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**AN AWAKENING AWARENESS: EXPLORING TEACHERS
UNDERSTANDINGS OF CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY IN THE
DIVERSE CLASSROOM**

by

Lauren Zorzi

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

February 16, 2020

Thesis Chair: Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D.

Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Frank Zorzi, for being there for me throughout these past few years with an encouraging smile. Life has been hectic throughout this process, from getting married and having our first child, but having you as my support has gotten me through. You continue to inspire me to be a better person and I could not imagine my life without you. For you, I am forever grateful.

I would also like to dedicate this to my beautiful baby daughter, Joelle. You are the reason I pursued my dream to become a reading specialist. Everything Mommy and Daddy do is for you. I can't wait to watch you grow up and I hope you know that you will forever be my greatest accomplishment.

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I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dr. Marjorie Madden. I appreciate your support and guidance throughout this process. This program been harder than I could have imagined but now that I am at the finish line, I realize how grateful I am for your knowledge and expertise.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the MA in reading program for their continuous support. I feel so blessed to have been on this journey with all of you and wish you all nothing but the best in your personal and professional future.

Abstract

Lauren Zorzi

AN AWAKENING AWARENESS: EXPLORING TEACHERS UNDERSTANDINGS
OF CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY IN THE DIVERSE CLASSROOM
2019-2020

Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to examine what teachers know (and still need to know) about culturally sustaining pedagogy and what happens when practitioners try to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies within their classrooms. A pre-question, survey, teacher readiness scale, recorded discussions, notes in a teacher research journal, and a post question were all analyzed to determine how five teachers who are completing their MA in Reading: Reading Specialist, incorporated culture into the classroom as well as their and their students openness and views of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Findings were that these five teachers who are completing their MA in Reading coursework have a surface-level understanding of how to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy. While they made attempts to include culture and diversity in the classroom, their attempts were limited. However, the findings revealed that the participants have an awakening awareness that instructional practices need to change if they are to truly engage in culturally sustaining pedagogy. Teachers shared their experiences and reactions to attempting to implement this pedagogy to diverse populations of students. Implications for further research are discussed. For future teacher researchers, more research is also needed on the actual implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies in diverse school districts through explicit practices.

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Chapter 1

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

“The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them.” (Lisa Delpit, pp. 32)

Throughout our Clinical Experience this summer, my eyes were opened to a vital part of education in which, unfortunately, I typically never put much emphasis on in my classroom. Yes I am aware of the extreme diversity in my school, yes I am aware that some students speak a language other than English in their home, yes I know that a majority of my schools’ population consists of African American children, yes I know that some students do not celebrate Christmas or Easter; however, what did I do with that information? How did I cater my education to those students who come from diverse backgrounds? How did I REALLY get to know my students and get information about their culture? Unfortunately, after some harsh reflection, I realized I had not done these students justice.

After unpacking the *Funds of Knowledge* (Moll and Gonzalez, 1992) with a group of colleagues, I became increasingly aware of my ignorance and could not believe that I used to preach how well I knew my students each year. Throughout dissecting this information and sharing with my colleagues about my family’s traditions, occupations, outings, etc. I could not help but think of previous students in which I thought I knew a lot about. Going through this paper, I could not complete all the information on a chosen previous student, simply because I did not know the answers. Now I will not completely say I did not know the student because I did know many things such as how many siblings he had, where his parents worked, what athletic games he had over the weekend and how he did; however, I did not know much about his cultural identity. I did not cater

or change my educational norms to fit into his culture and never asked for him to share his family values. In hindsight, this is a vital part of education and one that I am now extremely interested in investigating.

Through much self-reflection, especially throughout Clinical Experience this summer, I want to be better. I want to be a better listener. I want to be better at asking students to share about their life. I want to be better at encouraging my students to value their culture and challenge aspects in which they do not believe in. I want to be better at educating students about people who are different than they are and in different I don't mean just the way they look. I want to be better at providing students the opportunities to teach and learn from their classmates and to engage in dialogue. I want to be better at seeing students for who they are and be careful to never silence them. I want to be better at encouraging students to be active members of their community and promote that from inside the classroom. I want to share my goals for incorporating various cultures of students into the classroom and curriculum. I also want to learn from my colleagues about some ways in which they have made this effectively happen and how the students have responded.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to record how teachers who are currently one course away from completing their Master's Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist view, respond to, and incorporate the various cultures of their students into the classroom and curriculum and how their students react to this education. The specific aims are to determine what these teachers are already doing in the classroom to incorporate culturally

sustaining pedagogies, what changes they have made to their instruction, and how they value students' culture in the classroom.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers implement culturally sustaining pedagogies into the classroom and how they view, respond to, and bridge these cultural differences in the classroom. Sub-questions that guide my inquiry include: what do these teachers already know about culturally sustaining pedagogies? How do these teachers value culture within their classroom? Has incorporating students' cultures before this year been a priority? How is their teaching influenced by culture? What ways do these teachers incorporate culture into the classroom? Do these teachers do any work outside of the community to learn more about their students' diverse cultures?

Story of the Question

After learning about Django Paris' (2018) idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy throughout my graduate courses at Rowan University, I was curious to know more about how to incorporate culture into the everyday classroom. Also, I believe that as a future reading specialist, it is part of my job description to know more information on this topic. I can continue to educate my colleagues with the most up to date, meaningful, and effective teaching strategies and research. I am responsible for encouraging diversity and equity in the school, district, as well as the community. I can also accelerate the idea of praxis to eliminate school-based practices that are inherently biased. However, in order to do so, I must reflect and make changes to my own teaching.

After some serious self-reflection, I knew this was an area of education that I wanted to research more. I was curious if my Rowan colleagues have felt the same way

as I did. I noticed that as we were learning more about the idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom and through some informal conversations, many of my colleagues felt as I did that they had dropped the ball on this aspect of their classrooms. While listening to responses throughout our courses to connecting with my colleagues as they made personal reflections to our theorist presentations, I felt that I was not alone. While many of us felt as if we had included cultural education into some form of our curriculum, we quickly realized that a majority of our instruction was very surface and not complex enough to make an effective difference. I share my personal goal of becoming a culturally sustaining educator with a group of my Rowan colleagues. I will conduct my research based on the question; "What happens when practitioners try to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms?"

Organization of the Thesis

The following four chapters detail my teacher research. Chapter two focuses on a review of the literature that relates to and has influenced this study. Chapter three provides information regarding the context of the study such as the community and school information, as well as the research design and methodology. Chapter four analyzes the data gathered during the eight weeks. Chapter five consists of the conclusion and discusses any limitations and implications for further research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

“If the curriculum we use to teach our children does not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to school, it is doomed to failure.” (Lisa Delpit pp. 152).

Introduction

Ever since 1995 when Gloria Ladson-Billings proposed the culturally relevant pedagogy for education, many educators have been inspired to create a classroom with a commitment that affirms students’ cultural identities. The term, culturally relevant pedagogy supports the value of our multiethnic and multilingual present and future. Throughout the years, the population of our schools in the United States has drastically changed and unfortunately, educators and curriculum have not. Educators need to value the diversity in their classrooms and differentiate their instruction in order to meet the diverse needs of our students. A newer approach to teaching and learning challenges us to promote, celebrate, and even critique the multiple and shifting ways that students engage with culture. This has led to the question; How can teachers effectively educate and prepare our students to thrive in the diverse society that we live in today? These concerns mixed with Ladson-Billings’ principles of culturally relevant pedagogy has led to the development of culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature pertaining to the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy in today’s schools, the theoretical frameworks that lead to this pedagogy, teachers’ attitudes and knowledge towards adapting culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms, and how culturally sustaining pedagogy can be effectively implemented in the classroom and what role the teacher plays in this shift.

The first section explains the diversity of schools in the United States and the importance of implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies in order for our diversified students to be taught successfully. The next section shares the prior research that has led to Django Paris' (2017) evolved theory of culturally sustaining pedagogies. Section three explains teachers' attitudes and knowledge concerning the adoption and implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms. Finally, the last section explores how teachers have implemented culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms and how this implementation has led to a shift in today's education. The chapter ends with a summary of the literature and the benefits of this study concerning the knowledge of culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Importance of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies in Today's Education

The student population in the United States has continued to become increasingly diverse. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), 50.8 million public school students entered Pre-K through 12th grade in the fall of 2019. Of those 50.8 million students, the race statistics are as follows: 23.7 million White students, 13.9 million Hispanic students, 7.7 million Black students, 2.7 million Asian students, 2.1 million students of Two or more races, 0.5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 0.2 million Pacific Islander students. Since the fall of 2014, less than half of public school students have been White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The percentage of public school students who are White is projected to continue to decline through at least fall 2028 along with the percentages of students who are Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native. The percentages of students who are Hispanic, Asian, or biracial are projected to increase.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the percentage of teachers who were White declined from 84 percent to 80 percent and the number of teachers who were Black declined from 8 to 7 percent. The percentage of teachers who were Hispanic increased from 6 to 9 percent between 1999–2000 and 2015–16. However, the percentage of White teachers far surpasses the number of Black or Hispanic teachers by a large margin. A difference in backgrounds of culture between teachers and students will continue to be a topic that needs to be addressed in today’s education because these differences will have a significant impact on student achievement. Therefore, as the demographics of today’s schools are changing and will continue to change, educators must be ready to not only recognize cultural differences but provide a school experience in which students of color can both survive and thrive (Paris, 2012, p. 13).

