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Diversity in the Classroom:

A Case Study of the Definition, Challenges, and Approaches to Diversity in the Classroom

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## Abstract

### Diversity in the Classroom:

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By Falak Mawani

This research provides insight about the characterization of diversity by four high school teachers. The teachers were asked about their own definitions of diversity in the classroom, the challenges they faced and how they were able to overcome them, and how schools can help them in the future on the issues of diversity. Through the literature review and the interviews with the four teachers, there was a sizable amount of data collected to conclude the importance of this topic for the future of the United States. The findings suggest that the understanding of diversity for a teacher is shaped by his or her personal, educational, and cultural experiences. Furthermore, to address the issues that arise with diversity, schools should start conversing about this topic and incorporate the suggestions made by the teachers.

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## CHAPTER I-INTRODUCTION

### **Research Problem**

As a student from an immigrant family, I have always been interested in the American education system. My family immigrated to the United States in 1999 from Karachi, Pakistan for better opportunities in education. I questioned my parent's decision as I watched them struggle socially and financially in America. In high school, I was selected to be a part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. One of the requirements was to write an extended essay on a topic of my own choosing. I chose to compare the education system of the United States to Finland's, one of the best at the time. As I learned about the two systems, I was able to comprehend that Finland surpassed America in multiple ways. The teachers were respected on a deeper level, the test scores were higher, the schools days were shorter, and the overall school and classroom climate was more conducive to learning. However, America had something that Finland did not have- diversity. In a homogenous population like Finland's, I believe it is easier to address issues such as diversity and the many challenges it brings. Comparatively, in the United States, students and teacher encounter students from a multitude of backgrounds.

As I have learned more about diversity in the United States, I have come to realize that there are no set answers to the questions diversity raises for schooling. For example, what do we mean by diversity in the classroom? Are students talking about diversity in the classroom? Are they able to bring in their identities into the classroom? It also raises questions for the teachers. For instance, how are teachers managing the different types of diversity in the classroom? What role should teacher education play in helping teachers address diversity? How can educators and schools help teachers address diversity in the classroom? While scholars, policymakers, and politicians have weighed in on diversity, we know far less about how teachers understand and address diversity in their classroom. My research endeavors to understand how teachers

understand diversity in their classroom as well as the implications it has on their pedagogy. As an aspiring high school social studies teacher, I want to understand teachers' perspectives on this issue. In this study, I hope to learn:

1. How teachers define diversity
2. How their background and experiences shapes this definition
3. If and how their teacher education programs prepare them to enter diverse classrooms
4. The challenges encountered by the teachers
5. Thoughts on the ways schools can help them overcome these challenges.

From both my experiences as an immigrant student of color who went through the public education system and my time working with teachers both during and after school, I have grown concerned about the challenges to embracing diversity in the classroom. This qualitative study of four Palmer High School teachers seeks to understand their perspectives on the limitations and challenges of the notion of 'diversity in the classroom.'

### **Statement of problem**

The United States of America prides itself on being a melting pot of cultures, a metaphor for the diverse population. As the number of immigrants and refugees continues to grow, the education system is tasked with the challenge of ensuring that no child is left behind. I would like to acknowledge that diversity is not only about immigrants and refugees. Rather diversity is comprised of the background, culture, learning needs, and more individualities of any child. Many teachers face a diverse classroom with students who learn in different ways, come from different backgrounds, speak many languages, and celebrate different traditions. Though there have been changes in the teacher education programs and more resources provided to the teachers, there is no set definition of diversity for the teachers and this may lead to problems in

the classroom. However, teachers have learned to solve in these encounters in their own ways. In order to understand how teachers address diversity, I interviewed teachers to ask about their challenges in the classroom with diversity and how they overcome them.

This study has three overarching themes. First, it aimed to understand what diversity means to four teachers in public high schools in the Southeastern United States. The teachers were asked about how their personal education background, the teacher education program, and their informal education helps them cope with diversity.

Second, the teachers were questioned to elaborate on the challenges they face and how they overcome these. Since teachers come into the school with prior knowledge and experiences that help them manage diverse classrooms, the study strived to understand the strategies these teachers have developed to engage their students.

Third, this study explored the needs of the teachers by asking them how the schools can help them in the future. Teachers explained what types of training and support they would like to better address the diversity in their classrooms. While scholars have addressed diversity for many years, this study summons the teacher's perspectives on this issue. This will help to understand how educators can support the teachers in the future.

### **Background**

In the United States, public school classrooms are becoming diverse with influx of immigrants (Irvine, 2003). As classrooms become more diverse, there is a concern that teachers and schools are not prepared to supervising the needs of all students (Shaw, 1997). The literature gives recommendations to improve the teacher preparation programs to help new teachers meet the learning needs of all students. However, while there is plenty of literature on how teachers should acknowledge diversity, there is limited understanding of how teachers understand and

address the issue in their classrooms (Dilworth, 1992). This study seeks to explore how the teachers in a public high school approach diversity in their classrooms.

Since the creation of the United States, many people have migrated to the country for a better quality of life. The composition of students in the schools has significantly changed in the past few decades. However, in order to better prepare teachers, the teacher education programs have not altered their programs in significant ways to aid teachers in understanding diversity and how to incorporate it successfully into their pedagogical practices. In a study conducted by Hollins and Guzman (2006), the research claims that “Basic changes in teacher education for diversity are necessary, but have not occurred despite 25 years of attention” (p.3). This makes it difficult for teachers to adjust to a presence of a diverse group of students in the classroom. The task facing the teacher educator programs is enormous as it must prepare teacher to teach *all* students.

Historically, diversity in the United States was conceived as a negative aspect of society and the students were taught to assimilate into the American culture (Nelson, 2007). However, with time that has changed. Most of the definitions of diversity include the terms “different racial and ethnic groups, cultures, traditions, and belief systems” (Echols and Stader, 2002). Most research has taken the approach to define diversity by one or two parameters, specifically the cultural and linguistic parameters (Wubbels, 2010). However, I believe we should take a more inclusive approach. Diversity is primarily looked upon as cultural and linguistic. If a teacher has a diverse student population in her classroom, this includes children from not only different cultural backgrounds but also children with a variation of learning needs, races, socioeconomics and more. Therefore, I would like to categorize the definition of diversity with eight dimensions that are defined by Wubbels. These include: social class/socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity

(including refugees, asylum seekers, and travelers), bilingualism, religion, disability, sexuality and sexual orientation, and age (Wubbels, 2010, p.3).

### **Theoretical rationale**

The United States is experiencing demographic changes in the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population (Irvine, 2003). These changes affect the student population in the schools. This diversity then affects the academic achievement level and socioeconomic diversity in the schools (Cochran-Smith, 2013). There are positive and negative aspects of diversity in the classrooms. Diversity could create a positive effect on individual education performances (Dronkers and Van der Velden, 2013). These include high achieving students helping weaker students, weaker students having a chance to encounter challenging curriculum, and the increase in the quality of schools and the social structures (Dronkers and Van der Velden, 2013).

However, there are negative aspects. Teachers are not able to teach to a homogenous population and need more time bridging the ethnic and sociocultural differences between students. Also, teachers must work to create an environment of mutual trust among the students and themselves (Dronkers and Van der Velden, 2013). Though there are positive and negative aspects of diversity, the educational institutions in the United States are faced with the increasing diversity and should be managed well.

The diversity of the population demands a shift in the ways we educate the students. More importantly, the pluralism of the nation's classroom presents a challenge to the preparation of teachers. According to Morey et al. (1997), teacher preparation programs should include multicultural education, student teacher experience in ethnically diverse settings, and knowledge of learning approaches for different groups of students (Morey et al., 1997). The majority of teachers are of a different ethnicity and race than their students; that is, most of the teachers are

white, middle class, females. This leads to a need to learn more about their students, or become culturally proficient. Teaching strategies and teacher attitudes can help to accommodate the needs of the students if the teachers are well prepared to address diversity.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions will guide this study. Four teachers will be asked to share their understanding of diversity in the classroom and their teaching practices. This study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How do the four teachers in this study understand and define ‘diversity’ in their classroom?
2. How do respondents address this diversity in their practices? What are some of the challenges to addressing diversity in their classroom?
3. What do these teachers believe schools can do to help teachers better address diversity in the classroom?

Using a qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 1998), this study will seek to understand the how teachers define diversity in their classroom as the four teachers see it. This case study has three goals: first, to understand what the term diversity in the classroom means to a public high school teacher, second, to apprehend the challenges and benefits of diversity in the classroom for a teacher, and third, to know how schools can help teachers address diversity in the classroom.

### **Educational significance**

From one case study, I will not be able to make generalizations about the term diversity in the classroom for teachers. However, the purpose of my study is to illuminate and comprehend how four teachers understand and manage diversity in their classroom. While there is growing literature on the subject of diversity, this is an important issue that both scholars and the policy makers should understand from a teacher’s perspective. The teacher’s perspective will come from a local level and the suggestions can then be utilized in a certain school setting. This study

will seek to better understand the teacher's perspective and recommend their ideas from the interviews.

## CHAPTER II-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

The United States is known for its diverse population. According to the Census Bureau, by the end of this decade, "students of color will constitute a majority of children under 18" (United, 2012, p.1). Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans are growing dramatically and will soon surpass African Americans (United, 2012). The United States will become a "plurality nation" and there will be no racial group in the majority (United, 2012, p.1). William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution stated, "The diversity of the nation's children is increasing even faster than expected" (Cooper, 2012, p. 1). The Hispanic, African American, and Asian population are all expected to increase to double their current population (Cooper, 2012). In 1972, students of color constituted of 22% of the school population; by 2000, the percentage became 39%; in 2035, students of color are expected to double (United, 2012).

The impact of the immigration is reflected in the schools. The diversity index, or percent of chance that two students selected at random would be members of different ethnic groups, has increased from 52% in 1993 to 61% in 2006 (Cooper, 2012). In the past, there have been major failures to include African Americans, Native Americans, women, immigrants, and those in the lower class into the education system (Nelson, 2007). The increasingly diverse student population can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for the classroom. On the one hand, schools are called on to celebrate the differences in diversity. On the other, they are asked to prepare students for the American way of life and to treat every student the same.

In this literature review, I set the stage by examining the larger demographic trends that cause scholars to be concerned about diversity. I then address the historical approaches to

diversity, as well as how teacher education programs have defined and prepared preservice students. Next, I shift to explore the present literature on teachers' conceptions of diversity in their classrooms. Finally, I examine recent ideas of scholars and various programs that exemplify ways diversity can be resourceful to teachers.

