Nominated Exemplar Teacher Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom

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Abstract

The current study provided voice to nominated exemplar classroom teachers in identifying malleable, discrete aspects of the classroom environment, teacher behavior and practices that define culturally responsive instruction. Interview data from a sample of 13 teachers was analyzed using a consensual qualitative research approach. Results provided insight into the common teaching practices (e.g., classroom management), qualities (e.g., empathetic), actions and behaviors (e.g., tailoring the curriculum) of culturally responsive teachers. Study findings suggest that there may not be one universal way to implement culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Implications for the future of culturally responsive teaching research, measurement, and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Teachers, Cultural responsiveness, Culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, culturally responsive pedagogy

Nominated Exemplar Teacher Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom

Given the increasing diversity of students enrolled in public schools in the United States (U.S.)and the teacher workforce that continues to be over 80% White (Billingsley et al., 2019), adequately preparing teachers to work with students from diverse cultures is more important than ever. Of great concern, Black and Latina/o American students are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline, school failure data, and special education referrals (Skiba et al., 2011; Welsh & Little, 2018). Moreover, an educational achievement gap persists for these students (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2022; Gregory et al., 2010; Leavitt & Hess, 2019). Although these inequities can be attributed to many factors including structural racism (Bailey et al., 2017), the classroom environment continues to play an important role for Black and Latina/o students' educational performance (Bottiani et al., 2018a). Culturally responsive teaching strategies have been theorized as one mechanism for addressing the educational disparities and inequities that exist for many students of color (Fiedler et al., 2008; Gay, 2002b; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Research is underway to improve and strengthen culturally responsive teaching practices that push teachers beyond good intentions to develop concrete skills and competencies for teaching students from different backgrounds. However, these efforts are thwarted by inconsistent conceptualization and inadequate measurement of culturally responsive practices in the classroom. In an effort to improve the measurement of culturally responsive practices (CRPs), the current study sought to provide voice to classroom teachers who had engaged in professional development related to CRPs in identifying malleable, discrete aspects of the classroom environment as well as teacher beliefs and behaviors that contribute to culturally responsive instruction.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

There are a number of asset pedagogies (e.g., culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining teaching) that identify students' cultural experiences as strengths. Culturally-relevant pedagogy, posited by Ladson-Billings (1994), requires that students' cultural frames of reference are used for empowerment and that educators make efforts to increase students' cultural competence and critical consciousness (Harmon, 2012). Of note, Ladson-Billing's seminal work focused on Black students, though scholars and practitioners soon recognized the value of culturally responsive teaching practices for students from various different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014). In the U.S., the expansion of culturally responsive teaching to include other racial and ethnic groups was greatly influenced by the immigration of Latina/o students as well as other groups (Hammond, 2014). There is also a rich literature on the use of CRPs internationally (e.g., Karatas & Oral, 2015).

Drawing on multiple asset pedagogies, Muñiz (2019) identified eight characteristics of culturally responsive teachers which included teachers who reflect on their own culture, recognize and respond to systemic bias, draw on students' culture to shape curriculum and instruction, bring real-world issues into the classroom, model high expectations for all students, promote respect for student differences, collaborate with families and the local community, and communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways. As an example of how cultural responsiveness can be difficult to conceptualize and assess, another literature review (Rychly & Graves, 2012) identified only four characteristics of culturally responsive teachers: 1) being caring and empathetic, 2) being reflective about attitudes and beliefs about other cultures and 3) as well as one's own cultural frames of reference, and 4) being knowledgeable about other

cultures. The importance of being reflective is highlighted by the overlap between Muñiz's (2019) and Rychly and Grave's proposed characteristics (2012); however, reflection and knowledge building must be translated into use of CRPs in practice. Muñiz's (2019) proposed characteristics include more actionable steps that educators can take, but they notably do not highlight the caring and warmth that is often cited as the key to an effective teacher and student relationship (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

In the current study, we acknowledge the important contributions of each of the asset pedagogies, while specifically focusing on culturally responsive teaching, which puts culture at the center of all classroom instruction (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching and CRPs have been theorized as one mechanism for addressing the achievement and discipline gaps that exist for students from minoritized backgrounds. As defined by Geneva Gay (2000, p. 29): "[CRP] teaches to and through [students'] strengths. . . it builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities…it incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools". Dr. Gay also makes specific recommendations for culturally responsive teaching on an international scale by highlighting the importance of implementing CRPs that are culturally and contextually relevant and take into account the specific cultural frame of reference of the students (Gay, 2015).

Most schools in the U.S. operate based on middle-class White norms and the overwhelming majority of teachers are White. Yet, racial mismatch is not the only problem; when teachers do not understand or value their students' cultural frames of reference or try to understand, misunderstandings combined with implicit biases can result in negative outcomes for students of color (Carter, 2003; La Salle et al., 2020; Staats, 2014). Further, students may have a

hard time adjusting to cultural norms and values at school or even connecting to instructional content that does not reflect their home experiences (Arunkumar et al., 1999; Griner & Stewart, 2013). In addition to systemic and structural racism and years of oppression resulting in unequal educational access and opportunities for minoritized children, a lack of CRPs contributes to the discipline disparities and academic achievement gaps that persist for students of color.

Teachers and CRPs

The literature base on teacher CRPs primarily comes from teacher self-reports and qualitative research including interviews and focus groups. Teachers from urban southern California schools reported a strong understanding of CRPs and strong sense of competency (Bonner et al., 2018). Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) interviewed educators who had previously been selected as teacher of the year at the school or district level in a large urban district. The interviews focused on the strategies they used to create a culturally responsive classroom. Four themes were identified including implementing what they referred to as "RACCE" (i.e., respect, act immediately, communicate, celebrate, and encourage), co-creating a familial-style classroom culture of success, establishing student-first learning, and practicing critical multicultural content delivery. A study in Singapore included case studies of teachers whose instructional practices best aligned with the tenets of culturally responsive education (Lim et al., 2019). These teachers engaged in a number of efforts to best meet the needs of what they called "low progress" students. Some of their efforts included providing opportunities for students to gain cultural and social capital, setting high expectations, offering avenues for students' voices to be heard, and identifying ways for students to engage in their communities (Lim et al., 2019). In a study using quantitative methods to examine the use of CRPs in The Netherlands, self-reported stronger

perspective taking skills and multicultural attitudes were associated with the frequency in which teachers engaged in culturally responsive teacher practices (Abacioglu et al., 2020).