According to Paris (2012), “deficit approaches to teaching and learning, firmly in place prior to and during the 1960s and 1970s, viewed that the dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by school fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society” (p. 93). Unfortunately, this deficit perspective continues to haunt education in the United States. “The goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Many children experience difficulty in school because “the school attempts to insert culture into education, instead of inserting education into the culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159). With a deficit perspective, teachers take away dialect and retrain students to speak the way they expect; this practice

encourages all students to follow the dominant culture. This view is in direct opposition to the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy. A culturally sustaining pedagogy, as Paris (2012) argues, “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93).

Theoretical Frameworks that Lead to a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

It is an educator’s job to demonstrate a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) both within and outside the school community. This can be done in many ways and is not a new concept. As stated above, Paris (2012) describes that a culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). Culturally sustaining pedagogy works to erase the deficit perspective that has haunted the educational system. Paris (2012) explains the goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy to be that teachers “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). They must be present and aware of the broad diversities of the students. For this to occur, educators must be open and accepting to learning about others cultures coining the term, CSP. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), “culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20).

The approach to culturally sustaining pedagogies should meet the specific needs of all students to make the connections between their cultures and lives to their learning. Students come into classrooms with funds of knowledge (Moll and Gonzalez, 1992) that should inform what and how they are taught. Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a

Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms, Moll and Gonzalez (1992) describe the experience of doing ethnography with parents, what kinds of things they learned, and how they brought their new understandings into classroom practice. Being aware of a students' funds of knowledge (Moll and Gonzalez, 1992), such as what a family outing may look like or the occupations of their parents, should be used to foster a trusting relationship with a student. In turn, this can help to inform further effective instruction.

Gloria Ladson-Billings developed the idea of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy which eventually led to Alim and Paris (2017) coining the Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. Just as students need to feel empowered to make a change, so do teachers. They need to move from the deficit perspective to an asset perspective in which people of different cultures and backgrounds are accepted and treated justly and fairly. Ladson-Billings' (1995) article, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, was essential in starting this movement. In this article, Ladson-Billings (1995) expresses that "not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must help students recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (p. 476). Giving students the opportunity to solve a relevant social problem with possible solutions within their community is an effective way to advocate for respect and equity and instill community pride within the school, district, and community levels.

Lisa Delpit is also an advocate for diverse and multicultural education reform. Her work focuses on helping educators embrace linguistic diversity in classrooms and recognize the culture of power they are teaching within. In her seminal piece, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (2006), Delpit provides insight,

“The answer is to *accept* students, but also take responsibility to *teach* them.” (p. 38). This collection of essays reflects on Delpit’s beliefs about educating minority children; more specifically African American children, in what for them are often alienating environments (Delpit, 2006). Delpit’s *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children* was an essay that delivered a groundbreaking perspective on how to best educate children of color and recognizing the “culture of power” in our schools. "The Silenced Dialogue," refers to the lack of communication between white educators and teachers of color when it comes to issues of race, specifically due to the disparity between reliance on pedagogy and cultural understanding. The culture of power is the culture created by a dominant group that understands the codes or rules for participating in that group. Those outside of the culture of power often struggle to successfully perform within their norms. Therefore, the dominant group may unintentionally exclude newcomers by failing to identify what they need to know and how they can share it with others. Delpit explains how the culture of power is evident within our education system and how students of color are affected by it. Delpit encourages students to display their personal power in the classroom and for teachers to facilitate and allow opportunities that empower their students. She states that “The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them” (p. 32). This powerful statement recognizes that students bring their own expertise to the classroom and that teachers should recognize and embrace their knowledge.

Teacher's Attitudes and Knowledge

Unfortunately, there are many teachers in today's schools that are unaware of the cultural gaps that exists between them and their students. Because of this unequal social power and cultural alienation, Herbert Kohl (1992) believes that teachers can "cause negative impact to cognitive and intellectual development by causing not-learning" (Gao, 2014, p. 104). Gao (2014) explains that "not-learning does not refer to an incapability to learn, but is rather a choice a child intentionally or unintentionally makes to resist learning" (p. 104). Gao believes that when students do not feel valued or important, they will completely shut down and be unable to learn. This is something that educators need to be made aware of. For example, if a student speaks Spanish at home and a teacher does not allow the student to share this language in their school environment, they may immediately feel inferior and the ugly process of not-learning may begin. In order to make a change to encourage our students' diversities and cultures, teachers must be aware of the damage that may be occurring. Gao states that as educators, "we should always evaluate and adapt out pedagogy by using culturally relevant teaching to build up a just sociocultural context to make children feel respected and comfortable" (p. 105).

Johnson and Bolshakova (2015) conducted a study where they focused on working within a large, urban low-performing middle school to address and transform teacher beliefs in regards to culture within their science pedagogy. In this district, there has been a rapid growth in the number of students from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds. Before this study began, despite increased efforts to prepare teachers, the majority of current K-12 teachers were not provided the necessary training to integrate culture within their science curriculum. Johnson and Bolshakova (2015) share Ladson-Billings (1998)

thoughts in that most teachers in the United States “believe they are just regular Americans while people of color are the ones with culture,” and that “far too many teachers in U.S. schools possess only a surface understanding of culture- their own or anyone else’s” (Ladson-Billings (1998) p. 26, p. 179). Discoveries from this study found that transforming teacher’s beliefs was a challenge for all teachers involved: “three out of the five program participants were able, with intensive support, to challenge their conceptions and current approaches to teaching science to predominantly Hispanic populations and make the shift to a more relevant pedagogy” (p. 184). However, some teachers were still resistant. Johnson and Bolshakova concluded that “current teacher education programs may need to restructure experiences to better challenge existing beliefs of preservice teachers to better prepare them for the classrooms of today and the future” (p. 184).

A case study was done by Ozudogru (2018) that explored the readiness level for prospective teachers for culturally responsive teaching and explored students’ opinions on this topic. Ozudogru (2018) shares that Banks (2010) explains that “culturally responsive teaching supports that all students should have equal access to school learning irrespective of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics” (p. 1). In order to prepare for culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2002) explains the five different components of it as “developing a culturally diversity knowledge base, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrate cultural caring and building a learning community, establishing cross-cultural communications, and establishing cultural congruity in classroom instruction” (p. 106-112). Ozudogru (2018) concluded that “prospective teachers’ general readiness for culturally responsive teaching was high

and that prospective teachers perceived themselves as reading for culturally responsive teaching” (p. 9).

Implementation of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies in Classrooms

Researchers have identified what is needed to successfully implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom. According to Django Paris (2017) in order to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom, an educator must possess five characteristics. Paris (2017) proposes that schools should be sites for sustaining the cultural practices of communities of color, rather than eliminating them. The five understandings of educators who are culturally sustaining are:

1. An understanding of the systemic nature of racialized and intersectional inequalities and their own relative privileged or marginalized position within those systems.
2. An understanding that education participates in and often perpetuates such inequalities, though it can also disrupt them.
3. An understanding of the ways deficit approaches have historically and continue to perpetuate racialized inequalities, and an understanding of asset approaches and how to curricularize them.
4. An understanding that critical asset approaches do improve academic achievement, but that current measures of achievement are narrow and assimilative and so not the sole goal.
5. An understanding that humanizing relationships of dignity and care are fundamental to student and teacher learning.

Paris (2017) proposes that schools should be sites for sustaining the cultural practices of communities of color, rather than eliminating them. In order to do so, these five characteristics must be maintained within the classroom. The basis of culturally responsive teaching is student-centered instruction, elimination of deficit perspective with a positive perspective on parents and families, reshaping and restructuring of curriculum to validate students' culture, establishing high expectations, and allowing student-centered instruction through the use of open dialogue.

In order to be an effective teacher of students who have culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and radically diverse backgrounds, both teacher education and classroom practice need to improve. Sonia Nieto identified five qualities of an effective teacher. One quality of an effective teacher is the "sense of mission" (Nieto, 2006). This means that as a teacher you need to believe in your craft and believe that you are making the difference that you believe you can make. Another quality is "solidarity with, and empathy for, students." Caring relationships with students can make a difference despite hardships such as issues of inequality and racism. The third quality is "the courage to question mainstream knowledge" (Nieto, 2006). This is the idea that it is acceptable to question conventional teaching and to "think outside the lines." The next quality is "improvisation" (Nieto, 2006). As Nieto describes, "excellent teachers use improvisation to see beyond frameworks, rubrics, models, and templates" (Nieto, 2006). As teachers, we have to make decisions in the moment in order to successfully meet the needs of our students. The final quality is "a passion for social justice" (Nieto, 2006). This is the idea of believing that our students have rights to their different identities and languages. Sonia explains, "My research has made it clear that previous experiences as well as values,

dispositions, and beliefs fuel teachers' determination to remain in the profession" (Nieto, 2009). Overall, Nieto believes if teachers do not develop meaningful relationships with their students, they simply will not succeed. "Sensibilities such as love engaging with intellectual work, the hope of changing students' lives, a belief in the democratic potential of public education, and anger at the conditions of public education are all at the heart of what makes for excellent and caring teachers" (Nieto, 2003, p. 386). Teachers attitudes have a powerful influence on why they teach and why teachers remain in a profession in spite of difficulties.

