CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research Design**

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to explore how mothers of African American children perceive culturally relevant teaching (CRT). The study allows the researcher to assess questions such as: What do mothers believe are CRT practices and how effective these practices are in advancing their child’s academic performance? Results from this study will also allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of how mothers are involved in the educational experiences of their child since CRT practices emphasize the importance of embedding a child’s home life, interests, and real-world experiences into the classroom (Milner, 2013). This study is focused on mothers’ perspectives on teaching and learning. Grant and Ray (2016) explain the importance for schools to develop partnerships with their students’ homes to observe an increase in students’ grades. Moreover, researchers consistently emphasize the importance of bringing student culture into the classroom because a large component of a student’s culture is the lived and learned experiences encountered at home; hence, a mother’s insight into curriculum and teaching practices is critical (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017).

Statistics show that since 2012, single mothers make up 83% of single-parent households (Grant & Ray, 2016). According to researchers, 75% of African American and Latino families living in poverty are more likely to have single mothers raising school age children (Grant & Ray, 2016). Therefore, this research study will focus on mothers since they make up the larger population of parents of aged children. This study will be qualitative and will employ a phenomenological design, defined as an approach in which all participants have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenon in this study is that all participants are mothers with a child or children attending a middle or high school in Boston, Massachusetts.

To ensure that this phenomenological study is both consistent and transparent, the researcher’s experiences pertaining to CRT will be documented at the beginning of the study. By recording the researcher’s beliefs and feelings regarding the phenomenon understudy, the researcher will attempt to establish an objective outlook while exploring the research topic (Creswell, 2013).

**The Approval Process**

The researcher completed and submitted a research proposal to Endicott College institutional review board (IRB). Once reviewed, the Endicott College IRB approved the research. Appendix A is the research proposal application submitted as approved by the Endicott college.

**Setting and Participants**

To best understand how mothers perceived CRT practiced in urban middle schools and urban high schools, it was necessary to focus the research on mothers with students attending inner city schools. The participants were mothers who are active members of Phenomenal Moms Inc. and with a child enrolled in a middle or high school in Boston, Massachusetts. The rationale for recruiting participants from Phenomenal Moms was that the nonprofit organization was parent led and strove to work with schools and district level personnel to ensure success for students attending schools in Boston. The organization services Boston communities by conducting workshops for parents on advocacy, empowerment, and active relationships with schools. Phenomenal Moms works closely with Boston Public School (BPS) families and BPS central office staff, who offer parents and the school system the potential to build allegiances, to create adult learning opportunities, and to develop more community-based experiences.

Because the researcher sought participants who were mothers and resided in Boston, MA, with children attending middle or high school in Boston, MA, purposeful sampling was required (Creswell, 2017). The process for selecting participants began with the founder of Phenomenal Moms hosting an information emails to all participants with a description of the research topic. In addition to the information email, a participant of Phenomenal Moms also forwarded the study description to members of another local parent organization called Collaborative Parent Leadership Action Network (CPLAN). Mothers interested in interviewing for the study then emailed the researcher to schedule an interview. The first twelve mothers who showed interest in participating were allowed to take part in the study.

All selected participants had students enrolled in a BPS middle school or high school located in Boston, Massachusetts. BPS has a student population of about 54,312 in 125 schools with the following demographics: 76% of the high school graduates are African American students; 42% of the district population is Hispanic, 34% African American, 14% White, 9% Asian and 1% other; 45% of the student population’ first language not English; 32% English language learning; 21% of students with disabilities (with and individual education plan); 7% English language learning with disabilities; and 71% of students are economically disadvantaged. BPS has a high school graduation rate of 75.1%. Of the twelve mothers who showed interest in the study, three mothers had a child or multiple children in middle school, seven mothers had a child in high school, and two had children in middle school and high school.

