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Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in the Urban Pre-Kindergarten Classroom

by

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Dedication

To my little Eleanor Elizabeth:

For you I persisted in this, that you may also learn to do so one day.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband, Patrick Nord, for his countless hours of work in and outside the home so that I could focus on writing, for the thousands of miles he drove for us on road trips so I could read "one more chapter" for my research, and most of all, for loving me so much he made me see this through and finish even when I felt I could not. I would like to thank my mom and dad for believing in me and teaching me to always strive for more. I would also like to thank my editor and coach, Jennie Noakes, for helping me laugh when I wanted to cry, find my voice when I thought I had lost it, and for encouraging me to write just a little bit more when I felt that words had failed me. I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Bogiages, for all of his contributions to my intellectual growth and for his patience through this long process. Finally, I would like to thank God for blessing my life with the individuals listed above that I might complete this work.

Abstract

This action research study describes the influence of culturally relevant literacy instruction on an urban preschool classroom and its effect on an educator-researcher. This research study was grounded in a theoretical framework that involved culturally responsive teaching pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2012), and early literacy instruction (Algozzine, O'Shea, & Obiakor, 2009). The study was assembled as a case study bounded by one classroom in a federally funded daycare in a southern coastal city. It sought to answer the question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-kindergarten urban youth? The research question was further divided into two supporting questions: (a) Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills? and (b) What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students? The study participants in this research included seven 4- and 5-year-old children: one Hispanic American male, four African American males, and two African American females. The data collection methods used in this study were a pre-post assessment on concepts of print, concepts of writing, early emergent literacy, and phonics, along with a narrative research journal. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data was analyzed using a coding system of indicators consistent with culturally responsive teaching.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

It was the Friday before Labor Day. School had just completed its first full week and I was exhausted but excited about the year to come. Wanting to celebrate another successful start to a school year but too tired to commit to a major outing, my husband and I headed out to the local outdoor mall for ice cream and to enjoy the last good round of people watching before all of the tourists left my coastal South Carolina city for the season. As I tried to keep ice cream from running down my hand as it melted in the heat, I glanced up to see a familiar face.

It was Malik from my second period class my first year teaching in public school. Malik had been the fodder of his seventh-grade teachers' "warning" to his future eighth-grade teachers: He had emotional outbursts, he was disruptive, he was a "problem." As a first-year teacher full of hope and zeal, their warnings carried little weight with me, and Malik and I got along well. When his grades were endangering his ability to play football, he approached me about helping him with homework during his academic coaching class. It wasn't long into our time together that I realized his difficulty: his MAP scores placed him on a third-grade reading level. His ability to read people far surpassed my own, but repeating third and sixth grade had not helped his ability to read a text. I fought for him that entire school year, working with him and his football coach during my planning periods to help him learn the material, and eventually Malik had the

grades necessary to go to high school. He was a great kid who had been failed by a less than great school system.

My memories of supporting Malik through a tough time made me smile as I approached him to say hello. As I made an approach toward Malik, my husband quickly grabbed my wrist and motioned me to stop. What he had seen that I had not as I had focused on my dripping ice cream cone was that Malik was not alone. Bearing down over this young man were two foreboding looking police officers questioning him concerning the bicycle in his possession as they placed handcuffs on his wrists: How had he come upon it? Did he know it was stolen? Why had he tried to run when they first stopped him? Not wanting to make Malik feel uncomfortable or embarrassed, I adjusted my gait to walk away, though I have spent countless hours in the years since wondering if I could have provided some help in this situation had I decided to approach him. Before I turned, he looked up and his gaze fell upon mine. He had a look of embarrassment and shame I will never forget.

As a teacher for several years in an urban South Carolina middle school, I witnessed countless educationally disenfranchised students. By eighth grade, many of these students were several grade levels behind the national reading standards and struggled to keep their grades above passing. I witnessed how "the constant and repeated denigration of both Africa and African Americans works against African American students both in and outside the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 387). Several years into teaching, I saw personally how the lack of opportunities for students like Malik to fully engage in reading feeds what is referred to as the "school—prison nexus" (Winn, Behizadeh, Duncan, Fine, & Gadsden, 2011, p. 149), especially poignant as I witnessed

Malik's arrest. Malik suffered from unequal life chances due to "childhood poverty, the lack of early childhood education, and the denial of college-preparatory K–12 education promoting critical literacies" (Winn et al., 2011, p. 148), all of which contributed to his entrance into the "school-to-prison pipeline."

Despite Supreme Court cases like *Brown v. Board of Education,* designed at creating equal educational opportunities for all children, the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity and the promises of U.S. democracy are a right denied to many children of color and urban youth in poverty (Winn et al., 2011). The answer comes in a restructuring of education to meet the needs of children rather than forcing children to meet the constraints of the system. Culturally responsive literacy instruction buoys children's early concepts of literacy and supports the understandings they learn socially and culturally from their family and community (Morgan, Nutbrown, & Hannon, 2009).

Research Questions

My research sought to answer the following question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-Kindergarten, urban youth?

    a. Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

    b. What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

Problem of Practice

For children of color, schools are also representative of another kind of institution: prison. The reality is stark and depressing: Students of color face an

educational opportunity gap that leads to educational disenfranchisement, with African American males having "a statistically higher probability of walking the corridors of prison than the halls of college" (Prager, 2011, p. 1). Due to institutionalized racism present in the public education system, schools treat children of color as children placed at risk (Rashid, 2009) because they do not conform to the social expectations set forth by European American teachers or the tests developed with the culture of European American children in mind. In fact, research in early literacy and language development shows that a child performing below the normed level for early literacy achievement by age three is likely to also be behind standards in third grade, a measure which is critical concerning projected/anticipated high school graduation and lifetime earnings. Early childhood education programs have the potential to address long-term outcomes for students of color and underserved urban youth if they are of high quality (Rashid, 2009). Early reading interventions are a component of social justice, as they provide students with lifelong educational advantages and greater access to educational resources (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Coupled with childhood poverty, a lack of quality early childhood education programs that provide children with important critical literacy skills ushers students of color into what has been referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline," serving as further evidence that communities of color have been denied equal access to educational institutions as their European American counterparts (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). The lack of access to education and preparation for the workforce is evident through South Carolina's incarceration statistics: In 2016, more than half of the state's inmates were African American (Simon, 2016), meaning that black South Carolinians are four times more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts based off of South

Carolina's ethnic makeup (Munday, 2016). Literacy interventions at the pre-kindergarten level hold the potential to provide children with the skills requisite to be successful during their academic career, also potentially preventing the unequal life chances that, along with "the denial of literacy as a civil right [act as] two ways African American […] youth are ushered into this [school to prison] pipeline" (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011, p. 158).

Given the lack of education opportunities available to local children of color and urban youth due to failings of the educational system, this study will seek to design and implement a culturally responsive early reading curriculum at the pre-K level serving four- to five-year-olds using culturally responsive practices and materials to increase early literacy skills. The study and implementation will focus on students enrolled in a preschool program at a local federally funded daycare, as these students receive literacy preparation well below the quality of even the public school instruction, and "issues related to [instructional] quality continue to be at the forefront of research and policy debates related to early childhood [education]" (Rashid, 2009, p. 349). Not only do children need culturally responsive reading instruction to provide the necessary framework for their later success with literacy, but "schools need to respond to rapidly changing literacy demands of the global economy to allow for adequate preparation in the practices needed for authentic participation" (Larson, 2006, p. 320), and culturally responsive reading can provide the multiple literacies needed for students to be prepared for jobs in the global community.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I employed in this study culturally responsive teaching. In culturally responsive teaching, the teacher integrates a student's culture and experiences into her curriculum and instructional methods. The framework teaches the whole-child as she is, taking into consideration life experiences and unique talents that each learner possesses. The purpose of this framework is to improve achievement in school for ethnically diverse students by preparing teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to do so (Gay, 2002). Though there are many means by which a teacher can employ culturally responsive instruction, in this study, I focused on the following main tenets of culturally responsive teaching: (a) providing affirmation and creating a culture of high expectations for learning, (b) student-centered instruction with active teaching, (c) the importance of interpersonal relationships, (d) the cultural re-orientation of the teacher, and (e) reshaping the curriculum. Critical race theory, the overarching framework for culturally responsive teaching, focuses on how people of color transcend structural barriers placed before them in life (Chapman, 2007), in this instance, the barriers to literacy skill acquisition for preschool students. This also empowers students that are typically disadvantaged by traditional teaching methods. By accepting that traditional literacy instruction is designed largely by and for the White and middle class in education, critical race theory may be used by educators in order to identify ways in which an individual of color may receive an equal advantage in education through the modification of instructional methods.

Researcher Positionality

I am a European American, middle-aged woman with an affluent suburban west-coast background. This obviously posed a great need in developing an understanding of context and student culture before attempting to develop a culturally responsive curriculum for urban, southern, preschool students of color in poverty. The differences between me as an educator and my student population further underscored the differences that go unaddressed in general curricular design: There is a discontinuity between life experiences in educators and their student population, which leads to unintentional systemic racism and an educational experience biased against the learners. During this study, I also worked closely with the classroom teacher, who was a young woman of color from poverty. She was able to greatly increase my knowledge and understanding of the student culture.

Research Design

Design and Data Collection

This study utilized an action research, case study approach examining both qualitative and quantitative data in relationship to the implementation of culturally responsive instruction and curricular content. Given my positionality, I entered the classroom as culturally irrelevant and spent one month in the classroom performing no instructional duties. Rather, I used that time to get to know the children and the classroom teacher so that I could better understand what a culturally responsive curriculum would look like for this particular group of students. Based on student interests, I selected reading materials to center instruction every day around one developmentally-appropriate picture book. In addition to using the book to teach concepts of print, I used it as a

platform for engaging students in conversation about literature and then connected skill games with the reading of the day.

As this was a case study, developing a study narrative was important. Qualitative data was collected through a research journal. For this journal, I recorded daily what occurred during instruction, including direct quotes from students. This composed a narrative of the program changes during the implementation.

Quantitative data was derived from reading test scores that were administered twice during the implementation period to determine actual data shifts following program implementations. The assessment consisted of letter identification and sound-to-letter correspondence, along with concepts of print, early emergent literacy skills, concepts of writing, and distinguishing of rhyme, all consistent with early reading progress monitoring. The test content will be detailed later in both chapter three and four.

This data was used to determine if a culturally responsive reading instruction program can increase early literacy achievement and phonological awareness. The implementation occurred for 45 minutes per day, three days a week, for six weeks. Within the implementation, the following skills were instructed and assessed: capital letter identification, lowercase letter identification, identification of rhyming pairs, phonological awareness, recognition of first name, use of pictures to read a story, and speaks in complete sentences. Culturally responsive methods of storytelling, movement, social interaction, and relationship building were employed to promote greater attentiveness and engagement. I administered the assessments and first recorded data on paper by hand, later with digital records meticulously kept on a password protected device.

The sample size for this study was dependent on fall enrollment at the research site in the pre-K daycare program. This is a convenience sample as all of the students from the combined 4–5 age group classroom were invited to participate in the study.

Context

The study took place in a moderate-sized southern city whose primary industry is tourism. While the South as a region is characterized by a racial dichotomy of Black and White, the tourism-related jobs in this city have brought a plethora of other ethnic groups to the area, including first-generation students from Mexico, Central America, the Middle East, and the Baltic region. The research site is located within the urban part of the city and is located in close proximity to low income and government-subsidized housing. Many of those employed in the city work low skill, low wage jobs with few professional opportunities available. There is one local university and one community college. The graduation rate of high school students in the city is typical of statewide statistics—hovering around 80% on-time graduation.

The research was conducted in a preschool classroom within a child care center. The child care center itself is located in a moderately high-crime area (Tomasic 2018) and is adjacent to the highest crime neighborhood in the city. It is located between the ocean and the airport in a part of town that is beginning redevelopment due to a notorious reputation involving prostitution and drug crimes (Weaver 2017). The building in which the child care center is located is 27 years old and is adjacent to low-income housing and behind a tourist information center. It is a one-story brick building that lacks landscaping and is across the street from an abandoned bank.

Participants

This study was made up of a group of seven children in one child care preschool class consisting of five males and two females. Six of the seven children are African American and one male student is Hispanic. All of the children are between four and five years old. During the second half of the instructional unit, one European American female joined the class and so partial assessment data is present for her. The students in the class lack frequent exposure to literature in order to develop basic literacy skills. When I first arrived, there was great difficulty on the part of the children in sitting still for the duration of a brief story. Students, early on, would talk over the story despite attempts to engage them in conversation regarding personal connections to the text.

The children have one classroom teacher with them present during care hours, which extend from 8 am to 5:30 pm. The classroom teacher has a daughter in the class and a desire to help to give the students adequate educational preparation for the future; however, due to her lack of curricular knowledge, she obtains all of the items for classroom use from "Pinterest," a social media online image bulletin board, and spends great amount of times having students trace, cut, and paste. Despite excellent student practice for motor skills, no time is invested in emergent literacy skills. As a result, members of the class possess excellent fine motor skills that have left them well-prepared for writing tasks in the future, though they remain unprepared for future literacy tasks, with no phonological skills that will prepare them to read. The expectation has been communicated to the classroom teacher through her site manager and the child care center owner that she is to provide structured learning time, but she is unsure as to how to accomplish this. The teacher frequently expresses frustration about a lack of communication from her 'superiors', along with the seemingly endless changing

10

expectations she is asked to meet in terms of instruction. Despite realizing the importance of literacy instruction, the classroom teacher expressed that she is unsure how to accomplish this task as she characterized her experience as only having prepared her to administer to students "writing projects or art projects."

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using a case study evaluation approach to look at changes in student scores over time and to fully incorporate the contextual conditions existing with the use of culturally responsive instruction (Yin, 2014). I used descriptive statistics in creating a chart to compare student performance on pre-post assessment questions (described in chapters 3 and 4), summarizing my data with measures of frequency, specifically focused on calculating percentages (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching [CIRT], 2018). Approaching the data from a realist orientation, I viewed the quantitative data in connection to my first research question to see if percentage increases of student scores from pre to post test indicated if increases demonstrated a correlation to culturally responsive instruction (Yin, 2014, p. 220).

Qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive a descriptive framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 204). To understand the qualitative data obtained from my researcher journal, I conducted an inductive, comparative analysis. I used categories already present within culturally responsive teaching as opposed to a blind category construction; my categories became the indicators of effective instruction within the culturally responsive paradigm: affirmation and a culture of high expectations, student centered instruction with active teaching, the importance of interpersonal relationships, the cultural re-orientation of the teacher, and reshaping the curriculum. I then reviewed

my entries and coded data into the different categories, looking for examples and non-examples from my writing so that I could use the example to analyze how these aspects of culturally responsive instruction were met or not met through my instruction.

Significance of the Study

The first objective of this study was to determine what factors are important to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading instruction for pre-K students. Researchers have "found that differences in the size of children's vocabulary first appear at 18 months of age, based on whether they were born into a family with higher education and income or lower education and income" (Jackman, Beaver, & Wyatt, 2014, p. 98). Hart and Risley (1995), in their study concerning literacy, language, and the life of babies, found that by age 3, a 30-million-word gap existed between children from professional households and those in welfare households. While this word deficit represents the total exposure to speech and language, the types of words and variety of vocabulary differs between income groups, with children who have college-educated parents possessing vocabularies two to three times larger than those children whose parents did not graduate high school (Jackman et al., 2014). This research, however, while having been cited over 8,000 times in various research papers, has been criticized as possessing latent racial bias (Kamenetz 2018). Though several critiques surround the lack of replication of the study and the small sample size, the main critique is that a "thirty million word gap" is more likely a "four million word gap"- or less (Kamenetz 2018). Moreover, the most poignant criticism involves value judgements surrounding language use, with one researcher writing: "There are other values, like using language to entertain or connect, rather than just have children perform their knowledge. How do we honor different families rather

than have families change their values to align with school?" (Kamenetz 2018), which underscores the fact that the original study placed importance on speech patterns consistent with European American values rather than examining speech in terms of multicultural linguistic use.

Children from poverty come to pre-K with less exposure to skills valued by the local educational system and deserve instruction aimed at providing greater exposure to building pre-reading skills that they will be classified by in kindergarten. Children deserve to be prepared to meet the challenges placed before them since educational systems "inhibit the reading development of economically disadvantaged children, particularly in the earliest years in elementary school" (Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007). In the state, 61% of children whose families are 200% or more below the poverty level are not enrolled in school, which is 15% higher than families who are above the 200% poverty level mark, with 40% of children in the state under the age of six not being read to four days a week or more (Annie E Casey Foundation, 2016). This study is working to develop early literacy curriculum because by the time children reach elementary school, those who have parents with lower educational attainment are already behind their peers in the exposure to literacy that the system requires of them (Jackman et al., 2014), thus making it more important to provide a literacy-rich environment in preschool. By using culturally responsive literacy instruction, students can also form more meaningful connections between the reading instruction occurring within the classroom and the world in which they live in outside of the classroom. Further, since research shows that "teachers rated as more effective in their classroom teaching techniques had students with higher reading outcomes" (Moats & Foorman, 2008, p. 97), by providing additional

training to the child care center owner at my research site, I can help her to increase instructor efficacy across the board. Further, I modeled effective teaching techniques to and practiced instruction with the pre-K classroom teacher I worked with through classroom reading instruction and helped the classroom teacher to understand the metacognitive reasons for doing certain tasks during instruction, while she helped me to have a much better grasp on the cultural elements that would appeal to the students.

The second objective of this study was to ascertain the effectiveness of culturally responsive education on preschool students. Culturally responsive instruction made it possible for me to provide early literacy instruction to increase skills the students had before going to kindergarten. Waiting to provide instruction until kindergarten is too late: "How a child from birth to age 5 acquires language competence we see in the kindergarten child" (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011, p. 124). Technology offers the potential for students to independently use literacy tools outside the walls of a classroom, with the window of opportunity for children to learn literacy, syntax, or grammar open during the preschool years but beginning to close as early as five or six years old (Jackman et al., 2014). Research has noted a "persistent poor literacy performance of African American students, particularly males" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 381), with a culturally responsive curriculum providing promise for future literacy development. This culturally responsive curriculum allows for the potential of a student creating meaningful learning pathways in the brain before synaptic pruning completes and the window for neuroplasticity of language closes at around age seven (Birdsong, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by a small sample size, lack of probability sampling, and time constraints consistent with a doctoral research study.

The first limitation of this study is related to the sample size. This study was conducted in one pre-K classroom with a mix of four- to five-year-old students. Due to the nature of child care laws, children are not allowed to be in a ratio greater than 12 children to every one adult in the classroom at this age, meaning that there will be no more than 12 students involved in the study, as there is also the added physical limitation of classroom size in pre-K/child care facilities. In this instance, only seven students were present during the data collection period. With a small sample size, the power of the study is limited because it is more difficult to detect an effect of the implementation with certainty due to so few participants in the study. In short, a small sample size leads to less conclusive results.

The second limitation is the lack of probability sampling in this study. The sample in this study is a purposive sample, selected because of the physical location of the research site and its proximity to the city's urban center and overlapping the same attendance zone in which I had previously taught middle school. This sample is not reflective of the entire population of the city in which the study took place but rather represents a much more homogenous group. Moreover, the sample obtained here is a largely homogenous sample, with the majority of students attending the pre-K/daycare program receiving of federal program funding. The study participants are all of the same age range (four to five) and come from an urban background, as this is the demographic of interest with the treatment that uses culturally responsive methods of instruction. A

limitation of this type of sample is that results are difficult to generalize because of the specific population that was employed in the sample.

A third study limitation relates to the time period over which the study was conducted. The data was collected and treatment implemented over a five-week period. Ideally, a treatment that involves pre-K reading would be implemented over the course of a year, as early readers have yet to gain even the most basic of literacy skills and so the longer the treatment period, the more evidence there is of change as skills developed become continually more complex. Additionally, since one aspect of culturally responsive instruction involves relationship building with students, a longer time period would be more ideal for the researcher to become a more embedded and accepted member of the group.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is written over the course of five chapters. This chapter serves as an introduction to the background of the problem of practice, an overview of important guiding principles for the research, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 contains the literature review for this study to help situation this research in the greater body of research on the topic. In Chapter 3, methodology and the structure of the research project are detailed, along with assessment forms and the context for the research. Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of data with qualitative and quantitative data providing answers to the research questions. Finally, in Chapter 5, the research process and findings are reflected upon and recommendations are made for the next stage in the action research cycle.