Conclusion

According to the research above, culturally sustaining pedagogy provides a powerful framework to meet the needs of the diverse population of learners. The construct of Culturally sustaining pedagogy has been developed based on principles of other researchers such as funds of knowledge (Moll & Gutierrez, 1994) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The focus of this study is to investigate what happens when teachers with varying educational backgrounds, values, and experiences implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms.

Chapter Three

Context of the Study

Introduction

This study was completed in the Fall of 2019. The goal of this study is to explore educators' attitudes about implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. This study was conducted with teachers who have been educated about the importance of their role in bridging the gap between the cultural diversities in their classrooms.

In this chapter, the context of the study and the methodology used are discussed. The chapter begins with the context of the study. Included in this are the descriptions of the community in which the five different schools are located, the specific demographics of the districts, as well as the demographics of the schools and the descriptions of the participants in the study. In order to protect the confidentiality of the case study participants, districts, and schools, they were all given pseudonyms. The context is followed by a discussion of the methodology, specifically outlining the research design along with the data collection and analysis process.

Five Diverse Districts and Communities

This case study involves gathering information from five different school districts within New Jersey. I have compiled information from all the five districts.

Participant one, Michelle, teaches in Featherville Elementary School which is a public school located in New Jersey. The district is home to three elementary schools ranging in grades PK through sixth grade. There are over 1,400 students within the district and about 120 teachers and instructional aids. Education is provided for those in

regular education, special education, gifted and talented, and basic skills classes. The district is considered a Title 1 school district. About 20% of the district's population is considered in need of assistance due to economic factors. Black, Hispanic, Asian and White make of the community population. Of the population, about 12 % speak another language at home (New Jersey Department of Education). According to recent state testing scores, English Language Arts has not met the state average in terms of performance, whereas Mathematics has met the state average.

Participant two, Kathy, works for Lily Public School which is the only school in the district and consists of grades pre-k to eighth. According to the 2017-2018, NJ Performance Report the percentages of Economically Disadvantaged is 40.5%, the number of students with disabilities is 20.9%, English Learners is 0.9%. The ratio of teachers to students is 1 to 11. The ethnic makeup of the school is 52.6% white, 18% Hispanic, 21% black, 2.1% Asian, and 6.2% other. The total of students that met or exceeded the state expectations on standardized testing in ELA was 51.4% and in Math was 27%.

Participant three, Katie, teaches in NJ. The community in which she teaches consists of one elementary school and a combined middle school and high school. The total student enrollment for the district is 1,432. The study sites are located in a South Jersey town with a total population of 8,676 residents. Many people who live in this town are proud to be from a small town. Many generations have gone through the school system here and are now raising their families here. According to City data, the racial demographic of the township was 74% White, 14% African American, 4.4% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, 6.4% two or more races, and .2% American Indian. The median age resident

is 38.8%, while the median household income was \$65,887 in 2016. About 8.5% of families were living below the poverty line.

Participant four, Donna, teaches in West Bolero Township. The West Bolero Public Schools has eleven schools that serve grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. West Bolero High School is the district's only public high school. The enrollment for students at West Bolero High School for the 2019-2020 school year is 2,040 students. The racial makeup of is predominantly White, yet has become more racially diverse since 2000. In 2010, West Bolero was 69.4% White, 4% African American, 22.8% Asian or Pacific Islander and 6.7% identified as Hispanic. Approximately one-third of the population is foreign-born; China and India are the largest sources. The population by age is 75.9% over the age of 18. At the district level, the number and percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch has been increasing. Whereas 789 students (8.9%) received free or reduced lunch in the school district in 2008-09, the number increased to 1,304 (15.8%) in 2013-14. Nearly one-quarter of the district's free or reduced lunch population attend West Bolero High School.

Participant five, Brittany, teaches in a small town in Southern New Jersey. According to the United States Census Bureau data (2017), there are approximately 10,230 people living within the 3.87 square miles of the town. Based on reported racial demographics, the town is comprised of 64.8% White, 25.6% Black/African American, 1.6% Asian, 4.2% two or more races, and 9.7% Hispanic or Latino. In 2017, the median household income was \$51,286 and 13.6% of residents living in poverty. The Oak Mountain School District includes four schools, including two elementary schools (grades PreK - 5), one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12).

According to the New Jersey School Summary Report (2018), this district served 1,870 students in the 2017-2018 school year.

Five Schools, Five Participants

For this study, I chose to work with my Rowan University cohort in the M.A. in reading Program for Reading Specialist. I chose five participants who are also conducting research on the topics of culture such as culturally sustaining pedagogy, the use of multicultural literature, and the incorporation of Funds of Knowledge into their practice. In order to fully understand how teachers view and respond to culture in the classroom, these five participants volunteered and enabled me to obtain data, focusing on a small group with varying cultures, backgrounds, and teaching experiences.

I chose to work with teachers with different backgrounds. The years in the teaching field ranges from 4 years to 23 years. Also, the teachers all work with varying populations and in different classroom settings. However, each of the participants currently attend Rowan University. Each participant is completing their Master's Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist and is working to finalize their thesis.

Participant one, Michelle, teaches at Featherville Elementary School. This school is one of three within the school district. The school is home to grades third through fourth grade. There are about 417 students and 40 teachers within the school. The school's population consists of ethnically and economically diverse students. Of the 417 students, about 150 of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

Participant two, Kathy, teachers in the only school in the Lily Public School District which consists of grades pre-k to eighth. Over half of the population in this school is white.

Participant three, Katie, teaches first grade at Cementon Elementary School. According to the Department of Education NJ School Performance report, in the 2017-2018 school year, 674 students were enrolled at this school. Cementon Elementary is considered a large, modern facility with a full-size auditorium, library, state of the art gymnasium, full size cafeteria, and playgrounds for Pre-K and K-5 students (NJ Department of Education, 2017). Cementon Elementary is considered a Title I school; 44.3% of students are economically disadvantaged. 1% of students are considered homeless. All students are offered free breakfast each morning to ensure they have a meal to start their school day. The data presents Cementon Elementary as a diverse school. The student population is 46.1% female and 53.9% male. 51.6% of students are White, 22.3% are Black or African American, 13.1% are Hispanic, 1.9% Asian, .3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 10.8% are two or more races. Amongst the diverse population, 2.7% of students are considered English Language Learners and 18.8% of students have disabilities. Home language differs between English 93.3%, Turkish 2.7%, and Hispanic 2.5%.

Participant four, Donna, works at West Bolero High School. West Bolero High School is considered a Future Ready School; it has received the Bronze Certification, was awarded as a Blue Ribbon School, was listed on the 2018 AP Honor Roll and 95% of EBHS students attend post-secondary institutions. West Bolero High School is also a Model School of the Arts, including the Award-Winning Concert Choir, Chamber Orchestra and Wind Ensemble. In addition, over 80% of students participate in extracurricular activities - 54 clubs and 30 sports. In statewide assessments, 71% of

students met the state expectations in Language Arts, and 11% met the statewide expectations in Math in the 2018-2019 statewide administration of assessments.

Participant five, Brittany, teaches at Oak Mountain Elementary School. This school served 489 students during the 2017-2018 school year. Data retrieved from the New Jersey School Summary Report (2018) indicated that approximately 56% of students attending this school are economically disadvantaged, 21% have disabilities, and 2.5% are English Language Learners. At this school, the student population is comprised of 39.9% White, 18.6% Hispanic, 32.7% Black/African American, 2.5% Asian, and 6.1% of two or more races.

Methodology and Research Design

Qualitative research. This study is qualitative research or “research that consists of systematic documentation” in the form of observations, interviews, and data collections (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44). The method of the qualitative researcher is to “uncover, articulate, and question their own assumptions about teaching, learning and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). This is a qualitative design of research in which the overall goal is to improve student learning through the investigation of teacher practices within the school setting.

Teacher research is the specific type of research that was used to complete this study. This type of research enables educators to follow their interests and their needs as they investigate what they and their students need to be successful. Teacher research refers to the studies of K-12 teachers and pre-service teachers working collaboratively in an inquiry community to question, evaluate and change educational practices (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 2009). In conducting teacher research, the first step is for the educator to

develop a question based on their own curiosity and interest on a particular subject. In developing this question, teacher researchers are searching for a way to enrich their teaching skills and then take this information and collaborate with their peers who have similar interests or inquiries. After the question is determined, information is gathered through reading published research based on the topic. Using this information, a study is created to answer the question and then share this information with other colleagues.

This study was conducted in a series of discussion groups with the participating teachers. The teacher researcher assumed the roles as both a teacher and colleague, as well as researcher to investigate how the teachers in this school address their students' culture in the classroom. The qualitative data collection methods used included a pre-question, a survey, individual interviews, discussions, and a post-question.