Once all twelve participants were confirmed, the interviews were scheduled. The interviews were held at locations convenient to the participants such as work buildings and quiet cafes. To prepare for the interview and to become more comfortable with recording the interviews, the researcher completed a mock interview with a former University of Massachusetts, Boston professor who obtained her doctoral degree from Northeastern University. The mock interviewee also provided feedback on the original questions:I generated follow-up questions so that the interviewees could expand their answers without leading the direction of the interview. During the interviews, the researcher also spent five to ten minutes before the formal interview in casual conversation with the research participants discussing topics such as interests and work-related issues. This informal conversation allowed the participants to familiarize themselves with the researcher and to feel more comfortable.

The sampling method, purposeful sampling, was ideal for this study since the participants or sources of data provided rich personal experiences related to the topic studied (Creswell, 2013). The researcher focused on content validity by ensuring that all questions and follow-up questions related to the approved original, driving research questions.

**Driving Questions:**

Three questions drove this study.

1. What perceptions do mothers who have children attending urban middle schools or urban high schools have about culturally relevant teaching practices?
2. What perceptions do mothers of children attending urban middle schools or urban high schools have regarding their role in integrating culturally relevant teaching practices into their children’s learning experiences?
3. What perceptions do mothers with children in urban middle schools and urban high schools have concerning professional development geared towards effective culturally relevant teaching practices?

**Consent and Confidentiality**

Conducting research with adult participants requires informed consent. The participants must understand the purpose of the study and the impact the research will have on education as well as home and school partnerships. All participants must also be informed that they can remove themselves from the study at any time. The participants must understand that they will have the opportunity to meet with the researcher to clarify responses, request omissions, and/or make revisions. For this research, consent was gained from Phenomenal Moms Inc to share information with the members of the organization. Consent was also obtained from each mother selected to interview.

All participants were informed of the confidentiality safeguards via in-person conversation and written hard copy forms. The letters of consent and acknowledgement from participants and the founder of Phenomenal Moms Inc are provided in Appendix B. All participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded using the researcher’s personal iPhone and stored in a password protected folder in Dropbox. Participants were informed that the interview would be transcribed by an outside transcriber and then they would be given the transcript to review. This study did not include surveys or questionnaires.

An independent transcriber was used to transcribe all interviews. The independent transcriber was given and submitted a confidentiality form that stored in a password protected folder in Dropbox (see Appendix C). The transcriber confidentiality form is provided in Appendix C. All hard data were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s home and all electronic data were stored in password protected folders in the researcher’s personal Dropbox account.

Participants were referred to using pseudonyms along with the pronoun she to protect the identity of each interviewee.

The researcher also completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training “Protecting Human Research Participants.” The certificate of completion is provided in Appendix D.

**Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

The qualitative phenomenological study was designed to assist teachers, school leaders, and district administrators in understanding how mothers perceive CRT. The study will assist leaders in education with an understanding of the importance of developing authentic family partnerships so that children can engage positively in social and academic tasks. The researcher utilized guidelines defined by Creswell (2013). The guidelines included summarizing the philosophical perspective of the phenomenological study so that readers know the researcher’s beliefs associated with the research study. The researcher then developed questions to gather information regarding mothers’ feelings about how CRT practices are incorporated into the classroom. Next, a criterion based sample was used to identify participants who could share experiences associated with having a child or children in an urban middle school or high school. The data collected were in the form of statements, impressions, and quotes. The researcher assigned meaning to the statements, impressions, and quotes that were significant to the student and then created themes. The themes were extracted and clustered from the data and meaning was also assigned to the themes to categorize descriptions of the participants’ experiences with CRT practices. The researcher formulated meaning for the themes. Each participant was invited to review their transcript as well as the themes extracted to verify whether the information gathered and the participants’ perspectives were accurate.

Creswell recommends crafting open-ended questions that solicits textual descriptions of the participants’ experiences with urban public schools. Therefore, a structural description was developed to explain how the experience was impacted by conditions, situations, and contexts. Then, the contextual and structural experiences, as defined by Creswell (2009), were combined to formulate an overall essence of the participants’ experiences.

