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**UTILIZING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD
CLASSROOM TO ENHANCE AND CREATE READ-ALoud EXPERIENCES**

by

Grace Katharine O'Malley

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Critical Literacy, Technology & Multilingual Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

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Dedications

To my husband Frank for being my greatest friend, endless supporter and for always giving me a laugh when things turn upside down. With you I have everything.

To my children, Zio and Sonny thank you for giving me my greatest title and the most fun job. I love being your “Mama.”

To my parents, who instilled a love of reading in me from the start. You gave me a childhood filled with wonderment and continue to be the best parents a child could ask for. I love you.

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I would also like to express gratitude to my students and their families for participating in my study. Without you my teacher research would have been impossible to complete.

Abstract

Grace Katharine O'Malley
UTILIZING FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM
TO ENHANCE AND CREATE READ-ALoud EXPERIENCES
2023-2024
Susan Browne, Ed.D
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study is to investigate the read-aloud experiences in an early childhood classroom that embed students Funds of Knowledge (FoK). The specific aim is to explore what happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences. What happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences. The students demonstrated making connections to peers in response to text, engaging with text that highlights funds of knowledge and conversing about others culture through play. The implications for utilizing Funds of Knowledge in an early childhood classroom is also discussed.

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Chapter I

Scope of the Study

The last five years of my professional career have been dedicated to teaching preschool students in a public-school setting. During this time, I have been taking courses to gain my Master's in Reading and I took a lot of interest in choosing quality texts for read-aloud experiences. However, the first few years of teaching Preschool, I found it incredibly difficult to find texts that aligned with the students and their cultural backgrounds. In the program I teach we are given a curriculum that selects texts for us that we are required to read on a certain day. I have found that very limiting with the ever-changing student population that is placed in my classroom each year. We do not have access to a typical school library in my building and any books that we are interested in utilizing in our classrooms are provided by us, parents per teacher request or our Preschool Instructional Coaches personal library. The Covid-19 pandemic made it even harder to gain access to texts since I was teaching from home and was only able to utilize my personal texts as well as some online resources.

During my summer clinical at Rowan University, I became familiar with Moll and Gonzalez's Funds of Knowledge Theory which motivated me to learn more about my students and their families instead of making assumptions about them and reading only text from the curriculum or texts that I liked to read-aloud. During the 2022-2023 school year, I took time to get to know families by having them fill out a survey before the school year began. I learned that Connor's brother was Autistic, I learned that Gabby was born in Texas and fly's back each summer to visit her grandmother, I learned that Dylan's mom was a part of the Peace Corp in her early adult years and could speak

Ukrainian and I learned that Lance's family visited Disney World multiple times a year. By having the families fill out the survey I felt like I knew more about them and I just wanted to keep learning. My school year was cut short due to the birth of my son, however I continued to think about my students during my maternity leave and during those long sleepless nights I would scroll through various social media feeds and click through book suggestions for early childhood reads. If a specific book would catch my interest I would go ahead and order it for my son because I was determined that he would have a library filled with books that represented people from a variety of diverse cultural groups as well as his own cultural background which could also be used for my future students. I specifically remember one Tik Tok page from a book shop that would talk about new books that were being released and sold in their shop. The owner would show the book and give a brief overview of the text. I remember thinking, "I wish I had that book in my classroom!"

When I realized that the only way I would change the read-aloud experience in my classroom was by putting the work in myself, I wanted to take the new school year to learn about my students and their families and research texts that could be utilized appropriately in my classroom. What books are students engaging with during center time in the classroom library? What types of conversations are students participating in that involve the read-aloud outside the group carpet? Does having background knowledge about a story before it is read make it more interesting and engaging for students? Creating a running list of texts that would be useful in my classrooms and preschool program would be helpful in guiding myself and others on choosing appropriate texts for the current student populations.

Based on the lack of books that represent my students and diverse groups and the lack of appropriate text in my classroom I have chosen to focus on the use of read-aloud texts that represent my students and their Funds of Knowledge (FoK). I would like to study specifically, what happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences.

After completing my summer clinical course, “Clinical Experiences in Reading”, I found an interest in learning more about my students instead of assuming what I thought I knew based off of things I saw or heard about my students and their families. I wanted to utilize the Funds of Knowledge Theory to not only get to know them better but to utilize this knowledge to plan instruction for the school year. I came to the realization that I hold many roles in the classroom. Yes, I am labeled as the teacher and the leader of the class, but it is important for me to take a step back and learn from my students' life and cultural experiences. What is important to me might not be of importance to them and I wanted to find a way to incorporate as many student's knowledge in our classroom beginning with our read-aloud lessons. I chose our read-aloud experiences because I knew my library was lacking text that represented my student's lives and did not give all of them windows, doors and mirrors into a variety of texts.

Curious about my students and their lives outside of school as well as determined to add new texts to my read-aloud lessons that represented my students and other marginalized groups, I chose to focus on what happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences.

Statement of the Problem

There is a painful truth about the amount of children's books being published that reflect diverse characters. Only 23% of children's books published in 2018 featured traditionally underrepresented or marginalized groups (Cahill et al, 2021). In New Jersey the most recent census conducted in 2020, people who identified as white alone were 55% of the population. The other 45% of the state's population are from a diverse group (Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, Two or more races and other) (US Census, 2020). It is important for children to see themselves and others represented in books (Ulla Damber, 2015) and due to the lack of published books that represent diverse populations it takes some effort to find texts that provide windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) to the students in their classrooms instead of solely depending on curriculum provided texts. Windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors is a metaphor that explains how individuals see themselves in texts.

In my classroom, I struggle with utilizing the curriculum's preplanned read-alouds which lack connection to my students' lives. The same read-alouds are utilized each year which ignores the ever-changing student population that enters the classroom. I have noticed that many of these books do not provide windows, doors and mirrors to my students. However, I feel pressure to follow the curriculum and utilize their guidance since that is the curriculum's expectation. For instance, the first book that is expected to be read each year is, "A Pocket of Corduroy" while this is a cute read, it is a lengthy story for preschool students to sit through and discuss and many struggle with providing background knowledge about the story. This is something I have noticed each year and now has me curious to change up the read-alouds to cater to my students and their

families' Funds of Knowledge along with understanding the texts that motivate and engage my students.

Our classroom library is also an important resource that is utilized daily by the students to read and enjoy developmentally appropriate books which is important for a positive literacy development (Jacoby & Edlefsen, 2020). Many of these books in our classroom have been randomly donated from students' families or picked up from thrift stores or garage sales to fill our library shelves. A total of 10 books that are not from our mandated curriculum were bought by our school district to utilize in our library. Even though book donations are welcomed to fill our library shelves I will be the first to admit that not all books are developmentally appropriate and they lack representation from marginalized groups.

Statement of the Research Question

Gilde and Voleman (2021) state, “Teachers, on the other hand, with different cultural and social backgrounds to their students, do not always recognise the knowledge and skills that students acquire outside of school (p. 673). The researchers go on to say, “The funds of knowledge (FoK) approach was introduced and developed with the aim of bridging the gap between home and school, while avoiding deficit theorizing” (p.673). In a qualitative study, Hedges et al (2011) argues, “that using ‘funds of knowledge’ (as cited in González et al. 2005) as a theoretical framework to ascertain children’s interests provides more analytical way to respond to these interests than present approaches based on recognizing children’s choices of play activities (p.186). The study looked at students through a culturally responsive lens. Both families and individual students were interviewed utilizing a Funds of Knowledge survey (see Appendix A) to understand the

background knowledge and assets that the individuals brought to our classroom learning environment during read-aloud experiences. Being familiar with students' interests allowed the investigator to gather data to create meaningful read-aloud experiences to track motivation, engagement and self-efficacy amongst early childhood learners.

Based on the knowledge that classrooms are filled with new students each year that identifying as a variety of backgrounds as well as the importance of read-aloud instruction in early childhood settings, the questions I addressed in the study were: What happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences? What books are students engaging with during center time in the classroom library? What types of conversations are students participating in that involve the read-aloud outside the group carpet? Does having background knowledge about a story before it is read make it more interesting and engaging for students? In order to investigate these questions, I collected data and analyzed it to help me understand how the use of Funds of Knowledge will affect read-aloud experiences.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides a literature review that encompasses the use of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) as a resource for teachers to utilize in their classrooms to better get to know their students and their families as well as the importance of choosing books that act as “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors” for the students in the classroom and the importance of implementing culturally responsive teaching methods into the classroom environment. The chapter also discusses multicultural literature and the importance of read-aloud implementation in an early childhood classroom. Chapter three

describes the design and context of the study, including my read-aloud selections and lesson plans as well as information on the demographics of the classroom. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter five gives the conclusions of the study and implications for teaching and learning as well as suggestions for further research regarding the use of Funds of Knowledge Theory within read-aloud selections in the classroom environment.

Chapter II

Literature Review

In the United States, the current contrast between the increasingly diverse student population and their homogeneously white female teachers (Spiegelman, 2020) has illuminated the need for teachers who honor, celebrate, and leverage diversity in their classrooms. American teachers have the responsibility to take a lead in their classrooms to get to know their students and families to better develop an understanding of what they bring to the classroom. However, the pressure for teachers to follow mandated curriculum and stick to a strict schedule hinders the ability of teachers to take time to learn from their students. An immense amount of pressure falls on teachers to collect data that pertains to current state standards instead of focusing on the students and the assets they bring to the classroom. One way to do this is through focusing on current teacher education programs that “provide experiences to future teachers that will enable them to successfully teach a diverse population of learners, including children of varying racial, ethnic, religious and language diversity” (Djanko-Moore, 2018, p.298). This literature review is focused on the following areas that will help guide this study: Funds of Knowledge, Windows, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multicultural Literature. The chapter defines the Funds of Knowledge theory and how the theory focuses on asset-based learning instead of deficit based learning. The chapter also discusses the benefits of including “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Door” when selecting your classroom read-alouds year to year, the use of Culturally Responsive teaching in the evolving school populations in America and the proper use of Multicultural Literature and how teachers can sort through texts to ensure their choices reflect responsible book selection in their classrooms. The research

in this chapter provides a comprehensive view of utilizing the Funds of Knowledge Theory and other culturally responsive practices in order to benefit the classroom as a community, and in turn benefit the students, their families, and educators as the world around us constantly evolves.

Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge (FoK) has been defined as those ‘historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being.’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, p. 133)

Connecting students FoK to school curricula is important and allows the students and classroom staff to learn from one another. The Funds of knowledge theory began in the 1980s with the aim of analyzing people of Mexican origin in Tucson, Arizona to learn more about their knowledge and skills (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). From there the educational approaches Community Literacy Project(1988) and Funds of Knowledge for Teaching (González,1995) were developed. These approaches were dedicated to developing an asset mindset and move away from making assumptions of others based on their immigration status.

