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Teachers today feel pressure to maximize student engagement and learning. With an increased focus on student scores on end-of-grade test measures and their association with school performance grades, educators are forced to consider how to yield results. Limiting the disruptions and distractions throughout the school day shifts the focus to student behavior. In order to elicit desirable behaviors from students, schools, and teachers prioritize values to cultivate in students. The rationale for this study came from my desire to gain a deeper understanding of what teachers conceptualize their role to be in developing the values of their students. Therefore, this basic qualitative study explored: (a) what values elementary public school teachers think they should teach students in a diverse society, both explicitly and implicitly; (b) how teachers feel they teach their students these values (explicitly and implicitly) and what power do they have to do so; and (c) how teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach.

This critical qualitative study explores the values that elementary (K-5) school teachers feel are important to teach students. Nine teachers from various locations across the state of North Carolina were represented in this study. Using an online platform, participants engaged in two rounds of individual interviews and submitted 3-5 classroom photographs from the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year as well as 4 weeks of lesson plans reflecting their classroom instruction. The methodological approach for this basic qualitative study was through an interpretivist, constructivist paradigm, while Critical Theory served as the theoretical framework by which the data and findings were analyzed. The significance of the findings from this study

have potential to contribute to ongoing discourse about what teachers conceptualize their role to be in teaching values and the ways they design instructional opportunities to do so. Additionally, this study highlights the need for administrators and policymakers to work to disrupt systems and policies related to censorship of teachers as they navigate providing students with inclusive learning experiences that reflect all members of society.

Keywords: curricular practices, elementary education, teachers, values

WHAT DO TEACHERS VALUE? A STUDY EXAMINING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS, AND CURRICULAR PRACTICES IN SHAPING STUDENT VALUES

by

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Approved by

____

Dr. Leila Villaverde
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my children, Stavros and Marianna. I know this has been a long journey, but I hope watching me along the way showed you that you can accomplish anything! Sometimes life feels like a sprint—but slow and steady wins the race!

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Mary Elizabeth Meyer, has been approved by the following committee of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Walking down the third-grade hallway, my class was met by Hattie's class. The slightest buzz of conversation was beginning to trickle through our line as we made our way back from the assembly. "Can you believe an actual NFL team came to our school!?" one student says to another. Similar statements followed as the students buzzed with excitement from being in the presence of some of their favorite athletes. As my eyes met Hattie's, I could instantly sense her discontent. Her line of students walked down the hallway, poised, forward-facing almost expressionless, one behind the other. My students were *graping* (what I affectionately refer to them as when they are clumped together, much like grapes). With a very stern tone, Hattie quickly reminded my students that we are supposed to be in a straight line with no talking in the hallway. As someone who frequently seeks explanations to understand the reasons *why* certain rules are in place, I was shocked to see that before I could pose the question, Hattie had followed up with, "in life you have to learn that you must obey and follow basic instructions! We are all accountable to someone!" The looks on my student's faces varied between annoyed and completely perplexed.

Walking through schools today, it is not uncommon to notice what types of behaviors teachers value by observing the habits and dispositions they work to develop in their students. In an effort to elicit the compliance of students early on, many teachers employ the use of character development approaches and behavior management programs as a way to establish norms for *good*, or desirable, behaviors. The prevailing problem is that in trying to help students develop and elicit desirable behaviors, the methods often reinforce the values of the dominant culture.

According to Shields (2011), "few people remember most of what they learned in school; however, they carry forward with them patterns of thinking, styles of interaction, and modes of

engagement" (p. 49). Behaviors such as a prescribed way to move through the school building and not questioning authority figures have negatively impacted teachers' abilities to educate in a way that prepares students for their role as future citizens in a democracy.

Originally the American education system was established as a means of ensuring that democratic values were instilled in the youth of our society. However, only some were thought capable of being participants in a "democracy." Women nor folks of color could vote, so schools were created to both abide by the rule of religion, assimilate into the "American/patriotic way" and eventually establish a workforce. Spring (2018) noted that "it was believed that if children were exposed to a common instruction in morality and politics the nation might become free of crime, immoral behavior, and the possibility of political revolution" (p. 5). With the goal of social order and developing an understanding of the *identity* of our nation, school was established to support developing the future citizenry, focusing on newly immigrated populations and *Americanizing* them.

When we consider what schooling encompasses today, we see how the focus has shifted to a more standardized or routinized way of delivering instruction. Students, teachers, and schools alike face systems of accountability that serve to squelch the potential for creativity and establish a culture of worry and fear of labels such as "low performing" and "not meeting growth." With these systems, teachers and schools employed a variety of methods and strategies to decrease undesirable student behaviors and increase time on task, capitalizing on compliance in order to teach as much information as possible to avoid potential sanctions from low student performance.

According to Meir (2003) "the current crisis in education rests not on student performance but the ebbing strength of our democratic and egalitarian culture" (p. 18). Consider

a classroom where students enter and are taught to communicate openly, share ideas and develop mutually supportive relationships that help to guide their thinking and construct knowledge about the world around them. Values are always taught, communicated to students either explicitly or implicitly. It is important that teachers are concerned with emphasizing the social aspects of learning by focusing on values and reasoning, allowing for time and space to engage critically.

Today, these classrooms are few and far between. Teachers feel the top-down pressures of ensuring that students demonstrate growth and proficiency within the content areas (specifically reading and math), while neglecting to allow time for other aspects of their personal growth and development, especially in addressing learning loss post-COVID, and stunted the social and emotional growth of students as they lost the ability to successfully socialize. Kohn (1997) asserts that what goes by the name of character education is largely a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they are told to do. Educators are faced with the reality that the dominant view of education prioritizes obedience and compliance. With an increased focus on employing the use of behavior management systems to help decrease distractible behaviors and time off task, districts/schools work to maximize student engagement with the purpose of increased end of grades test measures. Teachers are faced with an endless stream of mandates imposed at the district and building-level that encourage the use of monitoring systems in an effort to track student academic performance and growth.

This is something that I felt the pressures of in my own classroom. Oftentimes I would think to myself, “what if…?”- if only I had the space in terms of support from administration or time in my schedule and pacing to veer off the predetermined path. Issues of values education captured my attention, specifically when our administrators at the time decided that we would

start selecting students monthly who exhibited particular, desirable traits such as "responsibility", "integrity", "respectfulness" and so on. What seemed odd at that time was that we were randomly asked to identify students who could receive recognition as exemplifying this trait, but we had not worked to help students understand what it would look like or what these meant. As a teacher, I was stumped. Speaking with my colleagues helped me to see that we do *some* things that indirectly speak to this, but ultimately these conversations led me to question what teachers conceptualize their role to be in developing the values of their students.

Defining Values

Values are the beliefs and principles that one believes to be important in the way we live our lives. Kirschenbaum (1995) defines values education as "the conscious attempt to help others acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that contribute to more personally satisfying and socially constructive lives" (p. 14). It is important to consider who defines what a personally satisfying and socially constructive life looks like.

Typically, values are tied to a belief one has about what is right versus wrong. I acknowledge that there is a tremendous amount of existing literature that works to unpack the philosophical understanding of values, morals, ethics, and character as it relates to this topic; however, this is outside of the scope of my study. I am focused primarily on understanding the values that teachers prioritize for students and gaining an understanding of how they implement this into the curriculum they teach.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding how teachers feel they teach values to students is increasingly important given the political climate of today. Proponents for schools and teachers working to shape the values of students believe that they must create a process through which young people can learn

to recognize values and represent prosocial behaviors, engage in actions that bring about a better life for others, and appreciate ethical and compassionate conduct (Joseph et. al, 2005). While several research studies have been conducted to understand what teachers think about the development of student values overall and assess their level of preparedness to shape students (Chang & Munoz, 2006; Milson & Mehlig, 2002), few provide a space to collectively allow for the voice of the teachers to be heard. With curricular implementation throughout schools, teachers are in the trenches, so to speak, working to ensure that the nuances of these programs are carried out with fidelity.

In addition, although a substantial number of studies have been conducted on the various types of behavior management programs and character education curricula that educators use, there is little research that highlights what teachers conceptualize their role to be in developing the values of their students or the ways they design the implementation of this curriculum down to how they craft the space in their classroom for relationship building.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

In order to gain an understanding of what values teachers think are important to teach students in a diverse society, it is important to consider not only what occurs during the instructional day but also teachers' perceptions about their craft. Much of what occurs during the day-to-day planning of the classroom illustrates the values of the teacher.

Designing and conducting this research project during a pandemic proved to be challenging as I considered methodology. On March 23rd, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper of North Carolina issued an executive order closing schools for two weeks due to COVID-19. Watching numbers increase over the course of those two weeks affirmed that face-to-face learning was impossible for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Throughout the summer, teachers

eagerly awaited news of how schools would progress for the 2020-2021 school year as districts feverishly prepared a series of plans for potential scenarios at the request of state education leaders. Each district was tasked with developing operational guidelines for three plans:

Plan A: Reopen for face-to-face learning with minimal social distancing guidelines in place.

Plan B: Increased social distancing and operating at 50% capacity.

Plan C: Remote instruction only.

With each of these options, teachers were left to consider how they could replicate the typical learning environment in a way that ensured opportunities for learning. When schools experienced forced closures in the spring, it was understood that the duration of the school year would be a time when teachers would keep students actively engaged with content. Removing end-of-grade testing from the equation allowed for greater flexibility as communities and school personnel adjusted to a sudden shift in the familiarity of what *school* had suddenly become. For some schools, who were mission based, the removal of the end of grade tests allowed for an even greater embrace of the mission/philosophy/values of the school. This event ultimately led to a significant amount of discussion about whether this would be the event that pushed for educational reform, including the obscene reliance on standardized tests.

On July 14, 2020, Governor Cooper announced that schools could operate under Plan B, but districts reserved the right to start the 2020-2021 school year with the more conservative Plan C, if they felt it was in the best interest of their students. As schools continued to evaluate their chosen plan in conjunction with current data and trends and adjust restrictions accordingly, I was forced to consider how I would conduct this research project in a manner that limited exposure to larger groups of students and lessened my interactions with others. Restrictions on visitors

coming in and out of the building, as well as the disparities between counties, and often schools within a county, impacted the methodology of this research project.

As I approached this research project I was also reminded of the dual role I played in the field of education. Leveraging my own classroom during the time of a pandemic while also trying to lead and conduct a research project led me to consider the challenges that my potential participants also faced. While many schools finished out the first 4 months of the 2020-2021 school year in a back and forth game of remote and hybrid learning, others were completely face to face without interruption or remained in remote learning.

Subsequently, guidance provided at the time, in the Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit (K-12) by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services created even more debate about whether it was safe for students to return and within what parameters. On February 2nd, 2021 Governor Roy Cooper, state superintendent Catherine Truitt, Dr. Mandy Cohen, and Eric Davis sent a letter to all North Carolina school board members and superintendents “strongly recommending that all public schools provide in-person instruction” (Cooper et al., 2021). A little over a month later, on March 11, 2021, North Carolina Senate Bill 220 enacted that:

> All local school administrative units shall provide in-person instruction to students in grades kindergarten through 12 enrolled in that unit in accordance with this act for the remainder of the scheduled 2020-2021 school year, beginning no later than the first instructional day scheduled in the adopted school calendar that occurs 21 days following the effective date of this act.

To say that teachers were frustrated is a gross understatement. Many waited days for clarification from their districts about what this meant, struggling to wrap their minds around the disruption of

learning would look like to transition back to in-person instruction with less than 8 weeks remaining in the school year.

As I began this work, I kept in mind the constant yo-yoing that had taken a toll on most. Ultimately the decisions leaders at the state and local level have made changed what learning looked like for many over the course of the school year, and for some it was a constant game of back and forth between in-person and remote, depending on COVID-19 metrics in their area. It was important that I designed my research study in a way that allowed me to fully develop an understanding of what values teachers feel are important to teach students and how they do so, regardless of how teachers were delivering instruction as a result of COVID-19. For purposes of this research study, the term *classroom* looked significantly different, depending on how local leadership responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What values do elementary public school teachers think they should teach students in a diverse society, both explicitly and implicitly?

RQ2: How do teachers feel they teach their students these values (explicitly and implicitly) and what power do they have to do so?

RQ3: How do teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach?

Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the values elementary public school teachers prioritize for students, how they teach values to students, and how they navigate the contradictions of what they think should be taught and what they are expected to

teach by identifying patterns and interpreting the data collected through interviews, document analysis, and photo-elicitation. I acknowledge that often variables being analyzed are complex in nature and at times difficult to measure. Operating from the interpretivist, constructivist research paradigm, I am focused primarily on how various perspectives come together to help construct meaning. Approaching this research project in this manner allowed me to explore the contextualized interpretations from the collected data.

Greene (1994) writes that "what is important to know, what constitutes an appropriate and legitimate focus for social inquiry, is the phenomenological meaningfulness of lived experience people's interpretations and sense making of their experiences in a given context" (p. 536). As a researcher, I seek to understand the nuances of social interaction that occur in the learning environment. The role of the teacher and what that individual embodies is unique in regards to how they structure their classroom, their day-to-day interactions with students, and how they cultivate a climate for learning. Teachers have reasons for what they do in their classrooms. Approaching this project from this paradigm enabled me to better understand the various dynamics at play and help to construct meaning around *what* is happening.

Entering this research project as both a researcher and a classroom teacher, it was important that I leverage my roles in a manner that allows me to carefully construct meaning in a credible and ethical way. By design, ensuring constant reflection of my interpretations constructed through interviews, document analysis, and photo-elicitation, I sought to triangulate the data in a manner that assured methodological quality. Greene (1994) highlights that "interpretivist evaluators reject the conventional stance that proper methods can insulate against bias and thereby ensure objectivity and truth" (p. 537). Understanding that I am not alone in constructing the interpretations is important. As an interpretivist researcher, I am guided by the

belief that interpretations and meaning can be constructed through the interactions between the participants and myself as well. Therefore I employed critical theory as my framework for the study.

I have leaned on the works of Kincheloe, Giroux, hooks, and Friere throughout my practice since I started my doctoral studies and infused even in how I conceptualized the study and analyzed the data. Even what I considered data was influenced by this framework. Kincheloe (2008) suggests we should pay attention to "how data comes to be called knowledge" and that it's "an epistemology of practice" that matters and how it "differs in the standardized, test-driven curriculum of the present" (pp. 6–7). What is considered knowledge or deemed important to be taught today is heavily influenced by educational laws and reform that sought to standardize or generalize learning in a way that delegates a "correct way to teach and the right way for students to learn" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 6). In this study, I am looking beyond the standards and curricula that teachers are *asked* (told) to teach and understand the ways they operationalize values they feel are important in concert with the work they do in the day-to-day.

Critical theory and pedagogy allow us to see the effects of power manifested in the everyday. For instance, teachers make decisions about "a critical understanding of the ways power shapes knowledge and the role such certified knowledge plays in constructing forms of consciousness that accede to the needs of dominant power" is my central concern here (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 8). This is at the heart of what I am curious about in regards to the values teachers feel are important to teach students and their ability to incorporate these into the curricula they teach. Regardless of how right-wing politics has vilified of the use of the word "values" as it relates to the lessons teachers develop for students, questioning any value that does not align with the conservative agenda, many teachers consider it important to teach students in a

way that infuses values they feel are important for them to have as they navigate all the various situations that await them and engaging within a world full of diversity, either by being polite or by being critical. I am drawn to consider what power teachers feel they have to teach these values to students and also how important they feel it is to do it in the absence of that power.

Methodological Overview

For this study I used a basic qualitative approach to explore what values teachers feel are important to teach students and how they do this in their classrooms. I also look at the power teachers feel they have to teach these values to students and how much they do so in contradiction to what they value. I solicited participants for this study via a flier distributed across my social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) and asking contacts to do so as well. A demographic survey was shared with potential participants to help screen for appropriate fit.

I interviewed nine K-5 licensed teachers in North Carolina public schools. Once participants were identified, I conducted initial and follow up interviews that lasted one hour each. Each interview was guided by a set of interview questions that aligned with the three research questions (Appendix D). Participants then submitted 3-5 classroom photographs from the 2020-2021 school year and the 2021-2022 school year as well as 4 weeks' worth of lesson plans. Analysis and open coding took place in an on-going process to ensure the most accurate analysis possible. In addition, I completed member check-ins with participants, ensuring accuracy of my interpretation and analysis that lasted about 30 minutes each.

Researcher Positionality

Carefully examining my positionality as a qualitative researcher allows me to examine how my collective experiences, as an individual, are present as I conducted and interpreted data that I gathered. First, I grew up in the Piedmont area of North Carolina in a home where my

parents viewed the Bible as our basis for understanding how to live a fulfilling life. Early on, I was immersed in Southern Baptist traditions and readings that taught values important to my faith and my family. I quickly learned that respect, compliance, and honesty, to name a few, were hallmarks of a *good* person. My childhood was filled with “no ma’am”, “yes ma’am” and learning not to question people in positions of authority. It was instilled in me that these people were older and wiser, and it was an insult to question them.

Most of these early lessons carried over into my educational experiences and helped me to be a “successful” student in that I could do what was asked and not question why. I do not have fond memories of my elementary school years. The majority of my teachers valued very regimented behavioral models where students were seen and not heard. I learned quickly how to successfully play the game and comply.

Growing up in a racially divided area, the majority of my formative years were spent surrounded by people who looked and lived similarly to me. As a privileged white female, I was immersed in violin lessons at the North Carolina School of the Arts, active in community youth service organizations, and ultimately segregated from others who did not fall into those categories. I did not grow up with many friends who were representative of other cultural or ethnic backgrounds. It was not until high school and college that I began to meet people that were different from my predominantly white, Protestant, middle-class upbringing, representing a variety of cultures and ethnicities.

After graduating with a degree in Curriculum and Instruction, I accepted a teaching position at a high poverty school that some family members referred to as on “the wrong side of town.” It was here that I began to notice how different educational experiences could be, depending on who you were and where you lived. During student teaching I noticed that the

students who attended a school closer to where I lived were given the freedom of choice to explore and question as they learned. Students were trusted to walk down the hallways without the supervision of an adult, they were able to chat freely with one another and they had control over the direction of their learning by way of interest surveys and check-ins with their teachers.

Noticing this piqued my interest in the disparities of educational opportunities that students were afforded depending on their socioeconomic status as well as race. Once I was settled into my first classroom, I remember feeling like I needed more support in helping my students become proficient readers. Half of the students in my class were English language learners and with such varying levels of ability, I knew I needed more tools in my toolkit to be able to help them grow. Completing my Masters in Reading Education not only assisted me in better understanding the needs of my students, but it also allowed me to explore how instrumental children's literature and students' interaction with texts can serve as a springboard for rich classroom discussion.

Being a classroom teacher for the past 18 years has given me the perspective of seeing how changes such as Common Core and Read to Achieve have shaped the educational landscape for teachers and their students alike. I have felt the same pressures day in and day out and faced the dreaded word: *accountability*. Through the course of my pilot research study, this word was used repeatedly throughout the interview process, and ultimately the repetitive nature and power in how it resonates with fellow teachers led me to identify it as an overarching theme in my data.

As I explored this study, I reminded myself to reflect and continuously ask questions of others about my research interactions along the way (Glesne, 2016). In an effort to attend to issues of trustworthiness throughout this research study, I examined my positionality in a manner that Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) assert that "we interrogate each of ourselves regarding

the ways that research efforts are staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives" (p. 124).

Although the word *accountability* evoked a range of emotions with participants in the pilot study, it is important for me to consider how it influences the nature of this study. In doing this work, I held myself *accountable* to ensure I am questioning the ways in which I code and analyze the data. Recognizing my Christian faith throughout was important as I explored the ways that teachers express that they teach values to students. I acknowledge that my faith influences how I approach this work; however, my criticality is key as I considered my position and reflected throughout. Using the help of a critical partner while doing this work also helped to provide a safeguard to ensure I "kept track of my subjective self and questioning how and why I made certain interpretations (and not others)" (Glesne, 2016, p. 147) Acknowledging how my positionality influenced my interpretations and understandings throughout the research process was instrumental to ensuring that I stayed reflexive.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In this chapter, I introduce the research topic, sharing my interest as a teacher researcher, providing the background context and purpose and significance of the study. I also present a short description of the theoretical framework that guides this research study. Furthermore, I introduce the research methodology and state the research questions. I conclude this chapter by addressing my positionality as a researcher and then provide an overview of the chapters that follow.

In the second chapter, I provide an analysis of the research literature that informs this research study. I divided the literature review into three primary sections. In the first section, I discuss the historical context surrounding teaching values to students in American schools. I do

so as a way to provide context around how schools have historically served as a place that works to shape the values of students. I highlight key periods in the history of education that illustrate important shifts in values education. In the second section, I include information on teacher efficacy as it relates to values education, highlighting existing literature and studies. In the third section, I address the hidden curriculum and its role in the unintended lessons or values that students learn in school.

In the third chapter, I describe the methodology for this study. I outline the research design for this basic qualitative study, sharing how a pilot study influenced the design of this study. I then detail strategies I used for recruitment and selection of participants. Next, I discuss the data collection procedures I used, providing a description of how initial interviews were conducted and analyzed, outlining how the collection procedures and document analysis of the photographs and lesson plans submitted by participants and the rationale for final interviews with participants. I then attend to how I maintained trustworthiness throughout the analysis portion of this research study.

In the fourth chapter I provide an introduction to the nine participants in this study. I describe them and what stood out throughout the course of the data collection. In addition, I present collages of the collected photo-elicitation data and a snapshot of lesson plans to help provide a sense of who the participants are and how they organize their learning spaces.

In the fifth chapter, I present the first of three themes that emerged, the implications of teacher identity and experiences on classroom practices. I use direct quotes from interviews to help develop an understanding of who the participants are, then I share classroom photographs from the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year to help imagine the classroom space where the

participants teach and finally, share lesson plan excerpts showing how teachers plan for instruction.

In the sixth chapter, I describe the last two themes that emerged: the use of children's literature as a springboard for teaching values to students and the impact of accountability on teacher practice. I explore how these two themes are interwoven as teachers often experience some level of censorship with the topics they broach and the texts they select to teach values to students. I also share how teachers face district level and building level obstacles with accountability that ultimately impacts their pedagogical practices.

In the seventh and final chapter, I conclude this research study by answering the research questions. I outline the implications for this study and then discuss the limitations and recommendations for future research and practice. I then share concluding thoughts that emerged as I completed the study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I divide my review of literature into three main sections. In the first section, I focus on the history of character education and moral development in American schools. I do so as a way to provide context around how schools have historically served as a place that works to develop the values of its students. I highlight key periods in the history of education that illustrate important shifts in values education. In the second section, I include information on teacher efficacy as it relates to values education, highlighting existing literature and studies. In the third section, I address the hidden curriculum and its role in the unintended lessons or values that students learn in school. The sections that follow provide a context for relevant areas related to my study and more literature will be discussed throughout the dissertation, particularly pertaining to the findings and data analysis.

Introduction

Taking a closer look at the aims of education throughout time illustrates important perspectives on the goals of schooling and what a community values. Schools are places that serve to prepare students for the future. Whether the focus is on their personal academic development (to become more knowledgeable) or to become upstanding citizens (good), schools have been tasked with cultivating the habits and dispositions of a society's future citizens. Joseph (2000) points out that "complex patterns of knowledge and interaction are learned both through formal and informal means of cultural transmission" (p. 16). Schools serve as the primary site for this, demonstrating the strong concern for the socialization of students. Schools operate as a "microcosm that is representative of the society in which it is situated, a space that has the power to shape young minds by connecting people who do not have duties of kinship to one another" (Han, 2016), often acting as a means for social glue.

Starting in the early 19th century there was increased interest in educating for character development, utilizing a more traditional approach that focused on the inculcation of desirable habits (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006, p. 497). The growth of moral education programs in the United States coincided with the rise in high-stakes testing of student achievement, leaving the No Child Left Behind Act to ask schools to contribute not only to students' academic performance but also to their character (Benninga et al., 2006, p. 448). There is an element of appeal with regard to moral education in the post-Trump era in which we are living today. Still feeling the reverberations and irreparable damage of a presidency that was marred by moral deficits that perpetuated further divisiveness, it is important that we, as a nation, take care not to lose our capacity to engage a sociopolitical ethical compass that we as community members should care about. However, what does it really mean to develop such a compass and shape the *values* of an individual? More often than not, character education and moral education are used synonymously as ways that this is done. Previously any discussion of values in terms of education has been relegated to character education and moral development, both situated within a white Christian ideology. This is a dissertation unto itself and although this is critically important to understand as the grounds for the immersion of these ideas into education, my deep interest is in hearing what values teachers prioritize to teach students and why.

Lickona (1989) states that "*character* is essentially values in action and consists of knowing the good, desiring the good and doing good" (p. 51). Values are the basic fundamental beliefs that help one to determine what is *good* or desirable. Values are central to the core of a society. Doyle (1997) notes that "values are the engine that define and drive culture" (p. 440). The question becomes whose values are being taught, why, and how they are being presented in a way that shapes the culture of our society without dominating through a specific White

ideological indoctrination. Understanding how this has been situated over time and the historical backdrop is important for considering the implications of what teaching values looks like today and why it is important for teachers to speak about values with students.

Historical Perspectives

To better understand present-day values development, it is important to consider the historical backdrop. What we now consider character or moral development has been both a formal and informal part of schools since their inception. Therefore, I begin by providing a brief analysis of the history of values development from early colonial influence to 19th and 20th century contributions. In each section I highlight influential laws as well as figures that help provide a context as to the complexity of teaching values to students in American schools.

Historically speaking schools have been tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that they shape future citizens that demonstrate the values of the larger society. Since the inception of public schooling in the United States, the primary purpose of education has been to help students grow to be intelligent and morally *good* individuals (Lickona, 1988). As colonists settled in America, they brought with them the desire to educate their children in a manner steeped with Christian principles and ideals (McClellan, 1999; Spring, 1997). Aristotle first addressed the subject of how to develop the character of students and cultivate virtue:

> Moral virtues come from habit … they are in us neither by nature, nor despite nature, but we are furnished by nature with a capacity for receiving them, and we develop them through habit. (Bennett, 1993, p. 101)

The history of practicing the habits associated with moral development in America can be traced back to colonial times. While originally the family was the primary source of early training in moral development, communities also looked to the church for help with moral training (Cremin,

1964; Cubberly, 1919; Thayer, 1968). Everything from the lessons taught to the materials used were created and disseminated in a way that students were learning to read and write while simultaneously learning Protestant values.

While many attribute early schools with the Puritans, Salls (2007) points out that the "colonies of early America was made up of 3 distinct settlements: the Puritans of New England who were Calvanists, the Southern settlers who belonged to the Church of England, and the Middle colonies, most of whom initially were from Holland and the Dutch Reformed Church" (p. 5). The common factor for each of three settlements was that the King James Bible be used as a means to teach reading. For purposes of this study, I discuss Puritan contributions to education in colonial America.

Early America

Religion played an integral role in the emergence of early education in America. As a new nation, colonists worked to establish guiding beliefs and values that cultivated the habits and dispositions of their citizens. During this time period, the family was believed to carry the primary responsibility of the first forms of moral training (Cubberly, 1962; Wright, 1999). Salls (2007) notes that the Puritans, who were a Calvinistic community, were the most rigid in their views on life and good character, as they viewed children "needed to be trained in self-denial, in rigorous discipline, and above all else in obedience to authority" (p. 5). It is important to note that Puritans' rigidity in these areas was a result of their desire to establish religious discipline in their community. They believed that creating a model religious community would ultimately win God's approval and serve as a model for others (Spring, 2018, p. 19). Using the King James Bible as a basis, families worked to instruct children in a manner that ultimately established colonial education as an instrument of faith.

Early Homeschooling

Early education took place within the home out of necessity to learn to read in order to access Biblical teachings. Salls (2007) points out that the "Puritans believed that salvation came by way of scripture, therefore education was important not only for transmission of intellectual heritage but also for shaping their cultural community" (p. 5). During these early years families bore the responsibility of ensuring that their children could read as well as write. Parents taught their children fundamental literacy skills (reading and writing) so that they were properly instructed in the tenets of their faith (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). To ensure that this work was being done well, a series of laws were established. Each of these brought about a shift in colonial education, further illustrating the importance that was placed on attitudes towards religion and learning at the time.

Massachusetts Law of 1642

The Massachusetts Law of 1642 was an early attempt by the colonial government to establish compulsory public education. This law laid out that town officials would ensure that parents and appointed educational masters were "attending to their educational duties and ensuring that children were being taught to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country" (Cubberly, 1962, p. 17). This law was a direct result of what was perceived to be families' lack of providing sufficient education and training to their children. Dwyer and Peters (2019) quote Tyack, stating that advocates of compulsory education observed that:

> families or at least some families, like those of the poor or foreign born—were failing to carry out their traditional functions of moral and vocational training. Immigrant children in crowded cities, reformers complained, were leading disorderly lives, schooled by the

street and their peers more than by Christian nurture in the home. Much of the drive for compulsory education reflected an animus against parents considered incompetent to train their children. (p. 14)

Although this first attempt established the requirement that students be trained and set in place a sort of monitoring by select officials, it did not bring about significant change. Five years later, the Old Deluder Satan Act was passed, moving education from the home to an established school system within the community.

Old Deluder Satan Act

Although the Massachusetts Law of 1642 laid the foundation for compulsory education in America, several years later it was noted that efforts were unsatisfactory. As a direct result, the Massachusetts Law of 1647 was passed as an attempt to remedy lingering ills of society and lack of instruction by parents. The law stated that "it being one of the chief projects of that old deluder Satan to keep men from the knowledge of the scriptures … that Learning may not be buried in the graves of our fore-fathers in Church and Commonwealth, the Lord assisting in our endeavors" (Massachusetts Law, 1642). This law ordered that school systems were established and laid out a means for their maintenance through taxation, illustrating the importance of transmission of intellectual heritage of the time. Funding schools in this manner made the law a very unpopular one.

19th Century

Coming off the heels of the Industrial Revolution, nineteenth century education in America marked a time where the cultural landscape was changing. More and more families were moving away from their small, rural communities, instead opting to live in larger cities where individuals were in search of new job opportunities. Salls (2007) points out that by the

mid-1830s, the goal of character education in schools shifted to function as promoting a common culture in addition to developing the morality of students. In order to develop a common culture, proponents for change in early public schooling in America claimed that schools could "solve major social, economic, and political problems of society and also argued that common schools were necessary for society's survival" (Spring, 2018, p. 93). Viewed as the father of public American education, Horace Mann worked to establish a more modern approach to learning through the creation of universal public education.

Horace Mann

Regarded as one of the most influential figures of character development in early American schools, Horace Mann believed that "education served as an opportunity to strengthen the physical, mental and spiritual development of youth" (Downs, 1974, p. 37). Mann believed that schooling was key to establishing a good society, and was necessary, as moral education was lacking.

In addition to his beliefs about moral education, Mann was a proponent for universal education for all children. From this belief, the Common School Movement evolved, establishing a "school that was attended in common by all (meaning White) children, where common political and social ideology was taught" (Spring, 2018, p. 19). Rich children were still taught at home or more private, elite spaces. The transition to a universal school brought about America's first textbooks that would serve as a means of supporting the curriculum but also extend prevailing American values.

McGuffey Readers

One task that was considered to be of extreme importance throughout early education in America was teaching young students to read. The primary motivation for this was to ensure that

students were able to read and understand the Bible. Many years later, in the 19th century, the *McGuffey Readers* were developed by William McGuffey in order to assist with reading instruction as well as to provide reading texts that provide moral themes (Bohning, 1986). These readers, as Smith (2008) notes “clearly taught a Calvinistic ethic that both reflected the moral tone of the time and proliferated it into the fabric of American society” (p. 4). Not only did they reflect the moral values of the 19th century but also shaped them.

As years passed, and the makeup of America became more diverse, people began to question the fact that Christianity or Protestantism played such a heavy role in trying to shape the character of young children. Around the same time period that the *McGuffey Readers* were published, Horace Mann (1848) used his Twelfth Annual Report to address that an increased rise in crime and national hostility was not a matter of issues with law but rested in the changes in moral education.

Sanctioning Religious Influence

Around the mid to late 19th century, many began to notice the pluralistic society required a change that was reflective of the changing range of beliefs. However, this change was not embraced by all. In May through July 1844 the Philadelphia Nativist Riots or the Bible Riots took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the heart of this conflict was a disagreement in curriculum materials used for daily reading. The widely accepted biblical text at the time was the King James version. In an effort to ensure the curriculum reflects Catholic biblical leanings, Bishop Francis Kenrick requested that children of that faith be allowed to read from the Douay translation, going against the Protestant Bible, which was viewed as a “symbol of American freedom and liberty over the foreign, allegedly despotic, Catholic church” (Oxx, 2013, p. 3). This

exacerbated tensions further as Protestantism was considered the basis of American values and behaviors, not Roman Catholicism (Ritter, 2021). In turn, this disagreement over how religion should be presented in schools led to the riots.

This proved to be significantly troubling, since not only did the variations of the Bible differ, but a nation that was established under the guise of religious freedom was resistant to allowing curriculum materials to reflect the beliefs of the students. People were using Protestant Biblical text in the service of building character, and different religious groups fought to have the right moral text before their students.