### **The Demographic Imperative**

As the United States continues to grow in its population, James Banks has coined the term of 'demographic imperative' to acknowledge the disparities in the education system (Banks, 2007). Cochran-Smith reflects on this term in her book *Walking the Road* (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The demographic imperative stems from the notion that there is a diverse student population, a homogenous teaching force, and academic disparities in schools (Cochran-Smith, 2007).

First, children of color will constitute the majority of the student population by 2035 and this will continue to rise (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Hodgkinson (2001) points out more changes in the United States population in the future. He argues that though 40% of the school population is racially diverse, this varies from state to state.

In contrast, the teaching force is becoming increasingly White European American (Hodgkinson, 2002). White females account for 86% of the teaching force (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Since the 1960's, African American and other non-white groups have been pursuing the business administration fields and there is a decline in the enrollment of teachers of color (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 5). The current teaching force has different cultural frames of reference from the students they teach (Villegas and Lucas, 2002).

Lastly, there are stark disparities in "educational opportunities, resources, and achievement among students from different racial, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic



contexts” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 4) For example, the achievements of Black and Hispanic students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and reading are consistently lower than white students (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The NAEP provides continued assessments of America’s students in order to provide an idea of the academic progress.

Furthermore, there are disparities in the allocation of resources to schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This demographic imperative makes the topic of diversity ever more essential than before.

### **Diversity Through Time**

Diversity in the American education system has been approached in very different ways throughout history. Before the mid-twentieth century, diversity was often ignored with the expectation that students must assimilate to the majority culture, and their differences simply disappear, if they were to succeed in school (Nelson, 2007). This gave way to the “one size fits all” approach that pervaded education for many years (Cochran-Smith, 2013, p.11). It was in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a new perspective on diversity began to take shape in schools. Schools began to see the value of diversity and made sure to include everyone with varied backgrounds (Stulberg and Weinberg, 2011). The Civil Rights Movement of the time began to force educational institutions to reconsider long-held views of diversity. In 1954, the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* articulated “separate education was identified as a lack of access to experiences that enable individuals to function in the mainstream of society” (Dilworth, 1992). This marked a pivotal change in the education of diverse groups as it integrated the racially and socioeconomically isolated African Americans into the classrooms. Finally, in the 1970’s, the movement towards culturally relevant education began to flourish. Societal changes such as the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Rights Movement, other groups such as gay and lesbian, elderly, and people with disabilities began to push for sociopolitical and human rights (Gorski, 2009). In the education world, there was the emergence of multicultural

education. James Banks (2007) was one of the key scholars and grounded his ideas by educational equality for all. By mid-1980's, multicultural education was developing into a foundational framework and reexamining the marginalized groups.

There are several legislation policies in relation to diversity that are important to examine. The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 is a federal legislation from the time of President Johnson. It gave funds to low-income students. The document, however, did not take a stance on diversity. It remained “remarkably silent about diversity and how to prepare teachers for diversity” (Ball and Tyson, 2011, p.38).

In 1972, Congress passed the Title IV of the Emergency School Aid Act, which provided support for a program of instruction of “all children from all racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, including instruction in the language and cultural heritage of minority groups” (Dilworth, 1992, p.5). Another influential policy of 1972 that changed traditional views of diversity was the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's (AACTE) first Commission on Multicultural Education which argued that diversity is valuable and should be “tolerated” rather than “disregarded” (Cochran-Smith, 2013, p.11). Ten years later, the report of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) brought the need for educational reform to the center of public and political concern. The report validated the importance of equal educational opportunity but ignored the sociopolitical dimensions of diversity (Ball and Tyson, 2011, p. 38). The report blamed the failure of students onto the teachers rather than identifying other dimensions.

Finally, with No Child Left Behind in 2001, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there was yet another pivotal change to how the nation approached diversity in the classroom. It had two key components- student outcomes associated with accountability standards and the closing of the achievement gap between students of

socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, and disabilities (Ball and Tyson, 2011, p. 39). However, there is no feature about multicultural education or culturally competent teachers.

### **Teacher Education Programs**

Teacher preparation programs are perplexing to describe due to the variety of the programs across the United States. Morey provides a general overview of the preservice programs. There are over 1200 institutions of higher education that offer preservice programs in public and private college and universities (Morey et al., 1997). Historically, the diversity of students was seen as a deficit. After the 1970's, the teacher education programs began to regard diversity as a "valuable resource to be preserved and extended" (Baptiste and Baptiste, 1980).

The teacher preparation programs are regarded as "accessible, lacking academic challenge, relatively inexpensive and convenient to academic programs in the major" (Morey et al., 1997, p. 6). The subjects fundamental to academic work come from an interdisciplinary approach to understanding human development. Course work is required in eight areas including linking theory and practice, learning process, classroom management, curriculum development, use of instructional technology, preparation in multicultural education, school law and finance, and methods of teaching various subject areas (Morey et al., 1997). There are a variety of formats that include 4-year programs, 5-year integrated programs, 5<sup>th</sup> year graduate programs, and alternative programs. It is important to understand that teacher education programs vary across the nation. Because of the variation in the teacher education programs, there are a wide range of ways teachers are prepared to teach. This means there is no set course on the issues we currently face such as fully preparing teachers to teacher to the spectrum of students in today's classrooms.

### **Preparing Teachers to Teach in Diverse Classrooms**

Although there is great importance given to teaching a diverse population of students in schools, there is little preparation given to teachers on how to meet the various needs. In the twentieth century, the notion of preparing teachers as knowers and thinkers was rare. Dewey notes, “Teaching was seen as a series of distinct behaviors that could elicit or undermine student achievement” (Dewey, 1929, p.81). This theory of knowledge suggested that teachers could get what they needed to know for the classroom through the manuals and procedures. Although the 2000 Census highlights the United States population becoming diverse, the response of the teacher education programs have been to “add a course or two on multicultural education, bilingual education, or urban education but to leave the rest of the curriculum intact” (Goodwin, 1997, p.3).

There are a few problems within the teacher education programs. Ziechner (1993) found that while most teacher education programs acknowledged the importance of pluralistic education, in practice they represented a far more monoculture approach (Ziechner, 1993, p.4). Part of the issue was that the majority of teachers were white, monolingual, middle class women. Furthermore, many teacher education students of the time came in with the mindset that diversity was a problem rather than a resource, something to be overcome. Furthermore, the scholars lumped the diverse groups of people together. Ziechner states, “The attempt to consolidate diversities [into just a few groups] mistakenly suggests that all diversities are the same and thus have the same needs” (Ziechner, 1993, p.7). For example, many times teacher preparation only teaches about English as a Second Language or Latinos rather than cultures in general. Likewise, Ladson-Billings (1999) comments on the poor curriculum of the teacher education programs for diverse classrooms. Ladson-Billings states, “...multicultural teacher education continues to suffer from a thin, poorly developed, fragmented literature that provides an inaccurate picture of

the kind of preparation teachers receive to teach in culturally diverse classrooms” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.114). This disjointed and repetitious knowledge base will not help teachers in the classroom.

Sleeter (2001) contends that multicultural education for teachers can prepare them to teach in diverse classrooms. Unfortunately, most teachers are not able to implement it in their classrooms. Sleeter writes:

“By the time they student taught, the preservice students were concerned mainly about surviving in the classroom. Those in primarily White schools had subordinated any interest in multicultural education to demands of their cooperating teachers. Those in urban schools were completely unprepared for the students and the setting and had great difficulty” (p.95).

It is important to understand the failure of implementing a multicultural education in the classroom. Haberman (1991) supports this position. He argues that most teacher education students are not capable of dealing with complexities associated with the successful teaching of diverse pupils (Haberman, 1991). Clarke and Drudgy (2006) claim that many student teachers enter the program with a thin knowledge base relative to their own.

There have been recent changes in the teacher education programs which are important to understand. During the 1980’s, there was a shift in teacher education from training by the books towards teacher thinking, knowledge, and learning. The programs were built with regards to the social contexts. For example, teachers were taught to adjust the curriculum and instruction for local contexts (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Shortly after, in 1990’s, there was yet another push towards aligning teachers with performance-based accountability (Cochran Smith, 2004). This approach continues to grow today as policies are concerned with standardized test accountability.

### **Teacher's Perspectives on Diversity in the Classroom**

Fehr and Agnello (2012) administered a survey to 400 preservice teachers about culturally responsive teaching and the impact of their teacher education programs. Most respondents defined culturally responsive teaching as “teaching respect and tolerance” (Fehr and Agnello, 2012, p.37). When asked about multicultural education, they had a superficial definition of the term, reflecting little or no knowledge of how to integrate multiculturalism into the curriculum. The authors discussed the challenge of the teacher preparation courses to document the effectiveness of their multicultural education classes. Also, it was a requirement to take diversity courses for all and it was hard to keep all the classes consistent. Faculty members avoid these courses because of the controversial topics that often arise in the classes (Fehr and Agnello, 2012).

In a case study, Angus and De Oliviera (2012) observed two secondary teachers in order to understand instructional strategies these teachers used to teach a diverse classroom. Scott and Helen, the two teachers, conceived of diversity in different ways according to their contextual knowledge of their local school and community. While Scott focused on the diversity of socio-economic status, Helen placed emphasis on the academic ability of students. Scott used his role as a teacher to become friendlier with the students while Helen differentiated her curriculum towards the students. One of the key recommendations of the study was the need to ask more teachers of their own understanding of diversity. The authors recommended that preservice teaching programs recognize diversity in its many forms rather than teaching only about linguistic and culturally diverse populations (Angus and De Oliviera, 2012, p.15).

Mary Louise Gomez is a teacher educator who prepares prospective teachers to work effectively with all children (Gomez, 1993). In her work, she observed that prospective teachers

often turn to their “experiences from their pasts for clues on how to interpret and respond to the contemporary behaviors of the children when they teach” (Gomez, 1993, p. 459). In her work, Gomez found that the reform of the teacher education program must be in partnership with the communities the students come from. Gomez believes there are four factors compulsory to teach diverse populations. These are: the predictions of demographer regarding the characteristics of the upcoming population, the pressure to professionalize teaching, the discontinuation of the higher status position outside of teaching for people of color, and the pervasive racism and homophobia in the United States (Gomez, 1993).