Glossary of Terms

Concepts of Print: Concepts of print is a child's knowledge of print conventions and the distinctions between images and text (Shanahan, 2012, p. 2), including: how to hold a book, where to begin reading a book, return sweep, the difference between a letter, a word, and a sentence, and which are the front and back of a book. Additionally, print awareness, the understanding of how print works, is important for children to understand in order for them to know how it can later be read and that it tells a story (Brown, 2014, p. 38).

Critical Race Theory: Developed from critical legal studies, critical race theory is a theoretical framework that asks researchers to take up a race-conscious view of education. This framework of race consciousness is meant to contrast with the framework of "colorblindness," in that many researchers argue than accounting of race is necessary in promoting "colorblindness" and confronting racism (Tate, 1997, p. 203). Critical race theory also posits that the narrator is important in the telling of any story because "people of color in society speak from experience framed by racism" (Tate, 1997, p. 210).

Culturally Responsive Instruction: Culturally responsive teaching asks teachers to make the language and culture of their instruction with the culture of the student population that they teach (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). In this, teachers should develop curriculum and instructional methods to meet the needs of their students, creating a "synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). Components of Ladson-Billings' original 1995 articulation of culturally responsive teaching include: interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, teacher and student expectations, social context, and cultural context (p. 469).

Emergent/ Early Literacy: Emergent/early literacy consists of reading skills that include ABC knowledge, phonological awareness, concepts of print, rapid naming of letters and numbers, and the ability to understand and produce oral language (Shanahan, 2012, p. 2). The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) noted that students who do not possess the above concepts mentioned prior to formal schooling (i.e., kindergarten) tend to fall behind classmates and end up reading and comprehending text below grade level (p. 36).

Phonemic Awareness: A subset of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness refers to a child's ability to recognize and identify phonemes spoken in words, which has also been determined to be the single largest predictor for success in a child's later ability to learn how to read (Brown, 2014, p. 40). This knowledge pertains to phonemes, the spoken sound a letter makes, and graphemes, the printed alphabet letters that correspond to phonemes (Brown, 2014, p. 40).

Phonics: Phonics is the understanding that sounds and printed letters are connected and correspond to one another (Brown, 2014, p. 40).

Phonological Awareness: Phonological awareness is a child's ability to perceive and analyze sounds within oral language, including the understanding of phonemes (Shanahan, 2012, p. 2), all of which are independent of meaning of a word.

Phonological Theory: A reading theory that acknowledges that while children naturally develop the ability to speak and listen, the ability to read must be explicitly taught. In this theory, children must learn that letters and letter strings represent sounds as heard in spoken language (orthography) and that letters in a written word represent

sounds (phonemes) that can be combined in a variety of ways to make words (Lyon, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Chhabra & Adams, 2005).

Preschool Assessment: The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that any assessment of preschoolers be done with the purpose of improving services and ensuring that children benefit from their educational experiences (Jones, 2003, p. 12). Additionally, while the NAEYC calls for purposive selection and use of assessments with young children, they recommend that content and data collection methods should both be age appropriate (Jones, 2003, p. 13).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Problem of Practice

This dissertation focuses on early literacy skill enhancement through culturally responsive teaching. I developed a curricular unit to teach preschool students early literacy skills and phonemic skills. From my experiences teaching middle school English, I had noticed that eighth-grade students who faced academic marginalization in high school by being funneled into non-credit-bearing "reading recovery" classes often did not possess the ability to decode words when reading, which led to additional difficulties with reading comprehension. By eighth grade, district reading skill expectation and student reading skill reality are often mismatched for urban youth in my community. The most extreme outcome of the institutionalized racism and unequal life chances for students of color in the local attendance area was that some of my former students were not graduating high school and others were ending up in the juvenile detention system.

After leaving the public school system to teach preschool in the private school system, I saw the great gains in student reading abilities for pre-k groups and wanted to help develop a program for pre-k students that taught necessary early reading skills through a culturally responsive teaching framework so that students in daycare possessed the same advantages as their pre-k counterparts in public school. While this model would not be beneficial to the eighth grade students I had once taught, it did provide an opportunity to assist the next generation of students early in their academic careers so that

other students would potentially avoid being unfairly categorized as some of their predecessors had been.

Statement of Purpose

This action research study in education was designed with the goal of improving educational practice to provide instruction that addressed the diverse needs of students. This study was designed with the goal of meeting the needs of diverse learners by improving a set of key literacy skills while engaging students through culturally responsive materials and practice. Action research is grounded in the attempts of educators to improve their own practice when faced with concrete problems. Students in a pre-k classroom not receiving any literacy instruction was a very real, concrete problem; I wanted to assist the daycare in rectifying this problem with their student population.

Research Questions

My research sought to answer the following question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-kindergarten, urban youth?

      a. Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

      b. What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

Chapter Organization

This chapter commences with a discussion of the importance of the literature review and my strategies for conducting the review. It then delves into the theoretical

framework used for my research, down to the pedagogy that informed my personal practice and the research in this project. Next is a brief historical contextualization of my research and other relevant research. Finally, before concluding and summarizing my review of the literature, I detail and explain relevant topics to my research, with careful attention paid to a variety of topics related to early literacy and literacy learning.

<h3 align="center">Importance of Literature Review</h3>

Literature reviews are important because they allow researchers to study the topics pertaining to their proposed research project in more depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The literature review allows a researcher to deeply study the issues, theories, and previous research relating to a specific topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The literature review also helped me to narrow my topic. Initially, I was uncertain whether I planned to conduct research only using critical theory or a subset of that theory (critical race theory within critical theory) as my theoretical framework, and eventually decided upon a subset (culturally responsive teaching within critical theory). Additionally, my literature review provided me with the resources that I later used to discuss the coding of my qualitative data in Chapter 4 (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For the reader of my research, the literature review communicates the basics of my research: the subject, the significance, and its intellectual roots (Marshall & Rossman).

The scope and sequence of any literature review is largely dependent on the familiarity the researcher has with the topic prior to designing her research project (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In completing my research, one strategy that I used was to search relevant topics and collect 10–15 different peer-reviewed journal articles on each subtopic through JSTOR. It was easiest for me to seek out and save a long list of articles

at once before reading any information. I saved articles on like-topics in folders on my computer for ease in finding the appropriate information later. Next, I read through the abstracts of all of the articles to determine which journals really did apply to the specific research I was planning to do, deleting ones that turned out to be seemingly unrelated. I did this task for all of my research folders. Then, I began reading articles, typically three at a time so that my mind was able to remain focused on the topic. At the end of the article, I would review the author's references pertaining to topics I thought would be helpful to read more about the subject. Occasionally, I noticed that the same books were quoted repeatedly or an author had quoted extensively from a book on a topic I felt I needed to know more about. In these instances, I purchased the ebook edition where possible and ordered the print version online where not possible to obtain a digital copy. Also, as I read each article, I typed out direct quotes in a word document under the APA citation of the book. This helped me to have material to draw upon later in my writing. Though I did use a limited number of websites in my study, I generally avoid the use of websites because it is difficult to determine the authenticity of the information presented therein since no peer-review process is required.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirding my teaching pedagogy is guided by several related frameworks. As an overarching framework encompassing the other frameworks, Critical Theory guided my thinking. It was then followed by Reality Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Culturally Responsive Teaching Pedagogy. Additionally, consistent with responsive forms of

teaching is child-centered learning theory, as culturally responsive teaching is student-centric instruction.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy a theoretical framework that seeks to understand the relationship between culture, economic structures, social practices, and how those categories relate to curriculum in schools (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). The theory began when Paulo Friere conducted literacy research in rural sections of Brazil, the results of which were later generalized and applied to urban populations in the United States (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). Critical pedagogy promotes increased subject study depth that prevents simply promulgating textbook content by focusing on the social, political, and historical dimensions of instruction to provide students with a global view of a subject matter. This pedagogy also asks educators to experience a paradigm shift in power relationships within the classroom, changing the role of the teacher from the "traditional position as innocuous information distributor" (Emdin, 2011, p. 286) to that of an instructional coach that challenges students to cultivate change in, and out, of the classroom. Additionally, critical pedagogy emphasizes that the classroom is a learning cooperative where individuals need the freedom and ability to express their personal connections to learning so that individuals can further reveal and better understand their own consciousness (Brady, 2015).

Reality Pedagogy

A reality pedagogy underscores the difference in educational opportunities between differing groups of students by acknowledging that students of color in poverty are often compared to White, middle class students in determining academic achievement

(Emdin, 2012) and that this practice stymies attempts to close an opportunity gap. Opportunity gaps are unequal learning chances for children that are a result of the lack of resources and opportunities provided to students in poverty by the educational system (Welner & Carter, 2013). Reality pedagogy asserts that this opportunity gap exists because the structures and procedures that are in place preference White, middle class students and disadvantage students of color and students in poverty (Emdin, 2012). It argues that by acknowledging that students of color are different than their counterparts in education, and by teaching them differently, the opportunity gap may be lessened. Further, it seeks to create spaces that align with students of color "core identities, their desires to think critically, make keen observations, support these observations with facts, and engage in dialogue" (Emdin, 2012, p. 14) in order to effectively educate an otherwise disenfranchised group of students.

Reality pedagogy contends that pop culture and public education have created a seemingly impossible contrasting, and contrary, set of expectations for students of color. In developing a reality pedagogy, Christopher Emdin, from the Teachers College at Columbia University, asserted that media and U.S. culture exaggerate disadvantages that students of color in particular are faced with in education, as "the world is inundated with scenarios that leave a false perception of Black males [… as the media takes] characteristics of Black culture, [ties] them to anti-school identities, violence, and misogyny, and [uses] them as forms of entertainment" (2012, p. 14). The contrast of expectation is stark within a classroom when compared to the behavior typecast on African American males by the media. Black youth are then faced with the confusing task of how to behave within an educational setting.

Due to the nature of this research project and its focus on the literacy achievement of urban preschool students, I employ a reality pedagogy to make students owners over their own learning. In reality pedagogy, students are engaged in the curriculum by becoming co-teachers: They engage in conversations with the teacher concerning teaching practices, question the learning, take responsibility over various aspects of the learning by having "jobs" or roles to perform, and study curriculum that is imbued with culturally relevant references and connections. Reality pedagogy is one means for increasing teacher effectiveness by challenging educators to consider the youth in their classrooms and how the sociopolitical factors involved in the students' rearing and their culture factor into how they learn at school.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory places the perspectives of people of color at the center of the educational narrative, examining issues from the social, political, and historical context of race and racism (Wun, 2014). Further, critical race theory purports that the narrative of disenfranchisement and inequality surrounding the education of people of color really acts to extend "the logic of racism in the U.S. educational system" (Wun, 2014, p. 463) rather than diminish it. It asserts that race is a determining factor to success in education, despite minority and marginalized groups having sought out education as a means to improve their economic mobility (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Critical race theory contends that "a combination of various factors such as structural inequality […], poor teacher quality […], lack of cultural relevance in school instruction […], and racial re-segregation of the nation's schools […]" (Howard & Navarro, 2016, p. 255) creates huge performance disparities between White students and students of color. Despite claims that

we live in a "colorblind" world, the denial that color does in fact make a difference as "race continues to be significant in explaining inequity in the United States is that class- and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the difference (or variance) in school experience and performance" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 51).

Critical race theory asks educators to create methods of teaching that are responsive to the needs of their diverse student populations, despite the fact that nearly 80% of the American teaching force is White and middle class (Howard & Navarro, 2016, p. 260). Critical race scholars suggest that teachers be aware of the histories of the populations of their students and how that influences them, include race and history as part of the curriculum, and teach how race has created materially different outcomes for individuals, all while keeping in mind that it is not a "crusade" of a White teacher but rather an awareness that it is all part of a history that has produced unequal outcomes for individuals (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Critical race theory asks educators to bring resources into the classroom that represent a variety of local cultures and engage accounts of individuals who are typically silenced through history or literature selections (i.e., Japanese internment, Black Panthers).

Critical race theory also expects educators to teach in ways that are culturally relevant, bringing in narratives that match the demographics of their students. This also involves using language patterns in the classroom that would be familiar to students, as the purpose of education in critical race theory is not to cultivate students who are compliant to and conform with traditional education but rather to create education that engages students of color in a synergy of school, home, and community culture.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

"Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching that considers the unique cultural backgrounds of youth" (Emdin, 2011, p. 285) and allows the teacher to adapt content in order to best meet the needs of her students in order to increase engagement and student ownership of learning. This pedagogy advocates for the educator to move beyond the textbook curriculum and integrate various facets of the culture from which her students have grown up in an effort to validate her students' backgrounds (Emdin, 2011), rather than continually denigrate student diversity and further marginalize those who are already culturally disenfranchised from the educational system. The hindrance to this pedagogy is that the White, middle class educator cannot truly understand or empathize with students of color and their differing life experiences.

Culturally relevant pedagogy also reshapes the way that literacy education is conceived, with a fluid literacy framework that emphasizes the reading of every day print and text and challenges schools to avoid using "a singular focus on traditional conceptions of literacy as autonomous skills" (Larson, 2006, p. 319) to prevent the skill set from appearing irrelevant to everyday life. In the culturally relevant classroom, literacy is a form of social justice, being viewed as a "necessary prelude to collective action of effectuate social transformation" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 380). Individuals with strong literacy skills possess the ability to affect social change through civic engagement and participation.

When concerned with literacy, culturally relevant teaching also examines the purposes of the reader. Though emergent readers are given tasks that encourage reading for meaning or for enjoyment, "literacy teaching by effective teachers involves the use of print to achieve the following: [… it] lead others to problem solving; invent new

28

procedures; and, generate problems as well as solutions" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 381). In the culturally relevant curriculum, reading has a more expansive purpose and encourages greater levels of critical thinking and creativity. Reading then becomes a matter of challenging boundaries, or leading discussions, of engaging in inquiry and of becoming a catalyst for social change.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is the practice of changing instructional methods to best meet the needs of the students dependent upon the culture of the students being taught. Current and pervasive educational practice uses the culture of the teacher, White and middle class in approximately 80% of cases, to educate the students, though this culture may vary widely from the cultural norms of the increasing amount of minority students in public education. Creating a student-centric educational model involves shifting instructional methods, references, connections, and potentially even resources to match the culture of the student. The culturally responsive classroom brings in realia, signage, and content from the local community and helps draw connections to curricular content for students. It takes into account that means for communication may differ between student and teacher, and accepts that parents have different expectations of education for their children: "African American parents […] defined success as the kind of teaching that encouraged their children to *choose* academic excellence, while at the same time it allowed them to maintain a positive identification with their own heritage and background" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382).

Culturally responsive education also involves understanding the community within which students live and their cultural norms and experiences. Because "Children

learn best when teachers understand and address the variability among them" (Jackman, Beaver, & Wyatt, 2014, p. 95), it is important that children receive reading instruction that relates to their cultural and varied communication backgrounds as language and culturally are directed related to student learning outcomes. This point represents convergence between culturally responsive pedagogy and critical pedagogy, as the experience of the student in both instances is presented as important content for the course.

Technology also provides the ability for educators to produce culturally relevant instruction, as varied cultural groups often experience early language in different ways: "Teaching letters, words, songs, and music is more characteristic of black non-Hispanic groups, whereas reading and telling stories is more typical of white non-Hispanic groups" (Jackman et al., 2014, p. 135).

Culturally responsive teaching also allows learners to receive instruction that is individualized to their culture. Students from urban areas do not learn through the same methods as suburban areas. Despite the cultural differences in learners, educators who are from predominantly White, middle class, suburban areas, use techniques and create curriculum that appeal to children like themselves and disengage students from different backgrounds, despite the fact that the United States has experienced a huge increase in students of poverty and of color in public school, which creates a system of educational inequality and lack of opportunity "particularly for children of color, children of low socioeconomic status, and others who are conceptualized as culturally inferior and are 'condemned to be invisible within the scope of an extremely narrow curricular lens'" (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011, p. 123).

Additionally, there is a linguistic divergence between language use and early literacy that a student experiences in his community and in an educational setting. Using what Christopher Emdin refers to as "code switching," students must navigate the complex pathways of differences between home and school vocabulary, syntax, and tonal patterns of speech. While educators socialize children at school to "use school-based language, [children] integrate [these] new discourses into the language and literacy practices they bring from home" (Larson, 2006, p. 320), which influences the student's independence and perception not only at school but also in her community. Students need to be explicitly taught the practice of "code switching" so that they are prepared to navigate the complex nature of communication at home and at school and realize that neither practice is above the other in any social hierarchy but rather that different speech patterns may simply be appropriate in different settings.

Another aspect of culturally relevant or responsive instruction involves the approach that the educator takes to the learner. In traditional education, a hierarchy exists that presumes the teacher is the content virtuoso and students are novices awaiting instruction. Outside and prior knowledge of students is diminished and the knowledge of the teacher is treated as superior and expert. In culturally relevant teaching, students are treated as experts in their field: the field of cultural understandings. Learners are appraised as competent individuals who, though they are acquiring new skills, already have cursory knowledge and learning. This then becomes a partnership where a teacher guides them "through a process, not by trying to tell them how to do it but by leading them to discover for themselves what they knew and showing them how their new

31

knowledge linked up with the knowledge they already had" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 387).

Child-Centered and Student-Centered Learning

Culturally relevant teaching also asks "educators to think outside the box by emphasizing the need for learners to be involved in designing their own learning process" (Campbell & Robinson, 2007), consistent with student-centered learning theories. Personalization of learning through culturally responsive teaching stems from differentiation theory, though it is "not a return to child-centered theories; it is not about separating pupils to learn on their own; it is not the abandonment of a national curriculum; and it is not a license to let pupils coast at their own preferred pace of learning" (Milibrand, 2006, p. 24). Culturally relevant teaching takes state amd national curricula and makes them accessible to all students by providing the necessary scaffolding to make content comprehensible to struggling students and allowing for enrichment of accelerated learners. A student-centered learning experience shifts the way that teachers and students behave. It also requires teachers to eschew the role of lecturer for a facilitator role, helping and supporting where needed.

Historical Perspective

In order to contextualize my problem of practice and the research surrounding culturally responsive teaching, it is important to understand the long movement for civil rights in the United States. Culturally responsive teaching asks educators, most of whom are White, to understand and involve the cultures of people of color, in this study, specifically, African Americans and Hispanic Americans. Living and teaching within the context of the South, American race relations and civil rights are especially poignant

given our nation's sordid history of inequality and injustice. A historicity of literacy instruction would be incomplete without first recognizing that for over 100 years in the state of South Carolina, African Americans were legally prohibited from reading. The Slave Codes of 1740 made it illegal to teach a slave (and few Blacks were free in South Carolina) to read and to write, as "slave literacy was feared" (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 201) after a slave uprising in 1739. This code was never repealed and remained in effect until there was no longer a group of individuals that it applied to: in December 1865, the passage of the 13th Amendment brought an end to slavery in South Carolina. Though a school for freed slaves was established in the low country in 1862, the anti-literacy laws prevented the majority of African Americans in South Carolina from learning to read for 125 years.

After the end of the Civil War and slavery, South Carolina entered the Reconstruction period and schools that admitted African Americans were built in small numbers around the state. Until the state's purposive integration of all public education in 1970 (Mizell, 1974), African American students were given inadequate resources for learning, with many children of color lacking physical school buildings and attending school in local churches. Even in the 21st century, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 15% of South Carolinians are illiterate (Providing a Nationally Competitive Education for All Students, 2011) underscoring the desperate need for effective literacy instruction in the state.