Several years later, Chicago Public Schools marked an era of change in the shift of thinking with regards to incorporation of the Bible into instruction. In 1875, Chicago schools banned the usage of biblical readings for moral instruction in the classroom. Cremin (1964) notes that the shift into industrialization and urban development represented an increased effort to respond to the changing society. In addition, progressive views of the modern way of life called for a more flexible approach to education (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). This more modern approach to character education, as well as education in general marked a time in American education that separation of church and state began to take shape.

20th Century-Present Day

Early 20th Century

During the early 20th century, modern society placed heavy emphasis on productivity. McClellan (1999) notes that the increased influence of technology allowed for leisure time. Schools took the primary role in passing values to youth by way of character formation (Field & Nickell, 2000) and curriculum was developed that presented desirable character traits. However,

in the mid to late 1920s Hartshorne and May conducted a study aimed at determining the effects of moral education on character related behavior. Results of this study concluded that character education programs, religious instruction and moral training had no effect on the overall moral conduct of students (Mulkey, 1997). What proved to be problematic with this study is that rather than evaluating current practices with regards to character development, critics of character development used this as a reason to balk at character development.

Mid-20th Century

In terms of character development, the focus for the mid-20th century centered on the separation of church and state that began in the 1960s (Lickona, 1993). In a landmark Supreme Court case, *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962 found that it was unconstitutional for school-sanctioned prayer to take place in public schools. Around the late 1960s, the Character Education Institute of San Antonio began working to develop the first character education program that was widely implemented in schools (Mulkey, 1997). During this time period there was also a shift of popularity into Christian schools. Reacting to drugs, disrespect, violence and a deterioration in Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, thousands of Christian schools opened to accommodate the need for values education centered on Protestant religious ideals. This movement further pushed the separatist society at the time of the Civil Rights Movement with the majority of students attending private, Christian schools being White. There was a resurgence in the 21st century with the approval of vouchers in the state for religious schools and lifting the family income restriction. This allowed wealthy families to use the vouchers to send their children to private, religious schools. We will see this again in the first quarter of the 21st century.

Late 20th Century

The late 20th century is marked by the return of values education with the values clarification movement. The premise for this movement was that students did not need to be taught explicit, predetermined values. Baer (2008) states, "rather than indoctrinating students with a pre-chosen set of values, teachers employing values clarification methods try to help students become more aware of who they really are through understanding more clearly the values they already possess" (p. 155). The primary problem with the values clarification approach was that students needed more support in identifying values of importance and grounding them in discussion and social interaction. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, education in America was called into question, drawing attention to the decline of schools. While this started a ripple effect, the focus was now back to developing the character or values of students, hoping to put an end to the mediocrity that student data conveyed at the time.

Another important event in the late 20th century with regard to values education was the development of the Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom, grounded in the work of John Dewey, is a student-centered approach to teaching and discipline. Rimm-Kauffman and Chiu (2007) share that:

> Responsive Classroom prioritizes a caring classroom environment and integrates social and academic learning through seven essential principles: (1) equal emphasis on the social and academic curriculum; (2) focus on how children learn as much as what they learn; (3) view that social interaction facilitates cognitive growth; (4) emphasis on cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control as critical social skills for children to learn; (5) emphasis on teachers' knowledge of children's individual, cultural,

> and developmental characteristics; (6) focus on understanding of children's families; and (7) attention to the way in which adults work together within a school. (p. 399)

One of the hallmarks of a Responsive Classroom approach that sets the classroom apart from others is through the use of Morning Meetings. Williams (2017) notes that "Morning Meeting is a method used in the Responsive Classroom that supports Dewey's ideas of social-emotional learning and building a community of learners, designating a set time at the start of the school day to build community in the classroom and set the tone for learning that day" (p. 94). This is important in that it establishes a time, safeguarded from the high stakes associated with other content areas, and seeks to address the social-emotional needs of students and provide ample space for teachers to infuse content focused on values.

21st Century

In 2001 the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush. While many remember the implications for schools with regards to testing accountability measures, there were other aspects that impacted schools as a whole. One way was through the allocation of funding to the Partnerships in Character Education program. According to Hudd (2004), "NCLB increased federal funding of character education to almost $25 million, tripling the amount" (p. 113), emphasizing the need to build the minds and character of every student. This in turn led to the development of packaged character education curricula. The creation of pre-packaged character education programs formalized character education and the values taught throughout.

Although the impact of NCLB had implications for schools throughout America, North Carolina took it a step further with the passage of House Bill 195 in 2001. North Carolina House Bill 195 (2001) states:

Each local board of education shall develop and implement character education instruction with input from the local community. The instruction shall be incorporated into the standard curriculum and should address the following traits:

(1) Courage—Having the determination to do the right thing even when others don't and the strength to follow your conscience rather than the crowd; and attempting difficult things that are worthwhile.

(2) Good Judgment—Choosing worthy goals and setting proper priorities; thinking through the consequences of your actions; and basing decisions on practical wisdom and good sense.

(3) Integrity—Having the inner strength to be truthful, trustworthy, and honest in all things; acting justly and honorably.

(4) Kindness—Being considerate, courteous, helpful, and understanding of others; showing care, compassion, friendship, and generosity; and treating others as you would like to be treated.

(5) Perseverance—Being persistent in the pursuit of worthy objectives in spite of difficulty, opposition, or discouragement; and exhibiting patiences and having the fortitude to try again when confronted with delays, mistakes or failures.

(6) Respect—Showing high regard for authority, for other people, for self, for property, and for country; and understanding that all people have value as human beings.

(7) Responsibility—Being dependable in carrying out obligations and duties; showing reliability and consistency in words and conduct; being accountable for your own actions; and being committed to active involvement in your community.

(8) Self-Discipline—Demonstrating hard work and commitment to purpose; regulating yourself for improvement and restraining from inappropriate behaviors; being in proper control of your words, actions, impulses, and desires; choosing abstinence from premarital sex, drugs, alcohol, and other harmful substances and behaviors; and doing your best in all situations. (p. 2)

In an effort to put this into practice and tie it all together, so to speak, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction published the *Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide II*. This was created for support and implementation of the Student Citizen Act of 2001, specifically addressing character and civic education. This tool outlined character education and spoke to desirable components of character education.

Another key moment that shifted the landscape of education was in 2011 when the cap on charter schools was lifted. This was significant because most of the schools getting approved were run by for-profit agencies like National Heritage Academies and Charter Schools USA. These organizations are heavily situated within Christian values, therefore blurring the lines between church and state and concerns about public dollars towards religious entities. Several years later when President Trump nominated Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, the voucher program for schools was pushed to the forefront of policy discussions, yet again. Ford et al. (2024) note that Trump and DeVos "championed a plan to provide federal funding for private school voucher systems nationwide, which funneled millions of taxpayer dollars out of public schools and into unaccountable private schools" (para. 2). In 2023, North Carolina lifted salary restrictions as a qualifier for vouchers, so any family could apply and use a voucher for attending a private school. In 2024, politicians are lobbying for increased voucher funding given the

demand. This is a rather explicit demonstration of which values the North Carolina legislature is willing to support.

Closing in on the first quarter of the 21st century, we have seen a shift back towards not wanting teachers to teach certain values to students with regards to current events, legislating book bans, curricular censure, and outright retaliation for going against these measures. This was largely in response to Black Lives Matter movement but interestingly, not the January 6th insurrection. With the attack on Critical Race Theory, teachers live in fear of teaching concepts and ideals that go against the view of the dominant culture, worried they will be accused of indoctrination. As a result, districts continue to enact more policies that prevent them from being able to discuss issues of race, gender and sexuality with students and in turn provide more say so to parents over curriculum. Additionally, understanding the power of children's literature to convey values and moving from censorship through book bans to complete decimation of school libraries has limited the ability of teachers to share diverse perspectives, ultimately serving as a way to exert authority over the way a group thinks.

Coming together, as a nation, as we enter the political landscape after Trump, it is now more important than ever that students be taught values that support questioning the world around them, equity, and the ability to critically evaluate real world issues of justice. Spring (2020) notes that "while the No Child Left Behind Act mentions integrating secular character education, the terms used (caring, civic virtue and citizenship, respect, responsibility, etc.) are vague and the substance of these traits takes on different meanings when put in a context" (p. 43). For example, coupling these within a political context calls one to consider if "respect" would look like respecting the rights of all community members, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation, or could it mean respect in the sense that one is submissive and passive when

dealing with people of authority? It is important to acknowledge that depending on a teacher's individual beliefs, shaping the ethical and moral compass of a student can take on a significantly different meaning however they are interpreted. Thus, examining the historical backdrop of how values development of students came to find itself to be the initial focus of schools, leads me to examine what values teachers feel are important to teach students and how they do this work in their classrooms.

Teacher Efficacy

Waters and Russell (2014) assert that personal teacher efficacy deals with internal beliefs regarding knowledge, confidence, and abilities as a teacher. In the field of education, teachers are heavily scrutinized and evaluated based on measures of effectiveness. Scores from common formative assessments, district-wide quarterly testing, and end-of-grade testing serve as points for assessment and accountability. With influence from politics and global capitalist systems, there has been a shift in concern from critical, democratic learning to evidence-based teaching practices.

It is not uncommon for teachers to reflect on their practice and verbalize their internal beliefs about the different subject areas they teach. In some districts, this comes by way of weekly professional learning community meetings (PLCs) where it is more of a top down didactic discussion of what is working well and identifying areas of improvement as opposed to an engaged conversation in a more critically informed PLC. What I find most interesting is that often this point of reflection and dialogue is centered around content areas that are tested. Very little time, if any, is devoted to understanding how comfortable elementary school teachers feel in their ability to shape other aspects in the lives of their students.

The concept of *teacher*, and what this particular individual embodies and represents with regards to modern education, has become an increasingly popular topic as we consider the problems facing classrooms and the function of education. In classrooms today, teachers face the daunting task of providing instructional experiences that align with state and district curriculum through the use of sometimes scripted and overly rigid programs. In turn, teachers have distinct beliefs about their ability to successfully teach students within these strict parameters. These beliefs that teachers carry with them ultimately have an impact on student learning in other areas, especially the role and subsequent impact they have on shaping the ethical and moral compass of their students.

Milson (2003) asserts that character education and teacher efficacy are connected in that

> … the construct of teacher efficacy has clear relevance for character education. For character education to be effective a teacher must believe in his or her own ability to build the character of the students, as well as the ability of the teachers in general to overcome negative influences from outside of the classroom. (p. 93)

While several research studies have been conducted to understand what teachers think about character education overall and assess their level of preparedness to teach on issues of morality (Chang & Munoz, 2006; Milson & Mehlig, 2002), few provide a space to collectively allow for the voice of teachers to be heard. Additionally, there is a disproportionate number of studies devoted to exploring preservice teacher efficacy with regards to moral education, rather than that of experienced teachers.

Studies on Teacher Efficacy for Moral Education

In a study on elementary school teacher's sense of efficacy for character education, Milson and Mehlig (2002) describe teachers' efficacy beliefs in relation to their ability to teach character education. The researchers received 254 survey samples from teachers in a large midwestern suburban school district, where participants responded to the Character Education Efficacy Belief Instrument (CEEBI) developed by the researchers. This instrument comprises 24 statements that participants respond to that "measures the two dimensions of the teacher efficacy scale (TES): personal teaching efficacy (PTE)" (Milson & Mehlig, 2002, p. 49). The results of the study suggest that teachers have a stronger sense of self-efficacy about most of the aspects associated with character education. An interesting finding of this study is "that teachers who earned their undergraduate degree from private, religiously affiliated colleges or universities had a greater sense of efficacy for character education than those who attended public or secular private institutions" (Milson & Mehlig, 2002, p. 52). This stands out because the results do not tease out whether or not it is more reflective of efficacy or alliance to the educational institution.

Additionally, in an article, Deborah W. Powers and Larry Nucci (2016) outline the findings of two studies that examined the impact of preservice teachers' self-efficacy with regards to character and moral development based on teacher preparation programs through the use of surveys. The first study compared learning outcomes from a developmental teacher education program at the University of California at Berkeley that provides preservice teachers with extensive coursework in the area of ethical and moral development to that of a similar program at the University of Chicago. The second study analyzed a revised version of the

program at University of California at Berkeley to its original design. The outcome demonstrated that:

> Studies 1 and 2 reinforced findings that a combination of course preparation for moral education practices followed by coursework and field experiences that reinforce attention to student development results in growth of knowledge in moral-education teaching practices and teacher self-efficacy for moral education" (Powers & Nucci, 2016, p. 67)

In a quantitative study measuring teacher self-efficacy for moral education in secondary teachers, Navarez et al., (2008) developed a Teacher Efficacy for Moral Education measure (TEME) in order to measure teachers' beliefs about their ability to bring about positive change in their students' moral development. In this study, 76 participants completed a survey packet outside of their workday, responding to items such as "I know how to promote positive feelings about morality among the students in my class" and "I know how to teach strategies to my students that will help them develop ethical character skills" (Navarez et al., 2008, p. 8). Through correlation and regression analysis, it was found that the newly devised instrument was effective in assessing teachers' self-efficacy through correlations with other instruments as well as school climate measures.

What I find interesting about each of these studies is that researchers cast a wide net that enabled them to get a large number of participants. What I find limiting about this approach is that there is a disconnect between the researcher and participants as each solely relies on survey data in response to various instruments. With program implementation throughout schools, teachers are in the trenches working to ensure that the nuances of ethical and moral education are carried out with fidelity as it is required by their state and board of education. One point of

interest that Powers & Nucci (2016) raise throughout their findings is that those who are more prepared through training (coursework) have a higher sense of efficacy with regards to this work. However, each of these studies (as well as others) present their findings in a more quantitative manner. I discovered that the quantitative studies examining issues surrounding teacher efficacy and ethical and moral development reduced the complexity of the data collected, failing to recognize the hidden curriculum associated with this work.

Hidden Curriculum

Curriculum in the general sense is inherently fraught with issues of power. Looking carefully at learning and all of the working pieces that go into shaping the learning environment, it is clear that neutrality is a challenging illusion. Teachers carry with them life experiences that have shaped who they are. These could be interactions as well as lessons learned from their family, places of worship, or even previous experiences in school. Their values not only shape who they are as a person, they also influence what they hold dear as a teacher as they work to make a lasting impact on the lives of the students they teach.

Ultimately, how teachers internalize these values impacts how they navigate the day-to-day in their classrooms and how they design learning experiences for their students. Halstead and Xiao (2010) quote Halstead (1996) sharing that:

> Values permeate everything that goes on in the classroom, even the seating arrangements and the disciplinary procedures: when teachers insist on precision and accuracy in children's work, or praise their use of imagination, or censure racist or sexist language, or encourage them to show initiative, or respond with interest, patience or frustration to their ideas, children are being introduced to values and value-laden issues. (p. 303)

This calls into question the unintended values teachers communicate through interaction, classroom design, and lesson planning.

There is little space made available for teachers to practice critical reflection about the values they internalize and also their understanding of how they incorporate these within instruction, explicitly and implicitly. Teachers and schools alike should carefully consider the values they seek to cultivate in their students to ensure that they are not focused on conservative ideals surrounding work ethic (hard-working and obedient), but instead focus on values that truly guide students in their ability to be engaged members of their communities, helping to maintain human dignity, equity, freedom and justice in social affairs (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 7).

Diving deeper, I am immediately curious about the extent to which teachers feel it is their role to shape the values of their students. For those who feel this work is important, what are their guiding values and principles? Looking at the values and principles above in relation to the list of traits shared in North Carolina House Bill 195 (2001) forces me to question what values teachers feel are important to teach and how they design experiences and spaces for learning and how they navigate contradictions in what they are asked to teach versus what they prioritize. With the passage of North Carolina Senate Bill 49 (2023), teachers are forced to navigate how they approach teaching values to students while being censored on topics of gender identity and topics surrounding LGBTQ issues. They must consider the implications this has on their practice.

Conclusion

hooks (2010) calls for educators to "make schools places where the conditions for democratic consciousness can be established and flourished" (p. 16). While the goal has been to

identify traits that are necessary for students and what purpose they serve as they grow, how they are taught, modeled, and incorporated into the curriculum (explicit and hidden) is ultimately shaped by the teachers and their beliefs about their role in this process. The materials they use, the spaces they construct, and discussions they have with students about these traits or values will make a lasting impact on the thoughts and actions of their students.

While reviewing literature that informs the field of my topic, I noticed there was little overlap in understanding elementary teachers' perspectives of their role in the ethical and moral development of the students they teach, both explicitly and in the hidden nuances of instruction and designed spaces for learning. This supports my previous assertion that there is a gap in the literature where teaching values, the hidden curriculum, and elementary teacher efficacy intersect. Completing this study serves to contribute to a larger body of knowledge in the field, addressing an existing gap in literature. Through this work, I explore what values teachers feel are important to teach students in K-5 public school classrooms, how teachers feel they teach values to students, and what power they have to do so as well as how teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

I was curious about the ways in which teachers describe and implement their values in the classroom. Therefore, I resonated with Hatch (2002), when he encouraged his students to explore their ontological and epistemological frames, "their beliefs about how their world is ordered and how we come to know things about it" (p. 2). I'm fascinated by how teachers, who are responsible for creating learning spaces and nurturing learners, may or may not have been aware of their own frames. I had the opportunity through a class to conduct a pilot study about these curiosities, and in this chapter, I share what I learned in that pilot study, as well as how it informed my dissertation research design. Further I situate my research questions, methodology, methods, participant recruitment and criteria, participant introductions, and data analysis process. Given my interest in values, it's important to share how I sought to ensure trustworthiness and take into account ethical considerations while working with participants and analyzing the data.

Pilot Study

The idea for this research study emerged from a smaller scale project I completed in the fall semester of 2017 while enrolled in a Democracy in Education course under the direction of Dr. Kathy Hytten. Taking this class while also teaching full time forced me to consider how schools prepare students to become future citizens by examining our school's participation in the PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) program. At the time, my colleagues expressed frustration and felt there was a disconnect between the impact we hoped to make in terms of developing the intrinsic motivation of students to demonstrate prosocial behaviors and the methods we were using to get there through these behavioral models.

Considering the framework of PBIS through a democratic lens, it was clear that there are anti-democratic underpinnings present throughout. Westheimer (2015) points out that if we were

to sit down and discuss ideas about good democratic citizens, there would be a great deal of variation. One of the most prevailing antidemocratic characteristics that is taught through the PBIS framework is compliance and obedience. Kohn (1998) asserts that children need opportunities to make good decisions by *making decisions*. Yet, much of the day at our school was based on coerced compliance with rules that required students to demonstrate desired behaviors such as not talking out of turn, following instructions given by an authority figure, and obedience with regard to school-wide procedures for behavior.

In response to declining student performance on end-of-grade assessments and increased office referrals for behavior issues, PBIS was adopted district wide in an effort to increase student achievement and improve performance. In 2014, the local school at which I recruited participants for the pilot study adopted the PBIS framework with the intended purpose of establishing behavioral supports and enhancing academic and social behavior outcomes. The school was experiencing a shift in demographics, moving from a predominantly white population to more of a mix of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. At the time I conducted the survey, the school had 707 students with a makeup of 52% White, 24% Hispanic and 19% Black for its three largest subgroups. I chose to use a survey so participants could share their thoughts in a way that did not identify them, hoping it would elicit more thoughtful and honest answers.

For this pilot study I had three guiding questions for participants:

1. To what extent do you feel like PBIS works to develop the character of students?
2. How do the underlying principles of PBIS support the democratic vision of schools?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve how we develop the character of students?

These questions were sent via email using Google Forms to 10 teachers, with 5 having completed the survey. Participants for this pilot study represented each grade level from first

through fifth grade. The only identifier noted on the survey was where participants were asked to share their grade level.

Completing this survey provided teachers with a space to voice their feelings and, in some cases, concerns with PBIS and reflect on this framework as a form of character education. Analysis of survey responses teachers shared demonstrated an overall frustration with PBIS and its implementation. The question that received the most detailed response for each participant was on the extent to which participants felt PBIS works to develop the character of students. Given the elements of behaviorism present throughout much of the framework, it is easy to understand that there is room for critical analysis of the positive, desired behaviors. As one teacher noted:

> Students aren't taught the how and why of what we do. All they see is teachers walking around handing out (omitted) bucks every single time they notice the student doing something good. This only motivates them to do these things when they know the likelihood of being rewarded is increased. The same student who is constantly rewarded for their behavior all day will get on the bus and get in trouble. Why??? Because once they cross through those doors to go home the positive reinforcement stops.

This response reflected Kohn's (1997) claim that the words and actions stemming from these types of programs are unlikely to continue, much less transfer to new situations because the child has not been invited to integrate them to his or her value structure. As with other responses, it appeared there was a disconnect between practice and desired outcome. The results of the survey overall showed that character education encompassed much more than the single program could provide. As Kohn (1998) notes, "intellectual development is a process by which the learner actively constructs meaning, yet the bulk of contemporary education proceeds according to the

idea that values can be inserted into the minds and hearts of students as if they are passive beings" (p. 460). Habits and dispositions are best developed over time with critical conversations about the world in which we live. Participant responses showed that students lacked the ability to take a character trait that is taught in isolation and transfer their understanding in a way that applies it in context. Participants felt strongly that it is only through reflective thinking and intentional and guided conversations that teachers can truly develop the values of their students.

Conducting this smaller scale pilot study enabled me to narrow my research interest and carefully shape how I approached this research project. I discovered that I am more interested in the values that teachers have and how they work to teach these values to students in the day-to-day learning experiences they design. Additionally, gaining an understanding of the basis for the values teachers feel are important to teach students and the power teachers feel they have to teach them helps me, as the researcher, see how this is conveyed through classroom layout and design as well as planning lessons for students. Narrowing down the scope of my interest helped me to develop the research questions that guide this study.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research study:

1. What values do elementary public school teachers think they should teach students in a diverse society, both explicitly and implicitly?
2. How do teachers feel they teach their students these values (explicitly and implicitly) and what power do they have to do so?
3. How do teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach?

Research Design

This study was conducted using a basic qualitative research methodology. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that basic qualitative methodology is a type of qualitative research that involves the collection of data via interviews, observation, and the analysis of documents. To better understand its intricate nature, Creswell & Poth (2018) metaphorically describe qualitative research as a fabric:

> comprising minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general assumptions and interpretive frameworks hold qualitative research together. (p. 42)

It is important for me to consider how each of the pieces and my interpretation and analysis helps to support this research study.

Carrying out this research study during the COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges as I considered what was feasible to successfully complete during this time. Although many districts had returned to some form of face-to-face instruction, many schools continued to limit access for outside visitors. Ideally, pairing observation with interviews would have provided me with the opportunity to understand the day-to-day nuances of the classroom environment that I would otherwise not be privy to. Understanding that the social constraints we faced at this time prevented me from conducting this research project in this manner, I chose to use interviews, document analysis, and photo-elicitation as my primary methods of inquiry.

To gain a better understanding of what teachers value and how they teach values to students, I interviewed nine teachers who teach in K-5 classrooms in North Carolina public schools. With the goal of understanding how teachers do this in their classrooms, I sought to

include teachers with differing years of experience. Over the years there have been shifts in the focus of teaching students values in the classroom. Each participant selected represented generationally different moments of time in policy and practice, as well as understanding, based on their personal education and training. I had a relatively balanced range of individuals with 0-5 years of teaching experience, 6-13 years of teaching experience, and 14-20+ years of teaching experience (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Years of Experience

0-5 Years Experience	6-13 Years Experience	14-20+ Years Experience
Destiney	Ceriya	Bell
Mae	Charlie	Griffin
	Reese	Maggie
	Hank	

Each of these timeframes represents key moments that shaped the landscape of education in North Carolina (summarized in Table 2). For Bell, Griffin, and Maggie, being the most seasoned participants in terms of years of experience means they have witnessed numerous shifts that have had implications for their pedagogical practice. One of the most significant events in their early career was the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in 2001. Roach (2014) described the legislation's purpose was that it "mandated that schools receiving Federal Title I funding would track student performance on tests and impose negative sanctions up to complete closure or reconstitution of a school if student performance fell below state-established levels." The passage of NCLB put a stringent accountability system in place that had implications for schools as well as teachers.

Table 2. Key Moments in Education in North Carolina

Number of Years of Teaching Experience	Years Entering the Teaching Profession	Significant Events in Education
0–5 years	2015–2019	2016: President Donald Trump names Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education.
6–13 years	2007–2014	February 17, 2009: President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) which set aside funding for the establishment of Race to the Top. June 3, 2010: North Carolina State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core State Standards.
14–20+ years	2000–2006	2001: Passage of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that set high standards and established measurable goals for improving learning outcomes.

Issues surrounding accountability were pushed to the forefront yet again in 2009. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), President Obama outlined reform that included measures to expand educational opportunities by offering funding through Race to the Top grants for schools. According to Onosko (2011), this flawed educational reform plan only served to increase standardization, centralization, and test-based accountability in schools. Shortly after, in 2010, the North Carolina State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core State Standards. As pointed out by Dornan (2015), this had implications for the field because there was a lack of training for teachers that would have enabled them to successfully implement the more challenging standards and ultimately schools were increasingly focused only on “teaching to the tests.”

Bringing an even heavier focus on accountability and state tests, President Trump named Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education. When schools closed due to COVID during the

spring of 2020, schools received a waiver for state testing. Given the nature of the pandemic at that time, it was not considered safe for schools to bring students and teachers together, in-person, for administering the end-of-grade assessments. At this point students had missed several months of school and most districts/schools opted to remain in some form of remote learning for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year. Many in the field of education expected a similar waiver to be issued prior to the administration of end-of-year assessments, since many students had not been in a classroom for well over a year at this point. Ujifusa (2023) referenced a letter from Betsy DeVos (2020) to state education leaders where she informed them that no waivers would be issued for federal testing mandates, stating that the assessments were “among the most reliable tools available to help us understand how children are performing in school.”

By interviewing teachers that represented different points of entry into the professional landscape of teaching, I gained insight as to how teacher’s training as well as professional experiences may have shaped the values they believe to be important to teach students. Through the events highlighted above, we see how stricter accountability measures were highlighted or imposed, creating implications for teacher practice. These interviews were key to this research because teachers also had a chance to define how they teach values to students and also speak to how much they feel they are told to teach in contradiction to what they value.

Aside from the political implications that each event highlights above, there have been significant societal events that have left teachers with the task of navigating ways to teach the *whole child* while still attending to the heavy emphasis on accountability. DeVitis and Yu (2011) argue that:

> … we continue to witness the unprecedented emphasis on accountability and standardization in national policies on education. Among the many unfortunate results

produced by this school reform movement is an erose of the moral mission of schooling. As economic objectives increasingly drive the reform movement, the moral purpose of education is forsaken. (p. XI)

Stepping into any learning environment it is easy to see how the pressure to meet predetermined growth indicators for students impacts teacher autonomy as they plan and deliver instruction. Teaching during a pandemic created tighter parameters for teachers as they navigated different learning platforms, delivered content instruction remotely, and often with much less interaction with students. Ultimately teachers were still responsible for ensuring student *proficiency* for the sake of accountability.

While attending to diversity was important when it came to years of teaching experience, it was also an important consideration when selecting participants. Each participant brought their unique lived experiences and personal values to this research project. Using network sampling, I reached out to contacts that I have in area schools as a way to find participants. Given that years of teaching experience and diversity in selected participants is important for purposes of this study, I used the Initial Survey Form (Appendix B) as a means to select participants that are best representative for this study. Once I identified participants, I scheduled a time to complete semi-structured interviews with each. This allowed me time to get to know them as well as gather data using the Interview Questions (Appendix C).

Using document analysis as a second method of inquiry, I collected lesson plans from teachers that reflected 4 weeks of instruction. Document analysis is a qualitative method that allowed me to gain a better understanding of the types of learning opportunities each participant seeks to provide their students throughout the instructional day. A lot of what occurs in the day-to-day functioning of the classroom can be categorized as explicit versus implicit. Joseph (2000)

draws attention to Eisner's conception of "three curricula that all schools teach: the explicit curriculum, the implicit curriculum, and the null curriculum" (p. 3). For purposes of this research project, I was most interested in the explicit and implicit curriculum, and by default, the null curriculum. Throughout this study, what teachers may ignore, deliberately or unknowingly, has implications for this study.

Joseph (2000) shares that "explicit curriculum can be found in the publicly stated goals of education, while the implicit curriculum is the learning and interaction that is not explicitly stated but can be intentional or inadvertent" (pp. 3–4). Understanding that elements of the hidden curriculum (implicit curriculum) were present in the documents I collected (lesson plans) required me to engage critically with each and code information throughout. Careful examination revealed valuable information about the types of materials being used as well as how participants' values were embodied in the lessons they delivered.

As a third method of inquiry, photo-elicitation allowed me to see a glimpse of the space for learning. Given the nature of how teachers delivered instruction, these pictures revealed key information. Pairing photo-elicitation with the interview process allowed for a talking point to help construct meaning with the participant. Rose (2016) points out that "these are sites in which the interviewees (and interviewers) perform their social identity by, in part, making and talking about the photographs they have taken" (p. 323). Utilizing the interviews, document analysis, and photo-elicitation assisted me in gaining insight about how teachers worked to shape the values of the students with whom they worked.

Recruitment Strategy

Before beginning this research study and recruiting participants, I completed an application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval with the University of North Carolina

at Greensboro's Office of Research Integrity. Prior to submitting the application, I was required to complete training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program), which is a requirement for IRB approval. Following the appropriate steps ensured that my research study design did not compromise or put human subject participants in situations that would cause harm.

After receiving notification of IRB approval, I distributed a study recruitment flier (Appendix A) on my personal social media platforms (i.e., Instagram and Facebook) and through direct messages sent to personal contacts that I knew were teachers in North Carolina K-5 public school classrooms. In addition, I asked my contacts on these platforms to share the flier on their social media pages and in direct messages to contacts they believed would meet the participant criteria. Within a two week window I had 11 individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study who represented a range of experience levels in the field of education as well as diverse reported genders and ethnicities. Participants were asked to review and sign the IRB information form (Appendix B). Of the 11 who expressed initial interest, nine participants submitted signed IRB consent forms to me via email.

Participant Selection Criteria

After sharing the flier across the two social media platforms, I received communication via emails and private messages from teachers who wished to participate in the study. Each of the 11 individuals who expressed interest in being a participant received a link to a Google form to gather basic demographic information. The initial demographic survey (Appendix C) asked potential participants to share: their name, a chosen pseudonym for the duration of the study, the name of the school district where they are employed, grade level taught during the 2021-2022 school year, race/ethnicity, preferred pronouns, number of years of teaching experience as of the

2020-2021 school year, model for instructional delivery (remote learning, hybrid, full time face-to-face) during the 2020-2021 school year and lastly, their personal email address. Initially, gathering this information from individuals who were interested in participating in the study allowed me the opportunity to ensure that chosen participants were diverse in gender and ethnicity and adequately represented years of experience as teachers. Given that only 11 teachers expressed interest, I chose to accept all into the research study. This proved to be helpful because two participants dropped out just before I began data collection. Table 3 outlines the nine participants who signed the consent form and completed the research study.

Table 3. Research Study Participant Demographics

Participant	Grade Level Taught 2020-2021	Race/Ethnicity	Pronouns	Years of Teaching Experience	Mode of Instructional Delivery 2020-2021
Reese	5th	White	She/her	6 years	Hybrid
Bell	3rd/4th Combo	White	She/her	35 years	Remote Learning
Charlie	5th	Black	She/her	10 years	Went from remote to hybrid. Most students were face-to-face, and 3-4 students were online
Destiney	2nd	African American	She/her	2.5 years	Started with remote learning and then transitioned to 60% of students face-to-face and 40% remote
Mae	3rd/4th Combo	White	She/her	3 years	Remote Learning
Griffin	2nd	White	She/her	15 years	Remote learning for 2 months, and face-to-face for the remainder of the year
Maggie	4th	White	She/her	17 years	Remote until January 2021 then hybrid with half the class in person and half of the class learning remotely from home
Hank	Kindergarten	White	He/him	12 years	Hybrid until December 2020 then

Participant	Grade Level Taught 2020-2021	Race/Ethnicity	Pronouns	Years of Teaching Experience	Mode of Instructional Delivery 2020-2021
					face-to-face until the end of the year
Ceriya	3rd	African American	She/her	6 years	Remote learning until January then hybrid until March 2021. All students returned for face-to-face learning for the remainder of the year (parents' choice)

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected from four sources: (1) initial interviews (1 hour in length for each participant) via Zoom, (2) 3-5 photographs of their learning space, (3) 4 weeks of lesson plans, and (4) follow up interviews (1 hour in length per participant) via Zoom. In addition, I completed member check-ins with participants (30 minutes each). During this time, I shared preliminary findings with participants, "ensuring I captured their responses, interpreting them in a useful way within the context provided" (Glesne, 2016, p. 212). Initial interviews began and concluded in July 2021. Follow up interviews began in September 2021 and concluded in November 2021. Being a classroom teacher myself was beneficial when considering the best time to complete interviews. I was intentional in conducting the initial interview just before school began and then scheduling the follow up interview after teachers had a chance to get their rooms set up and meet students and all interviews occurred outside of contracted hours.

