

Fall 2020

Exploring the Impact of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy on African American Students' Attitudes Toward Reading in a Pre-Kindergarten Classroom: An Action Research Study

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY ON AFRICAN AMERICAN
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD READING IN A PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

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2020

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to John C. Hudson, Dr. Rosie Ellis, and Dr. Glenn Brantley. Thank you for instilling in me tenacity, strength, and the ability to persevere and aim for the highest goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to endure and make it through this journey. I would also like to acknowledge all the special people in my life who have embarked upon this journey with me. I am extremely indebted to my family, whose love, support, and prayers have made the achievement of this goal a reality. To my parents, Glenn Brantley and Rosie Ellis, thank you for your unwavering faith in me to accomplish this goal. To my friends and colleagues who provided me with encouraging thoughts, prayers, and support throughout this journey, I am eternally grateful.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Rhonda Jeffries, Chairperson of my Committee. I extend my deepest gratitude to you for working with me throughout this journey. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee as well for their time and input throughout this process. Special thanks goes out to Dr. Yasha Becton, Dr. Suha Tamim, and Dr. Leigh D'Amico. Finally, I would like to thank the University of South Carolina. I sincerely appreciate the University of South Carolina for giving me the opportunity to conduct an action research project regarding such a critical topic, and the opportunity to serve as a change agent within my community.

ABSTRACT

In U.S. schools, the academic needs of many African American students are not being adequately met. This alarming trend has prompted many educators to recognize the need to make changes in their knowledge base and instructional practices in order to better serve African American students. Culturally relevant pedagogy--a multifaceted approach to teaching that utilizes students' cultural experiences to facilitate cultural competence, social justice, and student learning--has been identified as a method that may create more positive learning outcomes among African American students and diverse learners.

This study investigated the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American students' attitudes towards reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom. The problem of practice for this study addressed the urgent need for educators to focus on creating classroom opportunities that will better serve African American students and provide them with the skills and confidence to develop more positive attitudes toward reading early in life. For the purposes of this study, students' (N=18) attitudes toward reading were measured using three parameters: (a) students' responses to a pre- and post-student attitude toward reading survey (b) students' responses to individual semi-structured interviews and (c) teacher-researcher observations ascertaining students' in class reading behaviors, patterns, and levels of engagement. The data collection and observation process took place over a 6-week period at an urban early learning center in Atlanta, GA. Data were collected via student observations and interviews, lead teacher

interviews, and a pre-and post-reading attitude survey. The results of the analysis of the data indicated that many students reported experiencing enhanced positive attitudes toward reading after exposure to six weeks of culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Furthermore, common themes that emerged once culturally relevant pedagogy was introduced to students included: enhanced student engagement, enhanced student learning, and increased student awareness of social justice issues. Additional findings for this study revealed that ongoing professional development and professional learning communities focused on strategies to help teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into the reading curriculum might prove to be highly beneficial for many educators.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, pre-kindergarten, African American, action research, reading, attitude

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures.....	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	5
Purpose Statement	8
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Limitations of the Study	12
Organization of the Study	13
Key Terms and Definitions.....	13
Conclusion.....	14
Chapter 2: Review Of Related Literature	16
Historical Significance of Literacy and Race	17
Early Literacy	19
Reading Aloud to Children.....	24
Building Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Reading	26
Book Selection.....	29

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	32
Multicultural Books	35
Conclusion	39
Chapter 3: Methodology	41
Reintroduction of Research Question	41
Rationale for Mixed Methods Action Research Methodology	42
Role of Action Research	43
Role of the Researcher	44
Research Context	44
Study Participants	46
Classroom Demographics	51
Design of the Study	51
Data Collection	58
Data Analysis	63
Conclusion	67
Chapter 4: Findings	68
Reintroduction of the Purpose and Research Questions	69
Findings of the Study	69
Interpretation of the Study Results	84
Conclusion	86
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations	88
Overview and Summary of the Study	89
Questions and Suggested Additional Research	91
Conclusion	94
References	97

Appendix A: Pre-Kindergarten Student Attitudes Toward Reading Survey	109
Appendix B: Pre-Kindergarten Reading Attitude Survey Scoring Sheet	112
Appendix C: Student Interview Questions	113
Appendix D: Lead Teacher Interview Questions.....	114
Appendix E: Field Notes Page.....	115
Appendix F: Parental Consent Form.....	116

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Classroom demographics of 18 pre-kindergarten children.....	51
Table 3.2 Schedule of read aloud children’s literature	57
Table 3.3 Summary of the data collection process	59
Table 3.4 Culturally relevant data analysis chart.....	64
Table 4.1 Percentage scores: Selected items analysis.....	72

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1. Action research trajectory.....	52
Figure 4.1. Overall results of reading attitude survey.....	71
Figure 4.2. Action research summary of study findings.....	86

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALA	Apple Learning Academy
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
CRT.....	Culturally Responsive Teaching
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NELP.....	National Early Literacy Panel

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A student's attitude toward reading is an essential factor that can greatly influence their level of reading engagement, frequency of independent reading, and possibly their reading achievement (McKenna, Kear, & Elsworth, 1995; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Martinez, Aricak, & Jewell, 2008). Although research exploring factors impacting young children's attitudes toward reading is limited (Kush, Watkins, Brookhart, 2005), evidence confirms that students form attitudes toward reading early in life as early as four years of age (Cunningham, 2008). Scholars maintain that reading attitudes and behaviors formed during early childhood may impact students throughout their academic career, and low literacy levels developed in the early grades may be associated with increased risk of decreased graduation rates from high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010).

Several factors may influence and impact students' attitudes toward reading including, home literacy environment (Van Steensel, 2006) and peer influences (Henry & Rickman, 2017). However, a growing body of scholarship confirms that the quality of the school literacy environment (Cunningham, 2008; Nielsen & Monson, 1996) and the instructional strategies utilized by the teacher; (Hu, Wu, Curby, Wu, & Zhang, 2018) have a significant impact on literacy attitudes among early learners.

For African American students, the ability of educators to find ways to enhance the quality of their early learning literacy environments and create experiences to help them cultivate positive attitudes toward reading early in life is of urgent concern. Early

childhood has been documented as being a key malleable timepoint in a child's life and interventions implemented during this time have been found to have long-lasting effects (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Furthermore, by the time children enter kindergarten evidence suggests that achievement gaps based on race and income already exist, and these gaps remain as children progress through school (Reardon, 2011). Similarly, the Anne E. Casey Foundation (2010) reported that students should start engaging in learning literacy from birth, and the time up until the end of third grade is the time that students should be learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade, students should already know how to read and should be utilizing their skillset to read for understanding (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2010). However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], (2017), data from the 2017 reading assessment reported that only twenty percent of fourth-grade African American students read at or above the proficient level while forty-seven percent of fourth-grade White students read at or above the proficient level. When confronting the current reading data for African American students, the results from the NAEP report suggest a need for interventions that will help reverse the trend of low reading proficiency among African American readers. Moreover, the data suggest the urgent need for interventions that will help struggling readers in the early years of school.

In response to the need to increase academic achievement and better meet the needs of African American students, numerous scholars have challenged educators to re-examine the teaching strategies and methods used to teach African American students (Boutte, 2015; Kunjufu, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995). For many African American students, a critical aspect of instruction that is often missing in their classrooms is

instruction that provides a connection to their culture and lived experiences. However, when teachers exclude students' culture from the curriculum or also approach teaching from a deficit perspective, many African American students find that they cannot reach their fullest potential in these types of learning environments (Boutte, 2015).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been highlighted as an effective teaching method that educators can utilize to better serve the needs of African American students and provide them with more positive learning experiences along with the opportunity to experience increased academic outcomes. Although there is much existing scholarship highlighting the benefits of utilizing culturally relevant teaching to impact overall academic and social outcomes among African American students, (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2015;) there is limited rigorous research that speaks directly to the impact of utilizing culturally relevant teaching as a vehicle to impact reading attitudes among early learners. For this reason, there is an urgent need to study the role that culturally relevant pedagogy plays in impacting students' attitudes toward reading in an early learning classroom.

This action research study investigated the impact of utilizing culturally relevant teaching to create more positive attitudes toward reading among African American students in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA) (pseudonym). The primary purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of culturally relevant teaching strategies on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of practice for this action research study focused on the observed low interest in reading activities and negative attitudes expressed toward participating in reading among African American pre-kindergarten students at Apple Learning Academy (ALA). The curriculum used to guide instruction in this pre-kindergarten classroom required students to be able to acquire meaning from a variety of materials read to them. Observation by the teacher-researcher revealed that many of the books and learning activities that the lead teacher used to present the content to the students were not reflective of the students' identities and culture, nor did they challenge students or encourage students to think critically about issues pertaining to diversity or social justice.

Many students appeared to be disengaged and distracted when the teacher read a story to the group. Many students were also unable to answer questions about the stories that were read to them. The lead teacher also expressed frustration regarding how to meet the needs of many children in the class. The teacher-researcher assessed the lack of engagement among the students toward the reading activities along with the frustration expressed from the lead teacher to be problematic. The behaviors observed by the teacher-researcher from both the students and the teacher were very concerning considering that research affirms that students entering kindergarten today will be expected to know and be able to perform skills that were covered in the typical first-grade classroom of ten years or more ago (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). Furthermore, with reading skills being core skills that form the foundation for other content areas, action research in this classroom was warranted.

Significance of the Study

When teaching reading to African American students, it is urgent that educators self-reflect upon their pedagogical practices, and then retool their strategies, if necessary, to ensure that they are keeping students actively engaged and facilitating the development of positive reading attitudes and habits. Assisting students in cultivating positive attitudes toward reading and utilizing instructional strategies that will foster positive attitudes toward reading are critical components of helping students obtain academic achievement that must not be overlooked. In addition to fostering an appreciation for students' cultures and backgrounds, a major goal of culturally relevant teaching is to promote academic success among students. Considering the evidence that confirms the link between reading achievement and life-long outcomes including economic earning potential (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2010), it is critical that educators begin utilizing innovative teaching strategies to help maintain student's interest in reading and guide reading instruction. Moreover, considering the fact that little research has been conducted that directly focuses on pre-kindergarten students reading attitudes and literacy skills (Sperling, Sherwood & Hood, 2013), this study was warranted.

Apple Learning Academy (ALA) is located in a very high-poverty, urban area of Atlanta, GA, and eighty-three percent of the residents in the area are African American. The current median income in the area is \$22,750 a year (Zip Data Maps, 2018) and nine-seventy percent of the students who live in the community receive or are eligible to participate in the free or reduced school lunch program at their school. One hundred percent of the students in the pre-kindergarten classroom at ALA are African American students.

Many African American children who come from socioeconomic-disadvantaged backgrounds similar to the backgrounds of the students at ALA face a host of unique challenges as they progress throughout life and their academic careers. In many cases, society has already placed numerous negative stereotypes on African American children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds before they even enter school. Although a body of scholarship confirms that there is indeed an opportunity and achievement gap that exist between African American students and White students (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2009; Hanushek, Ingram, & Kenyon, 2014; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009), according to Anderson (2007), when the data is interrogated that examines African Americans students' academic growth outside of comparisons to other groups, the data reveals that African American students have made significant progress over time. Moreover, the fact that African American students have shown vast growth over time despite the monumental levels of oppression, inequalities, discrimination, and hardships they have endured further validates and confirms the strength and un-limitless potential of African American students to learn and succeed despite all obstacles. However, African American students from underprivileged backgrounds must have dedicated educators who are committed to providing them with the proper guidance, support, and instruction needed to ensure their success. This will also require educators to become more self-aware of their own biases, attitudes, or any stereotypes that they possess toward their students. African American students need educators who will make deliberate and concerted efforts in their instructional practices to highlight the strengths and possibilities of Black children, and who will go beyond the call of duty to dismantle the discourse of

Black inferiority that has historically and systemically plagued our society (Boutte, 2015).

With these considerations in mind, this study is important because it closely examines culturally relevant pedagogy as an effective strategy for impacting reading attitudes among African American learners in a pre-kindergarten classroom. Learning to read and cultivating positive attitudes and habits toward reading are important milestones in a child's life. Research has confirmed that the process of learning to read and developing attitudes toward reading begins in early childhood (Cunningham, 2008; Martinez, Aricak, & Jewel, 2008). A body of research has been conducted investigating reading instructional strategies and interventions for early learners that prioritizes phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008); however, limited research has investigated instructional interventions for teaching reading to early learners that prioritizes factors that may impact students' attitudes and behavior. It is important for educational researchers to conduct research such as this study to investigate and identify instructional strategies that can be used to teach reading to early learners and help them reach their highest potential. Furthermore, this study is important because it is urgent that scholars make it a priority to research and examine factors surrounding instructional strategies that will improve literacy outcomes for African American students -- a group that is often marginalized and overlooked. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge of best practices that will provide teachers with insight on ways to improve instruction to ensure, that "all the children will be well" (Boutte, 2015, p. 3).

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA).

Research Question

The teacher-researcher sought to answer the following research question through this present study. What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA)? Students' attitudes toward reading were measured using a (a) students' responses to a pre- and post-student attitude toward reading survey (b) students' responses to individual semi-structured interviews and (c) teacher-researcher observations ascertaining students' in class reading behaviors, patterns, and levels of engagement. A definition of culturally relevant pedagogy can be found in the definition of terms section.

Conceptual Framework

This action research study was grounded in the following conceptual frameworks: critical theory, sociocultural theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Critical Theory

According to Schiro (2013), critical theory is "based on social justice and equity, and it promotes action to improve society and the individual through education" (p.175). Guided by scholars who support tenets of critical theory and who also promote equity in schools, (Boutte, 2015; Delpit, 2012), the teacher-researcher grounded this study in critical theory to promote instructional practices among the early learners at ALA that

would bring about social change. The teacher-researcher believed that tenets of critical theory would appropriately support both the micro and macro goals of this action research study. On the micro level, this study aimed to create positive change and promote positive reading attitudes and habits among the pre-kindergarten students at ALA. However, on the macro level, from a broader critical theoretical perspective, this study was designed to challenge educators to critically reflect upon their pedagogical strategies along with their behaviors and dispositions toward students to ensure that they are adequately meeting the needs of children of color and children from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, pedagogical strategies grounded in critical theory may serve an important role in provoking educators to serve as change agents to reform aspects of the “hidden curriculum” that do not promote positive change within our society.

Schiro (2013) stated the following in reference to the hidden curriculum:

Underlying many of these problems [ie. racism, illiteracy, unemployment] are deep social structures-many based in Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge, culture, and values-that through the school’s hidden curriculum subtly shape student beliefs and behavior in such a way that they, as both students and future adults, will contribute to the continuation and worsening of these problems. If these problems are not resolved, they will threaten the survival of our society.

(p.151)

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory recognizes the significance of the social and cultural aspects that contribute to the development of mental processing. Lev Vygotsky is a key theorist who had the most significant impact on sociocultural theory. A key tenet of Vygotsky’s

Sociocultural theory maintains that social activity and interactions with others are the starting points for the development of thought and learning (Johnson, 2004). In regard to this action research study, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is significant because it recognizes the role that social interactions such as conversations with teachers, parents, peers, and community members, all play in helping students develop higher level mental processes that contribute to their learning outcomes.

All the students at ALS were African American, and all the students who participated in this study came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, all the students still had a variety of different experiences and levels of knowledge that they possessed based upon their prior social interactions. For example, some of the students were very culturally exposed and had visited museums, traveled extensively, and had a broad range of topics that they wanted to talk about and share with their teachers and peers. On the other hand, some students had limited cultural exposure and had not been many places. Using Vygotsky's theory as a guide, the teacher-researcher considered the various sociocultural experiences that each child possessed, and that factors surrounding the children's exposure and prior social interactions and experiences could possibly influence the child's overall schema and prior knowledge. This is significant because it is a key component in connecting with students when teachers understand them as individuals first and meet them wherever they are academically and socially.