A study conducted in 1966, The Equality of Educational Opportunity National Survey, "revealed that socioeconomic and ethnic groups that scored somewhat higher than others in the early grades scored much higher in later grades; and the gap or

cumulative advantage increased steadily with grade level" (Walberg & Tsai, 1983, p. 360). The aforementioned conclusion was drawn during a 1966 study that examined viewership of the popular *Sesame Street* television program that was designed as an early reading intervention for low income children. The study found that despite the television program's goal of reducing an opportunity gap between low and middle income children as a consequence of viewership, the opportunity gap actually grew according to viewership, though this was later attributed to the extensive discussions that middle class parents had with their children during and following watching the program (Walberg & Tsai, 1983). Further, in a language and literacy acquisition study from the 1980s and 1990s, research evidenced that when a young child is behind in literacy and language development, an opportunity gap will persist throughout education, despite attempts to remediate such a gap, as noted the Hart and Risley study that concluded, "the rate of vocabulary growth at age 3 was strongly associated with the scores at age 9–10" (2003, p. 8). Put simply, the opportunity gap that exists between three-year-olds not only persists but widens as the child moves towards adulthood. All of this research from the mid-twentieth century, however, undervalues the social capital and community reading practices that children bring with them to public education from the rich culture within their home communities. In fact, "the nature of such knowledge held by children from communities marginalized by constructs such as language, class, gender, and/or race is more often devalued and/or omitted within schools" (Purcell-Gates, 2013, p. 70). Children of all backgrounds come to school with rich knowledge of culture and the school then negates anything that does not fit into the European American narrative.

When "No Child Left Behind" was signed into law in 2001, it is doubtful that the intent was to delay the law's full integration for 60 years, yet that is the amount of time that it would take for 80% of U.S. students to reach the level of readiness required in order to find academic success at the collegiate level (Childress & Benson, 2013). If, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., justice delayed is justice denied, then for many American students falling behind the standards learning curve, adequate education, and access to educational resources, is a denied justice. Moreover, students from racial minorities and low income backgrounds are defined by academic measures that label them as "at-risk" of "academic failure," when in actuality a lack of appropriate learning opportunities have been provided by their instructors; educators who provide curriculum and instructional practices that "do not appear to be working well for many students as evidenced by numerous indicators" (Jobs for the Future, 2012, p. 1). Rather than requiring changes from an ill-adapted teaching model, we shift blame to students for their "underachievement."

With regards to the culturally responsive teaching practice, Gloria Ladson-Billings popularized the framework in the early 1990s as a response to what she claimed was a failing of higher education to focus on appropriately emphasizing pedagogy within teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educational theory and practice in the late 1990s emphasized "multicultural education," with James Banks developing four models for schools to adopt multicultural content into curriculums (contributions, additive, transformation, and social action), though only the most intensive model by Banks (social action) requires teachers to engage students in cultural thought and reflective action to the level that culturally responsive teaching does (Banks, 1999). In

2016, the Journal of Urban Education revisited Ladson-Billing's seminal work in "Critical Race Theory 20 Years Later," in which the authors argued that despite school reform, standards-based education, increased accountability, and Common Core curriculum, since Ladson-Billings' initial 1995 publication, "students of color continue to underachieve in comparison with their counterparts from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Howard & Navarro, 2016). What follows is a summary of the more recent research in the field of culturally responsive teaching and literacy education.

For students in poverty, education presents unequal life chances. In what is often portrayed as a meritocracy, students from poverty are faced with difficulty succeeding in school, largely due to the fact that "'federal education policy has not adequately addressed the ways in which poverty and inequality influence student learning and school performance' [...and] schools do not meet the needs of all students, especially those living in poverty" (Milner, 2013, p. 3).

Students are faced with racism and classism from the time they begin their literary journeys in preschool. Traditional literacy programs, for example *Imagine It!,* employ biased curricula that focus on cultural content that only relates to a small segment of the population. The curriculum is replete with examples of traditional nursery rhymes or 19th-century conceptions of family. However, for students of color and students from urban populations, these home–school content connections have no actual connection at all. The classic approaches to literacy later on in education focus on reading English literature, though in doing so students often are confronted by messages of disenfranchisement that they are too young to adequately interpret, while the resources also hold no personal connection, or interest, for many urban youth. For example, few

works students historically read were authored by females: "As the fifth most studied literary work in public schools, appearing in 69% of the curricula, [*To Kill a Mockingbird*] was the only book written by a woman" (Hovet & Hovet, 2001, p. 187) to appear in the standard canon of American fiction read by high school students. The more covert message students encounter is riddled with racist undertones, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* containing an allegory of the White savior coming to the rescue of the ingenuous Black male who is portrayed as innocent, even child-like. This is visible in literary analysis: "In defending Tom Robinson, Atticus has to find a way both to respect the humanity of even his most belligerent opponents and protect his innocent client" (Jones, 1996, p 147).

Not only are the texts selected for literature classes culturally insensitive but they also prove largely inaccessible due to syntax and social references unfamiliar to children of poverty. The language and literacy curriculum in mainstream education remains rooted in White, middle class experience, despite a growing minority population who experiences school in a distinctly different way than their White peers (Howard & Navarro, 2016). This creates conditions that are insensitive and exclusive for non-White students (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Consider again *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the damaging stereotypes established therein: Blacks are shown as finding success only when responding to society with "passivity and acceptance" and "know[ing] their place" (Phelps, 1994, p. 181). Moreover, "by foisting this mockingbird image on African Americans, the novel does not challenge the insidious conception of superior versus inferior 'races' [and] the notion of those meant to rule versus those meant to be ruled"

(Saney, 2003, p. 102), and thus minority students become further marginalized and disenfranchised from education.

Traditional textbook curricula that teachers employ for reading instruction, beginning as early as pre-k, are aligned to a deficit model of literacy that results in "curricular and academic disadvantage […　that asks teachers to choose] activities from the textbook series that they felt would remediate what they perceived were deficits in the children's capabilities" (Larson, 2006, p. 320). This perpetuates the idea that a student not learning along the path provided in the textbook must be deficient in knowledge because teachers assume that the pathway provided in the textbook is the correct pathway to learning reading for ALL students. In reality, students from a variety of cultural background have had different exposures to pre-reading skills. For example, a student from an urban setting may be well acquainted with rhyme scheme from listening to hip hop music, though the student may not have had exposure with that rhyme scheme in nursery rhymes.

While a textbook deficiency model would direct the teachers to instruct the student in rhyme scheme, thus negating his experience and knowledge of much more complex rhyme patterns through music as opposed to Mother Goose, using technology in the classroom can allow the educator to connect the student's expertise and experience to a similar concept in more mainstream education and create meaningful connections between school and the student's outside world. It also then becomes possible "to improve the cultural responsiveness of instruction while addressing students' attainment of critical subject matter and curriculum standards" (Duran, 1998, p. 220). One way that teachers are, however, meeting the needs of their students from poverty is through

language and literacy initiatives, as research has shown that these competencies empower the learner to transcend poverty when adequately mastered (Milner, 2013). Technology provides teachers with a means for providing culturally relevant instruction to students.

Culturally Responsive Instruction-Related Research

Gloria Ladson-Billings re-examined her 1990s research that led to her development of culturally responsive teaching in "Liberatory Consequences of Literacy" (1992). In her review, she discovered that a commonality of effective teachers of students of color was a strong sense of purpose and how society had influenced the expectations that education had for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1992). She was surprised by the teachers' deep conviction to help their students see the inequalities that existed in their local communities and the world and in the teacher's desire to "prepare students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382).

Geneva Gay (2001) develops a framework for preparing teachers for culturally responsive teaching through preservice education programs that provide them with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills in order to effectively instruct ethnically diverse students. For the purposes of her work, Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as, "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (2001, p. 106). By basing classroom instruction within a framework of experiences that students can relate to, students find more interest, appeal, and connectivity to the learning, making it more meaningfully understood. Gay writes that five elements are essential to preparing teachers for culturally responsive classroom instruction: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity,

including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2001). All of this develops a critical consciousness in teachers concerning the power of the teacher in using curriculum to convey important values and information about diversity.

Another area where culturally responsive teaching departs from the standard curriculum relates to instruction. As the curriculum is modified to be more relevant to the student population, so must assessments. In her 1998 work, "Culturally Responsive Assessment: Development Strategies and Validity Issues," Audrey Qualls raised questions concerning the culturally responsive assessments developed by classroom teachers and whether they possess external validity. She concluded that while there are some issues regarding breadth of content assessed, the concerns regarding classroom assessment validity are minor in comparison with the issues surrounding the development of culturally responsive educators (Qualls, 1998).

One area of interest to culturally responsive teachers is how the pedagogy will be expanded across the teaching practice in order to benefit the largest number of individuals. In his 2000 article, Peter Murrell, Jr. developed a framework for preparing exemplary urban teachers. Murrell noted that one of the biggest challenges universities face in transforming teacher candidates' perceptions of race, class, and ethnicity is the structural equality still present in America (p. 339). The three criteria that he developed to effectively shift the number of teachers prepared for culturally responsive education are: to develop communities of practice to develop linguistically and ethnically diverse curriculum, increase the number of teachers of color whose teaching practices are

effective to urban communities, and increase the amount of contextualized resources that educators have that are knowledgeable regarding urban communities (Murrell, 2000).

Culturally responsive educators have also sought ways to enrich instruction in the classroom through the use of technology. In "Learning and Technology: Implications for Culturally Responsive Instructional Activity and Models of Achievement," Richard Duran proposed that technology can be used to provide culturally responsive curriculum that still addresses important curricular content of the standard curriculum (1998, p. 226). In his research, students designed their own web pages to present important historical events and individuals that related to their own cultural heritage. Although this type of assessment would not be appropriate for preschool students, it does convey how technology can be used to enrich student learning in a unique way.

Research has also been done to illuminate how culturally responsive instruction influences learning in connection to neuroscience. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain,* Zaretta Hammond investigated the learning conditions necessary in order for a student's brain to optimize connections for learning within the brain (Hammond, 2015). Hammond wrote that neuroscience has shown that "cultural relevance is the key to enabling cognitive processing necessary for learning" (Hammond, 2015, p. vi), especially for students of color, because it engages the brain's reticular activating system that is responsible for attention and alertness (Hammond, 2015). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching activates the brain's limbic system, creating an emotional connection and a feeling of safety, which leads to an optional brain environment for learning (Hammond, 2015).

Culturally responsive instruction relies heavily on the emotional investment of the teacher and the affective environment within the classroom. In "Emotionally Supportive Classroom Contexts for Young Latino Children in Rural California," researchers discuss the socioemotional wellness necessary for academic success within a classroom. Despite Latino children entering public school with strong social and emotional competencies, their relative advantage declines the longer there are in the US educational system (Leslie, Jensen, & Ramirez, 2014). The author's write that in order to effectively provide culturally responsive instruction for Latino students, the classroom teacher should "demonstrate care and respect for students and their language, experiences, families, and communities" (Leslie, Jensen, & Ramirez, 2014, p. 506) rather than as group prescriptions aimed at incorporating the natal culture of the countries of origin of students. Moreover, culturally responsive teaching is consistent with the more global view of education to include manners and moral teachings, as opposed to an American view of education as more strictly book learning (Villenas &Deyhle, 1999).

Literacy Instruction-Related Research

Early childhood literacy encompasses reading practices of individuals from birth through kindergarten and includes all cultural and communication practices that influence early reading and language acquisition (Jackman, Beaver, & Wyatt, 2014, p. 94). While "Emergent literacy in young children is a process of developing awareness about reading and writing before they can actually read or write" (Jackman, Beaver, & Wyatt, 2014, p. 95), through the telling of stories, early readers begin to acquire understandings of print and text structure, while also obtaining an increase in vocabulary and developing an attitude towards literature as a whole. Storytelling and oral communication build the

pathways for emergent readers to be able to communicate themselves orally and through print as they build understandings of reading and writing for the future. The earliest literacy acquisition comes through the students' exposure to and participation in language practices within his or her community.

Early childhood literacy and emergent reading begins before students are able to comprehend any print with young children developing their "visual literacy skills before they can even read […] by stating the literal and concrete, children begin to think about what they see in an illustration and, in turn, describe what they think will happen next in the book they are reading" (Jackman et al., 2014, p. 95). By using pictures and engaging emergent readers through questioning and connection-making techniques, educators are able to teach reading skills before a reader can recognize letters or words. Children need a plethora of experiences and interactions with text and print before beginning to read, though more important than textual interactions is oral communication. Patterning dialogue with children before they can speak is a precursor to language development, and "because the brain uses the innate language pathway to learn to read, the development of language is an essential precursor to reading … Speaking is a natural development, reading is not. Reading is an acquired skill" (Jackman et al., 2014, p. 100).

An area of literacy instruction of more recent research relates to how the brain develops concepts of literacy. In the book, *Thirty Million Words: Building a Child's Brain*, neuroscientist Dana Suskind detailed how pathways in the brain acquire language. She noted that the brain is done physically developing by age three and that the foundation for all future thinking and learning occurs within the brain by age three (Suskind, Suskind, & Suskind, 2015). The language pathways in the brain begin closing

by three to four years of age and, although the brain possesses the ability to develop after this point, much of its neuroplasticity (the ability of the brain to respond to new stimuli) is gone past age four (Suskind et al., 2015). A child's eventual processing speed in learning is largely influenced by the richness or poorness of the language environment that the child grew up with from birth to age three (Suskind et al., 2015). This means that a child with less language exposure prior to kindergarten will have slower recall for information that he already knows and an increased time to make a connection to new information. This is important because "if you have to work hard at recognizing a word you already know, you also miss recognizing the word following it, making learning exceedingly difficult" (Suskind et al., 2015). In a 2005 study examining socioeconomic status and cultural influences on language acquisition, Erika Hoff studied maternal directed speech and child vocabulary growth in both the United States and China. While she found that only five percent of language development was impacted by a child's SES, maternal vocabulary was the strongest predictor of a child's ultimate vocabulary acquisition and that parents use of "varied and complex language [. . .] support normative or advanced language development in children" (Perkins, Finegood, & Swain, 2013, p. 14).

Additionally, a child's exposure to language at a young age (leading up to kindergarten) influences that child's future literacy skills. In a study on language used within the home, Hart and Risley (1995) discovered that by age 3, children from professional households had vocabulary of approximately 1,116 words, while children from poverty had an average vocabulary of only 525 words—a 591 word difference (Suskind et al., 2015). The researchers also followed up on the children within their case

study at age six to discover that the amount of talk children had been exposed to between birth and age three "also predicted their language skills and school test scores at ages nine and ten" (Suskind et al., 2015, p. 36).

Beyond quality exposure to vocabulary outside of isolation, language exposure and acquisition is affected by stress levels within a home environment . When a child is subjected to a stressed environment, his or her salivary cortisol levels increase and introduce stress hormones into the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, which weaken an individual's working memory and executive function (Perkins, Finegood, & Swain, 2013). Then, "dysregulation of stress response in educational settings likely interferes with the acquisition of language both directly by distraction and through adverse effects of executive function development" (Perkins, Finegood, & Swain, 2013, p. 11). This is to say, when a child is in a stressed environment continually, it hinders the brains ability to learn and to recall information.

Another area of interest in literacy instruction is the relationship between early childhood education and the acquisition of culturally relevant reading sources. Souto-Manning and Vasquez (2011) discussed trends in early childhood learning and the lack of diversity in literacy resources beginning with those intended for pre-kindergarten onward. They noted that due to the homogeneity of reading resources for early learners, "students of color are condemned to be invisible within the scope of an extremely narrow curricular lens" (Souto-Manning & Vasquez, 2011), and that despite efforts to create an online learning collaborative for teachers to share diverse instructional resources, there was a death of resources available to promote literacy from ages 0–5.

One element of providing culturally responsive instruction to urban students is teaching the students academic language and structure in relationship to home language; in other words, the necessity of explicitly teaching students about the "code switching" that occurs with language between academia and the real world. Joann Larson (2006) argued a student's identity in early education is linked to her language and literacy learning and that as children are socialized to use academic language and school-based vernacular, they change the way their identity is shaped. In order to better connect literacy learning in the classroom to literacy experiences at home, teachers can involve students' knowledge of local context in literacy instruction and shift instruction from autonomous to multiple literacies (Larson, 2006).

The work of Carol Ann Tomlinson points to the importance of differentiation, identifying research from The National Association for the Education of Young Children that emphasizes the importance of differentiation in the classroom: "it is the responsibility of schools to adjust to the developmental needs and levels of the children they serve, and schools should not expect children to adapt to a system that does not address their individual needs" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 183). Tomlinson asserted that differentiation is a means to maintain "equity and excellence in contemporary schools" (2005, p. 183) and to keep from educationally disenfranchising students of poverty. The purpose of differentiation should be to "move from one size-fits-all classrooms to classrooms that are far more personalized to address the diversity reflected in the classrooms" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 184). Culturally responsive reading curriculum adapts literacy best practices to "fit" the needs of a diverse student population.

Classroom differentiation is also based on researching centering on learning styles. The term *learning style* is used to refer to "the way individuals perceive and process information have been recognized as being an important factor related to the presentation of learning materials" (Yang, Hwan, & Yang, 2013, p. 185). More recent work on differentiation has focused on integrating several differentiation theories (cognitive, stylistic, etc.) into the differentiation in the classroom for each student, as "researchers have indicated the importance of taking multiple personalization factors into account in order to deliver effective learning systems to individual students" (Yang et al., 2012, p. 186).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed research relative to the theoretical framework underlying my problem of practice. It also contextualized issues of literacy and culturally responsive teaching within a historical framework and reviewed relevant research to the problem of practice. The next chapter outlines the methodology for my research, establishes the context for research, introduces data collection methods and curricular design for the implementation, and outlines the structure I employed for culturally responsive teaching.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Overview of Problem of Practice

The purpose of this action research study was to teach early literacy and phonemic skills to urban preschool students, aged 3–5 years, providing culturally responsive instruction to children who did not receive literacy instruction in their classroom. It also examined whether culturally responsive teaching could be used to effectively increase student achievement on an early emergent literacy skills assessment. The problem of practice addressed in this study was that a group of preschool aged students attending a state-funded daycare program did not receive literacy instruction prior to kindergarten, leaving them less kindergarten-ready with regard to literacy skills than their peers enrolled in the public school pre-k program. The intent of the curricular implementation was to provide opportunities to increase literacy, better preparing these students for kindergarten. In order to address the problem of practice and to assist students in their development of a solid foundation for kindergarten literacy, I focused on how to provide targeted literacy instruction through a culturally responsive framework.

Research Question

This research study seeks to answer the following question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-Kindergarten, urban youth?

a. Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

b. What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

Theoretical Framework

The central focus for my theoretical framework was culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching asks teachers to consider the varied perspectives and life experiences of ethnically diverse students and integrate those into the curriculum to make learning more meaningful to the students and increase achievement when students are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters (Gay, 2002). The purpose of culturally responsive teaching is to improve academic achievement for ethnically diverse students by increasing instructional capacity in the classroom through preparing teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to relate to their students and find more suitable instructional resources that students might not be forced to ignore their own culture in favor of European American cultural norms in order to learn (Gay, 2002). Though there are many means by which a teacher employs culturally responsive instruction, the main tenets of culturally responsive teaching employed in my study were: (a) providing affirmation and creating a culture of high expectations for learning, (b) student centered instruction with active teaching, (c) the importance of interpersonal relationships, (d) the cultural re-orientation of the teacher, and (e) reshaping the curriculum.

Critical race theory helped govern this study, as I specifically sought to redress the educationally ingrained racism in a Southern coastal town by affecting marginalized

students in one state funded preschool program. My research focused on how to help children transcend the barriers they faced because of unequal life opportunities as preschool students.

Chapter Organization

In this chapter, I review information pertinent to my methodology, beginning with the rationale for selecting a qualitative case study model using an action research design. Additionally, in order to provide context for readers, I provide a description of the participants and their background to help readers understand the necessity of a modified curriculum meant to meet the needs of diverse learners.

After providing a framework for understanding the context of my research, I detail my research methods, including which data collection methods I used and how those were consistent with those of a qualitative case study, especially in a setting working with young children. Lastly, I provide a description of my methods for data analysis and information concerning any ethical concerns arising from a study working with children.

Research Design: Methodology

Action Research

Action research is, by definition, any research that a practitioner undertakes in order to improve his or her practice (Corey, 1954). In my specific case, this means that as an educator, I identified an issue I saw in education through working in my own classroom and implemented a change in order to attempt to remediate this issue. I used action research to study an authentic classroom environment in order to improve the quality and efficacy of instruction occurring therein (Mertler, 2016).

Action research is well suited for this study because I was focused on crafting culturally responsive early reading interventions and implementing these strategies with a group of preschool students. As action research seeks to solve a specific problem, it was useful in this study, which set out to examine ways in which a student's reading skills could be increased by helping them to develop basic early literacy skills (i.e., early emergent and phonemic) in order to provide a foundational knowledge with which to enter kindergarten.