Procedure of the study and data sources. Before the research began, a pre question was administered in order to determine what the five teachers knew about culturally sustaining pedagogy and what that term meant to them. Then, a survey was administered to use as a baseline to analyze how teachers' background and experience may have an effect on their thoughts and opinions about culturally sustaining pedagogies. I then scheduled weekly discussions to talk about different aspects of culturally sustaining pedagogy such as implementation in the classroom and administration support. Each conversation was recorded. The conversations and teacher responses in each meeting, that were recorded within my teacher journal, fueled the later topics of conversation.

Through the use of pre and post questions, a teacher survey, transcripts of discussions/interviews, a teacher journal, and a readiness scale adapted from Culturally

Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale (Karatas & Oral, 2017), I was able to encourage the participants to reflect on their own use of a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Each participating teacher was interviewed independently. The interview consisted of 11 background questions that gathered information about their teaching experience and background. The readiness scale adapted from Culturally Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale (Karatas & Oral, 2017) included 20 questions regarding personal and professional readiness about teaching in a classroom of cultural diversity. The post question was administered at the conclusion of the study. Similar to the pre-question, teachers were asked to write down what culturally sustaining pedagogy looks like to them. Both post-questions were open-ended questions.

Data analysis. The data collected before, during, and after the study were used to determine what happens when teachers try to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms. First, the pre question was used as a baseline to understand what a classroom based upon a culturally sustaining pedagogy looks like.

The individual interviews helped me to understand each teachers' background and experience and compare their educational background, years of experience, strengths, weaknesses, and teaching backgrounds with their beliefs about culturally sustaining pedagogy.

The readiness scale, adapted from Culturally Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale (Karatas & Oral, 2017), was used to determine trends amongst the teachers on different aspects of culturally responsive teaching. These trends were used to fuel later conversations.

The recorded discussions were examined by looking for similarities and connections amongst the teachers that would help me to fully understand what the teachers in this case study understood about culturally sustaining pedagogy and how they used their students' cultures within the classroom. More importantly, I wanted to examine the teachers and students' reactions when this was implemented within the diverse classrooms.

After these conversations took place, I was able to write a description of what the participants experienced and how they felt surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogy and student reaction. I also looked for similarities across all participants' responses to the survey and conversations.

At the conclusion of the study, I compared each teachers' pre and post questions to determine any new understandings or change in perspective about culturally sustaining pedagogy. I also administered this question again to determine if teachers continued to be open and accepting of culturally diverse classrooms or if their experiences have left with a different opinion.

I analyzed these data sources in order to establish a description of each teacher and used these descriptions to compare and contrast different teaching experiences. The findings discovered during this study are detailed in Chapter Four. This is followed by the limitations of the study as well as implications for future research which are outlined in Chapter Five.

Chapter 4

Analysis and Findings

Introduction

Data was collected for eight weeks to investigate my research question, "What happens when practitioners try to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms?" Chapter four is divided into three major sections. The first section informs the reader about the teacher participants. This section begins with a brief summary of the individual teacher interviews to better understand the case study participants and their backgrounds on culturally sustaining pedagogies. In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant, each teacher was given a pseudonym.

In the second section, a discussion of the data taken from the Culturally Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale adapted from Karatas & Oral (2017) is analyzed and presented. In the final section, a discussion of the findings from the study are presented. This section is organized by participants' discoveries on the topics of student culture, race, administration support, funds of knowledge, and challenges.

Teacher Participants

Michelle. Michelle has two Bachelor's Degrees in elementary education and liberal studies (history and political science). She also has a reading endorsement. Michelle is currently completing her Master's Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist at Rowan University. Michelle has been teaching ELA (English and Language Arts) in 3rd and 4th grade for 7 years in the same Title One elementary school. Michelle was asked why she wanted to become a teacher, She responded, "I wanted to be a teacher because I felt like I wasn't the best student myself and struggled throughout most of school. I

thought if I went into teaching, I could help those students who were like me become more successful.”

Michelle was asked to state what she believed to be her greatest strength and weakness as a teacher. Her greatest strength is her open mind and willingness to try new ideas and implement new strategies. However, she is too self-critical which is her weakness. She stated that “sometimes I am concerned that my best isn’t good enough.” When asked what she believes her most important role as a teacher is, she responded, “to help my students identify their strengths in order to learn new skills. When teaching, I find it important to use what my students already know to help them with new content.”

In terms of collaboration, Michelle is the PLC (professional learning community) team leader in 4th grade. When asked what this entails, Michelle responded with “I share new ideas with my colleagues and administration throughout these meetings. For example, this year, I started a school wide morning meeting initiative which has been quite successful.”

Finally, when asked about the ways in which Michelle incorporates culture in the classroom, she responded with “multicultural texts, open participation for communication, and student spotlight in which students bring in pictures from home, write an essay about themselves, and share a special object that represents them.” Michelle also shared that she does not believe that her school does enough to value the varying cultures within the population because they are too worried about what the parents may say or how they may react.

Kathy. Kathy has Bachelor’s Degrees in both elementary and special education. She is currently completing her Master’s Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist at

Rowan University. She has been teaching for 23 years in various roles. Within her 23 years of experience, Kathy has taught special education, PSD (personal and social development), and resource room (grades K-8), autistic support, Co-teaching/ICR (In-Class Resource), RTI (Response to Intervention), and CST (Case Study Team) coordinator, and Tier III Reading Intervention. Kathy stated that she wanted to become a teacher because of the “not so great” educational experience she had as a child.

Kathy was asked to state what she believed to be her greatest strength and weakness as a teacher. Her greatest strength is her rapport with her students and her ability to connect with them and their families. Her greatest weakness is her difficulty in relinquishing control of a situation. When asked to elaborate, she responded, “I like to do everything myself and when I get overwhelmed and know I can’t do everything myself, I have a hard time trusting someone to do it correctly or in the way that I would do it.” When asked what she believes her most important role as a teacher is, she responded, “to make a child feel loved, safe, and valued.”

Kathy shares new ideas with colleagues during PLC (professional learning community) meetings, professional development opportunities, and simple back and forth email and conversation. Finally, when asked about the ways in which Kathy incorporates culture in the classroom, she responded with “recognizing the different variables within a classroom dynamic and incorporating these values into the curriculum.” She does not believe that her current school does enough to value the different cultures within the student population.

Katie. Katie has been teaching for 4 years and has Bachelor’s Degrees in both elementary education and literacy studies. She also has her reading certificate and is

currently completing her Master's Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist at Rowan University. During her 4 years of teaching, Katie has taught 1st grade in the same elementary school. Within this school, she teaches a mix of different races; African American, White, Hispanic, Asian, and Turkish. Many of her students live with their grandparents, step-parents, parents, aunts and uncles, or other guardians. Katie knew that she wanted to be a teacher since kindergarten. She stated that she has always had a passion for helping others and making people feel comfortable.

Katie was asked to share about what she believed to be her greatest strength and weakness as a teacher. Katie stated, "my greatest strength as a teacher is how I take the time to make each student feel like he/she is understood. I incorporate student interests into my lessons and allow students to shine in the classroom, even if it isn't the most traditional way. For example, if I have a student that is a great dancer, I will allow them to teach the class a dance to help us learn a new skill. This makes that student feel special, while the rest of the class learns in an engaging way." Katie's greatest weakness is being a perfectionist. She has a difficult time relinquishing control to other people and is not good at delegating responsibilities. She believes that her most important role as a teacher is to ensure that her students are safe, engaged, and eager to learn at school.

In order to incorporate students' cultures into her instruction, Katie stated, "I take the time to get to know my students on a personal level. I speak openly to their parents and ask questions about their backgrounds. My second year of teaching, I had an ELL student who did not want to read due to his struggles. I promised him that if he would teach me Spanish, I would teach him to read. Every time we worked together for guided reading, he would teach me a new Spanish word. We kept a journal of the Spanish,

English, and an illustration. I let my students who come from a different background be heard and recognized.” Katie’s school has a very traditional way of incorporating culture such as a food festival. For example, Katie said “the food to represent Las Posadas is chips and salsa, which doesn’t even go with the holiday, so right there the stereotypes shine through. I’m not sure many people at my school know how to teach with culturally relevant pedagogy.”

Donna. Donna has a Bachelor’s Degree in literature and has been an English teacher at the secondary level for 7 years. Donna is currently completing her Master’s Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist at Rowan University. She has taught 10th and 11th grade, both academic and honors levels. She has also taught a basic skills class that was comprised of 10th-11th graders. Currently, she is in her first full year at a new position in a high school. She decided she wanted to become a classroom teacher full time after tutoring students in English for quite some time.

Donna believes that her greatest strength as a teacher is building rapport with her students and holding them accountable for their own learning. When asked about her greatest weakness, Donna shared, “my greatest weakness is getting caught up with little details and taking things too personally in the classroom or with parents.” She believes her most important role as a teacher is to be someone that students can rely on, she stated, “whether they like it or not.” Donna shares new ideas with colleagues through a department wide group on her district’s Canvas wherein they have monthly discussion posts about best practices, success stories, and sharing new resources and content.

