes (IALEI; AsiaOne, 2007). The members of IALEI met annually to discuss thematic strategies for transforming education to better prepare teachers for an era of unprecedented globalization. The theme chosen for their 2010 research conference was *Multicultural Education*.

The fact that multicultural education was selected as the theme for the third annual IALEI conference signifies the high regard educational leaders place on this educational phenomenon and its ability to transform education to meet the needs of all students. According to Mehlsen (2010), many western societies have pulled away from making multicultural education a priority in their schools, causing great concern for

IALEI leaders given the rapid increase of global migration and diversifying populations in the 21st century. In response, the IALEI recommended the following action steps for all countries: (1) “Recognize their responsibility for developing appropriate educational responses to the ethnic and cultural complexity within their borders,” (2) “Support constructive research examining critical issues regarding diversity and equity in education,” and (3) “Ensure that 21st century teacher education is reformed in light of the cultural and social heterogeneity of local, national and global communities” (Mehlsen, 2010, p. 9). While the IALEI has not published a follow-up report on the adoption of these action steps, countries worldwide have seemed to sharpen their focus on multicultural education reform in recent years. Since the IALEI conference in 2010, other researchers have reported on widespread multicultural education reform efforts taking place in countries such as South Korea (Eden & Kang, 2016), Belgium (Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte, 2016), Finland and Canada (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

### **Approaches to Multicultural Education**

The IALEI’s recommendations are strongly aligned with the overall goals and approaches to multicultural education posited by renowned scholars in the field. To understand how teachers have been encouraged to approach multicultural education in the past, this section will look at two seminal frameworks (Banks, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1988). Over time, these frameworks have become part of the bedrock of multicultural education. Sleeter and Grant’s (1988) framework proposes five approaches to multicultural teaching, and Banks’s (1989) framework suggests four leveled approaches to multicultural education reform.

Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant first published their framework for multicultural teaching in 1988. Their framework (Table 1) consists of five approaches to multicultural education: (1) Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different; (2) Human Relations; (3) Single-Group Studies, (4) Multicultural Education, and (5) Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. Together, these approaches address an array of topics related to human diversity (Grant & Sleeter, 1998). While the authors of this framework contend that these approaches build on one another in complexity, it is Haberman and Post (1990) who suggest that these approaches and their related goals act as a measure of a person's maturity as a citizen of a pluralistic society. Nevertheless, Grant and Sleeter (1998) encourage teachers to select the approach (or two) that interests them the most and to implement it with fidelity because cherry-picking ideas from these approaches may allow teachers to easily revert back to the traditional curriculum and "business as usual" (p. 8).

Table 1  
*Sleeter & Grant's (1988) Approaches to Multicultural Education Framework*

Approach	Definition	Long Term Goal
Teaching the Exceptionally and Culturally Different	Changing instructional patterns and classroom procedures to fit the needs of exceptional and diverse students	Enable students to succeed in the traditional classroom and help them assimilate in the broader society
Human Relations	Encouraging students to accept others by teaching them to see the beauty within all people	Improve communication and student-student relationships in the classroom and school
Single-Group Studies	Classroom instruction that involves studying a single group of underrepresented people in-depth, including their perspectives, history,	Foster cultural pluralism by sharing experiences of the other

	culture, current social agenda, etc.	
Multicultural Education	A combination of the first three approaches which reform the classroom to ensure greater levels of equal opportunity and cultural pluralism	Promote understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity; promote alternative lifestyle choices for people while affirming their individuality; help all children achieve academic success; promote awareness of social justice issues
Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist	Concentrated on the issue of oppression, holistically, during instruction rather than focusing on an individual group, thus minimizing all forms of oppression	Teach students to critically understand issues related to citizenship, democracy, peace, and ecology as well as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc.

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In an interest of transforming the traditional curriculum, James Banks (1989) developed a four-leveled framework for multicultural education reform. The first and most basic level to multicultural education is the *contributions approach*. In this stage, teachers recognize cultural diversity by incorporating heroes, holidays, and culturally diverse celebrations into the curriculum. Usually, these topics are covered in brief and taught from the mainstream-centric lens; meanwhile, the traditional curriculum remains unchallenged and unchanged. Although this is the first step to implementing multicultural education, it is commonly perceived as multicultural education (Gorski, 2011).

The next level is called the *additive approach*. This approach to multicultural education builds upon the former stage, the *contributions approach*, by adding more culturally diverse content, themes, and perspectives into the daily curriculum. Irvine (2010) posits that many well-meaning teachers never reach this “culturally relevant” approach to reform nor go beyond this level because of a fear that developed from

believing in widely held myths about multicultural and culturally relevant teaching. These myths are based on common pedagogical misconceptions such as: culturally diverse content is not relevant nor necessary for White students, only teachers of Color can effectively teach diverse perspectives, and the only purpose for this approach (and more advanced approaches) is to boost the self-esteem of students of Color. As a result, the additive approach is most commonly encountered in social studies instruction when teachers generally discuss the effects of war or international conflict on multiple cultural groups.

When the curriculum is changed in some way to increase students' exposure to multiple cultural perspectives on relevant concepts or issues, teachers have achieved the *transformational approach* to multicultural education. The goal here should not be viewing every issue from the perspective of every culture; rather, students should have the opportunity to experience learning from more than one perspective (Banks, 1989). Additionally, students should learn the many ways (i.e., history, language, clothing, music, etc.) in which their society has been uniquely influenced by distinct cultural groups.

The fourth and final level of Banks's framework is the *social action approach* to multicultural education. In this approach, the teacher's goal is to develop her students' knowledge and skills to become social justice advocates and contributing members of a pluralistic society. This may require abandoning the traditional curriculum to facilitate learning through the examination of pertinent issues related to prejudice, discrimination, and privilege. In doing so, the purpose of schooling will consequently transform from that of simply socializing students to empowering students to become critical thinkers

and agents of social change (Banks, 2004). Banks's model will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Both frameworks provide the ideas, strategies, or approaches necessary for teachers to embed some level of multicultural education in their instructional practices. However, it could be argued that teachers will not implement these approaches if they do not understand the reasons behind it or see themselves as capable of doing so. While the dissemination of these frameworks for multicultural education reform is important for teachers, a clear understanding of their objectives and overall goals are as equally important for multicultural education to truly take shape in the United States.

### **Tenets of Multicultural Education**

The specific goals of multicultural education cited across forty years of literature are vast and often interrelated; nevertheless, they tend to fall into three broad categories: *educational equity*, *cultural tolerance*, and *social transformation*. These categories, or tenets, were developed as the result of a synthesis of the numerous works of renowned scholars in the field (i.e., Banks, 1989, 1999, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2018; Gorski, 2011; Grant & Sleeter, 1998, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Together, the tenets of multicultural education construct a sturdy frame in which the various goals of multicultural education are situated (Figure 1).

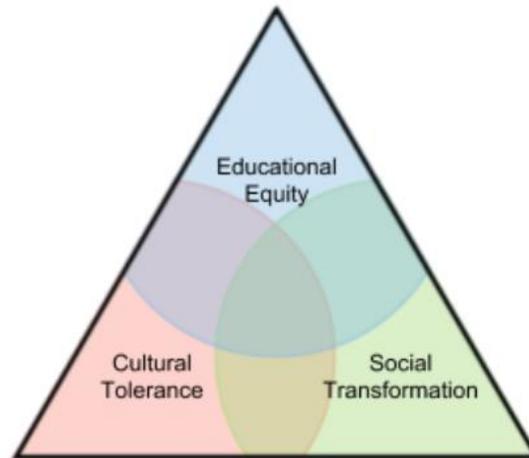


Figure 1. The tenets of multicultural education.

### **Multicultural Education Tenet #1: Educational Equity**

Champions of multicultural education are, first and foremost, committed to ensuring equitable learning for *all* students. Equitable learning, or equitable education, is defined as a process that gives all students the opportunity to achieve an equality of outcomes (Nieto & Bode, 2008). According to Robles de Meléndez and Ostertag (1997), the commitment to equity is “a core principle of those who advocate multicultural education” (p. 149). Equitable learning for students other than America’s dominant group (i.e., White, English-speaking, and middle-class students) has historically been a pivotal challenge in the United States.

Multicultural education scholars agree that *all* students should have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills needed to contribute to a fully democratic and pluralistic society (Banks, 1999; Banks & Banks, 2009; Gay, 2000; Manning & Baruth, 2004). For example, Banks (1999) suggests using cultural and ethnic alternatives to the traditional Anglo-centric curriculum to teach *all* students, including White mainstream students. As the world continually shrinks during the contemporary globalization era, *all* students will benefit from learning from diverse curricula designed

to help them function within and across cultures (Banks, 1999). Not only will this promote educational equity, it will secure social justice because transforming education in a way to teach from diverse perspectives will require educators to understand the socio-political effects of schooling in a global context (Gorski, 2011).

Finally, this tenet calls on teachers to commit to being an advocate for high quality instruction for all students. This includes acknowledging students' many differences and understanding how those differences impact learning to actively removing barriers that may prevent equitable high-quality instruction in their classrooms (Nieto & Bode, 2008). The goals of this tenet call on teachers to promote equity in their work, challenge the social institutions that create stratification in schools, and to become catalysts for societal change (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

### **Multicultural Education Tenet #2: Cultural Tolerance**

Constructing a more tolerant and democratic society is another important goal of multicultural education. Gorski (2011) states, "At its core, multicultural education attempts to institutionalize inclusivity, to engage a broader set of worldviews that, woven together, provide all of us with a deeper understanding of the world and ourselves" (p. 83). This involves transforming the learning environment so that it is respectful and inclusive of all cultural groups (Banks, 1987; Manning & Baruth, 2004). Building cultural tolerance—the affirmation, understanding, and celebration of all cultures—in schools requires educators to develop an awareness and appreciation of cultural differences, learn about other cultures, and develop empathy with members outside of their culture (Manning & Baruth, 2004). Meanwhile, to effectively build students' tolerance of other cultures, opportunities for students to embark on a critical self-

examination of themselves, especially from the perspectives of other cultures, must be facilitated by teachers (Banks, 1999).

Before teachers can lead their students in this critical work, teachers must first embark on a path of self-reflection. This includes a critical analysis of themselves as intersectional beings, their role in perpetuating systemic oppression, and their understanding of their students' cultural differences. To achieve goals of cultural tolerance in the classroom, teachers must confront their pre-held conceptions of their students of Color, low socioeconomic status, and immigrant status, which teacher education programs usually link to academic failure (Delpit, 1995). To build their own cultural tolerance, teachers must also become aware of any mismatches between their instructional techniques and their students' cultural norms which may hinder their strengths in learning.

Building cultural tolerance is fundamental to achieving a harmonious pluralistic society. Two key components of this mission include improving race relations (Gay, 2000) and promoting democracy (Nieto & Bode, 2008), which also serve as two elemental goals of multicultural education. Nieto and Bode (2008) argue all students should be prepared to contribute to the needs of the society as a whole, rather than their personal interests. This will allow them to adopt the mindset of a global citizen and support themselves in becoming "more likely to function effectively in cultures outside of their nation than citizens who have little understanding of and empathy for cultures within their own society," (Banks, 1999, pp. 23-24). This leads to the third set of goals of multicultural education.

### **Multicultural Education Tenet #3: Social Transformation**

The third tenet of multicultural education is focused on the transformation of ideologies, attitudes, and policies that shape society. This translates to helping “teachers and students transform their thinking about the nature and development of the United States and the world and also to develop a commitment to act in ways that will make the United States a more democratic and just nation,” (Banks, 1999, pp. 21-22). This commitment requires a shift in thinking and the development of critical consciousness in teachers and students. Critical consciousness “entails understanding the relationship between one’s everyday problems and larger uses and abuses of power and seeing oneself as capable of working for change” (Grant & Sleeter, 2011, p. 236). This commitment requires taking necessary action to reduce any damage caused by the discrimination or exclusion of members from ethnically or racially underrepresented groups in the past because of their physical or cultural characteristics (Banks, 1999).

Before multicultural education became a national movement, recognition of students’ unique qualities was overwhelmingly absent in the national education agenda (Robles de Meléndez & Ostertag, 1997). To build a pluralistic society based on equality and respect for all others, however, it is imperative to transform the institutionalized hegemonic ideologies that have historically pervaded educational theory and policy. Banks (1999, 2004) argues this includes everything from critically examining and replacing monocultural textbooks in classrooms to transforming institutional norms, such as mission statements, goals, and academic values of a school or district. The overarching goals of social transformation also require educators to evaluate their perpetuation of a culture of power (Delpit, 1995) in the classroom and examine how their instructional

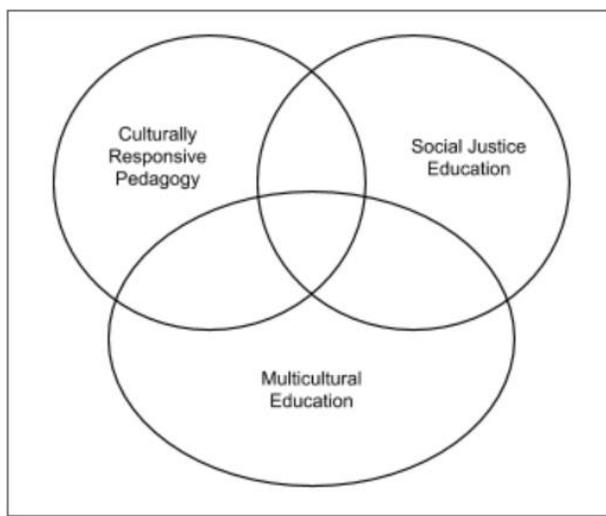
practices reinforce cultural rules and norms of the dominant group of society. While social transformation is the most visionary goal of multicultural education, it yields the most power for a democratic society outside of schools.

### **Distinguishing Multicultural Education Reform**

Multicultural education has been a slow-to-evolve reform movement. Its complexity and ambitiousness led to many misconceptions of what it was and how to implement it in schools (Hackman, 2005; Nieto, 1998; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). As a result, other educational movements formed over the years to fill in the gaps where multicultural education was not taking hold. Multicultural education is often used interchangeably with two of these other educational concepts: social justice education and culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond, 2017). It is apparent, based on the numerous definitions in the literature, that these concepts are similar in nature. Both social justice education and culturally responsive pedagogy contain elements of the much broader concept of multiculturalism, such as acknowledging diversity, promoting critical thinking, and encouraging social transformation. Yet, while multicultural education is primarily concerned with educational equity for all learners, as stated previously, it is not a primary goal of social justice education or culturally responsive pedagogy.

To further define multicultural education, it is important to discern the differences between these concepts despite their overlapping objectives (see Figure 2). Like multicultural education, social justice education strives to teach tolerance and advocate for social transformation (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). According to Hackman (2005), “social justice education encourages students to take an active role in their own education and supports teachers in creating empowering, democratic, and critical educational

environments” (p. 103). The main focus of this movement is to build students’ critical consciousness of the systems of power and privilege in play. The overarching goal of social justice education, developing critical consciousness, therefore, falls most in line with the third tenet of multicultural education.



*Figure 2.* A Venn diagram illustrates the overlapping relationships between the three similar educational concepts.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is defined by Gay (2018) as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to effective for them” (p. 36). The primary goals of CRP are focused on validating, affirming, and empowering culturally diverse students in the learning process (Gay, 2018). It is also concerned with developing strong relationships between a teacher and her students (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). This is done through culturally *relevant* teaching methods, which “[use] student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). Requiring teachers to gain a basic understanding of the human connections and disconnections between themselves and each of their students is a cornerstone of CRP (Delpit, 1995), whereas multicultural

education is focused on meeting the needs of *all* students equitably and harmoniously (Hammond, 2017).

Although the overarching goal is not the same, many CRP strategies tend to overlap with those found in multicultural education. For instance, culturally responsive teaching strives to incorporate various cultures into the formal curriculum with multicultural resources and texts (Gay, 2018). Both movements call on teachers to counter “dysconscious racism” in schools, which is a collective habit of mind in which teachers are somewhat aware of the ways children are privileged or disadvantaged based on their attributes (specifically, race), but do not challenge the status quo (see Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 35). Culturally responsive teaching is also concerned with preparing productive members of a pluralistic society, which is similar to the goals associated with the second and third tenets of multicultural education. In many respects, CRP seems to propel the tenets of multicultural education.

Hammond (2017) argues the underlying goals of multicultural education, social justice education, and CRP are social harmony, critical consciousness, and independent learning respectively. It could be argued that multicultural education is more intent on igniting the transformation required to achieve social harmony, which requires the critical consciousness promoted by social justice education and empowering diverse thinkers as encouraged by culturally responsive pedagogists. Still, the concepts of these three movements do seemingly support one another, and together they further strengthen the goals of multicultural education.

## Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework “offers a logical structure of connected concepts that help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another within the theoretical framework” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 17). To firmly bridge the theories of critical pedagogy and social constructivism to the tenets of multicultural education being studied, this study is additionally guided by James A. Banks’s (1989) framework of the four curricular approaches to multicultural education reform.

The four levels described earlier align to the three tenets of multicultural education. (Figure 3 visually displays the four approaches in relation to the tenets of multicultural education defined earlier.) The first approach, the *contributions approach*, is most frequently encountered in elementary grades (Banks, 1999). Using this approach, teachers recognize cultural diversity with lessons featuring culturally diverse heroes, holidays, and celebrations. One of the main purposes of this approach is to educate students about multiple cultures beyond the dominant group. Another purpose is to balance the proportionality of representation among genders, races, and ethnicities in the curriculum. Although this approach attempts to diversify the curricula, it does not necessarily strive to achieve goals related to cultural tolerance or social transformation. Rather, it intentionally diversifies the curricula to increase the awareness of the dominant group of students to other cultures while offering opportunities for students from underrepresented groups to experience curricula that represents their own likeness. Therefore, this approach is viewed as a strategy that teachers may use to begin increasing equity in the classroom (Banks, 1999).

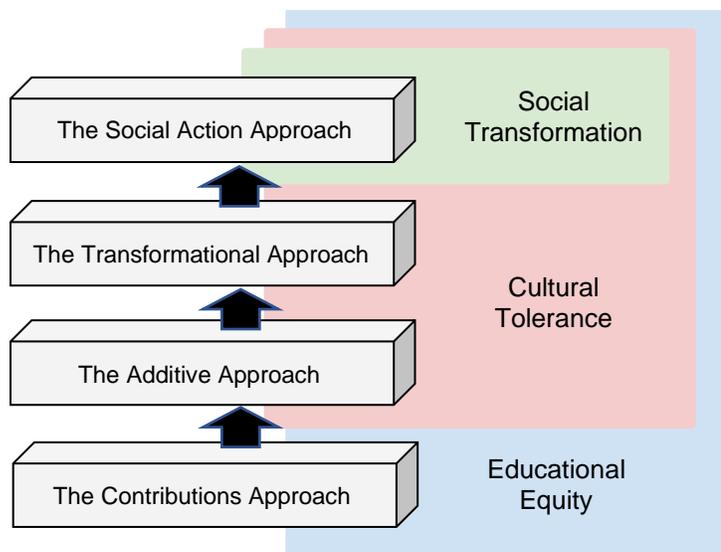


Figure 3. Banks's (1989) *Curricular Approaches to Multicultural Education Reform* framework aligned to the tenets of multicultural education.

The *additive approach* and *transformational approach* to multicultural education reform dig deeper into multicultural content. The additive approach does not alter the perspectives of the mainstream curriculum nor does it set out to transform students' thinking about social justice. Cultural tolerance, however, emerges in this approach as teachers are intentionally developing students' sense of diversity awareness through enriching discussions of the experiences of multiple groups other than the dominant group. The *transformational approach* tends to align with the goals of cultural tolerance more so; this approach includes teaching from multiple perspectives and giving students the opportunity to critically analyze the many ways in which society has been influenced by various cultures. By assuming the perspectives of others and learning the ways a society has been influenced over time, students can build cultural tolerance as well as access the door for social transformation.

The fourth and final approach in Banks's framework, the *social action approach*, focuses on social justice and issues that impact living in a pluralistic society. This approach is aligned to the three tenets of multicultural education: educational equity,

cultural tolerance, and social transformation. Unlike the first three approaches, this approach is primarily concerned with teaching students about the transformation of society. To achieve the goals associated with this approach to reform, teachers and students must embrace a shift in traditional thinking and schooling methods. Because of this, this approach to reform is presumably the least likely to be encountered in elementary schools.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Education**

There is scant empirical research regarding inservice teachers' perceptions of multicultural education (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018). Research shows that teachers' perceptions, formed by underlying conceptualizations and beliefs, have a significant influence on their teaching practices (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Smylie, 1995). While not all researchers agree that a teacher's instructional decisions and actions can be based off their beliefs (Roehler, Duffy, Herrmann, Conley, & Johnson, 1988), Pajares (1992) argues that understanding teachers' beliefs is a critical component of educational inquiry. "Researchers who have wandered into it have found exploring the nature of beliefs a rewarding enterprise, and their findings suggest a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices," (Pajares, 1992, p. 326). Teachers' beliefs, contends Kagan (1992), could lie "at the very heart of teaching" (p. 85). In learning more about the beliefs that shape elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, the field can gain a better understanding of how teachers are integrating multicultural education in elementary classrooms.

The limited corpus of literature related to teachers' perceptions of multicultural education contains an array of studies focusing on specific facets of multicultural education, such as teachers' attitudes towards racial integration (Washington, 1982), teachers' multicultural practices (Saldana & Waxman, 1997), or teacher preparation (Sharma, 2005). As a result, few studies have obtained a holistic picture of multicultural education from teachers' perspectives. This review of studies chronologically illustrates teachers' perceptions related to multicultural education throughout the contemporary globalization era (see Figure 4).