Moll et al, (1992) seminal work gave the Funds of Knowledge Theory an important place in education. Their study conducted in a Mexican community focused on a new movement in teaching that uses the knowledge and skills found in local households (Moll et al., 1992). The study utilized 10 teachers and encompassed three activities: ethnographic analysis of household dynamics, the examination of classroom practices, and the development of after school study groups with teachers. The ethnographic analysis of household dynamics piece of the study highlights that the home learning looks

at the child as a “whole” person and the relationship at home is multi-stranded compared to a typical student-teacher relationship where the teacher only knows the student in one environment which is based on performance and noted as a single-stranded relationship (Moll et al., 1992). Examining the classroom practices helped investigate how teachers could incorporate the students FoK into everyday teaching. The after school study groups with the teachers acted as a space to support the teachers in learning how to implement FoK into their classrooms daily. During these study groups it was put into question if the research would be more valuable if the teachers acted as the field researchers for their students instead of an outside researcher presenting their findings to them. Study findings included, families were better understood which allowed for the teachers to plan for instruction that reflected the student’s knowledge and interests. This was found to be more useful to the students rather than a curriculum that was created based on assumptions. Understanding the students and their personal lives allowed the teachers to make their students active learners rather than passive (Moll et al.,1992). The teacher-researchers worked together to create a new curriculum that encompassed their students' Funds of Knowledge which allowed them to see their students as a “whole” person rather than just a student and in turn created more trust amongst the students and their teachers (Moll, et al., 1992).

Author Denny Taylor’s book, *Many Families, Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles* (1997) focuses on moving away from deficit based thinking and focuses on family’s strengths. Taylor states, “we must honor, validate, and use the languages of the parents and children who are enrolled in our schools and who participate in family literacy programs” (p. 101). Taylor is encouraging an asset based mindset when

it comes to family literacy and taking the time to learn about the families and all of the knowledge they hold and are able to share with others. Taylor points out that families with low-socioeconomic incomes are often described using negative stereotypes such as “poor” or “disadvantaged.” Taylor’s goal is to move away from this type of thinking and focus on the family's rich experiences. Taylor’s concern led to him organizing a family literacy forum in Tucson, Arizona in 1994. A group of educators met in small groups to discuss a list of principles that could be utilized to develop family literacy programs that shifted away from any cultural stereotypes and the importance of involving families from diverse backgrounds when planning and implementing literacy programs (Taylor, 1997).

Much research has been conducted to show the positive impacts of the Funds of Knowledge Approach (FoK) however there is limited research about the limitations and improvements of the FoK approach. In a qualitative study, 9 educators from a state school in the Province of Girona and the University of Girona in Spain participated in a three part FoK study which included initial training, home visits to students, and creating and implementing FoK educational-based activities. The findings from the three-part study show positives such as improved teacher/family relationships, understanding of students’ behaviors/attitudes and having access to a study group of teachers during this research to support and collaborate one another. The results were collected during a teacher brainstorming session. The positive benefits of FoK were talked about amongst the teacher participants and a list was created. One teacher stated, “The relationship with the student and the family has changed enormously. The family is more open, more trusting” (p.577). Another teacher stated, He has opened up a lot; we talk often and he comes looking for me to tell me things; he’s okay with little hugs and kisses now. He’s

still shy and reserved but not as much as before. As well as that, I understand his way of doing things much more now” (p.578). As for the positive impact of access to a teacher study group an educator elaborates that the group, “offers support and makes all the work much easier. That is an aspect of the programme I would emphasize and which I value very positively (p. 578).

The limitations discovered were the amount of time it takes to familiarize teachers with Fok, not fully understanding the students' culture and difficulty assessing the experiences of the families (Llopart, Serra & Estaban-Guitart, 2018). Lastly, some areas of improvement found were the amount of time dedicated to this approach and fully understanding the cultures of the students' families.

Utilizing students' FoK in daily instruction can help create positive relationships with students in order to create a culturally responsive curriculum. Classroom demographics and student experiences are ever changing and it is important that the learning and teaching in the classroom are being evaluated and reinvented each year to reflect those students (Campano et al., 2016; Moll, 2019; Moll et al., 1992; Saubich & Esteban-Guitart, 2011; Sepulveda, 2011 as cited in McNeill, 2022) For example, a teacher sought to utilize the FoK framework along with an Acompañamiento Framework with 15 of her emergent bilingual students. The Acompañamiento Framework allows students stories and experiences to be the most important thing in the classroom space. The teacher created a “brave space” where students could share family stories, life experiences, and funds of knowledge and in turn found that understanding the students FoK created a safe and welcoming place in her classroom (McNeill, 2022).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Just like the children's book industry is dominated by white authors and illustrators, the same goes for teacher education programs which consist of predominantly white professionals who are teaching in classrooms that consist of racially and ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). Teachers' beliefs have profound influences on their instructional judgments and actions (Knopp & Smith, 2005; Pajares, 1992; Smylie, 1995, as cited in Gay, 2010). It is the responsibility of teacher education programs and school leadership to have their educational communities put in the work to better serve their evolving student population that highlights their unique cultures and backgrounds. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), a pedagogy created by Gloria Landson-Billings (1995). CRT provides a framework for examining multicultural practices that lead to increased engagement, motivation and academic success among children (Djanko-Moore, 2018).

Research shows that there is an increase in a culturally diverse student population attending schools in the United States (Bennett et al, 2018 as cited in Sission et al, 2020). One study found that culturally responsive teaching (CRT), "builds bridges between experiences at home within a school context, highlighting that the curriculum taught must be relevant and central to the children's lives" (Bennett, 2018, p.242). Just like the FoK framework, CRT connects the school and home that are important to the students in the classroom.

Durden et al. (2015) argued that culturally responsive teachers must demonstrate an openness to becoming a learner regarding children's cultures. Becoming aware of the cultures your students are a part of can allow educators to reimagine the curriculum in

school to incorporate other backgrounds and to set an environment that allows students to learn from one another. A study conducted by Sisson, Whittington and Shinn occurred in a primary school located in Australia utilized two approaches, Reggio Emilia principles and Nunga Way to answer the question, “How are culturally situated experiences and perspectives brought together to re-imagine early childhood education?” The Reggio Emilia model allowed for the teachers to design a culturally responsive classroom and learning environment that catered toward current students that would encourage independence and capableness. One of the groups studied was a preschool aged class who utilized the Reggio Emilia model to “reimagine their practice” (Sisson, Whittington & Shinn, 2020). The Nunga Way model, “is a term that Aboriginal peoples in southern South Australia use to self-identify, including, but not limited to, the Ngarrindjeri, Narungga, and Kurna peoples” (Sisson, Whittington & Shinn, p.112, 2020). The Treehouse at the primary school housed children aged 3-6 in an indoor/outdoor space that allowed for independent exploration and learning which are both important factors to both models when creating a learning environment for the students. It was found that including the principles of Reggio Emilia with the Nunga Way, “provided an opportunity for leaders and teachers to re-imagine their pedagogy in ways that reflected the shared values of the school community” (p.123).

The diversity of children and families continues to increase in the USA, especially within public schools (Passal and Cohn, 2008, as cited in Djanko-Moore, 2018). One study explored the connections between teacher education and teacher practice and how this connects with utilizing Culturally Responsive Teaching practices within the classroom. 105 Early Childhood Teachers who taught grades Preschool-2nd grade in the

southeast USA participated. The teachers were from 18 different school buildings all within the same county. 98% of the participants were female and 89% of the participants identified as white. Rose and Potts (2011, as cited in Djanko-Moore, 2018) research states that teachers cannot be culturally responsive if they do not acknowledge cultural differences among students. The study focused on the following areas: teacher efficacy, teacher satisfaction, multicultural coursework and culturally responsive teaching practices. The studies findings revealed that most of the teachers reported engaging CRT practices in their classrooms. The findings reported higher self-efficacy and higher job satisfaction predict frequent and accurate use of strategies to better educate the diverse populations of students that entered their classrooms (Djanko-Moore, Jiang & Gibson, 2018). Lastly, the studies findings support the work of Nadelson et al. (2012, as cited in Djanko-Moore, 2018) and suggest that coursework early childhood teachers undergo is not enough to encourage teachers to adopt up to date culturally responsive teaching practices.

A child's home and school are the two most influential environments in which learning happens (Galindo and Sheldon, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999, as cited in Tobin, 2022). Oftentimes, parents find that the communication between teachers and parents lessens as they move from Preschool to Kindergarten (Murphy et al. 2021; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta 2000, as cited in Tobin, 2022). In a study conducted by Elizabeth Tobin et al (2022) looked at Mothers who have children making the transition from preschool to primary school in Ireland. The study recruited five mothers from five preschools who shared their experience transitioning their child from preschool to primary school. A phone interview was conducted for each mother which included 10

questions that were asked to better understand their child's transition experience and current communication experience with the current primary school teacher. Engaging in CRT within a classroom environment necessitates that teachers validate their students' cultures, use their cultural knowledge to develop curriculum, help students become agents of change in their communities and see cultural diversity as an asset (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010). Without understanding who your students are and about their home life it will be tougher for teachers to incorporate CRT practices into their teaching. It has been stated that, "a child's home and school are the two most influential environments in which learning occurs, and supportive family relationships can help children navigate cultural and academic discontinuities upon school start" (Galindo and Sheldon 2012; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta 1999 as cited in Tobin, 2022). The study's findings highlight the importance for schools and teachers to communicate frequently with parents and in turn the parents will better support their child's learning at home. The study shares mixed experiences from the mothers. Not all of the mothers were as prone to be as involved in their child's primary school experience and trusted the teachers and the school was doing their job in the learning environment. However, research has shown that transition practices represent one of the earliest ways that schools and families can lay the groundwork for future collaborations and partnerships and provide children with access to optimal learning environments (Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods 2009, as cited in Tobin 2022).

Multicultural Literature

Teachers feel unprepared to teach their students about diversity (Hansen-Thomas & Cavagnetto, 2010; King and Butler, 2015, as cited in Hayes and Francis, 2023).

Majority of teachers at the head of the classrooms in public schools are female and white (Spiegelman, 2020) and are teaching students who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds other than their own. Researchers, Hayes and Francis (2023) discuss a “new wave” of educators who are ready to become uncomfortable with their biases and talk through the best approach to reach early childhood students through picture books that represent who they are and spark age-appropriate conversations about read-aloud stories in their classrooms in order to create an equitable classroom. Research shows that in equitable classrooms “children learn that they are valued by others, learn how to treat others with fairness and respect, and learn how to embrace human differences rather than ignore or fear them” (NAEYC, 2019 p. 5, as cited in Hayes and Francis, 2023). Children spend an ample amount of time in school learning from their teachers and students around them and early childhood teachers have an important role to help their students understand race, ethnicity, culture, and abilities that are represented in their own school community (Hayes & Francis, 2023). Research shows that students as young as 4 years old begin to develop racial stereotypes throughout elementary school (Pushkin & Veness, 2017; Seefeldt, 1995, as cited in Hayes and Francis, 2023) and one way to begin honest conversations with young children is through multicultural literature which could help shape their perceptions (Hayes & Francis, 2023).