Therefore, it is important for educators to be mindful that: (1) students will bring different levels of knowledge and exposure with them into the classroom based upon sociocultural factors and (2) engaging in meaningful conversations with students, especially early learners, is critical to helping them facilitate the higher mental processes

of the mind. With these considerations in mind, the teacher-researcher engaged in meaningful conversations and social interactions with the students through conducting literature circles, conducting semi-structured interviews, administering the pre-and post-survey, and facilitating question and answer sessions.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Many researchers agree that culturally relevant pedagogy is an effective strategy for integrating students' cultures into the curriculum and addressing the social and academic needs of African American students and other diverse populations (Kelly-Jackson, Jackson, 2008; Durden, Escalante, & Blich, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). According to Ladson-Billings (2009), teachers who incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into their praxis “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (p. 474).

Action Research Methodology

This section of Chapter One describes the action research design used to conduct this study. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), action research in education is defined as “a form of applied research whose primary purpose is to increase the quality, impact, and justice of education professionals' practice” (p. 597). This action research study utilized a mixed-methods research design method. Narrative data from interviews and observations were collected from research participants in the educational setting and analyzed for thematic convergence. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the pre and post intervention survey data. According to Taskakkori and Teddlie (2003), mixed-methods can provide richer insights into the study and have the potential to raise more

thought-provoking questions for future research. A more detailed and fully outline plan regarding the methodology is detailed in Chapter 3. The teacher-researcher collected the data and reflected on the findings with the faculty and staff at ALA to improve the reading outcomes and attitudes among pre-kindergarten students at the learning center. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and useful in describing the impact of the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy on the students' attitudes toward reading. The teacher-researcher also protected the identity of the study participants by utilizing pseudonyms when discussing the study participants and the school (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p,151).

Data collection included classroom observations, student surveys, teacher surveys, and a pre-and posttest survey. The pre-test survey was administered to students before and after the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and again at the end of the study after the intervention was complete.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was the small sample size (N=18) and the 6-week timeframe to conduct the research. Therefore, it may not be possible to form generalizations from the results. Utilizing a larger sample size over an extended period of time may have provided more in-depth information regarding the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on the students' attitudes toward reading. Additionally, it is possible that other extraneous variables outside of the teacher- researchers' control could have contributed to any attitude changes reported by the students. However, efforts were made to minimize the effect of extraneous variables as much as possible during class time. The pre-test survey was also administered to collect baseline data which provided a more in-

depth perspective of the students' attitudes before the culturally relevant pedagogical intervention.

Organization of the Study

The completed study is reported in five chapters. Chapter One, the introduction, introduces the reader to the identified problem of practice, purpose statement, research questions, related literature, and the action research methodological design.

Chapter Two starts by discussing early reading instruction and the value of building positive attitudes and perceptions toward reading. Next, the benefits of utilizing culturally relevant teaching as an effective teaching strategy are discussed. Lastly, Chapter Two synthesizes the use of multicultural books as a vehicle to facilitate student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness -- the key tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Chapter Three details the mixed methods action research methodology used to collect data, analyze data, reflect on data, and report data findings. Chapter Four reports the data findings and relates the findings to the identified problem of practice. Chapter Five discusses the conclusions, summary, and implications of the study along with recommendations for further study. The References and Appendices follow Chapter Five.

Key Terms and Definitions

Reading: Gunning (2003) defines reading as “a continuously developing ability which emerges from a child’s experience with oral language and print” (p.11).

Attitudes: “Feelings, values, and beliefs that can be evaluated through a person’s words and behaviors.” (Morrison, Ross, Kalman, & Kemp, 2013, p. 305)

Reading Attitudes: Alexander and Filler (1976) define reading attitudes as “ a system of feelings related to reading which cause the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (p. 1).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A method for teaching by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) that advocates the following: (a) academic success (b) cultural competence (c) critical consciousness which challenges social order and advocates for social justice.

Literature Circle: A small group discussion guided by the teacher where students gather with the teacher to discuss a text. The goal is to lead students to engage in higher-level discussions. (Gunning, 2003).

Conclusion

This action research topic sought to answer the following research question: What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy, have on African American students’ attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA)? The data generated will be used to determine if improved student attitudes toward reading occurred as a result of the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum intervention that was implemented during the Spring of 2018 in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA). The teacher-researcher was concerned with curriculum and pedagogy that seeks to improve students’ attitudes toward reading among pre-kindergarten African American students who come from low-income environments. The overall goal of this research is to improve African American students’ attitudes toward reading at an early age in the hope that this will lead to enhanced academic achievement and positive long-term benefits associated with college and career readiness. The teacher-researcher also hopes that culturally relevant pedagogy will prove to be a

powerful instructional strategy that has the potential to positively impact students' attitudes and engagement toward reading.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As U.S. classrooms have become increasingly diverse, it has become critical for educators to ensure that teaching practices are adjusted to account for the structural inequities that are present in our schools and society (Boutte, 2015). Culturally relevant teaching has been documented as an effective instructional strategy that can be used to better serve the needs of African American students and other diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009).

The problem of practice for this action research study focused on investigating the observed lack of engagement and negative attitudes displayed toward reading activities among African American pre-kindergarten students at an urban early learning center in Atlanta, GA. Considering the fact that instructional practices have been documented to impact student academic attitudes and student achievement (Hu, Wu, Curby, Wu, Zhang, 2018), the implementation of a culturally relevant teaching intervention served as an appropriate pedagogy to evaluate its effectiveness in establishing more positive student attitudes toward reading activities. The intervention utilized multicultural texts to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and themes were explored pertaining to identity, culture, and social justice.

This review of related literature begins with a brief discussion regarding the historical aspects of literacy and African Americans. Next, it presents a theoretical basis for the study “Exploring the Impact of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy on African

American Students' Attitudes Toward Reading in a Pre-Kindergarten Classroom.” A review of research and related literature examines four major areas: (1) early literacy (2) building positive attitudes and perceptions toward reading (3) the benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy, and (4) using multicultural books to facilitate culturally relevant teaching.

Utilizing action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014), the researcher conducted an online search of the literature utilizing the following databases: University of South Carolina's Library Catalogue, google scholar, EBSCO, and JSTOR. Specific strategies used to search the literature included a keyword search using terms such as African American students, action research, reading attitudes, culturally relevant pedagogy, and pre-kindergarten.

Historical Significance of Literacy and Race

The struggle for freedom, justice, and educational opportunity has been an ongoing and continuous battle for African Americans throughout American history. For hundreds of years African Americans have endured slavery, segregation, and treatment as second-class citizens. During the slavery era, anti-literacy laws were established in many southern states which prohibited teaching reading and writing to African Americans (Nieto, 2004). According to Cornelius (1991), approximately ninety percent of African Americans emerged from slavery illiterate.

However, Blackmon (2008), asserts that as the concept of public education later emerged and black people slowly gained access to educational opportunities, white people became infuriated with the discovery that part of their “white taxes” were being used to help educate black children rather than solely their own. More importantly,

keeping in mind the fact that quality education is closely linked to economic empowerment, whites proceeded to change laws that would limit funding for schools attended by black students, and in some areas black students were restricted to attending school only six months out of the year (Blackmon, 2008). Recent discussions regarding the right for all children to learn and “literacy as a civil right” have prompted scholars to re-examine policies and instructional practices to ensure that educational equity is a possibility for all students (Greene, 2008). Unfortunately, the literacy opportunity gap has continued to persist between African American and white students, and literacy scholars have challenged educators to examine the underlying reasons for achievement gaps from a broader perspective. According to Ladson-Billings (2014), we cannot ignore the historical systems of oppression that have led to the state of affairs with children of color. Therefore, we are in an urgent state of affairs to modify an educational debt. Furthermore, we need to ensure that we are providing high quality literacy instruction to all our students, especially our African American students, from the very beginning. When teaching our African American students, we must remain mindful to celebrate their strengths and their culture within our lessons, and we must approach teaching and learning with high expectations and from the perspective that academic success is the outcome. Culturally relevant pedagogy may serve as a powerful change agent to restore equity to diverse learners, particularly in the area of early childhood literacy instruction.

Although we have progressed beyond many of the historical struggles surrounding literacy education and race, Thompson and Shamberger (2015) argued that there is still a major reading crisis today concerning Black students, which warrants national and intensified attention. According to Thompson and Shamberger (2015) poor

reading skills are correlated to poverty during adulthood and also associated with prison incarceration rates, dropping out of school, and struggling academically in other subjects besides reading. Additionally, because Black youth are overrepresented among students who drop out of school and get trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline (The Children's Defense Fund, 2007), and underperform academically, educators at all levels have a professional obligation to work harder to help them develop good reading skills, thereby increasing their chances of having a bright future as adults. According to Thompson and Shamberger (2015), teachers who truly want to work effectively with Black students must do the following:

- (1) Adopt the mindset that they can help Black students become better readers
- (2) Adopt the mindset that it is their professional responsibility to do their best to bring all students as close to grade-level standards as possible
- (3) form alliances with parents
- (4) use effective and culturally relevant teaching strategies (p.7).

Early Literacy

Learning to read is one of the most important academic milestones in a child's life. Children who do not develop literacy skills by the end of third grade are at a high risk of failure in later grades (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Whether or not a child learns to successfully read can also have an impact on a child's entire academic future. Research demonstrates that children who have not developed some basic literacy skills during early childhood are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Similarly, Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall and Gwynne (2010) argued

that the educational careers of 25% to 40% of American children are imperiled because they do not read well enough, quickly enough, or easily enough.

Although many scholars agree that high quality literacy experiences and reading should be introduced to children during early childhood, even amongst top researchers there are differing views regarding the specific ways in which educators should strategically implement early literacy instruction. Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2010) critiqued research conducted by the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) regarding early childhood literacy instruction. Their analyses revealed that although the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) clearly identified skills that pre-kindergarten teachers should teach in order to have the greatest positive impact on the literacy skills of students, the researchers argued that “ the report had relatively little to say about how early literacy can or should be taught in everyday classroom interactions” (p. 313). Furthermore, Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2008) asserted that “leaving the how issue underspecified while drawing conclusions about what needs to be taught results in many practitioners’ having insufficient guidance about the implications regarding the nature of classroom interaction that constitute quality early literacy instruction” (p. 313).

Snow and Matthews (2016) investigated how literacy develops in the early years and the programs and practices that promote adequate literacy for all children. According to their work, a high- quality learning environment for children in pre-kindergarten must include high quality teaching. Children whose teachers use more sophisticated vocabulary and engage them more actively in talk about books show better reading skills in later grades (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Furthermore, they argued that a high-quality literacy learning environment in pre-kindergarten is contingent upon the following four

components: “explicit instruction, warmth and sensitivity to the needs of students, consistent feedback and interaction with students; and verbal stimulation” (p. 13).

Aram (2006) investigated the role of early literacy intervention among preschool students on various reading skills such as vocabulary and alphabetic skills. The study compared the effects of three yearlong programs, one involving storybook reading, the second training in alphabetic skills, and the third combining major activities from these two programs. Twelve low-SES preschools participated in the study, three in each program and three as a comparison group. The programs targeted two age groups, 3-4 and 4-5-year-old children. The results of the study indicated that the children in the three early literacy intervention programs progressed significantly more than the comparison group on name writing, letter knowledge, and phonological awareness. The results of the study also revealed that in regards to receptive vocabulary, the younger children surpassed the older children in all programs. Findings of the study suggested that the storybook reading program may have been more productive for the younger age group (3-4 years old) whereas the alphabetic skills program may have been more productive for the older children (4-5 years old). Findings of the study support the theory that working with students earlier in life on targeted early literacy interventions may have more significant outcomes. The findings also suggested that storybook reading is a highly effective early literacy intervention strategy for use with pre-kindergarten and younger students.

Similarly, Hilbert and Eis (2014) investigated factors pertaining to early intervention for emergent literacy development among preschool students considered at risk for literacy skill development. The focus of the research study was to investigate

whether or not an early intervention program targeting pre-literacy skill development implemented by pre-Kindergarten teachers would be effective. The study described the characteristics and findings of an early literacy intervention program implemented to facilitate the development of critical emergent literacy skills among children identified as low-income and at-risk in the context of a collaborative, pre-kindergarten/Head Start classroom. The study participants included one hundred and fifty-four pre-kindergarten students. The study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design including an experimental and a control group. The experimental group included preschool children from a low-income background who participated in the experimental intervention program that targeted print knowledge, vocabulary, narrative skills and phonological awareness. The intervention revealed the effectiveness of early literacy intervention in the areas of vocabulary, phonological awareness, and print knowledge. The results revealed a statistically significant increases in vocabulary and print knowledge within the intervention group itself. Furthermore, the results indicated in terms of emergent literacy skills, that educators can close the gap prior to the beginning of formal reading instruction. The overall findings of the investigation suggest that the trajectory of literacy development can be positively impacted with early intervention in the preschool classroom by early childhood educators.

In addition to debates surrounding factors pertaining to how educators should implement early childhood literacy instruction, early childhood literacy researchers also maintain differing views regarding the exact time frame that a child should begin to read. While some scholars argue that learning to read should start as soon as a child is born, other scholars assert that learning to read is a process that is different for each child.

Durkin (1966), who was one of the first scholars to examine the nature of early childhood reading instruction, asserts that there is no definite time that all children should be introduced to reading, nor is there any prescribed approach for teaching reading to all children. Durkin (1966) maintained that reading instruction should be determined by the child's maturity, interest, and ability. In two longitudinal studies, Durkin found that only about 1% to 3% of children could be described as early readers. Durkin gave questionnaires to the parents of children who were reading and to the parents of those who were not reading yet to try to ascertain what in the environments of the early readers might explain their abilities. The findings of Durkin's research revealed that early readers had internal motivations to read and that they had adults in their lives available and willing to answer their questions about letters and words. This meant that early readers were not self-taught but that they had access to caring adults who helped them when their help was sought.

Conversely, Phalen (2011), a scholar and advocate of early literacy intervention, maintains that reading should start for children beginning as early as birth. Phalen (2011), suggested that the advantages of reading to children and providing early literacy intervention during early childhood is so critical that it even impacts brain function. According to Phalen, (2011) if children are not provided with engaging early literacy experiences, their brains may start to atrophy. Phalen (2011) maintained that children are more receptive to learning literacy earlier in life because brain development occurs at a faster rate for children between the ages of zero and three.

Reading Aloud to Children

Despite differing views pertaining to what constitutes high quality literacy instruction, many scholars agree that reading aloud to children is a critical component of teaching reading in any early childhood reading program (McNair, 2013; Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009; Evans, 2010). Reading aloud to young children also increases students' interest in reading because children enjoy emulating their teachers, and they are eager to read the books that their teachers are reading (Cunningham, 2005).

Evans (2010) investigated the impact of teachers utilizing multicultural interactive read-alouds within elementary classrooms. The study was conducted to explore the role of interactively reading aloud multicultural books to fourth grade students coupled with critical literacy discussions and written student responses. Twice a week, the teacher read aloud picture books and engaged the students in conversations about the books. Themes of tolerance and freedom were used in the selected books. Evans (2010) concluded that as a result of exposing students to multicultural interactive read-alouds, students experienced enhanced engagement while listening to read-alouds, along with an enhanced and more positive awareness of diversity and social justice issues.