During the last part of the summer teachers often reflect on the previous year and begin looking to the new year ahead to think through instructional plans and go in early to set up classroom spaces. During the summer teachers are more apt to thoughtfully reflect and share because professional distractions are limited. In turn, completing follow-up interviews after the

school year begins enriches the discussion we have about the photographs, lesson plans, and any other clarifying questions that arose from the initial interview.

Initial Interview

During the initial interview, I met with each participant for around 60 minutes. During this time I asked a series of questions (Appendix D) targeted at helping me better understand (1) what values teachers have and why, (2) what power teachers feel they have to teach values to students, and (3) how much teachers feel they are told to teach in contradiction to what they value. To limit potential exposure during the pandemic and navigate strict protocols and guidelines of schools, all interviews were completed via Zoom. Each interview was recorded using a 4 GB SONY digital voice recorder. To ensure integrity of the research study, it was imperative that I had an accurate record of what each participant shared during the interviews for transcription purposes. Prior to transcribing the interviews, I listened to the recordings to ensure that the conversations were clear. I utilized a web-based software program, Temi, to assist in the transcription process. To ensure accuracy I reviewed each transcription while listening to the recording, making adjustments as needed in case something was transcribed incorrectly.

Following the initial interview, participants were sent an email reminding them that they needed to upload 3-5 classroom photographs as well as 4 weeks of lesson plans to the link shared with them on UNCG BOX. This is a secure site where data were collected and housed, safeguarding the flow of information shared.

Photo-Elicitation

Using photo-elicitation within the interviews allowed me the opportunity to have a glimpse inside the classroom spaces for each interviewee. According to Rose (2016), “most photo-elicitation studies ask research participants to take a series of photos that are then

discussed during an interview" (p. 314). Tinkler (2013) suggests that "advocates for the use of photographs identify two main reasons it is helpful to use photos in interviews: photos can facilitate rich discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee while also generating useful data" (p. 174). Studying photographs that participants presented afforded me, as the researcher, an opportunity for discussion and situated what was visible with what the participants shared about each in the context of the interview. Going into the follow-up interviews with the goal of understanding the context of the photograph from insights shared by the interviewees allowed for additional analysis of the second interview. Tinkler (2013) poses several guiding strategies to complement established techniques of interview analysis:

- Look at the photographs that interviewees are engaging with. What do they see? What do they talk about or ignore in the photos?
- Contextualize photos to understand their place in the interviewees' lives. How does this shape their account and help understand how and why the photograph was selected?
- Listen to accounts and attend to what is said as well as the silences and hesitations that may result.
- Juxtapose accounts. (How is what is shared in the photographs presented fit the narrative alongside what is shared in the interview and subsequently the document analysis?)
- Watch how interviewees physically engage with the photos and collections. How do they react when viewing and talking about them?
- Trace narrative threads that are woven through an account and not reducible to the sum of comments on individual photos. (pp. 193–194)

Looking at the photographs in conjunction with the interviews helped to provide additional material culture that served to further enhance my understanding of the spaces teachers create for learning and the nuances of what these spaces convey and capitalize on. Analyzing photos of how they design learning spaces ultimately provided a glimpse into what they value as the facilitator of learning.

Lesson Plans

For purposes of this study, lesson plans (spanning 4 weeks) were collected from each participant. Bowen (2009) references the work of Denzin (1970) stating that "often document analysis is used in combination with other qualitative methods as a means of triangulation to seek convergence and corroboration through the data sources" (p. 28). Using an open coding method, I closely analyzed lesson plans looking for insight on the learning experiences teachers create for students. Lesson plans provide a unique window into the day-to-day running of their classroom. Everything from the language that is used, experiences that are designed, ways students are grouped for activities and desired learning outcomes are often visible throughout the structure of a lesson plan. In addition, they highlight resources that teachers use to support concepts that are taught. Lesson plans capture how teachers make the curriculum and learning come alive within their learning spaces while also giving a glimpse into their personal beliefs and values.

Follow-Up Interview

Follow-up interviews served as an integral part of this study. During this time, I met with each of the participants for roughly one hour and posed clarifying questions that I had after reviewing my notes from the initial interview, viewing classroom photographs submitted and also reviewing their lesson plans. The photographs and lessons also provide new springboards

for deeper conversations about their values and pedagogy. Scheduling these after I had time to adequately transcribe and review the initial interview and look over the previously collected data sets, code them, and note lingering questions allowed me the opportunity to tailor follow up questions for each participant to pose during the second round of interviews.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Establishing trustworthiness at the beginning of my research study was important to me since I asked participants to reflect on and share sensitive aspects related to their instructional practices and individual beliefs. I shared a consent form with participants that explained, in detail, the methodology for this research project, assuring potential participants that their rights and overall welfare was protected throughout this process. In addition, I explained that at any time participants could withdraw their participation in the study without question.

Ensuring participant anonymity was a necessity throughout the course of this study. Throughout the findings chapter where I discuss analysis of the data, at times, I altered or omitted identifiable information that participants shared such as: the name of their school, school mascot, town, colleague names, and school district. Several expressed trepidation about the information they shared being linked back to them and impacting them professionally. With districts adopting vague policies that often censor teachers and use any action deemed a misstep as grounds for ethical violations and subsequent termination, it was important that participants felt it was a safe space to share information about their values and instructional practices as it relates to teaching values.

Being a teacher myself while conducting research gave me an avenue with which to develop rapport with participants. At times throughout the initial and final interview I made

connections with information participants shared, hoping they would see the intersectionality of my identity and see that through pieces I shared and connected with, I am also a teacher.

In doing this work, I held myself accountable to ensure I questioned the ways in which I coded and analyzed the data. As mentioned in my positionality statement in Chapter one, critically recognizing my Christian faith throughout the process of data collection and analysis and being mindful that it did not singularly influence how I defined values was important as I explored what participants shared. Yet I found my criticality took center stage as I interrogated my position and reflected throughout.

Using the help of someone to review the codes I assigned while doing this work also helped to provide a safeguard to ensure I am questioning how and why I make the interpretations that I do. I enlisted the help of a critical partner who looked over the coded data and concurred that I was on track with the codes I used and subsequent analysis. This was important to ensure how my positionality influences my interpretation and understanding throughout the research process is key to ensuring that I am reflexive.

Benefits to Participants

Participation in this research study benefited participants in several ways. First, participants were informed that their participation and feedback would contribute to a larger body of knowledge that helps me as a researcher and others in the field of education understand the awareness of what values are being taught. Second, I informed them that through sharing sample lesson plans and photographs of their classroom spaces, as well as describing how they work to teach values to students, sheds light on the day-to-day obstacles they may encounter while trying to navigate the unique learning experiences they design for students. Additionally,

participants received a $50 Amazon gift card that was sent to them electronically for their participation in this research study.

Coding and Analysis

I analyzed the interviews, photographs and lesson plans qualitatively. Finding the story that emerged from the collected data was integral to creating order through the patterns I saw. Glesne (2016) notes that "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced" (p. 183). Looking over the data sets as a whole and comparing the information gleaned from each helped to interpret how it meaningfully comes together to inform this study.

Once interviews were transcribed, I pulled out codes, categories, and themes that were found throughout using an open coding method. Glesne (2016) writes:

> Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (e.g., observation notes, interview transcripts, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose. By putting pieces that exemplify the same descriptive or theoretical idea together into data clumps labeled with a code, you begin to create a thematic organizational framework. (p. 196)

Doing so helped me to capture the more salient points of what was shared throughout data collection and provided me with a point of entry for analysis and organization.

Data analysis for this study consisted of 7 steps: (1) reading the initial interview transcripts for words and statements that stood out and open coding, (2) analyzing photographs collected during photo-elicitation and recording notes and codes based on my initial observation of the photographs, then repeating steps 1-2 again to ensure accuracy, (3) reviewing lesson plans, identifying important aspects of lessons or points for clarification, (4) reading the follow-up

interview transcripts for words and statements of importance and open coding, (5) completing member check-ins to ensure accurate interpretations were made, (6) using chart paper to record common concepts to identify larger categories, and (7) using the categories to pull out themes that arose across data sets.

Conclusion

Outlined in this chapter was a pilot study that helped shape this research study, research questions, research design, strategies for recruitment of participants, participant selection criteria, data collection procedures, trustworthiness and ethical considerations, benefits to participants, a brief introduction to each participant, a summary of the values shared and reported source of values for each participant, and a description of the coding and analysis procedures for this study.

In the chapters that follow, I organize my findings by three themes that emerged through analysis of the collected data: the impact of teacher identity and experiences on classroom practice, children's literature as a springboard for teaching values, and the impact of accountability on teacher practice. In addition, I speak to how the hidden curriculum illustrates conflict between what teachers articulate is happening in their classroom and what they value and the reality of what their classroom layout and design, planned lessons and interviews suggest within the larger patterns that occurred across the data sets.

CHAPTER IV: VALUE PORTRAITS: TEACHING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES

Not only did my own curiosities fuel this research, but it also quickly became evident that the teachers' stories, their experiences, and the time they dedicate to their craft took center stage. To honor that, I decided to dedicate a chapter to their stories before analyzing the data. This chapter introduces the participants, their reported values, and the source of their values. At the beginning of each initial interview, participants were asked to share and reflect on the values they believe to be important to teach students. While most participants shared overlaps in the values they mentioned, two things made each unique: the reasons they provided to support the values that were shared and the source of these values for them as an individual. The interviews were instrumental to this research project as it illuminated the underlying beliefs as well as perspective of the participant. In some cases, participants were reflective and identified areas where their privilege and subsequent bias come into play in their day-to-day teaching. In others, participants struggled to see beyond their perspective, even when their words and actions did not align. The following sections introduce the nine teachers who participated in this study, the pictures of their classrooms, and a sample lesson plan of the 4 weeks they provided. This information illuminates their lived experiences, the influences upon their values, and the values they deemed as important to teach students. The photographs span the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year and the lesson plans cover a 4 week period during the 2020-2021. Some teachers only had pictures from the 2021-2022 school year due to their method of instructional delivery during the pandemic and their lesson plan format varied greatly across schools.

Charlie

Charlie, a Black female with ten years of teaching experience, was the first participant to schedule her interview. She eagerly expressed "I want to make sure that I am not holding you

up!" Throughout the course of the initial interview, I learned that fear of not being perceived as *responsible* or holding herself *accountable* for follow through is ingrained in her and who she was taught to be. Having taught primarily at schools designated as low performing and Title I, Charlie shared that she experiences a different level of pressure to "move" students and show "academic growth" on state tests. In describing the culture of her school, it was apparent that student performance data is at the forefront of planning and instruction as well as displayed prominently throughout the building.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Charlie shared leadership, trust, responsibility, self-care, education, family, and friendship. At first glance, the values that she mentioned seemed fairly consistent with what other participants shared. However, during our discussion throughout the initial interview, I learned that much of what she values, and in turn hopes to teach her students to value, centers around accountability and responsibility. Throughout the course of the initial interview, Charlie continued to stress the importance of these values in relation to the labels that society places on individuals who do not exhibit them. She shared, "… we, as people, not even just students, get labels because of our actions." Charlie expressed that at several points during both interviews, she pointed out that students' actions provide insight to what they value and can ultimately lead to.

When asked about the source of her values, Charlie said that those who raised her taught her these values. She shared, "My parents—my mom, my dad, my grandparents as well. Because these are things that they have instilled in me and I could see the value of them as an adult. Maybe I couldn't see them as a child, but I definitely see them now." Much of what she shared during the interviews showed a conflict between what was said and what she feels she is doing with students versus the reality. For example, Charlie expressed a desire to allow for choice and

more but follows a more compartmentalized, traditional schedule in the day-to-day management of her classroom. In terms of her classroom design and layout, she shared that she is a proponent of flexible seating but also stated,

> I tried to get away from fancy decorations, um, just 'cause I want to have my walls be more purposeful in students making those content connections and seeing them look up to the walls to help them when they're doing assignments.

Utilizing flexible seating increases student engagement and collaboration, yet comparing her lesson plans, interviews and pictures of her classroom showed a much more individualistic approach to learning that focused primarily on assignment completion.

Figure 1. Charlie's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 2. Charlie's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

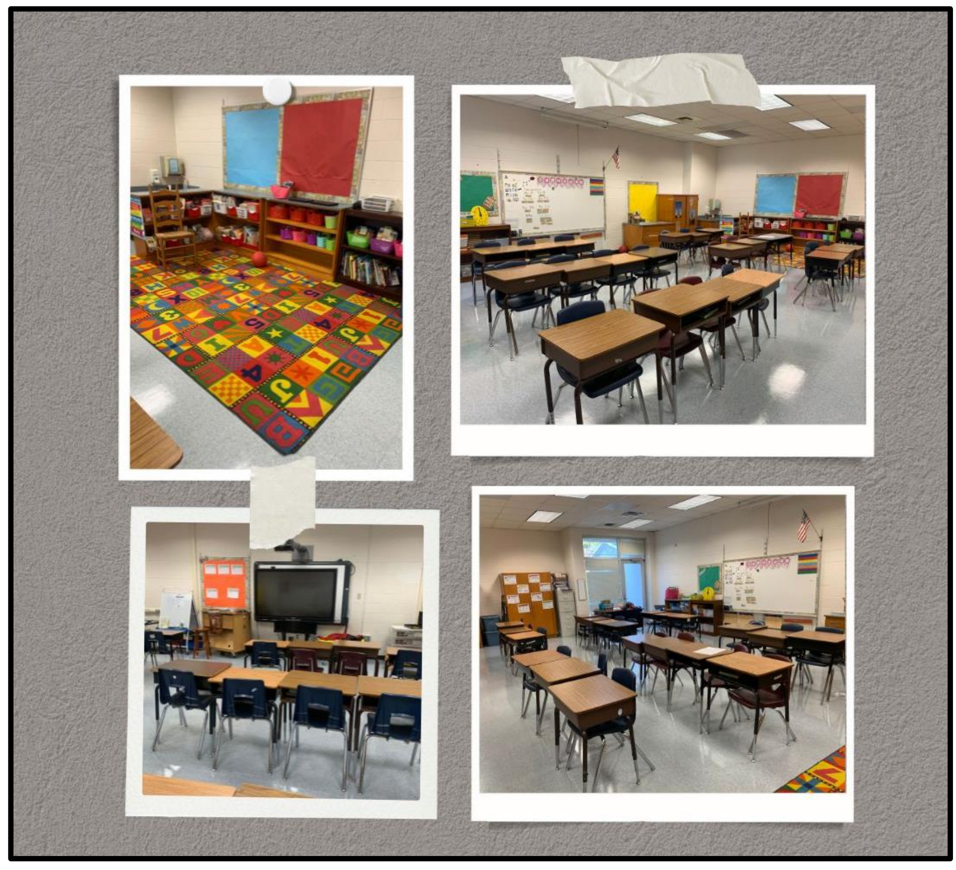


Figure 3. Sample Lesson Plan—Charlie

Week of August 16, 2020

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Morning Meeting 8:20-8:30 Welcome introduce myself and expectations	Morning Meeting 8:20-8:30 Welcome students introduce themselves Name, favorite color, and one thing they like about remote learning and one thing they don't like.	Morning Meeting 8:20-8:30 Welcome students introduce themselves Name, favorite color, and one thing they like about remote learning and one thing they don't like.	Morning Meeting 8:20-8:30 Welcome students introduce themselves Name, favorite color, and one thing they like about remote learning and one thing they don't like.	Morning Check-In Virtual Field Trip
	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Tw explain the expectation for the chat. Tw show students how to get to the chat. TW give the students two prompts to choose from. I love math because.... I dislike Math because....	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Review chat expectation. Students and teachers will do an icebreaker using padlet. 2 truths and a lie. Tw explain expectations for the activity.	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Tw introduce flipgrid to the students. Students will create a flipgrid answering one of 6 questions. Sw roll a die to determine which question to answer.	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Tw introduce Quizizz to students. TW ask students what do they like or not like about Quizizz. SW complete a Quizizz about Zoom expectations. Students will join the 5th grade class and then complete the quizizz.	
	Small Group Math 9:10-9:40 Attendance Expectations/Break time Expectations/Tardy vs late Show students how to access the chat. Give examples for students and have students to give a thumb up or thumbs down in the chat.	Small Group Math 9:10-9:40 TW introduce Google Slides to the students. Tw explain students expectations when working on google. Sw do Today's number	Small Group Math 9:10-9:40 Tw review expectations for google slides Sw do Today's number	Small Group Math 9:10-9:40 Tw review expectations for google slides. Sw do Today's number	

Mae

When I met with Mae, a White female with 3 years of experience, my first observation was how relaxed she appeared. She spoke confidently of her first few years in teaching and with ease, rattled off words like *equality*, *diversity*, *critical thought*, and *inclusivity*. She also spoke fervently of her passion for helping students understand their role as citizens in their community. However, there was little depth to what she shared throughout the initial interview, coming across as rote and inauthentic. It was not until the second, follow-up interview, that I was able to gain a better understanding of who Mae is as a teacher and what values she seeks to infuse in the day-to-day running of her classroom.

Mae is originally from a small town located in the mountain region of North Carolina. She shared that her hometown is known for higher poverty rates and overall lack of education due to higher dropout rates. She spoke highly of her grandparents, noting that they were widely known in the local community for helping others break out of the cycle of poverty pervasive in her hometown. It is evident that her grandparents made a tremendous impact on how she views the world around her and how she chooses to give back in the communities she is a part of. She frequently spoke of the importance of working within a community to support the needs of others.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Mae shared: kindness, compassion, justice, equality, collaboration, and community. All of the values she shared were emphasized as integral to serving a larger community system and ultimately fostering responsible citizens. She placed emphasis on citizenship and showing care for the natural world and frequently referred to conservation and addressed topics that are current concerns in the science discipline.

When asked about the source of her values, Mae shared that it was largely modeled by her family members over the years. She described her family as rather conservative in terms of social and economic policy and politics in general. What she found helpful during her early years was a "*show me, don't tell me*" mantra. Although the rhetoric she frequently overheard did not match the actions they displayed in the ways they gave back and supported the local community, Mae understood this to mean that mismatch in beliefs versus actions did not take away from the fact that her family were inherently *good* people who found ways to give back to the community and help others.

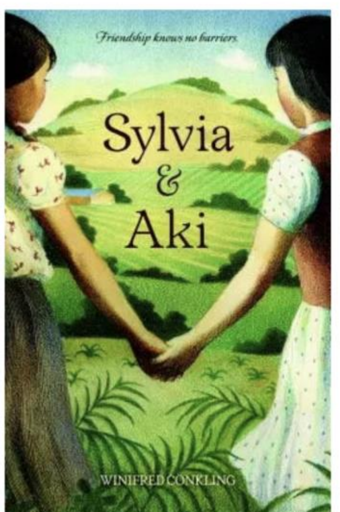
Figure 4. Mae's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 5. Sample Lesson Plan—Mae

9:30 - 10:00 **Morning Meeting**
*Deep Breathing & Stretching
Greeting: "Happy Monday, _____!" Fair Sticks
Sharing: Spring Break Activities in Breakout Rooms
Activity: *Sylvia & Aki* Book Club Introduction

Tell students we are going to embark on a new adventure together -- a book club! What is a book club? Has anyone been in a book club before? What do you think happens in a book club?

Discuss: Look at the cover of the book we are going to read, *Sylvia & Aki*. Who and what do you notice? What is happening? Can you make predictions about what this story might be about, based on the images and words you see?



Read the synopsis: Sylvia never expected to be at the center of a landmark legal battle--all she wanted was to enroll in school. Aki never expected to be relocated to a Japanese internment camp in the Arizona desert; all she wanted was to stay on her family farm and finish the school year. The two girls certainly never expected to know each other, until their lives intersected in Southern California during a time when their country changed forever. Here is the remarkable story based on true events of Sylvia Mendez and Aki Munemitsu, two ordinary girls living in extraordinary times. When Sylvia and her brothers are not allowed to register at the same school Aki attended and are instead sent to a "Mexican" school, the stage is set for Sylvia's father to challenge in court the separation of races in California's schools. Ultimately, Mendez vs. Westminster School District led to the desegregation of California schools and helped build the case that would end school segregation nationally. Through extensive interviews with Sylvia and Aki--still good friends to this day--Winifred Conkling brings to life two stories of persistent courage in the face of tremendous odds.

Reese

After completing her undergraduate degree, Reese, a White female with six years of teaching experience, began her teaching career in a small, rural town located in the mountains of North Carolina where she worked with a large number of indigenous students. During her time there, she shared that she faced several challenges ranging from lack of parental support and involvement, as well as an overall lack of student engagement and motivation. Throughout the course of our interviews it was evident that Reese struggled to recognize her implicit biases and how they may influence her interactions or perception of others. On more than one occasion Reese expressed negative perceptions about students that were centered around stereotypical beliefs communicated about indigenous groups of people.

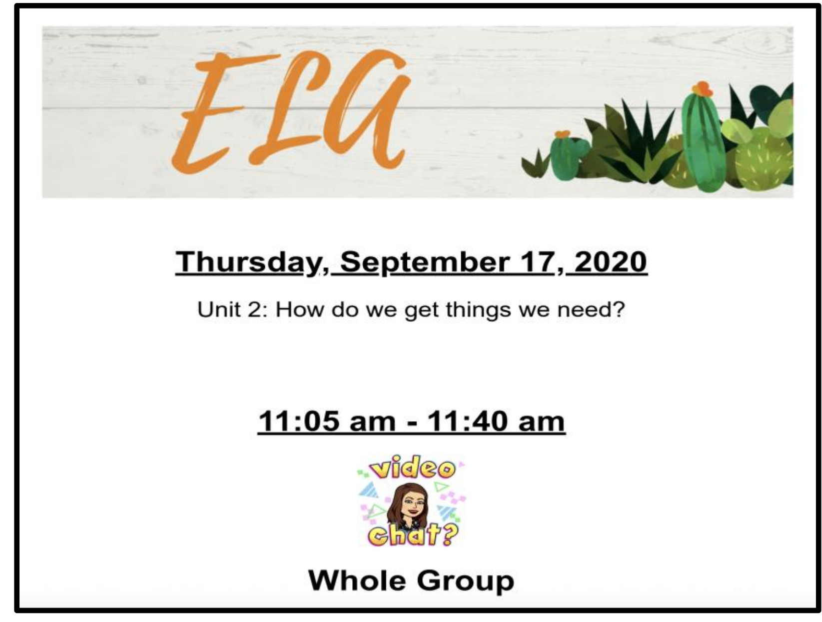
Realizing she missed the familiarity of home, Reese relocated back to the Piedmont region and works in a school that has been plagued with increased gang activity among students. In turn she spoke of issues of disrespect towards herself and classmates and an increased number of defiant behaviors. What she ultimately wants for her class is to develop a sense of community, however she conflated this by telling students they were like a family. This implied students were lacking that connection or level of care for one another by using this metaphor and proved to be problematic given the lack of community established in her classroom.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Reese shared: integrity, responsibility, and respect as being her top three. While she spoke of how each of these three values are beneficial to the larger society as a whole, respect was emphasized the most throughout the course of her interviews. When speaking about respect, Reese equated respect with using “good manners.” During the first interview she expressed, “… being respectful is just a way that you are going to be successful in life.”

When asked about the source of her values, Reese shared that her parents, grandparents, and also teachers she had over the years while growing up were integral in shaping what she values today. Being around others who do not share the same approach to the values she spoke of proved to be challenging for her when accepting her first teaching position roughly three hours from home. Reese explained that this was a determining factor for her relocating back to her hometown to teach.

Figure 6. Reese's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 7. Sample Lesson Plan—Reese



Destiney

Relatively new to the field of education, Destiney, a Black female with two and a half years of teaching experience, reflected on what motivated her to become a teacher. Growing up, she attended schools that were predominantly white. As a black female, she found that not seeing others who looked like her created challenges in developing an understanding and appreciation of her own cultural identity. Throughout the course of the initial interview Destiney frequently referred to her elementary and middle school journey and how receiving a whitewashed version of historical events limited her understanding of the contributions and struggles of the Black community negatively impacted her.

It was not until she grew up and went on to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) that she felt she had access to a diverse and inclusive body of scholarship that acknowledged the contributions and experiences of the Black community. Destiney reported that it was her experience as a student at a HBCU that helped develop her critical consciousness and opened her eyes to see what her early education was lacking. This in turn fueled her passion to become a teacher. Additionally, Destiney shared the struggles she faced not seeing herself reflected in read alouds that she heard or in the teachers she adored. On more than one occasion throughout the interviews she shared that being Black made her stand out to her peers growing up and later her colleagues while working in schools.

Destiney shared that often she was asked to navigate behavior or discipline issues involving students of color simply because her colleagues felt she was better able to address them. While she acknowledged that this was problematic, she was happy to help in the moment because she understood the importance of students being able to connect with someone who they share aspects of their identity with.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Destiney shared: respect, encouragement, fairness, responsibility, dignity, problem solving, and freedom. She situates these values as being ones that help develop well-rounded individuals and ultimately benefit the larger community when students reach adulthood. Destiney addressed the fact that the values she holds dear are ones that she felt were lacking in her early educational experiences in predominantly white schools.

When asked about the source of her values, Destiney said that her mother and her mother's two best friends. Although she shared that she did not necessarily feel she learned much by way of the values she holds dear from the teachers she had, she did speak to the fact that her life experiences, even those that are negative, have helped shape what she views as important values to exemplify in her classroom.

Figure 8. Destiney's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 9. Destiney's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 10. Sample Lesson Plan—Destiney

Tuesday:	Common Formative Assessment on 3.1 and 3.3				
Wednesday:	I can identify characteristics of folktales. I can identify and analyze the character's actions, feelings, and thoughts/words. I can identify the main characters, setting, problem and solution, and sequence of events in a folktale. I can determine the theme of a story and support my idea with evidence from the text. I can identify key traits of a character and support it with evidence or examples from the text.	1. I will recap our learning from Monday. I will introduce the concept of theme. I will explain that one characteristic of Folktales is they teach the reader a lesson through the actions of the characters throughout the plot of the story. I will identify questions we can ask ourselves as we read to help us determine what the author is teaching us.	3. After students complete graphic organizers summarizing the key traits and text evidence, we will share out their findings. I will guide students to analyze each of the events and determine what the author was trying to teach us through each of the character's actions. I will guide the class to determine the theme of the story through analysis or the key traits and actions.	2. Students will return to partner groups where they will read the story for the third time with a focus of identifying key character traits along with evidence from the text to provide as an example of the trait. Each team will contribute one trait for each of the characters to an anchor chart that we will use to help us determine the theme of the story.	4. I will have students record their thinking of what they think the theme of the story is on a sticky note using the sentence frame: "I think the theme of the story is ________ because the author ______________." Or The author is teaching ______ to have/be ________. I know this because in the text ________.
Thursday:	I can identify characteristics of folktales. I can identify and analyze the character's actions,	I will start by recapping what we know about Folktales:	Students will jot their thoughts on sticky notes as I am reading aloud. I will stop throughout the story and ask	Students will reread the story in partners. As they read, they will record any thoughts or questions in the	Each partner team will be assigned a specific section of the text to identify

Hank

After welcoming Hank, a White male with 12 years of experience, to the interview, explaining the process, and asking if he had any questions before getting started, his initial interview began with him immediately asking "Is it going to come back to bite me in the butt?" Throughout the course of the initial interview, he continued to emphasize the point that he was concerned that any comments he made could harm him as he was currently applying for openings in administrative roles. Hesitancy for fear of professional retaliation was continuously brought up for the first part of our interview.

As his comfort level grew, he began to describe his current teaching placement and obstacles he faces as he works to build community in his classroom. He has found teaching at a small, rural school in northwest North Carolina to be challenging while trying to navigate planning lessons around diversity and inclusion. To give an idea of what these struggles include, Hank shared an example of a parent interaction surrounding lessons he designed and taught during Black History Month. A parent, who is a local pastor, voiced concern about his reading aloud of *Henry and the Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine as well as books about the life of Harriet Tubman. Although Hank used the read-alouds to speak to the atrocities that people faced during the time of slavery, the parent was upset because he felt the topic was too complex for students to understand the historical context of the time period and not feel bad for a time in history that they did not live. This became a recurring issue that Hank brought up throughout both the initial and final interviews. Parental censorship based on the values and ideals of the school that lacks diversity in race, gender identity, and sexual orientation made it increasingly challenging for him to design a curriculum and provide learning experiences that he felt were authentic and representative of the diverse world in which students live.

When asked about the values he felt it was important to teach students, Hank shared: "love, respect, community, and open communication." Two of these values, community and communication, are significant insofar as they highlight obstacles Hank shared that he faces in the day-to-day interactions with parents and staff that he works with.

When asked about the source of his values, Hank shared that the source of his values comes from his upbringing as well as teachers he had over the course of his educational journey. He also noted that his Christian upbringing and using it as the basis to determine if they were "living the right way" guided much of what he believed to be important in terms of values. In his own classroom, Hank likes to acknowledge students who are doing the "right thing" as a way of motivating others to also mimic those behaviors or actions. Although he expressed he does not subscribe to the tenets of PBIS, this sort of elicitation through positive reinforcement creates a problematic situation due to the fact that students are externally motivated to behave in a certain way. This in turn reduces the work Hank does around values to be more performative in nature.

Figure 11. Hank's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 12. Hank's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 13. Sample Lesson Plan—Hank

Monday - We will create a bubble chart based around the word "compassion." We will come up with words and phrases that remind us of what compassion is.
We will then begin the book, "Tiara's Hat Parade." I will read this aloud to the class. After reading we will discuss the main character and her character traits. We will work on setting and character trait activity.

Tuesday - We will re-read "Tiara's Hat Parade" and go over the new vocabulary words for the week: tiara, strut, dazzle, sashay, milliner. We will then match the correct pictures to the correct vocabulary words. First grade will work on their Frayer chart.

Wednesday - Re-read "Tiara's Hat Parade." We will use the rest of the time to complete a craft making our own hats. Students can choose which hat they would like to make according to their personality and taste.

Thursday - We will read "I am Love." We will then watch a slideshow on compassion and empathy, feelings.
Students will discuss ways we can read cues and help others by showing compassion and empathy. At the end of the slideshow we will answer the questions together.

Friday - We will complete a compliment craft, making a compliment rainbow for each student.

Griffin

When Griffin, a White female with 15 years of teaching experience, and I sat down to complete the initial interview, the first question I posed was, "Do you have any questions before we get started?" With a quiver in her voice and nervous chuckle, Griffin replied, "I don't think so!" Over the course of the initial interview, I learned that the slight nervousness in her response was an indication of how comfortable she was speaking on her beliefs and values in relation to how she operates in a school community that struggles to maintain boundaries between their religious beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Working at a school in a small, rural town in the mountains of North Carolina, she describes the local area as fairly conservative with the predominant group represented as faithful members of local Southern Baptist churches. Marked by strict Christian ideology that emphasizes intolerance towards anything outside of the white, heteronormative majority. In a

move to protect the beliefs of the predominant group in the local area, Griffin shared that recent changes to school district policy served as a way to evoke fear of retaliation for discussing topics deemed as controversial. Adding an additional layer of complexity to the situation Griffin finds herself in, she shared that her principal also serves as a preacher at a church in the local community.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Griffin shared: problem solving, broadening world view, respect, and perseverance. She describes the importance of providing students with learning experiences rooted in these values because of the small town atmosphere where she teaches. Griffin spoke to the fact that students rarely experience the diversity present outside of their local community. Living in the small town bubble, as she describes, makes it challenging to push their thinking, especially with the level of professional surveillance she navigates daily.

When asked about the source of her values, Griffin credits her experiences growing up abroad in a military family. While she was born in the small, rural mountain community she now calls home and teaches in, she noted that it was a tough transition back after being abroad and gaining a different perspective. It was not until her teenage years that she returned and she remembered "how different it felt here versus other places and how kind of closed-minded people in this area are more apt to be, not that everybody is, but they're definitely just not as open to different points of view." This is something she has found to be a theme while navigating designing learning opportunities for her students that are inclusive and highlight the lived experiences of all.

Figure 14. Griffin's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 15. Griffin's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 16. Sample Lesson Plan—Griffin

	Finish Unit 4 Test today. Read aloud all questions. Collect.	***Biography SS 2.H.1.2- Identify contributions of historical figures & RI 2.2- Identify the main topic & details within a text*** As a class we will read a biography daily about a famous historical figure. Students will record their new learning in a graphic organizer after reading, as well as recount the important contribution that person should be known for. *These are all together to create a BIOGRAPHY BOOK by the time we finish unit. Today's Reading: Thurgood Marshall (EPIC BOOKS)	⇩	***AutoBiography- W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory text…*** **"I Do"-** Using previously created graphic organizer, begin the ROUGH DRAFT of autobiography today. Model the INTRODUCTION today. Use Graphic organizer to keep thoughts organized and concise.	***Timelines (Intro) SS 2.H.1.1 Use a timeline to show sequencing of events*** -Create a time line of my example biography I have modeled. -Use dates and important time to display on the timeline. - Model how to write the time line parts. *Use previous timeline example created as a class on Martin Luther King Jr. (February) refer back to as needed for reminders.