### **Diversity in Teacher Education in the Future**

In recent years, there have been several schools, colleges, and departments of education that have framed revisions in order to prepare teachers for diverse classrooms. There are several recommendations for revising the structure and curriculum of preservice teacher education programs. The suggestions are based on factors such as racial and cultural backgrounds, ability and motivational levels of students, setting of the school, adequacy of instructional resources, class size, and more (Dilworth, 1992).

Cummins (1986) argues for the reciprocal interaction model. This is associated with the “empowerment of minority students and their academic success; there is a genuine dialogue between the teacher and students and guidance and facilitation, rather than control of student learning by the teacher” (Cummins, 1986). Teachers need to have a wide variety of teaching strategies and practices to be able to respond to the varied needs (Cummins, 1986).

According to Dilworth (1992), there are several key aspects of teacher education programs’ curriculum and experiences that need to be altered. First, teachers need more exposure to cultural differences that “exist between and among students” (Dilworth, 1992, p.25). Teachers

should also be trained to accommodate the various learning styles of students from different racial and cultural group. Dilworth stresses that in addition to preservice education, the best ways for teachers to learn is through the real situations (Dilworth, 1992). Thus, education students should be exposed to a variety of students and schools as early as possible. Dilworth adds that preservice teachers should know how to communicate better and more closely with parents of the students. Lastly, all teachers must believe that all children can succeed regardless of race, social class, or culture (Dilworth, 1992).

Similarly, Cochran-Smith (2004) has studied seven distinctive teacher educator programs to find common features that prepare powerful teachers. The features include clear vision of good teaching, well defined standards for practice and performance, curriculum grounded in the knowledge of the child's development social context, strategies that help students confront their own deep beliefs and assumptions and learning about experiences of people different from them, and strong relationships among the faculty and school (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Banks (2007) also provides a list of assets teachers should have to address the diversity in the classroom. These should include skills such as leading discussions, managing groups, solid knowledge of the subject matter, and knowledge of how to teach essentials (Banks, 2007, p.243). Banks develops the metaphor of a teacher as a "cultural broker" which means one who "thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional process" (Banks, 2007, p.243). Research by prominent scholars have summarized effective teachers as those who link classroom content to students experiences and focus on the whole child (Banks, 2007, p.245).



### **Recent work**

In recent years, there have been several changes in different states that help address diversity in the classroom. With the growing population of English learners, Illinois has started to address the needs of the population by integrating content related to cultural and linguistic diversity into the program (Heineke and Lees, 2013). With the research, the scholars have recognized the impact teacher preparation has had on teachers. Loyola University implemented the Teaching, Learning, and Leading with Schools and Communities as a four-year model to prepare teachers (Heineke and Lees, 2013). In the program, teachers serve as co-teachers to implement the curriculum in collaboration with the faculty. The program has embedded teachers with the situation of the classroom they will face and allowed for the teachers to build confidence, knowledge, and skills to be effective with the diverse group of students.

A second example of the recent work with diversity is the professional development seminar CULTURES (Center for Urban Learning/Teaching and urban Research in Education and Schools) that took place at Emory University (McAllister and Irvine, 2002). In this seminar, teachers were to undergo a 40-hour program during which they were taught application of skills in the classroom, contextualization of the theory, and promotion of teacher reflection and dialogue to teach culturally diverse students. Teachers noted the importance of empathy as an embedded part of their teaching practices. Moreover, they found new experiences in the cross-cultural interaction and a support group in challenging situations from the other teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers are facing, and will continue to face, classrooms with more diversity than ever before, especially in the linguistic and cultural areas. However, it is important to note that diversity is more than the cultural and linguistic aspects; I believe it is made up of eight dimensions as noted by Wubbels: social class/socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity (including

refugees, asylum seekers, and travelers), bilingualism, religion, disability, sexuality and sexual orientation, and age. Currently, teachers are left to develop their own definitions of diversity in their classrooms. Furthermore, little is known about how the strategies that teachers have developed address this growing diversity. We are on the brink of a new era of diversity—one in which students will be far more different from each other than they are like. We must understand how the teachers of today are defining and approaching diversity in the classroom in order to prepare the educators of tomorrow for this new generation of diverse students.

### CHAPTER III-METHODOLOGY

#### **Restatement of Purpose**

This qualitative case study involved interviewing four teachers from a diverse urban public high to learn how they define and address diversity in the classroom. Also, this study aimed to understand how the teacher's education training prepared them to teach in diverse classrooms. The study analyzed how the teacher is able to address diversity in his or her own way. Lastly, the study explored teacher's ideas about how schools can help them better prepare for the diversity in the classroom at a local level.

#### **Research Design**

This research used a qualitative interviewing method. As pointed out by Merriam (1998), case study research "is focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied and offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p.3). It is a truncated case study because of the time constraints of finding teachers to interview at the same school. There are certain limitations of the case study that include the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator and the issues of reliability and generalizability (Merriam, 1998, p.34). However, with the combination of

description and interpretation, this case study gathers data and in order to analyze the stories told by the public high school teachers.

This case study used an interview process with semi-structured questions that are devised to understand each teacher's background. As Merriam notes, "interviewing is more open-ended and less structured because individuals define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 1998, p.73). The strategy behind this case study relied on the conversation between the teachers and myself. The semi-structured questions followed a logical path to understand the teacher's personal history before understanding them as a teacher. The format of the questions was as follows: my introduction, the teacher's educational experience of high school, college, and teaching certification, the path to teaching, the teacher education program, the personal definition of diversity, ways to address diversity, and the approach to diversity in the future to help teachers. Before this interview, I had prior knowledge about how scholars in education defined diversity in the classroom. However, I inquired how these teachers defined diversity and then followed up by listing the multi-tiered definition of Wubbels (2010) that I felt was the best one.

Case study research is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. As stated by Rowley (2002), "typically, it uses multiple data sources including two or more of: direct detailed observations, interviews, and documents" (Rowley, 2002, p. 18). This ensures there is construct validity, as there are multiple sources of evidence and helps to create the evidentiary warrant for identified trends and patterns. Specifically, I wanted to triangulate the data (Merriam, 1998). The three components to triangulate the data were the teacher's perspective from the interview, the school setting, and the evidence from the writing samples. For my case study, I asked teachers to bring their teaching philosophy, lesson plans, or other written work to the interview. This would have provided more data for the analysis so as to ensure validity in the research. However, only

one teacher emailed me a few pieces of her writing for a contest. Therefore, I was not able to meet the quantitative aspect of the case study research.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In this research, I spoke with teachers of a local public high school who had been teaching for at least five years. Five years is enough time to create one's opinions and thoughts. I asked students I knew who had attended Palmer High School to help make the initial connection to the teachers. This made it easier for me to gain access to the teacher to ask for permission to meet outside the school setting. After emailing ten teachers, I received a response from two. At the end of each interview, I made sure to ask the interviewees for additional teachers in the school I could interview. This method is known as snowball sampling, asking the individuals part of the study to locate other useful participants (Merriam, 1998). I was then able to add two more participants for the thesis. Initially, I wanted to interview six teachers. However, after emailing the teachers my peers knew and the ones recommended by the teachers, I only received responses from four teachers.

I met each participant at a location and time convenient for him or her. Before the interview, each teacher signed an informed consent form (Appendix B) that we went over together. Each teacher gave consent to be interviewed and understood the process of the interview. The condition presented to them was that their names and any places, events, and people stated would remain anonymous. I started each interview by introducing myself to the teacher and stating the purpose of my study. I used the semi-structured interview sample questions to guide the dialogue (Appendix D). When there was a point made during the interview that I was interested in, I would follow up with more questions.

I recorded all the conversations on my laptop and transcribed them after the interview. After the transcriptions were completed, I shared the document with the teacher to receive

feedback on the script. I then analyzed the transcripts to look for themes and patterns among the teacher's perspectives. The codes I used were: personal background, teacher education experience, definition of diversity, challenges and ways to address diversity, and ways to help teachers in the future.

After the interview, I realized that none of the teachers brought any written documents. I emailed all of them again to inquire about lesson plans, teaching philosophies, or other writing to help triangulate the data. However, I only received samples from one teacher. I decided to alter my approach to a narrative case study in order to understand the views of diversity of the teachers. A narrative case study is focused on close readings of stories told by participants in order to understand human experiences or social phenomena through the form of stories (Fitz, 2008).

#### Initial Questions to Guide the Dialogue

1. What is your school background and what information have you learned from the teacher educators program to address diversity?
2. How do you define diversity in the classroom and how is this addressed in your classroom?
3. What are some of the challenges you face when addressing diversity in the classroom?  
Are you able to address diversity in the classroom?

#### **Research Setting**

Palmer High School is a Non-Title I urban, public school system located in the Southeastern United States. In 2004-2005, the school became an International Baccalaureate school. It also provides students the chance to take Advanced Placement classes. Since then, it has received many honors such as the 2006 Governor's Cup for the best SAT score improvement in the state, the 2008 High Schools That Work Gold Achievement Award, 2008 School of

Excellence in Student Achievement, and listings in Newsweek's 1300 Top U.S. High Schools for four consecutive years.

Out of the 1446 students enrolled in the 2010-2011 school year, 48% are black, 14% Asian, 11% Hispanic, 23% white, and 3% other. There are 52% who are eligible for free/reduced lunch in the school. The gifted program enrolls 7.5% of the students and 10.6% are in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Language) programs. The school hosts many clubs and organizations on campus such as drama, debate, Future Business Leaders of America, Gay Straight Alliance, Model UN, Spanish National Honor Society, and Writers Club. There are other programs for gifted students to attend such as the Impact Program, with an enriched curriculum for the freshmen. Though the interviews did not take place at the school, the teachers will have a strong connection to the school and its programs that are offered. Thus the setting of the school is deliberated in the analysis of the teacher's outlooks.

### **Profile of the Researcher**

My family migrated to the United States in 1999 from Karachi, Pakistan. Coming to the United States, I saw the many struggles my family faced and continues to face financially and socially. I always questioned my father about why we decided to come to this country. His answer to me always dealt with education and how many opportunities I had in America. I would not have had these, especially as a woman, in Pakistan. I always agreed. However, my sister and I have had different educational pathways in school. She was in the lower track and I was in the higher track. We learned different material and it was frustrating that she was not knowledgeable about many significant things after graduating from high school. During my last few years in high school, I wrote an extended essay comparing the education system of Finland to America. I

learned that while America was not the highest in test scores, it had the most diverse population. This is something I take pride in as I feel it essential to live in a global world.