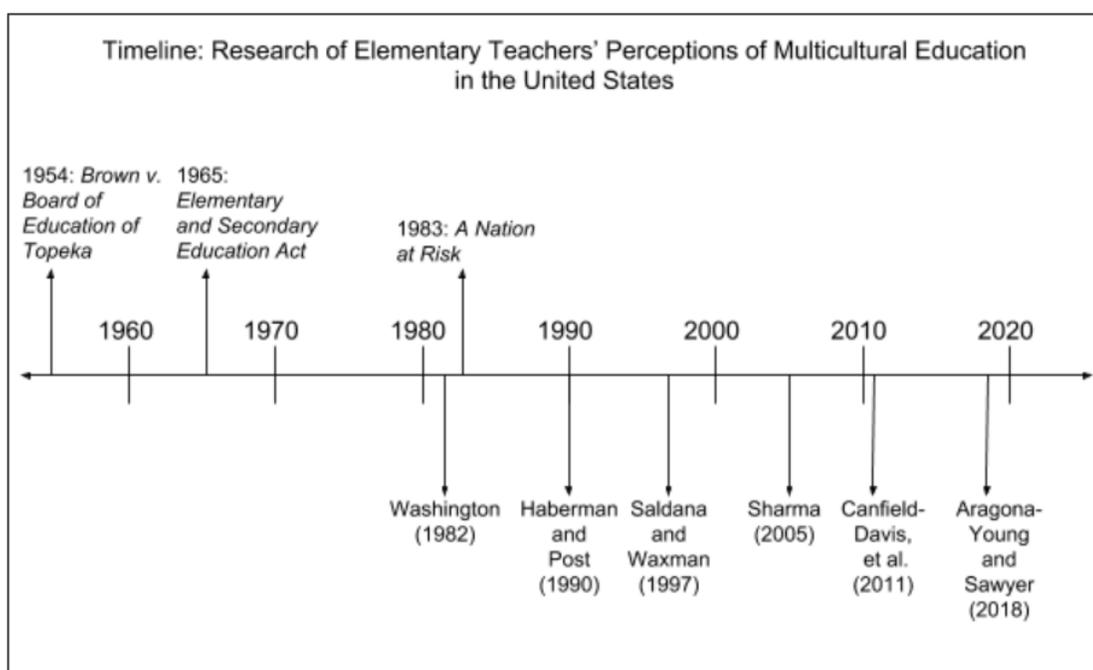


Figure 4. Studies related to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in the U.S.

Washington (1982) was one of the first educational researchers to study teachers' perceptions related to multicultural education in the United States. According to Washington, surveys of teacher attitudes and practices regarding multicultural education had not been conducted prior to 1979. The purpose of her groundbreaking study of more than 3,000 elementary teachers in North Carolina was determining elementary teachers'

attitudes toward multiethnic or integrated schooling, access to multicultural materials and methods, and the utilization of multicultural materials and methods.

Although this study did not focus on the variables contributing to teachers' perceptions, the demographic information obtained from the participants was used to determine some unique patterns in the data. For instance, teachers with advanced degrees generally held more favorable attitudes toward multicultural education; and teachers with a majority of ethnically and socioeconomically underrepresented students in their classes were also more favorable toward the concepts of multicultural education.

Regarding their attitudes toward multicultural education, a majority (71%) of teachers believed that children should know the contributions of minorities in every subject they study. A majority (65%) of teachers also believed that attention to multicultural education would not distract young children from learning basic skills. Finally, a majority (62%) agreed that multicultural education is beneficial to all students, both White and ethnically underrepresented cultures. These findings suggest that, even near its inception, more than half of elementary teachers shared similar ideals related to multicultural education. Yet, the factors that contributed to their beliefs remain unknown.

Nearly ten years later, Haberman and Post (1990) published the next study which employed a survey to understand teachers' (specifically, cooperating teachers') perceptions of multicultural education. Their survey, unlike Washington's and others to follow, only contained one question. It asked teachers to select one multicultural education goal out of five (represented by the five approaches to multicultural education established by Sleeter and Grant in 1988) to be taught above the others.

Over 80 percent of the respondents selected Item #1, *Children/youth would learn that all people are individuals - distinctive personalities - regardless of their backgrounds*, and Item #2, *Children/youth would learn that we all have to learn to live together in this world regardless of any group differences; Cooperation and tolerance are vital*. Less than five percent of participants chose Item #5, *Children/youth would learn that we all have a responsibility to change the discrimination and prejudice in our society against certain groups*. While not mutually exclusive, the five choices were perceived by the researchers as a “continuum of growth representing an understanding of American society” (p. 33). The authors reasoned as a person moves from Item #1 to #5, they demonstrate more maturity as a citizen of a pluralistic society.

The methodology of this study is worthy of critique in comparison to others since, as indicated previously, approaches to multicultural education are categorized by a spectrum of interrelated goals. Asking educators to choose one goal at the exclusion of others with no explanation does not provide a clear picture of why or how the teachers determined which goal to select, and it arguably does not provide an accurate depiction of teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education. Nevertheless, it is significant because it serves as one of the few indicators of teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education during this era.

The next study related to U.S. elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education was published nearly seven years later. Saldana and Waxman’s (1997) study observed the extent in which multicultural teaching was integrated in urban elementary school classrooms. They employed a Multicultural Teaching Observation Instrument (MTOI) to primarily assess the frequency and variability of multicultural teaching

strategies used in elementary classrooms. The results suggested that elementary school teachers were generally supportive of the diverse learners in their classrooms. The data gathered using the MTOI observation tool also revealed that, although teachers were using “culturally appropriate” materials, they did not explicitly reference other cultures during classroom discourse nor display many texts about non-American ethnic groups. Therefore, teachers were not actively reducing inequities and integrating aspects from the students' culture into their teaching.

This study did not specifically examine teachers' perceptions about multicultural education. Yet, the findings revealed several factors that could impact the successful implementation of multicultural education: (1) schools that empower their teachers in implementing multicultural education, (2) the availability of effective multicultural curricula at the elementary school level, (3) teachers' exposure to comprehensive inservice training, workshops, and resource materials, and (4) extensive instructional supervision and coaching. Since these school-level factors could influence levels of multicultural teaching, it could be argued they would also influence teachers' perceptions of multicultural education (Aydin & Tonbuloglu, 2014).

Teachers' perceptions of their preparation to teach multicultural education have also been studied. Sharma (2005) used surveys and interviews to explore elementary, middle, and high school teachers' perceptions of their teacher preparation programs in regard to teaching culturally diverse students. Several themes emerged in the data. First, teachers frequently made recommendations for changing teacher preparation programs (i.e., offering more multicultural education courses, offering study abroad programs). They also indicated a need for more multicultural education workshops, seminars, and

presentations for inservice teachers, as well as a need for teaching practicum in culturally diverse classrooms. Finally, the teachers suggested gaining real-life experiences with multiple cultures other than one's own to become better prepared to teach multicultural education. While these findings do not convey a general perception of multicultural education, they do signify a serious need for improved multicultural teacher education. According to Sharma, universities are not "operating from a comprehensive multicultural perspective with regard to teacher preparation programs" (p. 60), which could be a significant teacher-level factor influencing teachers' perceptions of multicultural education.

The most recently published studies on teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, conducted by Canfield-Davis, Tenuto, Jain, and McMurtry (2011) and Aragona-Young and Sawyer (2018), used surveys for their research. Canfield-Davis and colleagues administered a survey to 24 rural public school teachers (including nine elementary teachers) to explore their understanding of multicultural education as well as the extent to which multicultural education was addressed in their schools. In general, their findings denote a series of challenges facing teachers in this area, including a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in the school's community, a lack of instructional time devoted to multicultural education instruction, and a lack of interest/training in multicultural education, thus diminishing teacher's overall desire to implement multicultural education. Although this article distinguished two participant groups (elementary faculty and secondary faculty), analysis at each level was not reported, so any conclusion of findings unique to the elementary teachers is unknown.

At the time of this literature review, Aragona-Young and Sawyer (2018) had published the most recent study related to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. They investigated elementary teachers' definitions of culture, their use of multicultural practices, and the specific factors that contributed to teachers' endorsement of multicultural practices in the classroom. Forty-five elementary teachers across three schools were surveyed. The custom-developed survey asked teachers to "respond to a series of five scenarios...which represented a hypothetical teacher's use of differing recommended multicultural practices along Banks's (1999) continuum of approaches" (p. 470). They found that teachers were generally mindful about the goals of multicultural education, such as exposing students to cultural diversity, "weaving multicultural topics into their curricula" (p. 477), and creating inclusive classroom communities. Like Canfield-Davis et al.'s study, their research also revealed a series of challenges impacting multicultural education, such as a lack of multicultural resources, a lack of time to devote to multicultural topics, and an overall reluctance to address multicultural topics with their students.

The participants in this study demonstrated a general awareness of multicultural education. However, due to the participants' low Likert-scale responses on items related to their endorsement of multicultural practices, the authors concluded that the teachers did not strongly endorse multicultural practices. Elementary teachers' resistance to implementing multicultural education in their classrooms, according to Aragona-Young and Sawyer, could be related to an incomplete understanding of multicultural practices or a lack of instructional time. While this study gives insight into elementary teachers'

awareness of multicultural teaching, it does not provide a deep understanding of their perceptions of multicultural teaching nor the factors that contribute to those perceptions.

### **Studying Teachers' Perceptions Outside of the United States**

Although most of the research on multicultural education has been conducted in the United States (Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte, 2016), there are a few international studies of elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. First, Irwin (1999) conducted a study in which 278 elementary teachers from Alberta, Canada were surveyed about their beliefs of multicultural education. The author reported that teachers generally held a favorable attitude toward multicultural education implementation, which is similar to the findings of the U.S. studies. In contrast to findings in U.S. studies, the elementary teachers in the Canadian study indicated that it was not challenging to implement multicultural education in their classrooms. Interestingly, they generally shared the opinion that developing students' cultural tolerance is not part of their job nor should multicultural education be mandated in their province. Since this survey used Likert-scale responses, the teachers' unique perceptions of multicultural education are unknown, leaving educational researchers to hypothesize the teachers' reasoning for their answers.

The purpose of Aydın and Tonbuloğlu's (2014) qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of multicultural education in Turkey. The participants were nine doctoral students who taught in primary or secondary grades at the time of the study. Unlike the other reviewed studies that used surveys or observation tools to collect data, Aydın and Tonbuloğlu employed interviews, observations, and document analysis of the participants' weekly reflections and examination papers.

The document analysis revealed that all participants agreed on the necessity of multicultural education. Teachers' most emphasized notions were thematized into three categories. First, almost all participants emphasized educational equality, which is something they argued is ensured through multicultural education. Secondly, the participants revealed a perceived importance of multicultural education in forming a democratic society. Finally, the concept of justice was repeatedly mentioned by teachers as an important aspect of multicultural education. While these themes are more progressive in nature when compared to the other studies, it is important to note that all participants were doctoral students whose beliefs of multicultural education may have been influenced by their scholarship outside of teaching. A study with a larger or more diverse sample of participants, including novice teachers with minimal teaching experiences to distinguished teachers with advanced degrees, may potentially reveal a greater range of perceptions and evaluations of multicultural education.

In 2016, Agirdag, Merry, and Van Houtte published their mixed-methods study exploring teachers' understanding of multicultural education in Flanders, Belgium. Flanders has experienced a large wave of Muslim-born immigrants from Turkey and Morocco during the contemporary globalization era. This has resulted in two overwhelmingly-distinct cultural groups attending regional public schools: Flemish and Muslim immigrant students. Despite the Ministry of Education's efforts to ensure students were being taught from a multicultural perspective, little was known about Flemish teachers' understanding of multicultural education (Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte, 2016).

During the in-depth interviews conducted with teachers and administrators, participants reported a strong focus on religious diversity (i.e., teaching about Islamic holidays) and increasing their use of multicultural textbooks (e.g., texts that replaced the use of common Dutch names with common Muslim names) as part of their embedded practices of multicultural education. These multicultural practices reported by teachers related to the multicultural education goals of educational equity yet failed to align to goals associated with constructing cultural tolerance or social transformation, which is a similar finding encountered across the literature. One point of significance in this study, however, is the data analysis signified both teacher-level factors (i.e., ethnicity and age) and school-level factors (i.e., student demographics) related to teachers' multicultural teaching. If these factors are related to teachers' practices, they could also be related to their perceptions of multicultural education and should be considered in future research.

The studies included in this literature review were intentionally selected for their exploration of variables directly related to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. This review did not include other studies that focused on other aspects of multiculturalism and elementary teachers, such as Adamson, Santau and Lee's (2013) study of elementary teachers' use of science instructional strategies supporting ELL students, Kose and Lim's (2011) qualitative survey study researching the effects of professional development on teachers' implementation of transformative teaching, and Zoch's (2017) ethnographical study which investigated four elementary teachers' instructional strategies that attempted to sustain students' cultural competence. While these studies and others have made considerable contributions to the field of multicultural education, they do not provide insight into teachers' conceptualization of multicultural

education and its various components; therefore, they were excluded from this literature review.

In conclusion, a small amount of studies conducted during the past forty years have explored an array of variables related to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. By examining teachers' attitudes and abilities to implement multicultural education, this review has illuminated a gap in the corpus of literature about teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and the contextual factors that may influence them. As a result, the field still lacks a nuanced understanding of how multicultural education reform is evolving in the United States.

### **Summary**

Although *multicultural education* is a relatively new term that was coined as a product of the Civil Rights era, the tenets of multicultural education can be traced back to the times of ancient civilization. The goals of multicultural education posited by renowned scholars in the field can be classified into at least one of three categories: educational equity, cultural tolerance, and social transformation. These overarching goals, or tenets, provide the foundation of the conceptual framework, which provides a unique lens for this study and addresses a significant gap in the field's knowledge base about elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and its overarching goals. The following chapter will discuss the methodology of the study.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

To enhance the education field's knowledge base regarding the status of multicultural education in the 21st century, this qualitative study explores elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to their personal and professional experiences as well as other school-level variables. Since teachers' perceptions are related to the education they provide for their students (Costa, 1997; Sharma, 2005), this research topic holds great significance in the contemporary era of globalization in which the U.S. student population is rapidly diversifying. The following research questions are addressed in this study to gain a deeper understanding of this topic:

1. What are elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and its overarching goals?
2. In what ways do school-level factors (e.g., school policies, school leaderships' perceptions, school demographics, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?
3. In what ways do teacher-level factors (e.g., personal background, teaching experience, professional development, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?

### Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research methods such as case studies focus on interpreting a phenomenon of interest from the participant's lived experiences. Qualitative research is commonly rooted in constructivist epistemological assumptions in which the researcher

and participants work together to give meaning to the participants' experiences (Mertens, 2015). Stake (1995) similarly argued there are multiple interpretations of reality at play in qualitative designs; however, he posited this knowledge construction occurs on three different levels: the participant, the researcher, and the audience. The constructivist epistemological approach not only allows for multiple interpretations, but it also allows for the "inclusion of participants' differences in beliefs, values, intentions, and meanings, as well as social, cultural, and physical contextual factors that affect causal relationships" (Mertens, 2015, p. 238).

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher's role as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. This characteristic potentially bears both positive and negative effects on the research. The human researcher has the ability to adapt techniques to fit the context of the phenomenon or case being studied (Merriam, 1998). However, this role also introduces potential issues (e.g., personal bias) which may influence data quality. Later in this chapter, I will explicitly identify my subjectivity as the research instrument and address the steps taken to produce reliable and valid data, thus attempting to minimize any potential issues which could jeopardize the quality of my research.

A qualitative research design was selected for this study to provide a thick description of its findings based on inductive data analysis. Currently, little is known about the macro- and micro-level contextual factors that contribute to teachers' perspectives of multicultural education. Therefore, an inductive analysis approach was utilized to allow new concepts and theories to emerge from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When paired with the thick contextual descriptions of each case, these concepts or

theories provide a more comprehensive response to each of the respective research questions addressing this topic.

### **Multiple Case Study Method**

This qualitative research employed a multiple case study method. While there are different interpretations of the definition of *case study*, researchers often suggest that this method of research is defined by the unit of analysis (a unique object of study) rather than the process (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2015; Stake, 2005). Multiple case studies are traditionally employed to collect and analyze data across two or more cases to yield a significant and compelling interpretation of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). This study employed an embedded multiple case design (Yin, 2003) to analyze data from four unique cases (i.e., schools) and numerous subcases within each case (i.e., teachers) to illuminate the school-level factors and teacher-level factors related to multicultural education in elementary schools.

The primary mode of data collection for each case was in-depth interviews. Interviews are used to better understand the world by interpreting the meaning of participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Since teachers' *perceptions* of multicultural education cannot be measured quantitatively nor observed, I relied on in-depth interviews as the primary data source to gather deep and meaningful insights into the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences - both professional and personal - related to multicultural education.

To gather contextual data about each case (i.e., school), official school documents were collected and administrators were interviewed at each of the participating schools during the study. Both methods of data collection were employed to better understand the

school-level factors which may be related to teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. Examples of school-level factors include: geographical location, faculty composition, student body, community engagement practices, ongoing professional development, schoolwide multicultural initiatives or practices, and schoolwide multicultural policies.

### **Settings and Participants**

This study was conducted over a period of three weeks at four public charter schools located in the southeastern region of the United States. Through a professional contact, I was granted access to a network of schools through which I purposefully sampled four schools situated within a 75-mile radius. Each school was carefully selected because of its unique context created by various intersecting factors (i.e., student demographics, educators' backgrounds, geographical location, community composition, etc.). The public charter schools included in this study are representative of the communities where they are located, thus providing four unique settings for this research.

The participants in this study include one elementary administrator (e.g., principal or assistant principal) and five elementary teachers (grades K-5) from each school (see Table 2). Prior to the beginning of the study, each administrator was asked to help identify at least five elementary teachers who were willing to participate in the study. Twenty-four participants were interviewed for this study (four school administrators and 20 elementary teachers in all). All but two of the participants are female (Participant 5 and Administrator 4 are male). Eighteen participants are White, five participants are People of Color (including two or more ethnicities), and one participant is Native American. The range in years of professional educator experience for the 23 participants

who volunteered that information is 23 and the mean is 10.6 (Participant 3 declined to share the accumulation of her total years of teaching experience).

Table 2  
*Participant Professional Profiles*

Setting & Participant Names*	Position	Years of Experience
<b>Hoben Hills Elementary</b>		
Administrator 1	Principal	11 years
Participant 1	K-5 STEM Teacher	3 years
Participant 2	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher	7 years
Participant 3	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher	n/a
Participant 4	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	10 years
Participant 5	K-5 Physical Education Teacher	17 years
<b>Bentley Lake School</b>		
Administrator 2	Principal	25 years
Participant 6	K-5 Music Teacher	4 years
Participant 7	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher	3 years
Participant 8	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher	5 years
Participant 9	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	6 years
Participant 10	K-8 Curriculum Resource Teacher	15 years
<b>Lowell Community School</b>		
Administrator 3	Assistant Principal	22 years
Participant 11	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher	13 years
Participant 12	Kindergarten Teacher	3 years
Participant 13	Special Education Teacher	12 years
Participant 14	K-5 Curriculum Resource Teacher	13 years
Participant 15	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	12 years
<b>Woodville Academy</b>		
Administrator 4	Assistant Principal	11 years
Participant 16	K-5 AIG Teacher	19 years
Participant 17	K-5 Special Education Teacher	18 years
Participant 18	K-5 Technology Teacher	4 years
Participant 19	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher	9 years
Participant 20	Kindergarten Teacher	2 years**

\* Pseudonyms were used. \*\* Taught previously in a Pre-K setting for 17 years.

**Hoben Hills Elementary.** Hoben Hills Elementary is a Title I public charter elementary school located in one of the state's fastest growing cities. It enrolls students across eight districts, although it mainly enrolls students within its county's home district as well as a neighboring county's school district of approximately 147,000 students. Approximately 630 students were enrolled during the 2017-2018 school year. The school's population is comprised of students who identify as Black (39%), White (33%), Hispanic (16%), or two or more races (8%). According to the principal, approximately 68% of the students qualify for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRPL) and 12% of students are being served by the Exceptional Children Program.

**Bentley Lake School.** Bentley Lake School is a public charter K-8 school located in a large affluent town on the outskirts of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA). The school enrolled approximately 1,100 students during the 2017-2018 school year from six different counties. Approximately 11% of the student population qualify for FRPL and 9% of students are being served by the Exceptional Children Program. Most of the students in the school identify as White (42%), Black (20%), Asian (16%), Hispanic (11%), or two or more races (10%). According to the teachers and staff at this school, Bentley Lake School enrolls a significant population of Muslim students.

**Lowell Community School.** Lowell Community School is a Title I public charter K-8 school located in a small rural town. Most of the 560 students who were enrolled during the 2017-2018 school year reside within the county's school district, which serves approximately 20,000 students. According to the school administrator, approximately 61% of Lowell Community School's students qualify for FRPL and 18% of students are being served by the Exceptional Children Program. A majority of the students identify as

White (67%), while 13% identify as Hispanic, 11% identify as Black, and 8% identify as two or more races.