Wasik, Bond, and Hindman (2006), conducted an investigation exploring reading aloud to students and its impact on the language and literacy development of head start children. The main goal of the study was to explore the positive benefits of reading aloud to students and to also deepen teachers' knowledge of early literacy instruction. Another goal of the study was to provide teachers with targeted and intentional instructional support surrounding the implementation of their read-aloud lessons with students. Ten Head Start teachers participated in the study. The teachers in the study focused only on

read-aloud book reading with students for a full year. Teachers in the intervention and control classrooms were observed reading a book to their class in September in order to collect baseline data and again at the end of May and beginning of June as a post-test measure. Additionally, the teacher's talking and questioning strategies that they used before, during, and after the read-aloud sessions were recorded. Teachers in the intervention group received support in the form of professional development, modeling, and on-site coaching support from expert coaches. Findings from the study suggested that the way teachers talk to students both during interactive read-alouds and before and after read-alouds can have a significant impact on children's language skills.

Similarly, Singer and Smith (2003) maintain that simply reading books to students is not enough alone to facilitate meaningful conversations with students, especially meaningful conversations surrounding diversity and social justice issues. According to Singer and Smith, (2003), teachers should preplan focal questions that will allow students to discover multiple meanings from the book. After the teacher presents focal questions to students, the students can make new meanings through their conversations and insights that they bring to the text (Singer & Smith 2003).

Lastly, Meller, Richardson, and Hatch (2009) investigated the significance of using critical literacy read-alouds in K-3 primary classrooms. They highly recommended that teachers read aloud to students because it allows the teacher to model strategies that children can use during their own independent reading. Furthermore, they asserted that teachers should implement the following key strategies when planning for and conducting read-alouds with K-3 students: conducting a picture walk, conducting a mini-lesson to activate children's prior knowledge, developing critical questions to use during

the read-aloud, and reading the story to stop and discuss the questions. According to Meller, Richardson, and Hatch (2009), reading aloud to students and implementing these key strategies has been shown to “develop children’s background knowledge, stimulate their interest in high-quality literature, increase their comprehension skills, and foster critical thinking” (p.76).

Building Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Reading

Although research exploring factors pertaining to attitudes toward reading in early childhood is limited, research still exist that confirm that students’ attitudes toward reading can have an impact on their reading outcomes. For example, an investigation by Martinez, Aricak, and Jewel (2008) suggested that the reading attitudes of students at grade 4 significantly predicted their reading achievement in regards to oral reading fluency and general reading achievement at grades 4 and 5. Similarly, Kocaarslan (2016) argued that reading attitudes were a significant predictor of reading comprehension among fourth grade students.

Parker and Paradis (1986) conducted a study exploring attitude development toward reading for students in grades one through six. Eighty-three boys and one-hundred and seven girls participated in the study. The investigation examined reading attitudes in a large sample of elementary-aged students, followed over a period of 3 years. The purpose of the study was to identify developmental trends in reading attitudes on a multidimensional measure of reading attitude. The study also examined gender differences in reading attitudes. Parker and Paradis (1986) concluded that children’s attitudes about reading exhibited a consistent decline across the elementary school years. This attitude was expressed for both academic and recreational reading. Paradis (1986)

further reported that girls demonstrated more positive reading attitudes than did boys. Implications of the study acknowledged that children's academic attitudes toward reading may also be largely impacted by home literacy practices and parental attitudes occurring before formal school entry. Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that it is important to begin fostering and developing positive attitudes towards reading as early as possible with students, especially among boys, as research indicates that attitudes toward reading could start to decline across the elementary years if positive attitudes are not developed early in life.

Research confirms that two approaches to teaching have been traditionally studied in regard to reading attitudes and motivation among students: child-center practices or teacher-centered practices (Bi, Hua, H., Curbyc, Xiao and Zhange, 2018). Child-centered practices allow students to make choices that reflect their individual preferences, such as which book to read or which activity to complete in a learning center. Teacher-centered practices are practices that involve less choices for students and most often tend to center around whole group activities. Baggerly, Ray, and Bratton (2010), asserted that child-centered practices, where students have more choices surrounding their learning, tend to be more effective in early childhood in terms of fostering and cultivating motivation and positive attitudes. Similarly, Cople and Bredekamp (2009) argued that when teaching early learners and young children, teachers should lead with child-centered practices and should strive to follow students' leads in terms of preferences pertaining to learning activities. Furthermore, Kikas, Parkarinen, Soodla, Peets, and Lerkkanen (2017) noted that when young children are provided with child-centered activities that align with their choices and preferences, children score higher on interest scales for reading.

Bi, Hua, Curbyc, Xiao and Zhange (2018) explored the relationship between teaching quality and preschoolers' attitudes toward reading. Kindergartens from 29 classrooms participated in the study. The Preschool Reading Attitude Scale (PRAS) was used to examine three- to five- year old children's attitudes toward reading. The assessment was administered via one-on-one interviews. The tester recorded the child's responses using a recording sheet. The higher total score of the PRAS scale is interpreted as more positive attitudes toward reading. Findings of the study revealed that the instructional practices, along with emotional support provided by the teacher had a positive impact on children's reading attitudes. Emotional support involved actions such as teachers showing warmth toward students and connecting with children and their interest. The positive impact on children's attitudes toward reading also, in turn, had a positive effect on students' vocabulary outcomes.

Similarly, Cunningham (2008) argued that the quality of their preschool literacy environment, and the instructional practices of their preschool teachers can have a significant impact on children's attitudes toward reading. According to Cunningham (2008), Children's attitudes towards reading became more positive as the quality of their literacy environment improved. Students had significantly different attitudes toward reading and writing depending on the quality of the literacy environment from which they had participated in preschool. Students who came from preschool classrooms rated as deficient in their support of language and literacy had the most negative attitudes. Furthermore, Cunningham concluded that economically at-risk children had more negative attitudes toward reading and writing than children from more advantaged families. The findings of Cunningham's investigation suggest that economically at-risk

children may need additional support in order to establish positive attitudes toward reading. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence to suggest that the instructional practices of the teacher can have a significant impact on students' attitudes, especially among early learners.

Book Selection

Research also suggest that interest is a major factor in shaping students' attitudes toward reading and motivating children to read. Whitehead (1984) suggested that those who select books for children should consider the following general factors:

1. Each child develops his or her own patterns of reading interests.
2. There is a significant range of individual differences in the reading interests of children.
3. Reading a certain book may provide status to a given student, at least in the minds of his or her peers.
4. Movies and television have a positive bearing on children's reading interests (p. 137).

According to Pilgram and McAllister (1968), "The success of a reading program in any school is dependent in part upon the number and quality of books available" (p. 121). A good classroom library collection should include books that are of interest to students. The diverse range of reading interests and levels of the school population should be considered when selecting books.

One way to determine children's reading interest is to administer an interest inventory. Coody (1983) recommended questions for an interest inventory which include the following:

1. What is the name of your favorite book?
2. What do you like best about reading?
3. What do you like least about reading?
4. What is your hobby?
5. Do you collect anything?
6. What games or sports do you like? (pp.10-11).

Huus (1968) argued that children's interest in books is related to age and sex differences and noted the following factors as influencing the reading interest of children:

1. The interest of children differs due to the age and grade level of the child.
2. Boys and girls generally share the same interest before the age of nine.
3. Boys have a broader range of interest than girls and read a larger variety of books; however, girls read more than boys.
4. Boys are rarely interested in books that are chiefly read by girls, but girls will read books that are chiefly read by boys to a greater degree (p. 28).

Books are often favored by children and also highly influenced by the arrangement of illustrations, color, format, type of print, and style of writing (Cappa, 1968). An investigation by Dan Cappa (1968) which involved 2500 kindergarten children revealed that the major consideration in books preferred by kindergarten students pertained to the appeal of the illustrations, followed by the story content.

When trying to incorporate themes of social justice into literacy lessons, many teachers face challenges finding books that interest and motivate students to read. Traditional children's books rarely address social issues of interest or importance to children (Meller, Richardson, Hatch, 2009). This often makes the task of finding the

books that contain social justice that will be of interest to children a challenge for teachers (Meller, Richardson, and Hatch, 2009). However, Harste et al., (2000) argued that in order to have engaging conversations with students about social issues, teachers must find books that will appeal to students. Teachers should select books that explore individuals' differences rather than make them invisible. Books that also show how people can begin to take action on important social issues are also great for fostering engagement among students (Haste, 2000).

Children go through different stages of growth and development and it is important that the appropriate books are introduced or made available at each stage in order to keep students engaged in the learning. Huck and Kuhn (1968) noted that preschool and kindergarten children are interested in rhymes and storytelling while going through a period of rapid language development. Short attention spans of preschooler and kindergarten children require books that are short in length and allow participation by the children. Books should provide opportunities to learn about the world in which the child lives. Young children also need loving, secure relationships with adults, which can be achieved by reading stories. As children become more independent and broaden their experiences, books can help them adjust. During grades one and two, children are expected to master the skills of reading and writing. Therefore, it is important that the first reading experience is enjoyable. A wide variety of books, including multicultural books and books that highlight social justice issues and cultural identity are needed to meet the expanding interest of young children.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

According to Ladson-Billings (2014), culturally relevant pedagogy is a fluid multifaceted approach to teaching that is continuously changing and evolving. However, within culturally responsive classrooms, Ladson-Billings (2014) argued that there are certain basic tenets that are present, which include, “academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 75). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an approach to teaching that seeks to address the needs of all students. CRT allows for the incorporation of student culture into the classroom as a way for students to understand themselves and others and to conceptualize learning and knowledge (Ladson-Billings 1995). According to Gunn, Brice, and Peterson (2013), “Culturally responsive teachers learn about their children’s cultures, embrace those cultures in the classroom, and use them to frame instruction” (p. 9). Furthermore, Gunn, Brice, and Peterson (2013) asserted that CRT (a) aims to promote school success for all students; (b) builds bridges between experiences at home within a school context, highlighting that the curriculum taught must be relevant and central to the children’s lives; and (c) focuses on the equality of education and celebration of diversity through a social justice orientation.

Bennett, Gunn, Evans, Estanislado, and Leung (2018) argued that although it is important for educators to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy when teaching their students, it is also imperative for teacher to remain mindful of the fact that CRT is complex, fluid, broadly defined, constantly evolving, and it adjusts in consideration of specific contexts. This investigation explored how culturally responsive classrooms look and how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in an early childhood setting with real classroom practices. Findings of the investigation revealed that the following five

areas contribute to culturally responsive practices in an early childhood setting: “ (a) developing a culturally responsive classroom community, (b) family engagement, (c) critical literacy within a social justice framework, (d) multicultural literature, and (e) culturally responsive print rich environments”(p. 241). Additionally, Bennet, Gunn, Estanislado and Leung (2018) maintained that in order to facilitate culturally responsive teaching, teachers must build relationships with students, parents, caregivers, and families.

Cheesman and De Pry (2010), explored issues surrounding culturally responsive literacy instruction. The purpose of the study was to investigate and explore issues surrounding practices needed to increase student engagement, motivation, and reading academic achievement of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The findings of the study revealed that effective culturally responsive teachers know how to integrate knowledge of both the reader and the text to provide an appropriate proportion of word-reading and meaning construction skills in comprehensive reading instruction. The researchers also noted that culturally responsive instruction shows great promise and has the potential to positively influence the education and life-long success of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Similarly, Toppell (2015) asserted that cultural responsiveness can be achieved within the reading program when educators do the following: demonstrate care, incorporate student collaboration, and carefully use engagement strategies in conjunction with the established reading program. This research discussed strategies for incorporating components of cultural responsiveness into the already existing reading program. According to Toppel, (2015) there are three recurring themes that permeate the

implementation of culturally responsive reading instruction: (1) utilizing culturally appropriate texts with students (2) maintaining engagement with students and (3) incorporating knowledge from students' family and cultural backgrounds into the lessons. Teachers can place students at the center of learning by using students' interests and strengths as opportunities for academic success (Toppel, 2015). For example, according to Toppell (2015), having students create a personal alphabet that includes one word for each letter of the alphabet that has meaning to their child is an effective method. Since students spend a lot of time in kindergarten learning letters and their corresponding sounds, it is appropriate to ensure that students are hearing words they truly connect with, rather than simply hearing the words that are included in the phonics and phonemic awareness exercises in the core reading program. Families can include words from their native languages. Children are delighted to hear their words. This simple activity establishes a sense of connectedness and community in the classroom and results in increased engagement because students hear their names and their words. Observing students and taking detail notes about their level of engagement, body language, student interactions with the teacher and other students, and students' participation is also helpful.

Critical literacy may also be an effective method of incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the early childhood classroom. According to Lopez (2011), critical literacy is an active and reflective approach to reading texts that involves exploring and constructing knowledge in order to better understand and challenge unequal social relationships. Freire (1970) argued that critical literacy may start with analysis, but the goal is social action that will lead to social justice and changes in power

relationships within a society. Teachers of young children who engage in critical literacy in their classrooms take the intelligence of young children seriously and believe they can “use their intelligence in the service of creating a better world for us all” (Nieto 2004, p. xi).

When planning for critical literacy and a discussion of social justice issues with early learners, Lewison (2002) emphasized that critical literacy with young students starts with the everyday texts and resources that young children are exposed to including picture books, songs, TV shows, commercials, news broadcasts, game boards, internet games, iPad and iPhone apps, and other oral and written texts. Teachers facilitate critical analysis by exposing children to a variety of texts that present differing perspectives, encouraging discussions about social issues within the texts, looking closely at illustrations in picture books to interpret character’s feelings, teaching children how to collectively work through problems, and suggesting ways that children might take social action (Lewison, 2002).

Multicultural Books

Ladson-Billings (1995) noted a discourse of invisibility when discussing curriculum issues in the K-12 setting. Ladson-Billings suggested that throughout our history we have presented an incoherent and disjointed picture of those who are and those who are not White. This discourse of invisibility can be seen clearly in an examination of children’s literature, where there is currently inadequate representation of all races and cultures.

Bennett, Gunn, and Leung (2016) advocated for using multicultural literature in conjunction with various instructional approaches, such as critical literacy, literature

circles, response journals, and other forms of guided written and oral discussion of concepts portrayed in multicultural texts. Infusing multicultural literature in the early childhood curriculum encourages children's empathy and bonding with others. When comprehension and vocabulary strategies are taught in conjunction with multicultural literature, children make meaningful connections to the global messages contained in the multicultural literature (Harper & Brand 2010, p. 233). Furthermore, multicultural literature allows children to establish a greater understanding of themselves and others through the examination of the lives, realities, and experiences of people portrayed in the texts. The examination and discussion of multicultural literature can play a significant role in the development of young children's cross-cultural understandings. Children need to see themselves reflected in the literature to affirm who they are and the communities in which they live. The use of multicultural literature can provide a classroom environment for teachers to facilitate discourse that centers on race, social class, family structures, and diverse cultures where students share their realities, assert their perspectives, and learn about others.

Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, and Koehler (2009) investigated issues surrounding promoting equity in children's literacy instruction using a critical race theory framework. The findings of the study were analyzed using critical race theory (CRT), a theoretical framework that places race at the center of educational research and discourse. The results indicated that despite the increasing ethnic and racial diversity in the United States, children of color are rare in transitional books. Additional findings uncovered that authors of color are also rare. The researchers in this study concluded that this lack of representation of people of color in transitional books is a subtle form of racism that

denies children of color the kinds of resources research suggests they need to become motivated, engaged, and proficient readers.

Gangi (2008) investigated the unbearable whiteness of literacy instruction. According to Gangi, children's literature textbooks promote White children and marginalize children of color. Gangi (2008) argued that since children must be able to make connections with what they read to become proficient readers, White children whose experiences are depicted in books can make many more text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections than children of color. Therefore, Gangi (2008) asserted that preservice and in-service teachers need to know where to find quality multicultural children's literature, so that their diverse students can benefit from reading texts that depict their lives. Furthermore, the findings from Gangi's research suggested that classroom libraries must honor all children by equitably providing both mirror and window books for all.