In a study conducted by Courtney Hayes and Grace Francis (2023) utilized five teachers from Head Start and public-school programs in Virginia who taught PreK-2nd grade. The participants were interested in learning about utilizing multicultural literature in their classrooms and the researchers wanted to learn how these educators select multicultural texts for their classrooms. It was found that when choosing books, it is

beneficial to prioritize student considerations, research book titles and engage in intentional curation of the books in your classroom library. One of the participants stated, “I’ve kind of learned that just because something is diverse doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s good” (Hayes & Francis, 2023, Findings Section, para 8). The participants learned how to utilize their students interests and backgrounds when selecting books as well as taking time to sort through their current library and remove books that may not be beneficial to the students learning in order to create a library that give students opportunity to engage with texts that act as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990). The study noted that the current book banning culture may be a reason why many teachers are deterred from utilizing certain multicultural books in their classrooms or researching new texts to add to their libraries (Mackler & Natanson, 2022, as cited in Hayes and Francis 2023). In the future a study that involves more participants would be beneficial in collecting more data on multicultural book selection in early childhood classrooms.

Another qualitative study based in Singapore utilized educators and students from a teaching-training institute to educate them on how to choose diverse picture books while also utilizing the five Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision-making). Harper and Bran’s (2010, as cited in Garces-Bacsal, 2022) checklist was utilized when selecting and evaluating the multicultural picture books. The checklist that was utilized measures the authenticity of the picture book by evaluating the author’s connection to the story, story engagement, use of authentic language and ensuring the characters being depicted were an authentic representation of the highlighted cultural

group. The findings included a list of multicultural picture books that met the Harper and Bran (2010) checklist criteria as well as the five SEL competencies. Each book was given a brief description and a “book-bonding” activity to go along with the text which are discussion and activity suggestions for educators to use with their students to expand upon the learning experience (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Much research has been conducted to support the importance of multicultural literature and lessons in early childhood classrooms, however, many educators still feel uncomfortable doing so due to the mindset of introducing young students to world issues and societal problems (Bennett et al., 2018, as cited in Garces-Bacsal, 2022). This may be due to the belief of educators that early childhood classrooms should be focused on play (Bennett et al., 2018) and that educators feel it is not their place to discuss race with their young students since the conversations could lead to difficult conversations (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006, as cited in Garces-Bacsal, 2022).

The seminal work of Rudine Sims Bishop coined the phrase, “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors” in 1990. Bishop states, “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as a part of the larger human experience” (Bishop, 1990, p.1). Just like the Funds of Knowledge Theory (FoK) the importance of having accurate representations of the students’ lives within the curriculum, the same goes for the books being utilized in the classroom. There is a painful truth about the amount of children’s books being published that reflect diverse characters. Only 23% of children’s books published in 2018 featured traditionally underrepresented or marginalized groups (Cahill et al, 2021). It is important for children to see themselves and others represented in books (Ulla Damber, 2015) and

due to the lack of published books that represent diverse populations it takes some effort to find texts that provide windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors to the students in their classrooms instead of solely depending on curriculum provided texts. Bishop emphasized the lack of children's books representing non-white children in 1990 and that still remains true today. A lack of representation of cultural groups is a disservice to all White children too. Not having access to learn about the other cultural groups that live in their communities and the places around them may only find their own culture of importance and create thoughts of ethnocentrism (Bishop, 1990).

Research shows that children look for themselves being represented in books and in turn a diverse classroom library matters. The phrase windows, mirror and sliding glass doors is prevalent throughout many studies based in early childhood settings. For example, a content analysis explored issues related to representations of diversity in classroom libraries (Crisp et al, 2016). The study involved 11 early childhood sites in the state of Georgia where all books presented in the preschool classrooms were coded based on categories of religion, SES/class, dis/abilities, developmental differences, and chronic illnesses; sexual identity; gender; and representations of parallel cultures. The findings in the study supported the concern of lack of diversity presented in the classroom libraries (Crisp, et al, 2016).

For instance, the lack of diversity presented in early childhood libraires is found in a study involving 35 library story times held in three different states. The study focused on seven dimensions of diversity which included: (a) parallel populations, (b)categories of books, (c) gender of leading characters, (d) sexual identity, (e) disabilities, developmental differences and chronic illnesses, (f) religion and (g)

language. After coding books shared by the library the findings concluded that diversity is lacking at library story times and improvement is needed when selecting diverse books for preschool children (Cahill, Ingram & Joo, 2021).

Another example that stresses the importance of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors in early childhood settings is an empirical study that involves two preschool sites in Northeastern United States. The findings of the study in the area of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors concluded that preschoolers will choose books that include familiar and compelling media characters whether it reflects their own race or not. In conclusion, it is important to be mindful and include diverse and culturally relevant books in order to foster children to be interested in learning about the experiences of others (Jacoby & Edlefsen, 2020).

Along with the importance of choosing texts that provide windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors, choosing appropriate texts that linguistically are appropriate for preschool children is also crucial. An example of a study that researched storybook selection in a preschool setting involved 22 experienced Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) located in the Dallas, TX area. The purpose of the study was to create a storybook difficulty system utilizing the SLP's judgements in preschool classrooms. The study found that creating this evidence based selection tool could help alleviate poor book selection in preschool classrooms by educators and instead choose books that are linguistically appropriate for preschool understanding (Schwarz et al, 2015).

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature that encompassed Funds of Knowledge Theory, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multicultural Literature it is clear that there is still

significant work to be done within the school walls. While there is ample research to support the importance of implementing these theories and practices into classrooms; current curriculum mandates, not enough time and fear of teaching diverse material to young students in fear of pushback from others and gaining access to authentic texts is a real worry amongst educators. As educators we need to shift away from stereotypes that our society places on us as well as our students. We can be the pioneers that our students and school systems need to create spaces in our classroom that embrace our individual differences and backgrounds. With so many opinions from various social media platforms from local community members and beyond there is a fear that change will cause upheaval and perhaps that is where the fear stems from, our own thoughts, assumptions and life experiences. As educators we need to also become researchers who “redefine the homes of the students as rich in funds of knowledge that represent important resources for educational change” (Moll et al, 1992, p.139)

It is hoped that this particular study will further explore the ways in which Funds of Knowledge can be used to create a positive classroom experience for early childhood students and their families in order to encourage other educators to utilize these ideas in their own classrooms. The next chapter of this thesis will examine the design of the research study based data and research collection.

Chapter III

Research Design/Methodology

A qualitative research approach is the framework of this study. Qualitative research is used to observe and interpret non-numerical data of a certain group and later investigated by researchers. A qualitative teacher researcher examines, “how teaching and learning happen in dynamic classroom contexts” (Klehr, 2012) and qualitative teacher research is described as, “systematic and intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work” (Cochran-Smith & Lyte, 1993, as cited in Klehr, 2012). Although quantitative research and data analysis can provide concrete numerical data about learning it fails to give data about “local conditions, curriculum decisions, reform policies, and students themselves” (Klehr, 2012). Teacher researchers who take a qualitative approach understand that their classroom populations are ever-changing and an open-minded approach is constantly needed because there is always, “change, uncertainty, and complexity” within the classroom walls (Power & Hubbard, 1999, as cited in Klehr, 2012). This allows teachers to utilize their own classroom experiences to improve their teaching practice. Teacher researchers understand that their research will constantly continue to evolve and understand, “that findings can remain tentative and open to further interrogation in response to the complex and constantly shifting factors at play in any given classroom” (Klehr, 2012, p.125).

Klehr (2012), stresses the importance of allowing teachers to perform ongoing qualitative research in their classrooms. It is clear that we live in a data driven and standardized testing world, however qualitative research should be just as important since student performance should not be simplified and measured entirely by required

examinations, Cole and Knowles (2000, as cited in Klehr, 2012) reported that in the first half of the 20th century, teaching was viewed by outside researchers as a simplistic, and therefore a measurable and replicable, activity, leading to research designs that focused on isolating and charting teacher behaviors and skills. Teacher researcher data is collected in a variety of ways such as, teacher journals, field observations, interviews, media recordings, analyses of student work, surveys and conversations with colleagues (Klehr, 2012). By using a variety of methods teacher researchers are able to understand their research from different perspectives. Zeichner and Noffke (2001, as cited in Klehr, 2012) have pointed out, rapid advances in social science and qualitative methodology have led to increasingly sophisticated ideas about research, and once rigid criteria are being contested even within academic circles. Teacher researchers whose subjects change every school year should not be held to only quantitative data. Utilizing qualitative methods to research current issues in a classroom inspires teachers to continue to learn in order to better their teaching to help their students instead of relying on solely standardized quantitative data to guide teachers to successfully teach. There are so many outstanding factors that teachers face in their classrooms and qualitative research allows teachers to tell about their classroom experiences and the needs of their students.

This study examines the use of the Funds of Knowledge approach when planning and implementing read-alouds in an early childhood classroom. The purpose of this study is to include read-alouds outside of the everyday curriculum that promote diversity, culture and connect to the students and their families' everyday lives. Secondly, the teacher research is being utilized for the teacher to learn more about the student's and their families who are current members of the classroom community. Teacher research is

being utilized for this study because my research will be looking at my classroom and learning about the students and their families' Funds of Knowledge in order to plan and conduct read-aloud instruction that highlights the knowledge that they bring to the classroom. The question that is being used to guide the study is the following: What happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences? The following sub questions will also be used: What books are students engaging with during center time in the classroom library? What types of conversations are students participating in that involve the read-aloud outside the group carpet? How does having background knowledge about a story before it is read make it more interesting and engaging for students?

The qualitative data sources used to conduct this study include parent questionnaires, student book selection surveys, recorded discussions, student journals, student/family artifacts, charts from read-aloud discussions and a teacher-research journal.

Procedure of Study

Before I began collecting formal data, I organized my classroom library and went through the read-aloud texts that I had access to in order to get a better idea of what texts I had available to my students. I noticed that I had an exuberant number of board books with beloved cartoon characters such as Paw Patrol, Mickey Mouse and Disney Princesses. I also noticed that many of the books I had in my library collection had animals as the main character and what I was lacking was books that starred people as the main characters especially those of marginalized groups. Many of the books in my classroom library were donated to my classroom by previous students or selected by

myself at local thrift stores. My most beloved books that I have personally purchased do not sit out in my library center due to wanting to keep them preserved and intact. Over the years I have found that the books that I purchase on my own at full price tend to get well loved and worn down. I utilize these books for read-alouds or small group read-alouds with my students. I took time to sit in the library center with my students during our center time and noted what books children were choosing to engage with or ask me to read to them. I observed that the majority of the time I was asked to read books starring a cartoon character to the students who came to the library center. My assumption is many of the students are familiar with these characters and enjoyed the stories and the familiarity. I typically read to the students in my classroom three times a day, during our read-aloud time, during centers and at our end of the day meeting. I decided to use our read-aloud time on Tuesdays and Thursdays for when the study officially began because it is a large group lesson and our schedule allows 15 to do so which was the largest amount of time without interruption that I could dedicate to reading aloud.