Comparing the practices of teachers in these studies (Abacioglu, 2020; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2019) with the components of culturally responsive teaching identified by Muñiz (2019), Rychly and Graves (2012), and even Dr. Gay's definition demonstrates the breadth of CRPs and how some teacher practices that are perceived as culturally responsive go beyond what is currently captured in the different frameworks. For example, community engagement (Lim et al., 2019) is not included in Rychly and Graves's characteristics of culturally responsive teachers, though it aligns with Dr. Gay's framework in terms of building relationships between home and school and illuminates sociocultural realities.

There is an increasing focus on providing pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development programs to increase teacher use of CRPs. Indeed, teachers in Turkey report a greater need for teacher preparation programs to include instruction on culturally responsive teaching (Karatas & Oral, 2015). In the U.S., despite an increased focus on culturally responsive education in teacher preparation programs, few in-service and professional developmental opportunities are available for teachers who are already in the profession. One such teacher professional development and coaching model, named Double Check, was developed based on the asset pedagogy literature and focuses on: **C**onnection to the Curriculum, **A**uthentic Relationships, **R**eflective Thinking, **E**ffective Communication, and **S**ensitivity to Students' Culture (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). Double Check found an increase in teacher reported self-efficacy and culturally responsive behavior management and improved behavior management and student behaviors in classrooms whose teachers received coaching (Bradshaw et al., 2018b). Despite Double Check's promise in increasing culturally responsive behavior

management by coached teachers in their efficacy study, the authors acknowledge there remains a gap in our knowledge of the observable markers and discrete indicators of CRP that can be used as a source of objective feedback during coaching. This gap is also highlighted in a systematic review which found a need to better measure teacher knowledge, skills and discrete behaviors associated with CRPs (Bottiani et al., 2018a).

Several measures have been used to assess teachers' use of CRPs but the majority of these rely on teacher self-report which have the potential for bias whether teachers overestimate their abilities or underestimate them. In addition, these measures are often validated with pre-service teachers and may not fully capture the experiences and competencies of more experienced educators. For example, the Culturally Teacher Self-Efficacy scales (CRSTE), the Culturally Responsive Outcome Expectancy scale (CROE), and the Culturally Responsive Behavior Management scales (CRBM) are some of the most popular measures used to assess teachers' use of CRPs yet they solely rely on teacher report (Siwatu, 2007; Siwatu, 2017). The CRSTE and CROE were validated with pre-service teachers while the more recent CRBM included bother pre-service and in-service teachers (Siwatu, 2007; Siwatu, 2017). Siwatu (2007) points out that the scales do not include exhaustive lists of skills or outcomes associated with CRP indicating the importance of truly understanding the behaviors and strategies teachers use to implement CRPs. In a study using the CRSTE, in-service teachers who participated in a Double Check reported increased self-efficacy at the end of the school year (Authors et al., 2018). Alternatively, another study found that pre-service teachers felt more comfortable with general teaching practices than culturally responsive teaching practices possibly indicating a need for increased opportunities for practice and observations during training (Siwatu, 2011). The results from these studies demonstrate a need to understand the use of CRPs for both in-service and pre-

service teachers given their developmental differences in training and experiences. Further, identifying discrete behaviors associated with CRPs will contribute to more comprehensive measurement.

The Current Study

This study sought to fill this gap in the literature by identifying specific observable malleable and discrete aspects of the classroom environment, teacher beliefs, and teacher practices that exemplify CRP. Unlike prior studies, the current study focused on a standardized conceptualization and measurement of teacher CRPs by exploring teachers' self-identified CRP beliefs and the behaviors in their own classrooms that they associate with CRPs. Moreover, the current study is unique in its inclusion of teachers who had participated in the Double Check coaching and professional development program and were nominated by their administrators as exemplar teachers to provide their feedback via semi-structured interviews. Study findings will inform more comprehensive and robust measurement of CRP and will support teaching coaching in CRP. The interview protocol was designed to answer these specific research questions:

1. What is a culturally responsive teacher?
2. What are observable and discrete culturally responsive practices in the classroom?

METHOD

Grounded in the constructivist research paradigm, this study included semi-structured interviews with the guiding assumption that reality is socially constructed and that researchers should attempt to understand the lived experiences of the participating teachers (Mertens et al., 2019). As such, we sought to understand exemplar teachers' perspectives on culturally responsive teaching practices. A consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach was used to analyze the data (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005).

Participants

Participants were recruited from schools participating in ongoing studies of CRPs in suburban school districts in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions. Eligible teachers could not be active participants of the ongoing Double Check studies being conducted by the research team. Participants were purposefully recruited (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) based on recommendations from school-level administrators who were asked to provide the names of exemplar culturally responsive teachers. The administrators were not provided any criteria for a culturally responsive teacher; they used their own subjective judgement in recommending teachers. Although teachers were not provided with criteria for the study, there all had some level of familiarity with culturally responsive teaching given their schools' multiple years of involvement in the Double Check study. Recruitment procedures and the interview protocol received approval from the authors' institutional review board.

A sample of eight middle school and five high school general education teachers were consented for the study. Of the eight female and 5 male teachers, 10 self-identified as White, two Black or African American, and one as Asian American. Teachers' age ranged from 23 to 48 years old, with 2-20 years of teaching.