Additionally, action research focuses on changes at one specific site. In this study, I was focused on one preschool classroom at a federally funded childcare site. One of the goals of action research is to offer a strategic, organized process for current educational practice to be refined to become more representative of best practices (Mertler, 2016). For this study, I focused on improving instruction in a classroom that otherwise lacked research-based, targeted instruction in literacy.

Action research allowed me to use my literacy instruction background to interact with and assist the classroom teacher at the childcare site in order to help her develop her own instructional strategies that in turn would allow her to provide quality early literacy instruction after I completed my research. Furthermore, action research has long been a tool used to enact changes to aid disenfranchised students and is "an ideal mechanism for the advocacy of social justice within educational contexts" (Mertler, 2016). In this instance, it allowed me to enter a setting with bright, systemically underserved preschoolers and provide them with quality instruction so that when they enter kindergarten, they possessed literacy skills commensurate with their peers who attended the public school pre-k program.

Additionally, case study research is iterative and requires cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting. I initially entered the classroom with preconceived ideas concerning how instruction would function within the classroom. During the research period, after spending time interacting with the children and learning about their backgrounds and environment, I experienced a paradigm shift, from which I developed a culturally responsive instructional unit focused on rhyme and emergent literacy skills. Then, after implementing this portion of the unit, I further modified instruction for the remainder of the unit that focused on phonemes.

Case Study Research

With a background in English and teaching reading, I approach the world from a narrative point of view. I have always been interested in understanding the "complete" picture of an event and often find research lacking when it comes to describing the individuals involved and the setting in which a study takes place. It was important to me, in conducting my action research, to give readers a holistic view of my research and a case study allowed me to do so. By employing a case study structure, I was able to provide a detailed descriptions of my research site and participants. Further, I could spend time qualitatively looking at a curriculum and how to design and implement it to best meet the needs of a specific group of students. In writing, using a case study allowed me to provide vignettes that embodied my use of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

Additionally, this curricular implementation worked well as a case study because it allowed me to closely look at the skills of one small group of students and understand how their backgrounds and experiences shaped their literacy experience. I was able to get

an intimate look into staff and family dynamics and how those impacted the young students with which I worked and then share that information. Though case study research is not generalizable, there is certainly the potential that other researchers could extrapolate similarities between this case and their own experience so that they might be better informed in finding curriculum materials to best meet the needs of their students. My research question focuses on the implementation of a culturally responsive teaching curriculum developed with no-to-low cost materials that would be widely available to a childcare preschool teacher who might not otherwise have the educational background to design her own materials or the knowledge to use such materials with efficacy.

Data in this implementation was collected through a pre-post skills assessment administered by the researcher and through researcher conversations and observations as part of gathering data for descriptive statistics for my case study. Also, a case study attempts to illuminate a decision or set of decisions—in this case pre-K literacy instructional materials and methods, and why they were selected to address the needs of the target population, how they were implemented in the classroom, and what the result was on early literacy skills. The use of a case study allowed me to study the context of this implementation with great detail, as the context was an important factor in determining curricular resources so that the materials meet the diverse needs of the study participants.

By using a case study design, I was able to examine qualitative research that further allowed me to understand the complexities of the learning environment I was entering, while simultaneously developing, implementing, and studying the effect of the curriculum implementation in the most detailed way possible. Additionally, this research

uses a critical theory perspective to focus on empowering at-risk preschool students to become more proficient in early literacy skills so that they are able to transcend the constraint of low-quality early education placed upon them due to the poverty into which they were born; it also allows the use of a theory lens is associated with qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Context and Positionality

Context and Participants

The case in this research study is bound as a classroom of seven pre-kindergarten students. The case examines the students' emergent literacy skills, primarily focusing on the set of skills attributing to a child's phonemic awareness, which is a metalinguistic skill that allows a child to develop more complex literacy skills (i.e., analysis and reading fluency) later in their academic careers (Brown, 2014). Excluded from the case, but present within the context of this study, are three other students in the classroom. These students were excluded due to the infrequency of their presence during the data collection period, as two of them were only present during the last ten minutes of instruction and the other two were present so infrequently that they missed the pre-assessment, intermittent assessments, and the post assessment.

The study takes place within a federally funded child care attended by students age 0–5 for varying durations throughout the day. The daycare is located in a high-crime, low income, urban part of a coastal southern city. The child care center has been in existence for approximately four years, and more than 90% of students in the facility attend through federal assistance programs. It is divided into four classrooms, the oldest of which receives an hour of instruction each day, broken up into a 20-minute circle time

and 40 minutes of rotating students through one academic station meant to reinforce the learning of the week. The center has received several grants to help improve instruction through teacher development, but a high turnover in staff makes it difficult for consistent implementation. Child care workers at this facility make slightly more than minimum wage and have no educational requirement, only background checks required by the Department of Social Services.

The classroom itself contained a carpeted area with various play-based learning centers (musical instruments, kitchen, baby dolls, dollhouse) and a tiled area with two tables for learning and snacks. The tiled area regularly had food left on it from various points in the day.. The carpet was vacuumed, though it had various stains on it. One time when I arrived, there was a large wet spot underneath where one child had napped, and I was instructed not to touch it because a child had urinated on the carpet, though the urine spot was not disinfected or cleaned during the duration of my stay. The walls were brightly painted and displayed current student craft projects, though they lacked literacy tools like the alphabet, word walls, or printed instructional materials. The classroom had two windows, both of which had mini blinds that were broken and so remained closed. One day when I arrived, I was surprised to see a child's chair sitting in the window, and I was informed that the room was overly warm and as the window was non-functional, a chair had to be placed in the window to keep it open. The classroom possessed a small classroom library of approximately 15 books when I began my study, many of which were missing pages; one-third of the books were picture/word books usually associated with children that are just learning to speak and used as a vocabulary building skill. I inquired to the teacher about the existence of any other books in the classroom and she

opened a cabinet that had 10 more and told me that was where the "good" books were kept so that the children did not ruin them.

The social-emotional climate of the classroom ranged from subdued to hostile. Though I could tell that the teacher cared about the students, she often voiced her frustration at them and about them concerning behavioral issues. In one instance, a child was loudly reprimanded and the tense silence that followed was palpable (even I felt awkward). Children were given short directives and were not engaged often in conversation. The radio was almost always playing the top 40 hits station in the background, making it difficult to focus. That being said, after I had been in the environment for 10 or so doing visitations, the children would run up and hug me goodbye before leaving. They regularly shouted upon my arrival and asked about how my daughter and I were doing. The children demonstrated a great capacity for love and a desire to have meaningful relationships with adults. They readily shared information about their lives and interests.

The curriculum implemented in the classrooms at the time of this study (fall of 2017) was assembled by an individual who had been in the childcare industry for more than ten years and had participated in state-run childcare courses through the state's department of social services, but who did not possess a degree or specific training in the field of education. She provided resources to three separate daycare centers and used the same curriculum to each, despite dramatically different socioeconomic and racial demographics between each center. As an outsider to local culture and community of this study, she provided resources that the classroom teachers were often unsure of how to

implement. Because of this uncertainty, many classroom teachers decided to forego any implementation.

The classroom teacher within this case study had an Associate's degree from the local technical college, with the primary focus in her coursework in business. She had been in the same classroom for one year and had been identified by the child care center owner as having a "desire to help the children" but the teacher self-identified as "not knowing how to teach these kids what they need to know.". She attended a local high school and possessed a deep understanding of the economic and social challenges facing students in her class, as she had personally encountered similar educational outcomes and experiences as a child. Her child was a member of the class, and her desire to be with her daughter during the day, though still necessitating employment, led her to seek out a job in child care.

The study group was made up of students in the 3–5-year-old classroom, present for between eight and ten hours each day. Though the class fluctuated in attendance, there were regularly seven students present, five boys and two girls. The names given in this study are all pseudonyms. The first student, Jamar, is the only one of seven to come from a two-parent household and is also the only student who has a college-educated parent (a nurse). Another male student, Jose, lives with his grandmother and aunt, as his mother is recently deceased due to a drug overdose; he does not have contact with his father. The third male, Lebron, lives with his mother, who is unemployed. The last two male students, KeShawn and Deonte, are brothers and live in a homeless shelter with their mother who works part time at a beachwear store. The two remaining female students, Kalisha and Jaylin, live with their mothers; one mother is the classroom teacher at the

childcare facility and the other student's mother is unemployed and seeking education part-time at a technical school. An eighth student, Crystal, joined the class mid-way through the instructional unit and missed the pre-assessment but data available on her is present in Chapter 4 concerning phonics instruction. Crystal comes from a two-parent home, in which her college-educated mother is a music teacher and her father is a police officer.

Two students joined the class for after-school care shortly before I left the research site each day, as they are enrolled in special education preschool classes through the public school system. One additional female student was present for a partial week every third week because her custody is split between both parents; she was only present when visiting her mother during the instances where her mother is also working. I did not include these students in study results because of their limited time present during the implementation.

Further, context is deeply important in understanding the experiences and outcomes of the preschoolers with whom I worked, and the need for transformative learning experiences, given the lack of experiences allotted them in their current educational setting. Because the societal norms in this Southern coastal city impacts learning opportunities for children due to lack of regulations governing education required to teach in a preschool, critical race theory can be used to identify how the depth of life experiences experienced by these urban preschoolers influenced their learning. Critical race theory also takes into account the structural issues in education, such as teacher training and knowledge, which became an important consideration so that the students could continue to benefit from my research after my implementation had ended.

I worked with the classroom teacher to provide her with materials and experience to provide students with greater learning opportunities after my instructional units were complete, and she provided me with a greater depth of understanding into the lives of urban preschool students. Without the classroom teacher explicitly explaining the culture and background of many of the students in the classroom, I would have been ill-equipped to meet the needs of all of the learners in the room.

Positionality

In using a culturally responsive teaching framework to analyze my data, it is important to first position myself as a researcher. My background in literacy came from the six years I spent as a middle school English and social studies teacher invested in reading skill instruction, along with the three years I spent writing English curriculum for my district aimed at providing standards-based instruction that also improved reading test scores. After leaving public school to teach preschool to spend more time with my own child, I spent three years teaching reading to four-year-olds at a private, Christian preschool.

One potential issue in using culturally responsive teaching as a means to analyze data is that as a White, middle-aged, affluent female, I lack first-hand knowledge of the life experiences of African American preschoolers in poverty. Culturally responsive teaching theorists contend that only researchers of color can understand the unique experience of students of color, and that as a White researcher, I have benefitted from White privilege and the socially material benefits that bolster and sustain that privilege (Brown, 2016). Additionally, since culturally responsive teaching seeks to "excavate how race operates in society and in schooling" (Brown University, 2018, p. 13), despite a

desire to help achieve the critical race theory goal of racial redress and equality, I am very aware that I am coming in as an outsider to the culture established within the daycare classroom and the culture of the local community at large. As a researcher, it is important that I explicitly explore my biases as a White female in a classroom and how my experiences and understandings differ from my students. The qualitative data collected as a part of this study is mediated through me as a human instrument, and so I needed to be very careful to reflect on the observations I made within the classroom and how my biases affect them

Further, given the nature of this study, I began as a physical outsider to the group, and as I spent time getting to know the teachers and students in order to develop an appropriate curriculum and implemented and took notes about implementation, my role shifted from an outsider observing the group to an insider implementing curriculum. This transition makes my implementation notes more subject to bias. In this project, I was a learner along with being an educator. I possessed knowledge of literacy instruction but not of how to provide culturally relevant instruction to the students and, initially, wasn't completely familiar with the culture of the group. Despite learning immensely along the way and trying my best to integrate this new learning of my own into instruction, there are certainly mistakes I made, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through a pre-post assessment and a research journal. Data was collected Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during the data collection period from 2–3 pm. I hand recorded all data either immediately (in the case of assessments) or immediately following (in the case of descriptive and evaluative notes) the data collection

period each session. I also conducted individual formal and group informal assessments. I administered the pre-post assessment during a regular school day at the research site. I worked with students individually for 3–5 minutes before I began the instructional unit and after I had completed the unit. The assessment took place on the same carpet where I taught the lessons in "circle time," and the teacher and other students were present but occupied across the room during the assessment. The following sections discuss the types of tools used for data collection in greater detail.

Existing Data Collection Tools

I administered a general pre-assessment and post-assessment to students individually at the start and end of the data collection period. Assessments were completely verbal and lasted approximately four minutes with each student. The assessment was a condensed version of the Early Literacy Assessment in *Literacy Assessment and Intervention for Classroom Teachers* by Beverly DeVries (2017). I removed several questions in order to make the assessment shorter for students so I would not lose their focus and because the questions went beyond the scope of what I had time to teach during the intervention window. The questions were meant to gauge a student's readiness for reading in kindergarten and are all focused on early literacy skills divided into categories, as discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

The pre-post assessment tested students' literacy abilities related to concepts of print, early emergent literacy, concepts of writing, and distinguishing rhyme. Students also were asked to identify the letter and letter name for the following letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, J. Frequent, formal assessment is not developmentally

appropriate for this age group, so I limited the major assessment to the start and completion of the implementation only.

Depending on the section of the assessment, I used an unfamiliar book to elicit responses concerning the concepts of print, early emergent literacy, and concepts of writing so that students had a concrete object about which they could answer questions (e.g., I would hand the child the book and asked which was the correct way to hold it, where I should start to read, etc.). I had printed hard copies of my assessment questions so that I could mark responses on the chart by hand as the children answered questions. I marked answers to the questions as "yes" or "no," as each question represented the students ability to master a skill and whether the skill present or not present. For the phoneme portion of the assessment, I had printed cards with the capital letter on each card and I asked the children to identify the name of the letter and the sound that it made. I recorded this information on a printed spreadsheet.

Self-Generated Data Collection Tools

Mini assessments centered on rhyme and phonemes were administered before and after the units of instruction during the study period. For example, in the rhyming phase of implementation, the skill of identifying matching vs. non-matching sets of rhyming and non-rhyming pairs was presented to students, and I noted which students correctly identified each pair. I recorded results by hand on index cards and then documented them digitally into a spreadsheet at a later date. Identification of rhyming pairs also happened

Research Journal

After each lesson, I went home and wrote down my thoughts, experiences, and a summary of what went on during the learning session that day. Journal entries were

written within two to four hours of the classroom session and typed directly into a secure document. The journal was collected as a narrative of the implementation that occurred, as a journal is also an excellent way to provide the narrative text for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The journal entries include stories and information shared by the classroom teacher with me because "individuals need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 157). Additionally, after each learning session, I added direct quotes from students during the day that I wrote down on note cards during my research.

Limitations

There are some challenges associated with obtaining data from preschool-aged children. For example, since students do not yet read or write, they are not able to complete surveys on their classroom experiences. Short attention spans, an inability to participate effectively in a group dialogue, and the inability to consider topics abstractly as opposed to concretely also make it impossible to hold focus groups. Additionally, as described more fully in the following section on observation, there was initially a low amount of trust towards me from the classroom teacher, and she declined to be recorded during any discussions. Although trust increased with me as a researcher, she still expressed a general distrust towards administration at her workplace and asked that no recordings be made, despite my assurance that all information would remain confidential.

<center>**Research Procedure**</center>

Observation

As part of culturally responsive teaching, it is imperative that the educator possesses explicit knowledge concerning the cultural diversity of the student population

in order to meet the educational needs of an ethnically diverse classroom (Gay, 2002). Therefore, before developing a curriculum for students, I spent a month observing the classroom and interacting with students and teachers. I came during the same time of day that I would spend instructing children and engaged for the first several weeks in entirely non-educational practices with the children. I helped them clean up their bedding after their nap times, served the children snack alongside their teacher, and sat down with the children at their snack table to talk with them while they ate. They talked to me about their interests and their families and asked me about my interests and family. I regularly played preschool games with the children, such as "duck, duck, goose," and observed what their classroom structure was like along with their daily routine. This holistic approach to getting to know the children allowed me to observe and learn from the communication patterns between students, learning styles, interests outside of school, and protocols for interacting with adults inside an educational setting, all of which contribute to the student's culture (Gay, 2002). Classroom instruction for culturally responsive teaching relies as much on multicultural strategies as it does on content (Gay, 2002), and so by better understanding the children, I could better understand what learning strategies would be effective for them.

I talked with the classroom teacher about her background and experience, and she shared much of the information that was provided within the context and participant section of this chapter. Working with the classroom teacher also helped to build rapport, as there was a distrust present when I first entered the classroom. Further, on my first day of observation, the classroom teacher asked me "why exactly [I was] there" and "what, exactly, [I was] planning to do, anyway." The tone felt not so much or curious as

accusatory. At this particular daycare center, all of the employees were Black, though the owner was White. As the owner had arranged for me to come into this teacher's classroom, there was a real feeling of tension when I first arrived—I represented not only a connection to the teacher's employer (with whom the classroom teacher had engaged in several disagreements), but also represented the only White adult in the building. It took time for a relationship of trust to be established and for the teacher to feel comfortable working with me. Trust is a fundamentally important part of a culturally responsive teaching framework, as trust is required to build a social-emotional partnership for learning (Hammond, 2015).

Design and Implementation of Curriculum

In her book *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson Billings sets forth a framework for culturally responsive teaching, which Brown University also recommended as a method for effective teaching and learning (Brown University, 2018). The criteria for culturally responsive teaching include: positive perspectives on parents, communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and the teacher as facilitator (Brown, 2018). In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*: *Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, Zaretta Hammond (2015) also adds to the list for culturally responsive teaching traits: creating meaningful relationships, establishing learning partnership alliances to foster independence, and cultivating an academic mindset. In order to narrow my focus, as I only had a few weeks for my implementation, I selected five of the aforementioned indicators, combining several to create five areas of focus: (a) affirmation and creating a culture of high expectations, (b)

student centered instruction with active teaching, (c) the importance of interpersonal relationships, (d) the re-orientation of the teacher, and (e) reshaping curriculum. These indicators are explained in detail in Chapter 4 during my discussion of data.

In order to develop the most influential curriculum possible, I researched what literacy skills are most necessary for early learners, ultimately following the recommendations set forth by the National Early Literacy Panel as being the most necessary for later reading success (early emergent literacy skills, concepts of print, concepts of writing, and phonics). Next, I looked at how to integrate technology into instruction that was both low cost and appealing to diverse students. Finally, I researched how to engage preschoolers in reading who were otherwise uninterested in being read to through a culturally responsive framework by using meaningful experiences from my students everyday lives to help them connect to the text (Algozzine, O'Shea, & Obiakor, 2009). The selection of materials in this study was of particular importance: Research on picture books has found that students identify best with stories in which the characters look and act more like they do, yet the propensity of picture books feature White, middle-class characters, leaving youth of color in poverty little to identify with. The selected skills were then used to develop a culturally responsive curriculum that students could identify with and engage in after I had spent enough time working with the student population to understand how best to meet their unique learning needs as individuals.

To improve instruction, I spent time researching best practices in early literacy and then selected materials and planned instruction to meet the specific needs of the classroom. During implementation, I modeled quality instruction, debriefed with the classroom teacher after each lesson to help with her understanding of instructional

strategies, and provided resources for the classroom teacher to use. This also helped to increase rapport as time went on because the classroom teacher was able to see that questions she had were not passed back to her employer and that I had a desire to help her for the purpose of increasing instruction in an environment my own child had once been a part of and not for some egoistic reasons of my own devices.

In designing a curriculum for implementation in the pre-K classroom where this study took place, cost was a major concern. Since the classroom was part of a child care center, spending priority was not given to educational materials. The center had a great selection of toys, which can certainly teach children through play, but lacked early childhood learning resources (calendars, alphabet visuals, a whiteboard, etc.) and literacy materials. Reading curricula are expensive, require professional development to accurately implement, and rely upon some specialized knowledge of the educator. As the daycare centered lacked funding, staffing hours for training, and education related knowledge from staff, the curriculum needed to be relatively inexpensive and accessible to teachers. I gathered two sets of materials from a combination of online teacher resources: materials to teach rhyming skills and materials to teach the most basic level of phonics (letter recognition and sound).