It is also important that early childhood educators have adequate knowledge of multicultural literature. Brinson (2012) assessed the knowledge of early childhood educators about multicultural literature for children and developed an instrument entitled "Survey of Multicultural Children's Literature." The survey was administered to preservice and in-service educators in Shelby County, Tennessee. The findings of the study revealed that participants in the study had minimal awareness of African American literature. Additionally, Brinson (2012) reported that the participants in the study were not able to identify children's books featuring Asian-American, Latino-American, or Native American characters. Brinson concluded that this type of response among educators indicated a more deeply rooted issue that needs to be addressed when teaching

children from diverse populations. For example, Brinson (2012) argued that if early childhood educators cannot readily identify culturally-specific and multicultural books for children, then this issue could become problematic for diverse classrooms. According to Brinson (2012), lack of diverse multicultural literature can result in children of color and other races not adequately seeing themselves reflected in the literature. Similarly, lack of multicultural literature that only represents Anglo-American students can cause Anglo-American students to have limited opportunities to see other cultures represented in the literature outside of their own (Brinson, 2012).

In closing, the need to identify and incorporate multicultural literature into the early childhood curriculum is an urgent matter. According to data on books by and about Black, Indigenous, and people of color, published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison (2018), in a survey of 3,682 titles of children's books, the findings revealed the following: only 11% of books were about African Americans, 9% were about Asian-Pacific Americans, 7% were about Latinos, and 1.5% were about American Indians. Children's book author Walter Myers (2014) posed a question in a New York Times article asking the question of, "Where are the people of color in children's books?" Myers's question suggested that authors and educators need to reflect upon the message that is sent to our children when children from diverse races and cultures are not represented in children's books. Students of color are often exposed to literature that emphasizes white power and marginalizes other groups (Ebe, 2010). However, by using multicultural literature, students are able to see themselves reflected in the text. Furthermore, Ebe (2010) contended that culturally relevant literature allows students to

better comprehend the text and form deeper connections to the actions of characters, the description of the setting, and the sequences of events.

Conclusion

This literature review provides a thorough review of research related to the constructs and variables pertaining to the problem of practice. There is much research about the related constructs and variables which include: (1) early literacy (2) students' attitudes and perceptions toward reading (3) the benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy, and (4) using multicultural books to facilitate culturally relevant teaching. While most of these constructs and variables have been researched for decades (i.e., early literacy, multicultural books) others are relatively new (culturally relevant pedagogy). These constructs have been shown to have a positive relationship with students' reading outcomes, particularly students' attitudes toward reading. While relatively few studies have examined the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on literacy education among early learners, this literature review explored culturally relevant pedagogy and literacy among early learners. There is also limited research that explores factors associated with reading attitudes among early learners. The studies presented in this literature review provide evidence that it is possible to incorporate tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy into literacy activities for pre-kindergarten students and early learners. Furthermore, the studies presented in this literature review provide evidence that students' attitudes toward reading can be influenced by teachers' actions and pedagogical practices.

Additionally, these studies have highlighted the importance of providing students with high quality early literacy experiences and the importance of providing students with access to multicultural children's books. It is important that teachers and educators who

are responsible for book selection are familiar with the criteria for high quality multicultural book selection that will allow for the incorporation of culturally relevant teaching. Research suggests that it is important for teachers to consider the interest of students and special features of the books when selecting books for students.

In closing, the research presented in this literature review discusses students' reading attitudes, and it also presents research that discusses the importance of teachers' actions on students' feelings pertaining to reading, and students' motivation to approach or avoid a reading situation. Although there are numerous variables discussed in this literature review that can have an impact on students' reading attitudes and outcomes, this action research study primarily focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and students' attitudes toward reading. This study sought to determine how incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into reading lessons via the use of multicultural children's books might impact African American pre-kindergarten students' attitudes toward reading. The following chapter discusses the methodology upon which this goal was evaluated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three discusses the methodology used to investigate the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American pre-kindergarten students' attitudes toward reading. Through the use of action research methods, the teacher-researcher explored what impact culturally relevant pedagogical practices had on students' attitudes toward reading among 18 students in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy. The chapter begins with a re-introduction of the research questions for the study followed by the rationale for utilizing mixed methods and action research methodology as the specified research methodology. The chapter also includes a discussion of the teacher-researcher's role in the study. Additionally, background information about ALA, the research participants, and how the research participants were selected is described. Finally, chapter three discusses the research plan and specific procedures that guided the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices, and it ends with a discussion detailing how data were collected and analyzed, and the trustworthiness of the research.

Reintroduction of Research Question

In order to explore the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy-facilitated through culturally relevant teaching strategies utilizing lessons containing themes of social justice and cultural competence- the teacher-researcher sought to answer the following research question through this present study: What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy, have

on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA)?

Rationale for Mixed Methods Action Research Methodology

According to Creswell (2012), when researchers choose a mixed- methods research design, “the basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself” (p. 535). Similarly, Mertler (2014) argues that researchers who utilize mixed- methods methodology are able “to equally combine the strengths of each form of data which results in the data producing greater credibility” (p. 105). Qualitative methods are narrative and provide an enhanced opportunity for the researcher to ask open-ended questions. Qualitative methods also allow the study participants to share their thoughts and perspectives in their own words and “may appear in the form of interview transcripts, observational notes, journal entries, or transcriptions of audio or videotapes or as existing documents” (Mertler, 2014, p. 126). Quantitative methods involve the collection of an analysis of numerical data (Mertler, 2014). Quantitative data is data that can “ be counted, calculated, tallied, or rated and includes ratings of one’s feelings, attitudes, interests, or perceptions on some sort of numerical scale” (Mertler, 2014, p. 137).

The teacher-researcher in this action research study used quantitative data to triangulate and support the qualitative thematic analysis. By incorporating a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, the teacher-researcher was able to provide a more balanced approach to the data by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data were balanced by the strengths of another.

Role of Action Research

Mertler's (2014) cyclical action research model was implemented throughout this study through the use of planning, acting, developing and reflecting. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), the primary goal of action research is educational change that enhances the lives of children.

During the process of action research, information is gathered by educators with the goal of gaining insights, developing reflective practice, and improving student outcomes. Action research helps teachers and educators solve everyday problems in schools and improve effectiveness. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) described action research as a process “intended to bring about change of some kind, usually with a social justice focus” (p.8).

Gay, Mill, and Airasian (2006), contended that action research methods differ from traditional educational research methods regarding the fact that action research is conducted by teachers for themselves, and it is not imposed on them by someone else. Similarly, Kennedy (1997) posited that action research allows teachers to more closely examine their beliefs and values and challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning.

In *Experience and Education*, John Dewey discussed his views regarding the shortcomings of traditional education. According to Dewey (1938), traditional education imposes curriculum on students instead of tailoring the curriculum to create meaningful learning experiences for individual students. Dewey’s approach to education places a high value on considering the particular needs of students and striving to create relevant learning experiences for students that have lasting value. Action research may serve as a

conduit that allows teachers to critically examine their pedagogical practices and engage in critical reflection in an effort to enhance student learning outcomes.

Role of the Researcher

In this action research project, I served as the teacher-researcher by implementing culturally relevant pedagogical teaching practices into reading lessons and collecting data via surveys, observations, and interviews. I have been an educator for over 15 years, and I hold certifications in early childhood education, middle school education, and educational leadership. Additionally, I have 10 years of extensive experience in the area of early childhood education, and I gained access to the study research site through my coaching and consulting services. I have also served as an Associate Director of Programs at the University level. Throughout this action research project, I served as a coach and consultant to the lead teacher and provided the lead teacher with coaching and resources to effectively implement culturally relevant teaching practices into the established curriculum and lesson plans. I met with the lead teacher on a weekly basis to discuss any trends or patterns that emerged throughout the research process. Ethical considerations were an essential component of the research process. Before this action research was implemented, I ensured that parental consent forms were administered to the parents of the students participating in the research. Parents were informed that their child's participation in the study was voluntary and that their child could withdraw from the study at any time.

Research Context

This action research study took place at Apple Learning Academy (ALA). To protect the identities of the research participants and the setting, pseudonyms are used

throughout the study. ALA is a childcare learning center located in inner city Atlanta, GA in a very high-poverty area. The academy participates in the childcare subsidies (CAPS) program and the child and adult care food program (CACFP). The academy's racial and socioeconomic constitution and the academy's participation in the Georgia Pre-K Program were all factors that contributed to the selection of the research site.

The Georgia Pre-K Program is lottery-funded and free for all eligible four-year old children regardless of family income (Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2019). The Georgia Pre-K program serves over one million children in the state of Georgia and operates on the local public- school system calendar for approximately 6.5 hours a day and 180 days a year (Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2019).

ALA also participates in Georgia's quality rating program which means that it has agreed to meet standards that exceed the licensing requirements. ALA has a rating of one star with the Georgia Quality program, which means that it has demonstrated a commitment to meeting standards that exceed state health and safety requirements, it meets several quality benchmarks, and it scores sufficiently on the independent person observation.

At the time of the study, the Academy had two lead Pre-K teachers who were both African American women. The lead teacher in the classroom where this study took place had a Bachelor's degree in Education. To protect the confidentiality of the lead teacher employed by ALA, a pseudonym will be used to refer to the lead teacher. The lead teacher will be referred to as Mrs. Brown.

Study Participants

Eighteen study participants out of an initial total of 33 students from a pre-kindergarten classroom were selected to participate in the study. To select students to participate in the study, criterion sampling and convenience sampling were used. According to Patton (2001), “criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criteria” (p.238). Similarly, Donyei (2007) maintains that convenience sampling involves selecting a sample based upon the target’s population’s accessibility to the researcher. The study participants selected for this study were chosen based upon specific criteria and the ease and convenience of the research site to the teacher-researcher’s University employment. The selection criteria used to identify study participants are described below:

- Current Pre-Kindergarten student at ALA
- Pre-Kindergarten Student in Mrs. Brown’s classroom
- African American
- Displaying low interest and/or engagement in reading activities
- Family permission granted for the student to participate in the study

Using the selection criteria outlined, the teacher researcher worked with the lead teacher and Academy Administrator to identify 25 potential study participants from the lead teacher’s classroom of 33 students to participate in the study. Letters were sent home to the families of the students requesting permission for each student to participate in the study. Eighteen letters out of the 25 letters were returned granting permission for the students to participate in the study. Each student in the study was assigned a pseudonym. A pseudonym was also assigned to protect the name of the lead teacher of the classroom.

Additionally, a detailed profile of each study participant is included below, and pseudonyms have been used in the profile descriptions to protect the confidentiality of each research subject.

Marquis. Marquis is a reserved 4- year- old African American male. Marquis lives at home with his mother, grandmother, and two older brothers. Marquis enjoys drawing pictures of his family and playing with toy trucks during play time. Marquis stated that he wants to pursue a career as a fire fighter when he becomes an adult. He listens quietly during story time, but he shows little interest in the stories that are read to the class.

Terrell. Terrell is a very active 4-year-old African American male. Terrell enjoys running and climbing trees. Terrell lives at home with his mother and younger 2 -year old sister. Terrell enjoys school and interacting with his classmates. Terrell states that he would like to become a policeman when he becomes an adult. Terrell shows little interest in reading activities and rarely checks out books from the classroom library.

Louis. Louis is a reserved 4-year old-African American male. Louis lives with his maternal grandmother, older brother, and younger sister. Louis's mother is not an active part of his life, although he does visit her on occasion. Louis enjoys science and exploring rocks and nature. Louis is not sure about what he wants to do for a career when he becomes an adult. Louis shows little interest in the stories that are read during story time.

Todd. Todd is a soft-spoken inquisitive 4-year- old African American male. Todd lives with his mother and older sister. Todd enjoys nature, science, and playing with toy dinosaurs. Todd also enjoys visiting museums. Todd wants to pursue a career as a

scientist when he becomes an adult. Todd enjoys learning about new things, but he rarely checks out books from the classroom library.

Ryan. Ryan is an active 4-year-old African American male. Ryan lives at home with both his mother and father. Ryan is an only child. Ryan loves interacting with his classmates, and he loves to draw pictures of his home and his family. Ryan aspires to become an artist when he becomes an adult. Ryan prefers to draw and color pictures rather than actively participate in reading activities.

Darius. Darius is a very energetic and playful 4-year-old African American male. Darius lives at home with his mother and older brother. Darius loves the outdoors and enjoys running and climbing trees. Darius's older brother is a high school football player, and Darius aspires to play professional football as a career when he becomes an adult. Darius does not appear to be fully engaged during reading activities.

Anthony. Anthony is a very inquisitive 4-year-old African American male. Anthony lives with his maternal grandmother and his two older sisters. Anthony is very outgoing and energetic, and he enjoys all things related to the stars and outer space. Anthony aspires to become an astronaut when he becomes an adult. Anthony listens quietly during reading activities but rarely actively participates in the reading circle discussions.

Keith. Keith is a very active 4-year-old African American male. Keith is an only child, and he lives at home with his mother. Keith enjoys basketball and playing with toy airplanes. Keith aspires to become a pilot when he becomes an adult. Keith rarely checks out books to read from the classroom library.

Aaliyah. Aaliyah is an outgoing 4-year-old African American female. Aaliyah has two older sisters, and she lives at home with both her mother and father. Aaliyah loves helping others, and she aspires to become a nurse when she becomes an adult. Aaliyah rarely actively engages in discussions during story time.

Deja. Deja is a very quiet and reserved 4-year-old African American female. Deja's mother is African American, and her father is Caucasian; however, Deja self-identifies as African American. Deja lives at home with her mother. Deja loves playing with dolls and music. Deja aspires to become a ballerina when she becomes an adult. Deja rarely checks out books to read from the classroom library.

Chala. Chala is a very quiet 4-year-old African American female. Chala lives at home with her mother and younger sister. Chala loves helping her mother cook and prepare meals at home. Chala also enjoys playing pretend chef at school. Chala aspires to become a chef when she becomes an adult. Chala shows little interest in the stories that are read to the group during story time.

Kimberly. Kimberly is a very talkative 4-year-old African American female. Kimberly is an only child, and she lives at home with both her mother and father. Kimberly enjoys drawing, painting, and singing. Kimberly aspires to be a teacher when she becomes an adult. Kimberly often appears distracted and disinterested during story time.

Raven. Raven is a very outspoken and playful 4-year-old African American female. Raven lives at home with her mother, two older brothers, and her dog Santana. Raven loves animals, and she aspires to become a veterinarian when she becomes an adult. Raven rarely checks out books to read from the classroom library.

Nia. Nia is a very soft-spoken 4-year old African American female. Nia lives with her aunt and older cousin. Nia enjoys singing, music, and art. Nia wants to become a singer when she becomes an adult. Nia does not actively engage in discussions surrounding the books discussed during story time.

Ebony. Ebony is a very active 4-year old African American female. Ebony lives at home with her father and older brother. Ebony loves being outside, and recess is her favorite time of the day. Ebony is not sure about what career she would like to pursue when she becomes an adult. Ebony rarely checks out books to read from the classroom library.

Imani. Imani is an inquisitive and reserved 4-year old African American female. Imani is an only child and lives at home with both her mother and father. Imani enjoys putting together puzzles and drawing. Imani would like to become a doctor when she becomes an adult. Imani often times appears disinterested during story time.

Jennifer. Jennifer is a polite and quiet 4-year old African American female. Jennifer lives with her mother and grandmother. Jennifer enjoys engaging with her classmates and she loves to share and help others. Jennifer would like to become a nurse when she becomes an adult. Jennifer rarely volunteers to contribute to story time discussions.

Erica. Erica is an outgoing and talkative 4-year old African American female. Erica lives at home with her mother and younger sister. Erica loves music and she enjoys singing and dancing. Erica wants to become a dancer when she becomes an adult. Erica rarely checks out books to read from the classroom library.

Classroom Demographics

At the time of this study, 18 students out of a total of 33 students in Mrs. Brown's classroom participated in the study. A total of 8 boys and 10 girls participated in the study. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the classroom demographic information for the students.