Procedure

Members of the research team contacted the recommended teachers via email to provide additional information about the study and to determine their interest in participating. Interested teachers were scheduled to complete the interview in-person at their school during the workday and provided a $25 incentive participate. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed by a professional transcription company, and checked for accuracy.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed to elicit teacher perceptions of CRPs as operationalized in the Double Check CARES framework (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). The interview protocol was reviewed by the entire research team and questions were revised based on their expert feedback. The individual face-to-face interviews typically lasted 30-40 minutes and focused on teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices with a particular emphasis on the CARES domains. Teachers were first asked questions about why they entered the profession and how they get to know students (e.g., How do you get to know your students?). Next, interviewers asked teachers how they define culture and what it means to be culturally responsive. The subsequent set of questions focused on the remaining CARES elements and how teachers make connections to the curriculum, engage in reflective thinking, communicate effectively, and demonstrate sensitivity to students' culture. For example, participants were asked, "what do you think are key qualities of a culturally responsive teacher," "how do you create your classroom culture," and "what kinds of examples do you use within your lessons and/or curriculum materials that may be familiar to students from diverse backgrounds?" All responses were followed by probing questions to solicit more details. Finally, participants were asked how teachers can be more culturally responsive and if there was anything else they would like to share. The interviews were conducted by an experienced project staff with prior experience conducting interviews. Of the six interviewers, a two identified as male and all six of the interviewers identified as people of color.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews was closely guided by the CQR methodology (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Based on the interview protocol and a review of each transcript, the second author created domains to capture the broad ideas represented by the

data. The first and second authors read each interview transcript independently and to identify core ideas to represent each domain (Hill et al., 2005). The first and second author met regularly to come to consensus on the core ideas and to ensure that each core idea was sorted into the appropriate domain. Once a consensus was reached, an auditor (the third author) was presented with the data to review the core ideas, to ensure that the core ideas were sorted into the correct domain and worded in a way that was representative of the raw data (Hill et al., 2005).

Next, the results were visually charted to help identify connections or relationships between the various domains. The visual representation was then shared with the auditor for a check on how the domains were charted to depict connections. Next, the domains were categorized based on their frequency of occurrence in the data. Domains that were represented in all but one interview were labeled as "general," while those that occurred in at least half (up to the general cutoff) were considered "typical" and domains that only appeared in at least two (but less than half) of the interviews were labeled as "variant" (Hill et al., 2005). Lastly, we revisited the domain frequency categories to ensure that the visual representation was an accurate reflection of the data.

Trustworthiness

A number of steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. To ensure objectivity and confirmability, the method and procedure have been described in detail and the data have been retained for future analyses (Miles et al., 2020). The authors also reflected on their own biases throughout the research process (see reflexivity statement). There were multiple quality checks between the first and second author with third author serving as an auditor and peer reviewer throughout the data analysis and interpretation process. The internal validity of the

study is demonstrated through representative quotes from participants as well as data that indicates the frequency of each domain or theme (Miles et al., 2020).

Positionality and Reflexivity

Given that researchers' knowledge, experience, and social identities inform their methodological inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), we offer insight into the authors' identities and positionality as related to the current study. The first author (female, African American) has been conducting research on CRPs for over 8 years and has over 10 years of experience conducting interviews and focus groups and analyzing qualitative data. The second auuthor (female, African American) conducted several of the interviews with participants, has over five years of experience with qualitative data, has experience as a classroom teacher, and is trained as a clinical psychologist. The third author (male, Latino) also conducted several interviews in the current study, has 13 years of experience with qualitative data and acted as the auditor during analysis. All authors contributed to the development of the interview guide and provided feedback on the data analytic method, categorization of core ideas, and final domains. Our personal experiences persons of color and as teachers and researchers allowed us, during biweekly meetings, to engage in critical analysis of the classroom management and CRP practices that participants described implementing. Our knowledge about teacher preparation programs and school norms assisted in differentiating commonly used teaching practice from those that could be considered CRP. We examined the data with an ultimate goal of improving measurement of CRPs for practice and research.

RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the list of domains and sub-domains developed through CQR analyses and the frequency (i.e., general, typical, or variant) with which each domain emerged

across interviews. Data analysis and categorization of the core ideas and domains is also represented in a visual image of overlapping and overarching domains (see Figure 1): (a) School-wide dynamics, (b) Classroom culture, (c) Teacher factors that influence classroom culture. We provide a review of each of the domains and sub-domains below and discuss how they are related to one another based on the core ideas in participant responses. All names provided in the results are pseudonyms.

School-wide Dynamics

While participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of a culturally responsive teacher in the classroom, they also shared information about the school characteristics that influence their classrooms and their interactions with other school personnel.

School Characteristics

Some participants provided perspectives on their perceptions of the school community. One teacher stated, "…I feel like working here is more than just like teaching history or social studies. It's like you're serving the community that has a lot of other needs that go beyond, you know, what a normal school might." Other teachers had a more negative perspective of their schools with respect to the treatment of students. Teachers admitted that students from different cultures were treated differently at their school. For example, one teacher stated, "in my observations though, I know for a fact that different groups of kids are treated differently because of cultural differences." Another teacher acknowledged:

> I don't like when I witness teachers treating Black Johnny different from White Johnny. If you expect for both children to sit down and learn, say it the same way, expect the same results. And sometimes, I don't see that. Oftentimes, I see where one is being talked with, where the other child is being talked to.

Moreover, when asked by an interviewer "Do you think that people from different cultures feel accepted and welcomed here?," the teacher conceded, "I doubt it and to me that breaks my heart."

Co-worker interactions

Participant thoughts about the school characteristics were related to their perceptions of their coworkers. Participants provided examples of how they had conflict with other teachers regarding their treatment of students *or* tried to support other teachers' development of better practices. One teacher discussed using weekly grade level team meetings to exchange strategies on how to better work with students. This teacher provided an example of how leveraging other teachers' relationships with students can be helpful:

> Every teacher has a different relationship with every student, so we spend a lot of time talking about what works. I'm struggling and it's Billy - well did you know Billy' s mom is in the hospital? No, I didn't know Billy's mom was in the hospital. Okay. You know, and so Billy felt comfortable telling that to that person but not necessarily to me, and that's okay. We all have our different relationships, but now I know. So it's important for teachers to communicate within and our team does that very well.

Another participant talked about creating a safe space in those meetings for teachers to admit when they may have been wrong during an interaction with a student. This participant described a situation in which they were asked to confront another teacher about potentially offensive statements that were said in the classroom. The teacher shared that they struggled with some internal conflict in trying not to be accusatory, but to use questions to solicit more information.

> …as just a person working in this building I've encountered situations that are uncomfortable which I've struggled with like how to address cause they're like my colleagues. So, like for me it' s like one thing when it like has to do with the children but it's another thing when it's just like adult to adult and so there are times when I'm like, 'Should I address that or should I just let it go?'