As I began to brainstorm ideas for my thesis, the first that came to mind was the education system in America. I wanted to delve further into the diversity in America. I knew why we were such a diverse country as I had learned about it in history. However, I wanted to learn what impact the diversity had on the teachers in the classrooms. Furthermore, I was curious about how scholars address diversity and how their theories are implemented into the classroom. From my initial research, I saw that many scholars had multiple theories that speak to diversity, but what was missing was the teacher's perspective on this issue. As I myself am pursuing secondary education, I sought to explore the meaning of diversity to high school teachers and the ways they address it.

I would like to make it clear that I was interviewing people with whom I had never met before. I made sure to follow the semi-structured interview questions in order to ensure each participant received the same format for the interview. However, it was not easy to remain objective during this process. I anticipated teachers would address diversity in the classroom. I also expected the teachers to not relate to the education from the teacher education programs to their everyday classrooms because of the literature. In their definition, I predicted the teachers to only name the cultural and linguistic aspects.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This research followed the guidelines and procedures set forth by Emory University's Institutional Review Board and was classified as "Exempt" from IRB approval as the research will not contribute to generalizable knowledge (Appendix A). This study also poses no greater than minimal risk to participants. To protect anonymity, the personal investigator (PI) asked questions of each participant concerning their background and personal experiences and

implored the participants to speak liberally about the topics. The PI knows the names and affiliations of the participants and this information is secured on a single document, protected by a password, on a password-protected computer. In all assessments and analyses, the participants are referred to using a pre-determined code name. Only the PI will have access to the document linking the identification code name to the participant. All writing and data—digital voice files, transcriptions, and notes—will be identified using only the predetermined identification code name. The places, events, and schools the participants discussed are given pseudonyms in the final report.

## CHAPTER IV-FINDINGS

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I created a profile of the four teachers I interviewed. The profiles comprise of the teacher's background, educational experiences, teacher education program, challenges they face, and how schools can help them in the future. I used these profiles to explore their conceptions of, and teaching approaches for, diversity. Also, I provide my own analysis of the teachers in order to find common themes among them.

### **Teacher Profiles**

#### **John**

John, a math teacher at Palmer High School, has been teaching for seventeen years. John is a white, middle-aged man in his 40's. He attended a large state university where he majored in mechanical engineering. After working in the computer industry for a few years, he went back to school for his masters in teaching and certification as a high school teacher. Currently, John teaches AP calculus and standard math classes.

When I asked John about his teacher education program, he mentioned that he did not get teacher training and educational philosophy as you would in undergraduate program, which he was very thankful for. He believes, "You learn to teach by teaching and it's really important to



have support when you are starting out because lots of things go wrong. The practical experience of being in the classroom is where you learn to teach” (John, 2015). The masters program was useful because it helped him understand the content and learn how to teach math. He goes on to say that he is opposed to the behaviorist approach which is based on the principle of stimulus response that includes only observable behavior rather than internal thinking and emotions. He would like to see his students become thinkers. However, though the behaviorist approach is passive, he believes that there are times when you need patterns, structure, and form in the classroom as a teacher to make sure students learn. Furthermore, he took five math classes to learn how to teach the subject in his teacher education program. He claimed that understanding the content is the most important aspect of the teacher education program.

John decided to become a teacher because he thinks learning is really exciting and very rewarding. He is eager to facilitate the process of learning. He mentioned, “I literally do believe that my students are going to change the world. The fact is that my current students they are going to create a new society from today and I want to guide them to be thoughtful, creative, and problem solvers” (John, 2015).

When I asked John about diversity in the classroom, he stated that there are four things that come to mind. The most obvious element of diversity to John is race or ethnicity as the school has many refugees and immigrants who are racial minorities in the U.S. John also thinks of economics, meaning the resources students have outside of school, when he considers diversity in the classroom. He expresses, “What resources students have outside of the school and that makes a difference. Generally students that come from a family with larger economic means typically have more educational opportunities, more pervasive educational activities outside their schools and in school. All the education you get happens in school is lower

economic means” (John, 2015). John believes that economics makes a huge difference for students. Third, John considers diversity in terms of academic skills, which means assessing the prior knowledge of students. Tied into other factors, motivation plays a role in a diverse classroom and is another element of diversity that John mentioned during his interview. Finally, John adds that he also thinks of religion and politics when describing important aspects of diversity.

John manages diversity, as he understands it to be, by encouraging and facilitating diverse students learn from each other. He mentions that it is a challenge when you have a mixture of academic skills. John says, “When you have students from different academic skills and you are trying to run class that for the most part is working as a group. It’s not really practical” (John, 2015). To manage, he encourages differentiated instruction. This means students learn in a variety of methods such as electronic means and video tutorials. Other times, pairing students works well. Another method is to give different assignments to higher-level students and working basic problems for the lower level students.

John mentioned several impediments along the way as he addresses diversity. He states that close-mindedness in students can be a problem. He says, “When they (students) think their upbringing and culture is the only one that matters. But this is minimal and in most cases students are willing to listen to each other” (John, 2015). It can be hard for different people in different places but he makes sure people are respecting each other. Also, he brings up the history of math to help make lessons more contextualized.

In terms of the future of diversity in schools, John stresses that we need “to think about it in all the different ways” (John, 2015). He wants the education system to be able to address all

the different diversities in the classroom. Also, he states that schools should allow for diversity of age. He suggests, “Why do we try to stay homogenous about age? What if you have shown uncanny ability in studying literature? Why can’t you have twelve years olds study the same stuff as sixteen year olds” (John, 2015)? As a human, John believes we love to learn but because of regimentation, the lack of free time, and assessments, there is a lack of love of learning. Schools are shifting as younger teachers come into this job. John believes the best way to help teachers with diversity is by having conversations with his colleagues. He would like to hear from teachers because they have been in the classroom.

### **Analysis of John**

From John’s perspective, there are four aspects of diversity in the classroom. These are race, socioeconomics, academic skills, and motivation. All these factors are linked to each other. Because of the various races, there is also variety in the socioeconomic status of the students and the access to educational opportunities. This leads to the third factor, that of diversity in academic skills. Students who do not have access to educational opportunities arrive in the classroom with academic skills ranging from fifth grade to college level. This connects to the last factor, which is motivation in the classroom, and varies from student to student.

In the interview, John mentions that academic skills and motivation are the biggest factors, which he oscillates between when it comes to diversity. He says, “It’s easier to teach if the academics skills are less diverse and students make more progress. At the same time, if you can manage different students with different skill levels. If you can pair students, it’s helpful” (John, 2015). As an AP calculus teacher, John would like to ensure the students are motivated and interested. He says, “I tend to do better if the students are motivated and interested. I currently teach AP calculus and it’s not required for students. If a student is enrolled in the class, generally, they are pretty motivated” (John, 2015). John is excited to teach students who are

motivated to learn because as a teacher he is excited to teach them. For John, teaching is ensuring the students are learning content from him. He said, “I think that learning is really exciting and very rewarding and it’s fun to be part of it in anyway. It’s exciting to be facilitating and seeing students learn something they didn’t know before” (John, 2015). Thus, in his teacher education program, John wanted to receive as much content as possible. He commented, “Studying mathematics was way more important for me for becoming a good math teacher than studying psychology and behaviorism. This continues to be true today. When I’m studying math, that is always making me a better teacher” (John, 2015).

John stated an important point about diversity in the classroom. He said, “Most of this diversity issues are separated out. Think about it, in an AP calculus class, in general the motivation is fairly high. So it’s not uniformed by any means. The range there is not enormous” (John, 2015). This refers to the system of tracking in schools where most students are divided into regular, honors, AP, IB and more. However, even within the honors or AP classes, John finds diversity of students academic ability and more.

John manages the diversity in the classroom with differentiated instruction. When there is a range of academic skills, John facilitates the differentiated instruction by pairing students. The students are pretty enthusiastic about it and it works well. Another way is to give different assignments to students. Furthermore, he discusses the use of electronic means such as “textbooks publishers and their video tutorials, nonprofits like khan academy, and many more where students can work on their own pace” (John, 2015).

Other impediments to diversity include the close-mindedness of students coming from various racial backgrounds. To address this, John said he contextualizes the subject of math. He said, “I try to bring up history of math. Most things in math evolved in a logical way. I try to put

in the context and chronology. Not everything in math is done by Europeans. The students love to get away from the formulas and I think learning should be contextualized” (John, 2015). For John, addressing diversity starts by addressing the academic diversity in the classroom. He manages to speak to the racial diversity problems but this is to a minimum.

John gave his own insight about how public schools should address diversity. He stated, “I think it’s important to think about it in all the different ways. We probably need to do it a lot more. Why not have more diversity of age? Why do we try to stay homogenous about age? What if you have shown uncanny ability in studying literature? Why can’t you have twelve years olds study the same stuff as sixteen year olds” (John, 2015)? In John’s philosophy, learning is the most crucial factor for a student. Therefore, schools should encourage and facilitate this so there is more diversity and opportunity for the students. John comments on the future of public schools by mentioning the shift in schools that he has seen over time. John offers, “I think schools are shifting to address diversity. I’m not doing a great job of this and younger teachers are doing better. I think it’s inevitable for the better but it’s a painstaking slow process” (John, 2015).

The country is evolving and with that the policies are as well. According to John, the best way for teachers to learn to address diversity is by “having conversations with colleagues” (John, 2015). Schools administration should acknowledge this and support the teachers to network with one another. As John mentions, “We make so much progress by hanging out and talking with each other. I learn from my colleagues a lot and it’s the little things” (John, 2015). The administration should also understand that formal presentations are fine but they must be high quality and presented by a teacher who has been in the classroom. John restates the notion of learning from fellow teachers and finds it imperative to bring in this discussion continually

during the year as the country continues to grow and classrooms transform to more academic diversity.

### **Allison**

Allison, a British literature teacher at Palmer High School, has been teaching for more than thirteen years. She is a white, mid 30's woman from a biracial background. Originally from Virginia, Allison stated that she went to "one of the most diverse public schools in the country" (Allison, 2015). She mentioned how her high school has the highest minority students of which most went to AP classes. Because she was used to this as a student, Allison had an easy time as a teacher as she tried to bring different skill sets into the classroom.