Semi-structured interviews, including structured questions, were utilized. Below is the list of structured questions utilized during the interviews.

* Interview questions
  + What are the key components of culturally relevant teaching?
  + Who, in the school community, are key contributors to culturally relevant teaching?
  + What topics are needed to best understand culturally relevant practices?
  + Talk about the most impactful experiences you had at your child’s school that would be considered a culturally relevant teaching practice.
  + How would you advise district personnel with training teachers and administrators on culturally relevant teaching practices?
  + What is your perception of the use of culturally relevant teaching methods in the classroom?
  + How prepared, would you say, teachers are to implement culturally relevant teaching practices?
  + How do you see yourself contributing to culturally relevant teaching practices in the classroom?
  + Discuss your experience with schools in which you felt could benefit from academic tasks that incorporate components of culturally relevant teaching.
  + What recommendations would you give educators on methods to incorporate culturally relevant teaching practices into the classroom?

**Data Analysis**

Objectively analyzing the perspectives and experiences of the participants is a key component in extracting critical data. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed by an independent contractor. Transcriptions were redistributed to each participant so that the participant could review their transcribed interview. Participants were given the opportunity to omit or revise wording in their transcript before the researcher analyzed the data. The transcribed interviews were then analyzed using Dedoose, a computer program than analyzes interviews by organizing themes and clusters to capture participants’ views, experiences, and skills as they pertain to the research study.

**Validity, Reliability, and Ethics**

Qualitative research is a specific research method that gathers information to better understand a phenomenon within its context-specific setting without manipulating any elements of the phenomenon studied (Golafshani, 2003). This research study, like other qualitative studies, seeks understanding of a specific topic. The interviews were the dominant component necessary for obtaining data. To ensure validity, the researcher must work to separate personal belief so that the data represents only the participants’ experiences. Reliability, defined by Lincoln and Guba, is the dependability of the research and its process (cited by Golafshani, 2003). The researcher therefore utilized multiple strategies to safeguard validity and reliability. A mock interview, for example, was completed to receive feedback on the original questions and to eliminate bias. Several participants were identified to gather data in order to collect themes and clusters. Interview transcripts were shared with participants to validate data. Themes and meanings derived from the researcher were also shared to validate interpretation.

The researcher ensured an ethical study by informing all participants about the study. Participants were told that they were chosen from the Phenomenal Moms Inc membership because they were mothers of children enrolled in a middle school or high school in Boston. Each participant was allotted time prior to the interview to ask questions about the study and to express any concerns. Participants were told at the start of the original interview that follow-up interviews may be necessary if clarification was needed.

**Limitations of Research**

Research studies generally have limitations, which arise throughout the study. The limitations, if not addressed, could influence the results of the research study. After examining all components of the study, four limitations have been identified:

1. The researcher is a principal in the BPS district. Unexpectedly, all the mothers had a child enrolled in one of the researcher’s BPS schools at one point. As a principal in BPS, the researcher could have opinions and personal experiences related to BPS and the topic, CRT. To minimize any bias, the researcher used bracketing in the form of a pre-interview to identify personal influences on the topic so that the researcher’s opinions would not be a factor in the research process. The researcher also informed participants that all information was confidential and they would have the opportunity to omit any statements.
2. The researcher is a parent of African American children living in Boston. The experiences of the participants could elicit an emotional response from the researcher. To overcome any emotional response, the researcher refrained from sharing any personal experiences. Also an independent contractor was used to transcribe the interviews. And finally, a computer program was used to identify themes and clusters, then the participants were given the opportunity to review meaning assigned to those themes and clusters.
3. Twenty participants showed interest in participating in the study; however, only 12 participants were interviewed. The small number of participants limited the generalizability of the findings.
4. One participant was interviewed; however, there was an error that occurred with the recording and the participant has to be re-interviewed. The participant was asked the same questions and experienced the interview process in the same manner as her original interview to safeguard any biased information. However, this participant may have changed some of her original thoughts.