Conflict with co-workers also occurred when participants felt like other teachers were not being "self-reflective" or weren't "strong enough" to work with their student population. One participant expressed frustration with these fellow teachers:

> As teachers, our job is to learn how each student learns, and then teach that way. And then, oh, man. I get a lot of flak for that. 'I don't have time,' [or] 'I can't do that,' [or] 'That's so time consuming.' But it's like, that's what we do. You're here to teach all students so you have to know how each one learns...

An example of seeking sources of support outside of the classroom for culturally diverse students was shared when speaking with a teacher about adapting communication styles for different students. This teacher, who self-reported as White, felt like her culture was the reason that some students were sent to her by other teachers. She shared, "I get a lot of kids. They [other teachers] always send them to me, probably because I'm from a different culture, they figure I know how to deal with the kids that just moved here."

Classroom culture

Classroom culture was discussed in all interviews with participants. Across cases, participants described creating a "safe" learning environment for students. They expressed a desire to create a classroom culture that was "warm and welcoming" where students feel "wanted" and "comfortable," where "you can be yourself" and "every single person in that room

brings different parts of their culture." Participants used phrases like "respect for everyone," "mutual respect between student and teacher," and "a culture of trust" to describe their classrooms. Yet, how teachers attained their classroom culture differed across participants. One participant described her classroom as "controlled chaos," while another teacher said he had a "mellow calm class with structure and routines." As depicted in Figure 1, categorization of the domains resulted in three groupings of components related to classroom culture: 1) commonly used teaching practices, 2) culturally responsive practices, and 3) straddling the line, or qualities and practices that are both commonly used and could be considered culturally responsive.

Commonly used teaching practices

During the process of capturing core ideas from the data, several commonly used teaching practices were revealed in teacher responses. In organizing the domains, it was clear that many teachers equated these commonly used teaching practices with culturally responsive teaching. We present how teachers discussed each of these practices, while acknowledging that one can demonstrate these behaviors and still not be subjectively considered culturally responsive in the classroom.

Classroom management. One of the most consistently endorsed components of classroom culture was classroom management. When asked about their classroom culture, all 13 participants mentioned widely known classroom management strategies. Participants talked about the importance of setting clear expectations, consequences, and boundaries for students. Teachers sometimes used structure and routines to set the culture of their classroom. There were also mentions of "modeling desired behaviors" and using "more praise than reprimands."

Differentiation in instruction. Participants also discussed ways that they try to differentiate their instruction for students. Some strategies mentioned were "giving students

choices" on assignments and "individualizing lessons." One teacher was quick to acknowledge that "education should be tailored for everyone" while another believed that students can "show their learning in different ways."

Home/caregiver communication. Another component of classroom culture that teachers discussed, was home/caregiver communication. Typical recommended strategies for engaging caregivers were mentioned by participants, including emails home. Teachers shared sending positive and negative emails to parents and caregivers. One teacher called her positive emails "love notes" to caregivers regarding their child. Several teachers expressed challenges with engaging caregivers. One teacher admitted that she was better at connecting with students than families and that family communication is often something she pushes to the side until a caregiver reaches out to her. Another teacher shared that he felt caregivers of middle school students were less likely to make contact with teachers when compared to caregivers of elementary or high school students.

Culturally Responsive Teacher Qualities, Actions, and Behaviors

Though we separate culturally responsive qualities, actions, and behaviors in the figure from the commonly used teaching practices described above, it is important to note that this section also includes some well-known teaching practices. We provide them separately here solely because this is how the study participants described them when asked about the practices of a culturally responsive teacher.

Qualities. When asked about the specific qualities of a culturally responsive teacher, participant responses revolved around humility, awareness, self-reflection, and empathy. Regarding humility and awareness, participants shared that they felt you need to be "self-aware,"

"admit you have biases," "check biases" and involved in "getting rid of preconceived notions." A female teacher described her attempts to be a culturally responsive teacher this way:

> I need to be aware of the privileges that I have been lucky enough to experience in my life. I need to check my biases and try to not whitewash history...being aware of biases, being aware of privileges and understanding that not all of your students are the same and that they don't come from the same background, and trying to get to know each student and understand their motivations for things.

Another teacher disclosed, "I don't have everything figured out and I don't understand everyone's experiences," but she was "willing to learn from other people." A teacher also shared that being culturally responsive means "constant reflection," "checking yourself," and "putting your own values aside." Teachers discussed being empathetic to students and wanting their students to "know I care."

Actions and Behaviors. Though the focus of the study was hearing from participants about their perceptions of CRPs, many of the actions and behaviors identified were ones that, arguably, one would think that all teachers regularly engaged in. For example, participants repeatedly mentioned "listening" to students and being "open-minded and willing to understand" their students. They provided examples of culturally responsive teachers being "flexible," "not afraid to deviate from the lesson plan," "making allowances for disruptions in the classroom," and being "flexible with each other."

Some teachers mentioned educating themselves about and understanding the cultures of their students and respecting them. One teacher described being culturally responsive as:

> So I think that's that constant internal conversation and checking yourself because it is. It is a thing, and so whether it's in your classroom and the two or three White girls over

> there jabbing away in the middle of the class, you recognizing that, 'Okay, are you calling them out just like you would call the three Black girls that were jabbing over on the other corner. Are you treating everybody the same?'

While others, when probed to identify discrete culturally responsive teacher behaviors, mentioned giving students options for assignments in their classroom and teaching, "in a way to meet students where they are." Another popular, "culturally responsive action" included making lessons culturally relevant, which is expanded upon under the "bringing in student interests/tailoring curriculum" theme.

Bringing in student interests/tailoring curriculum. One CRP endorsed by almost all participants was tapping into student interests and bringing those interests into their academic lessons. Teachers shared that they learn students' stories, interests, and hobbies and use that information to drive teaching. One participant described it this way, "Culturally responsive teaching to me means helping my students feel represented in the curriculum, but also showing them where they fit into society and what they will be doing after high school." This reference to students feeling represented included showing diversity in instructional materials and embracing technology in lesson planning. Another great example of this type of behavior was provided by a participant who teaches Spanish:

> I try to do things that reflect the things that they've talked about in class, the things that look like them, the things that they've got going on in their lives and not just make it the first photo that I find, but being aware of who they are as people and trying to, you know, show things that look like them, that are them, that represent them.

Straddling the line

Many of the core ideas emerging from the analysis of interview data seemed to straddle the line between being commonly used teaching practices and the CRPs described above. These core ideas included: getting to know their students, building relationships with students, tailoring communications with individual students, and discussing culture in the classroom. Each are discussed here and are visualized as such in Figure 1.