**Woodville Academy.** Finally, Woodville Academy is a public charter K-8 school located in a suburban town. It sits just outside of an increasingly large metropolitan area of approximately 2.5 million people. Approximately 860 students were enrolled during the 2017-2018 school year; although most students live within the county's school district, students attend this school from numerous districts across the local region. Approximately 44% of the students qualify for FRPL according to a school administrator, and 12% of Woodville Academy's students are being served by the Exceptional Children Program. A majority of the student population identifies as White (49%), Black (23%), Hispanic (20%), or two or more races (6%). According to the school administrators and teachers, the school enrolls a significant population of students with an Eastern European or Russian background.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

After formal approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university, I contacted the administrators and teachers at each school via email to recruit participants and schedule interview times. Interviews were conducted in several settings based on the preferences of the participants. Most teachers were interviewed in their classrooms after school hours or during school hours while their students were in another classroom, and some teachers were interviewed in a conference room in their school's main office. Three administrators were interviewed in their private offices, and one administrator was interviewed by phone. The interviews were 51 minutes long on

average. Before each interview began, each participant was required to give consent to their participation in the study by signing an IRB-approved participation consent form (Appendix A). Each interview was audio recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Administrator and teacher interviews were facilitated with semi-structured interview protocols (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the method of data collection for this study because they guide the interview with specific questions for all participants yet allow the researcher to change the sequence of questioning and follow new paths for follow-up questioning based on the unique answers given by the participants (Fielding, 1993; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The interview questions in this study were initially adapted from interview and survey items used in previous studies of multicultural education (Canfield-Davis et al., 2011; Sharma, 2005). The protocols were then modified to address the specific purpose of this study. Both interview protocols began with questions aimed at understanding teachers' and administrators' personal and professional backgrounds (e.g., Describe yourself and your personal background; What is your professional teaching background?) and questions about their class or school (e.g., How would you describe your class?; Describe your school; Who are your teachers?). Then, teachers and administrators were asked to share their thoughts regarding multicultural education. To understand their perceptions of multicultural education and its tenets, the elementary teacher participants were asked questions such as "When you hear the term *multicultural education*, what comes to mind for you?" and "What does it look like to address equity in the classroom?" Teachers and administrators were also asked to describe their professional experiences

with multicultural education, schoolwide multicultural practices or policies, the significance of multicultural education, and its associated challenges.

Prior to the study, I piloted the instrument with two elementary teachers (one 2nd grade teacher with 18 years of teaching experience and a 3rd grade teacher with 11 years of teaching experience) and consulted with an advisor to further refine the interview questions to ensure they were logically sequenced, clearly communicated, and applicable to the purpose of the research. The initial design of the interview protocol used in this study did not contain questions asking teachers to specifically address the three tenets of multicultural education. However, the pilot interviews revealed (and the study confirmed) a need to subsequently ask elementary teachers about these three overarching goals since their initial perceptions did not speak to them directly. After the pilot interviews were conducted, the original interview protocol was amended to include questions pertaining to elementary teachers' perceptions of the three tenets of multicultural education (educational equity, cultural tolerance, and social transformation) to gain a better understanding of their holistic understanding of the topic.

### **Document Review**

In addition to interviews, I collected official documents from each school as a method of data triangulation. Official documents are important to qualitative research because they often contain important information that can be missed in interviews (Creswell, 2003). The documents included in the analysis were: school mission/vision statements, school improvement plans, school report cards, curriculum resources, and parent/student handbooks. These documents were mostly obtained digitally from the schools' websites, and some were collected in-person from the school administrators and

teachers. An analysis of these documents provides contextual information for each school as well as additional information related to the multicultural approaches each school currently utilizes, thus serving as a method of data triangulation in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of several phases of inductive qualitative analysis and immersive engagement with the teacher interview data (the administrator interview transcripts and official school documents were analyzed using similar methods). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), immersive engagement includes multiple rounds of unstructured data readings, goal-oriented data readings, and generating, scrutinizing, and vetting themes. During the unstructured data readings, I read the entire corpus of data to become familiar with it and get a sense of the overarching context. Then, I reread the data set and made analytic memos while reading to make sense of it. For instance, I made memos about the contexts in which teacher participants' used the words *culture* and *diversity*, and I also made notes about the types of personal experiences teachers shared. These memos were referenced while organizing and reflecting upon the transcript data and during peer debriefing.

Next, a second round of analysis was conducted, consisting of goal-oriented readings in which I inductively coded the teacher interview transcripts. The first goal in this reading of data consisted of highlighting pertinent units of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the second round of goal-oriented reading, the units of data were coded with in vivo codes (using the participants' words) and inductive codes (coming from the data; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Table 3 provides examples of in vivo and inductive codes from the data set. Once the codes were created, the teacher interview data were reread

using the constant comparative method of analysis to generate and confirm categories (see Appendix C). The units of data identified and coded for each research question were organized into broader categories, and then reorganized as new categories emerged. Finally, the categories were thematized. According to Saldana (2003), themes allow the researcher to establish a narrative created by the participants' beliefs and experiences.

The narrative findings in this study were further developed by comparing themes within-case and across-case. For example, the data obtained from teachers at Hoben Hills Elementary routinely fell into the category, *Building Relationships with Students and Builds Relationships/Inclusivity in the Classroom*, while the data from the other schools' teachers did not. Similarly, the data collected from teachers at Bentley Lake School regarding their perceptions about social transformation included units of data that mostly fell into the category of *Social Transformation Teaching Strategies* while data from other schools did not. These categories and the themes generated from them eventually led to a deeper case analysis of two schools that participated in this study.

Table 3  
*Coding Examples*

Participant Interview Data	Code
<b><u>In Vivo Codes</u></b>	
Um, teaching, teaching students about different cultures and, um, specifically the cultures that surround us in our community. (Participant 2)	Teaching about different cultures
Um, parental bias. Um, that's probably the biggest one is, is getting, um, the families on board. (Participant 7)	Parental bias is a challenge
And, and so I think that's my take on the equity piece of it. Like everybody has their right to be represented and whether they represent themselves, but to be represented, if they're not there to represent themselves, it's my job to represent them, I guess. (Participant 11)	Representation is equity

Well I think it's pretty much um, kind of creating an environment where the child feels accepted [and] wanted. (Participant 17)	Creating an accepting environment
And then it'll continue on as they grow and, um, we can make the just a better place. (Participant 20)	Making the world better
<b><u>Inductive Codes</u></b>	
Next year we're outlawing the clip charts. We're outlawing Class Dojo. Anything that showed publicly shaming a child. (Administrator 1)	Creating a trusting learning environment
The Era of Trump is a very, um, it's very heated. (Participant 12)	Political belief is a challenge
I know we have a Spanish class and we have an ESL teacher. (Participant 15)	Schoolwide multicultural initiative
We do a Hispanic cultural month with the Spanish teachers. (Participant 19)	Schoolwide multicultural initiative
Not that I'm aware of. (Multiple participants)	No schoolwide multicultural initiative

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### **Strategies for Quality**

Maximizing the quality of a study is critical in qualitative research (Yin, 2003). While validity can never be fully ensured in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), there are several measures that the researcher can take to produce a high-quality and ethical study. According to Yin (2003), there are four conditions related to the study's quality that must be considered by the qualitative researcher throughout the research process: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Construct validity is concerned with establishing neutral, unbiased, and operational measures within a study. To maximize this type of validity, Yin (2003) suggests using multiple sources of evidence and data triangulation methods. Multiple case studies partially address construct validity as they attempt to understand a phenomenon using multiple sources. Hence, one way this study addresses construct

validity is its design: it was intentionally designed to explore teachers' perceptions of multicultural education (the phenomenon) across various learning environments (multiple sources). I also addressed construct validity when triangulating three types of data within each case: teachers, administrators, and official school documents. Data triangulation allowed me to verify details about each school as well as challenge my "understanding of the participants and their perspectives/experiences as individuals" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 227).

Internal validity is an issue in qualitative research whenever an inference is being made that cannot be directly observed (Yin, 2003). This type of validity is achieved "by structuring a study to seek and attend to complexity throughout a recursive research design process" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 188). I employed several strategies suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016) to attain internal validity: data triangulation, participant validation, and dialogic engagement. As stated previously, I used data triangulation methods to gather information regarding school-level factors that relate to teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. Secondly, I conducted participant validation strategies, or member checks, with all participants to ensure the interview transcripts encapsulated their perspectives. While immersing myself in the data, I kept a notebook of analytic memos and used those to engage in ongoing dialogic engagement practices, or peer debriefing. During these ongoing discussions, I shared my analytical interpretations with my advisors and peers to receive feedback to challenge my assumptions. Finally, I remained committed to presenting a complete picture of my research, including any pertinent information that contradicted the thematic narratives that emerged during analysis.

Another critical issue with case study research, according to Yin (2003), is attaining external validity. External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the findings to cases beyond the scope of the research. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), “we may ask not whether interview findings can be generalized globally but whether the knowledge produced in a specific interview situation may be transferred to other relevant situations” (p. 296). This begs the question, can the findings related to teachers’ perceptions and awareness of multicultural education be generalized to others who share similar experiences? Furthermore, should the findings based on two or more teachers who share similar macro-level and micro-level experiences be analytically generalized to each other? This exploratory study does not produce knowledge that can be, nor should be, generalized out of context. For that reason, multiple contexts will be presented to provide a greater scope of this research topic, which will potentially increase the field’s ability to apply this new knowledge to similar cases and situations.

Yin’s final condition related to conducting sound, high-quality qualitative research is high levels of reliability. Reliability, or dependability, pertains to the trustworthiness of the study’s findings based on its replicability (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). It is achieved in part when the research procedures are explicitly communicated and adhered to throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). From ensuring all the data collection methods and instruments are appropriate for the research purpose and questions to following each step of the research process as communicated, all reliability procedures are critical in producing a high-quality study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Another measure of validity comes from the researcher's attention to ethics during a study to produce high-quality scientific knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). While planning my data collection procedures, I followed several steps suggested by Creswell (2003) to ensure my research design is highly ethical: I carefully considered any ethical issues that could arise to ensure there was minimal risk posed to the participants; to eliminate any threat of coercion, all participants selected for this study were willing volunteers who maintained the option to withdraw from the study at any time; and to minimize any disruption or inconvenience to the participants, all but one of the interviews were conducted in the schools being studied. Establishing this set of criteria in advance not only ensured that all federal and institutional regulations are being met, but also helped ensure that this study is ethical and of high-quality.

According to Merriam (1998), interviewing as a data collection method carries both risks and benefits. For example, participants may feel embarrassed or vulnerable when answering questions related to their personal and professional experiences with multiculturalism. For this reason, I frequently communicated my commitment to keeping their identity confidential and anonymous (this is also stated on the consent form). Additionally, participants may fear being judged for their lack of knowledge during an interview (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, it remained important to me that I clearly communicated my constructivist approach to this research and exhibit a caring and trustworthy disposition.

The researcher must also be aware of ethical considerations during the stages of data analysis and dissemination. Since the qualitative researcher is the instrument of data

collection and analysis, they determine which data is included and how it is reported (Merriam, 1998). My key responsibility as a researcher, then, was to strive for accuracy in my analysis and report unbiased comprehensive findings.

### **Positionality Statement**

As an instrument of this research, I acknowledge that my prior experiences and subjectivity impact the analysis conducted in this study. I was introduced to the field of multicultural education reform during my doctoral studies and was immediately drawn to the significance of this movement on the lives of my students: past, present, and future. When I reflect on my years of experience as a K-8 educator, I immediately recognize a lack of awareness of multicultural education in my own teaching practices as well as school policies in general. As a reflexive practitioner who strives to improve education for all students in my community, understanding the roots of teachers' awareness of multicultural education became of urgent importance to me and my purpose as an academic scholar.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my intersectional identity as a member of dominant group in society. I understand that my identity as a White, native-born U.S. citizen and English-speaking female is a variable in how I approach this topic of study. My lived experiences undoubtedly influenced me as an instrument of the research. Yet, it is important to note that I am a committed student of antiracist education who strives to continuously and critically evaluate the implications of my thoughts and actions as a White member of American society; this position also influences my scholarly work in multicultural education.

This positionality is further defined by my critical research perspective. According to Merriam (1998), this perspective draws on critical theories to understand how social institutions are designed and operated. The critical perspective aligns to the topic of this study because critical theories (i.e., critical pedagogy) promote multicultural education as a means to resist hegemonic and discriminatory practices commonly experienced in schools (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

As a qualitative researcher, I hold the epistemological perspective of a traveler seeking new knowledge. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), there are two metaphorical roles that an interviewer can assume: the miner or the traveler. While the miner “digs” for information that is buried within the participant’s knowledge, the traveler embarks on a journey with her participants to co-construct knowledge based on the participants’ experiences. The conceptions built by the traveler align to the theory of constructivism (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This position influences my own perception of this study, or journey, as a way to build new knowledge about multicultural education through the lens of other elementary teachers’ perspectives.

### **Summary**

To contribute to the education field’s knowledge base of multicultural education, this qualitative study has been designed using a multiple case study method to explore elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to their personal and professional experiences. Creswell (2009) posited, “Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). The data collection methods in this study included teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and the analysis of official school documents to

understand how multicultural education has manifested in four unique schools in the southeastern region of the United States. I engaged with these three sources of data during the analysis process to inductively code and thematize the data. Finally, the emergent themes were compared within-case and across cases to answer the research questions.

Throughout the duration of this qualitative study, great care and consideration was given to the high ethical standards I established for this research. Reporting accurate, valid, and reliable data while remaining conscientious of my participants' vulnerabilities and concerns was of great importance. Furthermore, I remained consciously aware of my subjectivity to ensure my positions as a former K-8 educator and a critical researcher with a constructivist epistemological perspective did not interfere with my ability to report the qualitative findings of this study.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to their personal and professional experiences as well as respective school-level factors. A multiple case study method was used to analyze data from twenty elementary educators employed at four unique schools. The semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers and administrators were transcribed and analyzed in addition to the official school documents that were collected from each school. The findings presented in this chapter are organized by the three research questions that guided this study:

1. What are elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and its overarching goals?
2. In what ways do school-level factors (e.g., school policies, school leaderships' perceptions, school demographics, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?
3. In what ways do teacher-level factors (e.g., personal background, teaching experience, professional development, etc.) influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education?

### **Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Education**

During the semi-structured interviews, the elementary teacher participants were asked to describe their immediate thoughts of the term *multicultural education*. Many participants' perceptions of multicultural education included multiple components. An analysis of their collective responses resulted in four main themes: teaching about global

awareness and culture, teaching students lessons about cultural tolerance, learning about students' backgrounds, and utilizing multicultural curriculum and materials.

### **Teaching About Global Awareness and Culture**

Teaching students about various cultures within their communities and around the world is the first theme that stood out across nearly all participants' perceptions of multicultural education. When describing multicultural education, eighteen teachers spoke to this theme in general, within which a select few spoke directly to increasing students' awareness of many cultures (including their own). Participant 2 described multicultural education as, "Teaching students about different cultures and, um, specifically the cultures that surround us in our community." Participant 13's perception was even more localized to the various family and cultural traditions found within a classroom: "basically just introducing them to a new culture and understanding, you know, that this is how *this* family does *their* traditions." Meanwhile, Participant 11 stated that teaching students about their *own* cultures was a necessary part of multicultural education to provide them an education of their ancestry:

A lot of them don't even have the ability to understand that about their own culture in the sense of, you know, my African American students may not even know about Africa or the struggles their ancestors might have had or, um, slavery.

While these teachers focused primarily on teaching about the specific cultures of their students and the school's community, others emphasized the need to include many other cultures from around the globe in their lessons. Participant 9, for instance, perceived multicultural education as a tool to prepare young students for the diversity and multiculturalism they will face outside their community based on her own multicultural

experiences traveling abroad in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. She also indicated multicultural education was necessary because of the global impact of technology on students' lives:

...we're such a smaller world now than what we used to be. Um, which means the multicultural aspect comes into play even more because these kids get online and play video games or they're on social media or whatever when they go online and they instantly connect to somebody across the world.

At other times, the teacher participants referred to *culture* in a more general sense.

Participant 1, for example, described multicultural education as, "teaching your students about other cultures in a way that allows them to be empathetic and understanding and recognize that people's background as a part of their story." Participant 17 also gave a vague description when describing multicultural education: "And the other aspect I think is educating all of [the students] about various cultural differences, things of that nature." Comments such as these suggest elementary teachers are not engaging in professional discussions about multiculturalism and related topics frequently enough to gain a critical understanding of how culture impacts society and education.

**Defining culture.** The elementary teachers' vague descriptions of *culture* may be related to the noticeable challenge in defining this term, which several teachers did spontaneously in their explanations of multicultural education. Participant 16 captured the complexity of teaching multiculturalism in this way:

It's not just language, it's not just race, it's not just religion. It's all these things put together. And it can be as simple as, like, do they live in this suburb versus that

suburb? Has their family been there for generations? Because there are cultural aspects of that.

Participant 11 also suggested that while it may be defined by race, *culture* is much more complex. “I think it really encompasses...I think a lot of people just think it encompasses the color of your skin. And I, myself, believe there's just so much more that it's not so cut and dry.” Meanwhile, Participant 5 described culture as a complex “way of life” that includes multiple facets—attitudes, language, fashion, learning styles, and food—which are influenced by “a number of different, oh, things or people, you know, family, the media, uh, and just society in general.” To these teachers, the concept of culture (and multiculturalism) is a difficult topic to teach in elementary grades because of its complexity.

In addition to the challenge in defining this concept, numerous participants admitted an observable shift in their definitions of *culture* in recent years. According to Participant 7, culture used to describe “people from different parts of the world.” Now, however, the definition is much more complex:

we've got this, what this family looks like, and this child in a foster home with a foster mom and we've got this child over here who's divorced. And then we've got this child over here who, um, you know, she speaks French and some dialects somewhere in some part of Africa...

Participant 18 also indicated during her interview that the definition of culture has changed during her adult life. She was the only elementary teacher who included various abilities, physical or intellectual differences, and sexual identities in her definition:

I think a lot of people would go right to, um, races and heritage and ethnicity,

stuff like that, which I think is what it sort of started as far as just kind of different peoples and different cultures. I think it's evolved into much more, though. I think it needs to include people with different abilities, people in the LGBT community, people with, um, mental health issues, people with other health issues, as well as culture and, and different backgrounds and ethnicities and stuff.

Based on these interviews, the definition of culture has seemingly expanded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus becoming a more inclusive term that no longer pertains to just race, ethnicity, class, and gender, but also to various human qualities (e.g., sexual orientation and mental health) and family circumstances (e.g., adoption and non-traditional families).

### **Lessons About Cultural Tolerance**

In addition to educating elementary learners about various cultures and increasing their global awareness, thirteen elementary teacher participants perceive multicultural education as a means for increasing their students' tolerance of others' differences. These teachers perceive multicultural education as having both immediate and lifelong impacts in this regard. Some teachers, like Participant 9, encourage their elementary students to be “open—and committed to being open—to other people's backgrounds in the way that they live, in the way that they were raised, in the way that they grew up in the way that they'll continue living.” Participant 1, Participant 12, and Participant 18 each spoke to the importance of multicultural education in building empathy in their classroom of learners. One of the purposes of multicultural education according to Participant 1 is “teaching your students about other cultures in a way that allows them to be empathetic and understanding and recognize that people's background is a part of their story.” In addition to empathy, Participant 18 felt that multicultural education could “help [students]

understand that differences are not a bad thing,” which may generate more open-mindedness and kindness among students, especially those whom she acknowledged “are just mean to each other.”

Not all teachers spoke directly to this concept of cultural tolerance in their initial perception of multicultural education. However, a few of them referenced the concept of teaching tolerance in their descriptions of multicultural education with words and phrases such as “teaching...diversity and inclusion” (Participant 19) or “And so to learn about all those cultures and all these parts of the world is important in schooling so that they can have a better acceptance and mindset going forward” (Participant 9). Although these references may seem insignificant, they could contribute to a bigger picture. Cultural tolerance could be on the periphery of teachers’ overall understanding of multicultural education; however, without professional training, they may be unable to articulate their understanding of cultural tolerance as a pertinent component of multicultural education.

### **Learning About Students’ Backgrounds**

Thirteen of the elementary teachers in this study also perceived multicultural education as the act of learning about their students’ diverse backgrounds, primarily as a means of building relationships in the classroom or making their lessons more culturally relevant or accessible. In a way, some teachers viewed it as a teacher-centered concept that informed instruction rather than the instruction itself. According to Participant 4,

just trying to learn more and then just getting [the students] to tell [the teachers] about what they're accustomed to, their background, where they're from and different things....So, when they tell me things about their backgrounds that I

didn't already know or you know, that helps to build my relationship with them as well. So, you know, just trying to build relationships helps to facilitate learning.

Participant 12 made a similar statement:

Um, but it's, it's more about just, I think, listening to them. Like, I need, I want to hear you tell me your stories and when you're talking about things I don't understand or backgrounds...just making sure that everyone is involved in the conversation, that there's other kids that don't have that background or asking questions, and as long as everybody feels comfortable

While similar, Participant 1 had a broader perception in this regard: "I think multicultural education is also just a larger conversation about who you are and your background and things like that." In their statements, these teachers emphasized the role multicultural education plays in building relational capacity with their students.

In addition to building relationships, teachers perceive multicultural education as a tool to make their instruction more culturally relevant and accessible. For instance, according to Participant 6, "[multicultural education is] pretty much a plethora of different, um, styles related to the different cultures that are represented in a setting." She believed that teachers should ensure their lessons include multiple cultures, especially those represented by the students in their classrooms. The example provided by Participant 15 spoke to this idea, as well as the idea of increased accessibility of learning:

If I expect a student who speaks a different language at home to really grasp what I'm teaching and don't take into account he may not know what I'm saying, then you have not just the language barrier but something in his home, his traditions, his culture...may prevent him from really understanding the texts.

When attempting to make lessons more accessible, Participant 15 perceived multicultural education as a tool that requires teachers to first understand how and why students from various cultures learn best, and then how to teach them most effectively. This initial statement was more profound than others for two reasons. First, Participant 15 had an understanding that students' cultures and home languages impact them as learners in both positive and negative ways. Secondly, she was the only participant who discussed the teachers' responsibility to act upon the knowledge they gain regarding their students' cultural differences. In doing this, Participant 15 recognizes that the instruction becomes more accessible to her learners from diverse backgrounds if the teacher takes students' differences into consideration when planning and teaching.

### **Multicultural Curriculum**

When asked to describe their perceptions of multicultural education, seventeen participants described it in relation to their curriculum or discussed *how* they integrate multicultural education in their school or classroom—both formally and informally—and gave examples. For instance, Participant 8 described her perception of multicultural education as teaching that generally includes “different types of cultures other than the American mainstream culture.” Meanwhile, Participant 6, a K-5 music teacher, perceived her music curriculum *as* multicultural education “...’cause music in itself bridges the gap between all cultures. That’s one of the only things that can get all cultures to come together.”