Allison wanted to be a high school teacher since high school because of the quality of her teachers. Her teachers kept her on track and she thought to do this for her students through the power of language. For her students, she wants them to "think for themselves, write for themselves, and be scared to not feel ignorant and be able to go into job interviews and to feel proud of the way they could use words" (Allison, 2015). She went to a state school for her undergraduate degree because of the teacher education program. The program was structured so that within the first year, first-year student teachers would teach students in classrooms. The coursework was also related to the classroom. Each student was assigned a master teacher who would come and observe the first year teacher. The commentary would help give feedback from another teacher. The program also offered to send students to the study abroad programs or exchange programs. In terms of diversity, Allison says the program helped her talk about diversity in the class and how to reach different students. However, her personal understanding of diversity comes more from her day-to-day experiences.

For Allison, diversity in the classroom is first and foremost about student strengths and how, as a teacher, one can connect what each child brings into the classroom to the material that

is covered. Later, Allison goes on to mention that diversity is also about learning styles and socioeconomic factors. Allison says, “I think of diverse learning styles, I think of my students who might be hungry, who may be ADD or have dyslexia, who learn visually or are auditory” (Allison, 2015). Diversity is being able to get to know the students personally and making a personal connection. Teachers should see the students as more than just English students; rather, there should be a personal connection between the teacher and the student.

In terms of addressing diversity, Allison has different ways she approaches topics. If there is a major project, she makes sure to give choice to the students on what they want to do. There are problems that she encounters with the different cultural backgrounds the children in her class come from. There are certain students who are unsure about vocally expressing themselves in class. She states, “Students that are not American born are unsure about to vocally expressing themselves in class. Certain kids come from a culture where you are supposed to sit down and shut up” (Allison, 2015). There are other times when students are made fun of because of the accents they have. These include immigrants but also Americans with southern accents and dialects. She overcomes these challenges by taking the role of the teacher and pointing out the good things in the students and by addressing teasing and bullying.

When asked about how schools should help teachers address diversity, Allison mentioned that she would want a successful teacher to come teach mini lessons that demonstrate how teachers can address diversity in their classrooms. She believes, “We need examples because as teacher we get too much theory. Good teachers want to watch other teachers and that’s the best way to learn. I want to be a fly on the wall and learn” (Allison, 2015). According to Allison’s education philosophy, the best way to learn for a teacher is to observe other teachers who are creating positive comfortable environments in their classrooms. She says, “You’re not a teacher

until you teach” (Allison, 2015). Furthermore, Allison believes that diversity is not the only issue that teachers face in the classroom. Teachers with smaller class sizes can assign richer work. Also, Allison believes that education should be appreciated in the culture we live in because it’s not just the teacher’s but also the parent’s role in educating the child.

### **Analysis of Allison**

According to Allison, she grew up in one of the most diverse public schools in the country. She grew up knowing she wanted to be a high school teacher, specifically teaching languages. Allison mentioned several times the power of languages. As a teacher, she wants for her students to “to think for themselves, write for themselves, and be scared to not feel ignorant and be able to go into job interviews and to feel proud of the way they could use words. To me, it’s absolutely a power or a superpower” (Allison, 2015). This term superpower helps to describe what diversity means to her. Superpowers give one abilities and special powers. This is something that Allison believes each child should have. Thus, Allison believes diversity is “about strengths so I try to think about what does this kid bring and how can I connect it to something we are going to study” (Allison, 2015). In this original definition, Allison sees diversity through one’s cultural background. She goes on to mention that diversity is not just about cultural backgrounds. She states, “Diversity happens through cultural but also learning styles and socioeconomic factors. So it’s about what you are good at. I think of diverse learning styles, I think of my students who might be hungry, who may be ADD or have dyslexia, who learn visually or are auditory” (Allison, 2015). For Allison, she has seen the diversity of many immigrants growing up and as a teacher. She understands it as bringing out the best in each child.

Addressing diversity for Allison came from her viewpoint that language is a powerful tool. In her teacher education program, Allison felt that she was exposed to diversity as a teacher



from the very beginning. In the program, the student teachers talked about diversity issues and how to reach each student. Her method for addressing diversity in her classroom comes from her personal background but also her teacher education program. She says, “So you try to have something in there for every kid to hang on to. These things can overlap and coexist too. You have to think about this carefully” (Allison, 2015). An example of Allison’s way to address diversity is her day-to-day teaching style. She explains, “When we are breaking out words, I’ll say this word comes from Spanish and say hey where my Spanish speakers. Then I ask them what this root looks like and constantly try to spread the web out and draw everybody in based on their experience” (Allison, 2015). Allison refers to other challenges that come from her student’s cultural background. There are two specific challenges Allison notes. First, in certain cultures students are not allowed to speak to a teacher or vocally express their thoughts. Second, there are students whose accents are made fun of. Some of these students have southern accents and dialects. The way Allison address this is to immediately shut down the students who are making fun of the accent. Also, she points to the great things a student brings to the class by bragging about them publically.

Allison believes that schools should address diversity as the nation continues to grow. She states, “The best things you can do is ask teacher who is successful at managing diversity to present a little mini lesson. We need examples because as teacher’s we get too much theory” (Allison, 2015). Allison wants to learn from her peers who create a comfortable positive environment in the classroom for the students. She wants for the diversity to thrive in the classroom. For her, letting people be different is where diversity comes together.

### **Becca**

Becca, an IB science teacher at Palmer High school, has been a teacher for more than twenty years. She is a white, mid 50's woman who grew up in South Georgia in a large family. Becca grew up in a time before integration. Around 6<sup>th</sup> grade, schools became integrated. At that point, schools became more culturally and racially diverse. She was glad to have received such a culturally diverse education in the public education system. Becca stated that an important part of her education was her informal education through her parents who would invite college students to come stay with them and learned a lot about different cultures and foods in this way. She says, "I think what it comes down to is what prejudice is and it is fear of the unknown. I think if people get to know others and find the commonality, we will not see many problems" (Becca, 2015).

Becca went to Massachusetts for her undergraduate degree in biology. She became a teacher after having several jobs on the side such as driving a van, a school bus, working in a food co-op, cleaning houses, and waitressing. She always had a desire to teach since middle school. Teaching helps give her a chance to keep her interest alive in the sciences. After taking a break for several years, she pursued her masters focusing on multicultural education in sciences for her thesis. In her master's program, she extended her program to get certified in teaching. These programs prepared her for the classroom very well in terms of diversity. Becca mentioned that one of the classes looked into her own upbringing, culture, and the diversity in her life. There were classes offered in anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, homophobias and much more. The programs also offered equity training on how to handle situations of the "isms" (Becca, 2015).

When it comes to diversity, there are many factors that Becca uses to define diversity in her classroom. First, Becca defines diversity in terms of socioeconomic diversity. Her examples of socioeconomic diversity were of people living in homeless shelters, people living in single-

family homes, and people living in the country club. Second, she thinks of ethnic and racial diversity with student from over forty countries in the school. She also thinks about the way people learn. There is diversity in people's ability. Then there are the physical disabilities. So diversity is multi-tiered and one should be cognizant of this issue. Becca feels that she addresses diversity well in her class and as much as she can.

There are challenges that Becca faces as a teacher when addressing diversity. Most of the challenges are with the diversity of ability. Even within accelerated classes, there is a wide range of diversity. Some students are at 100% academic ability versus others who are at 10% academic ability, according to Becca. Becca describes the challenge of getting thirty-four kids through a curriculum by herself. She overcomes this impediment by addressing different learning styles. She explains, "You know, we act out molecules, we draw, and we do three dimensional stuff. There is a diversity in people's ability" (Becca, 2015). Also, she groups students with similar abilities so that they can build confidence.

In order to assist teachers with diversity issues in the classroom, Becca thinks three important points must be addressed. First, according to Becca, it's important to clarify what aspect of diversity is being addressed whether racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, ability. Becca believes that teachers may need "sensitivity training" (Becca, 2015). Becca explains, "We need to be sensitive to people who are different. We need to celebrate people who are different and those differences. I think we have to have resources because everyone does not have the same education program. I don't think a college system can give all the answers either. So I think it needs to be an ongoing system but definitely resources" (Becca, 2015). Becca emphasizes the impediments of living in a democratic country but a republican state where there might not be money to spend on sensitivity training. She asserts, "We live in a democratic county but a

republican state and we don't want to spend money on diversity training or sensitivity training. How do you address that? And how do you get funding for that? So I think funding is a big thing" (Becca, 2015). Becca believes that priority is not given to sensitivity training programs in southern states.

### **Analysis of Becca**

Becca is an IB science teacher who grew up in South Georgia at the time of desegregation. As a student, she was able to see schools become more culturally and racially diverse. She mentioned that many students went to a private school once the desegregation movement came about. Feeling the discrimination, Becca said, "I couldn't wait to get out of there" (Becca, 2015). I believe this implies she wanted to leave South Georgia because of the culture of prejudice she saw. She then attended college in Massachusetts. This was a striking contrast of cultures from the south for her. It is important to add the importance of her own childhood with her family. She revealed, "... I had parents who brought the world to us. We had an international style Christmas every year" (Becca, 2015). Her parents would bring college students home during Christmas and they would celebrate the different cultures and food. This is where her philosophy of celebrating the differences started. It would have influenced her decision to obtain her masters in multicultural science education. In this program, the course focused on her personal upbringing and culture. Furthermore, she took classes on different diversity issues such as racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and more.

Diversity to Becca means multiple ideas intertwined together. There are socioeconomic, ethnic and racial, learning styles, student's ability and physical disability diversity in her classroom. For Becca, the central diversity she focuses on is the diversity in ability and learning styles. This is influenced by the cultural differences she has observed over her time as teacher

and as a student. For her, it is important to acknowledge the person and their individual differences.

As a teacher, Becca faces challenges of academic ability in the classroom when addressing diversity. She stated, “The challenges are mostly in the diversity of ability. There used to be some tracking but even within accelerated classes there is a wide range of diversity. Some students are at 100% versus somebody who is at 10%” (Becca, 2015). The way she addresses this issue is by focusing on different learning styles in the classroom. She might have students act out molecules or draw them out. She challenges the idea of grouping students and pairing a higher ability student with a lower ability student because it’s hard for students to teach the peers about the content. Her end goal is to build the confidence of the students and help them become self-reliant.