Getting to know students. One of the things that participants shared was important to their teaching was getting to know their students. When probed to understand what they felt was important to know about their students and how they went about doing this, teachers provided a wide range of responses. Several teachers expressed a desire to learn more about students' hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes, which would help in making connections in their academic lessons. Other teachers felt it was important to know "where students come from" and what they may be dealing with outside of school, while also understanding "what kind of helps them thrive." Teachers used organic conversations, surveys, and games to get to know their students. One high school teacher described how she gets to know her students through index cards:

> I start out the first week with nothing but get to knows. I do not touch curriculum at all. I use index cards that ask several questions, such as what is your name? What is your nickname? Why did you take this class? What do I need to know about you as a student to best serve you as your teacher? And then, I actually ask them to share anything culturally related that they feel comfortable with…they put a lot of good information on those getting to know [you] index cards.

Building relationships. Teachers discussed how getting to know more about their students helped build relationships with them. Building relationships with students stood out as

an important core idea across all interviews. One teacher shared, “You have to have a relationship first. And then, when you have a relationship, then they'll respect you more, they'll listen." Teachers offered various ways of building relationships: asking questions, one-on-one conversations, ice breakers, listening, asking parents to write a letter about their child, and finding common interests. For several teachers building a relationship with students also included disclosing things about themselves and doing things outside of the classroom. For example, “just being real with them, being a person that has thoughts and feelings and emotions and not hiding those.” One teacher called going to students’ sporting events building “relationship capital” and described it this way:

> I think just going and being seen and recognizing them outside of the classroom I think really helps, you know, to see them as more than just a student that I have for 90 minutes every other day, that they're a human being and also, I'm a human being. And I'm here. I could be anywhere else in the world, but I want to watch you do this thing that matters to you a lot. And they notice these things.

Tailoring communications. We also asked participants about how they tailor their communications to be more effective in communicating with students. Several teachers shared that they use different styles of communication with individual students. Their style of communication varied based on their knowledge of the student and their relationship with the student (e.g., not using sarcasm with everyone). One teacher described it this way:

> There are some students that I know I can be a little bit more [Rachel] than Ms [Bruce] with… I knew with him that I could do that because of the relationship that we have built over the last three months, I guess. But then other students, they need a stricter,

authoritative figure. You can just kind of tell from how students act and the way they respond to you, what they need.

Other teachers discussed tailoring communication as it was specifically related to teaching. For students for which English is their second language, one teacher shared that he uses mirroring and shadowing to help with translation problems while another shared that using different languages was encouraged in her class. Other examples included using multiple ways for students to share their thoughts (i.e., writing versus speaking in a large group), and repeating and paragraphing to check for understanding.

Discussing culture in class. Finally, we probed to better understand if and how culture was directly discussed in their classes. Several participants shared that they purposefully discuss cultural topics outside of traditional class subjects, during advisory classes, "organic conversations" and "morning meetings" with students. It was not surprising that most of the social studies teachers shared that they talk about culture at some point during their class because of the content they cover, "definitely like things that are in place for us to teach it through, like through curriculum." This is in contrast to a few math and science teachers who shared that they "don't talk about culture much" and that culture "is too big to address in each lesson." One math teacher did state "our content is so real world oriented" in an effort to describe how they easily incorporate culture into word problems with ease.

Teacher factors that influence classroom culture

Through analysis of the interview data, several core ideas emerged that may unconsciously influence classroom culture. In the interviews, teachers shared their impressions of students' home life and expectations, and even their beliefs about various social identities (i.e., race, religion, class). While not discussed by teachers as a component of their classroom culture,

it was easy to see how these factors may influence their relationships with students and the classroom culture they sought to establish.

Approach to social identities

At the beginning of several interviews, we chatted briefly with participants about what social identities were significant to them and which of their social identities were important to how they positioned themselves in the classroom. The responses revealed a wide range of perspectives that may have implications for how they interact with students. For example, one White teacher shared that she does not "dwell on race" and endeavors to "treat all students the same." This sentiment was shared by an African American teacher who stated, "I don't believe in race…Genetically there's more difference between height than there is color, and so I was teaching my kids like I don't care what color you are." We also had a teacher share, "I'm a Christian and I try to live that life," and admit she is "firm with religion" in her class. Perhaps, in contrast, we had teachers who "embrace students as they are," consider themselves an "ally" for their students, and approach social identities by "seeing the difference and understanding that and using the differences to help bring everything together." Another felt that differences could be ignored and that they are commonplace in the U.S.: "I tell my kids 'America means that it's your right to be offended.' You can look at something and look away from it if you don't like it, and we don't always have to fight that."

Perceptions of home life and expectations

Analysis revealed that teachers saw many differences in the students' home versus school lives. Much interview discussion included negative perceptions and assumptions about the structure and order in students' home lives. This quote was provided by one teacher, "I'm not saying all, but I think for a good amount of kids they don't go home to structure. I think some of

my kids go home to them being alone until later at night. They may have family members that are in prison. I have mothers that manage a bar." Another teacher shared, "I understand that a lot of kids don't have a lot of order, and routine to their home lives. I mean, I wouldn't say a lot, some. I feel like they almost crave that [order and routine]." This teacher went on to describe a previous teaching position in which she observed that:

> I had a lot of kids whose home lives were out of control. They would start to decline in their behavior, right before Christmas break, and summer break, because they just didn't really, I mean they couldn't voice that, 'I don't want to go home,' but they almost liked being here at school more.

Another teacher commented on the monitoring of expectations at home for some students, "there may be expectations at home but there not be anybody at home to follow through on those expectations."

However, several teachers provided a more positive lens to the differences in home and school life and expectations. A male math teacher shared, "we all have expectations with our child and then sometimes I think there' s seasons where we, you know, do what' s easiest just to get by and, you know, that could definitely create bad habits." Another teacher stated, "I'm pretty sure some parents outside have very high expectations for their kids, while some just let their kids try to figure it out one day at a time." The following quote eloquently summarizes the positive beliefs about students' home lives:

> There's a lot of close families. A lot of families who do things together, truly are concerned about each other, and they definitely welcome my being concerned for them as well. So, they may show love differently at home, but [I] might say most students are

loved. Yeah. Often times, by someone outside of their natural parent these days, but nevertheless, loved.