I first focused on what types of literacy skills were most important for preschools. I chose to focus my implementation on teaching the study participants phonological awareness (by recognizing rime in words) and phonemic awareness (through learning to recognize the printed letters A-G, and J, and their associated phoneme). Additionally, I taught them early literacy skills focused on concepts of print and concepts of writing. These are considered in early literacy to be the most fundamental reading skills and to

provide students with the strongest foundation for additional literacy learning later on and those with the greatest transfer and retention. Some of these skills include: being able to distinguish between images and text (Shanahan, 2012) and having an understanding of how print functions within a book (Brown, 2014).

The first half of my instructional unit focused on teaching rhyme and employed Dr. Seuss literature and focused on rhyming pairs that went with the stories. Though Dr. Seuss may seem more "mainstream" and less culturally relevant than some of the materials I used with the focus on phonemes, O'Shea and Obiakor (2008) promoted the use of Dr. Seuss specifically in *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction* as an excellent resource for "beginning level reading materials that have predictable features, such as rhyming and repeated phrases." They also noted that Dr. Seuss books are enjoyed by most readers, despite the fact that some of the titles are representative of racial bias, such as *The Sneeches*, and represent an oversimplification of complex social issues (Ford, 2005). I avoided any of the Seuss titles that contained political connections to, thereby, also avoid retrenchment of racism in children's literature with a new generation of early readers. I used the books *Green Eggs and Ham, The Cat and the Hat, There's a Wocket in My Pocket,* and *One Fish Two Fish, Red Fish Blue Fish.* For phonics, I developed lessons for the letters: A, B, C, D, E, F, and J, not only because most of the children knew at least the first half of the alphabet song but also because all of the children in the class had at least one of these letters in their name, which made letter recognition more simple.

Next, I looked to address what types of digital literacy materials appealed to urban preschoolers in order to bring a 21st-century element into the classroom. Knowing that my research site had little budget to use on materials, I previewed several hours of

content that was free on YouTube. After having worked with and observing the class for several weeks before designing a curriculum, I had noticed that the children really enjoyed listening to music but had not had the opportunity to have music in the classroom for instructional purposes. The radio was on in the classroom as a constant background, and the children danced when familiar songs came on with a strong beat. I incorporated music into instruction and found songs for each letter of the alphabet on YouTube (a series of phonemic alphabet songs by the content producer "Have Fun Teaching," where each letter was introduced individually) that used more of a hip-hop beat in connection with the letter. I selected hip hop specifically not because all students of color in the classroom necessarily preferred it, but rather because it was a familiar art form to the students, and therefore more engaging (Stairs, 2007). This helped children to want to sing along and seemed to make the songs more memorable as well. Additionally, I noticed much of the music contained syncopation, which the Center for Black Music Research noted is a "paradigm [in music] commonplace to sub-Saharan African cultures and in a great deal of African-American music" (Brothers, 1997, p. 173).

As part of a culturally responsive curriculum, I selected materials that students could connect with better than traditional print materials. For literature selection, when working with the letters of the alphabet, I selected picture books where the main characters were culturally and ethnically diverse. Many of the main characters were African American, and the stories revolved around situations with which these students, all of whom lived in an urban location and lived below the poverty line, could more readily identify. For example, in one story a young man covets tennis shoes that "popular" kids wear but that his grandmother, who he lives with, is unable to afford.

Picture books that feature culturally and ethnically diverse main characters allow children of diverse backgrounds to feel affirmed (Mendoza & Reese, 2001) and to engage more deeply with the story through identification with the characters therein (Rosenblatt, 1995). Moreover, by identifying with the character, children are able to connect the story to their own experiences and feel the validation that their personal experience is true of human experience (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 1998). Many of the selected picture books also had a rhyme scheme with short phrases that were almost song-like in nature, reflective of music with speech-like inflections meant to convey emotions relating back to African origins (Brothers, 1997).

Another major component of culturally responsive teaching involves teaching methods, as teachers must "learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies" (Gay, 2018, p. 1). A noted effective strategy for teaching African American students, for example, involved storytelling (Hill, 2012) and so I based every lesson with the children around a story. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Geneva Gay writes that, "stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention on a very personal level, and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are" (2018, p. 3) and by centering the curriculum upon stories, and plentiful opportunities to share text-to-self connections and their own personal stories, the children could better connect the learning the learning to themselves as people and engage on a personal level.

I met with students in whole group setting from 2–3 pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, directly after their nap time to ensure greatest level of alertness in the study

participants. I began each session by talking to the students about any literacy experiences they had encountered since the last session (e.g., seeing a letter, reading a story, etc.). We then read and discussed a story together, stopping frequently during the reading of the text to discuss the pictures, make personal connections to the text, and discuss the text features. During the rhyme portion of instruction, we would then discuss the rhyming pairs we had encountered and play a rhyming game before engaging in a printed rhyming activity.

During the phonics section of instruction, we would watch a video about the letter of the day before reading our story to familiarize ourselves with the letter we would be working with and reading about that day. After our story, we would engage in a variety of activities, often going on "scavenger hunts" around the room to find the letter in words on the walls. We would also look at signs with our names on them and discuss who had the letter we were working with that day in his or her name. We would then read an illustrated sentence together featuring the letter of the day. Lastly, we would read a formulaic story together that centered on the letter so that the children had the opportunity to practice reading their own book using proper print techniques (page turning, following along). Students all received a copy of their own of the formulaic story to color and take home to share with their families.

Data Control and Ethical Considerations

Privacy of student information and data is always one of the utmost concerns when obtaining data on children. Having some amount of distrust of technology and the ability to provide data safety over all student records, I printed assessments ahead of time and then hand-recorded results during the data collection period. The assessment results

and field notes were kept in folder inaccessible to anyone else, and as data was transcribed, it was on a password-protected personal computer to which only I have access. When I transcribed data, I used student pseudonyms so that data did not have any personal identifying information. Taking notes by hand also prevented classroom disruptions from occuring due to data collection. Preschoolers are very curious, and stopping to type notes would have been an unnecessary distraction.

My selection of research site had a personal connection. The daycare in which I completed my study is one that my daughter attended three days a week in the morning when she was one year old. As a result, I knew the owner. The location was in close proximity to the middle school where I had taught; not only was it convenient to me when I was working, but it also meant that for site selection, it serviced much of the same population I had taught in middle school. Despite being an outsider to the classroom, I possess not only a valid teaching certificate with appropriate background checks but have met all of the requirements from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to work in a preschool.

One important ethical consideration in this study was how students would be able to increase their learning after the implementation has ended. In order to ensure continued success of the students, I worked closely with the classroom teacher each week, explaining what skills she taught and the rationale for them and giving her additional classroom supplemental materials for use with the students. The students lacked a classroom library, so as part of the implementation, I left a copy of every book that was read to the class with the teacher to build a classroom library; this study contributed 22 books to the class by the end of project.

Additionally, I minimized any potential harm to students through the duration of this study. The reading activities were not withheld from any students in the classroom, thus allowing all of the students to benefit as much as possible from the program, not just those that participated in the study. Children were not removed from any lessons in order to participate in the program, as instruction was implemented into their routine during what would have otherwise been additional unstructured playtime, of which children already received five hours during the day.

Data Collection and Organization

I individually administered the post-assessment to students, keeping the location consistent with that of the pre-assessment in order to maintain the greatest level of consistentcy for students. It took 3–5 minutes to assess each student, and most students had difficulty remaining focused for this duration of time because they are so young and uninterested in assessments. I assessed students in the same room as their peers in the corner of the room while their peers were at a table interacting with the classroom teacher on the other side of the room. The room was not free of distractions as there were other children present. Two students—Deonte and KeShawn—were forced to relocate during the study and were unable to complete the post assessment.

As previously noted, I kept initial data hand-written on assessment forms that I had printed out beforehand. I had an assessment for for each student with his or her pseudonym written on the top. When I administered the assessments in person, I marked on the forms with a pen and kept the hand-written notes in a file folder with me to be entered into the computer after the class session once I returned home. For informal assessments during instruction, I had a note card for each day with a hand-drawn chart

that included the assessment criterion for the day and the student's pseudonym so that I could make quick notes during instruction. This was for ease of use since I was sitting on the floor in a circle with the preschoolers and it would have been distracting to have cumbersome papers with me. I saved my hand-written cards and papers until I had entered them into the computer each time, at which point I destroyed the originals because it was more difficult to have strict control over paper documents.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Pre-Post reading assessment data and pre-post phoneme assessment data was used to create tables that included individual student responses to questions, along with aggregated analytic information divide by question to address what percent of students correctly responded to the question of the pre-test, what percent did on the post-test, and then the percent change. These tables are meant to create a visual for readers to easily compare student data on the pre-post assessment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After data tables were initially sketched by the researcher, colleagues were consulted in order to have the most logical display of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Numbers, however, are not only displayed but are then explained to situate them in the context of the case study (Ellet 2007). The displays of data help readers to follow the logic of the analysis (Ellet, 2007).

The data were then connected to the previously discussed indicators of culturally responsive teaching to answer the question: Can culturally responsive teaching increase literacy skills? Critical race theory purports that a racial consciousness is a necessary lens through which to analyze data (Minda, 1996, p. 167) and that the reality of race

discrimination and institutionalized racism subordinate African Americans in society (Minda, 1996, p. 170). "Minority perspectives make explicit the need for fundamental change in the ways we think and construct knowledge" (Tate, 1997, p. 210), and viewing data through the analytic lens of the major pillars of Culturally Responsive Teaching aided me in demonstrating how knowledge constructs were impacted through the pedagogical shift required for a culturally responsive practitioner.

The quantitative data also acted as a source to triangulate evidence between the pre-post test and the researcher journal for more meaning in explaining the results of the case study (Yin, 2014). This further allowed for me to approach the data from both a realist and interpretivist orientation as the descriptive statistics of quantitative data provided percentages of student growth (realist) while my qualitative data included student and researcher perspectives and their meanings (Yin, 2014).

Qualitative Data

The research journal was analyzed using a coding method examining themes consistent with a culturally responsive teaching theoretical framework. Consistent with action research, qualitative data was concerned with not only what happened, but how it happened (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), in the instance of this study, primarily with hoq culturally responsive instruction was implemented. Rather than creating a coding system from the data, a coding system of indicators consistent with culturally responsive teaching were overlaid over the data and examples of each of the codes were identified Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As previously discussed, the indicators (or codes) used for data analysis were: affirmation and a culture of high expectations, student centered instruction with active teaching, the importance of interpersonal relationships, the cultural

reorientation of the teacher, and reshaping the curriculum. These indicators also provide themes for a discussion of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Beginning with re-reading entries and creating tables for each of the selected indicators for culturally responsive teaching, examples from the research journal were selected as evidence. The coding system (i.e., indicators) were explained and then examples were used to demonstrate evidence of each code (indicator) with an explanation of how the example related to the indicator.

Additionally, since this is case study research and the primary importance of it is for individuals to understand the case, readers of this research should pay special attention to the detailed description of the context and participants earlier as it is a result of field observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This data will be interpreted with excerpts from the research journal, though lessons learned will not be elucidated until chapter five, though the larger meaning of the data is described in chapter four (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed my research methodology, research context and researcher positionality, introduced data collection methods and my research procedure, addressed the foundations of my curricular design, and set a foundation for data analysis to be deepened in Chapter 4. In the next chapter, I will present and explain data in connection to my research questions, with quantitative data presented first in response to the question: Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills? I then present and explain qualitative data to respond to the question: What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

In this research study, I set out to teach early literacy and phonemic skills to urban preschool students through a culturally responsive curriculum I designed to meet the needs of one specific set of students in a state-funded daycare located in a southern coastal city. Early development of reading skills is important because a child's reading skills upon entering school have the second highest predictive power (behind math) for future academic success (Duncan et al., 2007), and preschool children with early literacy skills learn to read better and faster than their peers with fewer of these skills (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014).

My research sought to answer the following question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-Kindergarten, urban youth?

    a. Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

    b. What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

Skills to increase phonological awareness were taught in two week segments beginning with rhyme, followed by letter recognition/sound recognition for two weeks, and then word/letter recognition for two weeks. Literature in the class included Dr. Seuss

classics, along with contemporary fiction that featured diverse characters and were meant to resonate more soundly with the diversity represented in the classroom. The literature was selected because it not only taught the skills but also reflected culturally relevant elements. Rhyming pairs and rhyme families, and the activities used to reinforce them, were selected because they were common rhyming words and complemented the featured literature. Letters for visual recognition and sounds were selected because they were the first six letters in the alphabet and would allow the classroom teacher to continue sequentially with the program after the researcher had left. Further, all of the students in the class had names that contained at least one of each of the letters, which gave personal relevance to the learners

This chapter is organized as a response to and analysis of the aforementioned research questions. The first section addresses the question, "Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?" This section describes and analyzes the quantitative data collected during the research project and curricular implementation with preschool students. It presents the types of skills taught to students, the pre-post assessment scores that relate to these skills, and the culturally responsive methods that were used to increase achievement.

The second section in this chapter analyzes the response to question be: "What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?" In this section, qualitative data is used to support how the various elements of culturally responsive teaching affected the students in the research group. Each element is defined and then examples from the implementation are provided and discussed in accordance to the coding element. There are five specific elements of culturally responsive teaching that

were of focus during implementation: (a) affirmation and a culture of high expectations, (b) student centered instruction and active teaching, (c) the importance of interpersonal relationships, (d) the cultural reorientation of the teacher, and (e) reshaping the curriculum.

Research Question A

The first research question I posed was, "Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?" My findings supported that culturally responsive teaching does, in fact, increase preschool literacy skills. As will be discussed in Section I of this chapter, the general improvement of early literacy skills for any student enrolled in a preschool program should average to one half years' worth of knowledge increase over the course of an entire school year when compared with a similarly aged child not enrolled in preschool. The assessment data I obtained shows that many students experienced an entire year of academic growth in literacy based skills within less than one semester of a school year. As action research and not quasi-experimental, there is, of course, always the wondering about what other variables could have confounded the increase being due to culturally responsive instruction and not to something else. For example, students often perform well when they like their teacher, and so student score increases could relate to students liking me as a researcher, though since personal relationships are a component of culturally responsive instruction, I would contest that students "liking" or "not liking" their teacher actually becomes part of culturally responsive instruction. The data and explanation of data are further detailed in this chapter in Section I and the discussion of the pre-post assessment that follows.

Research Question B

The second research question I posted was, "What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?" This question is not answerable in as straight forward a manner as the previous question. To first address if the culturally responsive curriculum had an influence on students, yes, it clearly did. Additionally, the culturally responsive teaching practice also had a major effect on the researcher and her conceptions of learning and teaching as well. To determine the entirety of the influence that it had on the children in this study would be difficult as they were not able to adequately articulate any sort of exit survey because they are so young. The quotes that were captured from them, however, indicate an increase of enjoyment in literacy and in structured classroom learning experiences, as well as a desire to take on leadership roles within the classroom and a construction of meaning from the stories that they read and the content that they learned. The data and explanation of data for this research is present in Section II in this chapter.

Section I: Culturally Responsive Teaching as a Means to Increase Preschool Literacy Skills

In seeking to determine how best to develop a culturally responsive reading curriculum, I sought to answer the question: Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

To answer this research question, I reviewed a plethora of commercially available literacy assessments for preschool students and selected one that covered a breadth of information while still featuring brevity in question structures so that young students would not become distracted during assessments. Quantitative data was collected through a pre-post assessment on emergent literacy, a reading attitude survey, and a standard

phoneme assessment. Data was collected by individually assessing each child and recording his or her results by hand. Assessment for this age group is hallmarked by controversy due to the inability of assessments to account for the complexities of defining progress and demonstrating learning in young children (Shepard, 1994). By using specific, measurable indicators to define a narrow segment of literacy learning, data is able to provide a picture of the improvements within the limited scope of the research project. A major component in focus skill determination came from those determined as key predictive skills for later literacy success as indicated in my literature review.

What follows is a description of early emergent literacy skills and culturally responsive teaching, whereby I use sections of the pre-post assessment to discuss the skills being taught, the increases in achievement, and the culturally responsive methods that were used to influence these yields.

Pre-Post Assessment on Emergent Literacy

Explanation of the Assessment

The emergent literacy assessment that I used was a modified version of a commercially available early literacy assessment accessible through the textbook *Literacy Assessment and Intervention* by Beverly DeVries (2017). The assessment was modified by removing questions that extended past the scope of this study. This scope was narrowed because of the limited time that I would be able to spend with the students in the classroom during the study. The assessment was designed to measure progress over the course of an entire school year, and I had 13 instructional days for the curricular implementation. Seven students participated in both the pre- and post-assessment. All students were present for both assessments.

Standard 1: Concepts of Print

The concepts of print portion of the assessment was used to determine what students know about how a book works (MacDonald & Figueredo, 2010). These concepts build so that students are eventually able to work independently to decipher the meaning of a text, even before they can read, by using book queues and pictures to determine the story being presented. Margaret Clay (1977) maintains that in order for children to be able to learn to read, they must be able to employ four cueing systems: visual attention to print, directional rules about position and movement, speaking like a book, and hearing sounds in words. Concepts of print addresses the first three of these cueing systems through its line of questioning and skill development. Table 4.1 details the questions that were asked of students during this portion of the pre- and post-assessment, along with how many students correctly answered the question on the pre- and post-assessment (respectively) and what percent of students improved during through the course of instruction in their ability to correctly identify the answer.

The data in Table 4.1 shows that during the course of instruction, 100% of the concepts of print indicators were improved upon. In order to provide a point for comparison, one year of preschool enrollment, regardless of curriculum, has the average effect on young children's cognitive skills "that represented three months of additional learning beyond the normal levels of skill acquisition that occur among four-year-olds without access to preschool" (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016, p. 23). To consider this comparison more deeply, concepts of print were the area of greatest gain for preschool students with an increase in a half year's (.54 years) learning over non-preschool counterparts and a slightly smaller increase (.44 years) in early reading skills (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Consequently, if a pre-school program,

not necessarily meeting any quality standards, has the potential to increase standard achievement a half of a year's worth of growth, a program of high quality has the potential to increase it that much more.

Table 4.1

Concepts of Print

Concepts of Print	% Correct on Pre-Assessment	% Correct on Post-Assessment	% Improved Pre-to-Post
Knows which is the front of the book	57%	100%	43%
Holds a book correctly	43%	100%	57%
Knows that the words are what is read when asked, "Where do I start to read?"	0%	100%	100%
Knows that one reads from the top of the page to the bottom of the page	0%	57%	57%
Can point at where to go after completing the left-hand page	0%	71%	71%
Knows the "return-sweep" concept	0%	43%	43%
Is able to point from word-to-word	0%	86%	86%
Is able to identify a letter	0%	100%	100%
Is able to identify a word	0%	100%	100%
Is able to identify a sentence	0%	43%	43%
Is able to identify the first letter in a word	0%	86%	86%

Additionally, when referencing the tables in Appendix A–E, which contain pre-post assessment data by individual, the data shows that two individuals were able to attain perfect mastery over the concepts of print assessed and that three more students had a basic mastery over the skills (achievement greater than 70%). Since concepts of print

are taught by continual exposure for the skill set, I was sure to reinforce these concepts in all of my lessons with the children, giving them increasing amounts of responsibility and opportunities to participate.

Consistent with the culturally responsive teaching principle of "student centered instruction," the children would often hold the book while I read to them and turn the pages as we read. When I moved to letter instruction, students participated in holding their own paper copy of a story we were reading together and tracked the words with their fingers and held the books themselves for an increase in their experiential learning.

Standard 2: Early Emergent Literacy

Early emergent literacy focuses on children's ability grasp the basic concepts of literature before they are able to read. These skills include not only a child's understanding of a text but also his or her ability to engage with and enjoy being read to. Specifically, early emergent literacy is the "constellation of skills young children accumulate through […] listening, speaking, being read to" (Byrne, Deer, & Kropp, 2003, p. 42) and through the general handling of books. This section of the assessment focused on skills that are often developed in children at home through parent/child literature interaction. As parents or caregivers read books aloud to children and children look at picture books, the children develop the ability to "read" the story by simply using the illustrations to determine the book's plot. This technique is known as "picture walking." The period for early emergent literacy (ages 0–5) is often marked by sociocultural experiences because children spent more time in their homes and communities before full-time school enrollment than after (McGee & Purcell-Gates,

1997, p. 311), which makes early emergent literacy an indicator of the types and/or frequency of literary experiences children are experiencing in the home.