Once I had signed consent forms from the participants' family a Funds of Knowledge Survey was sent home to the students' caregivers. Since my students are 3-5 years old, I needed the help of their caregivers to learn more about their family. Once the surveys were back, I read through them all and looked for commonalities to pick eight read-alouds that would pertain to my students as well as choose stories that starred characters that represented the students in my classroom. The commonalities that I noticed between the surveys of the 9 participants were: extracurricular activities such as swimming and dancing, family vacations to the beach, spending time at the library, eating family meals together and the importance of different types of foods, family members

who speak a different language, spending time outside in nature and holiday celebrations. The study spans over a six week time period and two read-alouds a week will be read to the students that reflect their Funds of Knowledge.

Before the read-alouds took place a book selection survey (see Appendix B) was conducted. Sixteen books were displayed on a forward facing bookshelf where the book covers were fully exposed. Eight of the books were curriculum selected books. The preschool program that I teach for utilizes the Creative Curriculum which is a project-based learning curriculum. Every eight weeks or so we focus on a new study that the students vote on based on current class interest. The current study the students selected was the “Ball Study.” The other eight books were the books chosen based on the Funds of Knowledge surveys from the student’s families.

These books were never read to my students in our classroom. I met with each student individually and had them sit in front of the bookshelf. I said to each student, “Pick a book from the shelf that you would like me to read to you.” The students then picked a book for me to read. I then asked them the following questions before reading the book. 1. Why did you choose this book? 2. Have you ever read this book before? 3. Have you read any of the other books on this shelf before? I then indicated if the book was a curriculum book or a FoK book on my data sheet. Each book was marked with a number on the back so that I was able to quickly record the chosen book.

Funds of Knowledge Read-Alouds

The second week of the study consisted of reading the story *Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwell and *I Got the Rhythm* by Connie Schofield-Morrison and Frank Morrison. These books were chosen because the Funds of Knowledge Surveys reflected

extracurricular activities such as swimming and dance and it was also mentioned that many of the students spend time at the local swimming pool in the summer. The books were also chosen because the main characters were not only people but people who are from a marginalized group. The children in the books are Black and my current library lacks Black characters.

Before reading *Jabari Jumps* background knowledge was built with the students by discussing a time when they were scared, but became brave like Jabari in the story. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion could be accounted for. After the story students drew about a time, they felt brave in their journals and the teachers in the classroom wrote a description under their picture. Next, the book *Jabari Jumps* was placed in the music and movement center for students to interact with. Lastly, blue circles and goggles were placed in the music and movement center for children to act out the story of Jabari jumps along with pictures of the local swimming pool where students spend time in the summer.

Before reading *I Got Rhythm*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing the different kinds of music we enjoy listening too. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story children drew themselves dancing to their favorite song in their journals and the teachers in the classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *I Got Rhythm* was placed in the music and movement center for the students to interact with. Lastly, instruments such as sticks, drums and a radio from the story were placed into the center along with pictures of the children's favorite music artists and songs.

The third week of the study consisted of reading the stories *The Library Book* by Tom Chapin, Michael Mark and Chuck Groenink and *Every Night is Pizza Night* by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt and Gianna Ruggiero. These books were chosen because the Funds of Knowledge Surveys reflected extracurricular activities such as spending time at the local library and reading together as a family and eating meals together and eating different foods such as pasta, pizza and tacos as a family. The books were also chosen because the main characters were not only people but people who are from a marginalized group. The main character in *The Library Book* is a young Black girl and many of the characters in *Every Night is Pizza Night* are from a variety of cultures such as Asian, African, Indian and Middle Eastern and the book introduces readers to new foods that are important to the characters families.

Before reading *The Library Book* background knowledge was built with the students by discussing their favorite books to read. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story students drew a picture of their favorite book character and the teachers in the classroom wrote a description under their picture. Next, the book *The Library Book* was placed in the library center for the students to interact with. Lastly, book props for students to retell the story were placed in the library and a classroom made book that reflected all of the children's favorite books was placed in the library center too for students to learn about one another's favorite stories to check out from the library.

Before reading *Every Night is Pizza Night*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing the student's favorite foods to eat with their families. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was

accounted for. After the story children drew their favorite foods in their journals and the teachers in the classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *Every Night is Pizza Night* was placed in the Dramatic Play Center for the students to interact with. Lastly, images of the foods from the story as well as the students' favorite foods to eat with their families were placed in the Dramatic Play center to be used during imaginative play.

The fourth week of the study consisted of reading the stories *Gustavo the Shy Ghost* by Flavia Z. Drago and *Hiking Day* by Anne Rockwell and Lizzy Rockwell. These books were chosen because the Funds of Knowledge Surveys reflected the importance of celebrating holidays as a family and the importance of spending time in nature as a family. The books were also chosen because the main characters were not only people but people who are from a diverse group. The main character in *Gustavo the Shy Ghost* is a ghost who loves to play the violin. The book is set during the holiday Dia De Los Muertos. I discovered from the Funds of Knowledge Survey that one of my students celebrates this holiday. The study began in January after the holiday season and since we never learned about Dia De Los Muertos, I wanted to highlight it since one of the students celebrates it and it was never discussed in our classroom. *Hiking Day* is about a Black Family who spends the day outdoors together spotting new things in nature such as animals and plants. Many of the FoK surveys highlighted the importance of outdoor time as a family on the weekends and I wanted to highlight the importance of those experiences through the book.

Before reading *Gustavo the Shy Ghost*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing holidays that the students celebrated with their families. The read-

aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story children drew an artifact from their favorite holidays in their journals and the teachers in the classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *Gustavo the Shy Ghost* was placed in the Art Center for the students to interact with. Lastly, images of the student's Dia De Los Muertos celebration were placed in the Art center and materials for students to create papel picado were available for students to make authentic decorations from the story.

Before reading *Hiking Day*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing where we walk with families and what we see on those walks. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story children drew an item that they would want to see on their next walk or hike and the teachers in the classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *Hiking Day* was placed in the Discovery Center for the students to interact with. Lastly, a box of the student's outdoor discoveries on the playground was placed in the center for students to explore.

The fifth week of the study consisted of reading the stories *Day at the Beach* by Tom Booth and *I'll Go and Come Back* by Rajani LaRocca and Sara Palacios. These books were chosen because the Funds of Knowledge Surveys reflected the importance of vacationing/spending time at the beach and the presence of parents and other family members who speak a different language. The books were also chosen because the main characters were from a diverse group. The main characters in *Day at the Beach* are a mixed race family of four. The book is set at the beach while the family is on vacation. Currently, there are two students in my classroom who are from a mixed race family and

oftentimes I find it hard to find a story that represents a family like theirs. *I'll Go and Come Back* is about a girl who visits her grandmother in India. Despite the language barrier, the young girl and grandmother's relationship is a special one. The girl learns all about her Indian culture and then shares her American culture when her grandmother comes to visit her. Many of the FoK surveys highlighted that a few of the parents and grandparents spoke a different language or were learning a new language. Some of the languages that different family members spoke were: Spanish, Hebrew and Italian.

Before reading *Day at the Beach*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing different things students do or see at the beach. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story children drew an artifact of them doing their favorite activity on the beach in their journals and the teachers in the classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *Day at the Beach* was placed in the Water/Sand center for the students to interact with. Lastly, items from the student's beach list such as seagulls, kites, sand, shells were placed in the water/sand table for students to recreate their own beach experience or retell the story, *Day at the Beach*.

Before reading *I'll Go and Come Back*, background knowledge was built with the students by discussing family members who speak different languages and hearing a sound clip of how to say, "I love you" in the different languages of family members in our classroom. Pictures of the students' relatives who speak a different language were also shown to the students before reading. The read-aloud was recorded so that students' questions and the after story discussion was accounted for. After the story children drew a picture of a family member who lived far away in their journals and the teachers in the

classroom wrote descriptions under their picture. Next, the book *I'll Go and Come Back* was placed in the writing center for the students to interact with. Lastly, sentence strips that read “I Love You” in the languages of English, Spanish, Italian and Hebrew were written out so that children could write their own notes in their personal journals.

After all of the books were read and the students had time to interact and engage with the text on multiple occasions during our daily center time I conducted the final book selection survey. All of the books from the curriculums “Ball Study” (eight books) and the chosen FoK books (eight books) were displayed on the forward facing bookshelf again. I met with each student individually (sixth week of study) and had them sit in front of the bookshelf. I said to each student, “Pick a book from the shelf that you would like me to read to you.” The students then picked a book for me to read. I then asked them the following questions before reading the book. 1. Why did you choose this book? 2. Have you ever read this book before? 3. Have you read any of the other books on this shelf before? I then indicated if the book was a curriculum book or a FoK book on my data sheet. Each book was marked with a number on the back so that I was able to quickly record the chosen book.

Table 1

Funds of Knowledge Read-Aloud Summary Chart

| FoK Book Title | Before Reading | After Reading | Center Time Connection |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| <i>Jabari Jumps</i> | Tell me about a time you have been scared? | Journals: Draw a time that you have felt brave. | Story props such as goggles and blue dot circles were placed into the music and movement center for students to act out the story. |

| FoK Book Title | Before Reading | After Reading | Center Time Connection |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>I Got Rhythm</i> | What kind of music do you like to listen to? | Journals: Draw a picture of you dancing to your favorite song. | Instruments from the story were placed into our music center such as a boom box. A list of the students' favorite songs was also placed into the center. |
| <i>The Library Book</i> | What is your favorite book to read? | Journals: Draw a picture of your favorite book character | Story props were placed in the library center to retell the story as well as a class made book of all the journal entries. |
| <i>Every Night is Pizza Night</i> | What is your favorite food to eat with your family? | Journals: Draw a picture of your favorite food. | Pictures of food from the story along with the students' favorite foods were placed into the dramatic play center. |
| <i>Gustavo the Shy Ghost</i> | What is your favorite holiday to celebrate with your family? | Journals: Draw something about your favorite holiday | Pictures of a student's Dia De Los Muertos celebration were posted in the art center along with materials to create papel picado. |
| <i>Hiking Day</i> | Where do you walk with your family? What have you seen on your walks? | Journals: Draw something that you may see on your next walk or hike. | A box of the student's outdoor discoveries on the playground was placed in the center for students to explore. |
| <i>Day at the Beach</i> | What can you see/do at the beach? | Journals: Draw yourself doing something fun on the beach. | Items from the student's beach list such as seagulls, kites, sand, shells were placed in the water/sand table for students to recreate their own beach experience or retell the story |
| <i>I'll Go and Come Back</i> | Do you know someone who speaks a different language? | Journals: Draw a picture of someone in your family who lives far away. | Sentence strips that read "I Love You" in the languages of English, Spanish, Italian and Hebrew were written out so that children could write their own notes in their personal journals. |