She incorporates students’ cultures into her instruction through using more diverse literature and utilizing critical literacy as her students question text (short and

long text, and nonfiction and fiction) and ensuring student voices are heard in the texts they read and in what they write. When asked if Donna believes that her school does enough to value the varying cultures of their population, she stated, “perhaps superficially; our district is very “College Ready” focused and I do not necessarily believe that applies to all of our students; we have a Vocational School in the district, but students who are not college bound are not given enough options in terms of courses and types of courses they can take. In addition, the texts we use in our department are not relevant to most of our students; currently, my supervisor has completed a grant to ensure we receive more diverse texts in the classroom, which is exciting.”

Brittany. Brittany has a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology and New Jersey teaching certificates in elementary education and teacher of reading. Brittany is currently completing her Master’s Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist at Rowan University. She has been teaching for 13 years. Throughout these 13 years, Brittany has taught 1st and 2nd grade and all regular education subject areas. Brittany wanted to become a teacher because she always had a very positive school experience and has always loved learning, specifically reading.

Brittany was asked to share what she believed her greatest strength and weakness is as a teacher. Brittany shared that her greatest strength is her patient and positive attitude. She keeps a positive rapport with her families. She also shared that she is flexible and is willing to adjust and try new approaches. Brittany stated, “my greatest weakness as a teacher is that I tend to be hard on myself and I can get easily overwhelmed when deadlines approach.” She collaborates with colleagues at grade level or data team meetings.

In regard to incorporation of culture, Brittany uses multicultural books as read alouds, assigns narrative writing projects, and discusses holidays around the world. When asked if Brittany believes that her school does enough to value the varying cultures of their population, she stated, “No. I think we are moving in the right direction, but my district can do more. We are short staffed and have few resources for ELL families. We have only ONE ELL teacher between two elementary schools. She must service nearly 40 kids. There are no translators available at back to school night, so many Spanish families either bring older students to translate or they do not come at all.”

Cultural Responsive Readiness Scale

The purpose of this portion of my study is to determine the readiness level of current teachers for culturally responsive teaching and to explore their opinions about culturally responsive teaching and the impact of their graduate education on their culturally responsive teaching readiness. The data was collected via a Cultural Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale adapted by Karatas & Oral (2017). The scale, which consists of 20 items, has two-factors which are “Personal Readiness” and “Professional Readiness.” It was implemented in order to examine current teachers’ (in graduate classes) readiness for culturally responsive teaching. The statements in the questionnaire are in the form of five points. The items were coded like: “I strongly disagree=1”, “I disagree=2”, “Undecided=3”, “I agree=4” and “I strongly agree=5”. The results are displayed below and separated by “Personal Readiness” and “Professional Readiness.”

Personal Readiness

Table 1

Personal Readiness

| Personal Readiness | M | K | K | D | B |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. I am ready to teach in a class where there is a cultural diversity. | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 2. I am curious about the cultural values of the students in my class. | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 3. I think that while I guide my students' learning, I need to consider their cultural values. | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 5. I do not tolerate students in my class to discriminate against each other because of their cultural diversity. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 6. I think it would be fun to train in a class where cultural diversity is experienced. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 7. When cultural diversity is taken into consideration, I can teach anywhere in the United States. | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 8. I would like to increase the interactions in and out of the classroom by learning vocabulary and sentences from the mother tongues of my non-English native speakers. | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9. I think that students should be encouraged to give examples specific to their own culture in the course of the lessons. | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 10. I think that having training by taking the cultural environment in which the students are brought up into account will increase students' academic achievement. | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 11. If I have an option, I would teach in a place where people have different cultural characteristics different from my own culture. | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 12. I believe that our educational system should be structured to reflect the cultural diversity from pre-school to the university. | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

As seen above, in Table 1, a majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the items in the personal readiness part. All participants strongly agreed with the statement, *“I do not tolerate students in my class to discriminate against each other because of their cultural diversity.”* Teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statements: *“I am curious about the cultural values of the students in my class,” “I think that while I guide my students’ learning, I need to consider their cultural values,” “I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures,” “I think it would be fun to train in a class where cultural diversity is experienced,” “I would like to increase the interactions in and out of the classroom by learning vocabulary and sentences from the mother tongues of my non-English native speakers,” “I think that students should be encouraged to give examples specific to their own culture in the course of the lessons,” “I think that having training by taking the cultural environment in which the students are brought up into account will increase students’ academic achievement,”* and *“I believe that our educational system should be structured to reflect the cultural diversity from pre-school to the university.”* This indicates that current teachers completing their Master’s Degrees in Reading: Reading Specialist believed that taking the cultural environment in which the students were brought up into account would increase students’ academic achievement. They also indicated that the educational system should be structured to reflect the cultural diversity from pre-school to the university. It is evident that teachers strongly agreed that they were curious about the cultural values of the students in their class, they needed to consider students’ cultural values while guiding their learning, enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures, and would not tolerate students in their class to discriminate against each other because of their cultural

differences. However, one participant was undecided when asked if they were ready to teach in a class where there is cultural diversity. This same participant claimed to be unsure if she could teach anywhere in the United States and if given the option, she is unsure whether she would teach in a place where people have different cultural characteristics different from her own culture. These results will be addressed again throughout the study.

Professional Readiness

Table 2

Professional Readiness

| Professional Readiness | Michelle | Kathy | Katie | Donna | Brittany |
|--|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Our university instructors created awareness of the cultural diversity during our graduate education. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 2. I think that the compulsory courses I have taken during graduate education have contributed to me in terms of sensitivity to cultural values. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I find my graduate education program sufficient in creating awareness about cultural diversity in the U.S. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 4. I gained an awareness of the cultural diversity that lives on the geography of the U.S. during my graduate education. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5. I obtained information to know different cultures in the U.S. during my graduate education. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 6. I am aware that students' cultural lives must be used as a means of achieving their learning objectives. | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I find textbooks taught in graduate education courses sufficient in terms of presenting information related to cultural diversity. | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 8. I have gained awareness of cultural diversity thanks to the involvement of our instructors' personal lives and experiences. | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 |

As seen above, in Table 2, a majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the items in the professional readiness part. All participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statements: *“Our university instructors created awareness of the cultural diversity during our graduate education,” “I think that the compulsory courses I have taken during graduate education have contributed to me in terms of sensitivity to cultural values,” “I find my graduate education program sufficient in creating awareness about cultural diversity in the U.S.,” “I gained an awareness of the cultural diversity that lives on the geography of the U.S. during my graduate education,”* and *“I am aware that students’ cultural lives must be used as a means of achieving their learning objectives.”* This indicates that current teachers completing their Master’s Degrees in Reading: Reading Specialist believed that their graduate program had created an awareness of cultural diversity and that these teachers are aware that students’ cultural lives must be used as a means of achieving their learning objectives. However, when asked to rate whether the textbooks taught in graduate education courses were sufficient in terms of presenting information related to cultural diversity and if teachers have gained awareness of cultural diversity thanks to the involvement of our instructors’ personal lives and experiences, there were mixed responses. These responses ranged from “strongly disagree” and “agree.”

In Their Own Words: Teachers Define Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

The five teacher participants were asked to respond to the following pre-question: “What does a classroom based upon a culturally sustaining pedagogy look like to you?” Kathy, who has been teaching for 23 years (the most experienced teacher of the participants) stated, “Culturally sustaining pedagogy looks like an embracement and

inclusion of multiple cultures and ethnicities through one's teaching practice. It is being cognizant of materials used, dialogue that happens, and acceptance within a school community. It involves recognition and the importance of student's cultures towards curriculum and how instruction is delivered." Michelle, with 7 years in the profession stated, "To me, a culturally sustaining pedagogical classroom is constantly changing and evaluating its resources and practices. I feel culturally sustaining pedagogy includes various types of literature that mirror that of the students in the classroom. In addition, I feel this pedagogy includes opportunities for students to discuss and share their cultural backgrounds so that teachers can apply them to the classroom setting. Giving students the opportunity to also have meaningful conversations with peers about topics of interest to support discussions is important as well." Donna, who has been teaching for 7 years in a high school setting shared, "A classroom based on culturally sustaining pedagogy involves exposure to various texts written by authors of different backgrounds who have lived authentic, multicultural experiences. A culturally sustaining pedagogy within the classroom is also focused on questioning texts, questioning one another, and identifying bias and stereotypes within ourselves as well as within what we read. In a classroom, this looks a lot like debating, criticizing, and most importantly, sharing personal experiences or stories. This can often be difficult to maneuver as at times students will encounter sensitive topics; however, it is required in order to ensure students are able to question the source(s) of information they encounter and to question what they are reading." Brittany has been teaching for 13 years in an elementary school setting. When asked this question, she responded, "A culturally sustaining pedagogy incorporates multicultural literature, provides opportunities for students to use their home language, celebrates differences in

cultures, gives students choices in their learning, self-selected writing topics, assigns performance tasks rather than primarily paper/pencil assessments, and includes parents and values their input.” Katie, with the least amount of professional teaching experience amongst the group of 5 participants responded, “In my opinion, a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy reflects Sonia Nieto’s theory of Multicultural Education. A culturally sustaining pedagogy would be for all students and include the idea of praxis. Students would feel as though they can see themselves in the lessons in all disciplines. Students feel recognized in the lessons and are taught how to fight for social change if they believe in an issue. It is recognized that Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is not something that happens overnight, and that it is a work in progress.”