Becca brings up the issue that diversity is a big wide topic and one must clarify which element of diversity is being discussed. She claims, “Diversity is a broad topic but it must absolutely be addressed” (Becca, 2015). For the issue of how schools can help teachers, Becca refers to her personal teacher education where she took part in sensitivity training. She says, “We need to be sensitive to people who are different. We need to celebrate people who are different and those differences. I think we have to have for this resources because everyone does not have the same education program” (Becca, 2015). According to her, all teachers need to take classes with the “different isms” (Becca, 2015). Likewise, she brought up a concern that relates back to her childhood background. According to Becca, living in a democratic county but republican state, there will not be much funding offered for things such as sensitivity training. She iterated, “So I think funding is a big thing. In Massachusetts, we were doing equity training and would do it for business, schools, and other organizations. Here, there is an assumption that we are beyond

that and we don't need it" (Becca, 2015). For her personal classroom, she attempts to get to know her students and their cultures. She wants to overcome the fear of the unknown so that she can address diversity.

### **Nicole**

Nicole is an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Language) teacher at Palmer High School who teaches ESOL and American Literature. She is a white woman in her late 50's and has been teaching for thirteen years. Nicole grew up in a large family. She attended a public school that was college preparatory. She attended a private university and majored in music. After working in retail, the navy, and a few other places, Nicole went back to a state school to complete her masters in ESOL, applied linguistics and teaching English as a second language. She worked with adults after receiving her masters but after the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident, the number of people in the program dwindled down. Nicole went to another state school to get her certification for teaching high school. She enjoys high schoolers because they understand her sarcastic sense of humor.

Nicole is a teacher because she enjoys sharing knowledge with others. Her interest in languages began as a child. She grew up in Pennsylvania. On her street, there was a Mennonite, Indian, Italian, and German family. She laughed and said, "We would all play games and translate for each other. So when I looked for my masters, I wanted to teach my languages to others and learn about their culture" (Nicole, 2015).

Nicole had two different experiences in her teacher education programs. At the first state school she attended, she was taught to teach adults academic English. The curriculum was based on grammar, reading, and writing. She said, "After being a teacher since 2001, I fall back on the stuff from the program. In this program, they taught you what you can expect from French speakers and Spanish speakers and more. These are the problems you will encounter and how to

help them do it our way” (Nicole, 2015). At the second program, she took a class on exceptional children that taught her about learning differences geared towards kids with lower learning challenges. The program was half education classes and half English classes. She learned how to teach about certain books. She commented, “The education classes weren’t as useful to me. The education programs were like here’s how to make a bulletin board. They kind of leave the high school teachers to fend for themselves. To defend that, there aren’t as many high schools as there are middle and elementary schools” (Nicole, 2015).

For Nicole, diversity in the classroom means her normal day because she teaches ESOL. She said, “I have kids from Nepal, Burma, and I’ve learned all sorts of things. For me the diversity is seeing the world differently through their eyes” (Nicole, 2015). In her class, she makes sure to do activities from their culture and celebrate students’ differences. However, most of the time is focused on teaching students to be social in English. She later mentions that there are other forms of diversity but that’s not who she deals with daily. She says, “So in my American class, you’ve got diversity of male, female, African American, Hispanic background. These are kids who grew up in America but are still diverse. These are first generation Americans kids that grow up in immigrant homes but live in America” (Nicole, 2015).

During the interview, we talked about the assimilation of cultures into the American society. Nicole stated, “I think it’s a shame to lose their culture. By the third generation, the kids are American and their parent’s culture is foreign to them. I think it’s a shame when kids say they don’t speak a language anymore and it’s because their friends don’t. Their friends are more important than their parents, which is a shame. I tell my kids to use their language as much as they can but just not in my classroom” (Nicole, 2015). Nicole mentions the irony in the situation and says she sees why she has to teach them to assimilate into the American lifestyle. She wants

her students to feel part of the American culture and fit in with the rest of the students. For this reason, Nicole is always giving advice to teachers in other classrooms asking them to recognize the diversity. She tells them to learn about the backgrounds, play games with a personal touch, and do things differently. During her time in the classroom, she has seen that teachers and students can be close-minded to learning about different cultures. She states, “There are lots of teachers who don’t even know names of the students. I asked a kid once why is your name Susan. And she said if I don’t have an American name, I wouldn’t get called on in class. I said that’s sad and interesting at the same time. So I go out of my way to make sure I know their names” (Nicole, 2015). According to Nicole, for close-mindedness to change, there needs to be a societal change.

There are challenges that Nicole encounters when she is working with her students and addressing diversity. There are many times she has to go back to the basics because the students do not have the foundational basis. Her goal as a teacher is to ensure the students are succeeding in their regular classes. Nicole believes her challenges are different from the rest of the schoolteachers. She has to deal with political prejudices, students facing racial discrimination, and assimilating the students into the American culture. Also, planning the lessons for the students can be a challenge. She makes sure to plan for the middle and adjust for the higher and lower end. Also, she is constantly assessing them. As far as standardized tests, she comments, “It’s hard to teach to the test. There's no real way to hit all that. If they are reading and writing constantly, I think that’s good” (Nicole, 2015).

She fondly remembers her time at her first master’s program in ESOL because it prepared her well. The program taught a lot about language and how people acquire languages. The program also described the norms and values of various cultures. She believes that all teachers



should take a class on cultural awareness. Nicole also believes that teacher should research on their own about the types of students they have in the classroom. Schools could provide more research sources for teachers. One particular thing Nicole mentioned was not to ask the students about the culture directly if the teacher has not studied the culture. She said, “We can’t ask them (students) because they don’t understand why you are asking. They don’t understand how to fit that in with American way” (Nicole, 2015). She goes on to say that public schools are data driven and will not be investing in diversity issues to a large degree in the next few decades.

### **Analysis of Nicole**

For Nicole, diversity in the classroom is her everyday interactions with her students. She states, “Diversity is seeing the world differently through their eyes” (Nicole, 2015). Even when she talked about other types of diverse Americans, she considers them as “first generation Americans kids that grow up in immigrant home but live in America” (Nicole, 2015). In her classroom, there is a contrast between her beliefs of learning about different cultures and her assimilation of the students into the American culture. For her, it’s a shame to see the loss of cultures overtime.

Her interest in languages sparked from her neighborhood where she grew up. She said, “The street that I grew up there was Mennonite family, Indian, Italian, there was a German family. We would all play games and translate for each other. So when I looked for my masters, I wanted to teach my language to others and learn about their culture” (Nicole, 2015). She uses the diversity in her classroom to focus on asking the students to use their language and keep it as long as they can. The students easily lose their home languages as they find friends to speak to in English. To Nicole, diversity in the classroom is finding the balance to use their native language as much as they can, just not in her classroom.

Nicole believes she faces very different challenges than teachers in other subjects because her curriculum deals specifically with social issues such as racial prejudice, political differences, and ensuring the students don't lose their culture entirely. Her way to address the issues is to ask her students to talk to her about certain matters political prejudice and learning words in their language. Another aspect that Nicole feels is imperative is learning to say her students' names the correct way. In one of her anecdotes, Nicole reveals, "I asked a kid once why is your name Susan. And she said if I don't have an American name, I wouldn't get called on in class. I said that's sad and interesting at the same time. So I got out of my way to make sure I know their names" (Nicole, 2015). Also, she plays games to learn who the students are as people. She plays the game of two truths and a lie in which a student writes down two truths and one lie about themselves. After they present it to the class, the classmates guess which of the three statements a lie was. With the game of two truths and a lie, she has a chance to see who they want to be through the lies.

As an ESOL teacher, Nicole has several pieces of advice to other teachers and the school. She says teachers need to do research on their own about the different cultures they encounter in class. Schools can help provide that research to the teachers so they have access to multiple resources. Also, she asks teachers to recognize the diversity in their classrooms. She says, "It's a good thing to have in the classroom. There are lots of teachers who don't even know names of the students. Then the students stop caring. You should learn their background" (Nicole, 2015). If the teachers made sure to learn about the cultures in the classroom, the students would not feel the need to completely assimilate into the American culture. While it is crucial for schools to address diversity, Nicole immediately answered that schools will not address diversity. Public schools are data driven and only invest in a large number of the population according to her.

Worried she says, “For ESOL, if it’s not large enough to look at, it’s not even a recorded score. For the school it would be, but not the district” (Nicole, 2015). This needs to change immediately so that the districts can help teachers address diversity by allocating more resources.

**Research Question 1:**

*How do four teachers understand and define ‘diversity’ in their classroom?*

The definition of diversity in the education world varies across educators. Thus, the variance was also common amongst the teachers. Each of the four teachers interviewed gave a different definition.

First, teacher’s family values and location of their neighborhood colored the way they understood diversity. Allison grew up in a diverse public high school and appreciated the early exposure to racial/ethnic diversity. She had the advantage of understanding the need to weave in different skills sets and strengths into the classroom. Similarly, Becca hated the discrimination she saw in her schools at the time of desegregation and, as a result, decided to obtain a master’s degree in multicultural education. The teachers showed an appreciation of cultures because of the informal education they received from their families outside of the classroom. This was specifically noted with Becca and her family’s celebration of Christmas every year. Her personal upbringing, or informal education, influenced her to appreciate culture outside of the classroom.

Next, the impact of the teachers’ school and teachers’ education program left the imprint of the need for diversity in the classroom. Allison grew up in a diverse high school and had the advantage of understanding how to weave in different skills sets of immigrant children. She also specifically mentioned the “fantastic program” because “you got your feet wet early” (Allison, 2015). The program helped her connect the coursework from the class to the classroom. In her multicultural master program, Becca learned to handle the different isms such as racism, sexism,

and more diversities. Nicole also stressed the importance of the teacher education program helping her expect the problems she would face and learning ways to manage well.

Third, the subject that teachers taught in school impacted their definition of diversity and led to a dominant focus of diversity the teacher fixated on in the classroom. John understood student motivation as a critical part of diversity because he wanted students to be motivated to learn math. Allison understood diversity as bringing out the particular strengths of students through language. She wanted them to feel as though they have a superpower. As a science teacher who studied multicultural education, Becca focused on different learning styles. Nicole fixated on language acquisition in her definition and ways to see the world through her student's eyes as an ESOL teacher. As these examples show, each teacher brought about different ideas of diversity from their personal perspective and experiences. I recognize that diversity is a large and wide field in education that is yet to be defined. Therefore, as I saw teachers picking up a certain aspect of diversity, it seemed an appropriate way to tackle the class.