Table 4.2

Early Emergent Literacy

Early Emergent Literacy Skills	% Correct on Pre-Assessment	% Correct on Post-Assessment	% Improved Pre-to-Post
Shows pleasure in read alouds	43%	100%	57%
Can re-tell stories in a sequence	14%	58%	72%
Uses book language in retelling	0%	0%	0%
Uses pictures to read a story	0%	100%	100%
Understands what is read	100%	100%	100%
Hears some rhyming words	0%	100%	100%
Knows what the title of a book is	0%	71%	71%
Knows what the author of a book does	0%	86%	86%
Knows what the illustrator of a book does	0%	57%	57%
Recognizes name in print	14%	71%	57%
Can participate in a discussion	100%	100%	100%
Asks appropriate questions	14%	100%	86%

As can be seen in Table 4.2, before the curricular implementation, none of the students in the classroom had previously developed all of the skills associated with early emergent literacy. This is consistent with the children's self-reporting that they were not read to in their homes, with only Jamar stating that he had books at home, and

information relayed from the classroom teacher that parents did not bring home free book packs that were provided for their children each week.

The areas of greatest improvement for students in this portion of the assessment were the ability to use a picture to "read" a story and the ability to detect rhyme at the end of words. The increase in the ability to "use pictures to read a story" comes from time spent during instruction making predictions about the text based off the picture. Pausing during instruction to allow the children to make predictions and personal connections with the text was consist with culturally responsive, student-centered instruction, as it allowed children to drive the conversation and connect with the text while also practicing a new skill.

Standard 3: Concepts of Writing

The main facet of concepts of writing in the preschool years is that children understand that the words on a page are there to convey a message that can be read by anyone who understands the system of how the words work—i.e., the ability to read (Mass, 1982, p. 670). For children who have not spent considerable time consuming literature, either through pictures on their own or with adults reading to them, the words on a page appear to be merely a set of unfamiliar symbols that children do not possess the ability to decode. Contrary to what the name of this section of the assessment suggests, there is no writing that takes place on the part of the student. My curricular implementation did not require students to write anything; rather this set of indicators relates to a child's ability to distinguish differences in printed letters and to see that letters constitute words. The focus of these skills is on developing concepts of writing-related behaviors.

Table 4.3

Concepts of Writing

Concepts of Writing	% Correct on Pre-Assessment	% Correct on Post-Assessment	% Improved Pre-to-Post
Understands that Writing Carries a Message	57%	100%	43%
Sees unique differences between letters	0%	71%	71%
Understands that a space is needed between words	0%	100%	100%
Understands that letters construct words	0%	86%	86%

Table 4.3 shows that students had a strong foundation for understanding that words on a page translated to some sort of story or message, despite not being able to recognize or differentiate words or letters. The greatest gains from this data set came as the children grew to understand that words are demarcated from other words by the spacing between them. This understanding developed through engaging students with student-centered instruction, as students took turns as the teacher by pointing from word-to-word in a daily sentence that connected to phonemic instruction and featured the use of our letter-of-the-day. The sentences were formulaic and contained pictures to help reinforce the words. Students were given a pointer so that they could "read" the sentence to the group, each student receiving his or her own turn. This ownership that students had over the material through the culturally responsive teaching principle of student centered-instruction increased students concept of writing.

Standard 4: Distinguishing Rhyme

The assessment section on distinguishing rhyme tests a student's ability to segment words into phonemes (the smallest component of sound) (MacDonald & Figueredo, 2010). Teaching students to identify rhyme gives them the most universal literacy skill needed to decode words and to identify phonemes (sounds within words) to build vocabulary. The importance of the rhyming skill may be attributed to the fact that children can differentiate similar and dissimilar sounds before they can isolate or manipulate sounds within words (Anthony, Lonigan, Driscoll, Phillips, & Burgess, 2003). A child identifying two words that sound similar, or dissimilar, is an indication that the child recognizes that words are made up of discrete and different sounds and that this differentiates words from one another. As the child gains the ability to recognize letters, he or she can visually distinguish the difference between words; however, rhyme allows non-readers to differentiate words auditorily. Rhyme had the potential for the greatest influence because a child's ability to detect rhyme before they are able to read has a strong correlation with the child's reading progress once he or she begins to be able to decode words (Snowling & Hulme, 1994).

Table 4.4 shows that students did not perform as well on rhyming data as they had in other subsections of the post assessment. One reason that this data does not show as much progress in rhyme may have related to the timing of the post-assessment. I administered the post-assessment several weeks after having finished instructing students on rhyme since the last part of the instructional unit was focused on phonemic awareness. Many of the other subsections of knowledge I was able to easily integrate into the phoneme section, though the books that I used to teach phonics were not ones that reinforced rhyme scheme, meaning these indicators had fewer instructional days spent on

theme. This may indicate that more instructional time was necessary to really solidify a strong understanding of the concept of rhyme. Rhyme was an indicator that I took informal intermittent data on during instruction, however, and several students consistently were able to identify rhyming pairs (Jamar, Lebron, Deonte, Kalisha, and Crystal) while others consistently had difficulty hearing rhyme (Jose, KeShawn, Jaylin).

Table 4.4

Distinguishing Rhyme

Distinguishing Rhyme	% Correct on Pre-Assessment	% Correct on Post-Assessment	% Improved Pre-to-Post
Identifies correctly if "big" and "pig" rhyme	0%	0%	0%
Identifies correctly if "sand" and "hand" rhyme	0%	80%	80%
Identifies correctly if "rule" and "milk" rhyme	0%	80%	80%
Identifies correctly if "fair" and "farm" rhyme	0%	100%	100%
Identifies correctly if "bat" and "hat" rhyme	0%	60%	60%

Phoneme Assessment

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that a word is made up of by individual sounds and that those sounds are made by individual letters, thus making words on a page have meaning as spoken language rather than just appearing as undecipherable squiggles for early readers (Snider, 1997). When a child possess an understanding of phonemes, the smallest sounds of language, he or she also possess the ability to decode words later as he

or she learns to read (i.e., the ability to "sound out" letters to form words). Phonemic awareness is especially important for preschool students because it is a predictor of later reading success, acting as a stronger predictor than IQ, and teaches preschoolers that reading is part of a logical series of processes (Snider, 1997). The phoneme assessment asked the students to identify the names and corresponding sounds for the seven letters taught during the instructional unit. A pre-assessment was administered using letter cards with a printed capital letter printed on each in Arial font. The student was asked to tell me the name of the letter and then asked what sound the letter made.

The post assessment data from phonemic awareness in Table 4.5 demonstrates that the children retained information for some letters better than others. In a typical kindergarten classes, approximately one week of instruction would center on each letter of the alphabet. Due to time constraints of my research, I spent one class period with students on each letter and integrated review of previous letters briefly into the next session. Students struggled most with identifying the letter "D," which I initially thought could be connected to the text that I read with students for that letter. I realized when looking back on my field notes that students actually had difficulty articulating this letter initially and distinguishing between "B" and "D," which do sound similar in name. They did not have the same level of difficulty in identifying the sound of /b/ and /d/, which are easier to distinguish apart than the letter names themselves. Also, the children had the greatest gains for the letter "C."

Table 4.5

Phoneme Awareness

Phoneme Awareness	% Correct on Pre-Assessment	% Correct on Post-Assessment	% Improved Pre-to-Post
Correctly identifies letter name for "A"	20%	60%	40%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "A"	0%	60%	60%
Correctly identifies letter name for "B"	0%	40%	40%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "B"	0%	60%	60%
Correctly identifies letter name for "C"	20%	100%	80%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "C"	0%	100%	100%
Correctly identifies letter name for "D"	20%	40%	20%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "D"	0%	60%	60%
Correctly identifies letter name for "E"	20%	60%	40%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "E"	0%	60%	60%
Correctly identifies letter name for "F"	20%	80%	60%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "F"	0%	100%	100%
Correctly identifies letter name for "J"	40%	100%	60%
Correctly identifies sound for letter "J"	0%	60%	60%

In keeping with principles of culturally responsive teaching, as I reshaped the curriculum for students, I selected a picture book where the main character was African American and the storyline related to her purchasing a teddy bear. During instruction, this was a story where the children had a high level of personal text-to-self connections and I think that likely influenced retention of the letter that went along with that story. I was also able to model adult reading behavior to the classroom teacher, which is especially

important because "dimensions of teacher behavior during shared reading (e.g. dramatic quality, warmth, attempts to engage individual children) related to children's active involvement in shared reading and individual differences in children's phonological processing ability" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 857). This means by increasing the quality of read alouds in the classroom, and the frequency, a researcher is able to also increase the ability of the students to hear sound differences within words. Further, this phonological awareness was found to be the greatest predictor of reading success in first grade, especially in low income populations (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Section II: Indicators of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Influence of a Culturally Responsive Literacy Curriculum on Urban Youth

This research study collected and analyzed qualitative data as it sought to determine the answer to the question: "What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?" Qualitative data was maintained through a journal of observational experiences, conversations, and student responses that occured during and after classroom lessons. I wrote down notes and statements immediately upon returning home following the lesson for the greatest level of accuracy. I was unable to record conversations because of the high level of distrust that the classroom teacher had for authority and for outside influence. Recording our conversations would have eliminated the ability to have authentic conversations with the teacher and her receptivity of working together as I coached her through how to increase instructional practice within the classroom. This distrust was noted previously by her employer, but was also evident through non-verbal queues and statements she made to me concerning not wanting any of her comments to be shared with her employer. Coming in as an outsider, it took two months to establish trust with the classroom teacher so that

she knew I had her best interest in mind and was there to help in any way I could and to learn from her regarding the needs of her students.

The qualitative data that follows was all excerpted from my research journal in as much as it applied to the various tenets effective of culturally responsive practitioners, in keeping with the framework laid out by Gloria Ladson Billings in her 1994 book *The Dreamkeepers*. For each of the indicators of culturally responsive teaching that I employed during the study, this section contains an explanation of that indicator, research journal notes that correspond to the indicator, and a discussion of the example provided.

Qualitative Data Analysis using a Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework

Indicator 1: Affirmation and a culture of high expectations.

Definition of indicator. The first tenet of creating a culturally responsive classroom and culturally responsive lesson plans involves creating a culture of high expectations. While it many teachers believe that a personal connection with their students is created through appropriate displays of physical affection, culturally responsive instruction theorists posit that students love and admiration actually come through being held to high expectations by their teachers (Scherff & Spector, 2011). As an extension of this, teachers must fundamentally view their students as capable of being successful. This creates an emancipatory view for the student where they grow to understand the power of education and that learning goes far beyond "schooling" and predetermined sets of expectations to know that freedom comes from knowledge and not just "success" in school (Milner, 2016). Furthermore, by not only setting high expectations for students but also in building confidence in my instructional abilities, students are more likely to be receptive to instruction because they trust the teacher.

Cultivating trust through competency came as I demonstrated skill in teaching, knowledge in content, and strength of will in supporting students as learners (Hammond, 2011). Trust building through high expectations needs also be supplemented with a commitment to practicing affirmation, affirming not what a child does but rather who the child is (Hammond, 2011). Moreover, high expectations are reinforced through the instructive and corrective feedback provided during instruction in a loving, low stress manner.

Examples and analysis. Treating students as capable of learning and achievement affirms their self-worth and creates a culture of high-expectations. During my implementation, I engaged the children with informal assessment. In an excerpt from my teaching journal, I wrote:

> then when they were at the table I "quizzed" them with a thumbs up/thumbs down method to see if they could identify rhyming pairs. We snapped fingers in celebration whenever someone correctly identified a matching pair. (Research journal, November 6, 2017)

This demonstrates a culture of high expectations because I expected all of the students to participate in an informal assessment after our learning for the day. This informal assessment was not for the purpose of data collection but rather because I knew they were making progress on their ability to identify rhyme and I wanted them to know, see, and celebrate that as well. Children in this class had never been assessed prior to my work with the students, and I believe that assessment can be used to not only increase confidence but also to communicate to children that they are strong students worthy of being assessed, that I expect them to learn from what was being taught.

Affirming children for who they are, as opposed to merely what they do, is another principle of culturally responsive instruction, and I incorporated frequent opportunities for children to share text-to-self connections so that we could value each child's individuality and thinking as a part of our group. My teaching journal reads:

> We talked about different elements of the story as we went through and I had
> [each one of] them make personal connections to the text and predictions.
> (Research journal, November 10, 2017)

This second example demonstrates a culturally responsive teaching framework because I expected every child to provide a response to a question. Often times, teachers allow students to self-select out of answering questions by saying things like "I don't know." By requiring—and encouraging—participation from every child in the group, I communicated high standards for participation to students because they know there is an expectation of readiness. There are certainly instances where a child couldn't think of a response right away and so I had to come back to him or her after having others share, but I was always sure to come back around to the child to let his or her voice be heard and to maintain the expectation.

Indicator 2: Student-centered instruction with active teaching.

Definition of indicator. Diversity of experience is an element that enriches the classroom, and when teachers appropriately allow for students to enrich their instruction through the diverse experience of their students, learning not only becomes relevant but also memorable. Additionally, students retain more new learning when it is connected to material with which they are already familiar, as noted in the principle of congruity, so instruction must needs connect to a student's prior learning (Gay, 2018). An important

element in culturally responsive teaching is the proliferation of opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning through social interaction. Social interaction encourages students not only to form a community of learners but also to be responsible for one another through the feeling of a cohesive, learning collaborative (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In feeling responsibility over one another, students need opportunities to get to teach each other, with the student taking on the role of teacher and the teacher sitting among students as an equal. Culturally responsive teaching should help students to see themselves as a community of contributors helping to enrich the educational experience of everyone around them rather than as passive agents receiving information (Milner, 2016). Culturally responsive classrooms reinforce communities of learners by removing competition from activities, elevating the achievement of the entire class above the individual; in this, success does not suffer, rather the class as a whole views themselves as "smart" and capable of academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Additionally, the term "active teaching" does not refer to having students moving around the move or engaging in a total physical response during learning necessarily, but rather in actively engaging their minds. Though this is a principle of good teaching in general, "it is precisely explicit information processing that is too often left off the equity agenda for low performing students of color" (Hammond, 2015, p. 118), and we must have connections to prior learning when acquiring new information so that our brains can process, store, and use this new information for more complex and complicated tasks in the future.

Examples and analysis. Student's learn more when the new learning connects to knowledge or experience they already possess. I saw this during my instruction as I

worked with my students to teach them to identify rhyme through reading Dr. Seuss books. In one instance, we read *The Cat in the Hat*, and I noted that day in my journal that:

> The children were familiar with the character, Kalisha said that there is a television show with the Cat and the Hat so that she knew the character. When Jamar saw the cover he exclaimed, "My jacket! My jacket! I have that on my jacket!" (Research journal, November 10, 2017)

This instance shows the excitement that students have as they are able to make connections from what they are learning in the classroom to their realities outside of the classroom. This moment ended up being so memorable, in fact, that Jamar was sure to wear his Cat in the Hat jacket to school two days later when I returned to class so that he could show me that he had a cat jacket that was "just like the book we read." This excitement certainly made the literature we had read together not only memorable but retainable.

Another element of student-centered learning involves students participating in the learning process not only as learners but also as teachers. While I integrated opportunities for students to lead us activities, one such student teaching opportunity occured organically in the class. In my journal I noted,

> … the children were just waking up from naps when I arrived and when Kalisha sat up and moved her pillow I saw that the book *Ten Apples Up on Top* was under her pillow. She had slept with it because she told me she was "reading" it to herself and to her neighbor right before her nap. This is the first time I have

observed any self-selected literacy-related behavior with students outside of circle

time. (Research journal, November 17, 2017)

Kalisha had taken on the role of "teacher" by "reading" the book that we had read in a previous lesson to one of her classmates. This demonstrates the ownership that Kalisha took on as a valued member of the class learning community. She gained confidence from practice opportunities "teaching" her peers during lessons and then found her own opportunity to "teach." Additionally, her affinity for the book that we read together in class, as demonstrated by her placing the book protectively under her pillow during nap, marked the adoption of early emergent literacy behavior of using pictures to read the story.

Indicator 3: Importance of interpersonal relationships.

Definition of indicator. In this, the teacher understands that she must first discern a student's humanity before relaying information, building students' capacity socially and emotionally before building knowledge and skills (Milner, 2016). Additionally, relationships are as important as the curricular content in culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015). In fact, in her 2010 work, Geneva Gay called caring, positive relationships one of the great hallmarks of culturally responsive teaching, especially standing at a stark contrast with a mainstream institutionalized feeling (Hammond, 2015). Positive relationships help students to achieve their fullest potential with less stress, especially when we, as educators, not only care about students in a general sense but also in an emotional sense to build trust within the learning environment, which then allows students to build relationships with their peers across racial, cultural, and socioeconomic lines. In *The Skillful Teacher,* Stephen Brookfield goes so far as to assert that when

students do not trust teachers, "they are unwilling to submit themselves to the perilous uncertainty of new learning" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 162), remaining cynical against teachers and their instruction. When culturally responsive teaching practices provide this emotional support for students, their brains are primed for further learning, as neuroscience tells us that when a student feels safe and relaxed in a learning environment, the brain releases oxytocin, which further increases our desire to bond with another person (Hammond, 2015).

Examples and analysis. Genuine, caring relationships between students and teachers are a hallmark of culturally responsive teaching, though I would say they are likely consistent of effective teaching in general. I developed a warm, caring relationship together with the students with whom I worked, one that created a safe learning environment for them. I never allowed children to make disparaging comments towards each other and this added to the warm, affective environment conducive to learning. I loved each child for the special, unique soul that they are and looked forward to working with them each day, which body language readily communicates to children. I also looked for commonality between their experiences and my own and shared information with the children as readily as they did with me. One instance from my teaching journal reflects the first time that a socioemotional bond was noted by another adult:

When I arrived today Ayesha told me that Crystal had been asking the past two days when I was next coming. She was excited to see me and to read stories and helped me set up when I arrived. In circle time Crystal sat right next to me … (Research journal, November 17, 2017)

Crystal's eagerness to participate because she felt a personal connection to me was reflective of culturally responsive teaching and the positive influence on learning that building trust poses with students.

Another example of trust that I built with students through affective, warm teaching occured when I arrived at the door for a lesson and was greeted by students as I entered the room. I noted:

When I arrived the students were sitting in the circle waiting for me and Jamar said with exclaim "Miss Jackie is here!" This was the first time I had noticed general excitement from the children to participate. Jamar had worn a *Cat in the Hat* hooded sweatshirt that he was excited to show off, telling everyone that it was The Cat in the Hat "just like we read before." The students were very excited when I introduced that we were reading another Dr. Seuss book, with KeShawn commenting, "I like the books by this guy." (Research journal, November 13, 2017)

Though the students found the content to be enjoyable, the interpersonal connection that I had with the students created a sense of excitement for learning. I spent time getting to know each of the children and value their voices, and as a result the students cared to know what content I had to teach them. They had gone from disliking being read to, to possessing excitement about reading. This instance signified a change in classroom environment when I was there, moving the group from curious reluctance to interested excitement. I was so impressed with the academic risks they were willing to take in answering informal assessment questions and attempting to read words later as we moved

into phoneme instruction because of the sound emotional base that the children and I had built together early on during rhyme instruction.

Indicator 4: The cultural re-orientation of the teacher.

Definition of indicator. A common misconception is that the efficacy of a teacher remains inherent within the individual, regardless of context in which she is teaching: that a "good teachers anywhere are good teachers everywhere" (Gay, 2018, p. 29). In reality, classrooms structures, curriculum, and teachings methods are, in most cases, based off of European American cultural norms and understandings (Gay, 2018), which become ineffective in a multicultural environment. For a teacher to understand how to provide culturally responsive teaching, she needs first understand the culture of her students and how they have been influenced by cultural socialization to better understand the process by which they learn (Gay, 2018). Having not only experienced my own education in a system utilizing these norms but also coming from a family and circle of influence, it was important to be aware of my own social positioning and observe the environment familiar to my students in order to cultivate a curriculum culturally responsive to their complex social understandings and not my own. The reorientation that a White teacher needs to undergo in order to effectively instruct in a culturally responsive manner requires a certain level of vulnerability: the need to be an expert in standards and content but a novice in scaffolding and delivery, ready to learn from her students rich life experiences. This has the added benefit of building trust with students: Seeing the teacher's vulnerability and humanity is more authentic to students and increases rapport (Hammond, 2011).