Paris’ (2012) definition of culturally sustaining pedagogy is a pedagogy that “seeks to perpetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the school for positive social transformation” (p. 1). In analyzing each of the teacher’s definitions, I feel that the participants had an overall understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogy and I was confident that each teacher understood the importance of accepting and including cultural diversity within their various classroom settings. However, each response differed in some way. While each teacher, when asked to define what a culturally sustaining pedagogy is, was able to generate a definition, there were aspects to each explanation that were missing. A critical element of teaching with a culturally sustaining pedagogy is the importance of establishing relationships with not only students, but with families and the community. None of the participants mentioned the importance of this community partnership. Future discussions were used to investigate what a culturally sustaining pedagogy looked like to each participant and their

awareness of instructional practices that need to change in order to engage in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Unfortunately, what I discovered were some “creative failures” and surface level understanding which will hopefully turn into important tools for self-reflection and learning.

Culture: What Is It and How Can It be Implemented in the Classroom?

Throughout the study, the teacher participants developed an ongoing definition of culture that evolved as the weeks progressed. Teacher participants were also asked to share a specific example of how they infused culture into their teaching. When asked how to define culture, each participant had similar responses. They all stated that culture is how people define themselves. They shared the similar belief that culture is what you are born into and what you continue to choose to be a part of in some variation. When asked to share about culture, Katie had a thought-provoking response that made me reflect on my own ideas about culture. Below is an excerpt from our conversation about culture on November 6, 2019.

Lauren: What does culture mean to you?

Katie: To me, culture is a group of people who have a similar belief or social interaction. I think describing culture to children can be difficult sometimes.

Lauren: Why?

Katie: It is a complex thing for young students to comprehend. I mean, even as an adult, I don't specifically practice things that have to do with my Irish and German culture, but I know that plays a big part in my upbringing.

Lauren: I agree now that I think about it. I am Irish, German, and Polish, and besides hiding a pickle on my Christmas tree as a German tradition, that is about all I know. How about when it comes to sharing about your culture and family to your students, are you open to that?

Katie: I am an open book when it comes to sharing things about my life with my students. Instead of only describing culture as where my family is from, I also look at culture as a way of life. So, part of my culture and family practice is always doing the right thing, being kind to others, and always doing my best. I share these life lessons with my students in hopes they transfer these morals to their own lives.

Lauren: So, you're saying in your own life, culture isn't just your family makeup, but how you have been raised?

Katie: Yes, I feel that is just as important or even more.

When asked how she defines culture, Brittany shared “To me, culture is the beliefs, values, and behaviors that shape a person. I think I belong to several "cultures"” (Brittany, discussion transcript, November 11, 2019). I asked her to elaborate on what she means by belonging to several “cultures.” Brittany responded, “My family, my school, my neighborhood or community are part of my culture. I share stories from my family life with my students. I talk about some of the traditions that my family has, especially around the holidays. I often talk about what it was like to grow up and how that influenced my future to become a mom and teacher. I talk about going to church and my daughter's upcoming Holy Communion. I talk about my kids' soccer and baseball tournaments. I think sharing my personal life with my students builds a positive relationship” (Brittany, discussion transcript, November 11, 2019). Michelle shared, “Morning Meeting has helped me to express and relate my culture with students. When making connections to my culture though my students, I use examples of how their home life or family structure is similar to mine. I often talk about how even though I may be an adult, some of the same things that make up who they are, are some of the same things that make me. I share as much of my culture as students want to know. We've built a

culture in the classroom of respect in the classroom and so when my students want to know something about me and my culture, I make it a point to share with them”

(Michelle, discussion transcript, November 26, 2019).

After reflecting on these conversations and responses, it is clear that some aspects of culture have influenced certain aspects of the participants' lives. However, culture was defined by all participants on a surface level, not within the pedagogical research of a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Paris (2016) explains that the ways asset-based frameworks (funds of knowledge, the pedagogical third space, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy) have been taken up in practice have suffered from three pervasive short-comings. One of these shortcomings is “a lack of understanding about the dynamic nature of culture” (p. 7). I then investigated more into what the teachers were doing to incorporate culture within their classrooms.

After hearing individually about what culture means to the participants in their own lives, I was curious to explore specific examples in the classroom in which these teachers have incorporated culture. Below is an excerpt from a discussion with Brittany about incorporating culture into the classroom on November 11, 2019.

Lauren: Okay so I understand that you share your culture with your students. What do you do in the classroom to get to know your students’ cultures and can you share a recent specific example?

Brittany: We have classroom meetings on Fridays, we sit in a circle and students are given an opportunity to share about anything they would like. I often learn more about students' home cultures through this informal sharing.

Lauren: Can you give an example of a conversation you may have had this year with a student from a different culture?

Brittany: This year I had several students who were not born in America. I had two students from Honduras, two from Mexico, one from

Bangladesh, and one from Nigeria. We took time at the beginning of the school year to learn about each of these countries by locating it on the map and finding images that could be displayed on the smartboard.

Lauren: What were the students' reactions to this?

Brittany: Students felt proud to share about where their families came from.

Lauren: How can you tell they were proud?

Brittany: I allow students to have a reflection journal to share their thoughts about particular topics. One student in particular wrote that he couldn't wait to go home and tell his Mom that Mrs. Winter showed the class where Bangladesh is because the class thought it was cool.

In a previous discussion with Michelle, she explained that “culture is a makeup of characteristics that a person defines themselves as” (Michelle, discussion transcript, November 26, 2019). Below is an excerpt from a discussion with Michelle about incorporating culture into the classroom on December 2, 2019.

Lauren: What do you do in the classroom to get to know your students' cultures and can you share a specific example?

Michelle: In the beginning of the year I ask parents and students to complete a “get to know you” survey. I also have established morning meeting time where I can focus our conversations on getting to know my students.

Lauren: What is included in this survey that you send home to parents and students? What types of questions?

Michelle: Questions like, what makes you/family unique?, what special traditions do you or your family take part in?, what is a family?, what languages are spoken at home?, what hobbies and activities are important to you and your family?, those types of questions.

Lauren: This sounds like your questions are taken from the funds of knowledge, is that correct?

Michelle: What we learned in summer clinic about the importance of a students' funds of knowledge has definitely helped me tweak some of the questions that I typically would include in my beginning of the year "getting to know you" surveys, absolutely.

Lauren: After using these surveys this year, did you receive any feedback from parents or students?

Michelle: No, typically parents fill out these questionnaires with limited information. I get more information about a student as the year progresses through conversation and discussions.

After reflecting on this conversation with Michelle, I was eager to know of a specific example in which she believed that she was implementing culturally sustaining pedagogy in her classroom. I asked Michelle if she had ever followed up with parents who completed her beginning of the year questionnaire with limited information. She explained that she would typically ask more questions to the family when it was time for a conference because she did not have enough time to talk to each family throughout the school year. While Michelle had an emerging awareness of the importance of discussing funds of knowledge with the families of her students, she made an initial attempt at using this as a means of information. Unfortunately, simply distributing a beginning of the year questionnaire is only a small step to truly being a culturally sustaining educator. A critical element of culturally sustaining teaching is establishing positive relationships with not only the student, but with families as well. Although this is considered a creative failure, I see that Michelle was deliberately trying to support her students' diverse cultures.

The participants believed that culture and the idea of the incorporating culture within the classroom plays an important role in their everyday teaching. Findings from each discussion revealed that the teachers agreed that culture is not simply limited to race or ethnicity, it is all encompassing and makes a person who they are. Teachers discussed

the different aspects of culture which included; race, ethnicity, heritage, language, socioeconomic status, home life, family values, upbringing, outings, hobbies, and the classroom culture. Donna explained, “Culture is the world that students grow up in; it encompasses language, religion, family dynamics and cultural history. I try to discuss my family and home life with my students, as well as my own experience in school to connect with them. Given that I am what many students expect to see when they walk into a classroom, I think it is important for them to know me on a more personal level” (Donna, discussion transcript, December 9, 2019). Below is an excerpt from the discussion with Donna about incorporating culture into the classroom on December 9, 2019.

Lauren: So you stated that you are “what many students expect to see when they walk into a classroom.” What did you mean by this?

Donna: I mean let’s be real, I’m a white, female teacher. Bet the kids haven’t seen that before (haha).

Lauren: Because of this, what do you do to try to bridge the gap between you and students of a different race or culture?

Donna: Honestly, I am very self-aware of how I interact with my students and share my own personal culture with them. I haven't worked in my current district long; however, the students are similar in the fact that a majority are very family oriented and religion and culture play a huge role in their lives. Being aware of these elements of students' lives allows for stronger connections with students and allows me, as a teacher, to also continue to learn and apply my knowledge and understanding of students to my teaching. I share a lot of my own personal life and allow students to share about their lives as well.

Lauren: Is there a particular way in which you do this?