**Research Question 2:**

*How do respondents address this diversity in their practices? What are some of the challenges to addressing diversity in their classroom?*

The four teachers had a range of ways to address diversity in the classroom. First, it is important to note the various methods came from their teaching philosophy, as derived from the interviews, and were learned over a short period of time. Because the teachers engage with students on a regular basis, they learned to comprehend diversity quickly and thus strategized on ways to help the students. John facilitated differentiated instruction in the classroom because to him learning was the most important part of education. It didn't matter who it came from or how it came. He was open to using technology and methods to teach the students. Allison wanted to relate the content back to each child's culture and looked to break apart words for the students.

For Nicole, it was important to address the various learning styles and she made sure to appeal to all students to help them understand science.

Second, most teachers felt challenged by the close-mindedness of others- this could be the teacher or students. John also referred to the children thinking “their culture is the only one that mattered” (John, 2015). Nicole acknowledged that she witnessed teachers that did not take the time to learn student’s names. Allison commented on the students making fun of the accents of their peers. John took the chance to contextualize the subject while Allison bragged about students to others in the classroom to make them feel welcome. Nicole emphasized the need for teachers to recognize diversity and learn the names of their students.

Third, there was the notion that tracking would lead to the separation of the diversity issues; however, there was still diversity present in the attempt of the homogenous classroom. As students are tracked into higher or lower levels, they become more homogenous as a group which should mean there is less diversity. Even with students in IB or AP classes, there was a wide range of academic ability. While John preferred having students teach one another, Becca found that to be a problem because students were not able to clearly explain ideas to others.

To overcome the challenges, the teachers discussed their teacher education programs. Allison appreciated her teacher education program because it “got her feet wet early” and “talked about diversity and how to reach all students” (Allison, 2015). With Becca, the sensitivity trainings helped her to address the challenges diversity presented by recognizing the many isms in classrooms. The programs helped to shape the teachers preparation for the classroom population and they continue to refer to the programs till today.

**Research Question 3:**

*What do these teachers believe schools can do to help teachers better address diversity in the classroom?*

To begin with, according to all the teachers, diversity is broad topic that must be confronted. All teacher were again in consensus that this is an important topic to discuss as the population becomes diverse. However, diversity should be clarified in the education world. As Becca stated, “diversity is a wide big open topic and you have to clarify what you are talking about” (Becca, 2015). Nicole added that public schools are data driven; she wants the school to invest in the issues of diversity but does not see this happening in the near future.

Second, there was consensus among the teachers interviewed that they would like to hear from other teachers who have succeeded in any way to address diversity. One important resource the teachers requested was the opportunity to have more demonstration lessons from model teachers who can help them learn how to better implement activities, discussions, or ideas into the classroom. John hopes that the administration will allow for more time for teachers to have professional conversations about challenges in the classroom. Allison, who wants teachers to give mini-lessons about their ways to manage diversity, echoes this thought. Nicole also conveyed the importance of learning from other teachers; in her case, she was able to explain cultures to teachers in her school because of the knowledge she already had.

Third, the teachers referred to specific classes from their teacher education programs that they feel should be used for professional development of all teachers. Becca referred to sensitivity training from her teacher education program. Nicole discussed the classes she had on language acquisition that helped her familiarize herself with various cultures.

Lastly, a few teachers brought up the political governance in the south. Becca was concerned that there would be no funding for diversity training in a republican state. John also claimed that “it’s inevitable for the better but it’s a painstaking slow process in the south” (John,

2015). All these concerns are ones that should be noted by the school and become prominent issues discussed by the administration.

## CHAPTER V-DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION

### **Discussion**

#### *How do four teachers understand and define 'diversity' in their classroom?*

As explained in Chapter IV, there were several ideas that impact the teacher's definition of diversity in the classrooms. These are the personal upbringing of the teacher, the impact of the schooling from teachers' elementary schools to their teacher education programs, and the subject the teacher taught.

It is significant to discuss the impact of the family and the school life on the teachers as they were growing up. As a student, one spends a large portion of one's week at school. The rest of the time is with family where a familial culture is created. Thus, the two have a noteworthy influence on the life of any person. We see this phenomenon play out in the interviewees' lives. Moreover, this indicates the necessity for more classes to help teachers understand other cultures and value systems. While talking to the teachers, many discussed how the teacher education program was more theory than they would have liked. In order to address diversity, the teachers wanted more of a foundational basis especially on other cultures. I believe this significant change must occur as a first step.

In terms of the future, I believe that students should be exposed to more cultural diversity, especially in schools. As educators, we have no control over the culture created by one's family. However, exposing students to diversity leads to a diverse range of perspectives that one is exposed to from an early age. The United States is becoming more diverse. To prepare the students for what is to come, we must uncover each culture and relate the importance of diversity for the student's personal lives so that it allows for them to bring in their identities

into the classroom. Teachers that use the curriculum to relate to the student's lives ensure continued interest from the students.

From the literature, I found that the response of the teacher education programs have been to “add a course or two on multicultural education, bilingual education, or urban education but to leave the rest of the curriculum intact” (Goodwin, 1997). However, the teacher education programs played an important role in the teacher's lives. The programs helped to prepare them for the classrooms they would encounter. I was particularly surprised at this notion. A key point here is that classrooms are growing culturally and linguistically diverse. But, there are other diversities that the teacher education programs should discuss with the teachers. These include the gender roles, learning abilities, socioeconomic status, disability, and more. These should also be incorporated into the ‘diversity’ classes at the teacher education programs.

A crucial finding that I believe is imperative to understand the definition of diversity according to a teacher is the idea that because diversity is a large and wide concept, teachers have started focusing on one aspect of this multi-tiered word. All teachers recognized that diversity is composed of multiple things including race, socioeconomics, languages, cultures, academic ability, learning styles, and more. Their definitions went on to focus on one of the components of diversity. This focus related to the subject they teach, the personal philosophy, and the teacher's personal background and experiences. This was also verified by the research Gomez conducted. She found the teachers used “experiences from their pasts for clues on how to interpret and respond to the contemporary behaviors of the children when they teach” (Gomez, 1993, p. 459).

Lastly, when asked how they defined diversity in the classroom, there was no coherent answer given by the teachers. Each had their own ideas. Thus, it seems understandable that



diversity is subjective to each. Is there a coherent definition of diversity we can use for the purpose of education? It would behoove educators, scholars, and policy makers to have one but understandable when we say there is no right answer. Until there is a clear definition that is conveyed in all the teacher education programs, this notion of diversity in the classroom will continue to be incomplete.

*How do the teachers in this study address this diversity in their practices? What are some of the challenges to addressing diversity in their classrooms?*

The first theme that emerged was that the teaching philosophy, which was not stated but derived from the interview, was prominent in addressing the diversity. The teacher's teaching philosophy shaped the way the teachers managed the diversity in their class. Though no teacher said diversity was a negative aspect of their classroom, there were challenges they faced. While John preferred to address diversity by using new technology for differentiated instruction in order to ensure learning was happening, Allison was constantly ensuring she brought out the students strengths so they felt a part of the classroom.

One challenge faced by multiple teachers was the short sightedness by the students and teachers in the schools. By short sightedness, I refer to the disregard for the diversity and assumptions of inferior cultures. When there is a diverse group of people as seen in Palmer High School, this is bound to happen. This is especially likely if the students are not exposed to this outside the school. In education, we should shape the teacher education programs so that they encounter this diversity in the classroom from the very beginning. Dilworth supports this notion as he says, teachers need "more exposure to cultural differences that exist between and among students" during the teacher education program (Dilworth, 1992, p. 25). This will help them to converse with other teachers while they are in the teacher educator program on ways to overcome the challenges.

In addition, a diversity of people brings a diversity of ideas and perspectives into the classroom. If students have not encountered this outside of the school, this leads to trepidation or even short-sightedness which teachers must then deal with. This is a vital issue because this affects all students- ones who are from another culture and ones who do not know how to converse with those of a different culture. Cultural diversity is a big part of diversity faced by the teachers. Teachers have found ways to play certain games, use different learning styles, and converse with students to manage this cultural diversity. However, there should be a course or two about cultural diversity for teachers that they can use in specific classes. By this, I mean there should be a cultural diversity course of math, English, sciences, history, music, arts, and more to contextualize the situation for the students and the teacher.

I was fascinated by the similarity amongst the teachers of their approval of the teacher educator programs. Allison was excited about her program because she was immediately put into a classroom where she taught. Her education classes were also focused on that aspect. Becca claimed that the program prepared her well for diversity as it focused on multicultural education in the sciences. They also trained her for the different isms. Nicole also specified that she draws on the resources from her master's program that taught teaching academic English to adults. However, Nicole did mention that her second master's program was not very useful because it was not geared towards high school teachers. I believe we should continue to structure teacher education programs to place more of an emphasis on the teaching and implementing strategies into the classroom. Banks developed the term "cultural broker" to describe the role of the teacher which means one who "thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional

process” (Banks, 2007, p.243). I believe teacher education programs should restructure their classes to enhance this skill in teachers. Two teachers I interviewed fit the standard of the common teacher-white, middle class, female. Only one was biracial. As the population becomes culturally diverse, there will be a need to maintain strong relationships with the students even though the teachers may have different cultural frames of reference from the students they teach (Villegas and Lucas, 2002).

*What do these teacher believe schools can do to help teacher’s better address diversity in the classroom?*

The one idea all teachers mentioned was that they would like to learn from other teachers who were deemed successful in addressing issues of diversity. Though this may seem obvious, the teachers all agreed that diversity is an issue that is affecting their classrooms and will continue to do so in the future. A few teachers recommended a course they had taken in their own teacher education program and thought it would be good for other teachers to take. Nicole recommended the class on exceptional children, Becca the sensitivity training, and Allison the overall program at her teacher education school. These were courses that had left an impact on the teachers so that they were better able to accommodate to the diversity in their class.

One way to learn is by observing the people around you who are succeeding in their perspective field. The best way to understand a teacher is to actually become a teacher. Therefore, the teacher’s perspective of learning from high quality teachers is the most logical answer as to how schools can help them. If the teacher one observes is lacking in skill, there is not much to gain. However, teacher education programs should take time to make sure teachers are cognizant of their weaknesses. Simultaneously, teachers themselves are learners. They learn from their students, from their peers, from the ongoing discoveries in education. Teachers should be encouraged to learn from one another. From the interviews, I discovered that not much time is

given to teachers to socialize with other faculty in school. Reflection is a key part of teaching and the more time we can give teachers to understand the various practices, the more learning can take place at an educator's level. The opinions of the teachers matter and if they can help other teachers, these should be looked into. It is important to note that all schools now have Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that are weekly or biweekly meetings to learn from one another. Interestingly, none of the teachers referred to this in the interview.