Data Sources

To collect ample amounts of data for this study I used data collection. These sources include, a family Funds of Knowledge (FoK) survey which gave me information on my students' family's life experiences, values, traditions, daily activities and culture. The families answered the questionnaires and as I read over their responses, I was able to learn more about my students and saw that many of my students' families valued the same things, engaged in similar activities and traditions. I took the similarities and compiled a list of common themes to help guide me on choosing my FoK read-aloud choices for the study. Once the books were chosen participating students engaged in a book selection survey. The book selection survey allowed me to understand what books the students have read-before and their book interests based on what books they chose for me to read to them. Throughout the study I used audio-recordings of the read-alouds, charts to establish background knowledge, and a story check-in to see if the students enjoyed the story or not. Student journals were utilized in small groups after the story was read. The teacher would pose a question to the students to draw something that went along with the story. The teacher would record in writing under the drawing of what the student described. The student journals were a helpful tool and allowed the teacher to hear from students who may have not wanted to share their connections to a story in a whole group setting. A teacher research journal was also used to collect data throughout the day in different centers that the books were displayed in. Information on the books that the children were asking the teachers to read, interacting with and retelling was all able to be placed into the teacher-research journal. Lastly, artifacts that went along with the books were placed in our different centers for the children to engage with the books

again. This allowed a multisensory approach for the younger learners to not only engage with the books again but to better understand the books connection to themselves and classmates.

The data collected throughout the course of this study was used to help what happens when students' funds of knowledge are utilized when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences. I used the family Funds of Knowledge surveys to get to know the students and their families better. The surveys gave me more information about their family life experiences, values, traditions, daily activities and culture. The surveys took assumptions I may have had and allowed me to learn from the students and their family members. Using the survey information allowed me to see similarities and differences between my students and helped me begin researching read-alouds that connected to their lives and reflected their families FoK. The book selection survey allowed me to talk with my younger learners in an age appropriate way. The questions I asked allowed me to understand what books catch their attention and what books they may have already read from the selected texts of the study. The audio-recordings and the discussions before and after the read-alouds were also filled with informative data. I was able to learn more from the students about their connections to the story and the discussions allowed the students to learn from one another and make connections. I was also able to gauge who enjoyed the book and who did not by utilizing a story check-in using a thumbs up or down. The student journals were also an important part of the data analysis and allowed me to work with the students in a smaller group setting to share their connections to the texts instead of in front of a larger group. My teacher-research journal allowed me to collect data throughout the school day. I was able to record what

books and follow-up activities the children were engaged with during center time and conversations we had about the books outside of read-aloud time.

Context

Community

Oakhurst Elementary (pseudonym) is one of the four preschool locations in the Oakhurst School District (pseudonym). There are a total of 14,150 people living in Oakhurst, NJ. According to the 2022 census these 14,150 community members reside in 6,698 households. Of the 14,150 households, 4.4% include persons under 5 and 17.4% include persons under 18. Among the 6,698 households, 53.1% are owner occupied. The preschool program that I teach for is a state funded program that began in 2019.

Currently, the program has 14 classrooms across 4 school buildings that all utilize the Creative Curriculum which is a recommended curriculum from the state of New Jersey. 73.7% of students enrolled in the program are White while 26.3% of students are either Black, Hispanic, Asian or Multiple Races.

The racial make-up of the Collingswood community per the 2022 census is as follows: 80% White, 12.6% Black or African American, 6.4% Hispanic or Latino, 4.9% Two or more races, 1.1% Asian and 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native.

The Borough of Collingswood median household income as of the 2022 census is \$78,909 and persons in poverty is 11.8%. High School graduates make up 95.4% of the population and 48.8% of the population earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

School

The Oakhurst Elementary School (OES) consists of four classrooms all led by White female teachers. Each classroom is equipped with a teacher assistant. Three of the

assistants are female and one is male. There are also two full time floating teachers who are female and spend time in each classroom throughout the school day. OES has 56 enrolled students. 25% of the students are 3 years old, 45% are 4 years old and 30% are 5 years old. The racial make-up of the students is as follows: 86% of students are White, 9% of students are Two or more races, and 5% of students are Black or African American. Three of the students in the OES building are followed by the Child Study Team and have IEPs for speech and language delays.

Classroom

Currently there are 6 girls and 8 boys on the classroom roster. 11 students are white, 1 student is Black, and 2 students are mixed race. Two of the students have an IEP for speech. Two of the students live in a single-parent household. Six of the students attend the preschool aftercare program and twelve of the families are double income families with two full time working parents. Five of the students are 5 years old, 4 of the students are 4 years old and five of the students are 3 years old. Each of the students live in the same Southern New Jersey town and attend the full-day preschool program that is free and funded by the State of New Jersey.

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses the results of the Funds of Knowledge survey, student book selection surveys, audio-recordings of student responses and class discussions, my personal teacher research journal, student journals and the artifacts placed in centers that extended the read-aloud experiences. Chapter Five presents the conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further topics of study.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study, answering the research question, “What happens when I utilize my students' funds of knowledge when planning and implementing read-aloud experiences?” Once I analyzed and categorized the data collected from my six week study (teacher-research journal, parent-questionnaires, student book selection surveys, student journals and read-aloud audio recordings) I identified the data sources that worked together to answer the guiding research question. After analyzing all of the data sources three main themes recur throughout my classroom research study. These include making connections to peers in response to text, engaging with text that highlights Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and conversing about others cultures through play.

Revisiting the Study

Chapter three reviewed the data collection methods that occurred over a six week period where the students were introduced to eight new read-aloud texts that highlighted a piece of a classmate's Funds of Knowledge. I utilized the Family Funds of Knowledge (FoK) survey, student book selection surveys, read-aloud conversations, my teacher's research journal, records of students' likes/dislikes about the eight books, how they were engaging with them during our classroom center time and the conversations that they had with each other and myself outside of read-aloud time. The read-aloud audio recordings allowed me to revisit the background knowledge conversations that occurred during read-aloud time as well as the after story conversations that occurred on the carpet.

Findings

The major findings of the study include, making connections to peers in response to text, engaging with text that highlights funds of knowledge and conversing about others culture through play.

Making Connections to Peers in Response to Text

Week Two

During week two of the study, students began to make clear connections to their families and peers in response to the text. I first noticed this for the text, “The Library Book” (Chapin, Mark & Groenink, 2017). I began the read-aloud by asking the students “Who has been to a library before?” to understand how many students have been there before. Based on the Family Funds of Knowledge (Fok) Surveys I learned that five families mentioned their family library trips. Once we established that some of the students in the classroom had visited the library, I referred to a chart on the board that read, “Our Favorite Books.” Students were asked to share their favorite book they have gotten from the library and the responses were added to the chart. One student shared that they like to get “Frozen” books from the library, in response another student shouted, “I like the Frozen books too!” Another student mentioned the story, “Stick and Stone” in response a student raised their hand and shared, “I have that book at my house.” One student mentioned the story, “Mix it Up” and in response a few students were happy to mention that we have read that book in our classroom before. One student even jumped up to grab it from the classroom library. As the conversations continued, I noticed that the students were more responsive to share information that could be added to the background knowledge poster than in previous weeks. I think the students are

understanding the new read-aloud routine. They are adding more insightful information to the background knowledge charts this week and are responding to others' thoughts and connections (journal entry, January, 2024). I began reading "The Library Book" once the hands stopped being raised. I mentioned to the students that in the book they may see many characters that they recognize from our own classroom library or they may have some of the books with those characters in them at home. When we got to the page about Curious George. A student mentioned, "I have Curious George books at home." A few other students shouted, "Me too!" in response to the peer. As the story progressed, I mentioned to students that they have a library in their very own town that they may have been to before. One student said, "I know that library, I can walk there from my house." Another student mentioned, "I go there with my family." More and more students eagerly raised their hands to share similar stories about going to the same library as their friends with their family members too. It's nice to see the students leading the conversation and listening to the peers respond to one another about a shared experience (journal entry, January, 2024).

Week Three

During week three of the study, students made many connections to their peers for the text, "Hiking Day" (Rockwell & Rockwell, 2018). I began the read-aloud by asking the students, "Where do you walk with your families?" Students were able to label locations such as their neighborhoods, the main shopping street in town and a local park. One student, Violet mentioned visiting the woods with her family. I told the students that walking in the woods could also be called a hike. I explained to the students that the book we would be reading today would be about a family going on a hike. Colton raised his

hand to respond that he also went on a hike before with his family while on a vacation. I asked Colton what he saw while on his hike and he responded with, “I saw some animals.” His comment sparked a conversation about what we may see on a hike with our families. Students brainstormed ideas of things that the family in the text may see as well as things that they have seen on their own hikes. Based on the Family Funds of Knowledge (Fok) Surveys I learned that six families mentioned their family enjoyed weekend hikes, neighborhood walks or spending time outside under the family outings. Some of the additions added to our background knowledge poster were trees, rocks, birds and squirrels. As I read the text, I pointed to items that the family finds on a hike. Students helped me label the items throughout the story and they were added to the chart “What could we find on a hike?” On the last page of the story the family finds a toad. Harry, a 4-year-old boy mentioned, “I have seen a frog before!” Ashley, a 4-year-old student responded, “I have frogs at my house!” I emphasized the connection that they found between them and noted in my journal (journal entry, February, 2024), students are finding connections amongst each other using the texts that were chosen based on the knowledge that they bring to the classroom. It’s fun to watch their conversations with each other.

Week Five

During the fifth week of the study, students were comfortable with making connections to their peers and the students drove the conversations to help others build background knowledge as well as sharing their life experiences that they shared with a text. The book, “Day at the Beach” (Booth, 2022) sparked a lot of discussion about family beach trips and shared experiences at the beach. I began the read-aloud by asking

the students, “Who has gone to the beach before?” Many of the students raised their hands in response to the question. Based on the Family Funds of Knowledge (Fok) Surveys I learned that five families mentioned their family beach trips. I then referred to our background knowledge chart on the board and asked, “What can we do at the beach?” One student said, “We can build sandcastles.” Another student responded by saying, “I love building sandcastles at the beach.” The conversation picked up from there and students were leading the conversation on the group carpet without much guidance from myself. A conversation about digging holes on the beach was started by three year old Michael which led to a conversation about what others in the classroom like to do on the beach.

Ashley: My daddy digs holes to put up our umbrella at the beach.

Colton: I saw an umbrella blow away on the beach before.

Violet: Woah! I like when my parents dig a hole for me to sit in.

Nora: You can fill the hole with water to make a pool!