101

Examples and analysis. This coding indicator was really a matter of my shifting perspective and ability to understand the student's experience and culture as it differed from my own. While I was aware of the differing life experiences the children and I had, there were certainly moments where my privilege was invisible even to myself as an educator, despite having spent time not only being introspective but also listening and learning from my student's experiences. One such instance occured when a student was absent:

> When I arrived today I was surprised that Jaylin was absent for two days in a row and so asked if she was sick or out-of-town. Ayesha told me that she could not attend because she "no longer had her ABC." I said I didn't know what that meant and she said [Jaylin's] mom had failed to renew her government assistance paperwork and so wouldn't be able to attend … (Research journal, November 15, 2017)

The world of privilege that I experienced during my own education made my blind to the realities of others to the extent that the only reason I could conceive of where a student would be absent would involve a vacation or illness. This event occurred during the first half of the instructional unit and caused me to more deeply consider my own bias and privilege and how that was affecting instruction. Having no concept of the reality that my students experienced helped me to realize that in the second half of unit, I needed more diverse reading to reflect not only multicultural main characters but also a greater variety in character life experiences.

Genuine vulnerability on the part of the teacher can increase rapport with students as they see the teacher as more authentic. An instance of my own vulnerability being clear to the children occurred just before Thanksgiving:

> Jose talked about how he lived with his grandmother and aunt because his mom was up in Heaven. I choked up a little and the children came to sat closer to me, likely seeing that I was affected. […] The children were interested in the stories and rich illustrations, but as I read *Thanks for Thanksgiving* I realized how culturally out of touch it was for the children. From what they said, none of them could recall a Thanksgiving meal, and I realized that it was likely a matter of privilege that I had enjoyed a "special" Thanksgiving meal every year that I could recall. (Research journal, November 20, 2017)

This instance affected me deeply and the authenticity of the moment was definitely not lost on the children. As Jose shared about his mother's passing, the rest of the class seemed otherwise unaffected despite the fact that I fought back tears. This experience which was so matter-of-fact to Jose and his classmates was out of my experiences and deeply affected me, causing the children to come closer to me in an act of comfort. This was not only an instance of vulnerability for me as an adult but also an instance where the children's vast wisdom and life experience was readily apparent. The compassion that the children exhibited at age four was much more characteristic of the compassion not developed by their White peers until around age six. This example also demonstrates that despite a consciousness of my privilege, that sometimes it is difficult to truly have a re-orientation of thought without having lived the same life that others have lived.

Indicator 5: Reshaping the curriculum.

Definition of indicator. Transformative learning experiences helps students to "develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions into effective personal, social, political, and economic action" (Banks, 2002, p. 131). Culturally responsive teaching asks teachers to consider "how we teach, what we teach, how we relate to children and each other, what our goals are" (Hammond, 2011, p. 233) as all of these are related to culture. In this particular implementation, the reshaping of the curriculum occurred as I selected reading materials to use with my students, careful to select multicultural picture books that presented main characters of diversity and contained storylines more in keeping with the experiences of urban youth. As a matter of function, culturally responsive teaching should make high quality knowledge accessible to students and by integrating multicultural content into the curriculum, student achievement is shown to increase (Gay, 2018). Moreover, the content of a curriculum becomes "a tool to help students assert and accentuate their present and future powers, capabilities, attitudes, and experiences" (Gay, 2018, p. 142) through providing relevant, high quality, engaging materials for students. In a culturally responsive framework, curriculum must be matched with the culture of the students being taught: cultureless curriculum does not engage students (Scherff & Spector, 2011).

Examples and analysis. When I first began reading to the children, KeShawn would loudly remark how "boring" books were, and my second time reading to the children even remarked, "she's going to read AGAIN?" but that definitely changed as time went on. This first excerpt demonstrates student's reactions during the second half

of the instructional unit when I focused on phonemes. This was the first session, focused on the letter A:

> This was the most engaged I've ever seen the entire group. Everyone was listening and participating, which is particularly interesting because Abiyoyo is a long book that I was worried they would be less engaged. Lebron said the uncle character in the book was just like his uncle and KeShawn said that he […] liked that the uncle was a "joker" with his neighbors (Research journal, November 27, 2017).

I had selected Abiyoyo because the story's protagonist was Black (South African) and I wanted to provide literature for the children that featured main characters they could ethnically identify with (Fanelli & Klippel, 2001). In fact, research suggests that exposing a child to literature where the main character looks like them leads to a toddler's developing appreciation of self (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). Additionally, Abiyoyo is based off of a South African folktale and has a sing-song rhythm to some of the text, which I knew from working with the students that they enjoyed. The story's protagonist is a child, which also resonated well with the children since they were better able to envision themselves as the hero of the story, all while still underscoring our letter of the day, "A." The reshaping of the curriculum, in this instance, to include diverse literature lead to engagement for the students.

Another example of reshaping the curriculum came from the integration of music to help students remember letter names and sounds. I used letter music videos that employed frequent repetition of the phoneme for each letter. On this occasion, it was the session after I had spent time with the student's working on the letter "A." Their response

indicates that the repetition of the phoneme was effective because while not able to recall the name of the letter, every child was able to recall the sound that it made:

> Only Jamar and Crystal could remember what letter we had talked about on Monday. When I showed the children the letter, they could remember what sound it made but not what the name of it was. They made the /a/ sound just like the video had that we had watched and so I think that resonated with them better. (Research journal, November 29, 2017)

The children were able to recall the sound the letter "A" made despite only having spent one class period's worth of time learning it. The integration of music with letter instruction also underscored to children the instructional nature of music, in other words, that music has a place in learning and instruction and can deliver content (Emdin, 2011). High quality knowledge became accessible through engaging materials, thus leading to increased achievement as the children were able to retain the new learning.

Final Discussion

Culturally responsive teaching resulted in increases in assessment scores and in a greater depth of planning and implementation on the part of the researcher. The implementation of a story-based lesson that focused on an emergent reading skill necessary for greater phonological awareness left students possessing more skills that have been determined to be predictors of later reading success at the end of the implementation than they did at the beginning of the implementation. Additionally, despite students in the class having low literacy exposure at home, as determined by student responses concerning book availability and teacher observation concerning parent

behavior of not bringing home free literacy resources, students expressed increasing appreciation for reading.

In response to my first research questions, "Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?," the results of my study indicate that yes, culturally responsive teaching increases preschool literacy skills. While not every student improved on every indicator within every standard on the post-assessment, every student did show improvement.

In response to my second research question, "What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?," culturally responsive teaching aided in making students more excited about literacy and created a learning collaborative for the students. Students gained confidence in their ability to learn and to teach, while also learning the importance of sharing their unique experiences and how that enriches the curriculum for all.

In the next chapter, I reflect on my data and what it means in the greater context of this research and for me as a practitioner. I compare the findings of my research in this project to the findings of those who have also completed projects focused on culturally relevant instruction, those as a case study my comparisons are not widely generalizable. I then explore how my findings have and will continue to affect my personal practice as an educator, including the profound cultural lessons I learned through the course of this research. Next, I discuss the implications of my research for preschool education and within my specific research context. I conclude with how I would restructure my research if I were to do it again and develop an action plan for my research site to implement in the future.

Chapter 5: Action Plan and Implications for Future Practice

Introduction

My research study began because I was concerned about the literacy instruction children were receiving in the pre-k classroom at my daughter's former daycare. I had been in the public school preschool classrooms and saw the level of instruction occuring there (however scripted and culturally tone deaf it may have been) and had also been immersed in the reading instruction occuring in the private preschool in which I taught literacy skills to four year olds. I knew that the very minimal exposure to literacy skills students were receiving at the daycare would not prepare students to the same level as these other alternatives, and it bothered me.

I had witnessed the long term effects of early literacy instruction working for six years teaching middle school in the public school system. I repeatedly noticed that the inclusion English classes I taught (a mix of special education and regular education) were predominately African American, while the accelerated English classes I taught were almost completely Caucasian. To me, this seemed a matter of institutionalized racism, with students of color not being provided the same access to resources or opportunities as their White peers. Seeing that the daycare's preschool was in the same attendance zone in which I had taught middle school, I already had some experience with the local culture and a love for so many of the families in the area. This led me to develop a culturally responsive early literacy curriculum that I could share with students and teachers in order

to provide foundational skills for students, instructional skills for teachers, and learn more deeply about the local urban culture to decrease my own cultural tone deafness.

This study sought to answer the following question: What are the important factors to consider when designing a culturally responsive reading curriculum for pre-kindergarten, urban youth?

    a. Can culturally responsive teaching be used to increase preschool literacy skills?

    b. What is the influence of a culturally responsive literacy curriculum on urban preschool students?

During the course of this study, I found that yes, culturally responsive instruction has the ability to increase learning and skills for all children. It helps children to feel understood, valued, and a part of the learning process. Additionally, I discovered that the influence of a culturally responsive curriculum had the result of not only increasing skills for preschool children but increasing confidence and an enjoyment of learning. Children who had been reluctant for storytime because it was perceived as "boring" grew to enjoy being read to and enjoy participating in story-related learning.

Reflections

Findings Compared to Prior Research

Culturally responsive teaching is effective when a teacher knows her students and accurately correlates the types of activities for instruction with the types of activities that engage the student body for whom she is planning; in other words, teachers use what they know about students to help the students access learning (Stairs, 2007). My research was certainly consistent with this finding. I integrated the students' interest in superheroes,

princesses, and shoes into the curriculum through the picture books I selected for instruction. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching research for early literacy emphasizes the importance of teaching concepts of print as a means for developing a deeper understanding of what children know (Larson, 2006), which, when I assessed it, did indeed give me greater understanding into what children understood of how literacy works. When I saw child after child, initially, incorrectly pick up a book and not know the function of turning the pages, I was baffled. This helped me to understand where the students' literacy skills were before beginning my research.

At the same time, one influential aspect of culturally responsive teaching is empowering students by teaching them to question power structural injustice and then prepare them to be able to challenge it. While present in much of the literature, in my study, I did not find a point of comparison regarding this tenet of culturally responsive teaching because I consciously chose not to include it. In order to understand concepts like power structures and institutionalized racism, a student needs to possess some level of metacognition and an ability to abstract concepts to apply them across many different situations. Four-year-olds think very concretely and are just forming their initial concepts of the world outside of themselves, with much thinking still very egocentric. To ask a four-year-old to identify a system outside of herself would be difficult and further complicated by needing the child to identify a complex idea like "injustice." In summation, studies show that culturally responsive teaching increases learning and that is consistent with my findings.

Reflection and Implications for Personal Practice

When I began my research, I approached this study's problem of practice thinking that I could really make an impact in the lives of a classroom full of preschoolers and help a daycare to add structure and rigor to their instructional program. What I didn't anticipate was how much I would grow to love the students I worked with and how much I would learn about myself and my assumptions as an educator. I learned about my local community through the eyes of the children that live here and through the teacher that understands the lives of the children she teaches so much more deeply than I did, or could, when I taught a similar population in public school. I learned the vast importance of understanding *who* you teach before you develop a plan of *what* to teach. I learned that children absorb content with a great depth of knowledge when they can not only relate the learning to themselves but are given the opportunity to for their voice to be heard rather than asked to "just listen," as I so often asked students through my years in the classroom.

This research project made me aware of how deeply ingrained systemic racism is in education and in my community. I was surprised to learn that none of the children in the class had been to a library before, an experience which was so common of my childhood and in the experience of my own child as well. Upon further investigation, I discovered how difficult it is to get a library card. To begin with, if you visit the county's library website, it is completely in English. While there is a portion of the site in Spanish, this option is buried in a pull-down menu where a Spanish speaker would need to be able to read several levels of commands in English to be able to find the Spanish option. For those who can read English well enough to fill out a library card application, more impediments await applicants. In order to obtain a card, an individual must be able to

"prove residency" through a utility bill, vehicle registration, or property tax receipt. Most of the families of children in my class came from families that did not own vehicles or land, many of whom were also transient, several of which were homeless. This proof of residency requirement has also acted as a racist, systemic barrier to the abilility of individuals in this area to obtain drivers licenses and in turn in being able to vote, as a valid, government-issued ID is required to vote in this state.

Thinking back to my own experiences teaching middle school, I realize that asking a student to "go to the library" for research further alienated me from the students with whom I worked, as this request that seemed "simple" to me was evidence of how painfully out of touch I was with their access to resources. I had once read how the enemy to knowledge was not ignorance but the illusion of knowledge (a statement credited both to Stephen Hawking and Daniel Boorstin), and I believe this statement really typifies the experience of the European American teacher working with students of color. As an educator, it is easy to become lulled into a feeling of being a culturally responsive teacher because you understand some aspects of the lives of your students and feeling that you are really serving your students with the support that they need, when in reality, in depth of injustice that the students face is unfathomable because what they encounter is institutionalized racism not only through a curriculum they cannot relate to but also through educators that don't understand them.

In my future teaching practice, I plan to spend much more time in the classroom getting to know my students and their families in order to better understand challenges they may be facing in and out of school. I also recognize the importance of providing any required resources for my students to excel to the students themselves (e.g., pencils,

paper, art supplies, books), not assuming they will having access to a resource outside of my class. Most importantly, I see the importance of loving each student not in spite of who they are but because of who they are. To really teach kids in a culturally responsive way, I must appreciate each individual for the unique qualities he or she brings to my class.

Pre-School Literacy Instruction

Though the implications of my research on preschool literacy instruction directly influence instruction at my research site specifically (changes to which are detailed below in the section titled "next steps"), some lessons are widely applicable to pre-school contexts in general. The most important implication is that culturally responsive instruction works; it engages children and makes them feel valued and excited about learning. Public school preschool teachers can make their content more accessible to marginalized students by making it relatable. The curriculum, while research based, is scripted and does not leave much room for modification in implementation. All teachers, regardless of location, need to be able to spend time observing the students, meeting their families, and learning their culture in order to help them learn.

Implications

In working with urban preschool students, I came to understand how institutional failings were affecting urban youth. Through this understanding, I developed policy recommendations. To begin, while public school teachers in the child development (pre-k) programs are required to have a degree in early childhood education, teachers in private schools and daycares are not required to have any specialized experience, education, or knowledge aside from meeting background checks and continuing

education guidelines, most of which are meant to provide safety for children and not education, set forth by the department of social services. Despite falling under child care regulations and not education regulations, parents of young children often do not make the distinction between organizations and definitely are not informed concerning the differences. Therefore, many parents believe their children are receiving adequate education in daycare preschool programs when they are not. At a state level, daycare programs for four-year-olds should have more stringent regulation and require certified educators in the classroom so that children entering kindergarten have solid foundational literacy skills, regardless of whether they were enrolled in public pre-k or private daycare. While I can certainly see the cost challenge associated with this regulatory change, states and the federal government should defray the cost with easy-to-obtain grants or supplemental funding. Over 90% of the students at this study's research site received federal funding to attend daycare; it should be easy to increase funding for 4k classrooms so that they could be staffed with a qualified teacher.

This change in policy would solve the issue of inadequate literacy instruction in preschool daycare classrooms because the teachers would have received university training in best practices for the teaching and learning of preschool students. Teachers would be teaching to the standards outlined by state and national early education organizations and would come to classrooms with at least the previous experiences provided through student teaching and their teacher education programs.

At a school level, I would recommend extensive training, with support, for existing pre-k classroom teachers and an increase in available instructional resources. In the daycare in which this study took place, the classroom teacher had a deep

understanding of the culture of the children and community but did not have the training to implement literacy resources nor access to these resources. While I was working with the teacher and students during my research, I advocated to the owner on behalf of the teacher to have increased teaching resources so that her classroom could have pocket charts, a calendar, and a greater selection of books, as they had fewer than 20 for the entire classroom when I arrived. I also recommend an increase in available curriculum resources. Teachers were provided with an alphabet craft to do each week, but the letter name and sound were not taught in connection to the craft. Additionally, the craft required extensive work on the part of the teacher, which meant that rather than being a "process based" learning practice activity, with the students practicing cutting and gluing, the craft became merely an ornamental object to bring home to parents.

Action Plan

Improvements to Original Research

If I were to undertake this research again, I would definitely make some changes. To begin, I would like to have spent more time in the classroom working with students. Having the time constraints of my own employment and motherhood, I had limited time to go to my research site and instruct the children. Rather than the three hours a week I was able to spend in the classroom, I would much rather have been able to spend five to ten hours a week ons-site and extend my data collection period from five weeks to twelve weeks. Extended time in the classroom would have allowed me to gain even deeper insight into the culture of the students. It also would have allowed me the ability to interact with parents, as I would have been able to see and talk to them at their child's pickup at the end of the day.

I also wish that I had been able to integrate families more into my research program. In hindsight, it would have been a great idea to work with one of the local churches to gain more parental involvement. In the community where this study took place, churches act as social organizing places and often offer free classes to community members. I could have offered materials to parents through these community churches and would likely have had overlap with the families of the same group of students I taught in the classroom. Additionally, I wish I had sent home a newsletter to parents each week telling them what literacy skills we were working on at school and ways to support their child at home. So many parents want to aid their child in learning at home but just don't know how to do so.

Finally, I would have modified my data collection process. If I had been able to be in the classroom for a longer period of time, I could have established even greater rapport with the classroom teacher. Even if she still declined to be recorded, I believe she might have been willing to complete a written survey. In hindsight, the most optimal way to obtain more data would be to be able to go back to the same classroom with the same teacher and group of students and work with the teacher a second time; rapport would have already been established and I would be able to spend time in a coaching role with the classroom teacher to build her confidence in instructional methods and content.

Next Steps

In the next phase of this action research study, I would like to focus on working with the owner of the daycare to learn how to provide culturally responsive instruction across all of her daycare centers. As a European American from the suburban Northeast, the owner does not have experience with the culture of urban minority teachers or

students from the South. I observed that her suggestions to staff that were intended to be helpful were often derisive and perceived to be scornful. It would be incredibly useful for the owner to learn how to understand the culture of those with whom she employs so that she can effectively work with them and inspire them to be better teachers.

I also feel that she could use assistance in developing curriculum that is standards-based in content and culturally responsive in delivery. I observed that many of the classroom teachers in the school felt incredibly subordinate and so were resistant to any corrections or advice. If the owner could build rapport and create more trusting relationships with the staff, the teachers would likely feel more comfortable seeking assistance when they had questions. Additionally, since the owner does not have a background in education, helping her to understand what resources are most appropriate for her students and what skills will be most impactful to them in kindergarten would allow her to fundamentally reshape instruction occuring at the daycare.

An action plan to aid the daycare owner in promoting culturally responsive teaching would begin with improving her relationship with her staff by investing in them. Given the poor rapport between owner and staff, I would suggest that the owner visit with each teacher once a week over lunch and ask with real intent to understand and to help teachers. If she did this, I feel she would learn greatly from her staff. By sharing a meal with staff members one-on-one, the daycare own her could help the staff feel more valued and connected more, hopefully increasing their trust and helping them share the needs in their classrooms. The lunch could take place within the context of the classroom so that the owner knew what resources the teacher had available. They could work together with the teacher to develop a list of resources for instruction, thus empowering

the teacher. Additionally, sending teachers to the annual state conference for teachers of early education would provide teachers with instructional methods, curricular ideas, and information regarding recent educational research, all of which teachers could then adapt to their own instructional context.

The next part of the action plan would be for me to work with the owner to provide her with instructional materials. In obtaining materials for phonics instruction, I acquired resources to instruct every letter of the alphabet (despite the fact that the current study only taught students the first seven letters). Resources for the other 19 letters would provide a basis for future instruction. Additionally, I would review the types of skills encompassed in early literacy and share with her the list of skills that public school students the same age are working to acquire. Part of the owner's lack of implementation of curriculum involves not having a knowledge of what skills are being focused on with the children's peer group in public school. If the owner knew what types of skills children in a 4-year-old preschool class should have, I do believe she would work diligently to make sure that children were prepared for kindergarten. I would volunteer to help the owner to develop a phonics instructional curriculum for the four-year-old preschool class.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed how I have greatly benefitted from this research and how I can use this information for the benefit of my research site for years to come. I also reviewed an action plan for the owner of my research site going forward that will allow her to improve instruction by placing high quality materials in the hands of the most valuable resource she has: her staff. She possess staff that are able to readily employ culturally responsive teaching methods because they already understand the culture of

their students; they just need the scaffolding of learning what to teach so that they can then help to make it relevant and meaningful to students. I learned not only about an educational theory (culturally responsive teaching) through this research but also grew to understand a meaningful educational practice. I came to understand how imperative it is for educators to employ culturally responsive teaching methods to benefit not only the lives of students of color and those from diverse populations but also the entire educational system. As students become empowered to question antiquated practices and push for an end of practices that marginalize and educationally disenfranchise them, they are prepared to be the next generation of leaders and educators. Growing up, my mother always told me to "be the change" that I wanted to see in the world. Culturally responsive teaching has gifted me the ability to see the opportunities for local change in education and the desire to change the way I teach.