Participant 6 was the only teacher who perceives her discipline as being multicultural; other elementary teachers perceive multicultural education as a topic they must deliberately integrate across the multiple subjects they teach, such as reading,

language arts, mathematics, and social studies. For example, Participant 9 stated she teaches multicultural education through her diversity book club unit in language arts in which students explicitly learn about other cultures while reading “diverse literature.” Participant 4 also reported she attempts to integrate multicultural education in her mathematics instruction despite its challenges:

But I try to, especially like with word problems or if I'm trying to explain something, it's not always Johnny had five apples and Suzy had two apples. Sometimes I'll try to use like, um, vocabulary from other languages and things to try to incorporate that...So, I still feel like it's difficult in a math class, but we try to, you know, get some things in there.

While Participant 12 also felt it was difficult to integrate multicultural education in mathematics (“Um, math? I can't throw it in there as much.”), she did report multicultural education was much easier to integrate into her social studies instruction. In fact, social studies content, lessons, and units of study were referenced by multiple teachers during this part of the interview.

At least two elementary teacher participants in three of the schools (all except Hoben Hills) reported that multicultural education is taught in targeted social studies units such as “Holidays Around the World” or “Black History Month” at their schools: Participant 12: making sure that when we're doing our social studies type topics where we're putting in those different holidays from around the world.

Participant 13: A lot of the first-grade teachers do that; they do Holidays Around the World and they go to classroom to classroom. They have the little passports and, you know, they go to like, you know, um, uh, Mexico and

they do a craft and they learn about it and they go to Italy and they do well in France. And so I think that's really cute.

Participant 19: So, I've always done, like, Holidays Around the World, like, around Christmas instead of doing Christmas. We've always done that. Um, and then here we do a big study, um, for Black History Month.

Participant 20: In December we moved into, um, Holidays Around the World. So, as a grade level, um, we not only did Holidays Around the World in our own classroom where we talked about the different holidays, cultures, celebrations that happen throughout a year...[the students] actually had little passports and little activities and they went from classroom to classroom.

Participant 7: ...even my first year I was very, you get around to, you know, Martin Luther King Junior Day and things like that.

These teachers' perceptions exemplify Banks's (1999) contributions approach to multicultural education, which Banks posited is most frequently encountered in elementary schools. Teachers who utilize this approach commonly believe they integrate multicultural education in their teaching by featuring diverse holidays, celebrations, and heroes outside of the dominant group in their curriculum.

### **Multicultural Classroom Resources and Teaching Materials**

In addition to curriculum, ten elementary teachers also perceive multicultural education as intentionally using multicultural teaching materials in their classrooms. In her description of multicultural education, Participant 1 stated it "is first ensuring that your materials that you utilize in your classroom come from a varied cultural

background.” Participant 3 also adopted this same belief after teaching in a school that required the use of multicultural books and “posters that had to reflect multiculturalism and, and the people that were in it.” When discussing how she determines which materials to use, Participant 17 stated,

I try to do a variety of things like that when I pull materials just so they kind of do get some exposure to that and things they wouldn't get necessarily even in this country, you know, things, cultural things from other countries, that sort of thing. And, yeah, and we'll talk about things, you know, like the type of clothing they wore, you know, and this was a traditional meal that they would eat or, you know, things like that. I do try to make a point of that.

For her, choosing multicultural books that exemplify cultural traditions and norms (i.e., food, dress, and language) was an important strategy for increasing multicultural education in her special education classroom. Finally, Participant 20 indicated the different cultures represented in her materials was just as important as the materials themselves:

Um, having books, activities, pictures of all the different cultures...that represents our classroom as well as ones outside of the classroom... [the readings] I present to the class, you know, have different, um, backgrounds. I mean, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, um, skin color, um, abilities and disabilities, differences.

These findings suggest that some elementary teachers perceive multicultural education mainly as a teacher action in which they consider the backgrounds of their students when

lesson planning and gathering resources or are mindful of the cultures represented in their reading materials, classroom posters, and other decorations.

There is a wide range of perceptions of the term *multicultural education*. When asked to share their perceptions of multicultural education, the elementary teachers in this study discussed topics that were categorized into four themes: teaching global awareness and culture, lessons linked to cultural tolerance, learning about students' backgrounds, and the use of multicultural curriculum or materials. While some teachers mentioned the multicultural education tenet of cultural tolerance, their perceptions did not include comments directly related to the other two tenets of educational equity and social transformation.

In addition to asking elementary teachers about their perceptions of multicultural education, the participants were asked to describe their thoughts regarding the three tenets of multicultural education (educational equity, cultural tolerance, and social transformation) to gain a better understanding of their holistic understanding of the topic. Table 4 illustrates the major themes associated with the elementary teachers' perceptions of the tenets of multicultural education.

Table 4  
*Participants' Thematic Perceptions of the Three Tenets of Multicultural Education*

Tenet	Elementary Teachers' Perceptions
Educational Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing educational access and opportunity to all students</li> <li>• Meeting all students' needs</li> <li>• Differentiation</li> <li>• Establishing fairness and equality</li> </ul>
Cultural Tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching students to respect others (including explicit lessons)</li> <li>• Building a safe and inclusive learning environment</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making up for a lack of multicultural education at home/in society</li> </ul>
Social Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A difficult pedagogical challenge</li> <li>• An opportunity to improve our future society</li> <li>• Teaching strategies that enact change in the school or local community</li> </ul>

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### **Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Equity**

The teacher participants' perceptions of educational equity were categorized into four overarching themes: providing access and opportunities to all students, meeting all students' academic needs, differentiating instruction, and statements regarding fairness and equality.

#### **Access and Opportunity**

Only five elementary teacher participants referred to the concepts of educational access and opportunity when describing their perceptions of educational equity. Furthermore, their perceptions were quite unique from each other. Participant 1 discussed the idealism of the concept: "I really like the idea that every student, regardless of their background, socioeconomic, um, religious, whatever deserves the same opportunities, the same materials, the same resources." Later, she went on to say that equity was "making sure that every single person gets the same—not necessarily like the *same*—but the same education, the same opportunities and access." When asked to give an example of this in her classroom, Participant 1, a K-5 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) teacher stated, "My kindergarteners and my fifth graders both had opportunities to utilize, um, a program to kind of design things and 3D print." Participant

4 also described equity as making sure, as the teacher, that “everybody has access to the same resources in the classroom” such as books and instruction.

When asked to recollect examples of equity that could be observed in her classroom, Participant 9, instead, described an example of barriers created by inequitable access to technology among her students:

maybe a shortfall would be access to technology outside of the classroom...Um, a lot of our assignments are online...and so those students [who do not have technology at home] would have to do more in order to do those assignments.

Um, so I know of a couple that go to the library every Saturday or Sunday, um, so that they can get their assignments done. And so to think, well, not every kid can get to the library that doesn't have a computer at home, that might be a shortfall.

Although the concepts of equal access and opportunity stood out in these teachers' schemas of equity, they were unable to provide multiple examples of what it looks like in their classroom. In one case, the teacher was only able to come up with an example of inequity. As a result, the perceptions of equity as access and opportunity appear to be more ideological than practical in these elementary settings.

### **Meeting All Students' Needs**

When asked to share their perceptions of educational equity, thirteen elementary teachers discussed their attempts to meet all students' specific needs regardless of their academic abilities or cultural differences. Participant 2 described equity as “giving each student what they need, not the same thing for each student, but what they specifically need.” Participant 20 made a similar statement: “Like we need to hit every single child

where they're at, know where they're at, and keep moving them and progressing them forward.”

A quarter of the teachers in this study perceive equity specifically in relation to their students' academic abilities. Participant 4 believed her grade-level team's choice to ability group their students in mathematics and reading this past year was an example of educational equity because they were able to meet more students' needs. Before they began ability grouping, “the students who had the most academic needs were hiding behind the ones who didn't.” However, after they began teaching groups of students with similar academic levels, Participant 4 felt more confident in her abilities to equitably reach, teach, and assess her students.

Teachers, such as Participant 7, specifically referenced “special needs children” when discussing equity. Participant 8 similarly referenced students with who require additional accommodations to meet their needs:

I have a lot of students that have special accommodations, a lot in this specific class with this specific bunch. And some students can do certain other things that others can't, you know? Some students can hold a fidget, some students are allowed to chew on gum, some students are allowed to stand up.

Academically and intellectually advanced students came to mind for Participant 20 when describing equity: “But I have a student who was already completed by mid-school year... I don't want to just sit back and say, ‘Oh, he's fine. I don't have to worry about him.’ I need to give him the same amount of challenges and investment of my time into him.” To her, equity does not only concern academically struggling students or those below grade level. It also concerns the advanced and commonly overlooked students who

“you don't need to spend as much time with...because typically they get it and they get it a little bit faster so you can keep pushing them forward.”

Ten elementary teachers consider their students' cultural identities or other intersectional characteristics in their perception of educational equity. Participant 7 emphasized this in her interview because she felt that educational equity not only pertained to “special needs kids” but to others, as well, “just based on the background of that child with behavior...or the emotional background of that child and making sure that things are done in a way that *everybody* gets what they need.” Participant 5, Participant 4, Participant 6, and Participant 12 believe equity is achieved in part by acknowledging all students' differences—cultural backgrounds, languages, or struggles—and trying to teach them effectively regardless of those differences.

Participant 12 made a series of interesting comments that exemplify a teacher's complicated view of educational equity. After discussing the importance of considering her students' cultural differences, Participant 12 commented that it is her responsibility as the teacher to make sure “I'm not focused only on what I, as a White person, wants to focus on...” Participant 12 was the only educator to implicate her identity as a White female in conjunction with the power she has as a teacher in the status of equity in her classroom. She also perceives equity as delivering the same content in the same way for each student “no matter what” the students' background. To her, equity is “just trying, I guess, to put blinders on and just see the child for being a child.” Instead of changing her content or her instruction, she supplements her curriculum to reach all students with diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds “whether it's through pictures or through words or songs” to meet all students on the same level.

## Differentiation

Four participants who perceive educational equity as meeting all students' needs specifically addressed differentiation in their comments related to equity. When asked to give an example of how she addresses equity in her classroom, Participant 15 responded, "Um, well the scholarly answer would be differentiated learning." When asked to elaborate on that, she continued:

The textbook answer is differentiated learning. You want a break down things so that each kid has the opportunity to be successful. But that's so much more difficult in practice than it is to sit here and talk about it. Um, especially in the elementary classroom where you have 27 kids who may be on 27 different areas of learning.

Participant 18 also mentioned differentiation when asked the same question:

I try, for the ones I know, to differentiate their work sometimes and particularly if they're on an IEP or a 504, I have to differentiate things they do. So, they may have less questions or they may have one part of a two-part project or something like that. I'll also try to pair them up deliberately with students who I know will work well. Sometimes a higher student with the lower students so they work well.

When asked to give an example for how she addresses equity in her classroom,

Participant 2 also mentioned differentiation: "I can think of [equity] most in reading because they were all very close together in math. Like I had to spend less time like differentiating for math, whereas for reading I had to differentiate a lot on that." It is possible that elementary teachers view differentiation as a tool for achieving educational equity in their classrooms; however, it appears as though they currently view it as a tool

to create equity amongst different achievement and academic levels. There was a lack of evidence to suggest they view differentiation as a tool to create equity among students with cultural or linguistic differences.

### **Fairness and Equality**

Finally, when discussing educational equity, fourteen teachers in the study referenced the concepts of fairness or equality in their responses. Two teachers were very concise in their perception of equity as being given a fair chance in education. Participant 6 perceives equity as “making sure that people have fair chance” while Participant 17 perceives it as giving students a “fair chance at reaching their potential” and believes the teacher should do “whatever you have to do to structure the environment to give them the best, best chance they can have.”

Other teachers in this study who perceived equity as fairness elaborated on their conceptualizations. A popular phrase came to mind for Participant 7: “That old thing of ‘that fair is not everybody getting the same, fair is everybody getting what they need.’ That’s kind of the first thing that pops in my mind of, of equity.” Participant 14 also spoke about fairness:

Um, so even though we're, we're fair to each student, that doesn't mean that it looks the same for each student—if that makes sense—depending on where they're coming from and what else have they done going on.

While these elementary teachers perceive equity as being strictly synonymous with fairness, others perceive equity as providing an equal, or same, education for all students. When asked to share their perceptions of educational equity, the following comments regarding *equality* were made:

Participant 10: You know, equity, I know in the perfect world is, you know, every child being given the same education.

Participant 12: Well, I always think of that as, I mean, it's obviously equity that everyone's getting the same experiences and the same type of education.

Participant 15: Equal education for everybody...regardless of if you need something higher or you need us to break it down more, your educational experience should be the same as everyone else's.

Participant 19: Like, equality. I mean, like, everybody getting the same education no matter what culture they're from.

Participant 20: Um, yeah, so it's just that everyone, no matter what or where they are, that you put the same amount of time and effort into each child, no matter where they are.

In contrast, a few teachers in the study vocalized their concerns regarding the concept of equality in education. According to Participant 7, "equity isn't necessarily equal." This perspective, she feels, has changed since she was an elementary student. "When I was in school, it was, everybody got the same thing. Everybody sat the same way. Everybody did everything the same way, and it's just not that way anymore."

Participant 16 feels similarly and is concerned with mistaking equity as treating students the same: "if you treat them all the same, you're not going to meet everybody's needs." Participant 8 was also concerned with this message, and teaches her third graders lessons on the difference between equal versus fair:

Everybody is equal in that everybody has to bring a backpack to school.

Everybody is equal in that everyone has to wear a uniform. But in order for me to be *fair*, some students need a little bit more than others and vice versa.

According to Nieto and Bode (2008), *equality* and *equity* are often mistaken as synonymous terms by teachers. Most of the conceptualizations shared by teachers in this study demonstrate educational equality (e.g., giving students “the same opportunities, the same materials, the same resources”; giving students a “fair chance”; putting “the same amount of time and effort into each child”), while few comments exemplify the critical components of a truly equitable education, such as promoting high standards for all students, acknowledging students’ identities and their differences, and admitting those differences influence their students’ schooling experience (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

### **Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions of Cultural Tolerance**

The participants in this study also had varied perceptions of cultural tolerance as a part of multicultural education. First and foremost, the elementary teachers believe the goal of cultural tolerance is teaching students to respect others. Within that thread, their comments also related to the explicit instructional methods they use to teach tolerance, building a safe and inclusive learning community, and teaching cultural tolerance to make up for a lack of multicultural education at home and in society.

### **Teaching Students to Respect Others**

Based on the data collected in this study, the general perception of the multicultural education tenet of cultural tolerance is teaching elementary students to respect others, and it includes multiple subcomponents. The goal of cultural tolerance is viewed by seventeen participants as encouraging elementary learners to acknowledge,

appreciate, and understand people from other cultures. Teachers described this tenet as teaching their students to be “sensitive to all people” (Participant 3), “accept others” and their cultures (Participant 5 and Participant 15), and “treat someone the way you want to be treated” (Participant 10). Participant 12 admitted that tolerance is a “huge topic” in kindergarten and many other teachers made similar statements that indicate that cultural tolerance is an important concept taught in elementary grades. According to Participant 7, “That’s one of our big buzz words in here...diversity is a word that all my kids know. Tolerance, integrity, inclusion...” She elaborated on these buzz words more by saying,

I tell them, you don't have to be friends with everybody. You don't even have to be, you know, kind all the time because we're all, we all have our bad days. We come to school, we're just grumpy. But you *do* need to have patience and you do need to be tolerant of, you know, you're, maybe that person had a bad morning and they came into school and they're just, you know, extra, extra moody, and we need to be tolerant of that and accepting of that and not get mad at them.

To build his students’ cultural tolerance, Participant 5 points out, “Everybody's not going to be the same...” He went on to say, “...because if that's the case, what I would do, um, most times I would point out to them, especially in my health lesson, that, um, things would be...life would be boring.”

Other elementary teachers, like Participant 6 and Participant 18, teach cultural tolerance by discouraging their students from excluding others. For instance, Participant 6 tells her students, “If someone is wearing attire that is slightly different, it is a part of their culture. And so that is something, if you have questions you can ask, but you should not ostracize anybody because of preconceived things.” Meanwhile, Participant 18

perceives cultural tolerance as “Definitely learning about other people's backgrounds and respecting them, not making fun of them or using them to insult other people, but respecting them and celebrating them—people of all cultures, all backgrounds, all colors, all religions.” Finally, Participant 20 made a similar statement: “Um, just being accepting, first off, being aware and knowledgeable about the different cultures and accepting it, you know, that we don't want anyone to laugh or make fun of or shun somebody for who they are.”

Participant 8's response was slightly different. She was hesitant when she described her role and responsibility in teaching tolerance to her students:

So, not necessarily that they *have* to accept other cultures. I'm not going to tell them...that's a whole family thing. I'm not going to tell them what to do. But I do, I do present them with the facts. And I do say, you know, in this culture they do it this way and in this culture they do it this way. However you do it is, you know, how you do it. But we need to acknowledge that there are other people, other countries, other ways to do the same thing.

Despite her reservations, she is adamant in teaching her students to acknowledge differences and respect others. “I just have to say, you guys come from different backgrounds...We have to acknowledge that we're different. But one thing that we cannot do is make fun of our differences. I put my foot down on that so hard.”

While discussing the topic of teaching cultural tolerance, several participants discussed a responsibility to *model* acceptance and tolerance for their students. Participant 20 said, “We're all the same on the inside. We may look different, but we're all the same. So, it's really making sure they understand, and they know, and it starts with

me first, um, um, their model.” Participant 17 also believes that teachers demonstrate cultural tolerance through modeling tolerant behaviors when interacting with students. Meanwhile, Participant 15 believed that this responsibility falls on more than just teachers. “It’s up to all the adults in the entire spectrum to just model acceptance.”

### **Cultural Tolerance Instructional Methods**

In addition to their roles as models, seven teachers referenced two other methods for teaching students cultural tolerance: through explicit activities and classroom conversation. Participant 9 reported that she covers this topic “every single day” as she “intertwine[s] acceptance and understanding of all cultures in everyday curriculum.” Participant 13, a self-contained special education classroom teacher, reported that she also teaches cultural tolerance daily during “circle time.” This is a time set aside each day when students are given the opportunity to share about themselves, their family, and their cultural traditions with other students. Other teachers, like Participant 2 and Participant 11, view cultural tolerance instruction as more intermittent lessons or activities aimed at promoting kindness and friendship. Meanwhile, Participant 18, a K-5 technology teacher, perceives lessons of cultural tolerance occur when multiple cultural representations appear in her curriculum:

I know with the videos on Code.org, they have people who, uh, they have students, they have athletes, they have all different people doing, uh, the code videos for some of them, which I think is good because it pulls in—there’s men, there’s women, there’s people of different colors, there’s people of different ages. So that’s, that’s good.

Another group of teachers reported that this type of instruction occurs most organically in classroom conversations. While Participant 2 stated that she taught cultural tolerance through a few activities throughout the year, she also agreed that “a lot of it was conversation.” Participant 17 said, “Situations come up. You know, we talk about it, we talk about how we're feeling, how the other person might be feeling...you know, different ways we could respond to things that happen.” Participant 12 also indicated that cultural tolerance is taught as conflicts arise between students:

Um, so I think it is just making sure that whatever you hear, you stop at that moment and you talk about it, and you have the people talk to each other about, especially in kindergarten, that ability to talk nicely and ask questions and have a back and forth conversation.

These critical conversations are not only perceived as stand-alone lessons; they are also perceived by elementary teachers as the necessary steps in building an inclusive and safe classroom community.

### **Building a Safe Learning Community**

Cultural tolerance is perceived by four elementary teachers in this study as an important component in building relationships and a safe learning community in the classroom. Participant 17 spoke to this directly when asked to share her perception of cultural tolerance as a goal of multicultural education:

Well, I think it's pretty much um, kind of creating an environment where the child feels accepted, wanted...where children are accepting of each other and open to different ways that people might perceive things that are going on in the classroom, different needs.

Several teachers spoke very passionately about the importance of building a safe classroom community as a part of teaching cultural tolerance. According to Participant 6:

But we have to let people feel like they are safe when they don't feel like they are beneath or less than. And so one of the things that possibly could make it uncomfortable is if maybe we just got caught off on talking about one section of people. Everybody felt left out and it was like, well, what about everybody else? Everybody else has emotions. And feelings. And that is something that we really kept in mind because we wanted everyone to be engaged.

Participant 12 also referenced classroom conversations centered on students' emotions and feelings when discussing her perceptions of cultural tolerance. She also discussed the importance of building a classroom community, like Participant 2, who encouraged this concept in her classroom this school year. Participant 2 perceives this topic as a large part of building cultural tolerance among her students,

So, in a lot of it, was conversations about how it's okay for us to not say, like, not be friends with somebody, but it's not okay for us to be disrespectful to somebody, because *we're a community* and we have to work together. So that was a lot, I mean, a lot of our conversations this year.

### **A Lack of Multicultural Education at Home**

Elementary teachers at each school shared a common belief that cultural tolerance is necessary because they suspect there is a lack of multicultural education in their students' homes. Teachers felt as though their students are “not raised to accept people that are different than them” (Participant 2) or hear remarks at home that are “not okay in my classroom” (Participant 19). Due to a perceived lack of multiculturalism reinforced in

their homes or communities, nine elementary teachers shared a sense of responsibility to teach cultural tolerance. In fact, Participant 7 perceives this responsibility as a “huge part of our job” as an elementary educator. She went on to say,

Whether it's because parents aren't doing it, I don't know. But that's a huge part.

And I think that...my job is not just to teach math and science and reading. And I want these kids to be better when they grow up. I want them to be good humans, good adults.