As I read the story to the class, the students helped identify more activities that could be done on the beach such as flying kites and surfing. During lunch time that day I overheard a conversation with two students, Louie and Colton about what they want to do at the beach next. Louie, a 4-year-old boy, stated, “I want to bring a kite to the beach and fly it!” Colton, another 4-year-old boy responded, “I flew a kite before, it went high” The students are engaging in conversations outside of read-aloud time about the read-alouds and making connections with one another (journal entry, January 2024).

After analyzing the Funds of Knowledge surveys, student book selection surveys, the audio recordings and my personal teacher research journal, I found that over the

course of the four weeks that the students were making more connections to one another about the topics that the texts covered. Students were leading respectful conversations and responding to one another appropriately about the books. The students were excited to share their experiences about the library, hikes/walks and beach trips that they have experienced with their own families and were happy to listen to their peers share their own experiences. I was also in awe to see and listen to the young students engage in conversations during lunch time about a text that was just read to them. It reminded me of conversations that grown people have with their own friends about books they have read and shared about. Witnessing the conversation between the two students at lunch showed me that the students cared and connected to the text and wanted to engage with the book further as well as utilized language from the book in their conversation.

After each read-aloud, I also asked the students to show me with their thumbs, if they enjoyed the book (thumbs up), kind of enjoyed it (thumbs in the middle) or did not enjoy it at all (thumbs down). Out of the 9 participants they voted the following ways for the read-aloud texts.

Table 2

Participant Votes

| Name of Text | Student Reactions using their Thumbs |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| The Library Book | 9 thumbs up |
| Hiking Day | 7 thumbs Up 2 thumbs in the middle |
| Day at the Beach | 9 thumbs up |

This showed me that the students enjoyed the text and it was observed in my teaching research journal that the children were enjoying the texts, “I can tell the students are enjoying the texts because during the after story check-ins they are giving more thumbs up feedback” (Journal entry, February, 2024). After reading the story, *A Day at the Beach*, a student noticed the picture of another text that the author, Tom Booth had written on the back of the text. The student, Anthony, asked what the text was called and when they learned it was about baseball, they asked if we could read it because their brother plays baseball. The student was making a connection to their family. Another student, Louie overheard the conversation and said, “I want to read it too, I play baseball too.” It was noted in my teacher journal that, “students seem to be curious about other texts that the authors wrote as well as being interested in stories that relate to their own lives (journal entry, February, 2024). The students were taking the time to voice their opinions on what texts they wanted to read in the future as well as sharing why they wanted to read the particular text. It was also evident that the student felt compelled to share this information with his teacher and a peer and shared a personal piece of information about his life. Not only did the families share new information about themselves on the FoK survey, but now their children are sharing new information about themselves which can help guide text selection in the future.

Overall, my students were more eager to engage in conversations with their peers about read-alouds that connected too and had access to background knowledge about. This was suggested through the classroom read-aloud discussions, individual discussions with classroom staff and individual discussions with classroom peers. As the study continued students' conversations were more student driven based off of the question that

was posed at the beginning of the read-aloud on the background knowledge chart. It was also evident that the students enjoyed the texts that were chosen to be read to them based off of a peer(s) FoK. This was evident due to the fact that more students showed thumbs ups than thumbs downs when asked how they enjoyed the text.

Engaging with Text that Highlights Funds of Knowledge

Before reading the stories to the students I conducted a book selection survey with the students based on a study conducted by Jennifer Wallace Jacoby and Karen Edlefsen (2020). I wanted to discover what texts the students would choose to engage with blindly as well as note if the participants had read any of the texts before.

Table 3

Book Selection Survey (Before Readings)-Week 1

| Student Name (pseudonym) | Text Selected | FoK Text or Curriculum Text | Why did you choose this text? | Have you read it before? | Have you read any of these texts before? |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Ashley | I've Got Rhythm | FoK | "It has a girl on it." | No | The Three Little Pigs |
| Harry | Every Night is Pizza Night | FoK | "Because I like pizza." | No | The Three Little Pigs |
| Anthony | Every Night is Pizza Night | FoK | "I love pizza." | Yes | No |
| Violet | The Three Little Pigs | Curriculum Text | "I like when they build." | Yes | Just Like Josh Gibson |
| Louie | The Three Little Pigs | Curriculum Text | "I like pigs." | No | No |

| Student Name (pseudonym) | Text Selected | FoK Text or Curriculum Text | Why did you choose this text? | Have you read it before? | Have you read any of these texts before? |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Colton | The Three Little Pigs | Curriculum Text | “I have it at my house.” | Yes | No |
| Veronica | The Three Little Pigs | Curriculum Text | “I don’t know” | Yes | The Library Book and Gustavo, the Shy Ghost |
| Michael | Gustavo, the Shy Ghost | FoK text | “I like the ghost!” | Yes | Hiking Day |
| Bryan | Every Night is Pizza Night | FoK Text | “I like the food.” | No | No |

There are a variety of read-aloud texts that sit throughout my classroom. There is a library center with a forward facing bookshelf that holds sixteen to twenty books at a time, a calm down corner with books about emotions and six additional play-based centers that hold 3 to 5 books each. As I read the FoK read-aloud books throughout the study I would place the books in either the library or the appropriate play based-center. It was noted in my teacher research journal each time that I noticed a student(s) engaging with a FoK text. One example was when Ashley and Violet were playing in the music center together. They were reading the book, *I Got Rhythm* together. The two students pointed out the instruments in the books and Ashley stated, “I see a drum, we have one of those (points to the drum in the center). Violet states, “We have one of these too(points to a radio) but it's in the library.” Both of these students take dance lessons which was noted in the family FoK surveys and they chose to interact with a text that highlights a

dancer. It was stated in my teacher research journal, “The students are engaging with the FoK texts together. We have a variety of books in our classroom and they are choosing to engage with a text that highlights their FoK (journal entry, January, 2024). Another example where a student engaged with an FoK text outside of read-aloud time was with the text, *The Library Book*. The student was in the library center reading the book to themselves on the reading couch. I approached them to check in on them interacting with the text. The student, Veronica, was pointing to the characters on the page that she recognized and naming them. “Winnie the Pooh, Sleeping Beauty, I don’t know this (Madeline), Cat in the Hat.” I sat down beside her and she asked me if I would read the story for her. I complimented her retelling of the story and happily agreed to read the rest to her. “It’s encouraging to see the students engaging with texts that were chosen based on their own FoK or a peer’s FoK” (journal entry, January, 2024). I was able to engage in a conversation about the characters she knew in the books and how she knew them. Veronica labeled names of movies, tv shows and other stories that she recognized the fairytale characters from such as Sleeping Beauty and Pinocchio. This gave me insight to some of the media she was consuming while at home.

The students in my classroom take a daily nap each day for one hour. The students are allowed to choose one book from the classroom to bring to their nap cot with them. Since the study began, I became interested in the students' choices of text each day. Harry, a 4-year-old student chose the read-aloud, *Every Night is Pizza Night* three days in a row. When I asked why they chose that book to read he said, “I like it and I like pizza.” A student who overheard the conversation said, “I like pizza too, Harry!” Another student chose the story, *The Library Book* multiple days in a row to bring to his cot.

When I asked him why he chose that book to read during nap he said, “I like the pictures and Curious George is in it.” On the day I read, *Day at the Beach* multiple students asked for a turn with the book during nap time. When I asked the three students why they wanted that book they answered as followed, student one, “It’s funny when the sandcastle keeps getting knocked down”, student two, “I like looking at the pictures” and student three, “I am going to the beach with my family so I want to read it.” It was noted in my teacher research journal that, “students are showing me that they want to engage with the FoK books because they are connecting with the story in many different ways. They connect with the pictures, the experiences in the story and the characters” (journal entry, February, 2024).

As more FoK read-alouds were introduced students showed interest in them outside the group carpet which demonstrated they connected with the stories and were interested in experiencing them on their own multiple times. This demonstrates what was previously stated in Chapter two, understanding the students and their personal lives which allows the teachers to make their students active learners rather than passive (Moll et al.,1992). The students and their families let me into their personal lives where I was able to learn more about their family culture. From there I was able to become a learner and research culturally authentic read-alouds that would pertain to my students. The students were beginning to become active learners and their engagement with the FoK books outside the group carpet allowed for them to teach not only me about themselves but also their peers.

During the last week of the study, the participants engaged in another book selection survey that included the same books in the initial book selection survey. This

survey was conducted because I was curious how their book choices would change after reading all of the books on the bookshelf this time. The results of the books selection survey are listed in the chart below.

Table 4

Book Selection Survey (After Readings)-Week 6

| Student Name (pseudonym) | Text Selected | FoK Text or Curriculum Text | Why did you choose this text? |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Ashley | Hiking Day | FoK | “I like when they find the toad.” |
| Harry | Day at the Beach | FoK | “I like when the sandcastle gets broken.” |
| Anthony | Day at the Beach | FoK | “The beach is fun!” |
| Violet | When the Doorbell Rang | Curriculum Text | “I like how they share the cookies.” |
| Louie | Day at the Beach | FoK | “I am going to Ocean City soon for vacation.” |
| Colton | Hiking Day | FoK | “I like how they go hiking as a family.” |
| Veronica | The Three Little Pigs | Curriculum Text | “I like when the wolf scares the pigs.” |
| Michael | Every Night is Pizza Night | FoK text | “The food is yummy!” |
| Bryan | Day at the Beach | FoK Text | “I like going to the beach.” |

In conclusion, I found that the students showed that they enjoyed reading and engaging with the FoK texts outside of the group carpet. They demonstrated this by engaging with the FoK texts with their peers, independently or with their teachers. As mentioned in Chapter two, culturally relevant teaching “builds bridges between experiences at home within a school context, highlighting that the curriculum taught must be relevant and central to the children’s lives” (Bennett, 2011, p.242). I believed that I introduced the students to texts that demonstrated authentic text that encompassed their life experiences that they could engage with in the classroom. As an early childhood educator, the research that I conducted showed me the importance of continuing to make the curriculum relevant to the current student’s lives. The students showed that the books were relevant to them by choosing to engage with them during the school day.

