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Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning For Success

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR SUCCESS

Fred Hunter

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR SUCCESS

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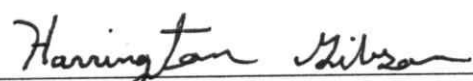
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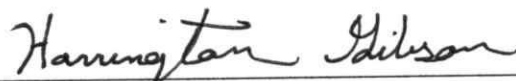
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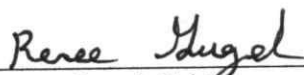
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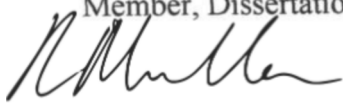
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ABSTRACT

The enduring gap between White and Black student achievement has challenged our educational systems for decades. This study evaluates an instructional pedagogy that values and embraces students' culture and experiences. Participants in this study include one teacher trained to implement culturally relevant instruction, her middle school students, and teacher leaders at the school where I served as principal during the time of the study.

The results of this study reveal the positive impact that a culturally relevant teacher yields for students and teacher. Students receiving an affirming instructional pedagogy benefit from improved academic outcomes. Teachers embracing this method of teaching are affirmed in their careers through the success of their students. Through policy, planning, and creating an environment that embraces a culturally relevant pedagogy, there is an opportunity to prepare a future generation of students to be ready for the challenges and ever-changing demands in college and careers.

PREFACE

Growing up in a diverse community with a wealth of resources, I often wondered why African American student academic achievement lags behind that of White peers. As W.E.B. DuBois once did, I pondered the question "Does the Negro need separate schools?" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 1). There may be benefits to educating African Americans in a separate school, but I believe African American students would benefit more from a diverse, culturally relevant teaching environment.

From personal experiences as a young student in the same community where I later advanced my career first as a teacher and then as an elementary school principal, I questioned the struggles our students experience. As evidenced by the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC) this community rich in diversity and resources, continued struggling to close the achievement gap between its African American and White students. From 2003 -2011, the community's one public high school never achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The 2016 IIRC revealed a 45-point gap between White and Black high school students in English-Language Arts (ELA) and an eight-point gap in mathematics achievement.

Recalling my own successes, I identified a critical piece in the instructional environment. This study was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of that critical piece - culturally-relevant teaching. I learned from interviewing and observing a master teacher whose classroom and instruction are filled with examples of cultural relevancy. I became an educator to help make a difference. This study and my greater exposure to culturally relevant teaching practices in reading-language arts will help me serve as a better instructional leader implementing this change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Educators helped shape my life, my career, and were instrumental in helping me complete this process. I acknowledge and sincerely appreciate the generous support of the teacher who participated in this study (at the request of the school, the teacher's name was changed to Dr. Bernstein to keep her identity anonymous). Without this teacher's participation, none of this work would have been possible. She is a talented educator whose students benefit from her deep understanding of culturally relevant teaching. She is one of the educators I admire. Others before her include Mrs. Johnson, the elementary school reading intervention teacher who gave me the confidence to become a better reader; Messrs. Bost and Michelin, middle school educators and coaches who supported me as a scholar and an athlete, and Mr. Brady, the high school U.S. History teacher who instilled in me an understanding about the relevance of history. I'm grateful for my Pastor John F. Hannah who models implementing CRP every Sunday and my professor who led our program, Dr. Tema Okun. I am especially grateful to my advisor, Dr. Harrington Gibson, whose guiding assistance helped sustain this research and dissertation to the conclusion.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge the continuing support of one very special educator my wife, Artishia Hunter, who gave tirelessly in the proofreading and editing process. My appreciation goes beyond being grateful for her support while I pursued this degree and this study. It extends to how much I value and appreciate her support, care, and love for me and our family. The journey would have been much more difficult without her by my side.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my kids and all the children who might benefit from educators who develop a deeper understanding about how to use culturally relevant instructional practices.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Gloria Ladson Billing introduced the term Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to describe a way of thinking and teaching to improve learning for students of color and their White counter parts. CRP "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references that impacts knowledge, skills, and attitude." It includes "creating a bridge between home and school life" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). This component is not only important to students, but also to their families. Educators who practice CRP have a high regard for others and see themselves as part of the community (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The District that is the focus of this study is viewed as part of a diverse community with a strategic plan framework that identifies high quality teaching and learning as its top priority. The principal is described as the instructional leader, the catalyst for change. In developing its strategic plan in 2013, the District identified many areas that strongly correlate with the CRP, including creating opportunities for students to build strong positive relationships with teachers and support staff as well as ensuring a connection that lets students know they are supported and encouraged by a caring adult. These are foundational components of the CRP.