During this school year, Participant 2 had to teach her students to “see past...skin color to see the *person*” as well as other lessons on common courtesy and being respectful to others: “I had to talk a lot about, ‘No, it's not okay for us to say that even if you hear it at home. It's not okay for us to say that.’” She taught these lessons under the assumption that many of her students came from backgrounds that were “not familiar with being around people that are different than them.”

Participant 12 taught lessons specifically aimed at cultural tolerance especially when her students would have conflicts in her class, such as “calling out a student by the color of their skin.” She would also attempt to “get to the root of” the issue to understand the family’s background, thus determining if it was going to be a reoccurring problem with that particular student. At the same time, however, she questioned her ability to enlighten students and truly eradicate racism if they live in homes with strong bias. She asked,

Can we change [students] enough to put them at odds with family members who may not believe those things as you're trying to educate them at the same time?

And I think that's going to be the most difficult part.

Other teachers in the study posed similar quandaries, yet remained committed to teaching cultural tolerance, especially given the current political climate. Multiple teachers, including Participant 12, referenced the 2016 U.S. presidential election when describing their reasons for teaching cultural tolerance. For example, Participant 19 recalled the noticeable repercussions that election had on her first graders:

Um, I remember like when it was a couple of years ago for the election, that was, that was hard...because you see both sides and these little kids, I'm like, you don't even get to vote! Like, but you're hearing what your parents are saying and a lot of it's bad, or you know, just *not* what you need to be talking about at school as a first grader.

Participant 11 also noticed a greater need to promote cultural tolerance since the 2016 election. She perceives cultural tolerance as a critical component of schooling during the “Era of Trump” specifically to build an understanding and appreciation for immigrant students: “I mean, we do have a lot of immigrants in our school. Not a lot, but it's growing. We have them. Every class has somebody from El Salvador, Colombia, or Mexico.” For this reason, her class spends “a lot of time with that, um, tolerance piece” to build empathy and support for immigrant students in her school’s community.

The data collected suggest that the lack of tolerance and respect experienced in today’s society makes the tenet of cultural tolerance just as relevant in today’s classrooms, if not more, than it has been in past years. The teacher participants spoke passionately about this topic which indicates this tenet of multicultural education—which is perceived as modeling how to respect all others, building safe and inclusive classrooms, and negating messages of disrespect, intolerance, and hate from students’

homes, the media, and society at large—is very important for them. Additionally, during this part of the interview, many participants spoke with confidence and optimism when sharing their thoughts related to cultural tolerance. That being said, a noticeable shift in their energy was detected when asked about the next tenet.

### **Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Social Transformation**

The elementary teachers in this study were less likely to speak cogently and extensively about social transformation than they did when asked to share their perceptions of the previous two tenets of multicultural education. Based on this data, the participants' perceptions of social transformation appear to be less developed than their perceptions of educational equity and cultural tolerance. Initially, themes associated with their thoughts of social transformation were more difficult to detect. After multiple rounds of analysis, however, three general themes were identified: social transformation as a difficult challenge, the opportunity to improve our future society, and examples of instructional strategies teachers use to enact change.

#### **A Difficult and Lonely Challenge**

Teachers at three of the four schools (all except Bentley Lake School) perceive the goal of social transformation as an extension of the general conflict between home and school that is associated with teaching cultural tolerance. Five teachers admitted that they do not observe social activism nor steps towards transformation taking place in their schools due to these challenges. In general, teachers are hesitant to embed lessons of social transformation into their elementary curriculum because, according to Participant 11, "A lot of [teachers] are scared. A lot of people don't want to deal with an aftermath."

Participant 11 also perceives this goal as a “losing battle” because “what happens at home is so strong,” thus insinuating that the values in her students’ homes are not aligned with the goals of social transformation. Participant 5 suggested the same thing, saying, “When the students leave us, we have no control over what goes on after they walk out that door.” Teachers seem less likely to enact change without explicit support, especially from their students’ families. Without support, teachers are less likely to attempt to bring this tenet of multicultural education into their classroom.

Participant 18 stated that she has not witnessed social activism being taught in her school. She added, “I don't think the kids have any idea about a lot of [social activism happening]. And I don't know if it's parents protecting them because they think they're too young or it's just that we're not teaching it in schools.” When asked who was responsible for teaching social activism, she replied, “I think it's probably, probably a two-part thing—that parents need to do some, but we need to do some at school as well.”

Parents are not the only factor in this perceived struggle. Before social transformation can succeed in schools, Participant 15 suggested steps towards transformation need to be taken first “at the community level so that students who may never have experienced other cultures, like in their classroom, can start to see that at home or start to see that in the community.” However, Participant 15 admitted that starting in the community would be more challenging than the classroom “because you're dealing with a lot more people who have more, more say in, or buy in, than I do.” Statements like this one and others mentioned previously suggest that elementary teachers lack a sense of empowerment, and they need greater support from their school

and local communities to embrace the task of social transformation in their elementary classrooms.

### **Planting Seeds for the Future**

While some participants perceive the goal of social transformation as a challenge, others—especially those in Bentley Lake School—perceive it as an opportunity to improve society with the youngest contributing members of society, their students. Six teachers believe that lessons of social transformation are most effective in elementary grades because young children are so “open-minded” (Participant 20) or they “don’t care” about the cultural or physical differences between people (Participant 6 and Participant 10).

Participant 1 was one of the few participants that communicated a purely optimistic outlook when discussing social transformation as a part of multicultural education: “I think it's really exciting that we are providing our students with the opportunity to change the world.” She views multicultural education with the perspective of “the true way to change the world is to change the people who will shape the world, and not that the world is shaped.”

Participant 4 was cautiously optimistic when describing her perspective:

So, I think it's commendable to want to do that to start with the children because we're, you know, planting seeds in them that hopefully will blossom into something great. At the same time, there are some other things that might cause some weeds to grow or, you know, just different things like that.

Participant 4 was not the only elementary teacher to perceive social transformation as “planting seeds.” Participant 11 also used the metaphor of planting

seeds. Her philosophy is, “if you plant a seed, and that seed keeps growing with positive role models and feedback and lessons as they grow, then I think that it works.” She felt it was important to teach social transformation in elementary grades so “by the time they get to that older grade where all these little seeds that can start to grow, that if you don't have them in the lower grades, they're not going to grow.”

In general, the teachers interviewed at Bentley Lake School spoke more passionately and optimistically about the tenet of social transformation than those at other schools. Participant 6 believes society can transform by teaching “universal things such as kindness, acceptance” and conflict resolution inside the classroom. She perceives lessons of social transformation as “just the foundation of what's gonna make them a well-versed adult when they leave here.” Participant 8 has a similar philosophy: “I tell them, ‘I'm trying to get you ready for when you go outside of this classroom, but I have to train you in here first.’” Meanwhile, Participant 10 believes social transformation boils down to one question for her students: Are you “helping or hurting?” She would like to see lessons of social transformation empower her students to turn the world around: “Everybody seems negative in the world nowadays. I'm like, ‘just be good people!’”

### **Examples of Instructional Strategies**

Fourteen elementary teachers made comments about social transformation during the interviews that were idealistic or hypothetical in nature. Only a few concrete examples from the classroom were given. Three teachers in the study implied social transformation is taught through conversations with the students. During her interview, Participant 1 said,

My students have very different perspectives on the police and very different perspectives on what is considered a safe place based off their experiences. And so, recognizing that, having those conversations, in the age-appropriate way, and allowing them to be part of the change...

The two kindergartner teachers in the study, Participant 12 and Participant 20, reported they do not explicitly teach lessons of social transformation. Instead, they view social transformation taking place as part of their classroom management techniques and their classroom conversations. Participant 12 said, “it’s going to blend in with some of the other [lessons]” that involve conversations about conflict resolution as well as “about what’s right and wrong.” Participant 20 said something similar, “I’m all about conflict resolution and giving them their words to have those conversations with each other.”

Only three teachers at Bentley Lake School—and across the entire study—reported that they intentionally teach social activism as part of their curriculum. Participant 7, a second-grade teacher, mindfully selects books for her classroom library that promote themes of social activism:

there's a book about a children's march that Martin Luther King did and that was huge, you know, and they were just like the kids who went to jail. I said, “The kids went to jail...for marching. Their parents couldn't do it because they would lose their job. So, the kids stepped up and did it.” Like teaching them that that stuff is possible.

During a poetry unit, one of Participant 9’s students wrote about racism. Participant 9 recalled how she turned her student’s poem, which was a call for action, into a lesson:

You know, what do we do about this? What are we supposed to do? And that was my question is, like, “Great that you pointed out a problem because it is a problem. Right? And what are you going to do and what could suggest others do?” And so I put them to work with, you know, just an extension and taking it outside the walls.

Finally, when discussing lessons that promote social transformation, both Participant 9 and Participant 10 mentioned their school’s schoolwide service learning projects:

Participant 9: So, um, first semester we did a day of service at the school. So, what could we do to make the school a better place? Um, and so some kids were doing antibullying stuff. Um, you know, we're cleaning up trash... and then our second day of service was this semester and we did outside of the wall outside of the school. So what were we gonna do to enact change in our local community...they collected box tops for Ronald McDonald House...we made blankets.

Participant 10: We do, like, a service learning thing here...which I love because I think it kind of teaches the kids regardless of what background that you come from, when you get out of these walls, like, it's all of this. Like, a tornado didn't hit *one* person, or a flood didn't hit *one* person. It hits *everybody*.

The administrator at Bentley Lake School initiated the schoolwide service learning projects this past school year to increase students’ opportunities to “give back to the community.” According to Administrator 2, these projects were viewed by the faculty as “a huge part of what it means to be good at multiculturalism.” The implications of this

schoolwide initiative and its impact on teacher's perceptions of social transformation will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In comparison to the other teachers in this study, Participant 1 had a unique perspective of social transformation. She views this tenet of multicultural education in relation to her K-5 STEM curriculum. More specifically, she aims to increase diversity in STEM:

When I taught coding at the beginning of the year, we did Hour of Code and one thing that I really wanted to do was to express to my students the opportunities that coding brings them, um, and just the future proofness of it...I showed them a lot of mentors and models from a lot of varied backgrounds: women, um, people of like, I tried to find, um, people of different races, like adults who are just learning for the first time, and kids who have already coded that are their age.

Participant 1 perceives her teaching as a step towards transforming STEM, especially the high-demand field of computer science, whose workforce is and has been predominantly White and male (Pew Research Center, 2018). To her, it is important that her students of underrepresented races, ethnicities, and genders “could find someone in coding that they identified with” as well as “really [bring] in all of those role models for my students, um, to have those conversations. That it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter your background. Like, you can do *anything*.”

Overall, the elementary teachers in this study were much less confident and cogent when discussing their perceptions of social transformation. Additionally, their discussions of social transformation typically referred back to their perceptions of cultural tolerance, suggesting that elementary teachers perceive these two goals as

somewhat synonymous. The participants were unable to elaborate on their understanding of social transformation, and they did not address social issues of discrimination, racism, or prejudice, which would be an indication of what Grant and Sleeter (2011) call true critical consciousness. The statements made by the participants suggest passivity and superficial views of multicultural education that lack antiracist and critical pedagogical thinking (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

### **Perceived Challenges of Multicultural Education**

To gain a deeper understanding of elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, the participants were also asked to share their perceptions regarding the challenges of integrating multicultural education in the elementary classroom. Their responses were categorized into five overarching themes: lack of instructional time, limited multicultural resources, lack of training and multicultural experiences, inherent biases in schools, and closed-mindedness in students' families.

#### **Lack of Instructional Time**

Six teachers across the four schools in this study stated that limited instructional time or rigid school calendars create challenges when trying to "teach" multicultural education. Time is the number one challenge experienced by "every teacher" according to Participant 1. Participant 2 said, "So just making sure I can fit in everything that I have to is a struggle sometimes. Like, I never feel like I have enough time to teach."

Participant 18 also indicated that time was a "big thing" because "we're so focused on tests and math and reading, we hardly even do science and social studies anymore."

Participant 17, a special education teacher, feels similarly, and even more so with students who are served by the special education program:

I think we're just under such a crunch sometimes to get the skills taught, especially with [exceptional children]...these children have IEPs, so they have very specific goals they're working on. So, trying to integrate that into, you know, achieving those skills that they need to be developing I think is probably the biggest obstacle.

Participant 15 perceives multicultural education as being locked into celebrating cultural events listed on a given calendar (“Okay, today's February, we're going to celebrate Black History Month,”) instead of “setting aside time to really celebrate other cultures that are in your classroom.” The calendar of predefined cultural celebrations is a challenge for Participant 15, who believes multiculturalism could—and will—be celebrated more organically once teachers “get away from the calendar.”

These participants' comments suggest that multicultural education is perceived as additional content to be taught rather than integrated content and teaching strategies. Elementary teachers may have a unique perspective of multicultural education because, according to Participant 1 and Participant 19, it is not part of their curricular standards. Participant 19 said multicultural education “is not really in the standards, per se. Like, it doesn't always fit in what I'm teaching at the moment.” Teaching multicultural education becomes a challenge considering the following message delivered to teachers: “[If] it's not a standard, it's not important” (Participant 1).

Although this is the message that is communicated to teachers, Participant 1 does not believe that it makes multicultural education any less significant. Multicultural education “definitely *can be* a standard...it can be incorporated in the standards” said Participant 1. Christine E. Sleeter and Judith Flores Carmona, authors of *Unstandardizing*

*Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom* (2017), would agree. However, according to the authors, many teachers, especially White teachers, are not familiar with teaching content standards from a multicultural perspective because there are few resources available to support them in this work.

### **Limited Resources**

Another challenge perceived by elementary teachers is a limited availability of multicultural resources. Seven teachers (and two principals) in this study considered this challenge to be the greatest one that teachers face when trying to implement multicultural education in their classroom. Participant 3 admitted that she does not include multicultural education in her second grade classroom as frequently as she would like because “it is not required and I don't have the materials to do it.”

Participant 19 also stated that she does not have multicultural resources in her classroom. This challenge is compounded by the additional challenge of “not really knowing where to find books that are appropriate for first grade.” Other teachers also communicated a desire to integrate more multiculturalism, but their unfamiliarity with locating multicultural books and curriculum materials had stopped them from doing so in the past.

Acquiring other types of multicultural resources, such as cultural experts and ideas for multicultural field trips, have also presented challenges for some elementary teachers. For example, Participant 13 claimed her unfamiliarity with multicultural resources such as museums and ideas for multicultural field trips as a challenge.

Participant 4's inability to locate a willing volunteer from China presented a challenge for her during the past school year, “I was trying to teach Chinese multiplication and I called

on different people to try to help. Like, I wanted someone to come in and actually do that and I couldn't get anybody to come in.” Finally, Participant 14 also said that the lack of resources is a challenge, but one that can be overcome together as a school community:

I think even just using like our surroundings a little bit better, and digging into our community, finding out what we already have here or what are, what families we might have here that would be able to, you know, put in some input or to be able to do PD for other families, you know, that kind of stuff. Using what we have as a school community to pull in, um, to try to teach the kids using the families that we have.

### **Lack of Multicultural Training and Experience**

Access to multicultural resources and materials is important for elementary teachers, especially those who feel inadequately prepared to teach their students about multiculturalism. Throughout the study, six participants communicated a reluctance to teach multicultural topics (e.g., racism and multicultural traditions) because they were not trained in multicultural education.

After discussing the tenets of multiculturalism, Participant 12 stated on two different occasions during her interview that she feels “limited on what I know to be able to teach” because she did not receive a multicultural education throughout her schooling. Participant 10 made a similar comment and added, “And there's not really been...a forum for people, you know, [and] some stuff about different cultures is uncomfortable to us...” She suggested that a lack of communication and sharing between cultures in the United States has led to a society comprised of groups who are afraid to offend others or are easily offended. According to Participant 10,

I feel like that's the thing is everybody's so upset and doesn't want to offend people that we're just overstepping in places, and that if we talked about it and learned about it and understood it and it wasn't so taboo, then it probably wouldn't even be so offensive.

Participant 4 and Participant 10 both suggested that teachers could “get in trouble” if they offend students or their families. According to Participant 10, today’s teachers educate children in a society that is “so [politically correct],” they must be careful of what they say as to not offend others. Participant 4 believes *this* is the main challenge of multicultural education:

The United States is just basically in a situation of there are a lot of different people that you can easily offend these days no matter what group it is. And so sometimes you just don't know what to say and what to do. So many people just say, *I'm not going to say or do anything.*

When Participant 4 teaches multicultural topics, she makes sure “the research is there” to minimize any possibility of offending students’ backgrounds:

So, I'm watching videos all over the place and, and asking questions to different people saying, *Okay, is this how you do this, and is this what you say?* and that type of thing so that you just make sure that you're not offending anybody.

Teachers have very good intentions, and then next thing you know, you've gone viral on Facebook of something that you thought was a good idea.

Although it may not be perceived as a challenge, the fear of teaching incorrect facts about other cultures or offending students and their families was communicated in multiple interviews in this study. This suggests that fear and discomfort are common

emotions experienced by these elementary teachers who feel ill-prepared or inexperienced when teaching their young students about multicultural topics in education. Without professional training to support their knowledge of multicultural education, teachers experience doubt and hesitance to teach these important topics.

### **Biased Families**

Another factor that may influence teachers' feelings of fear and discomfort when discussing multicultural topics is parental bias against multiculturalism. Eight teachers across the four schools in this study perceive parents' beliefs as a challenge when teaching multicultural education in their elementary classrooms. Participant 2 and Participant 7 stated that just "getting families onboard" would help them integrate multicultural education into their teaching.

A few of the teachers who perceive this challenge also acknowledged a conflict in expecting parents to get onboard, like Participant 12 who said, "Yeah, I mean obviously I think it starts with parents, and that's a hard issue because so many of us come in with beliefs that probably were not our own." She continued by saying,

[Beliefs] have been told to us and we've just integrated that into, you know, how we act and what we do. But overcoming that, just, you know, how do we fight what someone already believes in and change that when maybe at home they're not hearing...you know? You put the child in a situation where they're hearing two things.

With enthusiasm in her voice, Participant 11 acknowledged the same conflict as

Participant 12:

As a parent, it's a Catch-22 because you have every right to teach your child what you want to teach them. Um, and it's, it's a hard thing to reconcile because I'm not their parent, right? But I want them to be accepting and is it my right to want that? And as a parent, I want my child to come to school to learn, to read and write.

*Why do you have to teach them that [having] two moms is okay when I told them that it is absolutely unacceptable, and I'm their parent?*

Additionally, Participant 11 firmly believes that multicultural topics are often presented with positive or negative bias, and parents are the greatest challenge for teachers who want to “present all sides and give information and be positive about things.”

For some elementary teachers, closed-minded and biased families present a *daily* struggle. When asked about the biggest challenge of teaching multicultural education, Participant 8 took a moment and then replied, “The fact that every, every one of my students leaves my classroom every day.” She fears that her lessons are contradicted in some of her students’ homes. “Like, I can teach them all I want to in here, but they go home and they have their families and what their families are telling them.” Therefore, this challenge may not only lend itself to feelings of discomfort for teachers when teaching multicultural education, but also feelings of defeat.

### **Inherent Bias in Schools**

Parents are not the only named group of individuals whose bias impacts multicultural education. Eight participants suggested that teachers’ biases also present a challenge when trying to make multicultural education successful schoolwide. For a school to successfully implement multicultural education, teachers must “understand

[their] own biases going into it” (Participant 1), be “willing to change” (Participant 5) and be “willing to learn” (Participant 6).

To begin, teachers must introspectively look at their own biases. Participant 3 believes that teachers’ inherent prejudices and biases “are going to affect children...and your classroom as a whole.” For teachers who teach culturally diverse students, Participant 1 suggests “just understanding your own biases going into it, and so working to kind of dispel anything, um, before having conversations with our students.” She believes teachers must understand their biases towards multicultural topics because students will sense “if you’re uncomfortable” or “if you maybe aren’t ready to have that conversation” which could have a detrimental impact on their feelings of acceptance and safety inside the classroom.

Another perceived challenge in multicultural education is the presence of teachers who lack a desire to learn about others’ perspectives or an unwillingness to change their closed-minded beliefs. Participant 6 perceives this the greatest challenge of multicultural education: “So pretty much, just, if you’re willing to learn, you’ll be able to adapt into—and be intentional about—doing different things to appeal to different cultures.” Participant 5 perceives teachers’ willingness to “accept training” and then “change his or her beliefs” as the greatest factors in giving all students “a chance to succeed.”

Finally, when discussing this challenge of multicultural education, Participant 9 indicated that one teacher’s “open mindset” is not enough. For multicultural education to stick, students need to receive a uniform message from all teachers:

I think the challenge would be that not every teacher has an open mindset. So [students] might hear it in your class, you know, and they might hear it and

experience it in my class, but it doesn't mean that it's going to translate to all their classes, especially when they go from year to year.

For multicultural education to be “as successful as it could be,” Participant 9 believes that the “personal viewpoints of *all* teachers...have to have multiculturalism involved.” If the goal of multicultural education is to create and sustain change, then the challenge grows significantly from changing one teacher’s mindset to uniting the open-mindedness of all teachers.

The challenges listed in this study mimic some of the challenges identified by Canfield-Davis, Tenuto, Jain, and McMurtry (2011). This study also supports the findings of Aragona-Young and Sawyer (2018), whose research suggested the greatest multicultural teaching challenges for elementary teachers are a lack of multicultural resources, a lack of instructional time to devote to multicultural teaching, and a general reluctance to address multicultural topics with their students.

### **Perceived Significance of Multicultural Education**

The challenges associated with multicultural education do not deter elementary teachers from perceiving a desperate need for it at the elementary level. Each participant mentioned multiple reasons—with short-term or long-term effects—for teaching multicultural education in their grade level. When analyzed, the participants’ justifications for teaching multicultural education were categorized into two themes. First, multicultural education is significant because it builds relationships and creates inclusive classrooms. Additionally, it prepares young learners to become contributing citizens in a global and pluralistic society.