Donna: I teach high school students so open conversation and opportunities for journal or free writing is where I see most students open up personally. Students who are more outgoing participate in discussions and the more introverted students can

write in a journal. I allow opportunities for students to share about different aspects of their culture such as family outings or traditions in an informal manner. I am still trying to figure out what works best in this new district with a new bunch of students.

Lauren: Is your new district similar to your old?

Donna: No, they are very different. I was comfortable where I was previously because it was where I graduated and where I began my own career. The students from my first district were very culturally diverse and we had a high population of African Americans, a culture which I was comfortable with. I always tried to connect with my students on a personal level, and coming from the same town always helped me do so. The students in my current district are 50% white with a 20% Asian population, 10% Middle Eastern and less than 10% Spanish and African American each.

After analyzing the conversations I had with the participants about culture, I came to the conclusion that many of their classroom strategies for incorporating culture were similar. All participants explained that they are an “open book” and had discussions with their students about their own culture. They also allowed the students an opportunity to share about their own, such as where their family is from or what holidays they celebrate. Many of the participants felt that this incorporation of culture was successful based off of the positive feedback from students. However, while incorporating culture through the use of random discussion is a start, it is a long way from truly being a classroom defined as culturally sustaining pedagogy. While I believe these teachers want to teach in culturally sustaining ways and make some efforts, they need more professional development about what this pedagogy looks like with students. Many teachers assume that culturally sustaining pedagogy means incorporating different food or stories into the classroom, but this is far from true. For example, multicultural awareness should not be prompted solely around important cultural holidays or months, such as Black History Month. As (Puzio, et al., 2017) explain, “culturally sustaining pedagogy is *how* educators

use cultural artifacts and practices, not just *what* they use” (p. 230). By doing this, educators can honor and respect students’ culture.

Diverse Races Within the Classroom

Race and ethnicity are aspects of a persons’ culture that can be used in the classroom to connect to students and lead to a classroom in which a culturally sustaining pedagogy is at the forefront. In order to include culture in the classroom, the teachers all shared similar beliefs in that getting to know their students is the most important way to plan instruction that is relevant. Throughout the discussions about race and ethnicity, I asked the teachers if race, ethnicity and/or culture affected their teaching. All of the teachers agreed that it does and went on to share specific examples of how they allowed race and ethnicity to intertwine with their classroom curriculum. The transcript below was from a conversation between Katie and me on November 6, 2019.

Lauren: Does student race affect your teaching, if so, how?

Katie: Student race affects my teaching because I understand that every child is unique. Just because they look or dress a certain way, I do not play into stereotypes. I've learned that some of the parents who seem like they have nothing, are the ones who care the most about their children.

Lauren: Why do you say that?

Katie: Those are the parents who typically show up to their child’s conference or answer an email after I have sent one. With that being said, I try to take the time to get to know my students as individuals instead of as a class. Once I know what their home life is like, their traditions, cultural upbringing, I am better able to incorporate snippets of their lives into my teaching.

Lauren: Can you give an example?

Katie: Sure, this just happened this past week. I was reading a story about different foods, and I know Alex in my class has family that lives in Mexico, so I said, "Wow, tacos are a well-known Spanish dish

and Alex actually has family from Mexico. Alex told me before that his mom makes her own tortillas, Alex could you tell us more about that?" This allowed him to first, know that I pay attention when he shares things with me, and two gives him the opportunity to be proud of his background.

Lauren: How did Alex respond to this?

Katie: He had a huge smile on his face and even asked if I could show the other students' different pictures of how tortillas are made on google, which of course I did!

Lauren: Are there any other ways you incorporate race into the classroom?

Katie: In terms of race, I have become more aware of making sure that the literature I am choosing allows for all students to see themselves in the texts.

When Donna was asked about student race she responded "I have one student in my classroom who is Hispanic and is considered an ESL student and receives ESL instruction. I try to be mindful about incorporating more opportunities for discussion and speaking so that it helps my student practice English. When discussing new vocabulary terms, I try to discuss what words may mean in other cultures such as through the use of different shades of meaning" (Donna, discussion transcript, December 9, 2019). Donna also shared, "I also consider their race when it comes to approaching students with behavioral or academic issues, as many of these students have such influential home and family lives that affect their performance, behavior, and attitudes in school" (Donna, discussion transcript, December 9, 2019). Brittany and Kathy both discussed the use of multicultural literature and how "multicultural literature greatly influences my teaching and is the forefront of my text selection" (Kathy, discussion transcript, November 18, 2019). Below is a transcript from a discussion with Brittany regarding race on November 11, 2019.

Lauren: Can you give a current example of a time when student race affected your teaching?

Brittany: Well I feel like I do this best through multicultural books. I try to intentionally select texts that represent the diverse stories in my classroom. For example, I selected a read aloud, *Too Many Tamales*, which is about a Mexican-American family celebrating Christmas. I selected this book because I had several children of Mexican heritage and Christmas is coming up. These students were so excited to make connections to their families and we had a relevant conversation about their culture. The one little boy explained how his mom makes tamales for Christmas and he couldn't wait to eat them.

Lauren: This makes me wish that in my district we could bring in and share food with students. Are you able to do that in your district? This would be a great opportunity for that.

Brittany: We are, I didn't even think about it! I have never heard from this students' parents all year so asking them to bring in homemade tortillas I think would be too much, but I can try!

In summary, the teachers all agreed that race affects teaching. I believe that all of the participants strive to incorporate their students' race and ethnicity into their classroom and want to make their students feel valued. The examples and student reactions they shared with me seemed to be positive. Nevertheless, similar to the discussions about culture, I have concluded that the teachers are in the beginning stages of being a culturally sustaining educator. The fall of 2014 marked the first time students of color were the majority in public schools in the United States and within twenty years schools are projected to be upwards of sixty-five percent students of color (Strauss, 2014). However, U.S. educational policy and practice continues to be centered on White, middle-class, monocultural, and monolingual norms of educational achievement. All of the participants in this study fall within this norm (as Donna explained in an earlier discussion regarding culture). As they may believe they are aware of how race affects

their teaching, they still need to be educated on how to successfully incorporate this in the classroom. A culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2016) builds on research to “prove that our practices and ways of being as students and communities of color are legitimate and should be included meaningfully in classroom learning” (p. 6). The participants need continued support to value their young students of color and communities of color in which they work.

Administration Support

I conducted this part of my research for a variety of reasons. I have been working in the same district and same school for nine years. Throughout my teaching career, I have felt 100% supported on some things and have not received any support on other things from my administration. In something as important as culturally sustaining pedagogy, I personally do not believe that my administration is up to the task of revamping curriculum to meet the needs of our diverse students. However, I do feel that teachers on my team that I have shared current research with are beginning to value the importance of this pedagogy within the classroom. With all that being said, I wanted to investigate how the participants felt about their administration’s support while they are implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

All participants, besides one, believed that their administration on the “surface” is supportive but when real changes need to be made, no one wants to put forth the effort. “I think that my school administration thinks that they are all inclusive and allow everyone to feel equal, however, they don't do enough to highlight marginalized students. By allowing more family events, students can see that families come in all shapes and sizes. By allowing more diverse book selection, students will feel at home. I interviewed my

principal, and from his perspective, we do a lot to show culture. In my opinion, we don't seem to do enough” (Katie, discussion transcript, November 7, 2019). She also explains her thoughts on change, “Change seems to be a big hindrance in schools. Any time there is a change that needs to happen, people have a difficult time adapting” (Katie, discussion transcript, November 7, 2019). When Michelle was asked to share whether she had administration support on her implementation of a culturally sustaining pedagogy she shared her thoughts. Below is a transcript from a discussion with Michelle regarding race on December 2, 2019.

Lauren: How does your administration feel about incorporating culture into the classroom and do you feel supported?

Michelle: I feel that my support is curbed with caution.

Lauren: Can you explain further?

Michelle: I feel this is due to the possibility of having negative feedback from parents. For example, when asked about incorporating LGBTQ texts in the library, administration was supportive of it, but wanted to know more about what specific topics would be covered and how it would be brought up in class.

Lauren: Do you feel this is a fair response?

Michelle: I mean I agree with the administration wanting to know about what the discussion would be with students so they can prepare themselves for a backlash from parents. But at the end of the day, I truly think administration would say no to this type of text, which is frustrating.

Lauren: I agree. I have a male student in first grade that identifies as a girl. I know this because he asks that I refer to him as “she” and always talks about how, when he gets older, he is going to have long hair and will put on beautiful makeup. Those are just a few examples. I would love to have a discussion about the LGBTQ through the use of a text that is suited for younger students. However, I know administration would not support it. I feel bad because this student is internally going through all of this in his head and I would love

to show him and other students that I am trying my best to understand him.

Michelle: Exactly why the incorporation of these books is so important. Hopefully one day it will be more “acceptable.”

Lauren: Acceptable?

Michelle: By acceptable I mean supported and encouraged.

Kathy also shared in a discussion that she believes her administration would consider the LGBTQ as a “cautious” area in the curriculum and conversations would need to be had about how to incorporate it and to what extent.