At the time of this study I was the principal of a school in this diverse community. Our school served a student population in 2013 of close to 400 students. Demographically that population was 44% White, 24% Black, 19% Hispanic with the remaining students identifying as either Asian or two-or-more races. More than 35% of the children attending the school were supported with subsidized meals. The school did not suffer from high mobility or chronically truant students. Before and after-school care were available for students, and the school supported family involvement through Family Nights and Curriculum Nights as well as with traditional parent-teacher conferences. Instructional per pupil spending was reported at more than

$8,500. Understanding the support, resources, and commitment from the school community made it imperative to find a way to reach out to our struggling students. And recalling my personal experiences helped me to know that a culturally responsive environment was the missing element in our literacy instruction. While the District provides a diverse collection of books to appeal to all the students in our school library, cultivating relationships to help our students see themselves as learners who could be successful in school was an identified important first step in this process of transforming our school.

As a young student, I experienced culturally relevant teaching in one of my elementary classrooms, and it helped to change my life. The community where I grew up is racially and culturally diverse. At that time, the schools were integrated, though the elementary school I attended was attended by mostly African American and low-income students. Even as a young child, I was aware of the impact different teachers had on learning, and I began to identify the differences in my educational experiences. An intimidating or demeaning teacher left me, a struggling reader, fearful of going to her class. In the fourth grade I was tested and placed into a reading intervention group with an African American teacher who engaged her students with genuine care. She infused our lessons with interesting and meaningful literature. As we learned to decode words, we also learned about the Civil Rights Movement. As we learned to recite passages, she had us memorize parts of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream Speech" (King, 1963) to perform at a school-wide assembly. Her care extended beyond the classroom, inviting us to her home for lunch. Under the guidance of this proud Spelman College graduate, I learned I could become a better reader and I learned that teachers can care for more than just your learning – they can care for you as a person. My bond with this teacher extended well beyond my days as an elementary student. We connected as I moved into a career in education, returning to the

community where I grew up. Over the years, we served together on committees targeted toward supporting students. And our bond kept her genuine care for me as a young student in the forefront even as I approached the classroom as a teacher, and then moved into administrative positions. Just like the teachers Gloria Ladson-Billings interviewed in her book, *The Dreamkeepers*: *Successful Teachers of African American Children (Dreamkeepers)* (Ladson-Billings, 2009), my fourth grade reading teacher believed I could be successful and helped me develop the skills necessary to do so.

In middle school I learned first-hand that it takes a village to raise a child. After disclosing a troubling home situation with one of my African American teachers, a network of support was developed by three African American teachers to help resolve my family's challenges. These teachers demonstrated an interest and concern for my well-being in the classroom and for me and my family outside the classroom. They responded to my personal need with care and without judgment. They are my proof-positive that "teachers that practice culturally relevant teaching see themselves as part of the community, and they have a high regard for others" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38).

In addition to the support of a network of teachers, middle school was an experience very different from elementary school. The school, located on the other side of town from where I attended elementary school, had a more economically and racially diverse population. African American students made up about 40 percent of the school's population and most of these children came from the lowest income neighborhoods. White students, who made up about 57 percent of the student population, on the other hand primarily came from the highest income neighborhoods. The disparities and struggles were apparent. It was a challenge sometimes. But it was in middle school where I first experienced the guidance of an African American male

science teacher. This was something new– someone who looked like me was an educational professional teaching science. Watching him and hearing his story helped alter my mindset about education. Before then, my mindset was "fixed" as Carol Dweck (2008) would say.