### **Building Relationships in an Inclusive Classroom Community**

Unlike the core subjects of math, reading, or science, for example, multicultural education is perceived by teachers as promoting the concepts of cultural identity, healthy relationships, and community in the classroom. Multicultural education is perceived as “opportunities”, said Participant 1, for students to “be vulnerable with one another” and to share their experiences and backgrounds with each other. This is especially significant when building relationships between a teacher and students who “are spending eight hours a day, at least 180 days a year together.”

Participant 4 also believes the greatest significance of multicultural education “goes back to building relationships.” When discussing the significance, she said,

Everybody wants to feel included, and that helps to build that relationship by helping everybody to feel included. And if you can help them to feel included, then pretty much they'll do anything you want them to do, whether it's learning math, learning science, ELA, all of those things. And they take those lessons and they take it with them forever.

Participant 7 believes that the significance of multicultural education for teachers is learning about their students and making them feel understood, loved, and included. According to her, a teacher “can’t reach them until they feel understood...so until you can make that happen here, it doesn’t matter what you teach them.”

Participant 15, meanwhile, believes the significance of multicultural education is developing a trusting relationship with students. She believes trust is a necessary component of developing a deeper understanding of others’ cultures:

I mean, it really does boil down to trust. I mean, do you trust someone enough to share your culture with them? Are you trusting enough to feel like you're going to be accepted because of what you said about your culture?

Building trust requires an investment of time by teachers and students, but Participant 15 believes in the end it is worth the safe and inclusive learning environment it creates:

“And I think sharing those stories with your students or having the students share their stories with others breaks down all of the barriers, not just the learning ones.”

In addition to breaking down barriers, teachers also perceive the significance of multicultural education specifically as a means for creating more inclusive learning environments. At multiple times during her interview, Participant 4 claimed the significance of multicultural education was inclusion: “Everybody just wants to feel included.” Participant 6 also believes that the equal representation of diverse groups promoted by multicultural education simply increases students’ feelings of acceptance. According to Participant 6, “It's always great to see [or] feel like you're represented somewhere, so that's why we need [multicultural education].”

### **Preparing Students for a Global and Pluralistic Society**

The practice of building relationships in the elementary classroom is one that teachers hope will continue as students mature into young adults. The teachers also hope that this leads to students’ future success and a better society, which is another perceived significance of multicultural education in elementary grades. This perception of significance was the “big picture” shared by thirteen participants in the study:

Participant 2: Creating successful adults who can do better with their futures...The world's not looking so great right now; and hopefully, if we can get these

kids to understand, you know, learn about each other and learn about accepting each other, then the world will become better than it is right now.

Participant 5: The goal is to have a better society.

Participant 7: Just that it can change the world. Honestly, I mean that's the big picture part.

Participant 9: To make the world a better place...the significance would be that, like, we start to live in a world where our differences are celebrated always.

Participant 11: I just think that the world can only be better for it.

Participant 14: I just think it will, it will broaden our students' horizons to be better overall as human beings and being able to understand that everybody is different...

Participant 20: And then it'll continue on as they grow and, um, we can make the just a better place.

In general, teachers feel that multicultural education is significant in elementary schools because it illustrates a world full of differences, and it teaches students how to interact with those differences. For Participant 16, it is significant because teaching students about "other cultures and other languages" will positively impact the number of opportunities that are available to them in the future. Teaching students to have an "open mind" is significant for Participant 9, who wants to "live in a world where people aren't judged by how they were raised or how they grew up or, or who they are, what color their skin is." Finally, multicultural education is significant because, without it, says

Participant 7, “the cycle’s never going to break,” and according to Participant 15, “we’re giving a detriment to our students in their future selves.”

### **School-Level Factors that Influence Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions of Multicultural Education**

The second research question in this study was aimed at understanding the school-level factors that influence elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education. To identify those factors, the elementary teachers and school administrators were asked questions related to their schoolwide multicultural practices and initiatives. Only two influential school-level factors were detected during the analysis of the participants’ interview data: students’ cultural backgrounds and school culture.

#### **Students’ Backgrounds**

When discussing their perceptions, elementary teachers indicated that the diversity in their classroom or their students’ cultures impact their multicultural teaching. For four teachers, their previous jobs with students of Color in impoverished school settings influenced their awareness of multiculturalism. Participant 11’s teaching experience in a high-needs urban school with a predominantly African American student population was a “turning point” for her professionally. While teaching at that school with teachers “from many different cultures,” she understood “that there was so many more facets to multiculturalism, and how these teachers made sure to expose the students to not just their own culture, and how easy it was to weave in your day.”

Participant 1 attributed her “unique perspective” of multiculturalism to her extensive background of teaching experiences with students of different cultures. This included teaching students at a Spanish-immersion school and an alternative school for

at-risk youth, and tutoring student refugees from Africa. Meanwhile, Participant 18 attributed her current perception of multicultural education to her previous teaching experiences in a “very rural school” and a school with “super high poverty.” She said her general awareness of multiculturalism was influenced by these teaching experiences with impoverished Hispanic and African American students. Finally, Participant 9 also mentioned her teaching experience in a “really rough neighborhood” where “10 out of 30 dads were imprisoned and others were deported” when discussing the factors that influenced her thoughts of multicultural education. For each of these four teachers, the lessons related to topics in multicultural education that they learned in previous schools have stayed with them and continue to influence their perceptions in their current jobs.

The lack of diversity in the classroom also seems to influence elementary teachers’ multicultural teaching. Participant 15, for example, was admittedly less likely to use multicultural children’s literature in her classroom because her classroom was not very diverse. According to her, “when you don't have a very diverse classroom, um, it's going to be really difficult to make personal connections.” Participant 13 also limited her multicultural lessons to the cultures strictly represented in her classroom. Later, when giving examples of those lessons, she said she taught more multicultural lessons at a previous school because they had more diversity: “We had a high Indian population, so we were able to, um, integrate more of [those cultures].”

### **School Culture**

During the interviews, the elementary teachers at Hoben Hills Elementary and Bentley Lake School made similar references to the same educational values and activities as their school’s administrators, suggesting that a common vision or initiative

that drives a school's culture can influence teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. For instance, Hoben Hills Elementary's principal emphasized the school faculty's goal of improving the school's culture over the academic year. This was done in large part by focusing on "developing relationships" during staff meetings and professional development sessions. Not only was the theme of "developing relationships" made apparent throughout the elementary teachers' interviews at Hoben Hills Elementary, it also was viewed as a running theme across their perceptions of multicultural education. For example, Participant 4 believes teachers must "develop relationships so that you can try to achieve the educational equity," while Participant 2 believes relationship-building is a beginning step to addressing social transformation:

I think that this year overall in this school we, as teachers, worked harder to build relationships with our students and each other. And you can tell in the kids that it's a much happier place to be than it was last year.

Participant 1 also perceives multicultural education as providing an opportunity for teachers to build those necessary relationships with their students, thus suggesting that the theme driving the school's culture also influences the teachers' perception of their teaching.

During her interview, the administrator at Bentley Lake School emphasized her school's culture of empowering students to "be better" and encouraging them to spread the message of "embracing everyone and everything" throughout the school community. These themes were also very apparent in the teacher interviews at Bentley Lake School. When discussing cultural tolerance in her interview, Participant 7 said that she wants her students to "be better when they grow up; I want them to be good humans, good adults."

This theme also arose during Participant 10's interview when she discussed her perception of teaching cultural tolerance, which she later equated to teaching students to become better humans:

Because if we can't be kind to somebody that's different from us and, you know, the differences—whether it be cultural, whether it be age, whether it be race, it be gender—I mean, I feel like once we can start from there...and I don't even know if it's a cultural thing as much as just teaching some of these kids to be better humans.

Finally, Participant 9 also spoke to the theme of encouraging students to become better contributing citizens when discussing the schoolwide service learning projects that were implemented this current school year. The service learning projects, according to Participant 9, encouraged students to think beyond the walls of their classroom as well as consider how they would practice “being better” in their community *now*. Although the service learning project was not a *multicultural* initiative by name, the schoolwide activity contributed to the school's culture, which appears to influence teachers' perceptions of multicultural teaching practices. These examples of drivers of school culture that seemingly influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education will be discussed further in the next chapter.

### **Missed Opportunities of Influence**

One of the greatest findings in this study was the absence of schoolwide policies, initiatives, and practices aimed at empowering teachers to implement multicultural education practices at each of the four schools. When asked if their school has schoolwide practices or policies that support multicultural education, only one

administrator, Administrator 2, answered affirmatively. During her interview, the principal at Bentley Lake School acknowledged two schoolwide initiatives that address multicultural education: a character education program and a service learning project. According to Administrator 2, these initiatives were designed intentionally to teach lessons such as “What does it mean to be a good citizen?” and “What does it mean to love and support everybody regardless of who they are, where they came from, and what does that look like?” One or both of these initiatives were also mentioned by the teachers interviewed at Bentley Lake School, which suggests the potential impact that schoolwide reform initiatives can have on teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education.

Policies and practices that empower teachers to integrate multicultural teaching into their classroom were identified by Saldana and Waxman in 1997 as having a positive influence on teachers. Therefore, the lack of these school-level factors is considered a significant finding that will be explored more deeply during the within-case analyses.

### **Teacher-Level Factors that Influence Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions of Multicultural Education**

The third research question, *In what ways do teacher-level factors (e.g., personal background, teaching experience, professional development, etc.) influence elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education?*, is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of how participants’ personal and professional experiences contributed to their understanding of multicultural education. The three main teacher-level factors identified during analysis are categorized as the following: personal experiences, professional teaching experiences, and educator training. In general, the participants indicated that teacher-level factors had a much greater influence on their perceptions than

school-level factors, and their personal experiences with multiculturalism were claimed as having the greatest influence overall.

### **Personal Experiences**

More than half of elementary teachers in this study attributed their current perceptions of multicultural education to their own personal experiences. These experiences are considered teacher-level factors because they are unique to each individual. The personal experiences shared in the interviews range from early childhood to young adulthood, and fell into three categories: formative, college, and travel.

**Formative experiences.** Eighteen teachers referenced their families, childhood, or their experiences as a young adult when discussing the factors that influence their perceptions of multicultural education. Two dichotomous groups emerged within this category based on the formative experiences elementary teachers listed as influential factors: those who largely attribute their multicultural awareness to their family's diversity or their identity as a racially or ethnically underrepresented individual, and teachers who attribute their *limited* multicultural awareness to a lack of exposure to diversity and multiculturalism.

The former group of teachers referenced their upbringing as an influential source of their own multicultural education. For two teachers, being raised in culturally diverse families provided them with a multicultural awareness. When asked about the factors that influence her perceptions of multicultural education, Participant 19 replied,

I think, um, being raised in a family in that nobody looks the same. We're all different skin tones and all different; just because my dad's from Haiti, my mom's French Canadian. Um, and then his sister married a Colombian and then, so it's

just, there's every single probably nationality within the people that I grew up with.

Participant 16 also attributed her perception of multicultural education to her diverse family—“my mom's side of the family was the one where every other generation, somebody married somebody from another country”—and being raised to “embrace cultures.” According to Participant 16, although she identifies as White, being raised in a multicultural family gave her “a different background when it comes to culture, and then also with [multicultural] education.”

Participant 15 was another teacher who referenced her childhood memories when considering such influential factors. She attributes her ability to genuinely sympathize with the English language learners in her classroom directly to her experiences as a White, English-speaking student in a school that mostly spoke Spanish in a predominantly Hispanic town that was “a stone’s throw” from the U.S.-Mexico border. Participant 2 shared a similar experience as a White female who transferred to a predominantly African American high school when discussing factors that influence her multicultural teaching: “And so I think getting to know different people and learning about different cultures helped me in [high] school and that kind of transferred to me when I was a teacher.”

Participant 3 connected her formative experiences as a young African American woman to her perceptions of multiculturalism. Early in her interview, Participant 3 stressed the importance of ensuring classroom materials (e.g., books, posters, and crayons) represent each skin color and skin tone of the students in her classroom. The educational value Participant 3 places in physical representation was explained later in

her interview, when she shared personal stories from her childhood and her young adult life in which the color of her skin played a significant role in the formation of her own identity. One memory from a check-out line at a grocery store resonated with her:

Now, my husband's real light. He looked White...I'd tell him that, uh, he didn't see things in the same way that I do; because I'd say, "you're not seeing things through my eyes." And, so I remember him...he was in front of me, and she gave him his change. She put it in his hand, but when she gave me mine, she put it on the counter. I mean, it's the little things like that that people overlook, but *they affect* children and adults.

For Participant 3, a lifetime of experiences, such as this one, have significantly influenced her perceptions of multicultural education.

While some teachers claim their formative experiences as influential factors in developing their perceptions of multicultural education, another group of teachers believe it was a lack of these experiences that has influenced theirs. Three White female teachers, Participant 1, Participant 11, and Participant 9, indicated a lack of awareness of multiculturalism, especially as children, because they attended predominantly White schools. According to Participant 1, she and her "mostly White" classmates lived in a close-knit community that they referred to as "a bubble" that was devoid of multiculturalism. This lack of exposure is what motivated her to seek multicultural trainings when she attended college. Another teacher, Participant 12, also admitted to having a lack of awareness as a child because she "didn't grow up with a lot of diversity."

Many participants could not recall an experience in multicultural education during their primary and secondary schooling years. Teachers made comments such as "I don't

think there was a lot of emphasis on [multiculturalism] when I was in school” (Participant 17) and “there was no real multicultural back then when I went to school” (Participant 11). Even Participant 5, who was raised in Jamaica, could not recall receiving a multicultural or global education: “Growing up, we were not really taught in terms of—while in school, elementary and all that—um, we weren’t taught in terms of someone else’s experience.” Comments such as these suggest that multicultural education reform was ineffective or nonexistent before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, or that the multicultural lessons they were taught during their formative years were not transformative enough to influence their perspectives.

**College experiences.** For three participants who indicated a lack of multicultural education or exposure to diversity while growing up, the college they attended was significant in helping them develop their perceptions. Participant 11, who was raised in a predominantly white, blue-collar town, believed her perceptions of other cultures changed while obtaining her Bachelor’s degree at a small, yet diverse, Catholic college in upstate New York. After growing up in “a bubble,” Participant 1 attributed her experiences and coursework as a psychology major at a large 4-year public university to her multicultural perceptions: “definitely, college was where I got a lot of my understanding.” Meanwhile, Participant 18 mentioned that the courses she took while obtaining her Master’s in Education degree were influential in changing her conceptualization of multicultural education.

**Traveling.** The third and final personal factor that appears to influence teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education, according to four teacher participants in this study, is observing other cultures (locally and abroad) and immersing oneself in them.

One of the most influential factors contributing to Participant 7's perception of multicultural education was growing up in a military family:

I'm a military brat. Um, which is one of the things I think that interests me so much in this subject. Just because I have been so many places. My dad was in the military and then I married military...I would definitely say my teaching is influenced by that a lot.

Participant 9 believed studying abroad in college influenced her perceptions. Immersing herself in other cultures while traveling to Australia and other islands across the Pacific during college was a "huge, eye-opening experience" for her:

I remember I studied abroad, I traveled quite a bit. Um, and I lived in Australia and I remember there's, there's a very large Asian population in Australia, you know? And I traveled there and I was like, you know, third year of college. I was very open-minded, but I realized there were certain things that certain cultures did that I hadn't known or learned about.

Participant 16 also discussed traveling and living abroad in Russia as an adult when listing the experiences that have influenced her perceptions. Her experiences in Russia contradicted some preconceived notions she had about Russian culture, which helped her to realize that teachers and students can't fully understand other cultures unless you are immersed in them. Furthermore, Participant 16 contends, it is not as easy to appreciate other cultures when they aren't fully understood.

One does not have to travel outside of the country to become immersed in other cultures, as demonstrated by Participant 20. She shared her personal experience with multiculturalism as a young adult while living in a predominantly African American low-

income housing community shortly after she left her parent's home in a middle-class neighborhood:

...but really having that, and living in the low-income housing where my skin tone was much different than the majority of the people that live there...and to see the cycles and the things that happen and really live in it – um, two, three – for three years I was there. Um, and yeah, that really helped me understand that *everybody* is different.

### **Professional Experiences**

In addition to their personal lives, elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education have been influenced by their professional lives, too. Twelve participants indicated their previous jobs or teaching positions with underserved student populations (especially low-income African American and Latinx communities) have greatly influenced their thinking on the topic of multicultural education.

Participant 4 repeatedly referred to multicultural education as “on the job training.” For her, it is professional experience, not coursework, where teachers learn how to teach diverse students. She developed this perspective early in her career while trying to learn about her students who came from a vast “Hispanic American culture.” Another teacher who shared a similar outlook was Participant 13: Um, yeah, I mean, I think, you know, a teacher education programs can only do so much, but then you really learn about student differences once you step foot in a class.”

Participant 2 claimed to develop her current perception of multicultural education—teaching students about the community and giving students a chance to share and learn about their cultures—during her first job as a teacher:

When I was at my first school, I had—in the three and a half years I was there—I had one Caucasian student...So, I had a majority of African American students...and they all came from very similar backgrounds, so they kind of already knew [each other].

During that first teaching assignment, Participant 2 learned much more about the African American community from her students than she was able to teach to them, which encouraged her to provide more opportunities for students to share their backgrounds going forward.

Finally, Participant 12, who was not exposed to a lot of diversity as a child, acknowledged the induction to her career in education as a factor that influenced her perceptions of multiculturalism. Prior to teaching, Participant 12 said, “I never thought about it.” However, once she became aware of issues related to the inequities and strife impacting her students from underserved and immigrant populations, she began to develop a greater awareness of multicultural education.

### **Educator Training**

The final teacher-level factor that has been found to influence elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education is professional educator training. This category has been divided into two sub-categories: teacher preparation programs at a college or university and inservice professional development (PD).

**Teacher preparation programs.** Although most of the participants in the study could not recall courses or activities specifically designed to address multicultural education in their teacher preparation programs, six of them did name at least one component of their teacher preparation as an influential factor in developing their

perceptions of multicultural education. For instance, Participant 9, who integrates multicultural education each year through a diversity book club unit, mentioned a course she took in her Master's program:

I think [the course] was Multiculturalism in Literature. So, we kind of dived into what, um, what does it mean to teach kids multiculturalism just by reading different kinds of books? And why is it really important for us to, um, have our curriculum set in a way that it's not just old white authors and have kids reading things from around the world?

Meanwhile, Participant 3 recalled learning about multicultural education when she went back to school to become endorsed in teaching English language learners. She learned teaching strategies then that she continues to use today to reach her learners:

We took all these classes to help us to be able to teach children how to learn the language. And I finally realized physical response. And that was a one of the strategies... Basically, it's like you would teach a baby. He wouldn't, you know, if you would try to teach a baby about the water, you know, then you wouldn't let them experience it. And, so, we did a lot of pictures and total physical response with tapping him on the shoulder, raise her hand, but you know, things where they actually could really, uh, be a part of the learning. And, so, I think that makes a big difference.

Throughout her interview, Participant 20 questioned the accuracy of her perceptions of multicultural education because of the nuances that distinguish her certification area, early childhood education, from elementary education. She accredited her early childhood education program with preparing her in multicultural education

because, in early childhood programs, multicultural education is “one of the major focuses above the other education aspects.”

Another interesting finding came from two other teachers in the study who learned about multicultural education through courses they took in non-education disciplines. Although they could not recall any courses related to multicultural education in their teacher education programs, Participant 1 and Participant 11 stated that they learned about multicultural education in courses they took in the social science disciplines of psychology and sociology respectively.

**Inservice professional development.** Multicultural education has not been the prime focus of inservice training or PD according to the participants in this study. Only five teachers commented on training they have received that has influenced their perceptions of teaching diverse and underrepresented students.

As mentioned earlier, the faculty at Hoben Hills Elementary spent the current school year focusing on the theme of *building relationships*. This theme became a large part of their schoolwide PD, especially at the beginning of the year. This theme stood out as significant to Participant 2, who was the only teacher at Hoben Hills Elementary to mention their PD as an influential factor:

We spent the first half of the year not even talking about curriculum or you know, that kind of stuff. We spent the first half of our year, all our PDs and everything, we're talking about building relationships.

At Bentley Lake School, the teachers received inservice training on verbal de-escalation, which resonated with Participant 9 and contributed to her perception of multicultural education:

And we talked about how um, kids from different places and kids from different cultures react to situations in different ways and how you have to adjust your tactics with students if they're getting riled up about something that, um, there are certain ways to handle certain kinds of kids and their background matters and your background really matters.

In addition to school-based PD, one teacher claimed her attendance at a national conference for educators as an influential factor in her perception of multicultural education. For the past three years, Participant 11 has attended this week-long conference. This past year, she attended numerous multicultural reading and writing workshops which demonstrated how to “weave” multicultural themes into her instruction.

Grant and Sleeter (2011) contend that teacher-level factors such as family, culture, and identity are significant influences that contribute to the assumptions and beliefs that teachers bring into the classroom. The findings from this study support their argument as formative experiences, including family and culture, were found to have the most pervasive influence on teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education. Other teacher-level factors that were frequently listed by participants, such as traveling to or teaching in diverse or underserved communities, warrant more attention as contributing factors which influence elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education.

### **Summary**

This chapter shared the findings of a qualitative research study that explored elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to teacher-level factors (i.e., their personal and professional experiences), as well as respective school-level factors. Elementary teachers share an array of perceptions of multicultural

education, including: teaching about global awareness and culture, teaching students lessons about cultural tolerance, learning about students' backgrounds, and utilizing multicultural curriculum and materials.