Bell

The most seasoned participant that I interviewed was Bell, a White female with thirty-five years of teaching experience. Almost immediately during her initial interview, it emerged how her unique life experiences coupled with her years in education made a profound impact on who she is as a person as well as a teacher. She expressed a sense of pride in how her parents raised her to be accepting of others, noting how they encouraged her to "bloom where you are planted" and embrace the new surroundings of wherever she was in life. These would become important words to live by for Bell as spent time living overseas in several countries, teaching for the U.S. Department of Defense.

Throughout the interviews, Bell referred to her own early educational experiences as a student and how it has shaped her approach to working with students. She noted as an elementary through high school student her learning centered mostly on academic aspects and

being able to regurgitate information. It was not until she reached college that she found a path where her passion to learn, outside of the traditional sense she had experienced as an early student, was cultivated. Bell expressed that her desire to become a teacher came about because she wanted to provide opportunities for learning that were better than what she had while growing up.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Bell shared: kindness, respect for diversity, compassion, and equality. She expressed that she runs her classroom in a way that students feel seen, heard and cared for, and she intentionally provides students with opportunities to experience each of the values she mentioned. It was evident from pictures of her classroom that students are co-creators of their learning experiences. Artwork, teacher selected texts, anchor charts, and other visuals highlight aspects of their learning and give a glimpse into how Bell helps them process new information.

When asked about the source of her values, Bell credits her early school experiences as a learner. She described struggling in school, particularly in elementary and high school, because schooling was primarily focused on rote memorization of facts and information and being able to regurgitate back for a test. She describes herself as a passionate person and lacked the appropriate avenue in school to explore difficult topics. This coupled with her experiences living overseas helped shape the values she finds important to teach students.

Figure 17. Bell's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 18. Sample Lesson Plan—Bell

Week 5A/Day 22	
Monday, September 21, 2020	
Time	**Grading and Reporting Day** **4:00 Tech Q&A**
8:30-9:00	**Q&A/Office Hours**
9:30-10:00	**Morning Meeting** **(Materials: Name Cards, fair sticks)** • **Greeting:** Name Card, combine with sharing • **Sharing:** Weekend Adventures • **Group Activity:** Introduce Zoom Coseeki - send child to waiting room, set screen on gallery view • **News and Announcements:** *What is race? Reminder . . .no Live Session on Mondays!*
10:30-11:30	**Grade Level Planning**
11:45-12:15	**Read Aloud:** *Let's Talk About Race* Ask: What is race? (noun: The major groups into which human beings can be grouped, based on physical characteristics, such as color -relate to work on identity and how no one can tell your story, except for you, you know who you are

Maggie

Maggie, a White female with seventeen years of teaching experience, grew up in a home where she lived with both of her parents. She frequently spoke of her immediate family (mom, dad, and grandma) lovingly and appreciatively as she described the upbringing they provided and how it shaped who she is today. She also referenced being active in Christian, faith based worship her entire life. This was important to note as much of what she believes to be true is rooted in Christian ideology. Throughout the initial interview she alluded to struggling to understand the perspective of students who have lived experiences different from her own. Maggie also shared that she teaches "a lot of kids who come from really sensitive situations." Intrigued by what she meant by *sensitive situations*, I probed a little more by asking a clarifying question about defining the term. She explained that:

> some of them (students) come from like a poverty situation, um, possibly an abuse situation that maybe … I don't know for sure. But there might've been signals! Um, divorce … You know, I've had, um, students live with someone other than their parents, whether it was a stepparent involved or even a foster situation, living with a grandparent, that kind of thing. So that's kind of what I mean by sensitive, like nothing like that's gone on in my life.

Several times throughout the course of our interviews, Maggie referenced these sort of *sensitive situations*, or anything outside of the egocentric view of her own life experiences in comparison to others, as a deficit. One particular instance centered on students' lack of exhibiting manners and what she feels to be rude or disrespectful. Maggie pointed out that teaching at a school with a student population that represents many different cultures poses challenges in her expectations of students: "Growing up in the south, it is very much manners-driven. Like 'yes ma'am,' 'no

ma'am,' 'please,' and 'thank you.' But how does that translate to other cultures or even just other areas, you know?"

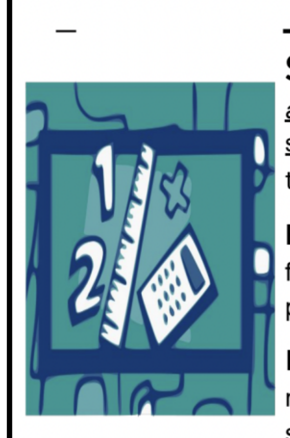
When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Maggie shared: compassion, patience and love. Although it was not directly stated, respect was discussed numerous times. It is interesting to note that Maggie equates respect with what one might attribute to *good manners*. Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that her standard for showing respect is defined by her white, middle-class upbringing in a small southern town. As mentioned previously, this is largely problematic because of the diverse populations she works with.

When asked about the source of her values, Maggie shared, "I know a lot of it comes from my faith. Um, and then people that, uh, you know, friends that I've made along the way, that for the most part have a similar mindset as me. But I've … it definitely goes back to my parents and my grandparents." This statement was highlighted in both interviews and helped to better understand her perspective as she reflected on her planning, classroom practices and interactions with students. A common theme that showed throughout was an internal struggle between expecting others to have or work towards acceptance of her shared values and taking into account how their difference in culture or upbringing influenced their personal beliefs and values.

Figure 19. Maggie's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 20. Maggie's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 21. Sample Lesson Plan—Maggie



Standards: 4.NF.3.a.b UNDERSTAND a fraction *a*/*b* with *a*> 1 as a sum of fractions 1/*b*. a. UNDERSTAND addition and subtraction of fractions as joining and separating parts referring to the same whole

Essential Questions: How can I add mixed number fractions? How can I add fractions/mixed numbers with word problems?

I Can Statement: I can use a visual model to help me add mixed numbers. I can use word problem skills to help me solve problems with fractions.

Ceriya

The importance of developing relationships and teaching the whole child was a common theme throughout Ceriya's interviews. As a Black female with six years of teaching experience, she described her teaching experiences working at a restart school that was continuously designated as low-performing by the state of North Carolina as challenging. Ceriya was one of the few teachers selected by her principal at the time to join her at the restart school. She shared that her principal was identified by the school system as highly effective as evidenced in her ability to move scores and show growth on end-of-grade test measures. Ceriya knew that teaching at a restart school would require more work but seemingly underestimated the hardships that students face outside of school that likely impacted their school performance and ability to engage with the curriculum being taught.

Ceriya casually mentioned her school had been identified as one of the worst schools in the county. Although she did not share the source of this information, she went on to elaborate: "I would say people cringe when they hear this name. Um, but that's because of, um, the

environment that it’s in.” The school is located in a high poverty area where the largest part of the student population lives in public housing. Additionally, there is a high crime rate with noted gang activity that plagues the local community. Ceriya expressed that upon coming to the school, student behavior issues made a huge impact on teaching and learning.

With the struggles she faces with student behavior and trying to remove barriers students may face around access to resources and meeting general day-to-day needs they may have, Ceriya shared that she often finds herself doubling as a social worker. She expressed that first and foremost, she wants her students to understand that school is a safe space for them and that she will do what she can to fill whatever is lacking in their life. The more she spoke to the deficits her students had, it was evident that her desire to meet the needs of her students crossed professional boundaries. Ceriya stated, “And also, because they are not getting it at home, we’re called their mommies and daddies. They call us that all the time. So we have to act, take on those roles.” Associating the issues that her students face while living in high poverty areas with lack of parenting is problematic and minimizes the obstacles the parents face when deciding how to allocate already limited resources for their family. In speaking with her, it is evident she cares a great deal for her students; however, it presents much more as a deficit on the part of the families and situates her as more of a savior to the students she works with.

When asked what values she thought were important to teach students, Ceriya shared: building relationships, respect, and perseverance. Building relationships and perseverance were referenced frequently within the interviews when speaking of the population of students she serves. For her, these two values are important for them to exemplify because of the adversity they could face as they grow up living in poverty. In terms of respect, much of what she expressed pertained to respect in terms of acknowledging authority figures.

When asked about the source of her values, Ceriya said that her foundation came from home by way of her family and church. She shared that when growing up she was very involved in her church community and acknowledges that the values she has today stem from the hidden lessons and messages embedded throughout biblical teachings and sermons. Ceriya was quick to share that although this is a source of her values, she tries not to push biblical views on the students she serves.

Figure 22. Ceriya's 2020-2021 Classroom Photographs

Figure 23. Ceriya's 2021-2022 Classroom Photographs

Figure 24. Sample Lesson Plan—Ceriya

Monday 04/12/2021	Tuesday 04/13/2021	Wednesday 04/14/2021	Thursday 04/15/2021	Friday 04/16/2021
Morning Meeting 7:45am - 8:45am	Morning Meeting 7:45am - 8:45am	Asynchronous Learning 8:20am - 2:50pm	Morning Meeting 7:45am - 8:45am	Morning Meeting 7:45am - 8:45am
Heggerty 8:45am - 9:00am	**Heggerty 8:45am - 9:00am**		**Heggerty 8:45am - 9:00am**	**Heggerty 8:45am - 9:00am**
Week 17	**Week 17**		**Week 17**	**Week 17**
Phonics 9:00am - 9:40am	**Phonics 9:00am - 9:40am**		**Phonics 9:00am - 9:40am**	**Phonics 9:00am - 9:40am**
Consonant le syllable type	**Consonant le syllable type**		**Consonant le syllable type**	**Consonant le syllable type**
West virginia lesson: Day 1 warm up, syllable type, syllable division rules, word reading blending	West virginia lesson: Day 1 word work, dictation, text application		West virginia lesson: Day 2	West virginia lesson: Day 2
Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm	Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm		Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm	Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm
Intro to Folktales	**Anansai Learns a Lesson**		**Anansai Learns a Lesson**	**Anansai Learns a Lesson**
Standards RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. RL.3.2 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.	**Standards** RL.3.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, identifying words that impact the meaning in a text.		**Standards** RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.	**Standards** RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
Objective I can identify the elements of a folktale in the text.	**Objective** I can determine the meaning of words in a text.		**Objective** I can refer explicitly to the text to ask and answer questions.	**Objective** I can refer explicitly to the text to ask and answer questions.
Activating Elements of folktales chart (refer to chart from MRT) - happens long ago - make believe - happily ever after - magical characters	**Activating** **Activate prior knowledge:** Class will have a discussion about the vocabulary words fabulous, splendid, unique - what do the words mean? - when have you used the words		**Activating** The class will discuss lessons that they have learned in their life. Explain that in this week's story the character Anansi is going to be learning a lesson. Our purpose will be to determine what that lesson is.	**Activating** Review story map.
	Vocabulary fabulous splendid unique Introduce vocabulary words (fabulous, splendid, unique)		**Vocabulary** fabulous splendid	Class will read pages 39-41 of Anansi Learns a Lesson **Checks for understanding:** - How does Turtle plan to solve his problem? - Why does Turtle invite Anasai to his house? - Use what Turtle says to make a prediction about how he will trick Anansai.

Summary

Highlighting each research study participant and capturing significant points from their interviews was integral in being able to understand how larger themes emerged from the three data points. These introductions serve to provide insight on each participant, and a preview of how their contributions influenced this study. To offer a snapshot for reference, Table 4 outlines each participant, the values they feel are important to teach students and also the reported source of where their values come from as an individual.

Table 4. Summary of Values and Source of Values Shared by Participants

Participant	Values Shared as Important to Teach	Source of Values
Charlie	Leadership Trust Responsibility Self-care Education Family Friendship	Parents (Mom & Dad) Grandparents
Mae	Kindness Equality Respecting Differences Collaboration Community	Family Upbringing Personal Observation
Reese	Integrity Responsibility Respect Organizational Skills	Parents Grandparents Previous Teachers
Destiney	Respect Encouragement Fairness Responsibility Dignity Problem Solving Freedom	Mother Mother’s Best Friends
Hank	Love Respect Community	Upbringing Previous Teachers

Participant	Values Shared as Important to Teach	Source of Values
	Open Communication	
Griffin	Problem Solving Broadening World View Respect Perseverance	Family Experiences (military) Teaching Experiences
Bell	Kindness Respect for Diversity Compassion Equality	Previous School Experiences Life Experiences Abroad
Maggie	Compassion Patience Love	Christian Faith Parents Grandparents
Ceriya	Building Relationships Respect Perseverance	Mom Family Church

As is evident, what teachers reported as values that are important to teach students was also conflated with skills and behaviors. I felt it was important to include, regardless, since the teachers defined these as values.

While many listed only a few values that they felt were important to teach students in their classrooms, it was evident through further discussion, review of lesson plans and classroom photographs, that much of the work they do conveys a greater range of values that are important to them, both explicitly and implicitly.

CHAPTER V: TEACHER IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the first of three themes from my study: teacher identity and how the intersectionality of participant identities influenced their values. This in turn impacted how they presented within the classroom space. Teacher identity has a profound impact on the classroom environment. The teacher in a given space works to establish their expectations, procedures, classroom layout/design, and instructional practices based on their values, attitudes, and belief system(s). Sachs (2005), as cited in Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), calls attention to the various dimensions of identity and its dynamic nature:

> Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be,' 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (p. 15)

Teachers carry lessons they have learned, previous life experiences, and their own personal values and beliefs with them each day. They navigate creating lesson plans, interactions with students and families, and interrogating their own values to ensure they can appropriately address the needs of their students. The values teachers have can also impact the overall classroom climate, the way students interact with each other, and how they connect with content that is being taught. In this chapter I start with the interviews as this gives insight into the participants, sharing more about their values. Next, I share photographs of their classrooms, providing an

image of the learning spaces where this work is happening. Finally, I highlight lesson plans from several participants, showing how the participants plan for instruction.

When Cultures Collide

Conducting interviews with participants provided me the opportunity to learn more about what I could not see (experiences and perceptions) and to explore alternate explanations about what I do see (lesson plans and photographs) with each participant (Glesne, 2016). During this time spent with participants, I gained insight and perspective about how their life experiences and their prevailing beliefs shaped who they are teachers and how they present in their classrooms.

One issue that arose across several interviews was how different types of cultural barriers manifested in the educational setting for participants. The cultural barriers that emerged fell into the following three categories: stereotypes and prejudices (cultural and poverty), conflicting values, and those involving race/ethnicity. In the sections that follow, I draw on conversations I had with participants during the initial and final interviews, illustrating the implications these cultural barriers have on classroom dynamics and conflict with values that teachers shared.

Stereotypes and Prejudices

Classrooms are diverse spaces that reflect the larger communities of the students they serve. Participants in this study frequently shared information indirectly and noted the differences in the identities of the groups of students they taught. Throughout the initial and post interviews, they provided comments that are stereotypical in nature, expressing the prejudices and the implicit bias of several participants. On more than one occasion, questionable statements were made surrounding the circumstances of people experiencing poverty as well as stereotyping

students and making negative generalizations about their behaviors, perpetuating negative beliefs about their ethnicity.

As I interviewed Reese, I learned a lot about her background and how she moved to the mountains of North Carolina for college, majoring in education. After graduating, she decided to teach in a school not far from her college town. Over the course of her interview I quickly learned that this was a challenging time for her professionally. Being several hours away from home and all that was familiar to her was difficult. Reese expressed:

> … basically I have been in ██████ County for most of my life. I went away to ██████ ██████ University and taught there for two years. Um, I feel like the values there were a little different than here. Um, so coming back to where I was raised, I feel like, you know- they're similar to the way that I was raised …

Reese went on to share that schooling and education in general were not something that folks in that area took seriously. In the area where Reese grew up, education and the relationships that were developed while at school were important and valued. She noted:

> There was a child that was, uh, not turning in homework. And so, I wrote many, many notes and letters home and said, 'you know, I'm just letting you know that this child's not completing homework and therefore their grade is suffering because of it.' And the mom wrote back and said that he would not be completing homework because football was more important after school. And so I just feel like school wasn't as valued and also the relationships with teachers weren't as valued.

Reese failed to consider what made football so important for this student and their family. Granted, teachers typically find extending content area lessons through additional practice at home as instrumental in students solidifying their understanding of concepts. However, she

neglects to consider the learning opportunities that come as a result of playing an organized sport. Skills such as collaboration, team work, and goal setting are important aspects of a child's learning that is a hallmark of sports involvement. Although it is not skills practice in terms of a worksheet, students who are playing sports such as football after school are learning skills that will ultimately help them grow in some capacity.

As she continued to elaborate, she shared another example that she felt supported her assertion that students and their families in that particular area/region did not value school, discussing the indigenous population in that area:

> … I did a couple of internships in as well. And the dynamics there are really different too. Just because a lot of those, a lot of those… , um, don't end up actually graduating high school from what we are told because they are going to get like the check related to them. I'm not sure, like I never got into all the details, but if you're a , then you get some kind of like stipend each month or something like that. Or every couple of months. And so, we were told whenever we were there, that school was not as valued because they were going to get the payment either way.

In moments like these where biased or prejudiced comments were made, I was challenged to maintain a researcher's disposition given my immediate critical analysis of all the issues with such statements and its pedagogical implications. Repeating this statement and attributing negative views about an already marginalized group that has historically faced adversity and discrimination only serves to further stigmatize them. It was hard to imagine how these negative assumptions/beliefs about students impacted her presence in the classroom and the ways she interacted with students.

About a week after our interview, I shared a transcript for Reese to review. Afterwards, she contacted me asking if we could chat. I was curious what she wanted to discuss or what questions she had. We scheduled a phone call for the following day and it appeared that she had reflected on the statements she made during the interview. Initially she asked me to redact school names, the name of her mascot and locations she shared, adding another layer of anonymity for her. I assured her that I already planned to do this for each participant. Then she began to stumble over her words and finally asked if I could retract the comments she made about a particular demographic during our interview. After reading the transcription, she was bothered at how the comment sounded and ultimately made her look. She feared that she came across as a racist. After further discussion, Reese deflected saying that she just repeated what she heard and said that since it was repeated anonymously it was okay to keep the comments.

Reflection is an important part of the professional practice of a teacher. Moments, days and sometimes years after, they continue to think about what they say and do. This illustrates another example of values at play in her teaching. While having our conversation, Reese began crying, expressing worry that she came across the wrong way and did not want folks to misinterpret her intended meaning behind what she shared. In her mind she simply shared what had been previously shared with her, failing to realize the implications of repeating such stereotypical comments.

Another way that stereotypical comments arose during interviews was in relation to financial insecurity. Of the nine participants in this study, two reported working within higher poverty schools. While Griffin's reflected on her work in a higher poverty school, serving a predominantly White population in the mountains of North Carolina, Ceriya described working at an inner city school serving mostly students of color who were living in poverty. Working at

higher poverty schools often posed challenges for these teachers as they tried to navigate the perceived needs of students. I intentionally used the word *perceived* as I found that both Griffin and Ceriya made assumptions about what students lacked or needed based on their own standard of living. Speaking closely with Griffin and Ceriya highlighted issues around stereotyping students they worked with who experienced poverty.

Ceriya reflected on her current school proudly, and shared how far they had come in such a short time under new leadership. As mentioned in Chapter IV, she left her previous school to join her then principal at a restart school. Her principal at the time was known for her ability to help struggling schools with implementation of policies and procedures to help get students on track and improve student performance on state tests. It was apparent during the interviews that Ceriya heard and believed the negative comments shared with her about her new school.

She reported, "students here don't have many things, they don't have clothes and they don't have shoes." Frequently throughout our conversation she referenced the fact that her students often did not have basic necessities needed for school or even living in the community. She spoke of how she, and other staff members, actively worked to fill gaps in things they felt students needed. This was important to Ceriya because she shared, "if they're thinking about their home life, then they're not able to focus on the academics." She described the level of poverty her students faced as pervasive and that it impacted all students.

During the second interview, I asked Ceriya to further clarify comments she made about her school. She described her school as "located in the quote, unquote hood" and highlighted examples to support how poverty impacted her work with students:

> Yes, we have to be teachers. We have to put our foot down, but at the same time … they want to get away from what they have to go home to. So they have to go home to their

> parents yelling at them … to no food. When they come to school, I'm going to feed you. I'm going to give you those snacks. I'm going to be that mother that you need while you're here. Um, so our school, we have a food pantry. We have clothes, we have shoes, even if we don't have it, somebody is going to the store to get it. Um … because it's … I just believe in providing an escape. So I can't take you out of your environment, but while you're with me, I can give you what you are lacking.

Although Ceriya's comments showed that she cares for the well-being of her students and makes it a point to ensure students have everything they need, they also illustrated how professional boundaries are crossed. Situating herself as a mother figure because it is perceived that is lacking for her students living in poverty is a questionable assumption. Making this generalization about her student's family dynamic minimized the obstacles they may face as it relates to financial insecurity, causing them to not be as present or available for their children. For example, families facing financial hardship often have to work longer hours or at times, multiple jobs to make ends meet. Situating the context in this way switches the narrative from a negative and deficit to that of a parent doing what they can to support their family.

Listening as Ceriya described her school painted a picture of extreme poverty where teachers worked actively to meet the perceived needs of students. However, Ceriya contradicted herself later in the interview sharing how families give back, thanking them for the support they provide their students:

> We had a potluck today and you never know the impact you make. One of the parents paid for our food because she just remembers the face of the teacher and she was like, you know, you've done so much for my child!

Hearing this comment against the previous statements she made about families and financial needs made me wonder if she truly had a sense of what students needed or if the motivation for the things she provided was based on the comments she had heard previously about her school. Although generosity can come in many forms, it is hard to imagine a family covering the cost of feeding an entire staff when they are unable to afford basic necessities for their students.

While Ceriya's comments reflected assumptions about what students were lacking in terms of material things, Griffin expressed concerns about life experiences and exposure to diverse perspectives/topics associated with the level of poverty her students faced. Griffin expressed that broadening a student's worldview was an important value she worked actively to teach students. She elaborated on this, stating:

> I feel like here, especially in the rural area, a lot of kids here have a very small worldview. They have a small bubble. And so I feel like, um, I've done a lot of trying to broaden that perspective for them because they don't have a lot of experiences with people outside of this area. And a lot of the kids haven't traveled a whole lot (due to finances) and they just … they don't have the experiences that a lot of kids have.

It is important to note that Griffin now teaches in the same relative area that she grew up in. As mentioned in Chapter 4, she grew up in a military family, often moving around, even internationally, to different bases for her dad's career. Based on what she described about the region, Griffin's lived experiences were an anomaly for many. Viewing her student's lack of diverse experiences while blaming it on the financial stressors they faced, negated the fact that they live in a rural area that is relatively remote and further removed from larger cities which typically attract diverse populations. To mitigate this, Griffin shared:

> … I do a lot of choosing, being really strategic about choosing more diverse books, um, picking characters that don't necessarily look like them … Cause most of the kids I have are just, you know, White children. Um, now there are a lot of white, lower class children, as far as socioeconomics. But broadening that worldview, and like, uh, I think I spend a lot of time thinking about culture.

Her diligence in selecting children's literature to support the values she works to teach students is an important theme that will be unpacked further in the following chapter.

The ways that teachers respond or engage with the diverse perspectives that inform the social identities of their students can affirm or contradict the values they expressed as important to teach students. In the case of this study, Reese articulated values that did not align with topics that were discussed during the interviews. Reese expressed an important value for her was respect. At multiple points throughout the interviews, she discussed how respect for one another helped to establish a mutually supportive sense of community in her classroom. However, it is hard to consider how this sense of community is developed when there is a blatant disrespect for the cultural heritage of her students. In turn, Ceriya seemed to accept and feed into negative stigmas of individuals living in higher poverty areas, making assumptions about the needs of her students and overinflating the role she *needs* to play in their lives. What sets these two participants apart is the level of reflection that Reese demonstrated about the racist comments she made regarding her indigenous students. Ceriya, Reese, and Griffin each highlighted how stereotypes can further perpetuate negative assumptions about groups of people, stigmatizing them, and working in contradiction with values that were expressed as important to teach students.

Conflicting Values

During the interviews, I learned of situations where participant's values conflicted with students and families, the school, or the local community. As I reflected on my own experiences as a teacher, I realized that at times where I most disagreed with what I was being asked to teach or how I was being asked to do it, I simply closed my door and did what I thought was best for students. Looking at this scenario through a critical lens, I realize the inherent problem that it poses. I made judgements based on my values in concert with what I felt were instructional best practices. While I acknowledge that my values have shifted over the years and I have become far more critically aware of the implications of my work, in my early career this was not always the case. Listening to Maggie, Hank and Griffin share instances of how differences in cultural values manifested in their classrooms forced me to consider how often it is hard for teachers to see past their own values, truly understanding the implications they have on their pedagogical practice.

Maggie described her school as very diverse, serving as the English language learning program site for their zone. She reports that the student body represents over 20-30 different countries and serves as a host to a large population of students who are political refugees from Burma. Although Maggie has worked at such a diverse school, it was evident throughout her interview that she struggles to navigate situations where her values differ culturally from those of her students.

In one instance, Maggie described how respect is an important value for her and one she works actively to model for and teach students. Failing to consider that respect takes on different meanings and presents differently depending on your culture, Maggie shared an instance that contradicted her own values and beliefs:

> I was always taught when an adult is speaking to you, whether it's good, bad, ugly, you look them in the eye. And there are several cultures that I have learned over the years that it is offensive if they look you in the eye and I'll notice that they they're, they're looking down kind of not always sheepish, but remorseful maybe. And I do recall there were times when I would say "Look right here! I'm talking to you! Look at me!" And they couldn't like, literally it was, it was like, it was physically impossible for them to look up at me. And in asking questions, I learned from other adults who were more familiar with them—uhh, well that's not how they do things. And so I've learned, and I just, I try to be, because I don't know where people are coming from. I don't let that be the thing that bugs me anymore. It used to get on my nerves, like how I felt like it was disrespectful. And now I learned that maybe I was being disrespectful by asking them to do something that they would never have been allowed to do before.

Although she reported having received a variety of professional development opportunities around diversity, Maggie showed that she still struggled with internalizing the concepts she learned throughout and applying it in everyday interactions she had with her students.

A point that I noted in this statement was that Maggie reached out to other adults to learn more about her students cultural identity. Curious about this, I asked Maggie if she ever sat down with her students to ask questions about their cultural identity and beliefs. She shared: "I have learned things from them, but I don't know that I've actually sat down and asked a student 'will you tell me about this part of your culture?' I don't know that I ever have." Considering the amount of diverse perspectives found in the school, and likely reflected in her own homeroom class, I was surprised to hear that she does not have these sorts of conversations with her students. This illustrated that Maggie does not plan or teach in a way that students see aspects of

their identity in the day-to-day of their classroom or that she thinks students could be knowledgeable about their culture.

Understanding the importance of allowing room for learning about and experiencing aspects of diverse cultures and perspectives is instrumental for students' learning, especially in preparing to be future citizens of a much larger community one day. Similarly to Maggie, Hank showed that he had trouble seeing past his values when it came to the types of opportunities for learning that he created for students. As I talked with Hank, I learned that at the time, he was serving as the chair of the PBIS committee at his school. He was quick to note that although he was over the PBIS committee he did not necessarily believe or support all of the tenets, particularly rewarding students for good behavior. Hank shared that although they were a PBIS school, they decided to implement Class Dojo as a tool to use in conjunction. Class Dojo is a web-based classroom management platform that is used to record and track student behavior through rewarding students with points or taking points away for less than desirable behaviors. From his description, it was decided that Class Dojo "became more of a … a tool we're going to use for classroom management and we created our PBIS system for the school."

Hank reported that he found ways to navigate aspects of each to make it work for what he valued as a teacher. Although he reported previously that he did not support all of its tenets and disapproving of the rewards students received, Hank shared in regards to the values he tries to teach students that:

> It is very embedded throughout the day. Um, there are times where it's explicitly taught. um, at Christmas with our values and stuff in class. I had a bare Christmas tree. Um … I had lights, but my students had to earn ornaments, um, for doing things, in the classroom. Kind of what you would do for the PBIS expectations. And if they showed that or they

> were completing their work or whatever, we would put the ornament on the tree, um, and decorate it that way. And so at the end, they could go around and see, oh, I have so many ornaments up on the tree. And see, we wrote down on the ornament, the specific thing they did. So if the principal came in or visitors came into the classroom, they're looking, the child's name is on it and what they've done and they can go up to say, "wow, I'm very proud of you." So trying to build them up and encourage them to continue to do those things.

Although students were not receiving a monetary (school based currency) reward for their good behaviors, they were still receiving public recognition for their acts embedded in a religious tradition in a public school. Hank even stressed including names so students were singled out and for their actions and received continued praise, hoping the constant affirmation would serve to elicit more of the desired behaviors.

I realized in that moment, Hank failed to see the correlation with his Christmas tree to that of PBIS. In the follow up interview I probed further, hoping he would see the relation if I asked a very pointed question: "In your interview, you talked about the fact that you're a PBIS school, and you're the PBS leader, but you don't necessarily subscribe to the reward system and the continuous reinforcement through things like that. But then you also talked about the Christmas tree and students earning ornaments based on good behavior. Could you kind of help me understand that better?" Hank responded, and stated that

> Well, the ornaments were just where if they did something positive, we'd write it down on the ornament on the tree. So they didn't necessarily get like a prize … or the prize, I guess you could say is the recognition for the positive thing that they've done. Um, so if they messed up, the ornament didn't come off the tree. We were trying to fill it up. So I

> don't like to tie candy and in the prize box to those types of things. I want them to take pride in something that they've done and that was an easy way to display it. So when whoever comes in to visit the classroom can say, oh wow, look at this. And it was unique and different and it was really centered around the student's efforts and stuff.

It was obvious with his answer that Hank did not recognize the relationship of the Christmas tree as the same type of reward system that PBIS uses. A hallmark of PBIS is that students do not lose the rewards they earn. For example, most schools implement PBIS, focusing on the *positive* behaviors, and bait students by paying (rewarding) them for demonstrating desirable behaviors using a school based currency system. Since there is not some sort of candy or school currency being exchanged as part of the reward, he views his approach as an improvement to the system. Given that the focus is only positively recognizing students and not deducting or taking away things after they have been rewarded, this called me to question his identity as a teacher, maintaining he does not completely buy in, creating an "improved" version and making it his own, seeing it as consistent with his values.

Aside from the fact that Hank's system is heavily rooted in the tenets of PBIS, whether recognized or not, the Christmas tree that he uses is associated with a Christian holiday. Although some may argue that a Christmas tree is a secular object, it is used in conjunction with a holiday widely celebrated by Christians and using one, during the month of December, in a classroom in such a way sends messages to students about Hank's values and beliefs. Hank is able to do this because the school where he works is a small rural school that is firmly rooted in the Christian ideals of the surrounding community. The assumption is that all students he teaches subscribe to the same beliefs.

Griffin's situation was similar to Maggie and Hank because there was an apparent contradiction in values. Working at a smaller rural school in the mountains that served a predominantly White, Christian population impacted the way Griffin designed lesson plans, selected materials, and ultimately taught her students. During our follow up interview she reported:

> I think in the county that I live in, in particular, um, I have to be real careful about things that would be considered "controversial." Um, our district has made it very clear this year that they, um, they even added it into our HR- there's like a whole policy now about, um, that they've added in about, um, teachers, you know, not delving into controversial topics or trying to sway children in any way with their political beliefs. That's like an ACTUAL thing in our HR now! Um, it's a policy that polices us as teachers!

In the initial interview, Griffin shared that she treads lightly when trying to discuss topics such as Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, and gender identity in her classroom. She credited the rapport she develops with families and established sense of trust that allows her to engage on some level with these topics, but given the addition to district policy, she does not feel safe doing so.

The values she expressed as important to teach students such as problem solving, broadening world view, respect, and perseverance are virtually impossible to discuss without situating them in a relevant context. In further discussion, Griffin emphasized that the policy was left vague, not clearly defining what was deemed as controversial, further limiting what topics teachers feel comfortable infusing into their daily instruction due to fear of retaliation and potentially, termination.

What makes each of these instances stand out is that teachers navigated situations where their values created a conflict of sorts for them, whether realized or not. Hank, for example, was

unable to identify how putting up the Christmas tree in his classroom and making students earn ornaments did in fact align with PBIS, a system he adamantly shared that he did not agree with. Additionally, decorating for holidays within the classroom can isolate children of faiths that do not align with the majority, contributing to the development of ethnocentrism. Additionally, Hank makes the assumption that all students are Christian and that all Christian denominations celebrate Christmas.

With regards to Griffin's situation, she understands the need for her students to learn about diverse perspectives and promote the values she shared in her initial interview. The trouble she faces is that the local community and school actively work to keep the dominant perspective central to learning, whitewashing the curriculum and materials in a way that silences the lived experiences of people of color, historically or in the present day.