Overall, there is an encompassing theme between the participants and their administration in regards to adapting a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: caution. In order to truly be a sustaining educator of students of color, you need courage. As Puzio, et al., (2017) explains, there are some commonalities amongst educators who have had “creature failures” when trying to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy. One of these commonalities is explained as “teachers were sometimes prevented from providing culturally sustaining pedagogy by their sense of obligation to local authority figures and policies” (p. 230). Unfortunately, educators may find themselves conforming to the beliefs of their administration. While the participants have expressed that they possess values aligned with a culturally sustaining pedagogy, they have not taken the plunge yet to make the change or share their research/knowledge with administration. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains a challenge in teacher education as “Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society. The teachers I studied work in opposition to the system that employs them” (p. 140). Our educational system continues to fail and

in order to make a positive change, both teachers and administration need further education on how to be culturally sustaining educators.

Post Question Results

The results of the post question showed that the teachers still supported their knowledge of culturally sustaining pedagogy and believed they saw first-hand the value of incorporating it in their classroom. After analyzing and reflecting on the conversations with the participants, it is evident that they are aware that instructional practices need to change; however, they are at the very beginning stages of implementation. When asked to again share what a classroom that has implemented a culturally sustaining pedagogy looked like, they had similar responses to their pre question answers. Each conversation I had with the participants, though very different, had a common theme. Each teacher strives to make their students feel valued, but some of their responses reflected various stereotypes and misconceptions about culturally sustaining pedagogy. The participants believed that they were culturally sustaining educators simply by incorporating diversity in their classroom such as reading a multicultural text or sharing about their own culture. It is more important to focus on how the teachers have used cultural artifacts, not solely what they are using. The “how” part of implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy still needs to be addressed. The goal of this study was to continue to bring awareness to the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Discussions were had with graduate students who were introduced to the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogy about their experiences. There is no confirming evidence that the participants have implemented a culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms other than with surface attempts. It is evident that teachers need more training and opportunities to implement a

culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. Chapter five presents a summary of the findings as well as the conclusions that were drawn from the study. It will also provide implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Introduction

The objective of this study was to explore what happens when teachers implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. The purpose was to discuss the impact that attempting a culturally sustaining pedagogy can have on graduate level teachers and how their students have responded to this pedagogy. The data suggests that overall the teachers in this study made attempts to incorporate culture into the classroom but these attempts were rudimentary and skim the surface of culturally sustaining pedagogy. The knowledge gained from the discussions with the participants who work in different schools with diverse student populations may benefit other teachers or schools who are attempting to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies. These findings can also inform practice and future research.

In this chapter, a brief summary of the findings is presented, followed by the conclusions of the study which relate the findings to the theoretical frameworks and relevant literature. The implications of the study are presented and recommendations for future research are then discussed.

Summary

For eight weeks, I worked with five teachers who are completing their Master's Degree in Reading: Reading Specialist, to determine what happens when they attempt to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. I began with interviewing each teacher one-on-one to gather information about their teaching experience and backgrounds and then asked them to complete a pre-question. The pre-question was used as a tool for me to recognize after all of our coursework, what a

culturally sustaining pedagogy meant to each individual. Also, within that time, I organized discussion meetings with all of the teachers. Throughout these conversations, the teachers discussed topics surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogies including how race and ethnicity affects teaching, culture and what that means to implement in the classroom, administration support, characteristics of culturally sustaining educators, and challenges along the way. Teachers were also asked to complete a Cultural Responsive Readiness Scale in which they examined their personal and professional readiness when it comes to being aware of cultural diversity. At the conclusion of the study, the teachers responded to the post question which mirrored the pre question. The pre and post question, the survey, and the recorded discussions provided triangulated data that showed that teachers need more support in learning about culturally sustaining pedagogy and how to effectively implement it in the classroom.

Conclusions of the Study

In this study, the teacher participants engaged in discussions surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogy. Paris (2012) explains that “the term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). The goal of this study was to establish focused discussions on aspects of culturally sustaining pedagogy so that teachers could self-reflect on their role in creating culturally sustaining classrooms, implement it, and discuss student participation and reaction. However, after analyzing our discussions, it is clear that the teachers are at the beginning stages of

implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy. The conversations centered around what the teachers know and what they still need to know about being a culturally sustaining educator. This study explored teachers' understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the context of their classrooms.

Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that most teachers in the United States “believe they are just regular Americans while people of color are the ones with culture” and “far too many teachers in U.S. schools possess only a surface understanding of culture-their own or anyone else’s” (p. 261). An analysis of the data revealed that the five teachers understood the importance of teaching their diverse population with a culturally sustaining pedagogy in mind and had an awareness that instructional practices need to change. However, while I believe these teachers want to teach in culturally sustaining ways and make some initial efforts, the data suggests that they need more professional development about what this pedagogy looks like with students. As Puzio, et al. (2017) explains, “culturally sustaining pedagogy is *how* educators use cultural artifacts and practices, not just *what* they use” (p. 230). By doing this, educators can honor and respect students’ culture. Each conversation I had with the participants, though very different, had a common theme. Each teacher strives to make their students feel valued. Much of my findings through discussions correlated with other research on introducing culturally relevant pedagogy (Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) into the classroom. But when asked to share about the implementation of this pedagogy, the participants were just at the very beginning stages of being truly culturally sustaining.

The fall of 2014 marked the first time students of color were the majority in public schools in the United States and within twenty years schools are projected to be

upwards of sixty-five percent students of color (Strauss, 2014). However, U.S. educational policy and practice continues to be centered on White, middle-class, monocultural, and monolingual norms of educational achievement. Paris (2016) explains this as a “serious crisis of representation in the teaching force” (p. 5). All of the participants in this study fall under this umbrella of white- middle class females. Although they may believe they are aware of how race affects their teaching, they still need to be educated on how to successfully implement this belief in their practice. Paris (2016) argued one major need for teaching education is to establish programs and resources that will “foster a teaching force and a teaching education force that is representative of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our schools” (p. 5). With this in mind, the participants need continued support to value their young students of color and communities of color in which they work.

The data also suggests that administration may need more support in learning about culturally sustaining pedagogies and implementing it in the classroom. The overall theme amongst teachers and administration alike in regards to adapting a culturally sustaining pedagogy is caution. Just as in the study conducted by Johnson and Bolshakova (2015) regarding the role of culture for diverse learners, when you expect everyone to participate in something that is not their choice, there are some who will conform and there are some who will be resistant. Unfortunately, educators may find themselves conforming to the beliefs of their administration. While the participants have expressed that they possess values aligned with a culturally sustaining pedagogy, they have not taken action to make the change or share their research/knowledge with administration. While the teachers did express the value of this pedagogy, and have an

awareness of how having a classroom in which cultures are accepted and discussed makes a positive difference in their students' education, the study's data suggests that administration still needs further education in this topic.

Limitations

A qualitative methodology was used in this research study in order to reach conclusions. Therefore, neither statistical data nor statistical analysis were used. This study focused on five teachers who are completing their MA in Reading: Reading Specialist. Each participant currently teaches in a different public school in New Jersey and has very diverse teaching backgrounds and experiences. This helped me to analyze the varying perspectives throughout the study. However, the data collected only represents the ideas and practice of five teachers in the MA program for Reading Specialist out of a total of 16. In order to more fully understand the perspectives and beliefs of the teachers in this Master's program, additional research might involve all of the teachers.

Furthermore, the study was completed within a short period of time. Data collection, analysis, and reporting were conducted over eight weeks. This limits results to only the experiences that occurred during this short time. After analyzing my research, it is evident that the participants have an awareness that instructional practices need to change to truly engage in a culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, the study explored the the understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the context of their classrooms, not the implementation. It may be beneficial to design a study that lasts from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year since conducting a longer study could help validate the findings. If given a longer time frame, I would spend more time collaborating

with these teachers' ideas and beliefs on the topics and offer any assistance/advice as needed. I would also request that the participants share explicit classroom practices to show how they honor and respect their students' cultural and linguistic histories.

Implications

After analyzing the data accumulated throughout this study, there are implications for teachers, administrators, reading specialists and future teacher researchers who want to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies into classrooms. As stated throughout, there are many benefits of incorporating a culturally sustaining pedagogy into schools. As I had conversations and discussions throughout this study with the participants, I found myself making many personal connections to the positive, and unfortunately, negative aspects of establishing something that may be “a new way of teaching” to others. The participants are at the beginning stages of being an educator that is culturally sustaining. However, as Puzio, et al. (2017) explains, “learning how to enact culturally sustaining pedagogy takes time, reflection, and, above all, being deeply attuned with our students. It cannot and should not be done alone; instead, it should be done in collaboration with our students, their families, and the community” (p. 231).

For future research, a larger sample size of teacher participants would be beneficial in order to gain more insight into teacher perspectives and readiness in regards to implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies. This could include other teachers, with different backgrounds and experiences, who teach in diverse school districts.

For future teacher researchers, more research is also needed on the actual implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies in diverse school districts through explicit practices. Teachers need to continue to focus on the application of the culturally

sustaining pedagogies within the classroom. It continues to be imperative to share and collaborate with colleagues to find the best methods for implementation so that it benefits the needs of the ever-changing diverse school population.

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