When asked about the three tenets of multicultural education (educational equity, cultural tolerance, and social transformation), the elementary teachers' perceptions became much more nuanced. For the goal of educational equity, for example, elementary teachers perceive multicultural education as meeting all students' academic needs, differentiating instruction, and enacting levels of fairness and equality in their classroom. Their perceptions of cultural tolerance included topics such as building a safe and inclusive learning community and compensating for a lack of multicultural education at home and in society. Lastly, their perception of the goals aligned with social transformation include improving society for the future and enacting change in the classroom; however, these perceptions are compounded by the participants' feelings of loneliness and defeat associated with this tenet of multicultural education.

To gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of multicultural education, participants were asked to identify its greatest challenges as well as define its overall significance. The perceived challenges associated with multicultural teaching include: (1) a lack of instructional time, (2) limited multicultural resources, (3) a lack of training and multicultural experiences for teachers, (4) inherent biases in schools, and (5) the closed-mindedness in students' families. Multicultural education is perceived as significant because it promotes relationship-building and creates inclusive classrooms and it prepares students to live in a globalized and pluralistic society.

Teachers' perceptions are an important factor in their implementation of effective multicultural teaching (Costa, 1997; Sharma, 2005). Therefore, understanding the common threads that influence elementary teachers' perceptions was another goal of this qualitative study. School-level factors and teacher-level factors were analyzed. According to the participants, the only two school-level factors that they claim as influencing their perceptions of multicultural education are students' cultural backgrounds and their school's culture. These factors appeared to be much less influential when compared to teacher-level factors that influence their perceptions, such as their personal experiences (i.e., childhood, college, and travel), professional teaching experiences, and educator training. These influences are further analyzed by each case in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Case Analysis

In the previous chapter, the findings from a qualitative study exploring elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education were reported. Chapter IV was organized by research question, which allowed for a cross-case (and sub-case) analysis of the findings, especially for the first two research questions. This discussion begins with an analytical exploration of each case to provide a deeper look at the schools' contexts as influential school-level factors that contribute to elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. The four schools in this study exemplify a wide range of efforts and strategies in establishing multicultural education reform.

#### **Hoben Hills Elementary: Building Relationships**

Hoben Hills Elementary is a public charter K-5 school located in a suburban city of a large metropolitan area that enrolled approximately 630 students during the 2017-2018 school year. The school's student population is mostly comprised of students who identify as Black (39%), White (33%), Hispanic (16%), or two or more races (8%). It is the only school in this study that is predominantly non-White. Out of all four schools in this study, Hoben Hills Elementary also has the highest percentage of teachers who identify as Black (33%).

To strengthen the school's culture, the administration and faculty at Hoben Hills Elementary are focused on building relationships this year. This is reiterated as part of their school's mission statement, as stated on Hoben Hills Elementary's official school website: *We value the relationship between the teacher and student and the role the family plays in a child's academic and social development.* This was also stressed by the school's principal during her interview, who strongly believes in "really making sure that

kids have that foundation of support and trust before you start really pushing them academically.” When Administrator 1 started her position as the principal a year ago, she saw an immediate need to expose her staff to professional development (PD) that was focused on building relationships. According to Administrator 1,

We went back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs with our staff training at the beginning of the year. If children do not have the basic needs met and don't feel loved, they're never going to achieve; and in order for us to grow them, we need them to feel safe enough to take a risk in the classroom.

The efforts made by the school's administration to create strong interpersonal relationships appeared to influence their teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and their teaching. Four out of the five teachers who were interviewed discussed the significance of building relationships to some extent when discussing their thoughts on multicultural education.

The best way to begin multicultural teaching practices is to establish relationships (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). According to Grant and Sleeter, “[relationships] form the foundation for everything else that happens in the classroom” (p. 93). The development of caring and trusting relationships is even more essential for the educational outcomes of immigrant and students of Color who have more often experienced societal forms of overt prejudice, racism, or stereotyping (Gay, 2018). To create a judgement-free learning environment for students, teachers are responsible for demonstrating, through words and actions (including body-language), that they unconditionally care for them. Once students trust their teacher and classmates, they will be able to take academic risks and try new ideas which will help them grow (Grant & Sleeter, 2011).

By focusing on relationships, the faculty at Hoben Hills Elementary are meeting the long-term goals of Sleeter and Grant's (1988) *human relationship approach* to multicultural teaching, while also addressing the multicultural education tenet of educational equity. The principal and teachers understand that improving communication and relational capacity is critical in the overall success of their students; however, what they may not realize is that it is also a necessary component of equity pedagogy according to Banks and Banks (1995). Equity pedagogy, according to Banks (1999), "exists when teachers use techniques and teaching methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups" (p. 16-17). Interpersonal relationships help improve all students' academic performances (Gay, 2018) as a result of students feeling seen, heard, and valued by their teachers and peers.

According to the school's principal, Hoben Hills Elementary does not currently employ any schoolwide policies, practices, or professional development that are intentionally designed to reform multicultural education at the school. This was confirmed by many of the teacher participants at Hoben Hills Elementary. Participant 1 said that she was unaware of any practices or policies driving multicultural education reform at her school when asked directly. However, later in the interview, she mentioned that she has recently seen "a very big push from [the administration] to kind of get us out there in the community." For example, teachers partnered with a local grocery store to sponsor a "Family Math Night" where the local community, students, and their families came together to participate in a variety of grocery-shopping math activities and events. Participant 1 said the event was wonderful because "it was just so cool to see the students start to understand, um, like what the real world is like, and to see each other...because

you know, some families have very different conversations around food and things like that than other families.” Experts in the field of multicultural education advocate for these events that promote strong school-parent-community partnerships (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). School-sponsored events held off-campus and in the community allow parents and community members to become involved in the education of its students. Furthermore, they provide opportunities for the teachers to increase their awareness of the students’ community funds of knowledge (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), thus increasing the relational capacity between a teacher and her students.

The efforts that Hoben Hills Elementary has made this school year to address equity through relationship-building and cultural tolerance through community-sponsored school events such as the Family Math Night indicate that they are on the path towards multicultural education reform.

### **Bentley Lake School: Building Character**

Bentley Lake School is a public charter K-8 school located in a large affluent town on the outskirts of a sprawling metropolitan area. The school’s student population of approximately 1,100 students is mostly comprised of students who identify as White (42%), Black (20%), Asian (16%), Hispanic (11%), or two or more races (10%). Unlike the other schools in this study, Bentley Lake School enrolls a significant population of Muslim students.

The participants in this study, including the principal, indicated that a significant number of students who attend Bentley Lake School come from “very privileged backgrounds” and have been raised in a “very insular” world. To promote action that will improve the lives of others and becoming part of a larger world community, the

administrators and teachers at Bentley Lake School intentionally focused on service learning and character education integration as schoolwide initiatives this school year. When asked about schoolwide practices and policies aimed at multicultural education reform, the participants at Bentley Lake School mentioned one or both of these initiatives. While these initiatives are not part of their school's mission statement, promoting "a community of character within the school to support the social and emotional growth of students" is listed as part of their school's curriculum on their website (this is also listed as part of the curriculum on the official school websites of Hoben Hills Elementary and Woodville Academy).

The new character education program, which is led by the school's guidance counselor, is taught to all students in the school. Participant 9 gave a general description of the program:

So, there is a monthly character trait and [the guidance counselor] does specific workshops with each grade level of students where we really dig into what that means. Um, so like: responsibility, respect, perseverance, grit, um, uh, kindness... we even did a whole unit on kindness. Like, *What does it mean to be kind?*

The principal asserted that the character education program was integrated into the school's curriculum this school year because, "We feel like that is a huge part of what it means to be good at multiculturalism." However, White and Shin (2017) caution the use of character education programs as a means of multicultural education reform. First, there is no widely accepted definition of *character education*. Secondly, the field lacks a research-based practice that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of *all* students in a multicultural society. Last, these programs are rarely implemented before

asking critical multicultural questions such as “whose values should be instilled or whose ‘moral code’ should be promoted?” (White & Shin, 2017, p. 45). While Bentley Lake School’s intentions for promoting multiculturalism should be acknowledged, their efforts in reforming their curriculum in this specific regard should be challenged.

The service learning project was a significant step towards Administrator 2’s mission of educating students “who really understand the big picture and the real world” despite living “a life of privilege.” This schoolwide initiative was mentioned by multiple participants in their discussions of multicultural education, especially when giving examples of how they meet the tenet of social transformation. The first service learning project, which launched in the fall, was focused on improving the school community. Students participated in projects such as cleaning up trash, constructing a “Buddy Bench” for the playground, and creating anti-bullying posters. The second service learning project, which took place in the spring, focused on improving the larger community. For example, students collected donations for the Ronald McDonald House, generated a hurricane relief drive, and made blankets for a non-profit organization that gives homemade blankets to children in need. Jay (2008) argues that service learning projects that connect the school and its surrounding community have the potential to raise critical issues such as race, diversity, and social justice. He is quick to point out, however, that for service learning to have an impact on students’ multicultural education, these lessons must be supplemented with “difficult dialogues about difference” (p. 256) that cover these sensitive topics. It is important to note that the teachers at Bentley Lake School did not state that these types of conversations were or were not part of the service learning curriculum or the schoolwide initiative.

In describing the students' participation in service learning, teachers discussed lessons focused on building empathy for others. For instance, Participant 10 had the following conversation with her students:

*You know, like earthquakes on the other side of the world. And you tell them, you know, just think about it. If it were your classroom, like how would you do? And it wouldn't matter what you look like or how old you are, what color you were, background you came from. You would want people to just come in and help. And I think getting them to realize...and I like that they do projects and I like that they – outside of the [school] walls – understand that.*

At the core of social transformation is the goal of preparing students to become contributing citizens to a democratic society (Nieto & Bode, 2008). The administration, faculty, and students at Bentley Lake School are currently striving towards that goal; the service learning projects, which focus on community involvement or improving the lives of citizens who have been unfairly impacted by disease or natural disasters, are in step with the overarching goal of serving the interests of a democratic society. This initiative falls short in preparing students to acknowledge, or solve problems related to, the inequities and social stratification caused by hegemonic power, privilege, and prejudice towards one's ethnicity, race, gender, and class (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). Banks's social action approach would urge teachers to include social issues that teach lessons about ethnic studies, racism, or gender inequality, for example, as part of their service learning (Banks, 1999). By encouraging their students to eradicate the social inequities caused by issues such as these, this schoolwide initiative would become fully steeped in the multicultural tenet of social transformation.

Both schoolwide initiatives appear to have influenced the teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. While it hasn't been a main priority, the administrators at Bentley Lake School have also been intentional about incorporating multicultural education into their schoolwide PD. According to Administrator 2, "For us as a staff, um, [multicultural education] is very much a part of what we embed into our professional development; to embrace all of our, all of our kids and all of our cultures and all of our races and ethnicities." The teachers confirmed that multicultural topics have been embedded into their PD sessions on other matters such as the general curriculum, child homelessness (including a book study on Ruby Payne's [2005], *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*), and verbal de-escalation techniques.

The vision of Administrator 2, and the subsequent efforts of the faculty at Bentley Lake School, to intentionally embed multicultural education in its schoolwide practices and professional development serve as an exemplar of reform in its first year. The preliminary goals of the character education program and service learning project related to increasing cultural awareness, tolerance, and respect among students who live in insular and privileged communities should be recognized. To embark on the path towards true multicultural education reform, however, Bentley Lake School must add to these goals going forward and include transformational themes of equity and antiracism in their multicultural teaching (Banks, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

### **Lowell Community School: Building a Foundation for Global Education**

Lowell Community School is a public charter K-8 school that serves approximately 560 students, and it is the only school in this study located in a rural setting. Out of the four schools, Lowell Community School enrolls the largest percentage

of White students (67%) as well as the second-largest percentage of students who qualify for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (61%). According to the assistant principal, the school's population of English language learners is growing at an exponential rate. Additionally, a significant number of the students attending Lowell Community School come from non-traditional households and live with a single parent, extended family members, foster parents, or group homes.

Since the school opened its doors three years ago, Lowell Community School has established a foreign language program that offers Spanish or Japanese to all students. The World Language Program, as it is listed on the official school website, is a prominent feature of the school curriculum. From the teacher participants' perspectives, multicultural education is achieved in the school primarily through this foreign language program, which includes a "Multicultural Week" that the Spanish teacher organizes and an after-school Japanese club that is hosted by the school's principal. The Japanese club was part of the principal's vision for the school in "seeing the big picture for the kids and introducing them to just more than just Spanish," said Administrator 3.

According to the assistant principal, Administrator 3, the teachers try to include multicultural education every day. Although she was unable to cite specific examples of this, the teachers shared the two major ways they address the goals of multicultural education in their classroom: facilitating conversations in their classrooms about culture and respect (Participant 12 and Participant 13), and selecting culturally diverse books for their students to read (Participant 11 and Participant 15). Diverse children's literature is a powerful component of multicultural education. Reading diverse literature, especially authored by diverse individuals, creates opportunities for young students to explore the

lived experiences of others, make connections to their own lives, and gain exposure to multicultural issues that typically go unspoken (Gay, 2018). Participant 15 sees the use of multicultural literature in her classroom as paramount in the academic success of her students, especially those who “have such vast experiences with homelessness or hunger or gang activity or just social awkwardness.” She also values multicultural literature for the unique opportunity it gives her to engage her diverse students in meaningful discussions, usually about the experiences of the non-White characters that are featured or the diverse language that is embedded in the text.

Participant 11 and Participant 12 stated that they have become more intentional about focusing on cultural tolerance due to the rise of immigrant students and English language learners enrolled in Lowell Community School. Participant 11 promotes a strong message of inclusion to all of her students that “everybody deserves to be here” despite the color of their skin, their political beliefs, or their religious beliefs. This is a difficult stance to have with some of her students (who are as young as seven years old) who question or counter her perspective with racist attitudes that are ingrained at home. The other teacher participants at Lowell Community School tend to avoid such conflicts and teach tolerance with the end goal of assimilating immigrant students to the norms experienced by the White student body. For example, Participant 13 said this about the English language learners in her classroom:

Um, they know their language. They know their culture. Uh, trying to get them to understand the American culture, you know, is sometimes, not challenging, but it's different for them and sometimes they struggle.

This mindset follows a conservative and conventional pedagogy that is based on the myths that the United States is one giant melting pot of cultures of which all immigrants transition into smoothly and painlessly (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

The teachers interviewed at Lowell Community School indicated that the only inservice multicultural training they have received was a one-day workshop related to student homelessness, which is a relevant and concerning issue at the school. As the socioeconomic gap continues to grow during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more students from underserved communities are attending U.S. schools, especially in inner-city and rural areas, like the one Lowell Community School is situated in. Inservice training that prepares teachers for this vulnerable population of students is needed because teachers tend to hold misconceptions or deficit thinking about students and parents living in low-income communities (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). This training is significant in raising awareness and cultural responsiveness within rural schools; however, they can simultaneously promote deficit theories which absolve schools from systemic discrimination (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Multicultural education is still an area that the school is growing in according to the assistant principal. The teachers presented a lack of critical pedagogical and antiracist thinking (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017) when describing their common daily contributions to multicultural education (e.g., demonstrating acceptance towards all students and promoting cultural understanding through class conversations). Their comments also indicate a pattern of deficit thinking about the students of Color, immigrant students, and English language learners in their classrooms. Deficit theorizing potentially influences one's perceptions of educational equity if the teacher assumes some students are unable

to learn due to predetermined conditions (i.e., poverty, linguistic differences, physical challenges, etc.; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Furthermore, the elementary teachers do not participate in schoolwide multicultural practices or policies. Instead, they view their school's Spanish teacher as the person primarily responsible for promoting multicultural events and lessons. Although the school's principal is passionate about increasing global education across the school, the faculty and staff at Lowell Community School have demonstrated a need for multicultural training in order to build a better foundation for multicultural education.

### **Woodville Academy: Building the Academic Side**

Woodville Academy is a public charter K-8 school located in a suburban town just outside of an increasingly large metropolitan area. It enrolled approximately 860 students during the 2017-2018 school year, 49% of whom identified as White, 23% whom identified as Black, and 20% whom identified as Hispanic. According to those who participated in the study, Woodville Academy enrolls a significant population of students with a strong Eastern European or Russian background.

According to the school's official website, Woodville Academy's mission is *to deliver a K-8 education that prepares students for success by equipping them with the academic skills and self-discipline necessary to compete on a global level*. In a variety of ways, this message was subtly conveyed by the assistant principal and the teachers in their interviews.

Academic success, measured by quantitative test score data, is a main priority at Woodville Academy. The assistant principal acknowledged this during his interview: "Data's data. It's good. Yes, at the end of the day we have to look good. Our kids have to

perform because that's the world we live in." Despite this reality, he also believes that the over-reliance on test data is a downfall of our current education system. To him, he would rather see the teachers instill values that make their students more compassionate, such as "sharing their food with another student who's hungry as opposed to getting a better score on a test." Right now, however, Administrator 4 said, "I think we give [students] the academic side, but the whole student? I don't know if we reached the whole student just yet."

The staff at Woodville Academy see their students and themselves as a close-knit and diverse family. Even though nearly half of the students identify as White, most of the teachers interviewed at Woodville Academy perceive their student population as culturally diverse due to the significant population of students' families having emigrated from Eastern Europe or Russia. The school's diverse learning environment contributes to a culture of inclusivity. In her interview, Participant 16 said,

All my students – and from what I see in the school as a whole – is that they all see each other as people, and they like to see the different ways that they can encourage each other to grow socially and academically.

Participant 20 and Participant 19 also commented that their students typically get along and don't see cultural differences. Participant 19, a first-grade teacher said, "We all get along. It's not like African American here and Hispanic [there]. Like, they're all friends." Participant 20, a kindergarten teacher, kicks off every school year with a lesson on inclusivity featuring brown and white eggs: "We're all the same on the inside. We may look different, but we're all the same. So, it's really making sure they understand, and they know, and it starts with me first, um, um, their model." After that lesson, said

Participant 20, her students begin to see their classmates beyond than their physical differences.

To the teacher participants' knowledge, Woodville Academy does not currently employ schoolwide practices or policies related to multicultural education. When asked about how the school integrates multicultural education, two elementary teachers acknowledged the Spanish teacher who organizes events during Hispanic Culture Month at the school, and a third teacher, Participant 19, briefly mentioned a Black History Living Museum Night organized by first-grade teachers for their students and families. Other than these events, the teachers in the study were unable to describe other ways in which the school incorporates multicultural practices.

The assistant principal and Participant 19, a K-5 special education teacher, were the only two participants in the study who mentioned multicultural teaching as a part of the state teaching standards in which teachers across the state are professionally evaluated. According to Administrator 4,

I talk about with the teachers all the time, um, when we do observations and we have the follow up after, um, and there is that piece of the [state evaluation] observation that talks about, um, you know, multicultural education. And I think sometimes, teachers [say], *In math, numbers are numbers, right?* [Or] *I'm not a language arts teacher, so how am I supposed to talk about this?*

Even though they are evaluated on their ability to include multicultural education in their teaching, the staff at Woodville Academy have not received inservice training on how to effectively embed multicultural education in their curriculum. When discussing teacher training, the assistant principal showed an interest in increasing his staff's

multicultural pedagogical knowledge and awareness, but admitted that he was not aware of resources, especially free resources, to use to begin that journey: “I think we could do more, though. I just don't know if we know where to get it.” Although locating quality and inexpensive resources is a frequently mentioned barrier to instituting reform, Sleeter and Carmona (2017) contend that resources are available for educators who *want* to look for them. An Internet search for *multicultural education resources* will quickly yield a plethora of online resources that are free for educators to use such as Teaching Tolerance (tolerance.org), the National Equity Project (nationalequityproject.org), and Teaching for Change (teachingforchange.org).

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

So far, I have shared the findings related to the immediate purpose of this study, which was a unique exploration of elementary teachers’ perceptions of multicultural education and the factors that most commonly influence those perceptions. During this multiple case study research I was able to conduct a thorough qualitative analysis to provide a thick description of twenty elementary teachers’ beliefs about multicultural education as well as their thoughts about the three tenets of this reform movement. Here, additional findings identified in a cross-case analysis that yield great significance for the future of multicultural education research and practice are reported.

First, the participants’ comments indicate that the elementary teachers in these schools do not currently possess a conceptualization of multicultural education that is antiracist (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Many teachers who participated in this study possess a *cultural difference* perspective towards multicultural education (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). This perspective views the purpose of multicultural education as teaching about

others' cultures with the intent of creating an understanding and harmonious classroom. An *antiracist* perspective, however, “focuses on challenging racial oppression and exploitation, and reconstructing racist systems to achieve equality of power across racial groups” (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017, p. 29). Even the teachers who admittedly discuss topics of racial and cultural discrimination with their students, such as Participant 11 at Lowell Community School, do so in a superficial manner that does not encourage students to critically question nor challenge the bias or racism they see in school or society.

It is important to note that the majority of teachers in this study did not suggest their curricula was multicultural nor describe multicultural education as a unique content area or a singular school subject. If anything, it was viewed as a topic that should be embedded in everyday life. Two teachers' comments spoke directly to this idea. According to Participant 9, “I think it can be taught in everyday kind of structure of what you're learning so that when kids leave school and they go into college or to the next step of life or wherever they go, they know that their mindset is not the only mindset out there.” Participant 12 believes it is her job, too, to help her kindergartners understand that multicultural education is not “an isolated subject in school” as it will always be a part of their future. This is a promising finding that suggests teachers are ready to integrate multiculturalism into the subjects they teach with training and professional support.

Consistent with Banks's (1999) observation of multicultural curriculum reform, the elementary teachers in this study are currently exhibiting thoughts and actions that align with Banks's *contributions approach* to multicultural education. Many of the elementary teachers relied on specialized faculty in the school, such as the guidance

counselor or the foreign language teacher, to teach multicultural topics. A few teachers reported integrating multicultural education into their core content with occasional projects or lesson plans (e.g., Holidays Around the World, Women's History Project). Seldom, teachers intentionally integrated multiculturalism into their core curriculum, like Participant 9's diversity book club unit.