Challenges Teachers of Color Face in the Classroom

Destiney shared the challenges she faced as a person of color growing up and going to schools in a predominantly white community. She reported that often the experiences she learned about did not feature or highlight the lived experiences of those who looked like her. As mentioned in Chapter 4, it was not surprising, given where she grew up, to hear Destiney share that it was not until she went to a HBCU that she began to learn of the history and contributions of people who look like her. Destiney reported:

> I think, uh, I had a really tough, um, really tough, like going through school. I hated school, you know? I definitely felt like, um, it wasn't for me. I was kind of tired of it and then I went to a Black college, then it was a totally different thing. I went to a HBCU and I was just like, "oh my God, this is amazing!" Um, but before that, it was just really tough

> being an African-American student in a predominantly white space … You know, I learned what not to do, what, who not to be.

As I listened to Destiney and observed the shift in her posture and face while describing her early educational experiences, it was obvious that this left a lasting impression on her and the interactions that she alluded to, but never fully shared, impacted her greatly.

She continued and noted that she was often treated differently as a person of color in a predominantly white space. She even drew attention to the fact that she later learned that the things she learned were not necessarily right:

> Then I decided to go to HBCU and I was like, wait, this is how life is supposed to be? So it was really, you know, totally eye opening, um, to see a huge difference on how, you know, I was treated and how I was talked to. And you know, the things that I learned that, you know, I thought were right, but it really wasn't.

I was curious about what she meant by "the things I learned that … I thought were right, but it really wasn't", so I asked her to elaborate more. Destiney shared,

> Well, and that's hard to … really explain. But, you know, the bare minimum was, um, like inventions. You thought that a lot of these inventions came from Caucasian people, but in reality, you know, a lot of these inventions came from African-Americans. And we have always learned about, um, Rosa parks and Martin Luther King. And it was like, wait, they're not the only people, you know, there's more! They're just, you know, the surface level everyone hears about. And so, you know, you think about Christopher Columbus and things like that. And you're like, this is all a lie!? You think about, you know, a history book in high school. And I'm like, like there's Black people and you know, like they did things. And so, you know, I was just like, wow, like, aren't we more

> important that this? I feel like in high school and elementary, we just … I didn't get … we didn't talk about African-Americans. We didn't talk about how important an African-American was. So I never thought, you know, like I just didn't think how important I was and how important, you know, our history was—so going to an HBCU, I just learned, you know, so much of what was right. Not saying that everything I learned was right, and what was wrong, but, you know, I just … it just cleared up a lot of things for me.

As I listened to her describe the feelings she had growing up, not experiencing curriculum that included perspectives that she could relate to, that looked like her, that gave her an opportunity to see the great works and contributions of Black people, I could visibly see the hurt she experienced when she went on to college and learned there was another narrative that she had been denied. The experiences she reflected on and feelings she still carries with her today became a catalyst for her as a teacher. Destiney went on to describe how this impacts the way she teaches:

> You know, for African-Americans … like we, we were kind of left behind. And I know that's awful to say because every teacher wants to … to, you know, teach every student. But when I think about the things that, you know, we went through, maybe, students are still being left behind. To me it's 2020/2021 and African-Americans are STILL being left behind. So that's always like a thought process for me, especially within my class.

When I considered the weight of this statement, I thought back to recent media stories involving the atrocities that Black people in America still face today. Ignoring their collective lived histories and omitting them from the curricula that are taught only seeks to present a false history that misrepresents how various events and struggles led to where we are today. Destiney knows all too well what it is like to live in a community where she is not valued and uses those

moments in time to present a different perspective, highlighting the histories representative of the students she teaches as a way to right the wrong she experienced. What I found to be particularly interesting was that other participants who identify as Black did not mention obstacles they face as teachers associated with their racial identity. This speaks to the different lived experiences each have had and how they impact the way teachers see their identities within the context of the classroom. I know Destiney's experience is not an anomaly, therefore I wanted to highlight it even though other teachers of color in the study did not discuss these challenges.

Setting Up Space

Each year teachers return to work with just a few days to spare before students arrive. During this time, they work frantically to set up their classrooms, deciding furniture placement, factoring in how students will engage, all while trying to leverage what they value with that of building level expectations. It is a daunting task that requires teachers to consider how creative and original they can be year to year! Walking into my first classroom in 2005, I was given a half sheet of copy paper that listed things that should be visible in my room design. During that time, for example, I had to have a "boys closet" and a "girls closet" for backpacks and coats, a classroom library, word wall, textbooks on each student's desk, and a bulletin board decorated for each content area that would be changed monthly to highlight new concepts. Although it does not feel that long ago since I started teaching, completing this research study showed me how far we have come with classroom design and the values these spaces convey to students.

For this study, participants submitted 3-5 classroom photographs for the 2020-2021 school year as well as the 2021-2022 school year. In the section that follows, I position one photograph from each year, side-by-side to compare differences as it relates to the teacher's identity and experiences. It is important to note that during 2020-2021 schools were under strict COVID

guidance and teachers were forced to follow social distancing guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all. In comparing the photographs, it is apparent that COVID impacted how teachers set up their room for the year and often contradicted the values they shared during the initial interview as important to teach students.

Looking at the 2020-2021 classroom photograph (Figure 25) that Charlie shared illustrates that her school was still operating under strict social distancing guidelines. Desks are spread apart, all facing towards the interactive whiteboard. Visible in the background, to the left of the interactive board is a computer setup that was used for students who chose to remain remote to be able to see the class and view lessons that Charlie taught.

Figure 25. Charlie's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

2020-2021 2021-2022

Comparing the 2020-2021 photograph to the 2021-2022 classroom photograph shows a shift in how desks are arranged, placing them together where they are in rows. Desks are still all forward facing, angled in a way that is traditional and teacher-centric. This photograph conveys

that the teacher is the focal point in the classroom, and instruction centers on teacher delivery of information. With desks in rows, facing forward, communication between students is limited. Both photographs show classroom spaces that are uninviting, stripped of color, student work and decor in general. While student proximity to each other changed post-COVID, not much else did.

The photographs Destiney submitted for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years (Figure 26) showing her classroom made it challenging to fully understand the flow of the space and how various spots of the classroom are utilized. What was evident was, like Charlie, the teacher is the focal point in the classroom. Pictures from both years show that there is a distinct *front* of the classroom. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, it can be attributed to being in proximity to technology. In the photograph from that year, the large monitor at the front of the room and additional technology pictured provided her with an avenue to reach students who opted to remain in remote learning, while simultaneously teaching students who were present for in-person learning.

Figure 26. Destiney's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

2020-2021 2021-2022

The photograph from 2020-2021 shows a very stripped-down version of a classroom, lacking instructional materials such as anchor charts for students to reference, learning materials such as manipulatives and student materials in/on desks. These aspects speak to the fact that at this time, Destiney was navigating local and state COVID guidance that impacted her design and ability to incorporate various materials.

In the 2021-2022 photograph, more materials were visible in general. There were name plates on each desk that served as an instructional support material depicting shapes with their names, numbers and other helpful reference information. In addition, Destiney has more instructional materials visible on the walls, for example, the ImagineIt! sound spelling cards hanging just above the white board which help students learn letter names and sound correspondence.

As I compared Hank's classroom photographs from 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, I noticed there was not much change visible (Figure 27). Both years reflect a welcoming classroom that is student-centered. Students had access to materials for learning, although 2021-2022 shows individual work bins for students. This is largely due to the nature of increased cleanings that COVID required. Limiting access to various materials throughout the day made it easier for teachers who were required to clean surfaces.

One of the first things that caught my attention was that the layout for both years showed students seated closely to one another, working in table groups. This is surprising given that the 2020-2021 photograph reflects when schools were still operating under COVID guidelines. Looking more closely at the two photographs shows that although students are seated together in relatively the same configuration, chair placement is slightly different, allowing for more space between students in the 2020-2021 school year.

Figure 27. Hank's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

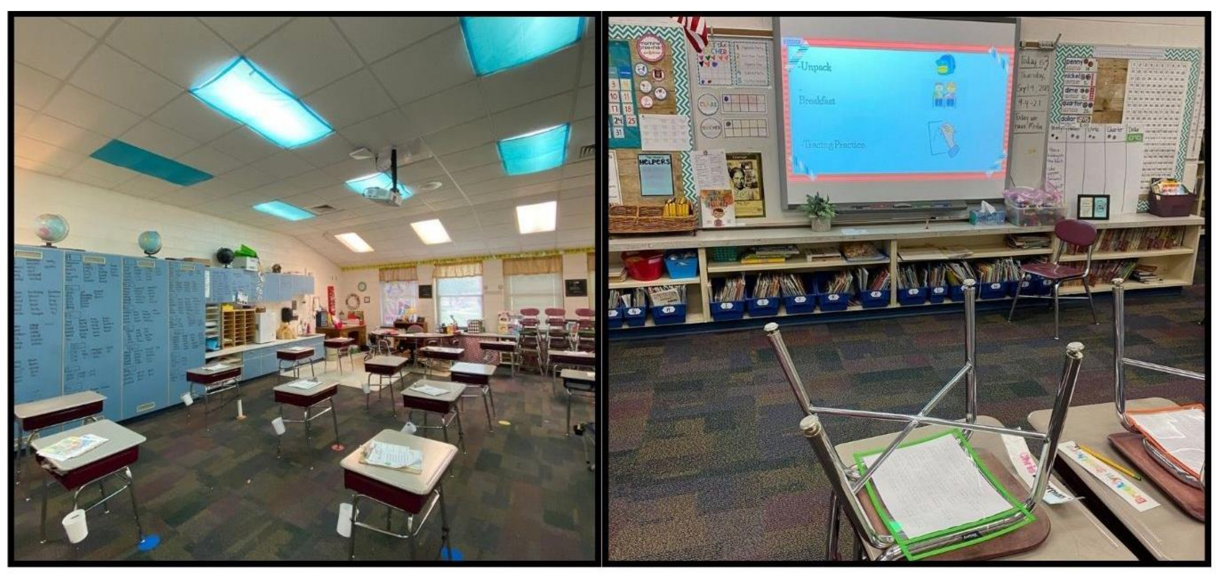
2020-2021 2021-2022

Hank's classroom design stands out from Charlie and Destiney because there is not a central focal point in the room, showing where the teacher delivers lessons from. There is a kidney shaped table visible in the 2021-2022 photograph that showed where small group instruction takes place. However, it is evident that there is not a central location, limiting where instruction occurs. Another hallmark of Hank's design is that there are walls that teach, showcasing visual displays, focused on content specific learning. These serve as a way for students to reference information and help promote student agency as they progress through the learning process.

Griffin's photograph (Figure 28) for the 2020-2021 school year shows the tell tale signs of classroom seating during the pandemic. Desks are spread apart, ensuring appropriate spacing for social distancing. At first glance it appeared that desks were all facing in a particular direction, but after careful analysis, you can see that the openings where students place materials are sometimes visible and sometimes not. Placed on the floor are colored circles that served as

guides for student desk spacing. Doing so allowed students to know that as long as the desk leg was on the circle, they were where they should be. Although this seems quite rigid, this was simply a sign of the times that Griffin was required to follow to ensure compliance during a very uncertain time, socially.

Figure 28. Griffin's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022



2020-2021 2021-2022

In the 2020-2021 photograph, another thing that stands out is the fact that students had limited access to classroom instructional materials. Globes were placed out of reach and manipulatives were carefully placed to ensure students were not handling them outside of designated times. Cleaning materials that students had access to between uses often created logistical issues for teachers during this time, forcing them to limit use because there was limited time to ensure proper sanitation.

Comparing the 2020-2021 photograph to that of the 2021-2022 photograph shows that social distancing relaxed, and Griffin was able to return to a design that aligns more closely with her personal values. Student desks were pushed together to form small groups, illustrating the

collaborative nature of her classroom. On the desk is a plastic pocket that protects original sheets so that items can be used more than once by students, using a dry erase marker. This conveys that students are able to share materials with one another, moving back to shared materials. Additionally, instructional support materials are visible to students. Similar to Hank's classroom design, Griffin has walls that teach, providing points of reference for students during content instruction.

The photographs that Maggie submitted (Figure 29) for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year only vary slightly. Both photographs illustrate classroom layouts/design that feels bare. There is minimal decor in terms of instructional resources visible on the walls, limiting content information that students were able to reference during instruction. Two primary differences in the two years are desk configuration and placement as well as access to classroom spaces and materials.

Figure 29. Maggie's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

2020-2021 | 2021-2022

In the 2020-2021 photograph, desks were spaced according to COVID guidelines. In addition, this is the first picture that depicts how rigid some schools were in following those

guidelines. For example, the student seated has their coat and backpack on the back of the chair, because they were not allowed to put them on hooks or closets (turned backwards in the photograph with the open side facing the wall), limiting potential spread of germs through touching other student's items.

In the 2021-2022 photographs, Maggie shifted students back to small groups, mitigating COVID requirements that continued for her school by placing a desk in the middle to put a bit of distance between students. While there is still a distinct "front" of the classroom where most of the teaching occurs from, students are not positioned in a way that the teacher is the perceived focal point. Additionally, the top right of the photograph shows that Maggie has re-opened her classroom library, providing a small space for seating and allowing students the opportunity to self-select texts.

Ceriya's classroom photograph for the 2020-2021 school year (Figure 30), like the five previous participants, highlights how the pandemic influenced her design/layout. Comparing photographs from the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school year illustrates how there is a disconnect in what they value in and how that is visible in the classroom room configuration. The previous year reflected students being spread apart, working individually, while the following year showed students working in table groups with one another.

Both photographs drew attention to the fact that there is a distinct place where teaching occurs, with most seating positioned in a way that the interactive board is visible to all. Hanging just above the interactive board are sound spelling cards that are associated with the ImagineIt! program, as were pictured in Destiney's classroom. However, the cards were covered with purple construction paper in the 2020-2021 photograph.

Figure 30. Ceriya's Room Layout 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

2020-2021 2021-2022

In the 2021-2022 photograph, the bright-colored backpacks at each table caught my eye. I inquired, asking Ceriya if this was where students kept their backpacks. She shared that given the high level of poverty many students face from her school, each student is given a backpack with the necessary supplies to start the school year, eliminating the need for families to feel pressure to go out and locate various items. This observation will be a point of discussion later in this chapter.

The photographs submitted by the participants above illustrated how teachers navigated classroom layout and design obstacles faced during the pandemic. For some, such as Charlie, Destiney, Griffin, Maggie and Ceriya, it is obvious that the typical values reflected in visual aspects of their classrooms was compromised given the strict social distancing guidelines that teachers faced as society made a move to send students back for in-person learning. Hank's space showed the least visible change between the two years, illustrating that he found a way to

incorporate the requirements while still holding true to the values he expressed previously in Chapter IV.

The three additional participants, Reese, Mae, and Bell did not have classroom photographs for the 2020-2021 school year due to their method for instructional delivery. Although we do not have two years to compare to see how the pandemic evaluates a potential shift in their values as they accommodated social distancing requirements, the photographs for the 2021-2022 school year provided insight into their values. For these participants, I highlight two photographs from the same year, depicting two views of the classroom.

Viewing Reese's photographs for the 2021-2022 school year (Figure 31) from the lens of a teacher, I was blown away by the time it obviously took for her to design the classroom layout and add finishing touches on. The room is inviting and is student-centered. The use of tables showed the collaborative nature of the work she expects of students. At the center of each table is a supply basket where students share supplies, ensuring everyone has access to the necessary materials, without creating a sense of "haves" and "have nots."

At first glance there does not appear to be a "front" of the classroom where Reese lectures from. Looking closely at the photograph on the left, the kidney table has a document camera where Reese models for instruction, projecting on the white board behind her. Initially I thought she used more small group throughout instruction, perhaps from the kidney table, but there is only a teacher chair and one student chair around the table.

Figure 31. Reese's Room Layout 2021-2022

2021-2022

Throughout interviews, Reese frequently referenced the importance of her classroom working together as a family. In the picture on the left, Reese created a sign for the wall, all caps and bold lettering that read, "**YOU ARE FAMILY.**" Additionally, on the opposing wall in the classroom a similarly designed sign was placed just above the whiteboard that read, "**YOU ARE LOVED.**" While this was done with positive intent, this establishes a problematic dynamic for the class that implies the teacher is then the *head of the family*, treating students as their children and expecting students to engage in a family dynamic with one another, causing relational and ethical dilemmas. It is obvious Reese cares deeply for her students and their well-being; however, it is important that teachers do not diminish the importance of students' biological families and work to preserve a healthy teacher-student relationship, as well as build strong school and family connections.

The photographs Mae submitted posed a challenge when trying to gain a sense of how her values are visible in the classroom design/layout. She took pictures of several spaces in her classroom but did not provide images that showed overall perspectives of the space. In the photographs from the 2021-2022 school year (Figure 32), Mae highlighted the area where students gather for read-alouds and larger class discussions. In the second photograph, captured from just outside her door, there is a slight glimpse that shows students are seated at table groups, appearing in an L-shape around the carpeted, whole group area.

Figure 32. Mae's Room Layout 2021-2022

2021-2022

From the images above as well as additional images that were shared, the classroom has an overall clean, yet sterile feel. Minimal decor is visible, however Mae made sure to have student names visible on the door just as students entered the space, fostering a sense of belonging. Both images illustrate that Mae values a sense of community and coming together. The space was designed intentionally to allow room for collaboration and discussion, two things

that Mae expressed that she values throughout both interviews and was featured in her lesson plans.

Lastly, Bell's photographs for the 2021-2022 school year (Figure 33) illustrate a classroom that is student centered and print rich. Anchor charts filled the walls and provided students with a snapshot of the important aspects of concepts they have covered and served as a point of reference when needed. Much of the decor throughout the room is co-created by students and illustrates the importance of student participation and input in the learning process.

Figure 33. Bell's Room Layout 2021-2022

2021-2022

Similarly to Mae, Bell has a carpeted area for students to come together for larger group discussions and read-alouds. Looking closely at the photograph on the left, students had individual book baskets for keeping texts they were reading. The classroom seating was organized into small groups of four students per table with a shared supply basket in the middle, like Reese's classroom. It is evident that collaboration and discussion is valued in this space and aligned with what Bell shared throughout the initial and follow up interview as important to her.

Values Visible in the Classroom

The photographs (Figures 25-33) illustrated how each of the nine participants set up their classroom spaces. Collecting photographs as a form of data was helpful in providing me with a glimpse into each teacher's classroom. How teachers set up their classroom provided insight into the values they have. For example, seeing students working in table groups, facing one another (Figures 31, 32, and 33) shows that teamwork and collaboration are values that are communicated to students within these spaces.

In addition to classroom design, lesson plans are also a way to see values communicated to students. Often in a more explicit manner, teachers design opportunities for learning that speak to the values they feel are important to teach students. As mentioned in chapter three, each participant submitted four weeks of lesson plans for review. These proved to provide little material culture, however it highlighted ways that some teachers work to teach values to students.

Lesson Planning

Teachers develop lesson plans while taking a variety of things into consideration. Depending on the school or district where they work, there could be predetermined "look fors" that are expected to be reflected in the lesson plans. Examples of elements that have been required in my own lesson plans as a teacher (to name a few) are:

- Topic/focus
- Standards to be addressed
- Essential question (s) that guides the overall lesson
- Overview of the activity
- Key vocabulary

- Differentiation plans to address diverse needs of students
- Plans for assessing student understanding

Although I have always felt very strongly that teachers develop plans for themselves and should not have to have key components for the sake of administration, this study illuminated the importance for clearly defined lesson plans that communicate learning goals, providing a guide for learning activities.

After reviewing collected lesson plans from all nine participants, it was evident that the various schools they represent all have different expectations surrounding lesson plans. Looking carefully at Hank's kindergarten lesson plan (Figure 34) showed that he outlines a basic overview of English language arts activities for each day for the week. Although the lesson plans he submitted aligned with the values he shared as important to teach students and demonstrated he is actively doing this work in his classroom, they are sparse and do not contain enough detail to truly capture the methods for teaching compassion to students, using *Tiara's Hat Parade* by Kelly Starling Lyons as a springboard.

As a curriculum facilitator, I frequently review lesson plans, providing feedback to teachers on how to fine-tune activities to align with their curricular goals. Looking at Hank's left me with several questions:

- On Monday, students completed a bubble chart for the word compassion. It was noted this served to elicit words/phrases that remind them of the meaning of the word. What lessons have students participated in that provided scaffolding for this activity?
- How is compassion related to the overall story?
- How do the vocabulary words tiara, strut, dazzle, sashay, and millner relate to the standards being addressed and goal for student learning?

Figure 34. Hank: Sample Lesson Plan

March 1 - Mar 5, 2021

Monday - We will create a bubble chart based around the word "compassion." We will come up with words and phrases that remind us of what compassion is.
We will then begin the book, "Tiara's Hat Parade." I will read this aloud to the class. After reading we will discuss the main character and her character traits. We will work on setting and character trait activity.

Tuesday - We will re-read "Tiara's Hat Parade" and go over the new vocabulary words for the week: tiara, strut, dazzle, sashay, milliner. We will then match the correct pictures to the correct vocabulary words. First grade will work on their Frayer chart.

Wednesday - Re-read "Tiara's Hat Parade." We will use the rest of the time to complete a craft making our own hats. Students can choose which hat they would like to make according to their personality and taste.

Thursday - We will read "I am Love." We will then watch a slideshow on compassion and empathy, feelings.
Students will discuss ways we can read cues and help others by showing compassion and empathy. At the end of the slideshow we will answer the questions together.

Friday - We will complete a compliment craft, making a compliment rainbow for each student.

Writing - We will work on a story map for Tiara's Hat Parade.
Monday - write in the character in the text
Tuesday - Describe the setting
Thursday - Practice sequencing and write down beginning, middle end

Although this highlights one example of the limited nature of what I was able to pull from lesson plans, others proved to be challenging to decipher. In addition to the nature of what components were included, the participants also used a variety of methods to generate lesson plans. Maggie, for example, created weekly slideshows that guided her instruction for the week (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Maggie: Sample Lesson Plan

Thursday, March 4, 2021

If I accept the sunshine and warmth I must Also Accept the thunder and the lightning.
Kahlil Gibran

Learning Targets:

1. Understand and identify fractions that are greater than whole.
2. Use models to add mixed fractions
3. Find equivalent fractions

Standards: **4.NF.3.a.b** UNDERSTAND a fraction a/b with $a > 1$ as a sum of fractions $1/b$. a. UNDERSTAND addition and subtraction of fractions as joining and separating parts referring to the same whole

Essential Questions: How can I add mixed number fractions? How can I add fractions/mixed numbers with word problems?

I Can Statement: I can use a visual model to help me add mixed numbers. I can use word problem skills to help me solve problems with fractions.

Morning Work

Ella and her father are building a bookcase. Ella measures two boards that they are going to cut and use to make shelves. One board is 4.50 feet. The other is 4.55 feet.

4.50 ☐ 4.55

Which symbol should go in the box to compare the boards?

A >

B =

C +

D <

Activation

Adding mixed numbers

Khan Academy

Vocabulary

Mixed Fraction: A **mixed number** is made up of a whole **number** and a **fraction**

Improper Fraction: An **improper fraction** is one that is 'top-heavy' so the numerator is bigger than the denominator.

Lesson Cont'd

Tim used $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups of oranges, $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups of apples, and $5\frac{1}{2}$ cups of pears in a fruit salad. How many cups of fruit did Tim use altogether?

Independent Work

Marissa used $3\frac{1}{3}$ cups of oats to make oatmeal and $2\frac{1}{3}$ cups of oats to make snack bars. How many cups of oats did Marissa use in all?

The image above (Figure 35) shows a sample of slides from Maggie's daily plans. As I continued to look through the slides that show the flow of the lesson for one day, I noticed that she has various components present, signifying distinct parts of her lesson such as warm up problems, standards, essential questions, "I Can" statements to guide students in understanding how they will demonstrate mastery, learning targets, key vocabulary, activators, and math questions that serve as the overall lesson. It is my experience that it is uncommon to see this level of detail in a teacher's lesson plans unless it is a building level expectation/requirement. Given the specificity, I decided to ask Maggie about it in the follow up interview. She shared:

> Prior to COVID we had a principal. In January of 2020, she was transferred to another school … and so then we have an interim and about a month later COVID hit. And so, um, the previous principal, she wanted to see the standard, she wanted the essential question, she wanted the um, the "I can statement." Um, she wanted all those things in her requirements. So then we, our current principal. She was hired in May of 2020, like maybe two weeks before school let out. And this was during the pandemic. So everybody was home in virtual learning. Um, and at that point we weren't really doing lesson plans. We were just making sure the kids had work to do. So out of habit when the next school year started … the teammate that I planned with, we just kept doing it because it was what we were used to doing for the past 4 or 5 years. And so we just continue doing that this year too. And she, um, wasn't as I guess, strict on our lesson plans last year, because we were all just trying to survive a virtual school year and different grades were coming in the building at different times. And it was just a lot. So, I mean, we, we submitted plans, but they weren't checked as stringent as they had been in the pa-, excuse me, in the past. Um, so because our fourth graders were virtual for so long, we started putting

everything on the the, um, slideshow. Because then we didn't have to type it twice. You know, if we had typed it in a traditional format, which nobody was really going to look at it … And it was kind of two birds with one stone kind of thing.

Maggie submitted lesson plans that reflected the time frame just after a major leadership change, losing her principal to a low-performing school. Based on what she shared in the comment above, she was made to have those previously mentioned components in her lesson plans and became accustomed to it. Even though her new leadership did not check lesson plans, she expected to see those components during instruction. Maggie found a way to make this work for her instructional practice by creating the slides.

As a curriculum facilitator I question how, as a leader, this is a best practice. If administration is not providing feedback on lesson plans prior to when the teacher carries them out, then it seems they only want to be able to view the components such as "I can statements," essential questions and so on, in order to check a box. While lesson plans, in general, across participants did not yield as much material culture, serving as records on the learning activities they designed, as I had hoped, they did provide me with insight about the ways that teachers plan for instruction.

Conclusion

The examples shared throughout this chapter highlighted how the identities of the teacher participants in this study influenced their values, and the implications this had for their classroom practice. Through review of the submitted photographs, participants illustrated how they design spaces for learning, often showing what they value in the learning process. These photographs highlighted how they decorated, the materials they used and how students were grouped. This

served as a springboard for further discussion in the interviews and gave me another method to which I could compare what teachers shared as important to teach students.

During the interviews, I asked participants to discuss the values they taught students, how they do this in their classrooms and how they navigate contradictions in the values they think are important to teach in relation to what they are expected to teach. Throughout, I heard how teachers struggle to negotiate values that differ from their own. Participants highlighted instances where they encountered uncomfortable moments that forced them to consider how there was a contradiction of values at play.

In summation, a common thread that participants in this study shared was how their identities and the values they have learned as a result present cultural barriers such as stereotypes, conflicting values, and those involving race/ethnic differences that impact their classroom practice. Participants discussed how they are unable to teach concepts and topics that align with their values due to policies put in place limiting the topics they can share. They also illustrated how often, teachers lack critical awareness to see how their personal values impact the students they work with, often negating or minimizing theirs. I think going forward, it would be helpful for space to be made where teachers can have discussions on these issues, focusing on how they balance their values and beliefs with that of their students. Additionally, revisiting district level policies that serve to censor is necessary to allow room for teachers to have relevant conversations and design culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

CHAPTER VI: (MIS)USE OF POWER: IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON TEACHER PRACTICE

In this chapter, I discuss the final two themes that emerged from my study: how teachers use literature as a springboard for teaching values to students and the impact of accountability on teacher practice. I chose to present them together, in this way, because of the nature of how intertwined they were when compared across the interviews, classroom photographs, and lesson plans. To better understand how teachers prioritize values for students in their classrooms, it was evident in the data we needed to explore accountability first as it seemed to play a central role in what teachers ultimately did in their classrooms. *Accountability* was a looming external pressure, largely influencing the selection of instructional materials and any authentic learning opportunities teachers designed.

Throughout this study, the theme of *accountability* kept appearing when participants discussed instructional materials, especially on topics associated with children's books which focused on a range of values. From this, participants extended the discussion to encompass issues surrounding district and school level pressures. The discussed increased accountability measures handed down from school administrators and district leaders to improve student proficiency, and on the heels of returning from remote learning post-pandemic, this created even more of a culture of fear and worry for teachers. As I describe in this chapter, there has been a shift towards more intense scrutiny for schools increasing the negative impact accountability has on teacher morale, as well as the many implications for teacher practice.

Here again I draw from classroom photographs, interviews and sample lesson plans to discuss how elementary teachers in this study use children's literature as a springboard for teaching values to students. I situate this in how participants describe the use for providing a

developmentally appropriate way to discuss “tough topics” such as race, gender identity, and LGBTQ issues. Next, I present how parental and district level censorship on children’s literature and curricular content impacts teachers’ ability to effectively prioritize values and provide learning opportunities they feel best meet the needs of their students, preparing them to one day be members of a larger community.

Finally, in the section entitled Accountability as an Obstacle, I analyze the issues participants shared as challenging within the goals of their instructional practice: district level professional development and pacing as well as building level expectations around scheduling and data tracking. Concluding this chapter, I share how these accountability practices negatively impact student learning and demoralizes teachers, and at times, building level administration.

Children’s Literature as a Springboard for Teaching Values

A theme that emerged was the use of children’s literature as a way to elicit discussion around values. Through the discussions with participants during interviews and lesson plans that were submitted, I was able to see that teachers use children’s books as a starting point for scaffolding conversations around values, providing a context by which the students can anchor their thinking. Additionally, children’s literature provides support for teachers who do not feel comfortable broaching topics deemed controversial by the majority group. In speaking with Bell, Ceriya, and Charlie, I gained a sense of the importance of children’s literature in their classrooms and how they use it to prioritize values they feel are important with their students.

Teaching a 3rd/4th grade combination class required Bell to consider how she can develop learning experiences in a way that addressed standards for both grade levels. Bell shared that she and her team came together and created their own two year plan for pacing that allowed them to develop their own curriculum, creating larger units of study by themes. She shared that

children’s literature is an important part of the work she does with her students. During the initial interview, Bell shared that kindness, respect for diversity, compassion, and equality were values she felt were important to teach students. While speaking about how children’s books support this, Bell shared,

> I think a lot it is through just discussions and listening to them and listening to each other. Um, it’s very powerful, you know, children’s literature is extremely powerful and just showing them different perspectives and talking about it and discussing it.

what I noticed about Listening to her speak of the power literature has in illustrating diverse perspectives highlighted the pictures she shared of her classroom space.

Figure 36 depicts Bell’s classroom library. One of the first things I noticed was that books are organized by genres. Zooming in to get a closer look, I could see bins for realistic fiction, poetry, historical fiction, and biography. Organizing books in this way allows for students to be able to more easily locate texts that interest them. Additionally, in Figure 37, Bell showed an up close look at her carpeted area where students come together for whole group discussions and teacher read-alouds.

Figure 36. Bell’s Classroom Library

Figure 37. Bell's Carpeted Area

Looking closely at the photograph shows the diverse types of children's literature that Bell provided for her students. In analyzing the photograph, it is clear to see that she was teaching a unit on civil/human rights. There are three bins of books, filled with texts that support the students' learning of this topic. Using my knowledge of children's literature from years spent as a classroom teacher, I can identify some of the texts shown:

- *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders and Steven Solerno
- *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida
- *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* by Jonah Winter and Shane Evans

- *Malala Yousafzai: Champion for Education* by Jodie Shepherd
- *My Uncle Martin's Words for America: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Niece Tells How He Made a Difference* by Angela Farris Watkins and Eric Velasquez
- *Coming to America: The Story of Immigration* by Betsy Maestro and Susannah Ryan

Each of these titles serves to support, in some way, the definitions of human rights and civil rights as they are displayed on sentence strips on the white board: (a) human rights- the rights you are born with. They are how people need to be treated equally; they are universal for everyone, everywhere, and (b) civil rights- the basic legal rights of a person regardless of gender, race, religion, nationality, age or disability; they protect people from disability. Reviewing these titles in conjunction with the values that Bell shared during the initial interview shows that she actively selects materials and designs instruction in a way that aligns with kindness, respect for diversity, compassion, and equality. Additionally, the way she has intentionally set up her room and selected instructional materials to support larger units of study that she plans shows the importance of children's literature within her practice. Speaking to this, Bell stated,

> When I get into a good book, I thought I, as I've told my kids through the years, I've fallen into it. And I think by reading to children, they have that opportunity to, however, that sounds whatever that means they have, that they have the chance or the ability to fall into it, which kind of, kind of correlates with what I said earlier about being able to walk in someone's shoes.