From these interviews and research, there is consensus amongst everyone that diversity is a key issue, especially in the education field. While each person has his or her own version of the way to handle diversity, every person feels that diversity is a work in progress. It is a wide range and should be more clarified for teachers and teacher educators. I argue that there should be more resources for teachers on diversity that is broader than a focus on only the cultural and linguistic aspect. Diversity is more than a cultural and language difference. This was made clear during the interviews and should be taken into consideration when preparing the teachers in the teacher education programs.

### **Recommendations**

These findings cannot be necessarily generalized because of the small number of participants in the study. However, the findings are imperative to understand and relate back to the education scholars, teachers, and policy makers in the United States. All the teachers gave insights on how their schools can help them on this fundamental aspect of education.

I would recommend for the school districts to start having open conversations with teachers on a regular basis on what their needs are and how they can be addressed. Specifically, in terms of diversity, many teachers have found ways to address the diversity they see within their classes and should share these at the school-wide level. The sharing of ideas should start at

the school level as the teachers encounter similar cultures, socioeconomics, and races. The discussion should continue to grow outside the schools to the districts and county levels.

By interviewing four teachers, I contextualized the various challenges that many teachers face on a daily basis. Though this is a small number, there are multiple factors that should be looked into by the schools and taken into consideration as they plan for professional development.

### **Conclusion**

This research provides insight on the foundational idea of diversity in the classroom and the personal perspective a teacher brings into the classroom with him or her. The topic of diversity is one that has played a role since the creation of the United States and becomes ever more prevalent as the nation continues to grow. Though it is a challenge for the education world, this challenge brings an appreciation of the world and helps to contextualize the need for educating everyone, whatever diversity they may bring with them. In the future, the study may offer considerations to scholars to engage in a dialogue with teachers in specific school settings to understand the challenges they may face, specifically in urban settings, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of diversity in the classroom. Furthermore, I hope teacher educator programs will consider the topic of diversity as a central focus in their programs and help provide resources to teachers. As one of the most diverse nations in the world, education is a critical issue that we should be thinking about as we progress and move forward in society.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION



Institutional Review Board

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Date: January 12, 2015

Falak Mawani  
Principal Investigator  
Financial Aid - Cdc

RE: **Exemption of Human Subjects Research**  
IRB00077967  
Diversity: What it Means to Teachers and How They Address It

Dear Principal Investigator:

Thank you for submitting an application to the Emory IRB for the above-referenced project. Based on the information you have provided, we have determined on **01/12/2015** that although it is human subjects research, it is exempt from further IRB review and approval.

This determination is good indefinitely unless substantive revisions to the study design (e.g., population or type of data to be obtained) occur which alter our analysis. Please consult the Emory IRB for clarification in case of such a change. Exempt projects do not require continuing renewal applications.

This project meets the criteria for exemption under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Specifically, you will interview six public school teachers and address diversity in their classrooms..

- IRBproposal 10.3.docx dated 10/23/2014
- Questions.doc dated 01/12/2015
- Informed consent.docx dated 01/12/2015

Please note that the Belmont Report principles apply to this research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. You should use the informed consent materials reviewed by the IRB unless a waiver of consent was granted. Similarly, if HIPAA applies to this project, you should use the HIPAA patient authorization and revocation materials reviewed by the IRB unless a waiver was granted. CITI certification is required of all personnel conducting this research.

Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others or violations of the HIPAA Privacy Rule must be reported promptly to the Emory IRB and the sponsoring agency (if any).

In future correspondence about this matter, please refer to the study ID shown above. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Will Smith, BA  
Research Protocol Analyst

*This letter has been digitally signed*

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study No.: IRB00077967

Emory University IRB  
IRB use only

Document Approved On: 1/12/2015

**Emory University**  
Consent to be a Research Subject**Title: Diversity: What it Means to Teachers and How They Address It****Principal Investigator:** Falak Mawani**Introduction**

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. **It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.**

Before making your decision:

- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
- Please ask questions about anything that is not clear

You can take a copy of this consent form, to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights.

**Study Overview**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers define diversity in the classroom and the teaching methods they have developed overtime to address the issues of diversity in the classroom.

**Procedures**

A researcher will interview you outside of the school setting to better understand the idea of diversity in the classroom and your teaching strategies. The interview should take only about 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Interviews will be recorded with the respondents' permission.

**Risks and Discomforts**

This study is unlikely to pose any risk to you. You may, however, feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. One risk is that of a breach of confidentiality. Again, you reserve the right to decline answering questions that you do not wish you answer.

**Benefits**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly; however, the information gathered during this study could be of benefit to educators throughout the nation. The study results may be used to help others in the future.

**Compensation**

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

**Confidentiality**

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. The PI will know the names and positions of the participants and this information will be kept on a single document, protected by a password, on a password-protected computer. In all assessments and analyses the participants will be referred to using a pre-determined code. Only the PI will have access to the document linking the identification code to the participant. All writing and data—digital voice files, transcriptions, and notes—will be identified using only the predetermined identification code. Audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study**

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to do any procedures you do not feel comfortable with, or answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if:

- They believe it is in your best interest;
- You were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan;
- or for any other reason.

**Contact Information**

Falak Mawani [fmawani@emory.edu](mailto:fmawani@emory.edu) *Principal Investigator*

901-438-0558

Dr. Aiden Downey [cadowne@emory.edu](mailto:cadowne@emory.edu) *Thesis Advisor*

404-729-5878

If you have any questions about this study or your part in it,

- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or

[irb@emory.edu](mailto:irb@emory.edu):

- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

Study No.: IRB00077967

Emory University IRB  
IRB use only

Document Approved On: 1/12/2015

**Consent**

Please, print your name and sign below if you agree to be in this study. By signing this consent form, you will not give up any of your legal rights. We will give you a copy of the signed consent, to keep.

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Name of Subject

---

Signature of Subject

---

Date      Time

---

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

---

Date      Time

## APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT

Falak Mawani  
Emory University Division of Educational Studies  
[fmawani@emory.edu](mailto:fmawani@emory.edu)

**Letter of Initial Contact**

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Falak Mawani and I am student at Emory University. I am studying political science and education studies. I am writing an honors thesis and am interested in diversity in the classroom in education. In high school, I wrote an extended essay comparing the United States education system to Finland's. While Finland ranks much higher and has much we can learn from, the United States has something Finland does not: diversity. After learning about that, I now want to take this term diversity and explore it further. Teachers face different situations each day according to the students in class. In fact, each year they face a variety of cultures, learners, ages, religions, and more. I hope to answer several questions with this study. These include

1. How do four teachers understand and define 'diversity' in their classroom?
2. How do they address this diversity in their practices? What are some of the challenges to addressing diversity in their classroom?
3. What can schools do to help teachers address diversity in the classroom?

**Benefits for the future**

The subjects will be able to contribute to an understanding of how teachers are resources themselves to understanding the diverse populations at school. The strategies can be compiled and presented back to the teachers.

My research request and methods have been reviewed for their adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Emory University's Institutional Review Board and Division of Educational Studies.

Please contact me by email at [fmawani@emory.edu](mailto:fmawani@emory.edu) to request additional information and/or to arrange to participate in the research. Your time and interest in this study are much appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Falak Mawani

## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE QUESTION GUIDE

- I. Introduction
  - a. My name is Falak Mawani. I want to teach secondary education in the future. I have been in many classrooms through my service over the years. I am fascinated by the idea in how teachers who have so much to manage face diversity. I know teachers have different ways to address diversity. I don't know how I will be able to address it in my classroom but I want to know your perspective.
- II. Opening
  - a. What is your name and where are you from?
  - b. What was your educational experience?
    - i. Traditional high school
    - ii. College
    - iii. Teaching certification
- III. Path to teaching
  - a. How did you decide to become a teacher?
  - b. When did you consider being a teacher?
  - c. Why do you teach?
- IV. Teacher education
  - a. Describe your teacher education experience
  - b. What do you believe are the most important aspects of your teacher education program?
- V. Diversity in the classroom
  - a. When you think of your current classroom, what comes to mind in terms of diversity?
  - b. How have you tried to address diversity?
  - c. Are there impediments you encounter when addressing diversity?
  - d. Does diversity in the class affect your lesson plan?
  - e. Do you have any stories of students/classes when you think of diversity?
  - f. Do you think your teacher educator program prepared you for the diversity in the classroom?
  - g. Should public schools address diversity and if so, how?
- VI. Change with time
  - a. How has your approach with diversity changed with time over the years in terms of pedagogy?
  - b. Do you think schools will shift to address this issue?
  - c. How should we teach teachers to address diversity in their classrooms?
  - d. What would help and prevent schools to address diversity?



## APPENDIX E: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION

Q: When you think of diversity, what comes to mind?

A: There's essentially four things. First and obvious one is race. We have refugees and immigrants in this school. I think schools this is the ideal situation because learning from your peers is rich kind of education. Second, it's the economics. What resources do students have outside of the school and that makes a difference? Generally students that come from a family with larger economic means typically have more educational opportunities, more pervasive educational activities outside their schools and in school. All the education you get happens in school is lower economic means. That's a significant issue. There is a diversity of academic skills as far as what they have studied prior to getting here. We have some student who are doing academic work in a third to fifth grade level. There are ones who are doing college level work. Tied into other factors, there is a wide range of motivated students are. Some are really enthused about school or certain subjects and other are really over it. Or you can get into things like religion and politics. Think of someone who comes from liberal kind of family versus conservative family.

Q: How do you manage this diversity in classroom?

A: Well most of this diverse issues are separated out. Think about it, in an AP calculus class, in general the motivation is fairly high. So it's not uniformed by any means. The range there is not enormous. Race and economics I think are a great opportunity to learn. As much as we can, I think we should encourage and facilitate in having diverse student whether it's their race, economics, religion or more. Because then there is great opportunity to learn from each other. I think this school does that to a significant degree. The economic diversity within any one classroom is not as great it could be. But then against that's because of that skill level. It's really a challenge when you've got a mixture of academic skills. When you have students from