Table 3.1 *Classroom Demographics of 18 Pre-Kindergarten Children (pseudonyms used)*

Child	Gender	Race	Age
1. Marquis	Male	Black	4
2. Terrell	Male	Black	4
3. Louis	Male	Black	4
4. Todd	Male	Black	4
5. Ryan	Male	Black	4
6. Darius	Male	Black	4
7. Anthony	Male	Black	4
8. Keith	Male	Black	4
9. Aaliyah	Female	Black	4
10. Deja	Female	Black	4
11. Chala	Female	Black	4
12. Kimberly	Female	Black	4
13. Raven	Female	Black	4
14. Nia	Female	Black	4
15. Ebony	Female	Black	4
16. Imani	Female	Black	4
17. Jennifer	Female	Black	4
18. Erica	Female	Black	4

Design of the Study

The design of this study was informed by an action research model presented by Mertler (2014). Figure 3.1 illustrates the key components of Mertler's (2014) action

research model that were used to guide the design of this study. Planning, acting, developing, and reflecting were the guiding tenets used to design this study. The procedures contained within each step of Mertler’s model as outlined in Figure 3.1 are discussed in detail.

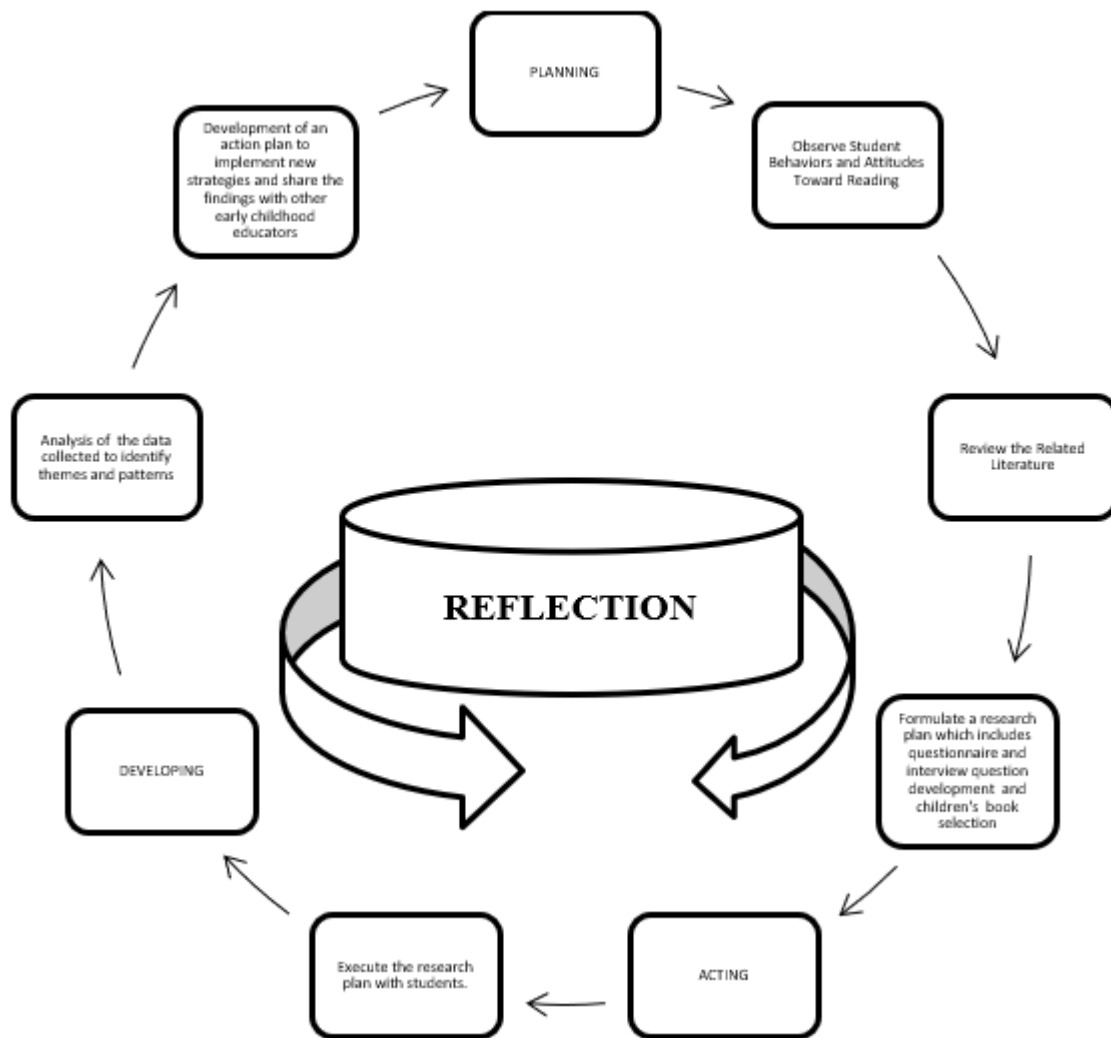


Figure 3.1. Action research trajectory.

Planning

Mertler (2014) outlines planning as the first stage of the action research process. During the planning stage, the teacher-researcher observed students’ behaviors and attitudes toward reading activities and worked with the ALA staff to identify the problem

of practice which determined the focus of the study. The research question was also developed during the planning phase and a detailed review of the related literature also helped to shape the development of the research question.

Exploration and Development Phase

During the exploration and development phase of the action research plan, students' attitudes toward reading and their behaviors toward reading activities were closely observed. The teacher-researcher collaborated with ALA teachers and academy leadership to obtain their input in identifying study participants and the development of the research plan. A plan was developed to implement culturally relevant pedagogy into reading lessons in an effort to create more positive attitudes toward reading among the students.

As detailed in Figure 3.1 a review of related literature guided the exploration and development phase of the study. Some studies revealed information discussing the importance of creating positive attitudes toward reading in early childhood (Cunningham, 2008; Hu, et. al., 2018) while other studies emphasized the significant positive impact that culturally responsive teaching can have on student outcomes (Bennett, et. al., 2018; Husband 2012; Ladson-Billings; 1995). From the information gathered during the review of literature, the teacher-researcher identified common themes for implementing a culturally responsive pedagogical methodology. Ladson-Billings (1995) description of culturally responsive pedagogy that highlights the following three tenants was used to develop the culturally responsive methodology used in this study: students must attain academic success, students must develop cultural competence, and students must develop critical consciousness or an awareness of social justice.

Acting

According to Metler (2014), the acting phase of action research is focused on data collection and analysis. Implementation of the intervention plan also occurs during the acting phase of the study. During this study, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data to determine, if, and to what extent, the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, influenced students' attitudes toward reading. The data collection methods used in this study included the following: (A) pre- and post-attitudes toward reading survey; (B) classroom observations and field notes; (C) semi-structured interviews; (D) whole and small group interventions; and (E) lead teacher interview questions.

The Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Reading Intervention Plan

Students received six weeks of instruction grounded in two key tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, which included cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness or social justice. The teacher researcher visited ALA three times a week for three hours in the morning between the hours of 8:00 am and 11:00 am three times a week to record student observations and assist the lead teacher with the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy into the lessons. Children's literature and lesson plans highlighting cultural competence and sociopolitical themes were implemented into the established curriculum by utilizing book recommendations from the Anti-Defamation League (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.). A total of six books were read to student throughout the study.

The first book that was read to students was *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*. The book was written for children between the ages of 0-3 years old.

However, the lead teacher indicated that there were some students in the classroom that struggled with basic letter and word recognition, so this book was included on the reading list. The main themes of the book highlighted identity and culture. In the book, author Sandra Pinkney and illustrator Myles Pinkney used simple poetic language and photographs of African American children of varied skin tones, hair textures, and eye colors to help children celebrate the diversity among African Americans and foster a sense of pride in their African American heritage.

The second book that was read to students was *I like Myself* by author Karen Beaumont and illustrator David Catrow. This book was written for children between the ages of 4-8 years old. The main theme of this book highlighted an appreciation for identity and culture. The book uses an African American character and encourages children to have healthy self-esteem by appreciating everything about themselves.

The third book that was read to students was *The Name Jar* by author Yangsook Choi. The book was written for children between the ages of 4-8. The book contains diversity and children of various and ethnic groups. The main character in the book is a young girl from Korea who has just moved to the United States. Fearful that her classmates won't be able to pronounce her name, she considers adopting an American name instead of revealing her real name to her classmates. However, later she realizes that her own name has special meaning, and she decides to keep her own name. The book highlights themes of cultural competence, social justice, and bullying awareness and prevention. The book also helps students to appreciate, value, and accept themselves and others for who they are.

The fourth book that was read to students was *My Heart Will Not Sit Down* by author Mara Rockcliff and illustrator Ann Tanksley. The book was written for children between the ages of 4-8 years old. The book is based upon a true story and contains themes that emphasize social justice, identity, and culture. The main character is a young girl who lives in a village in Africa who learns about other children and families who are hungry and going without food in New York City in America. The main character knows how it feels to not have enough food to eat, so she is determined to find a way to help those who have nothing at all to eat and are starving. With the help of members from her community, she is able to raise a small amount of money to send to the children and families in New York who are in need. The book helps students develop a sense of social justice and take pride in helping others who are less fortunate than themselves.

The fifth book that was read to students was *Same, Same but Different* by author Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw. The book was written for children between the ages of 4-8 years old. The book emphasizes themes pertaining to cultural competence, identity, and culture. The main characters are two boys, one boy lives in America, and the other boy lives in India. The boys become pen pals and learn that even though they are different and live in different places, they both still enjoy many of the same things. The book helps students develop an appreciation for learning about people from different cultures, and it helps children discover that they can still have many things in common with people who are different from them.

The last book that was read to students was *The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade* by author Justin Roberts and illustrator Christian Robinson. The book was written for children between the ages of 3-6 years old. The book emphasizes themes of social

justice and bullying awareness and prevention. Diversity is celebrated in the book through the use of characters from various races and ethnic groups. The main character in the book is about a girl who takes a stand against the bullying that she witnesses going on among her classmates. Although she is little in stature, the main character speaks up and tells everyone that bullying is not right and needs to stop. This book helps students understand the importance of treating others with respect and kindness, and it encourages students to speak up if they ever witness bullying.

Further information regarding the books and the schedule of read alouds that were conducted with students can be found in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Schedule of Read Aloud Children’s Literature*

Week	Theme	Book Title & Organization
Week 1 <i>Whole Group Lesson</i>	Identity & Culture	Author: Sandra Pinkney, (2006) Illustrator: Myles Pinkney <i>Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children</i> (Anti-Defamation League)
Week 2 <i>Small Group Literature Circle Lessons</i>	Identity & Culture	Author: Karen Beaumont (2004) Illustrator: David Catrow <i>I Like Myself!</i> (Anti-Defamation League)
Week 3 <i>Whole Group Lesson</i>	Social Justice/ Bullying Awareness & Prevention	Yangsook Choi <i>The Name Jar</i> (Anti-Defamation League)
Week 4 <i>Small Group Literature Circle Lessons</i>	Social Justice/Identity & Culture	Author: Mara Rockliff, (2012) Illustrator: Ann Tanksley <i>My Heart Will Not Sit Down</i> (Anti-Defamation League)

Table 3.2 Continued

Week	Theme	Book Title & Organization
Week 5	Identity & Culture	Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw, (2011) <i>Same, Same but Different</i> (Anti-Defamation League)
<i>Small Group Literature</i> <i>Circle Lessons</i>		
Week 6	Social Justice/ Bullying Awareness Identity & Culture	Author: Justin Roberts (2014) Illustrator: Christian Roberts <i>The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade</i> (Anti-Defamation League)
<i>Small Group Literature</i> <i>Circle Lessons</i>		

Data Collection

Table 3.3 provides an overview of activities involved in the data collection process which were used to conduct the study and implement the culturally relevant pedagogical intervention with students. The culturally relevant pedagogical intervention took place over a period of six weeks from January to February 2018. The researcher met with study participants on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week for six weeks for a total of 18 visits. Thirty-minute observations were conducted at all visits. The pre-survey and a semi-structured interview were conducted with each student during week one before the culturally relevant pedagogy intervention was implemented. A post-survey and semi-structured interview were conducted with each student at the end of the study. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the lead teacher at the end of the study. Semi-structured interviews were used so that the teacher-researcher could ask a series of questions and then probe more deeply with additional open form questions to obtain more information if necessary. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the teacher-researcher to gain a better perspective on the reading habits and attitudes of the

students in the classroom. Detailed notes were taken during the semi-structured interviews. Pre-scripted questions were used to guide the interviews. The questions utilized in the student semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix C. The semi-structured interview that was used with the lead teacher regarding each student can be found in Appendix D.

Thirty- minute sessions of whole group instruction occurred during week one and week three. Literature circle small group instruction occurred during weeks two, four, five, and six. Literature circle small group instruction provided the teacher-researcher with more one-on-one interaction with students, and small groups were comprised of no more than five students per group. Each group of five students met with the teacher-researcher for a small group reading lesson for 20 minutes, and the researcher met with three small groups on these days.

Table 3.3 *Summary of the Data Collection Process*

Events	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Pretest Survey	X					
Whole Group (30 min)	X		X			
Literature Circle Small Groups (3@ 20 min each with each small group)		X		X	X	X
Semi- Structured Interview	X					X
Observations (30 min)	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3.3 Continued

Events	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Lead Teacher Interview						X
Post-test Survey						X

Student Attitudes Toward Reading Survey

The teacher- researcher surveyed each student using a Student Attitudes Toward Reading Survey. The survey is included in Appendix A. According to Schuman and Presser (1996), a questionnaire that measures attitudes must be constructed as a scale and must use at least ten items in order to obtain a reliable assessment of an individual’s attitude. Therefore, the teacher-researcher developed a 10- question questionnaire in order to obtain a reliable assessment of attitude. The development of the scale was influenced by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The Reading Attitude Survey can be found in Appendix A.

The Reading Attitude Survey was administered to each student in the form of a pre -and post- survey. Students were administered the survey at the beginning of the study before the intervention of culturally relevant instruction, and then again at the end of the six- week intervention. In order to ensure pretest- reliability, the teacher-researcher met with students individually and verbally discussed and explained the meaning of each face with the student. The first face was described as being *very happy*; the second face was described as being somewhat happy; the third face was described as being neither happy or sad, but simply neutral; and the fourth face was described as being sad. The students were also required to point to the face as each face was being discussed and

described. The teacher researcher also administered the survey individually to each student at both the beginning and end of the study. During the directions, the teacher researcher explained to the student that they were going to answer ten questions about how they feel about reading. The teacher-researcher explained to each student that there was no “right” or “wrong” answer. While reading each question to the student, the teacher- researcher also read each number with the question and closely monitored the student to ensure that the correct question was being answered. Students responded to the questions by circling the face that best represented their feelings toward the question. In scoring the survey, the happiest face received four points, the slightly happy face received three points, the neutral face received two points, and the sad face received one point.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the student-research participants and Mrs. Brown. Semi-structured interviews occurred at the research site. According to Harrell and Bradley (2009), semi-structured interviews are conducted in a more conversational manner and they provide the researcher with the opportunity to collect more in-depth information from study participants. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the teacher-researcher was also able to interject questions into the interview process and gain greater insights into the thoughts of the study participants.

The semi-structured interview questions that were asked of the 18 student-participants are shown in Appendix C. The interviews occurred one-on-one with each student and occurred during week one and week six of the study. The interviews consisted of questions related to students general reading habits and general attitudes

toward reading. The interview with each student lasted approximately ten minutes. Because the teacher-researcher frequently visited the early learning academy, the students were used to seeing the teacher-researcher on the campus. The students were familiar with the teacher-researcher and almost all the students freely expressed their views with the teacher-researcher. Some students were very shy and reserved when answering the interview questions; however, all the students cooperated with the teacher-researcher and answered the questions.