In the initial interview, Bell spoke to the fact that providing students with texts to explore topics through the experiences of characters allows for a space to see different perspectives:

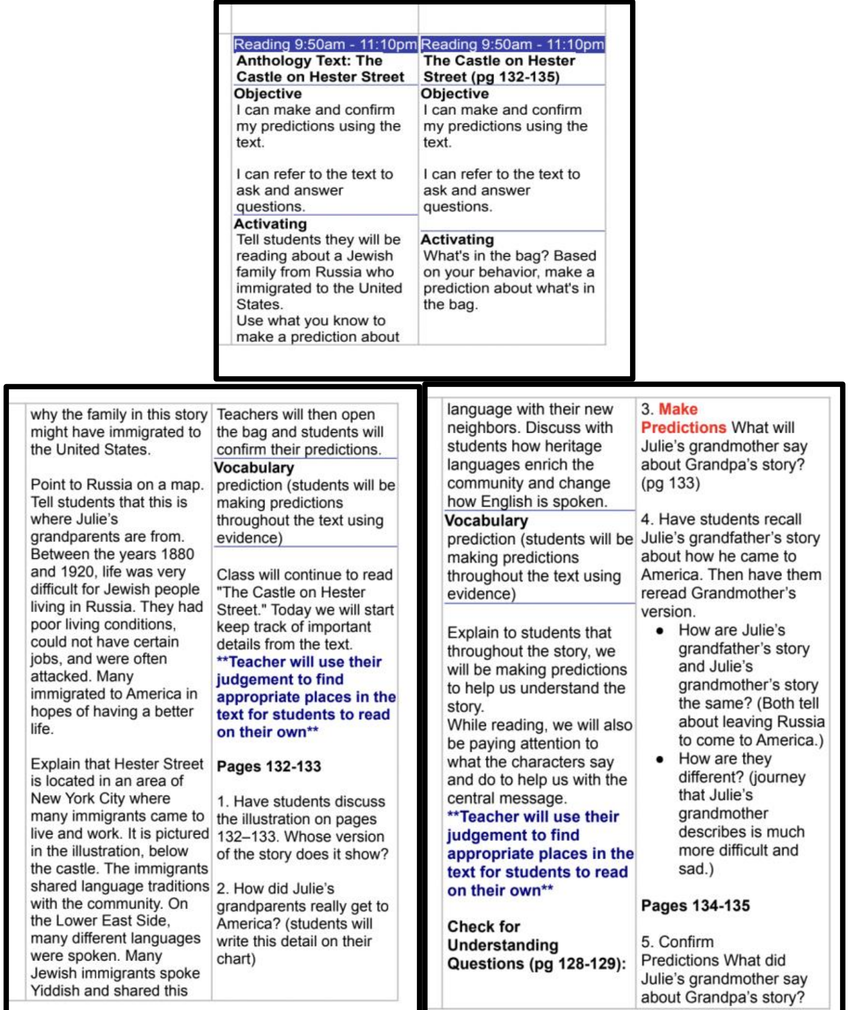
> When I read, I get to understand, … I have the ability or the chance to walk in someone else's shoes. And, um, it allows me to see different perspectives in a safe space because

it’s, you’re reading, you know, you’re not necessarily living it. Um, and you also, it just provides a different lens.

Although I agree with the ability of children’s literature to provide a safe space to learn about different perspectives, I am torn on the aspect of situating it as being safer because you are “not necessarily living it.” It is impossible for teachers to fully understand the lives of our students outside of school and the various dynamics at play for them. With the level of diversity found in classrooms today, issues involving the texts shared above, highlighted in Bell’s book bins, may be ones that her students have experienced on some level. What is important to take away from her statement is that children’s literature as a way to expose students to different perspectives offers another lens and helps to anchor children’s thinking about topics that may be new to them, through the experiences of the characters presented.

Similarly to Bell, Ceriya also acknowledged the importance of using children’s literature to engage in discussions around values. What differentiated the two was their level of autonomy in selecting instructional resources to support students’ exposure to and understanding of the values they prioritized. As previously mentioned in Chapter IV, Ceriya shared that building relationships, respect, and perseverance were important values she works to teach her students. Looking carefully at the lesson plans she submitted reflective of the activities she planned for her third grade class, it was apparent that she relied on an anthology/textbook (Figure 38) from which to pull stories.

Figure 38. Ceriya's Lesson Plan Excerpts



Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm	Reading 9:50am - 11:10pm
Anthology Text: The Castle on Hester Street	**The Castle on Hester Street (pg 132-135)**
Objective I can make and confirm my predictions using the text. I can refer to the text to ask and answer questions.	**Objective** I can make and confirm my predictions using the text. I can refer to the text to ask and answer questions.
Activating Tell students they will be reading about a Jewish family from Russia who immigrated to the United States. Use what you know to make a prediction about why the family in this story might have immigrated to the United States. Point to Russia on a map. Tell students that this is where Julie's grandparents are from. Between the years 1880 and 1920, life was very difficult for Jewish people living in Russia. They had poor living conditions, could not have certain jobs, and were often attacked. Many immigrated to America in hopes of having a better life. Explain that Hester Street is located in an area of New York City where many immigrants came to live and work. It is pictured in the illustration, below the castle. The immigrants shared language traditions with the community. On the Lower East Side, many different languages were spoken. Many Jewish immigrants spoke Yiddish and shared this language with their new neighbors. Discuss with students how heritage languages enrich the community and change how English is spoken.	**Activating** What's in the bag? Based on your behavior, make a prediction about what's in the bag. Teachers will then open the bag and students will confirm their predictions.
Vocabulary prediction (students will be making predictions throughout the text using evidence)	**Vocabulary** prediction (students will be making predictions throughout the text using evidence)
Explain to students that throughout the story, we will be making predictions to help us understand the story. While reading, we will also be paying attention to what the characters say and do to help us with the central message. ****Teacher will use their judgement to find appropriate places in the text for students to read on their own**** **Check for Understanding Questions (pg 128-129):**	Class will continue to read "The Castle on Hester Street." Today we will start keep track of important details from the text. ****Teacher will use their judgement to find appropriate places in the text for students to read on their own**** **Pages 132-133** 1. Have students discuss the illustration on pages 132–133. Whose version of the story does it show? 2. How did Julie's grandparents really get to America? (students will write this detail on their chart) 3. **Make Predictions** What will Julie's grandmother say about Grandpa's story? (pg 133) 4. Have students recall Julie's grandfather's story about how he came to America. Then have them reread Grandmother's version. • How are Julie's grandfather's story and Julie's grandmother's story the same? (Both tell about leaving Russia to come to America.) • How are they different? (journey that Julie's grandmother describes is much more difficult and sad.) **Pages 134-135** 5. Confirm Predictions What did Julie's grandmother say about Grandpa's story?

It is evident, based on the excerpts from her lesson plans shown above, that Ceriya works to utilize the resources she has to infuse values. For this particular lesson, Ceriya used the story *The Castle on Hester Street* written by Linda Heller and illustrated by Boris Kulikov to teach students how to make and confirm predictions using the text and also how to refer to the text to ask and answer questions. In addition to these third grade English language arts standards, Ceriya is also addressing issues of *respect*, especially as it relates to the lived experiences of immigrants.

Ceriya stressed the importance of children's literature in providing messages to students with a way of understanding values at play for the characters based on their experiences. When asked about how she goes about doing this, she shared:

> The values are mostly in the stories we teach. It's like "never give up" or um, um "honesty is the best policy," even "treat others the way you want to be treated." Um, those are the biggest ones. I'm trying to think of what the students usually say. We've read one about an old man and his wife and they end up becoming rich. So she was granted three wishes or something like that. So the wife was very greedy and she wasn't appreciative of what she had. So that's a good one for the students as well. They take a lot of things for granted just because it shows up for them.

Although this statement highlighted the types of "morals of the story" that Ceriya typically encountered through the stories she used with students, she couched this one in particular as important for her students because of her perceived notion of how "they take a lot of things for granted." This statement showed a stark contrast with how Ceriya first discussed the needs of her students, working in a higher poverty, inner city school.

In Chapter V, I introduced how Ceriya's tendency to go above and beyond to provide her students with material things she feels they are lacking, often crossed appropriate boundaries with students. She presented her desire to fill a perceived void in their life almost as a mission of hers, limiting potential distractions that students may have as a result, increasing their ability to focus on what matters: school. This shift from almost pitying students for the things they are lacking to generalizing that all students need a lesson in not taking things for granted is interesting. I am forced to consider how issues of accountability influence this perspective since Ceriya seems to be ultimately driven by test data and student growth. It gives the impression that

she goes above and beyond to provide for students, hoping they will have less barriers between them and success. When, in turn, students do not perform as she feels they should, "they take these things" she does for them, "for granted."

Aside from the inherent issues related to that statement, Ceriya expressed the importance of stories to support teaching students values. When asked, Ceriya offered a different interpretation than Bell when asked about why children's literature is often relied on to introduce values to students:

> Probably because we know (1) students are not reading as much as they used to. Um, and (2), because, um, we're told, "be strategic in what you read to the students." So we're going to read for a standard but this is a skill you are going to need in your life.

I found this statement to be interesting because of the way Ceriya viewed the use of children's books to support teaching values to students because they (students) "are not reading as much as they used to." This deficit way of thinking makes assumptions that the only time students read is when they are in her presence, during the confines of the instructional day. Additionally, it fails to acknowledge the very reasons they *could* not possibly be reading at home: lack of access to texts on their instructional reading level and parent support. Previously Ceriya shared that the majority of her students do not have access to basic necessities, so to negatively attribute a perceived lack of reading to them is perplexing.

Another issue with the statement above is the emphasis Ceryia places on "reading for a standard." Working at a restart school brings about a different level of pressure for Ceriya to get students to show growth and demonstrate proficiency on district wide assessments such as NC Check-Ins, iReady assessments, and subsequently end-of-grade tests. In addition, as a third-grade teacher, she has the added pressure of ensuring students are reading on grade level by the end of

the school year in order to meet Read to Achieve promotion standards. To say that the school where she works is heavily monitored in terms of lesson planning and alignment with district pacing guides is an understatement.

It is apparent that, in comparison, Bell and Ceriya have very different approaches to planning. Bell uses the standards to guide her instruction, seeing the potential for overlap and fitting them together in a way that provides authentic learning experiences for students, rooted in a rich variety of children’s literature. On the other hand, Ceriya is given a list of standards she must teach and a set anthology she must follow, often limiting her autonomy and ability to design lessons that align with the values she expressed as important. She seems to rely first on the direct standard she is required to teach and then second, the values that appear through the experiences of the characters by way of happenstance. Comparing the two illustrates the differences between working at a small charter school versus a larger school district. Bell has more freedom to plan units of study and select instructional materials to support because her school does not have the sweeping accountability systems in place that a larger district does.

In my professional experience, having worked in both a larger district and a charter school, the bigger the system, the more routinized and automatized they try to make learning, seeking to align all classrooms for purposes of comparing student performance. Ensuring teachers are following the same pacing guides and utilizing the same materials/resources for instruction leaves one variable to consider when determining instructional effectiveness: the teacher. In the case of Ceriya, she worked at a school that is monitored closely to look for even the smallest bit of growth in student performance, waiting for the opportunity to prove that the previous low performing scores were reflective of poor teaching and leadership. This level of

pressure created a trickle down model of the impact of district level accountability measures that I highlight later in this chapter.

The intense pressure and curricular oversight that Ceriya experienced at her school was a direct reflection of what it is like working at a restart school and illustrated the pressures that teachers face to meet student growth measures tied to state testing. In comparison, working in another larger school district, Charlie expressed a different experience when it came to planning and designing instruction for students. She reported that she feels that she has more freedom to plan instruction, allowing her to use her professional judgment when selecting materials and designing learning experiences; however, she is still held to the same level of monitoring in terms of staying aligned with district level pacing and in looking to student performance data to assess the effectiveness of her instructional delivery.

As a fifth grade classroom teacher, Charlie's students must take three state end-of-grade tests and demonstrate their level of proficiency in the areas of reading, math and science. Although she hinted to some degree about the pressure placed on her to ensure student performance standards are met, it pales in comparison to the intense scrutiny that Ceriya faced. Throughout the interviews Charlie frequently referenced the teachable moments that arose during the day-to-day in her classroom and spoke to how often they served as a way for her to discuss values she feels are important for students to learn.

When asked about the values she felt were important to teach students, Charlie shared: leadership, trust, responsibility, self-care, family, and friendship. What stood out about how she couched discussions around values was that she frequently mentioned the importance of students doing their personal best, limiting stress that is placed on them. In reference to the importance of the value of self-care she shared:

> I feel like one of the things I know I've done as a teacher is just say how, you know what students do…their parents, are … they like pleasing their parents and they're doing things to make their parents proud. But they also need to do things that are gonna make them happy as well. And then it's just teaching them like, "hey- you may not be that A/B student, but if you're doing your best and not stressing yourself to do more than what you're able to do" then they are taking care of themself.

What Charlie communicated to students is important to note. To say students are unaware of the daily pressures of a classroom in today's society that is tied so heavily to student performance would minimize and fail to acknowledge the very systems we operate within. Here, Charlie is shifting the view of *who* and *what* students are accountable to focusing more on themselves. I found this statement interesting because I never considered that we as teachers are held accountable in ways much different from our students, although working towards the same perceived end result on state testing measures. Students feel increased pressure and a level of accountability to their parents, their teacher, and in some cases, their schools, depending on the level of data tracking they have experienced. I will further discuss the influence of student data and how schools utilize it later in this chapter.

Much like Bell and Ceriya, Charlie expressed that she capitalized on using children's literature to infuse or highlight values she feels are important for students to know and internalize. When asked about how this comes up within her instructional practice, Charlie shared:

> In my teacher directed reading. Especially like if we do a character analysis so we can talk about that character and the values that they can see within the character. And of course, going into details about how that character shows these values.

This statement aligns with what other participants shared about children's literature serving as a springboard for talks/instruction around the importance of various values with students. As mentioned by Bell, the stories we read with students provide them with a way to see values in action and in turn allows students a way to anchor their understanding and thinking within the experiences of the characters depicted.

A common point of entry for teachers when discussing values was through character analysis. Character analysis is an important part of developing the literacy skills of students. It provides a way for students to evaluate the character's traits while also thinking through their role in the story and how they navigate the conflicts they experience within. Charlie highlighted this in her lesson plan (Figure 39), with her teacher read aloud. In this lesson, she chose to read *More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby, a fictionalized story that highlights Booker T. Washington's desire to learn how to read after emancipation. Her lesson plan shows the theme and focuses on how he worked to overcome the obstacles he faced.

Figure 39. Charlie's Lesson Plan Excerpt

	Whole Group Reading Read Aloud: The Day You Begin Theme: Your unique story may feel uncomfortable at first, but eventually it will be the very thing that helps you find your place. A	Read Aloud: All Are Welcome Theme: Everyone is **welcome** in their school, in their class, and in their community.	Read Aloud: More Than Anything Else Theme: He struggled to overcome obstacles and learn to read. It also sets the tone for the year that learning and reading is important in life and should not be taken for granted.	Read Aloud: Our Class is a Family Theme: Discuss ways we can stay connected during remote learning.	

This sort of character analysis illustrates how teachers use children's literature to highlight values such as perseverance and responsibility. Being able to situate their thinking into the experiences of Booker T. Washington allows students to have points for reflection and discussion as they learn to understand what these values look like in action.

While she identified children's literature as an important starting point for discussions around values, Charlie reported that she was unsure of the carryover it provided in students internalizing and ultimately exemplifying the values. She shared:

> I would say that it will be more helpful when they're trying to make a connection to the character and helping them to understand, like, the actions that are happening. I'm not sure how much it connects to them, like outside in life and taking those values and using them for themselves.

This called me to consider how teachers perceive the impact of their work to be. As a teacher, I never considered the singular nature of a story or a teachable moment for that matter, to be the event or cause of a student internalizing something, particularly a value. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that I feel collectively, these early experiences come together to support students as they better understand various values and what they exemplify in a given context.

One thing that stood out from the interviews with Charlie is the difference between values she prioritized with students versus those of district level initiatives around values that were rolled out just prior to COVID. She mentioned that her district developed an initiative that highlighted six core values: student centered, accountability, integrity, high expectation, collaboration, and equity. Charlie shared that these were originally presented as ones the district expected teachers to exemplify, but her school placed emphasis on modeling these for students. At the time of our initial interview, she mentioned them but did not expand on them or how she navigated using these guiding core values within the larger work she hopes to accomplish with students. When I asked about this during the follow up interview, Charlie expressed her frustration and shared:

> I don't know if you know … but there was an incident at [redacted] where a student was shot and killed in a classroom. But then the next day, everyone (in the district) goes back to school besides that school that had the shooting and we get a message from our guidance counselor and it's like, "Hey! Here are some things you can do, but I am not available until like 9:30/10 o'clock." So if I have a student that comes in and they're grieving over whatever may have happened or traumatized by the event, um, I'm going to have to hold them until about 10 o'clock. And I know that response for the school itself, like where the incident happened, it was more like the head counselor (for the district) set up the next day at that school. I know that they closed that classroom where the incident happened for the remainder of the school year. So I know they took steps and all but I just don't think the district understands how much other people were impacted. Like as a teacher and a parent, and to have friends that have children that are in high school, like I'm worried and stuff. But I don't see how they took a stand to help others who were indirectly affected.

Listening to Charlie share this and seeing how much it impacted her left a lasting impression on me. With the increase of school violence and how worrisome it is for teachers, its prevalence desensitizes some. However, it is shocking that some type of outrage does not occur in an effort to minimize this level of violence. While she is not the first participant to share a contradiction in personal values to that of the school or larger district, Charlie is the only participant to speak to the fact that her district rolled out an initiative of six core values, but when the situation called for it, they were unable to exemplify them. She went on to note that the moment this event occurred, simultaneously, the core values fell by the wayside, and everything shifted on a dime. This is something teachers have grown accustomed to in the field of education. Every now and

again districts or schools roll out initiatives they expect teachers to carry out with little or no guidance and then something happens causing the pendulum to swing, changing the focus to the next big thing.

Through their interviews, classroom photographs and lesson plans Bell, Ceriya and Charlie each, in some way, called attention to the importance of children's literature in elementary classrooms. Whether it is a teacher selected text or a story that is used from an anthology, there was the potential for teachers to strategically highlight the values they feel are important to teach students within their instruction. Through character analysis and discussions about events in the stories, these three participants illustrated how they do this in their classrooms. The texts that teachers use with students provide a springboard for rich discussion about values. In turn, children's literature provides a point of entry for teachers to use in order to broach more difficult topics for students, whether it's difficult to understand or deemed controversial by various stakeholders.

Lesson Planning: Avenues for Comfortably Addressing "Tough" Topics

In addition to the ways that children's literature provided support with anchoring students' thinking about values, it was also reported to provide an avenue for participants to engage in discussions and expose students to topics that are at times considered challenging as it goes against the white, heteronormative standard of the majority. Participants such as Hank, Bell, and Griffin shared instances of how children's literature supported them in broaching topics such as race, gender identity and LGBTQ issues with their elementary students. While most participants alluded to using children's literature in some way to address these topics, these participants in particular stood out in how they positioned their description.

Issues of Race and Racial Consciousness

Hank shared that he works at a school where there is little diversity reflected in the student body. Hank expressed that the majority of the school's student body is White, with only two students of color in the entire school. Working at a school in a small, rural mountain community posed challenges reminiscent of the ones Griffin shared. Similarly, Hank shared that one of his student's dad is a pastor of a local church.

Throughout the initial interview, I was surprised to learn that the topic of race was called into question regarding his instructional practices by a parent. In describing activities he designed for Black History Month, he shared,

> Um, pretty much every student in my school except for two are white. Um, so you know, where I'm at, you may touch on it, but we got a little bit deeper with it than I should have. Um, we read a book called *Henry's Freedom Box*. It's a great book! And we talked about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad and how they were slaves and people would beat them. And this one child went home and was talking about his day with his parents and the child's dad is a pastor. And he said, "you brought these topics up to my kid?" I said, "yeah, these are things they're going to hear from now all throughout their school career." I said, "these are times in our history that kids have a hard time understanding because times are different," but the way the world is right now, I mean, they're being brought up in the media and everything. Um, so they're going to come across it one way or another, and we weren't choosing sides. We weren't saying, um, things to make them feel a certain way. And we're just trying to educate them on it. These are things that took place in history and it's kind of formed the way that people value things now. So it goes back to those values.

After speaking further with Hank, it was evident that the parent's concern stemmed from whether or not the topic was broached in a way that was developmentally appropriate for the kindergarten student to understand. What the parent did not articulate is that embedded in their desire to ensure their student received this information in an appropriate way also translates to the desire to protect their student from the harsh realities that enslaved people faced during that time period, glossing over that which makes us uneasy.

This point is further raised by the comment Hank made, insinuating that given the schools demographics they may only touch on topics such as race during Black History Month but this time he "got a little deeper than he should have." What Hank is implying with this statement is that if he taught at a more diverse school, more time would be devoted to learning about and discussing issues of race. It is troublesome in and of itself to imagine that focusing on issues of race has been reduced to one month a year at his school, but unfortunately this is the norm for less critically minded folks who fail to acknowledge the benefit and power of highlighting diverse perspectives seamlessly throughout the year. Teaching the way that he spoke of above reduces the contributions of Black people to one month a year. In trying to make sense of Hank's statement, situated in the context of the activity he described, I am inclined to question whether there would be less parental concern if discussions on topics of race did not get scheduled for just the month of February. Although Hank's example illustrated a degree of pushback with the selection of the text and the topic covered, it is important to highlight how issues around race can be uncomfortable for some to address, in this case largely in part because parents question the intended purpose and level of appropriateness for students.

Throughout the interviews, Ceriya, Charlie, and Destiney also spoke to how children's literature can support discussions with students about race, incorporating diverse historical

perspectives. Although Destiny did not go into the same level of detail about how this looks in their classrooms and issues they have faced as a result, she stood out because she articulated the importance of students learning about the contributions of people of color. Charlie and Ceriya briefly touched on the importance of using books that depict different races to teach values such as compassion and empathy.

Gender Identity and Representation

When Bell reflected on her instructional practices and how children's literacy supported her in discussing various topics that would be deemed as controversial by the majority group, she reflected on how issues surrounding gender identity had historically been challenging for her. Considering my work as a teacher, I am reminded of how there were certain topics that were hard for me to initiate conversations around, fearing that I would not do the topic justice or perhaps use words in a way that confused or potentially offended. Bell shared that same sentiment and when asked to further explain her assertion that children's literature was a safe space to scaffold challenging topics. She described,

> I mean, and that, that's really powerful, because how many times, you know, in the past three years have I thought, "I need to find a children's book on that!" because I didn't feel necessarily … You know, I didn't have the courage. I didn't feel that, that I had the knowledge or the language to share it with children. Reading a book about it provided that safe haven.

As a curriculum facilitator, this has also been an area of concern raised by the teachers for whom I provide instructional support. Words have power and although teachers are often learning more about topics, encountering narratives and perspectives that shape and push their thinking alongside their students a sense of fear and worry surrounds the implications of

addressing *controversial* topics in a way that further perpetuates bias or marginalizes groups of people. In the case of Bell, issues surrounding identity, particularly as it related to gender, was a topic she did not feel as equipped or knowledgeable to broach with students. When asked to further explain this, she shared,

> I think the one that stands out the most is gender. It's just, I'm not as, I'm not as comfortable because I don't feel that I'm as knowledgeable, um, about it as I should be. Um, and, and the vocabulary keeps changing. And so, and there's, they're adding more pronouns and, you know, it's just like, okay, I feel like I'm five steps behind. And I want to make sure that when I'm teaching it, I'm teaching it so that, um, children understand it. And I'm also expressing it the way it is supposed to be in respect for everyone.

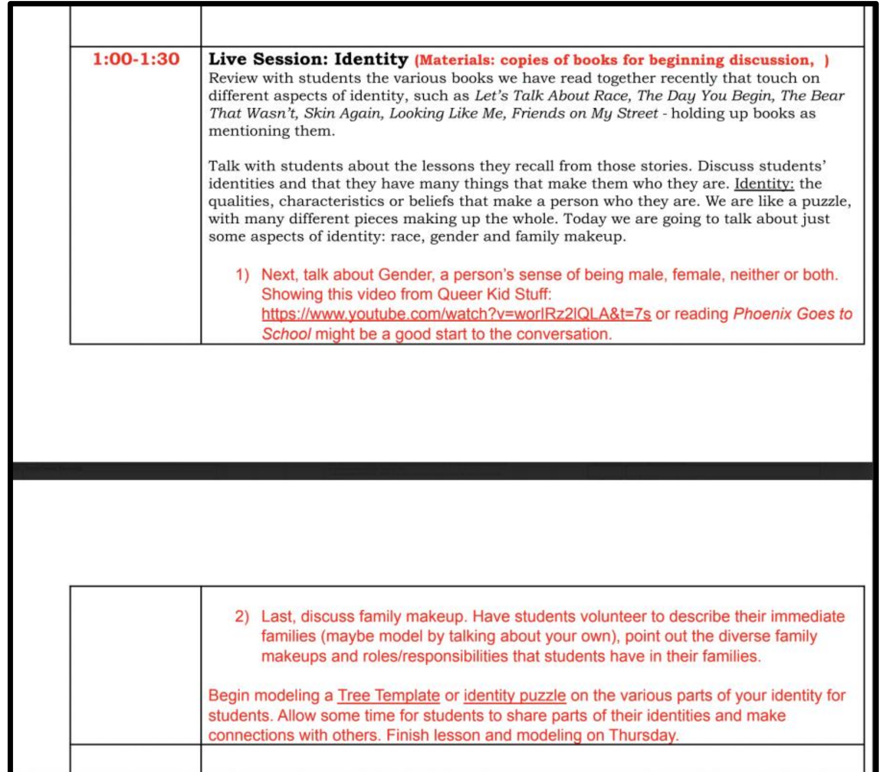
Based on how she spoke to this in the interview, Bell described what most teachers feel when trying to speak to issues that impact others surrounding topics of identity that are different from their own. There is a level of fear and discomfort teachers experience with speaking to or providing a space for discussion on topics such as gender largely as a result of the tension that exists in society today.

In her statement, Bell articulated that part of the uncertainty and lack of confidence she has in addressing issues involving gender centers around how the "vocabulary" keeps changing, especially as it relates to pronouns. Considering her age in terms of the generation she grew up in and her 35 years of teaching experience provides more insight as to the relevance of this comment. As the most seasoned participant in this study, Bell comes with a wealth of knowledge about how the landscape of teaching and learning has evolved over time. It is safe to say that when she entered the field of education, discussions around gender constructs were not something that she facilitated in her classroom. Navigating changing times and trying to create

relevant pedagogy has called her to reflect on her own understanding and knowledge in order to best address the topic of gender in her classroom.

A sample lesson plan that Bell shared highlighted how she initiates these discussions and learning opportunities in her classroom. In Figure 40, Bell showed a lesson that she planned on identity. To begin, she reviewed various texts they read together, addressing aspects of their identity. From the list provided, it is evident they have discussed race (*Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester), cultural diversity (*The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson), intersectionality of identities (*Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers & *The Bear That Wasn't* by Frank Tashlin), and appreciation and celebration of diversity (*Skin Again* by bell hooks & *Friends on My Street* by Erika Bracken Probst).

Figure 40. Bell's Lesson Plan Excerpt

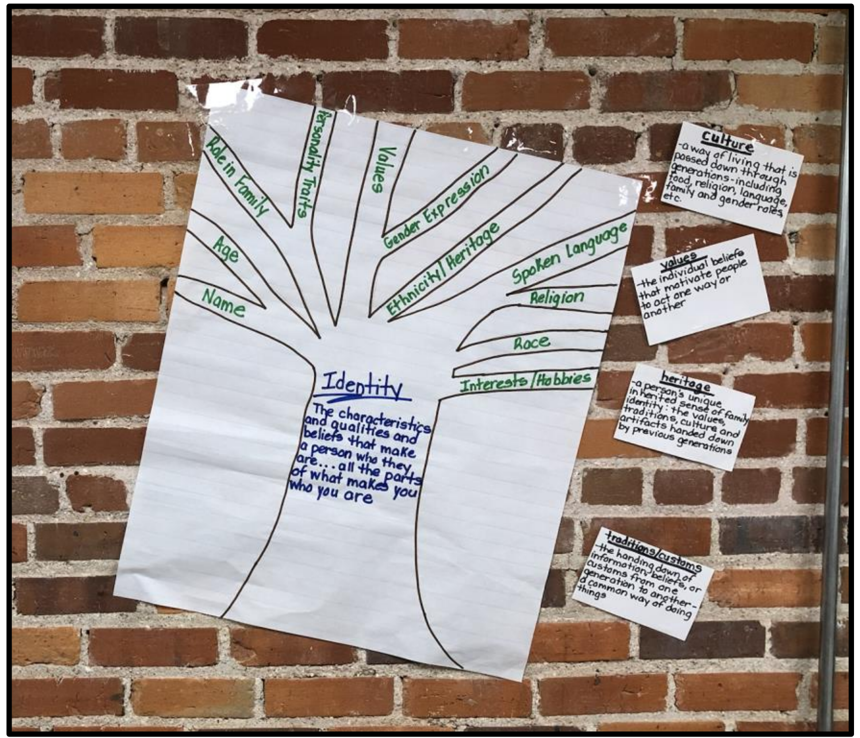


1:00-1:30	**Live Session: Identity** **(Materials: copies of books for beginning discussion,)** Review with students the various books we have read together recently that touch on different aspects of identity, such as *Let's Talk About Race, The Day You Begin, The Bear That Wasn't, Skin Again, Looking Like Me, Friends on My Street* - holding up books as mentioning them. Talk with students about the lessons they recall from those stories. Discuss students' identities and that they have many things that make them who they are. Identity: the qualities, characteristics or beliefs that make a person who they are. We are like a puzzle, with many different pieces making up the whole. Today we are going to talk about just some aspects of identity: race, gender and family makeup. 1) Next, talk about Gender, a person's sense of being male, female, neither or both. Showing this video from Queer Kid Stuff: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=worIRz2lQLA&t=7s or reading *Phoenix Goes to School* might be a good start to the conversation.
	2) Last, discuss family makeup. Have students volunteer to describe their immediate families (maybe model by talking about your own), point out the diverse family makeups and roles/responsibilities that students have in their families. Begin modeling a Tree Template or identity puzzle on the various parts of your identity for students. Allow some time for students to share parts of their identities and make connections with others. Finish lesson and modeling on Thursday.

In the lesson pictured above, Bell is just beginning their exploration of gender and introduced her students to this aspect of identity by way of a video by Queer Kid Stuff or reading *Phoenix Goes to School* by Michelle Finch and Phoenix Finch. From the way that it is posed in the lesson plans, it appeared that she gave herself two options for introducing the concept either through a video or a book. This is important as it speaks to how she relies on support materials due to her level of comfort in addressing gender with students and because she has a strong sense about what is best for students. Third and fourth graders are developmentally shifting who and what they believe, and they often learn best through text, story or video and not necessarily from their teacher alone. As a reflective teacher, Bell is conscientious about expanding the students' knowledge and ultimately her own. These resources provide the language in a developmentally appropriate way for students to understand, lessening the discomfort Bell feels when broaching gender discussions with her students. This is important as children have a keen sense of when adults are uncertain or uncomfortable. Any perceived uncertainty or discomfort could be misinterpreted.

In reviewing photographs submitted, I was able to see that Bell incorporated a variety of aspects related to student identity in her classroom, helping students frame their thinking in terms of visualizing how the different branches of the tree inform a person's identity (Figure 41). She mentioned introducing the concept of this anchor chart in the lesson plans shown in Figure 40. The excerpt shows that she is modeling how students will create a depiction of their own identities through the use of either an identity tree or identity puzzle. This demonstrated the different aspects of identity that Bell provided direct opportunities for learning on and served as a way for students to situate their thinking, understanding how the intersectionality of their identity makes them unique.

Figure 41. Bell's Identity Tree



Although Bell expressed a lack of confidence in being able to appropriately speak to issues surrounding gender identity, it is evident that identity as a whole is an important aspect of what she values in her classroom. Through her lesson plans and interviews, Bell highlighted the importance of students feeling reflected in the space. In Figure 42, a photograph that she submitted during data collection captured self-portraits that students made. In speaking to the importance of this in her classroom, Bell shared:

> I teach the kids when we put things up (in the class) we're sharing them with the world and we need to show them our best. For our self portraits … they are members of our classroom and they need to be visible. And I think, um, it makes people feel comfortable and makes them feel, I think it makes children know that that is their place and network. I think they see the differences and we learn about the different systems. We learn to appreciate the differences.

Figure 42. Bell's Class Self-Portraits

This statement beautifully conveys the importance of identity and how it aligns with the values that Bell shared as important to teach students. Through reviewing data, it is evident that Bell uses literature in a way that supports identity as a whole, although she expressed it was most necessary to address gender, a topic of which she feels less versed.

Mae and Griffin also briefly touched on how they use children's books to support discussions on gender identity, expressing the importance of their students seeing diverse perspectives that reflect their personal identity or the possible identity groups their family members belong to. The difference was that Bell articulated a level of intentionality that was striking, detailing what this looks like within her instruction. Griffin, however, mentioned the use of children's literature to address issues of gender identity mostly from a perspective of fear of pushback.

LGBTQ Awareness and Literacy

Another "tough" topic that was highlighted was how teachers broach LGBTQ issues within the classroom. As discussed in Chapter IV, Griffin works at a small, rural school in the mountains of North Carolina. She described the local community as fairly conservative, rooted heavily in Christian ideology. This posed a challenge for Griffin as she planned instructional opportunities and selected materials to support lessons she designed, since her principal serves as the pastor of a local church.