Yet, there is evidence that some elementary teachers desire to go beyond the contributions approach to reform. Participant 11 and Participant 7 perceive their role as educators as being social justice advocates who explicitly teach students about the topics of racism, prejudice, and discrimination in society. Participant 11, a first-grade teacher at Lowell Community School, perceives multicultural teaching as an opportunity to "plant seeds" for future generations to become more tolerant. She fervently believes that multicultural education needs to be integrated in every grade level despite the challenges it presents. However, she is not naïve in this belief; she recognizes that elementary teachers are "in a very sticky place" given the narrow-mindedness of parents and other educators. Being able to teach about these difficult topics "in an age-appropriate... nonthreatening way is a very delicate dance."

Unlike her colleagues, Participant 7 at Bentley Lake School looks forward to the challenges presented by these difficult topics. According to her,

I think *still* in this profession, we're still afraid to talk about [racism]. Um, but for me, I think in here I talk about everything so much that I don't see a problem with talking to second graders about racism, and because that's a part of [teaching].

Participant 11 and Participant 7 understand that multicultural education reform calls on all teachers to disrupt silences (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Multicultural education reform

takes more than one individual teacher in a school, however. The reform efforts of Participant 11 and Participant 7 will likely fall short of becoming fully actualized until they receive more training and resources, and their critical consciousness is shared by more administrators and teachers in their schools.

This study also found that some elementary teachers believe their students are too young to discuss difficult topics such as racism, stereotypes, and discrimination towards others because of ethnicity, language, gender identity, or socioeconomic status. Participant 12 at Lowell Community School, for instance, does not teach about the history of racism in America because she feels it is “beyond” her kindergartners’ comprehension level. Meanwhile, Participant 8 at Bentley Lake School believes that her third graders will not fully comprehend the long-term goals of multicultural education at their age. Other teachers, such as Participant 10 at Bentley Lake School and Participant 14 at Lowell Community School, reported that elementary students do not see cultural differences at all. However, past research suggests that children start becoming aware of racial and cultural differences and start developing biases as young as the age of four (Banks, 1999). In holding these topics back from young learners, however, elementary teachers are building a foundation for their miseducation. The teachers’ misconceptions about elementary students’ cultural awareness and readiness for multicultural education raises some concerns that could be resolved with professional training.

Next, some of the teacher participants’ perceptions of *culture* suggest that this concept is currently shifting in elementary schools. According to Banks and Banks (2001), culture is a difficult term to define and a formal definition has not been agreed upon by experts. Nevertheless, the concept of “culture” continues to evolve. At Lowell

Community School, for instance, families' political beliefs have recently become a contributing factor to students' cultural identities in the classroom. At each of the four schools, more students are coming from diverse family structures, too, headed by single parents, LGBTQ parents, foster or adoptive parents, and immigrant parents. As access to technology and social media grows, gaps in social stratification widen, family dynamics change, and more migration occurs, schools will continue to see an evolution of diversity and culture. Ongoing staff development targeted at helping teachers understand the multitude of cultural experiences of their students is a responsibility of school districts and leaders (Banks, 1999). This study illuminates elementary teachers' dire need of multicultural PD to effectively teach the rise of young students who are coming to school from non-traditional and non-White households.

Finally, this study illustrates the critical role school administrators play in promoting multicultural education reform within his or her school. While the teachers primarily claimed students' cultural backgrounds as school-level factors that influence their perceptions of multicultural education, the analysis of teacher comments at Hoben Hills Elementary and Bentley Lake School reveal that their perceptions may also be influenced by the school's culture that is driven by their administrator's beliefs and schoolwide initiatives. At Hoben Hills Elementary, the teachers perceive multicultural education as building strong relationships in the school, which strongly correlated to the principal's vision for that school year. The teachers at Bentley Lake School perceived their two schoolwide initiatives as examples of multicultural education reform, which were intentionally planned by the school's principal that year. Again, the influential school-level factors identified at Hoben Hills Elementary and Bentley Lake School

support the findings of Saldana and Waxman (1997) suggesting that schools that empower their teachers can influence their perceptions, thus impacting the levels of implementation of multicultural education in the classroom. Meanwhile, the teachers at Lowell Community School and Woodville Academy did not share common perceptions of multicultural education, which also aligned to the (absence of) schoolwide practices and initiatives driven by the school's administration. This finding has serious implications for school administrators, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study have several implications for elementary school teachers, their administrators, district leaders, and teacher educators. The elementary teachers in this study generally perceive *multicultural education* as a means for teaching global awareness and culture, lessons linked to cultural tolerance, learning about students' backgrounds, and the teacher's use of multicultural curriculum or materials. As stated previously, their perceptions do not exhibit critical nor antiracist perspectives of multicultural education that are at the heart of the reform movement. From wearing "blindness" to ensure her students are learning equitably (Participant 12) to avoiding sensitive multicultural topics in the classroom to circumvent tough classroom conversations and potential conflicts with parents (Participant 8), the majority of participants in this study exhibit varying levels of dysconscious racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009) enveloped in naivete and the mainstream's culture of power (Delpit, 1995). To develop perspectives rooted in critical and antiracist thinking, teachers are called to confront the systemic and institutionalized barriers for educational equity caused by racist and discriminatory school practices (Nieto & Bode, 2008). For White teachers, it also

means acknowledging the implications of their whiteness and remaining aware of its influence over their perceptions of students of Color. All teachers, including elementary teachers, must be well-educated in these areas and be given professional opportunities to practice self-awareness to address these issues (Grant & Sleeter, 2011).

This responsibility is not placed on teachers' shoulders alone, however. Canfield-Davis and her colleagues (2011) argue that all individuals involved in education should be concerned with this work. It is recommended that teacher education programs support their local school district leaders and elementary school principals by providing access to the resources that will enable all educators to engage in this task. Gaining such perspectives is important for teachers and administrators who are the leaders of multicultural education reform, but it becomes even more critical for today's youngest students who are the immediate and long-term beneficiaries of this work and for whom all educational stakeholders are held accountable.

In addition to supporting local school districts, U.S. teacher education programs accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) also carry the responsibility to prepare all preservice teachers to meet Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards. These standards, which define effective teaching and learning in a "transformed public education system" (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2013, p. 3), include instructional practices that exemplify key components of multicultural education. According to InTASC Standard #2 (Learning Differences), teacher candidates should demonstrate their "understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet

high standards” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 17). For example, all teacher candidates should demonstrate the ability to understand students’ differences from diverse cultures, connect subject matter content to students’ background knowledge and personal interests, and “[integrate] diverse languages, dialects and cultures into instructional practice” (CCSO, 2013, p. 19). Teacher educators should conduct program evaluations to ensure their candidates are adequately trained to integrate multicultural education and truly meet these standards by the end of their teacher preparation program.

According to Banks (1999), preservice teachers are receiving more training in multicultural education now than ever before. While this may be true, the lessons that have been taught on this topic in undergraduate level courses are often forgotten by the time teachers enter the classroom. According to the teachers in this study, personal experiences with cultural diversity are the greatest factors that influence one’s perceptions about multiculturalism and multicultural education. The teachers in this study commonly referenced their upbringing, familial influences, exposure to other cultures through travel, and exposure to other cultures in their classrooms as significant influences on their current perceptions of multicultural education. These lived experiences provide first-hand knowledge of interacting with the other that textbooks and case studies presented in teacher preparation coursework cannot match. While few participants mentioned multicultural courses as part of their teacher preparation, they did not list these courses as influential in the development of their understanding of multicultural education.

It is impossible to require all preservice and inservice teachers to acquire vast and authentic multicultural experiences within diverse communities prior to stepping foot in

the classroom. However, research shows that these experiences are extremely valuable and sorely needed for all teachers (Grant & Secada, 1990; Wiest, 1998). The findings of this study, which place an emphasis on cultural immersion as part of the process in becoming a multicultural teacher, support that previous research. Going forward, it is recommended for teacher education programs to support the multicultural awareness of preservice teachers through international programs of study, and by requiring *multiple* field experiences that fully *immerse* students in diverse educational settings. Furthermore, it is recommended that school district leaders and school administrators partner with community leaders and organizations to provide structured PD that will empower teachers with training and resources, enhance their cultural awareness, and encourage strong community-school dialogue and engagement.

A need for multicultural teacher education and inservice PD cannot be stressed enough as an implication of this research. The teachers in this study did not receive ongoing PD on topics related to multicultural education. At most, they received a partial day of training on a related topic within the past year. Aydın and Tonbuloğlu's (2014) research suggests that continuing education on these topics can influence teachers' perceptions; their study found that inservice teachers who were enrolled in a doctoral education program favored multicultural education and recognized the importance of educational equality, forming a democratic society and social justice. Ongoing high-quality PD that focuses on the tenets of multicultural education could positively influence elementary teachers' perceptions and teaching practices related to multicultural education.

Many elementary teachers in this study identified a lack of professional training as a challenge in implementing multicultural teaching practices at their schools. While they mostly view multicultural education as a subject that can be integrated into other core curricula, they view the extra time it takes to plan and teach about multicultural topics as an additional challenge they must overcome. Furthermore, the participants' perceptions of the tenets of multicultural education suggest that their limited perspectives of the overarching goals of this reform movement need more development. These major challenges can be overcome with intentional, specific, and ongoing district- and schoolwide staff development.

Teachers, who are professionally evaluated on their ability to integrate multicultural education into their teaching, and their administrators should call upon their district leaders for more support in this area. Given the rise of cultural diversity in schools and a state evaluation tool that currently measures teachers' multicultural teaching effectiveness, it is also recommended that educational leaders and state boards of education step up to secure the funds and resources necessary at the state level to develop critically conscious and culturally relevant educators in every school, especially at the elementary level.

This multiple case study was able to provide the field with unique insight into twenty elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as well as the personal and professional contexts that foster them. However, the dearth of studies like this one warrant additional research in this area. More qualitative and mixed-methods studies of elementary teachers' perceptions and their multicultural teaching practices is recommended, including longitudinal studies that examine the effects of international

programs of study or culturally diverse field placements on preservice teachers' perceptions and implementation of multicultural education as practitioners in the future. Larger studies investigating elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education that allow for more generalization are also recommended to further this line of research. Finally, case study or action research of elementary teachers who subscribe to antiracist thinking and the tenets of multicultural education is also recommended to provide novel insight into transformative multicultural reform at the elementary level.

### **Summary**

Four schools were selected for this multiple case study to provide a range of school-level contexts that potentially influence elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education. There were running themes among the teachers' perspectives at Hoben Hills Elementary and Bentley Lake School which aligned to the administrators' vision and intentional schoolwide initiatives for increasing multicultural education. However, the teachers' perspectives of multicultural education and its tenets lacked the same level of uniformity at the other two schools, which had varying degrees of multicultural education support in place. This finding supports earlier studies that suggests school-level factors have some power to influence teachers' perspectives and practices when it comes to multicultural teaching (Saldana & Waxman, 1997).

Teacher-level factors, such as teachers' upbringing, familial influences, and exposure to other cultures through travel or professional experiences in the classroom were listed by teachers as having the most significant impact on their perception of multicultural education. However, these factors may heavily influence teachers' perspectives due to the absence of multicultural teacher training and PD. More research is

needed to identify the factors that contribute most significantly to teachers who benefit from personal experiences with diversity and receive ongoing professional development and multicultural teaching support.

Multicultural education is a journey that, first and foremost, begins with teachers exploring the concepts of power, privilege, and social justice. To lay the groundwork for students to embark on their own multicultural journey, teachers must be empowered to question the societal issues related to power, democracy, and justice, and develop a critical consciousness to teach elementary students about these same issues. Without these professional learning opportunities, elementary teachers will be ill-equipped to provide the critical multicultural pedagogy needed for their students to function in a democratic and pluralistic society.

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## APPENDIX A

## Participation Consent Form Sample



Cato College of Education  
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

**Consent to be Part of a Research Study**

**Title of the Project:** Exploring Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Education

**Principal Investigator:** Amanda Casto, UNC Charlotte

**Faculty Advisors:** Amy Good, PhD & Luke Reinke, PhD, UNC Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

**Important Information You Need to Know**

- The purpose of this study is to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education as it relates to their personal and professional experiences as well as respective school-level factors.
- You will be asked to participate in an interview regarding your experiences with multicultural education.
- If you agree to participate it will require approximately 45-60 minutes of your time.
- There are no foreseeable risks involved with your participation in this research study.
- Benefits of your participation may include an increase of knowledge about multicultural education. Also, by sharing your experiences as they relate to multicultural education, you are contributing significant knowledge to this field education.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

**Why are we doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to better understand elementary teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and to learn more about the personal and professional experiences that contribute to their conceptualization of multicultural education.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study.**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are an elementary (K-5) educator or school administrator.

**What will happen if I take part in this study?**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your personal and professional teaching experiences. This interview, which may be audio recorded, will take place at your school or via an online communication platform (e.g., Skype).

Your time commitment will be about an hour. The interview will take 45-60 minutes. You will be given the opportunity to read the interview transcript within a week after the interview to check for accuracy.

**What benefits might I experience?**

You will not benefit directly from being in this study. However, other teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and education policymakers may benefit from the information you provide in the study.

**What risks might I experience?**

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation of this study. The dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants in this study will be given primary consideration at all times.

**How will my information be protected?**

I will do everything I can to keep your identity private and your responses confidential. The data collected from this study will only be accessible to the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee members.

We plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, we will not include any information that could identify you. Your interview transcript data will remain confidential and secured on a password-protected computer. Additionally, your identity will be represented by a pseudonym in the research.

**How will my information be used after the study is over?**

After this study is complete, study data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The data we share will NOT include information that could identify you.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. You will be given the option to decline to answer any or all questions and terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

**Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?**

For questions about this research, you may contact Amanda Casto, [acasto2@uncc.edu](mailto:acasto2@uncc.edu), Dr. Amy Good, [agood5@uncc.edu](mailto:agood5@uncc.edu), or Dr. Luke Reinke, [lreinke@uncc.edu](mailto:lreinke@uncc.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704-687-1871 or [uncc-irb@uncc.edu](mailto:uncc-irb@uncc.edu).

**Consent to Participate**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

---

 Name (PRINT)

---

 Email Address (PRINT)

---

 Signature

---

 Date

---

 Name and signature of person obtaining consent

---

 Date

## APPENDIX B

## Interview Protocols

**Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions**

- Describe yourself and your personal background.
- What is your professional teaching background?
- How would you describe your class? Who are your students? (You can begin your response by saying “My students are...”)
  - Is this typically how you would describe your class in previous years? Has this description changed over time? If so, how?
- How would you describe yourself as an elementary educator?
  - Is this how you would have always described yourself? Has this description changed over time? If so, how/why?
- What is your philosophy of teaching?
  - Has your philosophy of teaching changed over time? If so, how/why? (Does it relate to how student populations have changed over time?)

-----

The next set of questions are related to your thoughts of multicultural education:

- When you hear the term *multicultural education*, what comes to mind for you?
  - Has this changed since you began teaching? If so, why?

Scholars in this field of education suggest that multicultural education is comprised of three ideas: educational equity, cultural acceptance or tolerance, and social activism or transformation.

- When you hear the term *educational equity*, what comes to mind for you?
  - What does it look like to address equity in the classroom?
  - Does it look like this in your classroom? School? Explain.
- When you hear the term *cultural acceptance* or *tolerance*, what comes to mind for you?
  - What does it look like to address cultural tolerance in the classroom?
  - Does it look like this in your classroom? School? Explain.
- When you hear the term *social activism* or *social transformation*, what comes to your mind?

- What does that look like in the classroom?
- Does it look like this in your classroom? School? Explain.
- What, in your opinion, are the main justifications for integrating multicultural education into the curriculum?
  - Who benefits from multicultural education?
- How have your personal experiences (outside of education) influenced your perception of multicultural education?
- Which professional experiences (teacher education courses or PD) have contributed to your perception of multicultural teaching?
  - Have you shared these experiences with others at your school?
- In what ways are you supported by your administration and colleagues in implementing multicultural education in your classroom?
- Does your school have any multicultural education policies or schoolwide practices? What are they?
- What do you perceive as the challenges of multicultural education?
- What do you think is the significance of multicultural education?

### **Semi-Structured Administrator Interview Questions**

- Describe yourself and your personal background.
- What is your professional background in education?
- Describe your school. Who are your teachers? Who are your students? Who is your school's community?
  - Has this description changed over time? If so, how/why?

-----

The next set of questions are related to your thoughts of multicultural education:

- When you hear the term *multicultural education*, what comes to mind for you?
  - Has this changed since you began in the field of education? If so, why?

Scholars in this field of education suggest that multicultural education is comprised of three ideas: educational equity, cultural acceptance or tolerance, and social activism or transformation.

- When you hear the term *educational equity*, what comes to mind for you?
  - What does it look like to address equity in the classroom?
  - Do you see evidence of this in your school?
  
- When you hear the term *cultural acceptance* or *tolerance*, what comes to mind for you?
  - What does that look like in the classroom?
  - Do you see evidence of this in your school?
  
- When you hear the term *social activism* or *social transformation*, what comes to your mind?
  - What does that look like in the classroom?
  - Do you see evidence of this in your school?
  
- What, in your opinion, are the main justifications for integrating multicultural education?
  - Who benefits from multicultural education integration in your school?
  
- Does your school have any multicultural education policies or schoolwide practices? If so, what are they?
  
- Describe any professional development that has been offered to your school's staff (admin or teachers) related to multicultural teaching.
  - When was this offered? How frequently do they receive training?
  
- If one purpose of schools is to prepare citizens of all backgrounds to contribute to a global and pluralistic society, how does your school environment contribute to this purpose?
  
- What challenges do you see in implementing multicultural education in your school?
  
- What do you perceive as the challenges of multicultural education?
  
- What do you think is the overall significance of multicultural education?

## APPENDIX C

## Categories and Themes in the Data

## RQ1: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Multicultural Education

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
Teaching about Global Awareness and Culture	Teaching Students about Others' Cultures/Backgrounds	Teaching about different cultures, cultures other than American mainstream, poverty
Learning About Students' Backgrounds	Promoting Individualism and Students' Identities	Students explain their cultures, students' vast experiences, race, conversations about who we are
	Building Relationships with Students	Building relationships, embracing all students
	Learning about Students Cultures/Backgrounds	Learning about/knowing students' backgrounds
	Understanding How Students Learn Best	Reach students at their level, students from different countries, personalization
Teaching Students Lessons about Cultural Tolerance	Teaching Students Acceptance & Tolerance	Being able to acknowledge others, being open-minded
Utilizing Multicultural Curriculum and Materials	Multicultural Teaching Materials	Varied educational materials, classroom reflects children in the class, diversity book club, multicultural literature, cultural artifacts, character education curriculum, service learning projects
	Heroes and Holidays	Holidays Around the World, MLK Day, Chinese lanterns
	What ME Is/Isn't	Cultural food, month-long celebration, foreign language classes

## RQ1: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Equity

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
Providing Educational Access and Opportunity to All Students	Providing Access and Opportunities	Equal access, everyone has the same opportunity, same resources
Meeting All Students' Needs	Meeting All Students' Needs: Academically	Students get what they need based on ability, special needs students
	Meeting All Students' Needs: Culturally	So many cultures, students have background knowledge to be successful, everyone is represented, ELL students
Differentiation	Differentiated Instruction	Differentiated reading, ability grouping
Establishing Fairness and Equality	Equality and Fairness	Not the same as equal, students get the same resources, fair chance, fair vs. equal, equity vs. equality

## RQ1: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Tolerance

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
Teaching Students to Respect Others (Including Explicit Lessons)	Teaching Students to Respect Others' Differences	Acceptance of others, everybody isn't the same, teaching respect, mental health
	Cultural Tolerance Teaching Strategies	Class conversation, slam poetry, multicultural literature, morning meeting
	Talking about Race	Students don't understand race, talking about skin color, teachers wear blinders, egg experiment
Building a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment	Building Relationships/ Classroom Community	Creating a safe place to learn, clear communication, morning meeting, inclusivity
Making Up For a Lack of Multicultural Education at Home/In Society	Lack of Multicultural Education at Home	Home impact, family history, school vs. home
	Politics	Immigration, society isn't tolerant, presidential election

## RQ1: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Social Transformation

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
A Difficult Pedagogical Challenge	School and Home	School vs. home, a losing battle
	Social Transformation and Elementary Learners	Change starts now, difficult conversations
An Opportunity to Improve Our Future Society ("Planting Seeds for the Future")	Planting Seeds for the Future	Changing the world, planting seeds, preparing students for the future
Teaching Strategies That Enact Change in the School or Local Community	Social Transformation Teaching Strategies	Classroom conversations, character education curriculum, service learning project

## RQ2: School-Level Factors

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
Students' Backgrounds	Students' Cultural Backgrounds	Teaching rural students, teaching different cultures, learning about cultures from students
	Previous School Settings	Eye-opening experiences, impoverished communities, rural schools
School Culture	School Culture	Everyone is welcome, building trusting relationships, assessment data
	Administration Beliefs/Support	Building trusting relationships, conversations with staff, administration is supportive, teacher evaluation
	Schoolwide Policies	Schoolwide policies, handbook policies, no schoolwide policies
	Schoolwide Practices	Relationship-building, character education, service learning project

## RQ3: Teacher-Level Factors

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Codes</b>
Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences with Multiculturalism - Youth/Family	Small town, "bubble," diverse family, not exposed to diversity as a child
	Personal Experiences with Multiculturalism - College	Eye-opening, first exposure to multiculturalism
	Personal Experiences with Multiculturalism - Travel	Study abroad, family in the military, moving to a different community
Professional Teaching Experiences	Current Teaching Experiences	On-the-job training, students' vast backgrounds, teaching in low SES communities
Educator Training	Teacher Training	Teacher preparation program, Master's degree, learning about ME in other disciplines
	Professional Development	Book study, poverty simulation, national conference, no professional development