Inappropriate beliefs about students

Finally, we feel it is important to acknowledge that another domain that emerged during analysis was the use of inappropriate language or microaggressions by teachers during the interviews. Though variant in its frequency, the emergence of this domain during the interviews was surprising to discover especially since these teachers were recommended as exemplar educators. Participants shared experiences and used language that, during analysis, we felt was offensive to students and their families. For example, one teacher referred to some of her "Spanish" students as "right off the boat kids." Another teacher jokingly shared, "I threatened one kid that I was going to adopt him just so I could take him home, feed him and beat his butt when he didn't bring home good grades."

DISCUSSION

Using a methodologically rigorous CQR analysis process, we heard from nominated and exemplar teachers about what they think a culturally responsive teacher looks like and what behaviors and practices a culturally responsive teacher enacts in the classroom. Findings showed a range of commonly used teaching practices, CRP, and practices that straddle the line between the two in participant classrooms. Teachers also commented on the school-wide dynamics and classroom culture that they seek to build. Finally, themes emerged regarding the teacher attitudes and beliefs that influence their culturally responsive classroom culture. Study findings provide unique insight into how to the strengthen measurement of teacher CRPs.

Participant discussion of the practices of a culturally responsive teacher revealed several commonly taught and used teaching practices. These practices have a large evidence base

(Korpershoek et al., 2016) and most states have a requirement that accredited teacher preparation programs include instruction in classroom management (Freeman et al., 2014). While research shows that there are certain practices, like classroom management and differentiated instruction, that are essential to effective teaching; perhaps the difference comes in *how* classroom management and differentiated instruction is employed with students. For example, setting up boundaries, rules, and expectations has long been found to create a safe and orderly classroom for students (Sugai & Horner, 2006). However, frameworks like positive behavior interventions and supports stress *how* you set up the rules and expectations is just as important as *what* the rules and expectations are (Sugai & Horner, 2006). By providing students a voice in establishing these rules and expectations, a teacher communicates that the classroom belongs to everyone and creates a space for collaboration and cooperation (Sugai & Horner, 2006). For example, through the process of getting to know students while setting up the classroom culture, teachers and students could jointly set classroom rules and expectations that are respectful of the multiple roles and responsibilities that students may have in their home life. Through cultivating a community of collaboration with all students in the classroom this commonly used practice can lean towards being culturally responsive.

In addition, while some may think teachers' use of commonly used teaching practices lends credibility to the belief that CRP is just good teaching, we argue, in agreement with Geneva Gay (2000), that the standards and practices of good teaching in the U.S. are inherently driven by the culture of the mainstream population. As a result, these commonly used practices can also be used to reinforce mainstream values instead of diverse values (e.g., competition vs cooperation, individual effort vs. working with others) and benefit some students more than others. For example, focusing on competition for the individual high grades among students, may

be a detriment to students who work best in cooperation with others or in groups. In contrast, culturally responsive classroom management is a distinct area of scholarship from traditional classroom management research that focuses on how teachers equitably establish and enforce classroom expectations (Siwatu et al., 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004). This approach to classroom management is characterized by its incorporation of student perspectives, backgrounds, and identities when considering communication, engagement, and participation (Hickey & Schafer, 2013). It also aims to address racial injustice and inequities in the education system by affirming the cultural wealth of students of color through behavior management (Gay, 2013).

It is important to note that it was challenging during the interviews to elicit the qualities and behaviors of culturally responsive teachers from participants. Even when participants were probed to provide examples of these behaviors, many provided vague, generalized responses. Overall, the responses that were provided aligned with the "R" domain for Reflective Thinking in the Double Check CARES framework (Debnam et al., 2017). Consistent with study findings related to self-reflection and getting rid of bias and preconceived notions, this domain describes a need for examination of one's own social, cultural, and class membership, and how these factors interact with the group memberships of students. As noted in the Double Check framework, indicators of thoughtful reflection related to culturally responsive practice include (1) understanding the concept of culture and why it is important; (2) being aware of one's own and others' socio-cultural histories; (3) considering how past and current circumstances contribute to presenting behaviors; (4) examining one's own attitudes and biases, and seeing how they impact relationships with students; (5) articulating positive and constructive views of difference; and (6) making tangible efforts to reach out and understand differences (Richards et al., 2007; Villegas

& Lucas, 2002). Though teachers in the current study had a hard time articulating these specific behaviors, many were able to identify some of the qualities within themselves.

One frequently endorsed behavior of culturally responsive teachers was bringing in student interests and tailoring the curriculum for students. Participants describe many ways that they attempt to incorporate the interests of their students into their lessons. Some examples included using students' favorite characters from a favorite television show in math and teaching students the Spanish translation for some of their favorite activities (i.e., hunting, fishing). Through anecdotes, teachers described that students are more engaged in learning when they are able to connect with the curriculum. This is consistent with research that shows that a lack of connection to the curriculum is one of the reasons that many students drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Bringing in student interests is also a domain in the Double Check framework, "C" for connecting to the curriculum. In fact, this domain stresses that in CRP the connection should go beyond the superficiality of *heroes and holidays* and focus on the delivery of learning activities that resonate well below the surface of observable traditions and artistic expressions. It also emphasizes that the prevailing attitude guiding curriculum and instruction reflect a partnership between teacher and student in the goal of mastering the material (Gay, 2002a; Haberman, 1995; McIntyre, 1996). Given partnership between student and teacher was not expressed by study participants, future research should consider how teachers view their relationship with students towards mastery of the curriculum.

As illustrated in the figure, interviews revealed several practices that seemed to straddle the line between being described as CRP and a commonly used practice. Through interview probes we were able to draw from participants some of the practices that they used in their own

classrooms. However, it was generally unclear if they felt their own classroom practices were culturally responsive. Participants talked about these practices as if they were what made them a good teacher as opposed to them being behaviors of a CRP teacher. For this reason, we labeled these practices as straddling the line. Practices like getting to know students and building positive relationships with them are universally thought of as sound evidence-based teaching practice (McLeskey et al., 2017). Again, it is perhaps in *how* these practices are executed that they become culturally responsive or not. For example, while wanting to learn more about student's families demonstrates a desire to build a relationship, that relationship can be harmed if the teacher forms a disapproving view of the student because of their home life. This is also true when deciding how and when to discuss culture in the classroom. We heard from some teachers that culture was sometimes not appropriate and sometimes a good fit. It is unclear how teachers determine when and how it appropriate to bring culture into their lessons.