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Appendix A: Pre-Post Assessment Data for Concepts of Print

Concepts of Print	Jamar	Jose	Lebron	KeShawn	Deonte	Jaylin	Kalisha		# Correct	% Correct	% +/-
PRE: Knows which is the front of the book	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Pre	4/7	57%	---
POST: Knows which is the front of the book	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**43%**
PRE: Holds a book correctly	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Pre	3/7	43%	---
POST: Holds a book correctly	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**57%**
PRE: Knows that the words are what is read when asked, "Where do I start to read?"	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Knows that the words are what is read when asked, "Where do I start to read?"	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100%**
PRE: Knows that one reads from the top of the page to the bottom of the page	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---

POST: Knows that one reads from the top of the page to the bottom of the page	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Post**	**4/7**	**57%**	**57%**
PRE: Can point at where to go after completing the left-hand page	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Can point at where to go after completing the left-hand page	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Post**	**5/7**	**57%**	**57%**
PRE: Knows the 'return-sweep' concept	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Knows the "return-sweep" concept	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Post**	**3/7**	**43%**	**43%**
PRE: Is able to point from word-to-word	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Is able to point from word-to-word	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**6/7**	**86%**	**86%**
PRE: Is able to identify a letter	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	1/7	14%	---
POST: Is able to identify a letter	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100 %**
PRE: Is able to identify a word	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Is able to identify a word	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100 %**
PRE: Is able to identify a sentence	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---

POST: Is able to identify a sentence	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Post**	**3/7**	**43%**	**43%**
PRE: Is able to identify the first letter in a word	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Is able to identify the first letter in a word	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**N**</u>	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**Y**</u>	<u>**Post**</u>	<u>**6/7**</u>	<u>**86%**</u>	<u>**86%**</u>
# correct of Concepts of Print (pre)	3/11	0/11	0/11	2/11	0/11	1/11	2/11				
# correct of Concepts of Print (post)	11/11	8/11	9/11	11/11	7/11	9/11	7/11				
% accuracy on pre-assessment Concepts of Print	27%	0%	0%	18%	0%	9%	18%				
% accuracy on post-assessment concepts of print	100%	73%	82%	100%	64%	82%	64%				
% change pre to post	73%	73%	82%	82%	64%	73%	46%				

Appendix B: Pre-Post Assessment Data for Early Emergent Literacy

Early Emergent Literacy	Jamar	Jose	Lebron	KeShawn	Deonte	Jaylin	Kalisha		# correct	% correct	% change pre to post
PRE: Shows pleasure in read alouds	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Pre	3/7	43%	---
POST: Shows pleasure in read alouds	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**67%**
PRE: Can re-tell stories in a sequence	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	1/7	14%	---
POST: Can re-tell stories in a sequence	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**6/7**	**86%**	**72%**
PRE: Uses book language in retelling	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Uses book language in retelling	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Post**	**0/7**	**0%**	**0%**
PRE: Uses pictures to read a story	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Uses pictures to read a story	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100%**
PRE: Understands what is read	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Pre	7/7	100%	---
POST: Understands what is read	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100%**

PRE: Hears some rhyming words	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Hears some rhyming words	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100%**
PRE: Knows what the title of a book is	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Knows what the title of a book is	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Post**	**5/7**	**71%**	**71%**
PRE: Knows what the author of a book does	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Knows what the author of a book does	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**6/7**	**86%**	**86%**
PRE: Knows what the illustrator of a book does	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Knows what the illustrator of a book does	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**4/7**	**57%**	**57%**
PRE: Recognizes name in print	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Pre	1/7	14%	---
POST: Recognizes name in print	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Post**	**5/7**	**71%**	**57%**
PRE: Can participate in a discussion	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Pre	7/7	100%	---
POST: Can participate in a discussion	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**0%**
PRE: Asks appropriate questions	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Pre	1/7	14%	---

POST: Asks appropriate questions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Post	7/7	100%	86%
# of correct emergent literacy (pre)	5/12	2/12	3/12	5/12	2/12	3/12	2/12				
# of correct emergent literacy (post)	11/12	8/12	10/12	11/12	8/12	10/12	10/12				
% correct emergent literacy (pre)	42%	17%	25%	42%	17%	25%	17%				
% correct emergent literacy (post)	92%	67%	83%	92%	67%	83%	83%				
% increase from pre to post for emergent literacy	50%	50%	58%	50%	50%	58%	66%				

Appendix C: Pre-Post Assessment Data for Concepts of Writing

Concepts of Writing	Jamar	Jose	Lebron	KeShawn	Deonte	Jaylin	Kalisha		# correct	% correct	% change pre to post
PRE: Understands that Writing Carries a Message	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Pre	4/7	57%	---
POST: Understands that Writing Carries a Message	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**43%**
PRE: Sees unique differences between letters	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Sees unique differences between letters	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**5/7**	**71%**	**71%**
PRE: Understands that a space is needed between words	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---
POST: Understands that a space is needed between words	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**7/7**	**100%**	**100%**
PRE: Understands that letters construct words	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0/7	0%	---

POST: Understands that letters construct words	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Post	6/7	86%	88%
# of correct emergent literacy (pre)	1/4	0/4	0/4	1/4	1/4	1/4	0/4				
# of correct emergent literacy (post)	3/4	3/4	3/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	4/4				
% correct emergent literacy (pre)	25%	0%	0%	25%	25%	25%	0%				
% correct emergent literacy (post)	75%	75%	75%	100%	75%	100%	100%				
% increase from pre to post for emergent literacy	50%	75%	75%	75%	50%	75%	100%				

Appendix D: Pre-Post Assessment Data for Distinguishing Rhyme

Distinguishing Rhyme	Jamar	Jose	Lebron	KeShawn	Deonte	Jaylin	Kalisha		# correct	% correct	% change pre to post
PRE: Identifies correctly if "Big" and "Pig" rhyme	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0	0	
POST: Identifies correctly if "Big" and "Pig" rhyme	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N**	**N**	**Post**	**0**		**0%**
PRE: Identifies correctly if "Sand" and "Hand" rhyme	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0	0	
POST: Identifies correctly if "Sand" and "Hand" rhyme	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**Y**	**N**	**Post**	**4/5**	**80%**	**80%**
PRE: Identifies correctly if "rule" and "milk" rhyme	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0	0	
POST: Identifies correctly if "rule" and "milk" rhyme	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**Y**	**Y**	**Post**	**4/5**	**80%**	**80%**
PRE: Identifies correctly if "fair" and "farm" rhyme	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0	0	

POST: Identifies correctly if "fair" and "farm" rhyme	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	Y	Y	Post	5/5	100%	100%
PRE: Identifies correctly if "bat" and "hat" rhyme	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Pre	0	0	
POST: Identifies correctly if "bat" and "hat" rhyme	N	Y	N	N/A	N/A	Y	Y	Post	3/5	60%	60%
# of correct emergent literacy (pre)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
# of correct emergent literacy (post)	3	3	3	n/a	n/a	4	3				
% correct emergent literacy (pre)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%				
% correct emergent literacy (post)	60%	60%	60%	n/a	n/a	80%	60%				
% increase from pre to post for emergent literacy	60%	60%	60%	n/a	n/a	80%	60%				

Appendix E: Pre-Post Data Assessment for Letter and Sound Recognition

		A		B		C		D		E		F		J	
		Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd	Ltr	Snd
Jamar	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	Post	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**
Jose	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**
Kalisha	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**
KeShawn	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	**N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Deonte	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lebron	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Jaylin	Pre	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Post	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**
Crystal	Pre	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	Post	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**
# correct		20%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	40%	0%
% correct		60%	60%	40%	60%	100%	100%	40%	60%	60%	60%	80%	100%	100%	60%
% change pre to post		40%	60%	40%	60%	80%	100%	20%	60%	40%	60%	60%	100%	60%	60%

Note: Ltr = Letter; Snd = Sound

Appendix F: Examples of Active Teaching Methods/ Student Centered Instruction

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 6, 2017	"We played a fish matching rhyme game to practice rhyming after we read the story together"
Example 2: Excerpt from Nov 10, 2017	Read "The Cat in the Hat." The children were familiar with the character, Kalisha said that there is a television show with the Cat and the Hat so that she knew the character. When Jamar saw the cover he exclaimed, 'My jacket! My jacket! I have that on my jacket!'The children are consistently able to identify the front cover of the book and the job of the author."
Example 3: Excerpt from Nov 13, 2017	We listened to the Ten Apples Up on Top song and the children stood up to dance and swayed during the song with Jaylin commenting, 'This song is so funny' and Deonte asking if we could listen to it again."
Example 4: Excerpt from Nov 15, 2017	In circle time today everyone was excited to read a book about superheroes and readily shared who their favorite superheroes were when asked."
Example 5: Excerpt from Nov 17, 2017	"Also, the children were just waking up from naps when I arrived and when Kalisha sat up and moved her pillow I saw that the book *Ten Apples Up on Top* was under her pillow. She had slept with it because she was 'reading' it to herself and her neighbor right before her nap. This is the first time I have observed any self-selected literacy-related behavior with students outside of circle time."
Example 6: Excerpt from Nov 20, 2017	We did the Turkey Hokey Pokey after the original Hokey Pokey and the children participated and laughed. They had never seen the Hokey Pokey before and Deonte said it was 'so silly and crazy.'"
Example 7: Excerpt from Dec 1, 2017	Then we watched the letter "C" video the kids were excited and sang along. Jaylin lead the group in wanting to stand up and dance while watching and singing and despite being up and moving around, everyone's eyes were glued to the screen as we sang the song, each one

	carefully studying images that went with words so they could sing along. The kids have started to pick up on the formulaic structure of the song and can sing along on the repeat of the words."
Example 8: Excerpt from Dec 4, 2017	The 12 Dancing Princesses and the letter D. When I arrived I actually got a "yay!" from Jamar and Lebron today. The kids asked if we could do the letter first before reading the story because they were excited to sing. Kalisha said she liked the beat on the song- that it was good to dance to. "

Appendix G: Examples of the Practitioner as Facilitator and the Importance of

Interpersonal Relationships

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 8, 2017	"Read "There's a Wocket in My Pocket" and played a rhyming game. The children really enjoyed making up nonsensical words and seemed to have an easier time coming up with rhyming words and identifying rhyme when the words were made up. Made up rhymes to pair with names and children laughed."
Example 2: Excerpt from Nov 13, 2017	"When I arrived the students were sitting in the circle waiting for me and Jamar said with exclaim 'Miss Jackie is here!' This was the first time I had noticed general excitement from the children to participate. Jamar had worn a *Cat in the Hat* hooded sweatshirt that he was excited to show off, telling everyone that it was The Cat in the Hat 'just like we read last time.' The students were very excited when I introduced that we were reading another Dr. Seuss book, with KeShawn commenting, 'I like the books by this guy.'"
Example 3: Excerpt from Nov 17, 2017	"When I arrived today Ayesha told me that Crystal had been asking the past two days when I was next coming. She was excited to see me and to read stories and helped me set up when I arrived. In circle time Crystal sat right next to me and eagerly engaged with the text-based questions I asked the group, adding information about shapes as we went."

Appendix H: Examples of the Practitioner as Facilitator and the Importance of

Interpersonal Relationships

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 8, 2017	"Read "There's a Wocket in My Pocket" and played a rhyming game. The children really enjoyed making up nonsensical words and seemed to have an easier time coming up with rhyming words and identifying rhyme when the words were made up. Made up rhymes to pair with names and children laughed."
Example 2: Excerpt from Nov 13, 2017	"When I arrived the students were sitting in the circle waiting for me and Jamar said with exclaim 'Miss Jackie is here!' This was the first time I had noticed general excitement from the children to participate. Jamar had worn a *Cat in the Hat* hooded sweatshirt that he was excited to show off, telling everyone that it was The Cat in the Hat 'just like we read last time.' The students were very excited when I introduced that we were reading another Dr. Seuss book, with KeShawn commenting, 'I like the books by this guy.'"
Example 3: Excerpt from Nov 17, 2017	"When I arrived today Ayesha told me that Crystal had been asking the past two days when I was next coming. She was excited to see me and to read stories and helped me set up when I arrived. In circle time Crystal sat right next to me and eagerly engaged with the text-based questions I asked the group, adding information about shapes as we went."

Appendix I: Examples of the Re-Orientation of the Teacher

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 15, 2017	"When I arrived today I was surprised that Jaylin was absent for two days in a row and so asked if she was sick or out-of-town. Ayesha told me that she could not attend because she "no longer had her ABC." I said I didn't know what that meant and she said her mom had failed to renew her government assistance paperwork and so wouldn't be able to attend until her mother completed the paperwork"
Example 2: Excerpt from Nov 20, 2017	" Jose talked about how he lived with his grandmother and aunt because his mom was up in Heaven. I choked up a little and the children came to sat closer to me, likely seeing that I was affected. Upon clarification later with the teacher, Jose's mother died in prison and so he did not know her very well but his grandmother is very supportive. The children were interested in the stories and rich illustrations, but as I read *Thanks for Thanksgiving* I realized how culturally out of touch it was for the children. From what they said, none of them could recall a Thanksgiving meal, and I realized that it was likely a matter of privilege that I had enjoyed a 'special' Thanksgiving meal every year that I could recall."

Appendix J: Examples of Reshaping the Curriculum and Delivery of Services

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 27, 2017	The kids loved the A song from youtube and all sang along, practicing the short A sound."
Example 2: Excerpt from Nov 27, 2017	"This was the most engaged Ive ever seen the entire group. Everyone was listening and participating, which is particularly interesting because Abiyoyo is a long book that I was worried they would be less engaged with. Lebron said the uncle character in the book was just like his uncle and KeShawn said that he loved to play tricks on people and liked that the uncle was a 'joker' with his neighbors."
Example 3: Excerpt from Nov 29, 2017	"Only Jamar and Crystal could remember what letter we had talked about on Monday. When I showed the children the letter, they could remember what sound it made but not what the name of it was. They made the /a/ sound just like the video had that we had watched and so I think that resonated with them better"

Appendix K: Examples of Student-Controlled Discourse

Example 1: Excerpt from Nov 20, 2017	"Read two Thanksgiving books to children. When we discussed the holiday before the books, no one in the class was aware that it was Thanksgiving that was that coming Wednesday or knew of their family's plan for the holiday. We went around the circle sharing something we were grateful for and while I expected everyone to say something like 'my toys' or 'candy' because my own child had expressed gratitude for these earlier in the day, each one talked about their families and how they loved them. This changed the direction of the conversation and Jose wanted to know about my family and where I lived. We talked about who people lived with and who they were grateful for in their family."
Example 2: Excerpt from December 1, 2017	"We went around the circle pointing to the letter C on the book. As we did this, KeShawn looked at the book and said, "hey, this book has an A on it too!" I was surprised and impressed to see that he could transfer information from what we had learned to a new circumstance. "
Example 3: Excerpt from December 1, 2017	"As we read, we stopped frequently to make connections to the text and discuss the pictures of the book. The kids discussed Christmas and all of the kids said that they were excited for Santa to come, each sharing what they wanted for Christmas with most of them wanting to ask for new clothes or shoes. "

Appendix L: Example of Culturally Responsive Lesson Plan for the Letter "A"

Focus Skills	Phonics: Grapheme and Phoneme: "A" Concepts of Print: front cover, return sweep, identify letter, page turning Concepts of Writing: understand that letters make up words Early Emergent Literacy: picture reading, title of book, author, illustrator
Goal of Lesson	For students to be able to correctly identify the grapheme "A," articulate the phoneme /a/, and recognize that the two mean the same letter
Lesson Introduction	1. Sit in circle and ask students to sing "ABC" song together 2. Introduce that today we're discussing the first letter of the alphabet: "A" 3. Give each student a card with his or her name on it. Hold up card with the letter "A" printed on it. Tell students this is the letter "A." Ask students to see if their name has the letter "A" in it- once they think they know the answer they should check with a neighbor to see if the neighbor agrees. 4. Go around the circle, holding up name cards and sharing if there name has the letter "A" and where it is in their name.

Interactive Teacher Modeling	1. Model how to say the name and sound of letter A, with children participating.
	2. Share letter "A" video- we'll watch to it twice. Watch the first time and write the letter "A" in the air and the second time students are encouraged to sing along and dance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBAuIzZttP4
	3. Show children Abiyoyo book.
	   a. Students identify which is the front cover and tell what the author and illustrator do.
	   b. Then each child makes a prediction about what the story is about based off of the front cover of the book. What does it look like the man on the front cover is doing? How can you tell?
	   c. Discuss letter "A" on the front cover of the book, give every child an opportunity to find and touch the letter A in "Abiyoyo"
	   d. Read the story, stopping frequently to have students make predictions and connections to text
	4. Share-out: What did people like about the story? What was silly?

Student Modeling	1. Have one student put the letter "A" sentence into the pocket chart. Help the student read the sentence, pointing from word-to-word with a pointer
	2. Hand out student copies of letter student "A" book.
	    a. Model how to read the story together, having students turn the pages on their own in their own books
	    b. Have students take turns reading their books with a partner.

Assessment	1. Students go on a "scavenger hunt" to find the letter "A" in words around the room. When someone finds an "A" we all high-five and take turns touching the letter "A" on the wall. 2. Everyone gets a chance to share one word that begins with the letter A

Appendix M: Picture Books from Curricular Implementation

Becker, S. (2016). *Even superheroes have bad days.* New York, NY: Sterling Publishing.

Boelts, M. (2007). *Those shoes*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Publishing.

Curato, M. (2015). *Little Elliott's big family*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co.

Freeman, D. (2014). *A Christmas wish for Corduroy*. New York, NY: Viking Books for
    Young Readers.

Geisel, T. S., & Seuss [pseud]. (1958). *The cat in the hat.* New York: Random House.

Howard, E. F. (2004). *Flower girl butterflies.* New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.

Isadora, R. (2009). *The twelve dancing princesses*. London, UK: Puffin Books.

Keats, E. J. (1998). *Peter's chair.* London, UK: Puffin Books.

Keats, E. J. (1976). *The snowy day.* London, UK: Puffin Books.

Keats, E. J. (1998). *Whistle for Willie*. London, UK: Puffin Books.

LeSieg, T. (1961). *Ten apples up on top!* New York, NY: Random House.

Marks, J. (2008). *Thanks for Thanksgiving.* New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Miller, S. (2017). *Princess hair*. Columbus, GA: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Murray, D. (2016). *City shapes*. Columbus, GA: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Reynolds, P. (2003). *The dot*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Publishing.

Santat, D. (2014). *Beekle*. Columbus, GA: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Sauer, T. (2016). *Mary had a little glam*. New York, NY: Sterling Publishing.

Seeger, P. (1994). *Abiyoyo*. New York, NY: Aladdin.

Seuss, D., & Edmondson, A. (1960). *Green eggs and ham*. New York, NY: Beginner Books.

Seuss. (1974). *There's a wocket in my pocket!* (Vol. 18). New York, NY: Random House.

Seuss. (2003). *One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish*. London, UK: HarperCollins.

Appendix N: Multimedia Sources from Curricular Implementation

Have Fun Teaching. (2010, August 18). *Letter A song for kids* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBAuIzZttP4.

Have Fun Teaching. (2011, February 10). *Letter B song for kids* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5D3ySh7s2c.

Have Fun Teaching. (2011, February 10). *Letter C song for kids* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieo0LPYdUfQ.

Have Fun Teaching. (2011, February 10). *Letter D song for kids* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqntSJGu1t0.

Have Fun Teaching. (2011, February 10). *Letter E song for kids* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm4OnFLl5Uw.

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