Conversing About Others Culture Through Play

The foundation of our curriculum is the importance of play. I chose to connect each FoK story with an activity in each of our play centers. For each book I curated an after reading activity for the students to engage with if they chose (see chart in chapter 3). One of the activities was based on the read-aloud, *Gustavo, the Shy Ghost*. This story was initially chosen because holiday celebrations were important to all of the participants according to the FoK surveys. Many of the holidays that were mentioned on the surveys were spoken about already during the school year such as; Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Hanukkah. One holiday that was mentioned was Dia De Los Muertos. I learned that a student in my classroom celebrated this holiday and I wanted to make sure we highlighted it. *Gustavo, the Shy Ghost* was the perfect story to learn about the holiday. The illustrations display authentic decorations for the holiday and portray the

characters wearing bright costumes. I asked Michael's family to send in pictures from their holiday. Michael shared them after reading the story and later they were hung in our art center for students to view. One of the decorations that are used for Dia De Los Muertos is papel picado. Michael's holiday photos displayed the decoration in many of the photos he shared. To connect Michael's holiday experience with our read-aloud, I added colorful tissue paper into our classroom art center. Students were encouraged to make papel picado on their own. I explained once they were finished making their decorations we would decorate the classroom with it. The students were eager to join in on the activity and conversed about the decorations they were making. Violet said, "Michael's family had these decorations at their house for Day of the Dead!" (Dia De Los Muertos) as she sat cutting out paper designs to make her own papel picado. Another student pointed to the photo and said, "I am going to make a pink paper decoration like this one." (points to the photo). Louie said, "I watched Coco before and they celebrate this holiday too, like Michael!"

All nine of the student participants participated in the activity over the course of a week (journal entry, January, 2024). Once enough papel picado was made, I hung the decorations throughout the classroom. I was excited to show Michael's Mom how we connected the pictures she sent us to our learning. She was so excited to see their holiday being acknowledged in our classroom and told me that she told her mother-in-law who lives in Mexico that a little piece of Mexico made it to Oakhurst Elementary School. "If I never sent the surveys home, I would never have known that I have a student who celebrates Dia De Los Muertos. The FoK surveys are allowing me to take on the role of a learner and in doing so I am learning new things about my students which are enhancing

our classroom experiences.” (journal entry, January, 2024). A child’s home and school are the two most influential environments in which learning occurs, and supportive family relationships can help children navigate cultural and academic discontinuities upon school start” (Galindo and Sheldon, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999, as cited in Tobin 2022). Introducing Dia De Los Muertos to my students gave them knowledge about a new holiday that a peer celebrates with their family. The students participating with the activity showed me that they were interested in learning and engaging with their peers' culture.

After reading the story, *Every Night is Pizza Night*, pictures of the foods mentioned in the story such as bibimbap, dumplings and rice and beans were placed in the dramatic play center. Before reading the story, the students shared their favorite foods to eat with their families. The list was hung in the dramatic play center and I collected their favorite foods in pretend form and they were placed in the dramatic play center for them to use. Many of the students showed interest in spending time with the new foods in the dramatic play center. Louie pretended to make brownies in the center. “I like eating brownies with my family, would you like to try some?” He used bowls, spoons, and measuring cups to whisk me up a food he likes to eat with his family. In the dramatic play center, Harry points to the picture of the dumplings and says, “Yum, I love Chinese food. I have some in my lunchbox.” Harry runs to grab his lunchbox and shows me lo mein noodles. He then suggests, “We could make some dumplings in the kitchen!” He then proceeds to use a variety of cooking tools to make the dumplings from the story. Bryan and Michael spent time in the dramatic play center looking through the read-aloud *Every Night is Pizza Night* together.

Michael: Let's make pizza, Bryan!

Bryan: Okay.

Michael: We need some cheese and pepperoni (points to the picture in the story).

Bryan: Yeah!

Michael: My daddy makes pizza at his work!

Bryan and Michael continue to work together to make pizza in the dramatic play center. Michael shared with Bryan that his Dad is a chef and makes pizza at a restaurant. This was something that I had learned from the FoK survey and was a reason that I chose a book that had pizza in it. "It was really neat to observe Michael sharing about his family with his friend Bryan. This is not something that was discussed in our read-aloud time but, by having the books and manipulatives that go along with the book available in our classroom, these conversations can exist." (journal entry, January, 2024).

In conclusion, I found through evidence in my research journal that the students continued to interact with the read-aloud texts within the play-based centers. I witnessed many students viewing the books within the centers and choosing to plan their play around the texts. Students interacted with each other to share about their culture and also acknowledged how the books connected with them or a peer. "The books did not go away after reading them, they were purposely placed within the classroom along with activities or manipulatives that connected with the stories. This allowed my students to have the opportunity to engage with diverse texts that represented themselves or a peer. As mentioned in chapter two, research shows that children look for themselves being represented in books and in turn a diverse classroom library matters. The children were

able to converse about how the books connected to themselves and/or their peers which helped establish a culturally responsive classroom environment.

Summary of Data Analysis

“Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as a part of the larger human experience” (Bishop, 1990, p.1). An analysis of the data showed that my students were able to make connections to peers in response to text. This became evident as the study progressed and the students became more comfortable with sharing about their lives and connecting themselves and/or peers to the stories. The data also showed that the students chose to engage with text that highlights funds of knowledge. This was evident by the conversations that were recorded in my teacher research journal between peers and teachers in the classroom. It was also evident that the students enjoyed the FoK text based on the final book selection survey where the majority of the students chose FoK books to be read rather than the curriculum texts. I also was able to learn new information about families and communicated with some about how their surveys helped pick certain FoK texts. It was a great experience learning from the families and picking read-aloud texts based off of their lived experiences rather than basing the read-aloud choices off of the curriculum or my own classroom library. Lastly, students demonstrated interest in conversing about the culture of others through play. The data suggests this by the conversations that were recorded in the play based centers and the type of play the children engaged in that originated from the text.

Chapter 5 speaks about the conclusions, implications and recommendations for further research.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for Teaching and the Field

Summary

In concluding my research, I found that students demonstrated growth in making connections to their peers in response to the Funds of Knowledge Text (FoK). The major findings of the study include, making connections to peers in response to text, engaging with text that highlights funds of knowledge and conversing about others culture through play.

A total of four weeks was utilized introducing the students to the carefully selected FoK text that highlighted their peers and/or their own family knowledge. Students engaged in more extensive conversations on the read-aloud carpet in a group setting and engaged in conversations with peers outside of the read-aloud carpet. I found that this study benefited both the students and myself as a learner. The students were able to learn more about one another and I was able to learn more about the students in my classroom and their families to create interactive read-aloud lessons to help spark conversations that lead to a deeper connection between the stakeholders in our classroom (teachers, students and families).

Additionally, I used the Family Funds of Knowledge (FoK) survey to learn more about my students' families' backgrounds. The answers to the FoK surveys helped me find commonalities between the students and their families. From there I chose eight read-aloud texts that highlighted those commonalities. Before any of the read-alouds were shared with my students, a book selection survey was administered to the participants that included the eight FoK texts alongside the curriculum mandated texts

that would be shared during the six-week time period. The students were asked to choose a book from the shelf of 16 books for me to read to them as well as, 1. Why did you choose this book? 2. Have you ever read this book before? 3. Have you read any of the other books on this shelf before? The book selection survey helped me understand who may have read a book already on the shelf and possible book interests of students. By the end of the study, I was able to compare the students' original book choices to their final books choices and the data showed that the students overall picked to engage with a FoK text rather than a curriculum text. Using my teacher's research journal, I recorded and analyzed the students' likes/dislikes about the eight books, how they were engaging with them during our classroom center time and the conversations that they had with each other and myself outside of read-aloud time.

Furthermore, the read-aloud audio recordings and teacher research journal allowed me to revisit the background knowledge conversations that occurred during read-aloud time as well as the after story conversations that occurred on the carpet and in the classroom environment. As the eight read-aloud texts were introduced over the four week span I noticed that students were choosing to engage with the FoK text at their own leisure during our center time and naptime. An example of this is the day I read, *Day at the Beach* (Booth, 2018) multiple students asked for a turn with the book during nap time.

Lastly, the findings of my research suggested that the students were utilizing play to converse about other cultures. Each book was paired with an activity that was located in one of the classroom's nine centers. Students were introduced to a teacher curated after reading activity that they could choose to participate in at their own pace during our daily

center time. It was evident that the students enjoyed the activities and wanted to engage in them whether it was when students viewed photos from Michael's Day of the Day holiday celebration and created their own papel picado or used their imagination to make their favorite foods in the dramatic play center that was inspired by the text, *Every Night is Pizza Night* (Lopez-Alt, 2020)

Limitations

The major limitation that affected the study was the time that it took to conduct the research. This study took place in a full-day public preschool classroom with a total class size of 14 students. I am responsible for collecting daily data on my students through our mandated curriculum across six domains as well as collecting data for the students with Individualized Educational Plans. Incorporating new data collection pertaining to my research study into the daily routine was even more time consuming and took a great deal of additional time outside of my school day which would be an arduous task to continue outside of the six-week study. The read-aloud time in our daily schedule is allotted for 15 minutes which was not enough time to introduce the story, read the story and discuss the story as a group. I found myself running over the allotted read-aloud time every Tuesday and Thursday the read-aloud portion was conducted. This affected the study due to large group discussions getting cut short in order to begin the students' lunch as well as not being able to stop as often throughout the text to reflect as a group and ask questions about the read-aloud and how it connected to the students in the classroom.

In addition to the time within each day the study was conducted, the overall time frame of the study was also a limitation. The study took place over a six-week period. The first week was utilized to collect Funds of Knowledge (FoK) survey data and student

book selection data as well as compile a list of books that would be culturally and developmentally appropriate for the students. The next four weeks were focused on the read-alouds, the discussions connecting to the read-alouds and curating and introducing the book activities that connected to the read-alouds to the students. For the purpose of this study a longer time frame as well as having a researcher who was solely focused on incorporating read-aloud instruction based on the students FoK would be more ideal. If the time frame were able to be expanded the teacher researcher could explore and research more texts that connected with the students based on learned interests during student conversations during the ongoing read-aloud discussions. In addition, daily read-aloud instruction based on the student's FoK could be had instead of twice a week, especially if the teacher researcher was solely focused on the read-aloud portion instead of planning and collecting other portions of the day.

Implications for Teaching

After analyzing the data, I compiled throughout the study in order to draw conclusions about the use of Funds of Knowledge in an early childhood classroom to enhance read-aloud experiences, I found that there were certain areas that could be further investigated. One area would be teacher knowledge. Not all schools and/or educators are familiar with the Funds of Knowledge approach and how to implement it in their schools and classrooms. A great deal of professional development time and discussion would need to be had with the school staff before implementing this approach.

Another implication would be deriving from a school's mandated curriculum. Not all educators have the flexibility to try new lessons and steer from the expected

curriculum throughout the year. Schools outline expectations for the school year early on and how each classroom should present the curriculum to their students. It would take some discussion with the administrators, parents and the teaching team to make a change to the curriculum's read-aloud time as well as giving the educators space to communicate with the families to learn more about their Funds of Knowledge.

Implications for the Field

After analyzing the data, I compiled throughout the study in order to draw conclusions about the use of Funds of Knowledge in an early childhood classroom to enhance read-aloud experiences, I found that there were certain areas that could be further investigated. One area would be how would the study be affected if all of the students and their families participated. It would be highly beneficial to learn more about all of the students and their families in order to research and connect read-alouds to their own families' Funds of Knowledge (FoK). A total of nine families participated in the study, five families chose not to participate. The students who did not participate in the study still benefited by learning about their peers FoK and engaging with the FoK book activities; however, having the ability to learn about what is deemed important to their families' lives would be beneficial rather than basing it off of my own assumptions.