What was most surprising in this study was the use of derogatory language and microaggressions during the interviews with participants. Though teachers were recommended to participate in the study because of their exemplar teaching capabilities and culturally responsive practice, it was clear that there is still much room for growth. This was particularly exemplified during discussion about student identity groups and students' home life and expectations at home. For example, notions of not caring about race or being color-blind have been found to be particularly harmful to African American students (Williams & Land, 2006). Taking up a race neutral stance, or endorsing the color-blind myth, as several participants did, is a form of racism that overlooks the history, struggles, and individuality of African Americans in an attempt to maintain equality despite decades of research showing that considering race in the classroom helps address the needs of the student (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Williams & Land, 2006). Some

teachers also felt that students' home lives did not provide enough structure and order, and this negatively affects students at school. However, one could also argue that homes are not the place for rigorous structure and order like at school or work. Classroom and home settings are distinct settings with different expectations and priorities. The issue is not that home and school are different, but that students may have difficulty navigating the boundary between home and school given the differing expectations (Phelan et al., 1991).

Limitations

One important limitation of this study is that we were only able to elicit the perspective of select classroom teachers and had limited knowledge about their individual teaching backgrounds. It is equally important, if not more important, to triangulate these perspectives with student experiences, caregiver perspectives, and direct observations. Students often have a different perspective of the teachers that they engage with each day. Their opinions of culturally responsive teaching practices are critically important to the field. We must also acknowledge there are limitations in one's ability to self-reflect on their teaching practice and critique themselves. In addition, teachers' classroom practices are influenced by a wide range of personal factors and professional restrictions. Finally, while nomination was used to identify exemplar teachers, this sampling procedure was still limited by the nominators' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and what occurs in an individual teacher's classroom.

Implications

The impetus for this study was a desire to identify and describe the discrete and malleable indicators of culturally responsive teaching. Although prior studies have interviewed teachers about strategies they use to promote CRPs (Abacioglu, 2020; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2019), the present study was unique in how we sampled teachers (i.e., teachers nominated

specifically for exemplary CRP skills), the conceptual lens we used to guide our work (i.e., Double Check CARES), and the focus on asking teachers to specify discrete CRPs that could be used to guide measure development. For instance, in the current study we saw some similarities with findings from the Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) and Rychly and Graves (2012) studies, such as the importance of respect in building classroom culture and multicultural content delivery were noted by teachers in both studies. However, differences were found with respect to the importance of acting immediately as resources for students outside of the school day and being a parental figure within the classroom. Teachers from our sample do not use these as CRP strategies. Study findings also revealed that many teacher behaviors are related to commonly used and evidence-based teaching practices and some that straddle the line between common practices and CRP. However, as noted by participants, the implementation of these behaviors can have iatrogenic or positive effects on students. For example, neglecting to provide examples of women and people of color as scientists and mathematicians when connecting students to the curriculum could have iatrogenic effects on the career aspirations of students. Thus, research is needed to measure iatrogenic or positive implementation of these practices reliably and validly in the classroom. Future research must also wrestle with how to support the culturally responsive implementation of these commonly used teaching practices. Studies have found that teacher coaching may be one way to support initial implementation of culturally responsive practices (Bradshaw et al., 2018b; Pas et al., 2016). More research is needed to determine what other supports are needed to help teacher sustain these practices in the long term.

From a practice perspective, we must also consider the larger school and district that teachers operate within. Teachers who seek to be more culturally responsive in the classroom sometimes do this in isolation from or in opposition to other teachers in their school building.

Indeed, in the current study, teachers described sometimes feeling uncomfortable confronting other teachers about their lack of CRPs. Attempting to enact CRPs in the classroom without support from other teachers and administrators could prove challenging and could have personal consequences in today's climate where in some localities practices like culturally responsive teaching have been restricted.

There is also emerging research that culturally sustaining teaching practices are more beneficial to students when compared to culturally responsive teaching. Culturally sustaining teaching aims to "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). It does not prioritize mainstream culture and ideology, but encourages students to engage with multiple and shifting cultural groups and celebrates cultural dexterity (Woodard et al., 2017). The role of the teacher in this approach is to incorporate and honor both mainstream and diverse worldviews (Puzio et al., 2017). This approach is contrasted with culturally responsive and culturally relevant approaches that have been often reduced to simply incorporating more culturally relevant material into mainstream educational practices (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 2014). In fact, Ladson-Billings who coined the term culturally relevant teaching, recently acknowledge that culturally sustaining is built upon and extends CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

In conclusion, the current study extends our understanding of CRPs in the classroom environment to guide the development of discrete measures of these practices. We heard from teachers who had received training in CRPs how they define a CRP teacher and how they execute the implementation of CRPs in their classroom environment. Yet, study findings and extant research suggest that there may not be one universal way to implement CRPs in the classroom. It is more likely that being perceived as culturally responsive includes incorporating a

constellation of commonly used classroom behaviors and practices that are implemented using a culturally sustaining, equitable, and student-centered lens. Given the vastly changing needs and demographics of our student population in the U.S., it is imperative that teachers are provided the training, support, resources, and accountability for enacting culturally responsive practices in their classrooms.