The semi-structured interview questions that were asked of Mrs. Brown regarding each student are shown in Appendix D. Mrs. Brown completed the lead teacher interview questions for each student-participant at the conclusion of the study and end of week six. The teacher-researcher believed that it would be beneficial to gain insight from Mrs. Brown, the lead classroom teacher, because she had opportunities to observe and interact with the students every day.

The data from these interviews helped the teacher-researcher gain deeper insight into how the culturally relevant pedagogy intervention program may have impacted students' attitudes toward reading. The data from the interviews were also used to identify themes among the student-participants and the data was used to develop an action plan at the conclusion of the research study.

Observations and Field Notes

During the six-week timeframe of the study, weekly observations were conducted to observe the reading attitudes, behaviors, and habits of the student research participants. Students were observed three times a week for six weeks. The observation portion of

each study visit lasted approximately 30 minutes. During the observations, the teacher-researcher also took field notes. Table 3.3 provides the schedule of observations.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection period was complete, all data were analyzed for emerging patterns and themes that developed as a result of the implementation of the culturally relevant pedagogy intervention. The Students' Attitudes Toward Reading Survey was analyzed to explore students' mean scores on the pre-and post-survey and examine any associated patterns and themes. Data from interviews, observations, and field notes were analyzed and coded using four different rounds of coding which included the following: Protocol coding, In Vivo coding, Emotion coding, and Descriptive coding. Each type of coding and the associated coding processes are detailed below.

Protocol coding was the first round of coding utilized to analyze the data. Saldana (2010) described protocol coding as a method of coding qualitative data that utilizes a pre-established system. The pre-established system used in this study utilized the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy was utilized as an analytical tool to locate examples of outcomes among the students pertaining to academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness or social justice. The second round of coding used to analyze the data was In vivo. Manning (2017) described In vivo coding as a form of qualitative data analysis that emphasizes the importance of the actual spoken words of study participants. In vivo coding highlights the voices of study participants and gives meaning to data (Manning, 2017). Using In vivo coding, the teacher-researcher captured the words and ideas of the students and the lead teacher from the semi-structured interviews and the small and whole group literacy circles. The third

round of coding used to analyze the data was Emotion coding. Saldana (2010) asserted that Emotion coding allows the researcher to capture the emotions recalled and experienced by the research participants. Emotion coding was used to analyze data collected from the pre-and post-survey, interviews, and observations.

Finally, the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and field notes, and whole and small group literacy circle data were analyzed using descriptive coding. Saldana (2010) noted that descriptive coding allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of the opinions of the research participants.

Developing

During the developing phase of the action research cycle, the data collection was examined for patterns and themes. Codes were created for each theme based upon the three key tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy utilized in this study: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Table 3.4 illustrates a chart with examples of codes associated with each tenet.

Table 3.4 *Culturally Relevant Data Analysis Chart*

Tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching	In Vivo and Descriptive Examples
Student Learning	Terrell has shown a huge improvement regarding his attitude toward reading. During small group read-aloud time, I've noticed that Terrell has started to: sit still during the read-aloud, he maintains eye contact with the reader and the book, he raises his hand to answer questions about the story, and he even formulates questions of his own about the stories we read. I also noticed that Terrell checked out two books from the classroom library last week, and his mother told me that she has noticed a positive change in Terrell as well. His mother said that he has been asking her to read to him more often at home. His mother was so thankful that he has taken on more interest in reading and she stated. "I am so glad that my son is participating in that study that you all have going on. Terrell is definitely more excited about coming to school and more excited about books and reading." (Mrs. Brown, semi-structured interview)

Table 3.4 Continued

Tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching	In Vivo and Descriptive Examples
Cultural Competence	<p>Students read and discuss books that contain images, themes, and characters that help see themselves reflected in the books. Students also read and discuss books that allow them to learn about other cultures and develop an appreciation for other cultures (Classroom Observation)</p> <p>Ryan stated, “It makes it fun when I see Brown people in the book that look like me.” (Ryan, semi-structured interview) Deja stated, “It was so much fun to read about the girl from Korea. I would be her friend if she was in my class.” (Deja, semi-structured interview)</p> <p>Helping them to understand themselves and other cultures has really had a positive impact on the students. I think also adding more stories with other children of color has helped many of the students understand who they are as African Americans and develop a sense of pride within their cultural identity. I think that it is important to foster cultural competence among student at an early age.” (Mrs. Brown, semi-structured interview)</p>
Sociopolitical Consciousness	<p>After reading the story, <i>My Heart Will Not Sit Down</i>, students discussed difficult times that people can experience in life and the different ways that they can help others who are in need of help. (Classroom Observation)</p> <p>Louis revealed to me during a semi-structured interview, “I liked that story that you read to us yesterday. After you read that story to us, I asked my mommy if we could give some of our food to the people who don’t have food, and she said we could.” (Semi-structured interview)</p>

The overall findings of this study informed an action plan that the teacher-researcher developed for ALA which included incorporating more culturally relevant teaching practices into the established curriculum. Since the data showed that students’ reading attitudes and habits were positively impacted by the culturally relevant pedagogy intervention in this study, the researcher believed that it was appropriate to collaborate with ALA leadership to devise a plan to make culturally relevant pedagogy a permanent part of the curriculum.

Reflecting

The reflection phase of this action research study took place during the end of the study as well as throughout the study. During the end of the study and during the reflection phase, students participated in completing a post-survey. Students were also given the opportunity to expound upon or share any additional emotion or insights they experienced during the study with the researcher. In speaking with individual students during the reflective phase of the study, the teacher-researcher noted that many students made statements indicating increased awareness of social justice issues. For example, Ebony stated, “I want to give some of my toys to other kids who don’t have any.” Deja stated, “I will tell my teacher if I see someone being mean.”

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, one of the major responsibilities of researchers is to ensure that ethical standards are adhered to in regard to the treatment of data, students, and all study participants. Furthermore Mertler (2014) asserts that it is important for researchers to maintain trustworthiness and ensure that they honestly and truthfully report data and research findings. The teacher-researcher was mindful to record all observations and study participants’ responses truthfully and in an objective manner. Triangulation was also employed in order to help the researcher gain a more in-depth understanding of the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on students’ attitudes toward reading. According to Patton (2001), triangulation allows researchers to use multiple methods and data sources in order to help develop a more comprehensive understanding of research questions. Consent was also obtained from the parents of students who participated in this study and participating in the study was strictly voluntary.

The researcher conducted this study at a location other than her primary place of employment during the time period that this study occurred. All ALA policies and guidelines were strictly adhered to during the study, and the teacher-researcher ensured that this action research study did not hinder the normal teaching activities of the lead classroom teacher. The teacher-researcher was also committed to protecting the privacy of the study location and all study participants. Therefore, pseudonyms were used to report all data and findings.

Conclusion

Numerous pre-kindergarten students at ALA were displaying low interest and negative attitudes toward reading activities. This was problematic when considering the fact that healthy reading attitudes and habits form early in a child's life and have the ability to influence student's long-term academic outcomes (Cunningham, 2008). The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy would create more positive reading attitudes and habits among pre-kindergarten students at ALA and encourage the students to embrace more positive attitudes toward reading. This research was shaped by the following research question: What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at ALA? The research methodology utilized throughout this study was grounded in action research principles and shaped by a review of the literature which can be found in Chapter Two.

In the next chapters, the teacher-researcher will share data and observations. Chapter Four will discuss a summary of the findings and conclusions. An action plan for the ALA community will be presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study examined the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on student's attitudes toward reading with 18 African American students in a pre-kindergarten classroom after culturally relevant pedagogy was introduced into reading lessons. The identified problem of practice for the study was that pre-kindergarten students at ALA appeared to have low interest in participating in reading activities and less than enthusiastic attitudes toward reading. Many students also appeared to be disengaged and distracted when the teacher read a story to the group. The teacher-researcher conducted this study over a six-week period in order to determine if implementing tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy into the reading lessons would have any impact on positively affecting students' attitudes toward reading. The pre-kindergarten student attitudes toward reading survey was used to collect data pertaining to students' attitudes regarding reading activities. A body of scholarship confirms that administering individual attitude assessment surveys to students can serve as an effective method of measuring students' attitudes (Zhang, Yang, Zou, Hu, & Ren 2020; Cunningham, 2008; Schuman & Presser, 1996). Additionally, other multiple sources of data such as observations of students' behaviors, one-on-one interviews with each student, and an interview with the lead teacher, were used to give the teacher-researcher a more detailed assessment of the pre-kindergarten students' attitudes toward reading. By using the pre-kindergarten student attitudes toward reading survey in combination with other sources of

data, the teacher-researcher was able to analyze students' attitudes and behaviors regarding participating in reading activities.

Reintroduction of the Purpose and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom at Apple Learning Academy (ALA). In order to accomplish this goal, the following research question was posed: What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom?

Findings of the Study

This part of Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study based upon data collected from the Attitudes Toward Reading Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and the researcher's observations and field notes. By examining each source of data, the teacher-researcher was able to use multiple data sources to gain more in-depth information regarding students' attitudes toward reading and identify common responses among students. After a close examination of the data, coding, and categorizing the data, three major themes emerged. Overall, students experienced: (1) enhanced student engagement, (2) enhanced student learning, and (3) increased awareness of social justice issues. Findings also revealed a need for increased teacher support and coaching dedicated to helping educators incorporate culturally relevant teaching into the reading curriculum. The results of the Attitudes Toward Reading Survey and the themes and supporting data patterns that emerged will be discussed in the next sections.

Overall Results of the Attitudes Toward Reading Survey

In order to examine pre-kindergarten students' attitudes toward reading, the Student Attitudes Toward Reading Survey asked the following ten key questions: 1) How does it make you feel when someone reads to you? 2) How does it make you feel when you share a book with a friend? 3) How do you feel about reading at school? 4) How do you feel about reading at home when you leave school? 5) How do you feel when you start a new book? 6) How do you feel about reading instead of going outside to play? 7) How do you feel about receiving a book as a gift? 8) How do you feel about the stories your teacher reads to you in class? 9) How do you feel about reading at home for fun? 10) How do you feel when you are asked questions about the stories you read? Participants responses to these questions were then analyzed to determine if any differences existed between the pre-test group and the post-test group. Results of the Students' Attitudes Toward Reading Survey can be found in Figure 4.1 Results of the survey indicated that 17 out of 18 student-participants indicated an increase in happy attitudes toward reading from the beginning to the end of the study. At the beginning of the study before students were introduced to culturally relevant pedagogy, student-participants scored from 26 to 38 on the pre-test survey. Only three students scored in the highest quartile on the pre-test survey, which indicated an almost extremely happy attitude toward reading. When the survey was administered a second time at the end of the study, student-participants scored from 28 to 40, with nine students scoring in the highest quartile, and four students scoring in the very top percentile, indicating an extremely happy attitude toward reading. The average score increase of student participants was a 5- point increase from the pre-

test scores to the post-test scores, indicating that most students moved in the direction of having a very happy attitude toward reading.

Table 4.1 also provides information on selected-item responses. After receiving the culturally relevant intervention, 66.7 % of students reported that they felt very happy about the stories their teacher read to them in class. Additionally, forty-four percent of students reported that they felt very happy about sharing a book with a friend after receiving the culturally relevant intervention.

Overall, the results suggested that most students expressed slightly happier feelings toward reading at the end of the culturally relevant pedagogical intervention.

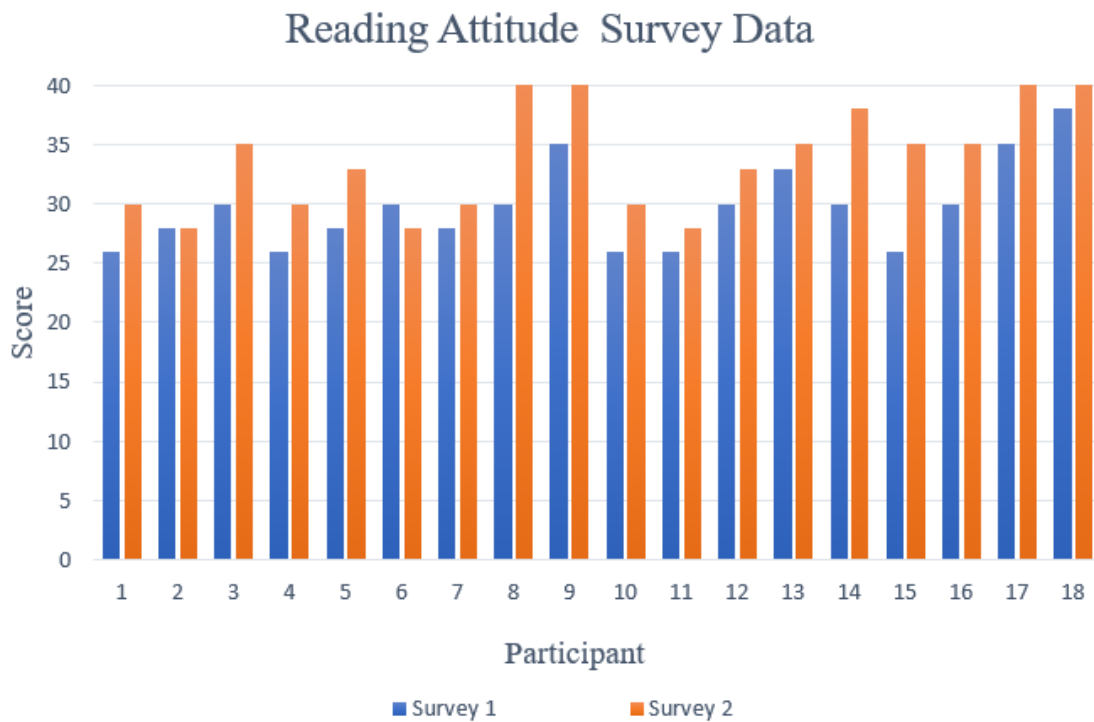


Figure 4.1. Overall results of reading attitude survey.

Table 4.1 *Percentage Scores: Selected Items Analysis*

	4 = Very Happy	3 = Happy	2 = Neutral	1 = Sad
Pretest Percentages				
Question #8				
How do you feel about the stories your teacher reads to you in class?	16.67%	50%	27.78%	5%
Post-test Percentages				
Questions #8				
How do you feel about the stories your teacher reads to you in class?	66.67%	22%	11%	0%
Pretest Percentages				
Question #2				
How does it make you feel when you share a book with a friend?	16.67%	38.89%	44.44%	0%
Post-test Percentages				
Question #2				
How does it make you feel when you share a book with a friend?	44.44%	44.44%	11.11%	0%

Student-Participant Interviews

Individual student interviews occurred during the study and at the end of the study. These interviews provided in-depth information on the student-participants attitudes and beliefs about reading. Findings from the interviews revealed data that also supported the findings from the Reading Attitudes Survey Data. Many students expressed increased positive feelings regarding participating in reading activities. The

lead teacher also observed more positive reading habits and reading behaviors among students during the intervention and at the end of the study.

Marquis

During the pre-interview, Marquis indicated that reading and story time was not his absolute favorite activity to participate in, but that it was just “ok.” Marquis also stated that he did not enjoy visiting the reading center or checking out books from the classroom library to take home. Marquis indicated that he enjoyed some of the stories that his teacher read to the class during story time, but most of the time he would rather enjoy recess outside instead of listening to a story.

Marquis’s responses to the post-interview indicated some improvement in his attitude toward reading. Marquis indicated that the stories being read during story time had become “more fun.” Marquis was observed visiting the reading center more frequently as the study progressed. Marquis also began volunteering to answer more questions during small group reading sessions. Mrs. Brown indicated in her post-interview regarding Marquis that she noticed an improvement in Marquis’s reading habits.