During our initial interview, Griffin expressed concern that somehow the information she shared could be linked back to her. I would later learn that ensuring anonymity through the process was important because of the fear she had of bringing attention to herself or the things she values. I got a better sense of what she was alluding to with the increased question around anonymity. There are topics that Griffin feels are outside of the lived experiences of the majority that are deemed "safe" or not as controversial to discuss, such as race. During the initial interview when asked about the level of freedom she has to design curriculum that aligns with the values she prioritized for students, she shared:

> I think I have some freedom. Um, I definitely don't feel like I have a hundred percent freedom. I say I feel that way and I think I'm always worried about stepping on someone's toes more than maybe it really is an issue honestly. I'm mostly worried that I'm not overstepping boundaries in any way.

To clarify what she meant by "overstepping boundaries," I sought to clarify and asked if by this she meant teaching values that contradict with their personal or familial beliefs. She elaborated, sharing that she had to be careful not to overstep:

> I definitely do. Um, I definitely feel more comfortable talking about like, you know, race relations and things like that. Like those kind of more, um, well, those topics that we've been kind of headlining the news lately. Um, I feel more comfortable talking about those topics. Um, I don't explicitly use books right now in my classroom that probably feature, um, you know, parents that have two, there are families that have two dads or families that have two moms. But I am not able to use those with my students.

Through further discussion with Griffin, it was apparent that any discourse or instruction that incorporated LGBTQ issues would be deemed inappropriate and grounds for termination. This troubled Griffin who knew that a student in her own class had two dads. She spoke to how this impacted her as a teacher:

> You know, I have these students in my classroom and I try to plan for, you know, teaching so all of them see themselves in the books I read. It's hard to do that when the community looks at having two moms or two dads as a "sin." So I can't even acknowledge, you know—that my student over here has two dads because it could cause upset and put a target on my back.

Griffin's desire to teach in a way that reflects the identity of *all* illustrated how community beliefs shape what teachers are able to do in their classroom. This is something that was expressed by Bell and Mae as well. While Bell touched briefly on the importance through understanding and affirming the intersectionality of identities of her students, the photographs she submitted highlighted children's books that depict LGBTQ issues. Mae on the other hand did not elaborate on how she broaches LGBTQ issues in her classroom, however expressed a desire to reflect all identities.

What emerged from this study is that, often, teachers are censored by building level administration, local districts, and even parents, dictating what topics they are able to discuss or incorporate within their instruction. What I heard from teachers is that the different levels of accountability can often translate to censorship for them, impacting their ability to teach in a way that is relevant and encompasses the lived experiences of all their students.

Parental Pushback

Another system that serves to censor teachers is parental pushback. In this study, I found that the teachers who are more critically reflective of their practice, and thus the implications of their work, see how different systems at play impact how their instruction is received and by whom. Hank, Griffin, Destiney raised issues of parental pushback during their interviews. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the conservative community where Griffin teaches forces her to question the types of discussions she has and the texts she uses with students. When asked about how she relies on children's literature to initiate discussion on topics deemed controversial in her community, she shared,

> I think a lot of it probably honestly comes with, that's like my comfort, like in my mind. If I'm using a book and I'm "not saying it," and the book is saying what I'm trying to say—if that makes sense, um, then I think, honestly in my mind I won't have as much pushback from parents. Um, if someone were to call me out on it, it's more of me saying, "okay, we read this book and this is what it was about" versus me saying something specifically and then being called out about it. Um, so … I do, I, I'm very mindful about the books I pick and use. Like I do spend a lot of time thinking about the books that I use, because there are certain things that I feel like I want to bring up, but I don't want to tell the kids specifically those things sometimes because I'm not sure that I'm comfortable

saying exactly what I want to say. But I'm hoping that they will see some of those important things that I think are important for them to know about within the literature, those lessons, I guess. The lessons that the books are teaching … I guess is what I'm trying to say.

What is problematic about this approach is that Griffin is using children's literature as a sort of scapegoat in the event questions are raised by parents. It is an easy way out if a student were to go home and discuss a particular story and parents felt the content or topic was inappropriate, going against their personal values or beliefs. Two problems arise with this approach: (1) Griffin hides behind children's literature and uses it in a way that minimizes her ability to engage with her students on various topics, and (2) doing so relies too heavily on the hope that students grasp the intended meaning or *lesson* of the story without her having to unpack it with them. Ultimately, this has a negative impact on instruction as students are left to piece things together with limited guidance of their teacher.

While Griffin's parental pushback stemmed from an overwhelming sense of fear, Destiney reported experiences where she was questioned about topics she covered or books that she used. In describing her experience, she shared,

> So for example, um, when I taught third grade, we were learning about Jackie Robinson and how, you know, how all that, all those things happened with Jackie Robinson. He wasn't allowed to do this and, and things like that. And I got a lot of pushback from parents. Like, why are you teaching this? Because it's important! These kids need to know, but other coworkers didn't get that pushback though. It's, it's a little bit different being an African-American teacher. Um, cause I've always gotten pushback, which is strange, right!? So, um, when I'm planning, not only am I thinking about, okay, am I, I

have a little trouble with this? Um, I think about, you know, these kids need me to understand these values so that they're not when it comes to them being an adult and continuing that they're not being the same way, you know?

Destiney's statement highlights the issues she has faced as an African-American trying to teach values to students. As she noted above, parents pushed back simply because a story featured Jackie Robinson, who became the first African-American to play major league baseball. It is hard to imagine that there would be any level of push back because she highlighted the lived experiences of such a notable figure. I was surprised to learn that Destiney plans closely with her team, yet she was the only one questioned about the choice in reading selection. Although all team members taught the same lessons using the same materials, Destiney reported,

> I think since every single year I've taught, I've had some sort of like, "why are you teaching this?" Or "my student shouldn't be learning about this." And it's just so funny because I'm not the one who … who's the only person teaching it, you know? We're all collectively teaching it because well, it was in our book, you know? Um, so it just depends on, so …

After further discussion, I learned that Destiney attributed this to the fact that she is the only African-American teacher on the grade level. Being questioned in this way insinuated that Destiney is trying to push some sort of agenda or narrative with the selection of materials she chose to use. Sadly, accountability is an obstacle that teachers face daily that has tremendous implications for their instructional practice.

Accountability as an Obstacle

In an effort to quantify learning and improve student outcomes, states and local school boards place increased pressure on school leaders to implement practices deemed necessary to

support that endeavor. Living in an age where school performance grades are shared across media outlets (news channels and newspapers) as well as sent to individual families, explaining the implications for their school's grade on their students' learning, shows the emphasis of student testing as a measure of accountability for schools.

Speaking with the participants in this study highlighted the issues they faced as a result of accountability. Through analysis of the data, I was able to see that parental pushback and censorship, in relation to the ways teachers incorporate values in their instruction, was just the beginning of how accountability impacts their instructional practice. Participants described how accountability measures at the district level (centered around pressures placed on principals, lack of professional development and district-wide pacing) and building level expectations (regarding scheduling and data tracking) impacted their ability to teach in a way that incorporates values they feel are important for students to learn within their instruction.

District Level

During our follow up interview, Ceriya noted how district level accountability measures often cultivate a top-down approach that increases the pressures school level leadership face that then trickles down to teachers. She shared:

> So we had a big shake-up in our county. Our superintendent looked at the eight low performing schools and she said, "these schools have not moved in three years." So she removed those principals. And the principals that, you know, showed growth in the schools that they were in, she moved them and put them in the eight low performing schools.

Sweeping decisions such as this fosters a sense of fear in administrators and teachers alike. It minimizes the importance of developing a positive school culture and fails to consider how

making such a drastic shift during the instructional year impacts all members of a school community.

Although most participants spoke to how district level accountability impacted their own instructional practice, only Ceriya called attention to the fact that it is something building level leadership experiences also. Ceriya is right. There is a top-down approach when it comes to the pressures accountability measures place on education. In my years of experience working closely with leadership, principals gather monthly to meet as a district. During these meetings they are commended for what is going well and often raked over the coals when it comes to review of district level student performance data. In turn, principals go back to their schools and find ways to take this new information and apply it within their building to improve instructional practice, ultimately working to raise student scores.

Some are able to shoulder this burden better than others. Some become micromanagers where others shield their staff from the outside pressures. In the case of Ceriya, she is seeing the strain working at a restart school has put on her principal. She shared:

> She is amazing. So just to see all the stress that she's under, I'm like, Hmm. Yeah, I know I don't want to be a principal! And then to be so visible in a restart school, they got all eyes on her!

What Ceriya is describing is the microscope that her school, and subsequently, leader has been placed under in order to yield results and quickly when it comes to improving their school performance grade and getting out of low performing status. Listening to Ceriya describe the intense pressure her school faces in terms of accountability measures leads me to question what the district has provided in terms of professional development to support the teachers in their efforts to improve student scores. Unfortunately, in my experience as a teacher, often the

professional development opportunities that are provided at the district level are quick, surface level presentations of concepts/material and lack the implementation support needed.

Professional Development

In response to students returning to in-person learning after participating in remote instruction during the pandemic, the districts where Ceriya, Destiney, Charlie, Maggie, and Reese are employed issued a directive that classes needed to begin incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies within their instruction. Destiney and Charlie both shared that their district handed down core values they wanted students to intentionally learn and expected to see incorporated into their instructional practice. Maggie, Ceriya, and Reese described the newfound focus on the implementation of SEL as challenging because of professional development and time constraints as it related to district level pacing.

Learning more about the SEL implementation from Reese's perspective highlighted how limited guidance was provided to teachers as they began to do this work. She shared:

> I know that I attended two trainings on SEL. Um, when the school year started, I don't know if they were required? I don't think they were, I think I just attended because I wanted to, but they were offered.

I found it surprising that with the tremendous amount of resources that exists to support districts in providing quality professional development to teachers for a more successful implementation, that it was not done with fidelity and required for all. Developing an appropriate understanding of the background knowledge of SEL practices has the potential to assist teachers in developing learning opportunities with more intentionality, ensuring they are doing so appropriately rather than teachers fledging through, figuring it out as they go.

Ceriya spoke to how working at the summer reading camp her school offered to students gave her scaffolding to better understand how SEL competencies could be incorporated into Morning Meeting, for example. Knowing there was a push for SEL implementation forced her to look for ways she could see this in action as she developed an understanding of what it could look like for her. Ceriya described going to a first grade teacher's classroom during summer camp to observe how she led Morning Meeting with her students. She shared,

> Everybody's big on the morning meetings because of the pandemic, um, social and emotional learning. They've tied that into our standards as well. Um, so I've been watching the first grade classroom here at our summer camp. And so she (the teacher) goes through, they do a good morning song and she has a quote and then she'll have a video that goes into the quote and they share about like … I know one day was about kindness and they watched a video of people helping each other. Um, so the morning meetings are big now! I hope that we have time for these morning meetings when school starts back!

What stood out in hearing Ceriya share this was the excitement in her voice. She genuinely enjoyed observing the first grade Morning Meeting and understood why they are so "big" now. She went on to say that "it's a time of day I can truly connect with my students and not be so focused on whether or not they will pass a test at the end of the year." Ultimately, pacing creates challenges for teachers when they have to make decisions about the value of taking time from one subject area to work on SEL competencies or deciding whether or not they can take time out of their already very packed day to lead a Morning Meeting with their students. Understanding how these district level mandates result in implications at the school level is important. Often

district level accountability systems translate to a shift in building level expectations for teachers, impacting their pedagogical practice.

Building-Level Expectations

With the exception of Mae and Bell, all participants discussed how building level expectations from their administration served as a way to hold them to systems of accountability. In particular, teachers spoke to how their schedules were closely monitored and how student data was used in a way to constantly remind teachers of their primary focus: proficiency on end of grade measures for their respective grade level.

During the initial interview, Ceriya shared how there was two weeks at the start of the school year that teachers had flexibility to design lessons to “set the tone” for the year. She shared,

> The first two weeks of school are set aside to build relationships. So we have the freedom to, at our school, with our administration. We have the freedom to take that opportunity, um, get to learn about our students, do whatever you need to do to set the tone for the beginning of the school year and for the rest of the school year. So if we want to, um, tie in certain values, we can definitely do that. I know growth mindset is one value that they’ve incorporated into our math curriculum. And for the past couple of years, that’s been a big one. That one just popped in my head. So that is a um, a value that we also work on explicitly. Um, so not saying that after the first two weeks you can’t, um, work on these values, but it’s a little bit harder because now we’re starting the school year, pretty much teaching the standards and going heavy in math and reading.

What is interesting about this statement is the emphasis Ceriya placed on the fact that once the two week period at the beginning of the school year ends, the focus is heavily on math and

reading standards. In careful review of the lesson plans she submitted, we can see this in action. In Figure 43, Ceriya has a designated block of time for "Morning Meeting." Although this block of time on her lesson plan template does not illustrate a well-thought out plan or give a sense of the activities that she does with students during this time, we see there is specific time set aside to come together and build relationships with students.

Figure 43. Ceriya's Beginning-of-Year Lesson Plan Excerpt

Week of August 23, 2020

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Students will watch The Importance of Struggle. Tw have students discuss a time they struggled and what happen because of their struggle. Krispy Kreme 3 ACTS	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Dill'er Up 3 ACTS	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Where's the Beef 3 ACTS	Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 Do the Dew 3 ACTS
	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40 SEL: Students will answer question using the flipgrid. Students will respond to two other students post. Question: If you were a superhero, what would be your superpower? Explain why you chose that superpower.	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40 Sw watch the video Believe in yourself! Students will use a padlet to share a time that they believed in them self and what happened because they believed in them self.	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40 Speed is not important, Students will do the Crossing a Rectangle task	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40 Brains Grow and Change Students will do Check boards and More activity.
	Science 9:50-10:30	Science 9:50-10:30	Science 9:50-10:30	Science 9:50-10:30

Looking at this excerpt from the beginning of the year, which illustrates how building level administration allowed for time to do this work, speaks to the importance they know it plays in being able to establish a sense of classroom community. Working in a school where every minute is accounted for and focused primarily on test prep typically limits the sense of freedom teachers feel in veering off script. Ceriya noted that during this time at the start of the year she has the ability to prioritize values for students using resources she chooses. The issue arises, however, that once the two weeks is over, the time becomes repurposed for something

else. In the lesson plan excerpt (Figure 43), carefully looking at the blocks of time assigned raises the question of how much time is allotted for the Morning Meeting.

As Ceriya moved further into the school year, and beyond the initial two weeks, we see there is a 10 minute block of time from 8:20-8:30 am where Morning Meeting has been repurposed for i-Ready reading and math (Figure 44).

Figure 44. Ceriya's October Lesson Plan Excerpt

Week of October 04, 2020

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Morning Meeting 8:20-8:30	Morning Meeting I-Ready Reading	Morning Meeting I-Ready Math	Morning Meeting I-Ready Reading	Morning Meeting I-Ready Math
Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05	NC.5.MD.4 NC.5.MD.5 Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 **I can** measure volume by counting unit cubes. Tw use pages 3-6 from I-ready toolbox Exit ticket: pg 9 #1 and 2	NC.5.MD.4 NC.5.MD.5 Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 **I can** use multiplication and addition to relate to volume. **I can** use a formula to find the volume of rectangular prisms. Flocabulary video Tw use IReady lesson	NC.5.MD.4 NC.5.MD.5 Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 **I can** use multiplication and addition to relate to volume. **I can** use a formula to find the volume of rectangular prisms. **I can** take apart a figure that is made up of 2 or more rectangular prisms. Tw use IReady Lesson	NC.5.MD.4 NC.5.MD.5 Whole Group Math 8:30-9:05 I can use multiplication and addition to relate to volume. I can use a formula to find the volume of rectangular prisms. **I can** take apart a figure that is made up of 2 or more rectangular prisms. Tw continue with using Iready lesson from previous day. Tw also use parts of the following video.
Small-Group Math 9:10-9:40	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40	Small Group Math- 9:10-9:40
Science 9:50-10:30	5.E.1.2 Science 9:50-10:30 Vocabulary: air mass, humidity, continental tropical, continental polar, maritime tropical,	5.E.1.2 Science 9:50-10:30 Vocabulary: air mass, humidity, continental tropical, continental	5.E.1.2 Science 9:50-10:30 Vocabulary: air mass, humidity, continental tropical, continental	5.E.1.2 Science 9:50-10:30 Vocabulary: air mass, humidity, continental tropical, continental

i-Ready is an online platform for reading and math that is used, first, as an adaptive assessment tool that takes diagnostic results to personalize instruction for students, providing them with lessons based on their skill level and noted areas of need. Recently, there has been a push in district schools to pay for and utilize programs such as i-Ready in order to have

additional data on how students are performing. The primary problem with this is that it continues to feed into the high stakes accountability students face with constant data tracking and also plugs them into a screen, so to speak, taking away the transformative potential of peer interaction and collaboration in the learning process. Rather than using this time for purposeful, engaging student interactions, the focus is shifted to their own individual learning, reinforcing the idea that learning is reduced to rote memorization and skills necessary to demonstrate proficiency. Learning that is reduced to focus on skills mastery does not allow room for students to understand the context with which those skills should be applied.

Understanding the importance of Morning Meeting and the potential for learning to occur, Bell (Figure 45) designed activities within her block that served as an introduction to the day and allowed time for students to come together to build community.

Figure 45. Bell's Morning Meeting Block

9:30-10:00	**Morning Meeting (Materials: Name Cards)** • **Greeting:** Pulling name cards, student greets and shares something briefly about the weekend, combine with sharing • **Sharing:** weekend adventures - combine with greeting • **Group Activity: N/A** • **News and Announcements:** *No read aloud today. Tomorrow we will start new sharing topics from Seesaw*

Similarly, Mae also illustrated a block of time at the start of her day that is divided into four distinct parts: greeting, sharing, group activity and news and announcements (Figure 46). Through each of these parts, it is evident that there is intentionality and activities have been well planned to make students feel seen, acknowledged and to come together to have fun.

Figure 46. Mae's Morning Meeting Block

Monday August 24

9:30 - 10:00 **Morning Meeting #1 (small group)**
Greeting: Virtual Fist Bump/High Five
Model for students how to greet a person by name, "Good Morning, _____!" and give them a virtual fist bump or high five up to the webcam. Discuss with students how important it is that each of our classmates is greeted by name and welcomed into the classroom community. Greet with enthusiasm! Go around the class until each person is greeted by everyone present.
Sharing: Discuss the importance of sharing to get to know each other and make connections. Review our sign language for "me too!" showing a connection with another person. Have students think for a moment about today's sharing topic: "If I could travel anywhere…"
Activity: If time allows, play a quick game of pictionary by using the document camera.
News & Announcements: Since this small group hasn't met for a morning meeting since the first day of school, review our Zoom expectations and what we learned in the book *A Little Spot Learns Online.* Ask students what they remember and what they might want to add:

- eating and drinking should occur before and after Zoom meetings
- come prepared
- find a quiet place where you will not be distracted
- place your device in one stable place and keep it there
- select chosen background prior to getting on-line and keep it there
- only bring materials that have been assigned
- put your microphone on mute and click the hand raise button to speak
- wear appropriate clothing for others to see
- use your name for display on Zoom. For security purposes, we cannot admit someone into a Zoom room if we don't know who they are.

Throughout both of these plans for Morning Meeting, the teachers planned activities that also address cooperation and coming together to help support students for success socially as well as academically.

Tying it All Together

In this chapter, I shared how the data collected through interviews, photo-elicitation, and document analysis of lesson plans shed light on how elementary teachers use children's literature as a springboard for teaching values and in broaching topics that teachers feel are difficult to find an entry point for discussing. As I illustrated with direct quotes from participants, they feel the pressures from families as well as leaders to abstain from topics that are deemed controversial by the majority group. In turn, this has implications for students as it directly influences the teacher's ability to highlight diverse perspectives and forces teachers to make decisions on

instructional materials based on fear of being called on the carpet, so to speak, by families or local leaders.

Although none of the participants suggested an interest in leaving the profession, it was clear that they are feeling the pressures and face a degree of internal struggle when trying to navigate what they are asked to do when it contradicts what they know to be best for students. Santoro (2016) notes that most teachers choose to leave the teaching profession due to dissatisfaction ranging from administration to lack of support and lack of input and control over teaching decisions as well as testing and accountability pressures. This chapter illustrated each of these issues and how they manifest for the participants I highlighted. Demoralizing teachers in this way can have a tremendous impact on the profession, one that I am afraid we are already experiencing by way of teacher shortages.

Additionally, I described what participants shared as obstacles in teaching values they prioritize to students, both at the district and building level. It is important to note that this study represents the perspective and experiences of nine teachers in North Carolina public schools and cannot be generalized to reflect all teachers. In the chapter that follows, I conclude this study by placing my findings in conversation with existing literature. I answer my research questions, discuss recommendations for future practice and research, and reflect on the overall study.

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I was inspired to choose this topic for research because I have always been intrigued by the values teachers teach students and how they are communicated through their instructional practice and design of classroom space. By conducting this study, I sought to learn from K-5 classroom teachers in North Carolina public schools how they do this with the students they teach. When I began this research study, I was also a teacher. Listening to participants share their answers to the interview questions also allowed for room in sharing who they are as individuals, what they hold dear in terms of values and, oftentimes, the unique experiences they have had over the years that shaped their beliefs about important values for students to understand as they learn and grow. Throughout the course of our conversations and, subsequently, review of the data I collected, I saw many aspects that I could relate to in some way. There were also times that the data made sense to me in a way that it would not have, had I not been a classroom teacher for the last 17 years.

I bring to this study a wealth of practical knowledge about K-5th grade students, their development, and how it influences the learning environment. When considering the values teachers feel are important to teach students, I am called to question how they do this in their classroom and interrogate this in a way that questions intent versus reality. Using interviews with participants, photo-elicitation, and document analysis, I discuss the research question findings, and I convey further analysis and examination around what can be learned from the data shared in Chapters IV through VI.

Research Questions: Purpose and Findings

The following research questions guided this study as I examined the values teachers felt were important to teach students:

Question One

What values do elementary public school teachers think they should teach students in a diverse society, both explicitly and implicitly?

Question Two

How do teachers feel they teach their students these values (explicitly and implicitly) and what power do they have to do so?

Question Three

How do teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach?

In the sections that follow I revisit the research questions, using data collected from participants to provide insight on the values teachers prioritize with students and how they do this explicitly and implicitly.

Identifying Values to Prioritize

Gaining an understanding of the values teachers felt were important to teach students was central to this research study as the first research question. Kesberg and Keller (2018) note that values are reflective of what is important to us, serving as personal guiding principles that influence our behavior and actions throughout the various aspects of our daily life. Each participant shared the values they felt are important to teach students and elaborated on why these were important for students to learn. Teachers spend a considerable amount of time with students daily and are tasked with providing learning opportunities that help them develop the

skills necessary to succeed. Throughout the course of this research study, teachers expressed the importance of helping students develop in a way that shapes who they ultimately become, a much larger goal than teaching them academic content, whether they explicitly intend to or not.

As mentioned in Chapter III, collectively, participants in this study shared forty one values they feel are important to teach students. Through careful analysis it was clear to see that although different words were used at times, there were overlaps in meaning for how the participants used them. An example of this was with the words *integrity* and *honesty*. For several participants, *honesty* was used in reference to being truthful and trustworthy. Other participants used the word *integrity* to mean being honest in situations where students were not in the presence of an adult. Although one focuses on truthfulness and the other from trying to ensure truthful actions that hold students accountable to desirable behaviors in the absence of constant surveillance, the premise/focus was ultimately on adhering to what is true in some way.

Comparing the different values shared, I identified four that overlapped across multiple participants: respect (showing respect/behaving respectfully and respecting difference), responsibility, equality (fairness), and community. Situating each of these in the context that the participants discussed provides an opportunity for better understanding the values they feel are important to teach students and why they are important to them. In this section I expand upon the four overlapping values and provide insight on the points that participants shared while listing these values as important for students to learn.

Respect was by far the most frequent value that teachers articulated as important for students to learn, with seven participants sharing it. What made this particular value stand out was how the participants positioned it. For some, it was described in terms of showing respect by way of actions and words or behaving well-mannered by White and Black southern ideals for

social etiquette. I contextualize it in this way because I highlight participants living in the South and there are cultural/regional expectations they have to adopt and exemplify. As Hank, Reese, Destiney, and Ceriya noted, demonstrating *respect* this way "helps them be more successful in the future." However, these three failed to see how their view of showing respect ultimately played into power structures and reduced demonstrating *respect* to only those in positions of authority. Failing to acknowledge how this further perpetuates the belief that those who have perceived power over us are deserving of "yes ma'am," "no ma'am," "yes sir," and "no sir" creates a dynamic where one does not necessarily feel comfortable questioning or pushing back when needed. This is something I have struggled with in my own life and sought to address within my instructional practice.

For others, respect was described in terms of having compassion for difference. Bell, Mae, and Griffin each spoke to ensuring that they taught students the value of respecting differences in others. Each of these participants highlighted respect as a way of acknowledging differences in others, understanding how these differences are important and how we respond to the differences in a way that does not cause harm to others. I was intrigued that the interviews brought to light that respect is challenging to define, thus leading me to wonder how students come to understand what respect is and looks like given the variations they may encounter, based on how their teachers internalize its meaning.

The second most reported value by participants in this study was *responsibility*. The ways that most who shared this value spoke of what it looks like or the importance of students exemplifying it, addressed it from the standpoint of work completion, making the right choices and demonstrating an awareness of how their actions are tied to the larger community, particularly in terms of goal setting and working towards improving their collective data

tracking. However, two participants, Mae and Bell, situated *responsibility* in terms of contributing to the welfare of their community as a whole, making the classroom community one where all members are able to learn. What is interesting in the differences in how *responsibility* is positioned is that one focuses much more heavily on market-oriented skills that translate to success in the workforce and is driven by accountability as well as the need to "teach to the test," while the other focuses on community welfare and access to learning. Looking at *responsibility* through the lens of Mae and Bell showed that their perspective on what this looks like is more closely aligned with critical citizenship and leads students to take note of what is happening around them and engage in ways to take action in making things better for all members of a community. Comparing the differences shared by participants highlights just how much accountability measures impact how teachers decide the values that are important for students to know and internalize, in addition to how they situate these values. One view of *responsibility* focuses on individual accountability in terms of putting in the work to learn enough to move your data point and in turn positively impacting the statistical measure of the class, whereas the other is focused on accountability of others. Giroux (2011) points out that "responsibility makes politics and agency possible, because it does not end with matters of understanding since it recognizes the importance of students becoming accountable for others through their ideas, language and actions" (p. 126). Understanding our *responsibility* as a way that others are looked after, cared for, and respected, as Mae and Bell position the meaning, lends itself to ensure that they are supporting the needs of the larger communities that students are a part of as a whole.

Equality, in terms of fairness, was shared by three participants. It is important to note that the three participants who shared this value, Mae, Bell, and Destiney, all shared personal, life experiences that supported their belief students should be taught this value. Through their

explanations during the interviews, it was evident that they felt it was important for people to be treated equally or fairly in the communities that they are a part of, acknowledging and respecting the ways in which we are different.

Mae highlighted examples of how equality in terms of educational attainment and financial security impacted her family as well as the local community where they are from. She saw firsthand how these differences impacted the lives of those around her. Bell relied on her experiences growing up during the Civil Rights Movement and traveling to teach abroad as the basis for her view of the importance of teaching *equality* as a value. Both Mae and Bell saw the importance of how *equality* translates to ensuring everyone has access to the same opportunities and care, regardless of their background while not discriminating against them for what makes them different.

Destiney's view of the importance of *equality* was tied much more to her lived experiences as a Black female in predominantly white communities growing up in the rural South. During the course of our discussions throughout the interviews, Destiney shared how she was provided with a whitewashed version of instruction that neglected to give adequate exposure and the opportunity for learning about the lived experiences and contributions of Black people throughout American history. As she got older, it was then that she learned more about these issues and entered spaces where she was not a minority. Prior to that, though, she felt increased pressure to fit in with the predominant culture and as a teacher was frequently asked to attend to issues of behavior involving students of color simply because she is Black. Her belief about teaching students the value of *equality* comes from the standpoint that everyone deserves the same opportunity to make the most of their lives, regardless of their background, especially as it relates to race/ethnicity.

What I found interesting was that what Mae and Destiney reported in terms of *equality* as a value aligned more closely with fairness. While equality and fairness were used interchangeably at times, equality means treating everyone the same regardless of opportunity, ethnicity, ability, etc., whereas fairness requires us to treat everyone based on their individual needs, ensuring equity. The way this materialized in this study seemed that fairness was used when describing individuals and their opportunities and equality was directed as more of a need when discussing groups of people. Another interesting layer that impacts how these participants view *equality* is tied to the areas where they grew up. Mae and Destiney grew up in very rural, Southern towns where Bell grew up in the Midwest before relocating to North Carolina during the Civil Rights Movement. How Bell situated values in general is different than that of the other participants based on her experiences growing up in a family with midwestern roots and the communities she has been a part of over the years. Taking this into consideration helps to understand how her view of values are contextualized in a different way than other participants.

Another value that stood out in the collected data was *community*. What makes this value significant was how participants speak to the importance of teaching *community* as a value and how they discuss it with students. While all participants shared aspects that speak to the need for developing community in their classroom and the importance in building relationships, only two participants, Mae and Hank, explicitly listed it as a value important to teach. Both participants speak to the importance of this value in terms of coming together and providing support in the learning community so that all are successful. However, when comparing data from both interviews in conjunction with the other data collection methods, there was a discrepancy in what was reported versus the implications of what the implicit curriculum Hank delivers.

Hank spoke frequently of ensuring that students feel cared for, seen, and understood within a community. He acknowledged that this directly impacts how students come to school each day and their comfort for opening up and learning. Although much of what he does speaks to his desire to teach students to value *community* such as designing opportunities for team building, there are things he does that work antithetically to this. For example, using the Christmas tree (as mentioned in the previous chapter) as a way for students to earn ornaments for good acts they have done for the benefit of the classroom community singles out students and acknowledges their actions by providing a reward, hoping to entice others to also add to the list of good acts being carried out. Doing so serves as an external motivator for students which focuses on the individualistic nature, capitalizing on singular acts rather than identifying ways they come together for the good of all. Additionally, using a Christmas tree in this manner is not inclusive for all students and supports the dominant religious tradition, giving students the impression that beliefs and holidays associated with Christianity are more important or acceptable than others.

Each of the participants in this study articulated values they feel are important to teach students they work with. What I found in answering this initial research question is that most participants have clearly defined reasons, based on their personal beliefs or lived experience that influenced the list of values they shared. Understanding how teachers teach values to students is important because these learning experiences have the power to influence how students see and interact with others in the world around them.

Teaching Values to Students

The second research question focused on gaining a sense of how teachers teach values and helped shed light on the explicit and implicit nature of the work they do with students.

Teachers play a pivotal role in helping to shape students academically as well as socially and emotionally. The values that were shared are ones that they feel are beneficial for future members of our society to possess. Participants in this study noted that, often, this is done in their classrooms through utilization of school-based approaches and initiatives (social and emotional learning and PBIS), modeling, and direct instruction.

Returning to in-person instruction after learning remotely for such a long time posed challenges for students and teachers. Additionally, following social distancing guidelines provided by the CDC and limiting interactions with others left a tremendous impact on students. The stress from adjusting to a new normal, social isolation, and lack of the typical routines associated with in-person learning took a toll on students and teachers. In response to this, districts sought to implement practices that addressed the post-pandemic needs of students while comfortably helping them transition back to in-person learning.

Reese, Ceriya, Charlie, and Destiney reported that their district pushed for teachers to have meetings with students at the start of the day, focused on social and emotional learning competencies. Ceriya and Destiney reported that this is the one time during their day where they are able to incorporate values directly without worrying about being off the district level pacing guides. All four participants shared that this was a time in their day where they had the most freedom to plan in a way that is responsive to the needs of the students. In reviewing lesson plans for these participants, I noticed that there were distinct blocks of time devoted to having Morning Meetings, although they varied in length and demonstrated a different level in the detail of planning.

In Figure 24, Ceriya shows there is an hour block of time in her schedule, in April, allotted to hold Morning Meetings, a stark difference from what her plans illustrated in Chapter

VI. From my experience, Morning Meetings are typically anywhere from 20-30 minutes in length. Planning for an hour block of time is entirely too long to keep student's attention and showed that whoever mandated this does not have a true sense of child development and the aims of a Morning Meeting. In carefully reviewing, it is not clear of the specific format for this time frame or the types of activities used that would help develop an understanding of how she capitalizes on this freedom in her schedule to incorporate the values she prioritizes.

In contrast, as shown in Chapter VI, Bell and Mae's plans also highlighted blocks of time at the start of the day, clearly defining how the time will be used. The lesson plan for Bell showed that she divides her Morning Meeting block into four parts: the greeting, sharing, a group activity. and news and announcements. These four components are an integral part of the Responsive Classroom approach and how students start the day with one another. Together, they help students learn more about one another, develop a sense of community and help students get focused for the day ahead. Similarly, Mae's plans shown in chapter six reflected the same distinct parts. Seeing the intentionality in planning for this block of time illustrated a difference in the level of professional development Mae and Bell received in relation to other participants.