Another implication, for future teacher researchers, is the age group of the students in the study group. Preschooler students bring a fair amount of empathy and interesting perspectives to group conversations when they are ready to be on task. It is important for students to be introduced to cultures other than their own. Research shows that students as young as 4 years old begin to develop racial stereotypes throughout elementary school (Pushkin & Veness, 2017; Seefeldt, 1995) and one way to begin

honest conversations with young children is through multicultural literature which could help shape their perceptions (Hayes & Francis, 2023). However, their ability to maintain back and forth conversations with one another can vary day to day and they are still developing language skills that may impede their ability to join in conversations. Teachers conducting research on FoK to enhance read aloud experiences may consider utilizing participants in an older early childhood setting, such as 2nd or 3rd grade.

This study could also be improved by scheduling interviews with the families rather than them filling out the questionnaires on their own time. I found that I wanted to learn more about the families and their responses on the surveys ranged from lengthy to short depending on the person answering them. If an in-person interview was conducted follow up questions would be easier to ask and potentially more about their families FoK would be learned. Additionally, bi-weekly check-ins with the families to update them on our read-aloud experiences would be helpful in remaining communication with the students' families if the study was conducted over a longer period of time. This could be done over the phone, via email or in person. Since the students are so young, the bi-weekly check ins would allow the teacher researcher to learn if the students are engaging in conversations or play based on the read-alouds that are being read in the classroom.

In summary, the use of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) in an early childhood classroom to enhance read-aloud experiences can help students engage with text outside the mandated curriculum that highlights their own and others Funds of Knowledge, this can look like conversations as a whole group, individual conversations with teachers and/or peers throughout the school day, engaging with the text through play-based opportunities and making connections about the text shared experiences. This study

suggests that the teacher takes on the role as a learner to better understand their current students' FoK instead of basing read-aloud choices off assumptions about the students and what the structured curriculum considers best practice for an ever-changing group of students with a variety of life experiences. Teachers' beliefs have profound influences on their instructional judgments and actions (Knopp & Smith, 2005; Pajares, 1992; Smylie, 1995, as cited in Gay, 2010). It is the role of the teacher to work alongside students and their families to create a classroom space that allows culturally responsive teaching to occur. By introducing FoK into early childhood settings we are setting the tone that we care for the students as individuals and strive to incorporate a feeling of belonging no matter what background you come from.

Conclusions

While planning the study I was curious about the information I would learn about my students and their families that were not known to me. Once the surveys were completed and reviewed, I began by looking for commonalities between the surveys. As previously mentioned in chapter three some of the commonalities that were found included: extracurricular activities such as swimming and dancing, family vacations to the beach, spending time at the library, eating family meals together and the importance of different types of foods, family members who speak a different language, spending time outside in nature and holiday celebrations. The importance of choosing texts that are developmentally appropriate for a classroom library is important for positive literacy development (Jacoby & Edlefsen, 2020). I began researching book titles that were deemed appropriate for preschool aged children. I utilized websites such as scholastic.com and bookroo.com. I searched on their sites using keywords such as

“swimming” and “food.” Once the book results came up I searched for books that highlighted characters from a marginalized population. As mentioned in chapter one, only 23% of children’s books published in 2018 featured traditionally underrepresented or marginalized groups (Cahill et al, 2021). It remained important to me throughout this study to highlight characters from a variety of cultural backgrounds other than my students to expose students to characters that look different to them but share a similarity to themselves or a peer(s). From there I reviewed my chosen text on youtube.com, at the library or from texts that were borrowed from my colleagues to determine if they were culturally authentic. I used the article, *The Importance of Including Culturally Authentic Literature* written by Katrina Willard Hall (January, 2008) to finalize my chosen read-aloud choices. The books that I chose portrayed authentic illustrations and character representations. Many of the books such as *Gustavo, the Shy Ghost* (Flavia Z. Drago), *Every Night is Pizza Night* (J. Kenji López-Alt), *I’ll Go and Come Back* (Rajani LaRocca), *I Got Rhythm* (Connie Schofield-Morrison) were written and/or illustrated by a culturally diverse person.

In addition, “Teachers, on the other hand, with different cultural and social backgrounds to their students, do not always recognise the knowledge and skills that students acquire outside of school (Gilde & Coleman, 2021, p. 673). This was evident throughout my planning of read-alouds. I learned more about my participants and their families and what their family valued. If it were not for the Funds of Knowledge surveys, I would have had to utilize my own assumptions on what types of text reflected my students instead of taking the time to learn from the direct source. Utilizing texts that meant something to the students allowed for deeper group discussions during and outside

of read-aloud time. Students learned about their peers' holiday celebrations, food culture, family activities, family dynamics and more. This was evident throughout their back and forth conversations and their choice to interact with the books during their play time.

Moreover, as I moved through the study, I found that I began to see my students as “whole” people (Moll, et al., 1992) rather than just a student and in turn created more trust amongst my students and myself. Previously, I strictly followed a curriculum that dictated what read-alouds were best for my students even though each year a new set of students brings new experiences and cultural identities. The students taught me more about their life outside of school and allowed me to put in the time to research texts that were both developmentally and culturally appropriate for them. I found read-aloud time to be more enjoyable than reading the same texts year after year. “I am having fun planning the read-alouds, I am learning about new books that are being published that reflect this year's students FoK” (journal entry, January 2024). My read-aloud instruction allowed me to practice maintaining an asset based mindset rather than deficit based thinking. I attempted to honor, validate and use the languages of the students enrolled in my classroom to the best of my ability (Taylor, 1997).

Essentially, the findings of my research closely supported the current literature around culturally responsive teaching and multicultural literature. The focus on FoK allowed me to understand my students better while creating experiences for them to understand each other on a deeper level. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), “builds bridges between experiences at home within a school context, highlighting that the curriculum taught must be relevant and central to the children’s lives” (Bennett, 2011, p.242). The planned read-alouds outside of the usual curriculum allowed me to fill in the

missing gaps for my current group of students. Further connections were built between myself, the students and their families. This was evident through conversations that I had with parents about how we connected their culture to our classroom. For example when Michael's mom was excited to share with her mother-in law who resides in Mexico all about how his classroom learned about their family's holiday celebration and highlighted it through their families photos being hung in the classroom as well as students creating their own Dia De Los Muertos decor. Students as young as three years old were engaging in conversations with their peers during both guided and unguided conversations. These conversations were highlighted throughout my teacher research journal and allowed me to reflect on my students' abilities to connect with one another when a text gave them opportunity to notice "windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors" (Bishop, 1990). My classroom is filled with mostly White individuals like myself and this research project allowed for students to be introduced to cultures and people that were different as well as similar to them. Even though many of the books highlighted characters of different ethnicities, students were able to connect with them through shared experiences. For example, *Hiking Day* (Rockwell,2018) highlights a Black family who enjoys spending time outdoors together. Even though this family shared a different background than the majority of my students they were still able to connect with the characters through their own experiences in nature with their families. The use of culturally responsive teaching combined with appropriate multicultural literature allowed our classroom community to be introduced to a variety of characters from diverse backgrounds that shared similar Funds of Knowledge to the students in our classroom.

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Appendix A

Family Funds of Knowledge Survey

We are inviting you to participate in a research survey entitled, "Family Funds of Knowledge Survey." We are inviting you because you are the parent of guardian of a child in Mrs. O'Malley's class. In order to participate in this survey, you must be a parent or guardian of a child in Mrs. O'Malley's class.

The survey may take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this paper survey. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be up to 14, which is the number of students in the class.

The purpose of the research study is to review how students and their families Funds of Knowledge can be integrated into read-aloud instruction to enhance read-aloud experiences. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand the benefit of incorporating students and their families Funds of Knowledge in our read-aloud time for future students.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Dr. Susan Browne at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification. Dr. Susan Browne: 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701, (856)-256-4500 x53830

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078-Glassboro/CMSRU. This study has been approved by the Rowan IRB, PRO-2023-367

Family Funds of Knowledge Survey

1. What is your home language? Does anyone in the home speak another language?
2. What are your family values and traditions?
3. What holidays do you celebrate in your family?
4. What are some things your family enjoys doing together?
5. Describe and family outings you may go on together. (supermarket, park, library, etc.)
6. Does your child have any responsibilities at home? Some examples are: cleaning up, brushing teeth, putting clothes in a hamper, etc.
7. Are there any educational activities you do as a family?

- 8. If your child watches TV what are their favorite movie or shows to watch?**

- 9. If your family has traveled on a vacation before, where have you traveled?**

- 10. What are some of your favorite family meals to share in your home?**

- 11. Who takes care of your children when they are not at school? No help, grandparents, babysitter, etc.**

- 12. What does a typical weekend look like in your family?**

- 13. What are the adult occupations in the household?**

Appendix B

Student Book Selection Survey

Book Selection Survey

Directions: 16 read-alouds that are either provided by the curriculum or based off of the students Funds of Knowledge (FoK) will be placed in front facing bookshelf. The books will be organized in 5 rows and 3 columns. The same books will be presented to each student, however the books will be placed in different places on the shelf for each student. Each book will be given a number and the number will be placed on the back of the book. This number will be the identifier for the surveyor.

One child at a time will be invited to the bookshelf and will be asked to choose one to be read to them. It will be noted if the text was a curriculum selected text or Funds of Knowledge selected text based off of the student family FoK survey.

| Student Initials | Text Selected | FoK Text or Curriculum Text |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
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List of Texts:

1. The Little Red Hen-Bonnie Dobkin and Subhash Vohra
2. Have a Ball!- Teaching Strategies LLC
3. A Birthday Basket for Tia- Pat Mora and Cecily Lang
4. Bounce- Dorin Cronin and Scott Menchin
5. The Three Little Pigs- Bonnie Dobkin and Subhash Bajaj
6. Just Like Josh Gibson- Angela Johnson and Beth Peck

7. **Play Ball!**- Nancy Noel Williams
8. **The Doorbell Rang**- Pat Hutchins
9. **Jabari Jumps**- Gaia Cornwall
10. **I Got the Rhythm**- Connie Schofield-Morrison and Frank Morrison
11. **Day at the Beach**- Tom Booth
12. **The Library Book**- Tom Chapin, Michael Mark and Chuck Groenink
13. **Every Night is Pizza Night**- J. Kenji Lopez-Alt and Gianna Ruggiero
14. **I'll Go and Come Back**- Rajani LaRocca and Sara Palacios
15. **Hiking Day**- Anne Rockwell and Lizzy Rockwell
16. **Gustavo the Shy Ghost**- Flavia Z. Drago

***The rest of the text will be determined based on the students' FoK survey. This survey will be completed once at the start of the study and at the end of the study after all of the books have been read.**