Terrell

In Terrell’s pre-interview, he indicated that he enjoyed reading and listening to stories during story time; however, there were just some books that he found boring. Terrell indicated that he would like to read more books that align with his interest and contain characters that look more like him. Terrell rarely checked out books from the classroom library to take home to read prior to the study.

During the post-interview, Terrell indicated that he really liked the new stories that were selected to read to the class. Terrell commented that his favorite book that was read to the class during the study was the book entitled, *Same, Same, but Different*. Terrell expressed that he liked the book because he felt like he had things in common with the characters. He stated that he enjoyed drawing pictures and climbing trees just like the characters in the book. Terrell also discussed the fact that he enjoyed checking out books from the classroom library more after participating in the study. Terrell indicated that he had started asking his mother to read books to him at home that he had checked out from the classroom library. Mrs. Brown indicated that she observed more engagement from Terrell during story time and discussions.

Louis

In the course of Louis's pre-interview, Louis indicated that he enjoyed reading and that his mother and grandmother read books to him at home. However, Louis indicated that he didn't like the books and stories that were being read to him at school. He stated that he would rather play with the dinosaurs in the sandbox center rather than participate in the story time read aloud.

During the post-interview, Louis indicated that reading at school had become more interesting. When asked a follow-up question regarding the last book that was read to him that he enjoyed, Louis responded, "That book about helping others get food made me want to help others too. . I asked my mommy if we could give food to people who need food, and she said we could." The book that Louis was referring to was entitled, *My Heart Will Not Sit Down*. Mrs. Brown indicated during her post-interview regarding Louis that she observed him to be more engaged and interactive during story time toward

the end of the study. She also indicated that Louis visited the reading center more frequently and also checked out books from the classroom library to take home to read more often.

Todd

Todd was very shy and reserved during the pre-interview. However, Todd indicated that he enjoyed reading overall, but that he mainly enjoyed books about science or space. Todd rarely checked out books from the classroom library to take home to read. He also commented during the pre-interview, “Those books over there look boring,” as he pointed toward the books in the classroom library.

During the post interview, Todd indicated that he enjoyed the new stories that were introduced to the class during the study. He also shared that he enjoyed the small group reading session and the opportunity to engage in reading activities within a small group. Todd also started visiting the reading center more on his own and Mrs. Brown indicated that she observed Todd participating in class discussions more. She also indicated that Todd had started checking out more books from the classroom library.

Ryan

In the course of the pre-interview, Ryan responded that having his teacher read to him makes him feel happy. However, Ryan indicated that although he enjoys reading, he would much rather draw pictures than read a story or share book with a friend.

During his post-interview, Ryan expressed an increased interest in reading. He indicated that one of the stories that was his favorite during the study was *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*. He particularly enjoyed drawing and coloring pictures of himself and his family members after reading the story. Mrs. Brown stated

that she observed Ryan to be more attentive and focused during story time after participating in the study. Ryan also increased his participation during reading time, and he visited the reading center within the classroom more frequently.

Darius

Darius was very energetic during the pre-interview. Darius shared that he loves coming to school but he feels neutral about reading and neither happy nor sad when reading or participating in reading activities. When asked what could make reading more interesting for him, Darius indicated that he would like to read more stories that pertain to things that interest him, which includes sports, running, and climbing trees.

During his post-interview, Darius expressed a happier disposition when talking about reading, and expressed that he enjoys reading more after participating in the study. Darius commented that one of his favorite books during the study was the book entitled *Same, Same but Different*. Darius shared that he enjoyed learning about someone who looked different from him but who also shared similar interest as him. Mrs. Brown noted in her post-interview regarding Darius that she observed him being more fully engaged and asking more questions during reading discussions.

Anthony

In Anthony's pre-interview he indicated that he does enjoy reading, even though story time is not his favorite time of the day. When asked what would make him enjoy story time more, Anthony indicated that he enjoys listening to stories more when he has an opportunity to draw pictures about the characters in the story. Anthony shared that he did not enjoy visiting the classroom library because he had already read most of the books in the classroom library and he did not find them interesting anymore.

During the post-interview, Anthony revealed that he was enjoying reading activities more after participating in the study. Anthony shared that his favorite book that was read and discussed during the study was *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*. Anthony enjoyed drawing pictures of the characters in the book, and he enjoyed the small group discussion that followed the reading of the book. Mrs. Brown shared that she observed Anthony to be more attentive and engaged during story time. Mrs. Brown reported that she believes that participating in the study had a positive impact on Anthony's reading habits and attitude toward reading.

Keith

In Keith's pre-interview he shared that he is not very excited about participating in reading activities at school, although he enjoys having his mother read books to him at home. Keith stated that the books he reads at home with his mother are more interesting than the stories his teacher reads to him at school.

During his post-interview Keith expressed that reading time at school had become just as interesting and fun as reading time at home. He shared that he enjoyed the books that were shared with students throughout the study and he stated that his favorite book was *My Heart Will Not Sit Down*. After reading the book, Keith revealed that he asked his mother if they could donate toys and clothes to children less fortunate than him. Mrs. Brown noted in her post-interview regarding Keith that he had started checking out books from the classroom library to read at home.

Aaliyah

During her pre-interview, Aaliyah was very talkative, energetic and eager to share her thoughts. Aaliyah expressed that she enjoyed reading more at home than at school.

When asked follow-up questions regarding why she preferred reading at home more than at school, Aaliyah stated that, “The books my mommy and daddy read to me are fun and have girls in the story that are brown like me.”

In her post-interview, Aaliyah indicated that she was enjoying story time at school more. She also indicated that she enjoyed visiting the reading center on her own more often and sharing books with friends. Mrs. Brown noticed that Aaliyah was more attentive during story time and that she volunteered to answer more questions about the stories.

Deja

Deja was somewhat reserved during her pre-interview, although she did provide detailed answers regarding her thoughts. Deja expressed that, overall, she found reading to be relaxing and fun. Deja shared that the main reason that she was not super excited about reading at school was because she had already read most of the books in the classroom library.

In her post-interview, Deja shared that the book she enjoyed most during the study was *The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade*. Deja felt that she could relate to issues surrounding bullying and she expressed that the book gave her the courage to speak up and tell her teacher and mother when she witnessed bullying behaviors among her classmates. In her post-interview regarding Deja, Mrs. Brown indicated that Deja became more engaged and participated more in book discussions after participating in the study.

Chala

Chala was very shy during her pre-interview. Chala indicated that although she did not dislike reading or listening to a story, she would much rather play with dolls than listen to her teacher read a book during story time.

In her post-interview Chala did express more positive interest and emotions toward reading. She stated that she was asking her mother to read to her more at home, and she had also started checking out more books from the classroom library to take home and read. Chala mentioned that she really enjoyed when we read the book *The Name Jar* during the study. Chala could relate to having a name that was very different from all of her classmates and expressed that she could identify with how the main character in the story felt. In her post-interview Mrs. Brown indicated that she noticed a positive difference in Chala's reading habits during the study intervention and she observed Chala visiting the reading center more frequently. Chala also stated in her post-interview, "I will tell my teacher if someone is saying mean things to me or my classmates." Chala's comments indicated that she was willing to speak up against bullying behaviors and take a stand against bullying and injustice. Furthermore, Chala's comments suggested that she experienced an increased awareness of social justice issues.

Kimberly

During her pre-interview Kimberly shared that reading was not her favorite subject and she felt neutral about reading and participating in reading activities. Kimberly says that she would rather sing or paint rather than participate in story time.

In her post-interview, Kimberly express that reading had become more interesting during the six weeks that she participated in the study. Kimberly shared that she enjoyed

several of the books read during the study, but her favorite book was *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*. Kimberly expressed that it made her feel happy to see children in the story that looked like her. In the post-interview, Mrs. Brown indicated that she observed more active participation from Kimberly during reading discussions. She also noted that Kimberly began visiting the reading center more often, and Kimberly's mother mentioned that Kimberly began asking her to read books to her at home more frequently.

Raven

Raven was very outspoken during her pre-interview. Raven indicated that she only enjoys reading and having books read to her when she finds the books interesting. Raven revealed that she did not visit the reading center often because she did not like the books in the reading center.

In her post-interview, Raven exhibited an enthusiasm and energy when discussing reading that she did not display during her pre-interview. Raven shared that she liked all the books that we read to the class during the study and that the books and lessons that she experienced in the study made reading more exciting. Raven stated that her favorite book during the study was *I like Myself*. Raven shared that she liked the book because the main character was a "brown girl just like me and she liked everything about herself." During the post-interview regarding Raven, Mrs. Brown revealed that she observed Raven to be more intrinsically motivated to read on her own after participating in the study. She also noticed that Raven visited the reading center more often on her own and enjoyed sharing books with her friends more.

Nia

During Nia's pre-interview she revealed that she enjoyed reading very much. She indicated that she also loves reading when she is at home, and that her mother and aunt read books to her often. Nia revealed that she enjoys the books that her teacher reads to her at school, but sometimes finds the stories boring.

In her post-interview Nia revealed that she enjoyed all the new books that were introduced to the class during the study. She said that the new books, "made her feel happy on the inside." Nia indicated that her favorite book during the study was *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*. Nia liked this book so much because there was a picture of a little girl in the book that almost had her same features and looked identical to her. Nia even requested to check out *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children* from the classroom library so that she could share the book with her mother and aunt. During her post-interview regarding Nia, Mrs. Brown reported that although Nia always displayed high interest in reading activities, she observed that Nia was more active and engaged during reading discussions after participating in the study.

Ebony

In Ebony's pre-interview, she revealed that she would rather go outside for recess rather than participate in reading activities. When asked what would make her enjoy story time more, Ebony indicated that she would enjoy story time more if the class could listen to the stories outside sometimes.

During the post-interview, Ebony revealed that she was enjoying reading activities more after participating in the study. Ebony shared that her favorite book that was read and discussed during the study was *My Heart Will Not Sit Down*. Ebony

expressed that she enjoyed the small group discussion that followed the reading of the book. Mrs. Brown shared that she observed Ebony to be more attentive and engaged during story time. Ebony's mother also mentioned to Mrs. Brown that Ebony wanted to do something to help those less fortunate than herself after reading the book. According to Ebony's mother, Ebony stated the following, "Mommy, can I give some food to other kids who are hungry." Ebony's comments suggested that she developed an increased awareness of social justice issues along with a desire to help others in need.

Imani

Imani was very reserved during her pre-interview. Imani did not provide a lot of information when asked follow-up questions. Imani shared that reading is just "ok," and that if given a choice, she would rather draw or put together a puzzle rather than listen to a story or share a book with a friend.

In her post-interview, Imani was a bit more talkative and expressed that reading had become more fun and interesting to her since participating in the study. Imani stated that her favorite book during the study was *Same, Same but Different*. Imani shared that the two boys were different from each other but could still be good friends. During her post-interview regarding Imani, Mrs. Brown indicated that she observed Imani checking out more books from the classroom library and actively participating more in reading discussions since participating in the study.

Jennifer

Jennifer was very soft-spoken during her pre-interview. Jennifer shared that she liked when someone read to her and she liked sharing books with friends. However, Jennifer indicated that she did not find the books that her teacher read to the class

interesting. Jennifer indicated that she would rather play with dolls rather than listen to a story in class.

During Jennifer's post-interview, Jennifer indicated that she liked the books utilized throughout the study. Jennifer smiled as she talked about the books read to the class during the study. Jennifer stated that her favorite book introduced during the study was *I like Myself*. Jennifer stated that reading about the girl who liked everything about herself made her happy. In the post-interview regarding Jennifer, Mrs. Brown shared that she observed Jennifer visiting the reading center more often and checking out books from the classroom library to read at home more often. Mrs. Brown also revealed that Jennifer was participating and answering more questions during reading discussions.

Erica

In Erica's pre-interview she indicated that she enjoyed reading more at home than at school. Jennifer expressed that she had lost interest in the stories and books that were being read to her at school.

During Erica's post-interview, Erica shared that she liked all the books introduced to the class during the study. She said that the new books, "made story time more fun." Erica's favorite book presented during the study was *My Heart Will Not Sit Down*. Erica enjoyed actively participating in class discussions about the book and thinking of ways that she could also help those less fortunate than herself. Erica stated, "I would like to give some food and toys to the boys and girls who won't have any at Christmas." Erica's comments documented that she experienced increased awareness of social justice issues.

In the post-interview regarding Erica, Mrs. Brown shared that she observed Erica to be more engaged and focused during story time and reading discussions. Mrs. Brown

reported that she believes that participating in the study had a positive impact on Erica's reading habits and overall attitude toward reading.

Interpretation of the Study Results

The multiple sets of data collected from this study revealed several interrelated results. Using the constant comparative method (Mertler, 2014) as a guide, four main themes emerged (Figure 4.2). The themes included the following: (a) enhanced student learning and engagement, (b) enhanced positive attitudes toward reading, and (c) increased student awareness of social justice issues. Each of these themes provided a unique perspective in response to the research question about whether the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy appeared to have a positive impact on students' reading attitudes.

Enhanced Student Learning and Engagement

Observations and field notes by the teacher-researcher indicated that overall student learning was enhanced, and almost all the students experienced enhanced engagement and enthusiasm toward reading activities during both whole group and small group reading instruction. During one class, the teacher-researcher recorded in her field notes that during the small group read-aloud, three out of four students maintained eye contact during the reading of the story and raised their hands to answer questions asked about the story and the characters. One student in the group, Terell, was also able to formulate his own question about the story and relate the story to his own life. Terell's mother also mentioned to the lead teacher that Terell had been asking her to read to him more often at home. This was something that Terell had not traditionally asked her to do prior to participating in the study.

Enhanced Positive Attitudes Toward Reading

The findings from the data also suggested an increase in student's overall attitudes toward reading. As previously explained in the discussion of the overall results from the Students Attitudes Toward Reading Survey, 17 out of 18 student-participants indicated an increase in happy attitudes toward reading between the pre- and postsurvey. The average score increase of student participants was a 5- point increase from the pre-test scores to the post-test scores, indicating that most students moved in the direction of having a very happy attitude toward reading. The score increases indicated that overall students experienced enhanced positive attitudes toward reading at school, and happier feelings regarding the stories that were read to them at school during read-alouds.

Increased Student Awareness of Social Justice Issues

Based primarily on one of the foundational tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy which was previously discussed in the literature review, observations and field notes by the teacher-researcher indicated that once students who were exposed to stories containing themes of social justice, many students became more conscious of the world as a whole and their role in wanting to help and be of service to others. For example, after students participated in the read-aloud for the story, *My Heart Will Not Sit Down*, several students talked about wanting to give food to others in need. The teacher- researcher observed several students talking about how sad it made them feel to know that some people in the world did not have enough food to eat. Overall, the majority of the students developed an awareness of helping others in need who are less fortunate than them.

Conclusion

Overall, the themes of enhanced student learning and engagement, enhanced positive attitudes toward reading, and increased awareness of social justice issues were key themes that emerged as a result of the data collection and findings of the study.