What Reese, Ceriya, Charlie, and Destiney spoke of with regards to the push in their district seemed most similar to the Responsive Classroom Morning Meeting framework, but their lesson plans did not reflect they had received appropriate guidance or professional development on how best to use this time. In listening to the participants discuss how they planned for this time and the types of lessons they developed, it was apparent that teachers had been tasked with utilizing this time but had been given limited guidance or resources on how to effectively address these competencies. Reese reported that teachers in her district received a half day, optional professional development training at the start of the school year that explained how to facilitate

their version of the Morning Meeting, but it was not enough for them to truly get a sense of what was expected and what it should look like.

Although these four participants expressed some level of uncertainty with utilizing this time to teach values to students, almost all participants articulated that they capitalize on teachable moments that arise throughout the day as well as employ the use of children's books to help directly teach values to students. Teachable moments occur spontaneously throughout the instructional day and are unplanned moments where teachers are able to capitalize on the potential for learning found within that moment. An example shared by Charlie during an interview was a student raising their hand and asking why a particular student smelled bad. Rather than chastising the student for not demonstrating acceptable behavior, Charlie instead used this as a teachable moment, to address personal hygiene for the whole group and also speak to treating others with kindness.

Another way that participants spoke teaching values to students was through school-wide use of PBIS. As mentioned in Chapter V, PBIS is a framework that utilizes external approaches to promote positive behavior, limiting the frequency of discipline referrals for students. In using this framework, schools develop an acronym that incorporates what they value as desirable attributes of students and use it as a means for policing or monitoring student behaviors that occur throughout the day. An example Reese shared during an interview was that at her school, students were expected to be safe, considerate, respectful, kind and on time. (These were listed in a different order and form an acronym of importance to her school. However, to further ensure anonymity of her as a participant, I have changed the order.) When less desirable behaviors occur, this acronym was employed as a tool for questioning students about their behaviors, such as asking, "were you being considerate when you did that to so and so?" In turn, PBIS calls for

teachers to acknowledge and reward positive, desirable behaviors that students demonstrate. Often this is done by way of offering a school based currency as payment for reward. Students then use this form of currency to purchase items at designated points throughout the year or use it to purchase access to an event such as a special party.

Over half of the participants in the study are employed at schools that utilize PBIS as a means for eliciting desirable behaviors from students. Of the participants who spoke of their schools use of PBIS, only two identified the problematic nature of conflating it with the concept of teaching values to students. PBIS is viewed as widely problematic in that students are extrinsically motivated to "do the right thing" rather than truly understanding the values at play and how they have the potential to service the communities they are a part of.

Much of what participants shared about how they teach values to students was done so by modeling. Maggie, for example, noted the importance of students being able to see what she taught them by way of values, in action. She described how she as well as other students served as models for what it looks like to possess these values and live them out. Where things become less clear was in how Maggie conflated modeling values with that of demonstrating manners. In her first interview, she spoke to the fact that manners are something "you can't buy them at the store", "you have to learn them somehow." As a researcher, I am drawn to consider how placing yourself, as the teacher, at the forefront, as the model for appropriate values can be problematic. In this sense, Maggie stressed the importance of manners as a sort of value or skill students should possess.

However, this has little to do with values and more to do with social norms in the South. She goes on in her interview to discuss the importance of *compassion* as a value. She situates this within understanding where one another comes from and the influence this has. What

complicated matters is that during the initial interview, Maggie shared an example of how depending on students' cultural beliefs, they may do things that teachers perceive as being rude or disrespectful. In the example shared, she speaks to how some students are taught that it is disrespectful to look an adult in the eye when they are talking to them. Maggie noted that this is a struggle for her because she grew up being taught the complete opposite. Rather than using this as a point for learning about another culture, Maggie simply says "because I don't know where people are coming from. I don't let that be the thing that bugs me anymore." It is important, given the level of cultural diversity most teachers have in their classrooms, that they carefully consider the unique differences and how that, in turn, influences the values they teach students. Serving as a model is an important role that can be controversial for those who do not share the same beliefs or identity. As noted by Berkowitz (2011), adults, members of the community, historical figures and roles of characters in literature that children read can take on the form of role-models for students. Ensuring that teachers model in a way that accurately portrays the intended value and does so in a culturally responsive manner, respecting the values of others as well, is difficult and requires a great deal of self-reflection.

Lastly, participants expressed direct instruction as a method for how they teach values to students. Most spoke to incorporating aspects of teaching values into social studies and reading blocks during the day because it seemed to align more closely with standards they were already addressing. Although several described how they utilized children's literature to do this discreetly and tied discussion of values in while breaking apart the text, others expressed capitalizing on the moments when issues arise. Maggie, for example, shared:

> I don't recall sitting down and explicitly going over a certain value unless it comes up in conversation. If it's something in a story that we were reading and they didn't understand what it meant, then we sit there and talk about it.

She is not alone in this sentiment. Charlie also shared that during teacher directed reading, she capitalized on times where they were doing "character analysis so we can talk about that character and the values they see within that character. And of course, going into detail about how that character shows these values." It is evident that teachers infuse teaching values to students through various moments in their day-to-day instruction. Whether it is through school based approaches and initiatives, modeling, or direct instruction employing the use of children's literature, teachers find time to do this work.

In this study, I sought to understand what values teachers taught students through both explicit or direct instructional learning opportunities and through the implicit curriculum. Although participants readily shared ways in which they provide learning opportunities for students to learn values explicitly, few acknowledged the conflict between their actions as it relates to the impact of the implicit curriculum on the values they hoped to teach students. Additionally, most teachers spoke to district level expectations and pacing as obstacles for the work they hoped to do with students around values. It was apparent that the teachers faced a plethora of accountability measures that impacted their ability to teach in a meaningful way, being responsive to needs that arise in the day-to-day running of their classrooms as it relates to teaching values.

Personal and Professional Alignment: Navigating Potential Contradictions

In answering my third research question, I reflect on my own experiences as a teacher and am drawn to consider how there were times in my professional career where my beliefs were

not aligned with that of the school or perhaps the administration I taught under at that time. As a beginning teacher, I remember feeling that the learning experiences I created for students had to be perfectly aligned with what our school leaders articulated as important. Lesson plans had to contain standards being taught, essential questions that guided the lesson, a detailed description of my activity and also factor in whatever building level focus we had at the time. This was a daunting task that I learned how to successfully navigate, critically making decisions about what was important to teach based on my professional experience.

During my professional career as a teacher, I felt I was fortunate that I taught within systems and structures that afforded me instructional freedom to teach in a way that met the needs of my students, as long as I could justify my approach when asked. It was not until later in my career that I learned more about the importance of teaching in a way that critically evaluates systems of power at play rather than perpetuating students' role as a participant in working within those systems. Through reflection, I have come to learn that my teaching philosophy has shifted, exponentially, from the early years of my career and I am called to question whether I could have taught in those first schools I was initially employed in because now, I realize I would be doing so in contradiction to what I believe.

While conducting interviews, most participants, with the exception of one, shared that they feel they work in schools that the values align with their personal values. Maggie, for example, as a proponent of the work she did as a founding member of the PBIS team at her school and "when we first switched over to PBIS, I feel like I've just incorporated that into what I do all the time. So I feel like what I'm doing in my room is gonna to be the same thing you would see happening school-wide." Additionally, Ceriya shared "I don't know that I could be at a school that does not support my values." Hearing that most shared this sentiment leads me to

believe that either they were able to find the perfect school for them, or they do not critically evaluate what they are asked to teach students.

One participant who critically examined what was occurring at her school was Griffin. A larger theme throughout her interviews highlighted the stark difference in values she feels are important to teach students in comparison to what she is expected to teach. As noted in chapter four, Griffin works in a small rural community in the mountain region of North Carolina. In her small town, often folks wear multiple hats within the larger community. At the time, the principal of her school also served as the pastor of the local church. As is characteristic of most poorer, mountain communities in the South, the guide for values is reflected in strict Biblical teachings.

Griffin shared how the various hats her principal wore influenced values she was able to teach students and concepts she was able to anchor her work with values in. During the initial interview, she described a school sponsored club that students can be recognized as members of which is tied to a "three strikes and you're out" policy. Students are all part of the club if they demonstrate desirable behaviors and follow the predetermined criteria. However, the moment you have a misstep, you get a strike. Griffin pointed out that while aspects of this club seem reflective of PBIS, they are not a PBIS school. The club is centered upon their school mascot and earning a "strike" means you have lost a blue jay, for example. (The original mascot was changed to further protect the identity of the teacher). Griffin shared that students can lose "blue jays" based on things such as office referrals or bus referrals for behavior. In addition, she shared that when attendance became a problem, students could lose a "blue jay" based on absences and tardies. These are often issues that students cannot help or control, such as issues with transportation or their families.

Another issue that she faced in terms of navigating contradictions in what she values with that of what is deemed acceptable by the school, and honestly the surrounding community was designing instruction that reflected the lived experiences of all of the students she taught. Griffin shared that teaching lessons to students about acceptance and respect for difference and situating them within the context of Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ issues, for example, were deemed as controversial and could be grounds for termination if someone were to raise concern. After reviewing lesson plans she shared and hearing the types of books that she shares with students, I was perplexed how she finds ways to incorporate some of the values that she feels are best for students as they grow up to become members of a diverse society. She shared that she works hard to build trust with families and front-load what students will be learning to lessen the pushback or amount of questions she receives after the fact.

Griffin reflected on her own teaching practice and identified that building relationships with families was key in her being able to address values through topics that her co-workers might not necessarily feel comfortable broaching. As she mentioned in Chapter six about not being able to be as inclusive as she wanted about the different types of families her students had, there was fear and uncertainty about the level of pushback she would receive for bringing in materials that highlighted two moms or two dads. After further questioning, she shared, “I’m afraid, honestly, I’m afraid of how, of how they’re (parents) gonna react.”

While most felt their values aligned with the values of the school or what they were expected to teach, examples such as Griffin highlight the struggle teachers face in providing relevant instruction to students, that is reflective of our larger society. Understanding how Griffin navigated this contradiction illustrates how teachers are asked to demonstrate perceived impartiality so as not to upset the dominant culture of the schools where they teach. Establishing

a fear of professional retaliation, in this case, served as a means for censorship to perpetuate the beliefs of the larger, conservative community. As we look to the future in the field of education, it is important to consider how policies often serve as a means of censoring teachers, thus impacting the types of learning experiences they are able to provide and materials they are able to use, in light of Senate Bill 49 regarding the parent bill of rights.

Teaching Values: An Evolving Criticality

As Giroux (2011) notes, "it is crucial to recognize that pedagogy has less to do with the language of technique and methodology than it does with issues of politics and power" (p. 71). Throughout this study, participants expressed values they felt were important to teach students and also gave a glimpse into the source of these values for them, often relying on their religious beliefs, family and personal experiences in shaping these. Regardless of what society views the role of teachers to be in shaping the values of students, it occurs, both explicitly and implicitly throughout the day-to-day running of the classroom. As mentioned in the previous section, policies and laws such as Senate Bill 49 limit the freedoms teachers have to select materials that align with values they feel are important to teach students.

Griffin, Hank and Destiney each expressed how they shied away from certain topics and books out of concern for the pushback they would receive, whether it was from administration or the families of students they teach. This in turn impacted their ability to incorporate children's literature that highlights diverse perspectives. Speaking with participants during the interviews, I learned that almost all spoke to the fact that they relied heavily on children's literature as a means to enter discussions on aspects of identity, and ultimately position how they broach different values with their students. What I found to be particularly interesting was that participants spoke to the ways in which they did this, often citing books they used, but in the

cases where they were instructed not to use certain titles or discuss certain topics, none pushed back or addressed how control was being exerted over their professional judgment in the selection of instructional materials. As Denzin (2007) notes, “pedagogical practices are always moral and political” (p. 128), yet Griffin, Destiney and Hank seemed to, at times, accept the censorship steeped in politics and avoid being morally courageous out of fear of professional retaliation.

Although one could argue that teachers’ use of children’s literature to engage in topics they are less comfortable broaching with students is an easy way out, offering them a crutch with which they can fall back on, I see it as the opposite. Teachers face the challenge of teaching in a way that allows students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum but often lack the resources to do so. Participants in this study varied in the expectations they faced in planning as well as instructional materials they were required to use. Some were given scripted programs that did not allow for autonomy as they planned, others were given the freedom to develop units of study based on the North Carolina Standards and select instructional materials to support their lessons.

Skerrett and Smagorinsky (2023) argue that “teachers need to assist students in inquiring into how significant social constructs (e.g., race, gender, class, dis/ability, mental health, national affiliation, and other labels and positions) shape their experiences of the world and self- and other-ascribed identities” (p. 28). Using children’s literature to explore topics such as these helps to develop students’ critical literacy skills, while teaching values, “rejecting the role of students as passive recipients of familiar knowledge and view them instead as producers of knowledge, who not only critically engage diverse ideas but also transform and act on them” (Giroux, 2007, p. 3). Children’s literature then provides the needed springboard for deep discussions about

difference, discussions which are then grounded in further research in text, inviting students to explore text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world relationships. Children's literature is often a treasure trove in any teacher's classroom.

Implications for Future Research

In this study, I describe the values that nine K-5 public school teachers in North Carolina feel are important to teach students, highlighting the source of these values for them and providing insight into how they do this in the context of the learning environment. Historians and researchers have established that teachers bring their personal values into the day-to-day learning environment both explicitly and implicitly. With sincerity, I hope that the information provided in this study provides additional insight as to what values teachers feel are important to teach students and uplifts their individual voices, using their words to describe how they feel they teach these values to students and how they navigate the difference between the values they think students should be taught and that of what is expected. I hope that the information found in this study prompts teachers, schools, districts and those who create laws and policies in the field of education to assess what is in place currently and evaluate the support teachers have to do this work. I want teachers to be able to read this work and see pieces of themselves through the words shared by the participants of this study and use this as a point of reflection for their own teaching practice.

In this section, I present implications for future research and practice. Revisiting and further development of policy, programs, materials, and practice that support teachers is essential to students and, ultimately, societal success. Narratives of the experiences participants shared in this study, reflecting on the values they feel are important for students to learn, provide valuable insight into areas for reevaluation. These narratives revealed that teachers have an expectation to

teach values to students but question the ways in which school districts or building level administrators expect them to do so. Multiple participants spoke to how they are often given arbitrary character traits for focus or asked to emphasize desirable characteristics of *good* students to elicit desired behavior outcomes (PBIS) with little to no guidance on what these look like in action or appropriate guidance on developmentally appropriate ways to teach them. Providing quality professional development that is student-centered will provide a context for teachers to ground their work. The implications for this study are an expressed lack of preparedness or understanding why they are expected to do certain things with regards to values education and how they are limited in other ways by vague censoring policies, impacts their ability to provide relevant and authentic opportunities for learning in their classrooms. This study allowed me to be fully immersed in critically considering how teachers can best be supported while navigating the various reported obstacles they expressed regarding teaching values to students.

Limitations

Although I gained valuable insights from each participant that were outlined in the value portraits and in turn informed the overarching themes that emerged, this study also had limitations. The three primary limitations of this study were as follows: issues surrounding conducting this research study during a pandemic, recruitment diversity, and time constraints involved in qualitative research.

First, designing and conducting this study during the COVID pandemic necessitated the adoption of remote methods, focusing on ensuring the safety of both myself and the participants. At the time I collected data, schools were all at different points of transitioning back to in-person learning. While most had transitioned to some sort of hybrid model, several participants had

remained in remote learning for the 2020-2021 school year. By the time I began collecting data during the summer of 2021, all participants reported they would be transitioning into a full in-person model for the 2021-2022 school year. During this point of transition, schools had strict parameters in place: wearing masks, social distancing within the classroom spaces, increased frequency of cleanings and remaining as socially distanced as possible when masks were off (eating snack or lunch). For some, there was a lot of anxiety around what school would feel like under such strict parameters, how students would navigate the guidelines and expectations as well as how it would impact a sense of community within classrooms, all while still being concerned for the risk of potential exposure. For others, they were glad to get back into a routine for school that felt more like before.

Understanding and taking into account all of these factors forced me to consider a feasible way to conduct this study. Qualitative research "translates life into text. It is not an exact translation, a mirror image, but a product *inspired*- or breathed into- by the lives you observe and by what you, as researchers, bring to the setting and research interactions" (Glesne, 2016, p. iv). I was limited in terms of the setting and level of interactions I could have with participants. Although the world shifted to online platforms during COVID, giving folks time to get more comfortable with interactions on it, it still impacted the overall feel and lacked a certain closeness you would feel interviewing someone in person. Although these were scheduled, oftentimes distractions, either on my end or that of the participant, occurred. Collectively we did what we could to limit those but given that we often completed the interviews from our respective homes, sometimes children, pets or the occasional phone call caused interruption. I would be interested to see how completing these in person and in a space with limited disruption would impact the data I was able to collect from participants. To a degree, I feel as though a

stronger connection could be developed in person, making the interview feel more conversational in nature without the wall, so to speak, of the internet.

Second, I initially set a goal of recruiting participants from the three different geographic regions in North Carolina, an even balance of genders, and representative of a diverse group of teachers with regards to race/ethnicity. I was unable to meet this goal which limited understanding how values were prioritized, taught and navigated across a diverse group of educators. I relied heavily on recruitment from the participant flier being shared on my social media platforms and also a handful of friends who also shared it. Although I reached the number of participants I hoped for, this method also limited how many people I was able to reach and their location. Of the nine participants, most were from the mountain or piedmont region, representing four different school districts and one charter school. I discovered that this impacted the information that participants shared in the work that they do given the policies and mandates at the county level. For the participants who teach in the mountain region of North Carolina, for example, I noticed that responses to questions about the values they felt were important or the source of their values were tied heavily to conservative, Christian ideals, often citing how religious underpinnings present within the schools from the small communities where they are situated.

In terms of ethnicity and racial diversity for this study, three out of nine participants identified as Black, while six out of nine identified as White. Additionally, eight participants identified as female and one identified as male. Originally I had eleven individuals express interest in participating in the study, however two did not respond after the initial communication. Having those individuals would have assisted in providing additional, diverse perspectives. Although I was not able to get a diverse sample using those particular categories, I

did have a more balanced distribution with regards to years of teaching experience. However, I would have liked to ensure a more diverse participant group given how values are tied to a persons lived experiences and influenced, culturally.

Third, conducting qualitative research is time consuming. For this study I conducted 2 interviews (2 hours each plus member check in of 30 minutes each), collected 4 weeks worth of lesson plans and 3-5 photographs from each participant. A great deal of time was spent transcribing and coding interviews, reviewing and coding lesson plans and photographs. The work required of qualitative research was challenging while working a full time teaching position, myself, in another city. In turn, this impacts the sample size because I have to take into consideration what is feasible given my own time constraints.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants in this study provided rich detail about the source of values they shared, often elaborating on how their lived experiences were a factor. In conducting this study, I sought to fill a gap in current research and literature on what values teachers feel are important to teach students in elementary classrooms, by examining their lesson plans and photographs illustrating their classroom design. What makes this research study unique is that I used the data collected to answer the research questions posed, through the voices of teachers, classroom photographs and lesson plans. Doing so in conjunction with the other data sources highlighted important findings as it relates to this research.

While the findings cannot be generalized for all teachers in K-5 classrooms in North Carolina, this study helps to provide a glimpse into the values teachers feel are important to teach students of a small sample of elementary teachers whose values and lived experiences others may relate to. To provide relevant information that could inform and/or influence professional

development, practice, and research in the field of education, I wanted to ensure that voices of those directly working with students were at the forefront of this study. What I discovered through this research is there are different avenues to continue delving into this topic. In this section, I provide recommendations for future research based on three areas that emerged. I feel that fine tuning or exploring these areas further would positively contribute to current discourse and research as it relates to what values teachers feel are important to teach students. These areas are: building on the finding of how teachers use children's literature to discuss *difficult* topics, moving to in-person interviews and conducting observations in participant classrooms, and exploring accountability as an obstacle, a finding I did not anticipate when designing this study.

As a teacher and curriculum facilitator, children's literature was often central to my instructional practice. It plays a crucial part in education as it provides points of entry for discussion while giving students a context for exploring and connecting to the real world. Participants in this study reported that they frequently used children's literature as a way to provide students with a way to observe the lives and experiences of the characters that are portrayed and see how they respond to and navigate the conflicts or obstacles within the larger storyline.

As a teacher in my own classroom, I found myself gravitating towards books that introduced topics that I was most uncomfortable broaching with students. Children's books have a way of presenting concepts or ideas in a way that is child friendly and comes across more subtle rather than a teacher led discussion which feels more like a lecture. This in turn allows students to be able to connect the ideas and do the work of pulling together the meaning, often eliciting the very points the teacher hoped to raise through discussion. As a curriculum facilitator, now, I spend time guiding teachers as they work to find children's books to support

larger units of study in a developmentally appropriate way for their students. An important topic for future research would be investigating how teachers use children's literature to support instruction in the wake of book bans. Using books to discuss values presented throughout is instrumental in addressing obstacles that various groups face, but recent bans on books limits the perspectives teachers are able to present, often excluding the most marginalized and oppressed people. Learning how teachers acknowledge and navigate the implications of book bans on their instructional practice would provide valuable insight into what values teachers teach students and how they do so in their classroom.

Structuring this research as a qualitative study was important to me as I wanted to investigate questions that were not necessarily quantifiable. Designing the study in a way that I was able to capitalize on the different points of data collection (interviews, photo-elicitation and document analysis) was important because i knew it would come together to provide a rich perspective of the values teachers feel are important to teach the students they work with and how they do this in their day-to-day. Something I worked hard to navigate throughout the course of the study was navigating how technology impacted the personal interactions I had with participants. A hallmark of qualitative research is the interaction between researcher and participant. Conducting this study during a time where coming together in-person was not possible, impacted the overall sense of connection I was able to develop or experience with participants. Utilizing in-person interviews would be an important consideration for future research with this topic.

Additionally, conducting this research study and utilizing observation would allow for a deeper understanding as it would provide detailed information with which to better understand and make meaning of the other forms of collected data. As Glesne (2016) points out, "participant

observation grounds you in the context of the ensure under investigation", giving you better insight that helps to support in guiding the questions one may pose and the ability to make note of interactions that occur at a given time (p. 64). Much of this study relied heavily on information shared based on the participant's perspective. Using observation would allow room for interrogating what is shared by participants in interviews against what is occurring in the classroom, providing a systematic and meaningful way to analyze the collected data.

As stated in previous chapters, I was a teacher researcher, and now I am a curriculum facilitator researcher. Wearing several hats throughout this study provided me with the opportunity to experience and explore how teachers design and incorporate lessons on values they feel are important to teach students within their instructional practice, both explicitly and implicitly through different lenses. As a teacher, I saw my instructional practice from a different vantage point. I viewed it as more systematic, designing learning experiences in a way that is logical and sequential, building on previous lessons and guiding us to points of entry for future learning. As a curriculum facilitator, I now support teachers as they do this, often evaluating their practice in order to find ways to help them fine tune instruction, while also considering the bigger picture of ensuring that curriculum implementation is aligned with North Carolina State Standards.

I am drawn to consider my own experiences and realize that accountability looks different depending on the systems you are operating within. With the exception of the last 6 years of my career I have worked at schools that were part of the fourth largest school district in North Carolina under four different principals. Each principal had their own way of navigating the pressures they felt and the level of accountability they experienced from leadership at the district level. Some shielded us as teachers from the daunting pieces, while others used them as a

checklist to evaluate our practice, putting us in a position where we questioned the most minute aspects of our teaching, in fear that it was a misstep.

Moving to a charter school these past 6 years has given me the opportunity to see how important it is for schools to have a clearly defined mission and philosophy. For me, as a teacher this was my guide and how I held myself accountable, so to speak, ensuring that my focus was properly aligned. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently spoke of district level mandates and training, policies, and expectations as well as initiatives. Beyond a couple of participants, rarely did they speak to their individual school's identity.

Working at schools that are part of larger districts, school identity is tied more heavily to performance grades. Schools faced obstacles in terms of accountability when North Carolina passed legislation that required the inclusion of school performance grades as part of school achievement on school report card grades (School Achievement, Growth, Performance Scores, and Grades, 2013). My experience has been that unless employed by a magnet school or early/middle college with a specialized focus or curricula, an acute high stakes atmosphere is ever present and centers accountability measures tied to state tests. The focus becomes teaching to the test to ensure students score high enough, collectively, on the end-of-grade tests to keep them off of the much dreaded "low performing" list. As Westheimer (2015) notes, "*since we can't measure what we care about, we start to care about what we can measure"* (p. 27).

An important prospective research topic would be an in-depth study as to how accountability measures become the identity of the school. In my 18 years of experience as a teacher, with the constant fixation on student performance and rating schools based on student outcomes, teachers have lost sight of the schools identity and there has been a shift in culture of what matters at the school level. Treating students as data points, constantly analyzing how to

“grow” their scores takes precedence and serves to hold teachers accountable for their practice. Understanding how the North Carolina School Report Card Grades influence the identity of the schools and how teachers view or respond to that would provide insight about how teachers design learning experiences for students.

Recommendations for Practice

As a curriculum facilitator working at a mission based school with clearly defined values and a philosophy that serves to guide pedagogical practice, I am drawn to consider the implications this study has on my work with teachers. Based upon the findings of this study, two practical recommendations emerge: delving into the cross-section between the standards teachers incorporate into larger units of study and children’s literature and analysis of the elementary curriculum (standards and units of study) to see how teachers prioritize values at a school where they can be upfront about this.

I am fortunate to be at a school where administration prioritizes Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Hord (2007) describes:

> A PLC is demonstrated by the collective learning that occurs. Professional staff from all departments and grade levels come together to study collegially and work collaboratively. They engage in collegial inquiry that includes reflection and discussion focused on instruction and student learning. (p. 1)

This is a time that my principal and I come together with grade levels, weekly, to discuss topics such as the development of units of study, engage in professional inquiry and review student data. All of this is done through the lens of our mission and philosophy, ensuring that we are moving forward in an intentional and purposeful way.

Incorporating discussions around children's literature and how we are using it in alignment with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study would be increasingly helpful as teachers design units of study that encompass the pedagogical pillars of our school: experiential education, design-based learning and social justice education. It was evident through data analysis that the participants relied on children's literature as a springboard for learning with students, particularly topics that are challenging to broach. Using our PLC time to collaborate in this manner would be beneficial in selecting developmentally appropriate texts, aligning the overall instructional goals and considering ways to support learning through literature. In addition, it would be helpful to use this time together to develop a resource that teachers can reference that has suggested titles by topics or aligned to the social justice anchor standards we teach: identity, diversity, justice and action. Creating a resource that can be used throughout the building would support teachers as they align social justice concepts and standards with the North Carolina Social Studies and Science standards. In turn, completing this resource together would allow us an opportunity to discuss how we are prioritizing values through the units of study we create and the materials we select and utilize with students.

Closing Reflection and Conclusion

You have to go wholeheartedly into anything in order to achieve anything worth having.

– Frank Lloyd Wright

This study grew from my own personal experiences as a teacher working in a larger school district where my colleagues and I grew increasingly frustrated with the implementation of PBIS. We were expected to have students demonstrate "PRIDE": Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Discipline, and Excellence and also model for them, teach them, and guide them on

how to do so. Most days it felt very arbitrary and truthfully, I never truly felt that I could adequately do this within the context or confines of what I was working within.

When I consider how moments in my professional journey contributed to my desire to complete this study, I am in awe of my own professional growth over the years. I have a lot of respect for each of the teachers who participated in this study who shared similar experiences that they faced while teaching, and began to question similar issues. I always felt that teachers who are reflective and continuously evaluate their practice are more apt to see the more problematic things that occur in the day-to-day for what they really are. Being reflective enables teachers to situate their instructional practices within the larger institutional, social, and political context and, in turn, analyze how these factors impact student learning.

I am eternally grateful to the nine teachers who took the time to meet with me and share important aspects of their teaching practice as it relates to this study. Hearing their perspectives and personal experiences is what made this study so impactful. Now, in my role as Curriculum Facilitator, I find myself supporting teachers as they develop curriculum that provides students with rich learning experiences. This change in my professional capacity has given me another lens through which to look.

Looking through this new lens, I am called to view education from an organizational or institutional standpoint. Coming from a school that is mission based, there are already values that are clearly articulated and explicit. Given that we are mission based, instruction is not what individual teachers think is necessary, instead the focus is what's primary to the school's philosophy. I look from both the micro level (supporting individual teachers to develop their instructional practice and curriculum in alignment with our school values) and macro level (ensuring continuity of instruction across grade levels in alignment with our mission and

philosophy while also meeting mandates by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction), giving me an additional vantage point with which to help shape the curriculum that we develop as a school. Through my experiences as a teacher, curriculum facilitator and now, researcher, I see how important understanding the various factors from the micro and macro level of education comes together to shape the overall learning experiences that teachers are able to provide students.

As a final conclusion, I would like to leave you with the following quote from one of my participants, Bell. This quote resonated with me as I completed this work and stood out as I combed through data and sought to accurately highlight the individual participants and truly capture what they shared during data collection. Although simply put, these words are powerful to live by:

> *Well, I think that if we understood or learned about different perspectives and learned about different experiences, we would have a deeper understanding of each other.*"
>
> \- Bell

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT FLIER

Version Date 2/24/21

ARE YOU A K-5 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER IN NC?

Looking For:
Teachers who are currently teaching in grades K-5 in North Carolina public schools.

What to Expect:
1st: *Initial survey to determine eligibility. (5 min.)*
2nd: *If selected you will be invited to participate in an interview. (45 min.)*
3rd: *You will be asked to submit lesson plans and pictures of your current learning space. (10-15 min.)*
4th: *A transcription of your initial interview will be shared with you and you will be asked to participate in a follow up interview. (45 min.)*

Benefits:
Your participation and feedback will contribute to a larger body of knowledge that helps others understand what teachers perceive their role is in shaping the ethical and moral compass of their students.

Compensation:
Participants who complete the requirements of this study will receive a $50 gift card to Amazon for their time and effort.

CONTACT

Please contact Mary Elizabeth Meyer, if you are interested or would like more information.
megray@uncg.edu
(336) 341-9520

APPENDIX B: IRB INFORMATION SHEET TEMPLATE

Project Title: Navigating the Hidden Curriculum: Elementary Teachers' Perspectives of Their Role in Moral and Ethical Development

Principal Investigator: Mary Elizabeth Meyer

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Leila Villaverde

What is this all about?

This study explores how teachers define ethical and moral agency. Subsequently, understanding what teachers view their role to be in shaping the ethical and moral compass of students is of interest. This research project will involve your participation in the following:

1. Initial survey to gather demographic information from participants and better understand how they are currently delivering instruction to students (<5 minutes).
2. Initial Interview (45-60 minutes).
3. Document Collection (10-15 minutes)
4. Follow Up Interview (45-60 minutes)

Neither interview will take place in-person.

How will this negatively affect me?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

What do I get out of this research project?

Your participation in this study will contribute to a larger body of knowledge that informs the field of education. Understanding how you create spaces for students to grow as ethically engaged members of society is especially important considering the current political climate of our nation.

Will I get paid for participating?

All participants will receive a $50 Amazon gift card as compensation for their participation in this research project.

What about my confidentiality?

Throughout the course of this research project your confidentiality will be respected in the following ways:

- At the beginning of the project you will have the opportunity to self-select a pseudonym that will be used on all forms of data collection (interviews and document collection).

- All audio recordings, notes, transcripts and documents will be stored via password protected devices and accounts.
- Only the principal investigator, Mary Elizabeth Meyer, and her advisor will have access to the collected data.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?

As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate, and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the class research activity and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions please contact Mary E. Meyer at megray@uncg.edu or her faculty advisor Dr. Leila Villaverde at levillav@uncg.edu. If you have concerns about how you have been treated in this study call the Office of Research and Integrity Director at 1-855-251-2351.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research process by checking the following statement and providing your signature below. The signatures below indicate an acknowledgement of the terms described above.

______ I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, and agree to be audiotaped and have our video conference sessions recorded.

____ ______________________

(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT) (DATE)

____ ______________________

(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER) (DATE)

APPENDIX C: INITIAL SURVEY FORM

1. Name of Participant
2. What school district or county do you work for?
3. In your own words, how would you describe your race or ethnicity?
4. Which pronouns do you prefer for people to use for you?
5. How many years of teaching experience do you have as you entered the 2020-2021 school year?
6. Explain your current model for instructional delivery (remote learning, hybrid, full-time face-to-face.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
1. What values do elementary public school teachers think they should teach students in a diverse, democratic society, both explicitly and implicitly?	● What values do you think are important to teach students? ● Why do you feel these values are important? ● How do these values service the larger society? ● What do you think is the source of these values for you?
2. How do teacher feel they teach their students these values (explicitly and implicitly) and what power do they have to do so?	● How do you teach values to students? ● How much of what you teach, with regard to values, is done so explicitly? ● How much of what you teach, with regards to values, is done so implicitly? ● To what extent do you have the freedom to design curriculum that aligns with the values you have outlined above? ● To what extent do you have freedom to choose instructional materials you use to support these lessons? ● To what extent do you have the freedom to design your classroom learning space according to these values?
3. How do teachers navigate the differences between the values they think should be taught and what they are expected to teach?	● What values do you think are promoted in the curriculum you are asked to teach? ● What values do you think are promoted in the school norms? ● What values, in your opinion, are promoted in the school? ○ How do these align with or contradict what you teach?