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Table 1. Summary of Domains and Categories with Exemplars

Domain/Category	Cases	Exemplar core idea
School-wide Dynamics		
School characteristics	Typical	"…in my observations though, I know for a fact that different groups of kids are treated differently because of cultural differences."
Co-worker interactions	Typical	"…as just a person working in this building I've encountered situations that are uncomfortable which I've struggled with like how to address cause they're like my colleagues"
Classroom Culture	General	" I like things to be very mellow and very like calm, and so like I that's the kind of atmosphere I want to set and I've tried."
Common teaching practices		
Classroom management	General	"It's the teacher setting the expectations that in this room, as dorky as it sounds, we're going to be respectful, responsible, and safe, and holding the kids to that and modeling that."
Differentiation in instruction	Typical	"As teachers, our job is to learn how each student learns, and then teach that way."
Home/Caregiver communication	Typical	"I reach out anytime there is something negative obviously, but I also love sending little love notes home, essentially is what I call them."
Culturally responsive teacher qualities, actions, and behaviors		
Qualities	General	"I need to be aware of the privileges that I have been lucky enough to experience in my life. I need to check my biases and try to not whitewash history...being aware of biases, being aware of privileges and understanding that not all of your students are the same and that they don't come from the same background, and trying to get to know each student and understand their motivations for things."
Actions & Behaviors	General	"So I think that's that constant internal conversation and checking yourself

		because it is. It is a thing, and so whether it's in your classroom and the two or three white girls over there jabbing away in the middle of the class, you recognizing that, 'Okay, are you calling them out just like you would call the three black girls that were jabbing over on the other corner. Are you treating everybody the same?'"
Bringing in student interests/tailoring curriculum	Typical	"Culturally responsive teaching to me means helping my students feel represented in the curriculum, but also showing them where they fit into society and what they will be doing after high school."
Straddling the Line		
Getting to know students	General	"I'd say we'd have this conversation of the building and I think this is something we have to continually grow in, you've got to know where they are and where they come from."
Building Relationships	General	"You have to have a relationship first. And then, when you have a relationship, then they'll respect you more, they'll listen."
Tailoring Communications	General	"There are some students that respond better to, you know one-on-one, 'Hey, let' s get to work on this.' Some students respond better to being challenged. There are some students who respond better to sarcasm, you know. "
Discussing Culture in Class	General	"If they come up and we get in a side conversation sometimes. You know, when we're doing a math problem but we're also having a side conversation, but I don't think we necessarily address culture outside of like morning rally."
Teacher factors that influence classroom culture		
Approach to social identities	Typical	"I'm very firm with religion. I'm a Christian and I try to live that life…Race is okay, but I don't dwell in that too much. I try not to stress the small stuff unless it really does affect me, but I try to reach all my kids."
Perceptions of home and life experiences	Typical	"I had a lot of kids whose home lives were out of control. They would start to decline in their behavior, right before Christmas

		break, and summer break, because they just didn't really, I mean they couldn't voice that, "I don't want to go home," but they almost liked being here at school more"
Inappropriate beliefs about students	Variant	"In the past I've had like right off the boat kids, mostly Spanish I've had."

Note: General = 12 or more cases; Typical = 7-11 cases; Variant = 2-6 cases

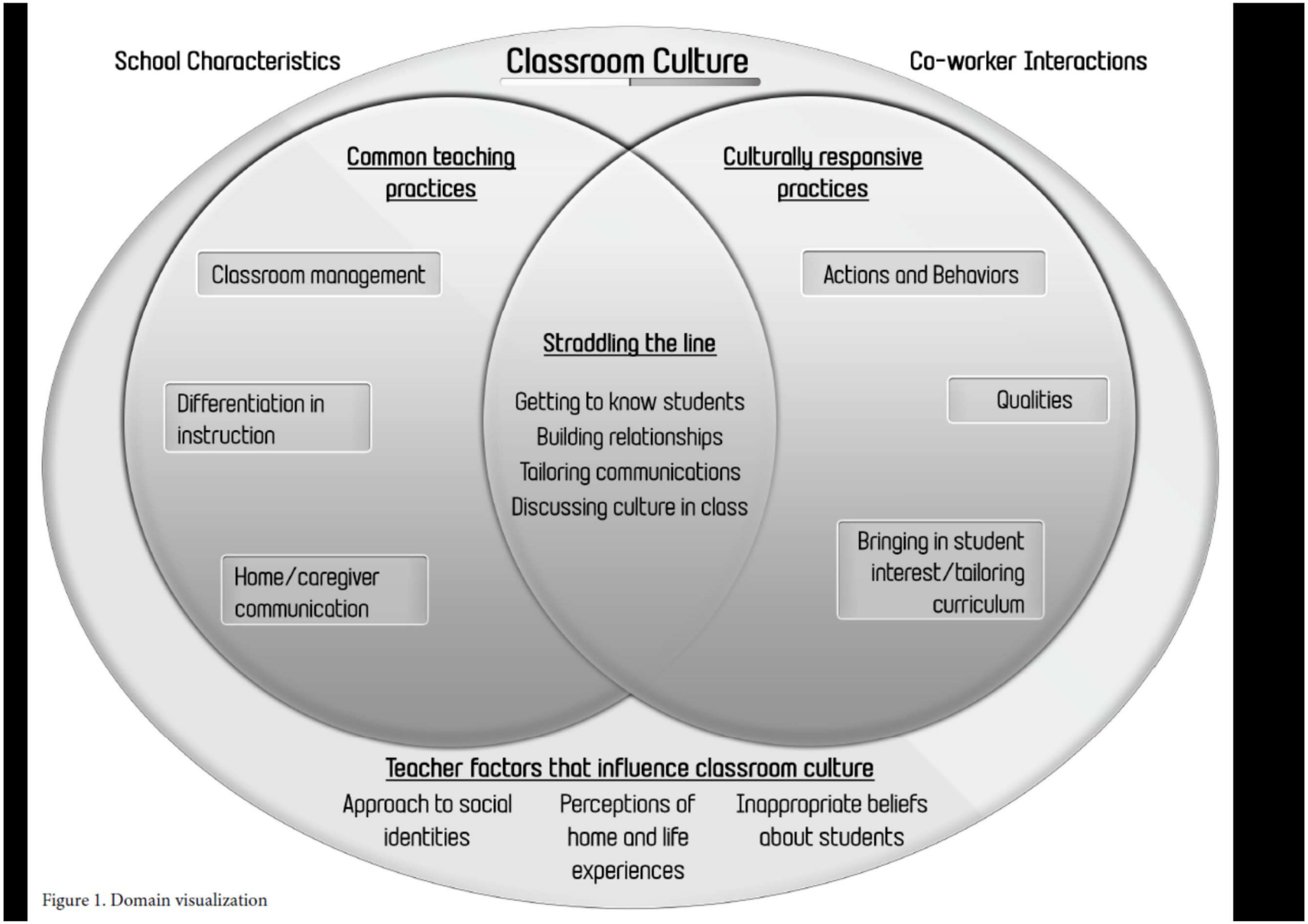

Figure 1. Domain visualization

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