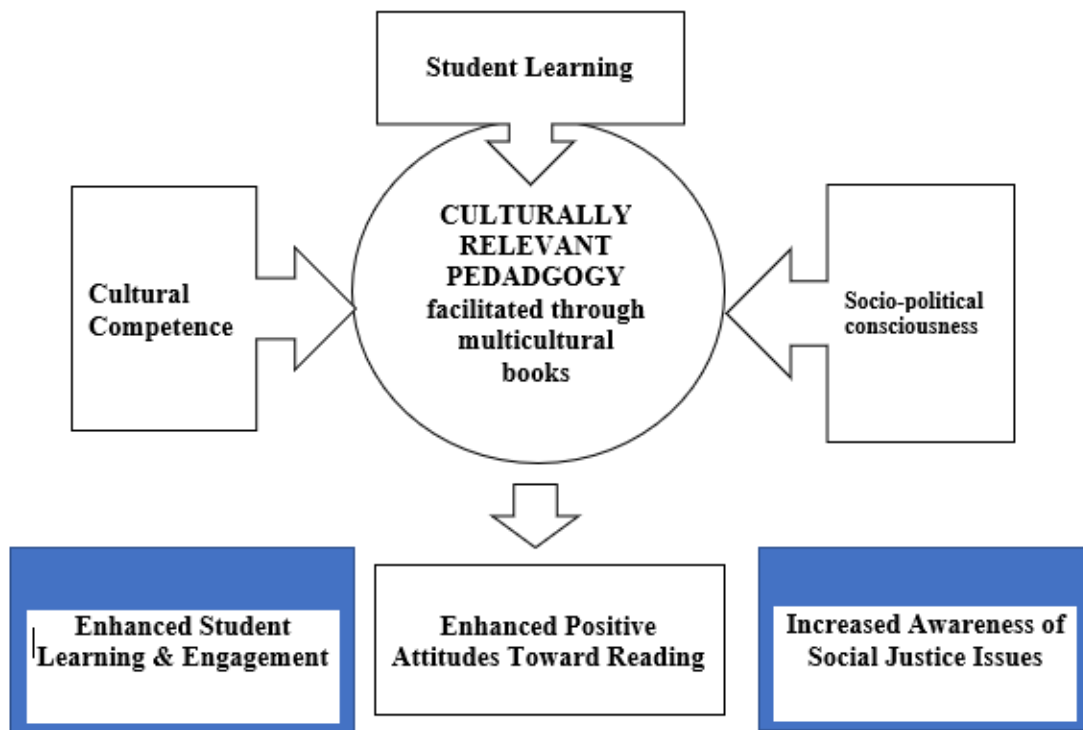


Figure 4.2. Action research summary of study findings.

Figure 4.2 provides a general overview of the findings of this study. Figure 4.2 illustrates that this study examined culturally relevant pedagogy from the perspective of the framework developed by Ladson-Billing (1995). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy encompasses the following three tenets: student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness. In describing Figure 4.2, the figure illustrates that culturally relevant pedagogy was introduced to students through the use of multicultural children's books. By utilizing multicultural literature to

incorporate key tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, which included cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness, students experienced enhanced learning and engagement, enhanced positive attitudes toward reading, and increased awareness of social justice issues.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five of this dissertation presents a summary of the findings of the study, including a description of the Problem of Practice and the research question. Following this description, there is a brief discussion of the data collection instruments and a summary of the findings. Questions that emerged from the study results are then discussed with suggestions for additional research related to students' attitudes toward reading. Finally, there is a detailed discussion of an action plan developed by the teacher-researcher that will be used to share with other educators of early learning students. Following this discussion are concluding remarks about this action research process and specific implications of this study.

Learning to read is one of the most important milestones in a child's life. Even equally important, children develop attitudes about reading very early in their development. Cultivating positive attitudes toward reading may prove to be an effective method for encouraging children to develop healthy life-long reading habits and promoting reading achievement. However, many young African American students who attend school face unique challenges that require careful consideration and pedagogical expertise from their teachers in order to help them develop the necessary positive attitudes toward reading that will lead to successful reading achievement. This study examined students' attitudes toward reading and how teachers may be able to positively impact students' individual attitudes toward reading.

Based on observations from the teacher-researcher and feedback from the lead teacher, many students in the pre-kindergarten class at ALA appeared to display attitudes and expressed a lack of engagement and interest during story time and other reading activities. Many students also showed a lack of enthusiasm during reading lessons and a lack of interest in participating in class discussions about the books and stories that were being read to them. The teacher-researcher and lead teacher believed that if the trend of lack of interest in reading activities continued among the students, that student achievement in reading would be negatively impacted long-term. This research explored how teachers of African American pre-kindergarten students may positively affect individual students' attitudes toward reading by including instruction during class that incorporates tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Engaging diverse populations and the early learners of today's classrooms, and helping students develop positive attitudes toward reading early in life may require deliberate action and the use of innovative pedagogical strategies on the part of the teacher to achieve tangible results. Gunn, Brice and Peterson (2013) suggested that the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy may serve as an effective tool to create positive attitudes toward learning and positive outcomes among learners. To this end, the research question for this study was, what impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on the attitudes toward reading of 18 African American students in a pre-kindergarten classroom at ALA?

Overview and Summary of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a

pre-kindergarten classroom at ALA. In this action research study, the teacher-researcher implemented culturally relevant pedagogical teaching practices into the reading lessons and collected data via surveys, observations, and interviews. The teacher-researcher met with the lead teacher on a weekly basis to discuss any trends or patterns that emerged throughout the research process. The culturally relevant pedagogical intervention took place over a period of six weeks from January to February 2018. Eighteen African American students from a pre-kindergarten classroom participated in the study. Eight boys and ten girls, all four years of age, participated in the study.

The researcher met with study participants on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week for six weeks for a total of 18 visits. Thirty-minute observations were conducted at all visits. The pre-survey and a semi-structured interview were conducted with each student during week one before the culturally relevant pedagogy intervention was implemented. A post-survey and semi-structured interview were conducted with each student at the end of the study. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the lead teacher at the end of the study. Semi-structured interviews were used so that the teacher-researcher could ask a series of questions and then probe more deeply with additional open form questions to obtain more information if necessary. Observations by the teacher-researcher, recorded in the form of field notes, further informed the interpretation of the data from the standpoint of the students' behaviors demonstrated during the lessons.

In response to the research question, the combined results of the multiple data sources indicated that students' attitudes toward reading became far more positive when tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy were introduced into their reading lessons.

Students demonstrated (a) enhanced student learning and engagement, (b) enhanced positive attitudes toward reading, and (c) increased awareness of social justice issues. Overall the findings revealed that students were more relaxed, more willing to try, they read more, and they became kinder and more helpful toward each other. Students were also observed to enjoy visiting the reading center more on their own and reading more for pleasure. Although it initially appeared to the teacher and teacher-researcher that the students were displaying negative attitudes toward reading, the findings of the study revealed that the book selection, teaching strategies, and methods of engaging students in the reading activities were the root cause of students lack of interest in reading in the classroom and not reading. The four data sources collectively supported these findings from the unique perspectives of the student-participants, the lead teacher interviews, and the teacher-researcher observations. Overall, the data indicated that student-participants benefited from exposure to culturally relevant pedagogy through the use of multicultural children's books.

Questions and Suggested Additional Research

As an important aspect of the research process, several questions emerged from the study that support further inquiry and investigation. Furthermore, the limitations and challenges experienced during the study suggest that further research may facilitate a better understanding and develop more in-depth knowledge about the Problem of Practice.

One question that emerged from the study at the conclusion of the data collection and interpretation was whether a specific tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy had more of an impact on influencing students' overall increased attitudes toward reading than

another. Although all three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy were examined together, the findings raise the question of whether exposure to lessons highlighting cultural competence had a greater impact on students' attitudes than lessons highlighting issues of social justice.

Another question also emerged regarding whether gender has any impact on the students' overall attitudes toward reading. This raised the question of whether culturally relevant pedagogy had a different impact on learning and attitude outcomes for boys versus girls.

A third question that emerged during the study was whether or not teachers could benefit from additional training on selecting grade-level appropriate books that highlight culturally relevant pedagogy tenets and themes.

In regard to limitations, one of the limitations of the study was the small sample size (N=18) and the 6-week timeframe to conduct the research. Therefore, it may not be possible to form generalizations from the results. Utilizing a larger sample size over an extended period of time may have provided more in-depth information regarding the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on the students' attitudes toward reading. Additionally, it is possible that other extraneous variables outside of the teacher-researchers' control or variables in the students' home environments could have contributed to any attitude changes reported by the students and observed by the teacher-researcher. However, efforts were made to minimize the effects of extraneous variables as much as possible during class time. The pre-test survey was also administered to collect baseline data which provided a more in-depth perspective of the students' attitudes before the culturally relevant pedagogical intervention.

Action Plan

Promoting positive reading attitudes and behaviors among students should be a top priority for all schools and educators. Evidence and previous research confirm that the benefits of helping students cultivate positive literacy attitudes and habits can have a multitude of beneficial long-term effects. Based upon the findings of this research, the teacher- researcher has concluded that the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy may prove to be a viable solution to help positively impact reading attitudes among African American students. To this end, the following action plan will be implemented:

- Teachers will be provided with ongoing professional learning communities regarding ways to effectively incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum. Teachers who require intensive support will be paired with instructional coaches who can provide them with guidance and demonstration lessons, along with providing them with suggestions for age appropriate children's multicultural literature.
- Teachers will consider the interest of the child when making book selections and planning activities. Teachers will also remain mindful of gender differences and recognize that the same types of books and activities that appeal to girls may not appeal to boys.
- Teachers will make reading fun and display a positive upbeat attitude and disposition as the instructional leader. Young pre-kindergarten children also enjoy songs and rhymes. Teachers will sing songs to students and create excitement within the students. Also, teachers will read in front of their students, and set a good example by being a positive role model.

- Teachers will start a classroom library that contains multicultural culturally relevant children's literature. Students should be able to check out books from the classroom library. Teachers should also try to get parents involved and encourage them to read to their children at home as much as possible.

Conclusion

According to Dewey (1938), traditional education imposes curriculum on students instead of tailoring the curriculum to create meaningful learning experiences for individual students. Dewey's approach to education places a high value on considering the particular needs of students and striving to create relevant learning experiences for students that have lasting value.

The ideology of Dewey was a key component of the reflective process that led me to study the topic of the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on pre-kindergarten students' attitudes toward reading.

Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) assert that studies such as this action research study are based upon a problem-centered design, where the curriculum is based on social issues and emphasizes both content and the learners' development. My action plan entails providing ongoing professional development regarding supporting teachers with the implementation of effective culturally relevant research-based teaching strategies that they can utilize to positively impact student learning outcomes. Moreover, as an overall goal, my action plan seeks to create a learning community where systems that promote inequity in schools are not supported. Specific actions that I plan to take include the following: lead conversations with staff about inequities and about honoring diversity, provide formal and informal professional development to teachers and staff to improve

their own understanding of how their worldviews inform their interpretation of the world, work with teachers and staff to disaggregate data to ensure that traditionally underserved and underperforming students are provided with fair opportunities to learn, and provide resources and training to teachers on the importance of exposing students to children's books with characters that are representative of their culture and other global cultures.

Research suggests that although teachers are aware that culturally relevant teaching exists and culturally relevant children's literature exist for diverse groups of students, many teachers are not very knowledgeable in evaluating and selecting multicultural literature, and they doubt their ability to select multicultural literature that is free from stereotypical images (Banks, 1991; Diamond & Moore, 1995). This action research project, along with the professional development that I will provide to teachers and staff, will create greater awareness among educators about the importance of creating equitable practices within the school community. This action research project also highlights the fact that authentic, enriching literature written by and about people of color does indeed exist. Furthermore, in terms of social justice and diversity, I believe that in my role as a curriculum leader, I will be very instrumental in helping teachers become more aware of the impact of cultural biases and cultural differences on learning outcomes. My role will help highlight the fact that choosing literature that represents the student population served and that is free of stereotypes in language, illustrations, behaviors, and character traits may be a critical link to promoting diversity, increasing literacy achievement, and setting the stage for life-long positive attitudes toward literacy.

Additionally, my goal as a transformational curriculum leader is to create an environment that fosters trust, high morale, and respect for all educators and students. My

specific vision for this action research project was to bring equitable practices to the school community and hold cultural competence as an important part of the school's culture. However, I believe that to successfully implement and develop a comprehensive culturally relevant program, one must first reflect upon their own views regarding diversity. For example, I always express to my constituents that to become a multicultural educator, one must first become a multicultural person. This can be a challenging task for many educators because it involves continuous learning and professional development, confronting their own racism and biases, and learning to see reality from a variety of perspectives. As a part of my leadership role in school and communities, I realize that sometimes it takes time and deep reflection for some educators to come to terms with reeducating themselves due to their own experiences with the monocultural education that has been ingrained into their consciousness.

In conclusion, it was my goal through this action research study to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy and transformational leadership strategies to address the need for creating early positive attitudes toward reading among African American pre-kindergarten students. It was also my goal to bring attention to the need for continued professional development for educators as it relates to issues involving the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy into the early childhood reading curriculum.

The findings of this research suggest that tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy-cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness-may positively impact student learning and serve as a tool for positively impacting students' attitudes toward reading during early childhood among African American student populations. Further research into this topic is warranted.

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APPENDIX A

PRE-KINDERGARTEN STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD READING SURVEY

Subject ID Number: _____	Administration Date: _____
Subject Gender: _____	Evaluator Initials: _____

1. How does it make you feel when someone reads to you?



2. How does it make you feel when you share a book with a friend?



3. How do you feel about reading at school?



4. How do you feel about reading at home when you leave school?



5. How do you feel when you start a new book?



6. How do you feel about reading instead of going outside to play?



7. How do you feel about receiving a book as a gift?



8. How do you feel about the stories your teacher reads to you in class?



9. How do you feel about reading at home for fun?



10. How do you feel when you are asked questions about the stories you read?



APPENDIX B

PRE-KINDERGARTEN READING ATTITUDE SURVEY SCORING
SHEET

Subject ID Number: _____	Administration Date: _____
Subject Gender: _____	Evaluator Initials: _____

Scoring Key

4 points	Very Happy Face
3 points	Slightly Happy Face
2 points	Neutral Face (not happy or sad)
1 point	Sad face

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Total Score: _____

APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the last book you read in the reading center? Did you share the book with a friend? What did you like about the book? What did you not like about the book?
2. Tell me about the last story your teacher read to you during story time? Has story time become more fun? Why or why not?
3. Does anyone read to you at home when you leave school? If so, tell me about the last story you read at home?
4. Overall, do you enjoy reading?

APPENDIX D

LEAD TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What types of reading activities appear to motivate the student?
2. What feelings have you observed the student to express about reading activities?
3. What does the student do when asked to read a book independently?
4. What does the student do when asked to participate in a shared or group reading activity?
5. Has the student checked out more books from the classroom library to take home to read since the incorporation of culturally relevant teaching has been introduced into the lessons?
6. In your overall opinion, do you believe that culturally relevant teaching has had any impact on the students' attitudes toward reading? Please explain.

APPENDIX E

FIELD NOTES PAGE

DATE AND TIME	OBSERVATION	COMMENTS

APPENDIX F

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

September 25, 2017

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is being invited to participate in a study that explores the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on African American students' attitudes toward reading in a pre-kindergarten classroom. The students will receive targeted culturally relevant instructional strategies which will consist of students listening to stories and participating in reading activities that promote cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. Students will also participate in small group literacy circles. Data will be collected in the form of pre-and post-surveys, weekly observations, and field notes.

Survey Content

The surveys, interviews and observations will gather information on and about your child's attitudes toward reading.

It is Voluntary

Your child does not have to take the survey or be interviewed. Students who participate only have to answer the questions they want to answer, and they may stop talking at any time without penalty. Students may provide whatever information they are comfortable providing.

It is Anonymous and Confidential

The survey, interviews, and observation data will be kept confidential (not seen by others) and anonymous (no names will be recorded and/or attached to the survey forms or data—Students cannot be identified).

Benefit of the Study

The study will help teachers plan and/or learn more about how to design activities to improve your child's reading habits, reading attitudes, and reading learning outcomes.

Potential Risks

There are no known risk of physical harm to your child. Your child will not have to answer any questions unless s/he wants to.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems, arise, please contact Ms. Janet Brantley at brantlj@email.sc.edu or call 404-956-4465.

Consent

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I give approval allowing Ms. Janet Brantley to conduct this research. A copy of this form has been provided to me.

I do want my child to participate: _____
Parent/Guardian signature Date

I do not want my child to participate: _____
Parent/Guardian signature Date