As a young man, I believed I was a naturally gifted athlete. But as a struggling student, I believed some people were born smart and others were not. This teacher recognized me as both a student with great potential and a talented athlete. You see, this teacher was also an athlete. He played minor league baseball during the civil rights movement and shared that he often experienced discrimination as he traveled across the country with his team. His experiences helped him develop a passion for teaching and coaching. Before meeting this teacher/coach, my thinking was based on what I saw on television – Black athletes and series with White doctors and lawyers. Our textbook and curricula didn't introduce us to African American professionals other than Dr. Martin Luther King, but this teacher gave me a glimpse into a future as a scholar and an athlete. Meeting him broadened my perspective of what was possible. I heard stories of pro basketball players who worked hard to make their dreams come true. They got up early to do drills and would stay late after everyone left to improve their game. I did that same thing. I would spend hours alone at a neighborhood basketball court. I played in the cold and the rain. I was a pretty good basketball player, but I wasn't the best. I already aspired to become a pro basketball player. And then a guest speaker at the annual banquet celebrating the accomplishments of students and teams in the Fellowship of African American Men (FAAM) league encouraged us to think about a plan B. He shared the probability of making it to the National Basketball Association (NBA) compared to becoming a doctor or lawyer. He planted the seed for developing a Plan B. I may not have been ready to develop Plan B, but the seed was there.

As I moved forward in the eighth grade, I discovered that a requirement of graduation was to pass the constitution tests. And if I wanted to be eligible to play high school basketball, I had to pass those tests. I still thought my gift on the basketball court would be my ticket out of poverty. Determined not to fail; determined to make sure I got into high school so that I could move on to the next level, a friend and I teamed up and began studying for the tests we knew we had to pass. Just as I had practiced hoops every day, now my friend and I quizzed each other on the constitution. I clearly recall us quizzing and yelling and screaming answers, catching my aunt off guard when she arrived home! But once she discovered we were eagerly studying she was pleasantly surprised. Her surprise was nothing compared to how I felt on the day of the test when I discovered my studying paid off. My score of 98 out of 100 was so surprising that some people thought I may have cheated. But I knew the truth. I discovered the important life lesson that if I wanted to be a better student I would have to work as hard on my academic skills as I had been working on my basketball skills. In addition to daily drills and hours on the court, I also would have to invest time and energy to improve my scholarly talents. There was another valuable lesson learned from this experience, and that was the power of positive peer pressure. My friend and I helped each other, held each other accountable and didn't isolate ourselves. We learned together and celebrated our success.

As I look back, I can see the misconceptions shaped by teachers not trained to meet my needs. The media, the lack of being exposed to the world of possibilities, the lack of confidence, the belief that I was not smart – these are the things that led to my fixed mindset. But slowly, over time, with the support of caring teachers, mentors, and friends, my mind was being reshaped. As I moved into high school, my thirst for knowledge broadened even though I continued to struggle academically in the beginning. And then the light switch turned on and I

began not just to want to know things but to experience the joy of learning. The connections were made, and I finished high school as an honor roll student in both junior and senior years. Some of this I attribute to my own quest, some may be the privilege of having African American male mathematics teachers, three of whom were skilled mathematicians able to simplify the complex mathematical concepts and direct me and my classmates to understand how the math skills we were learning were needed and used in certain careers, brining relevance to what we were learning.

But if you think this story of success is only about African American teachers reaching me, I think it is time to talk about my experience in U.S. History class at Evanston Township High School. There, a laid-back White male teacher, an alum of the high school, who I later discovered also had been a great high school athlete, made history come alive. I was challenged to think about the lessons we learn from history and their relevance in current times. Later in life I incorporated his teaching practices as well as the model of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1995) into my own instructional practices. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, "Differentiated instruction is attending to the learning needs of a particular student or group of students rather than the more typical pattern of teaching the class as though all individuals in it were basically alike." (p. 4).

At the time of this study, I served as school principal for an elementary school in the community where I grew up. Like all other schools where I've worked, our school population is diverse, and White classmates outperform students of color. I see my role as ensuring that all students receive high quality education and acknowledge that we have a steep hill to climb to make that a reality. Culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy is the topic of this study and it is

the framework for what I believe will help make a difference for students who currently struggle to excel in our school.

Purpose

Literacy instruction in the District and school that are the subject of this study underwent a series of curricula models over the years. Research-based curriculum was adopted to address common core state standards, and annual goals were established by the District and school improvement teams to increase the percentage of students meeting/exceeding state standards. Technology was infused into classrooms, and a wealth of other resources were committed to the academic success of the more than 7,000 children attending this K-8 district located in a suburb north of Chicago. Yet, regardless of the curriculum, the resources, or the commitments to closing the achievement gap, students of color continued to lag behind their White peers.

The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, it offers an opportunity to discern how a teacher implements a culturally relevant pedagogy. Through interview and observation, I will identify the strategies used by the teacher and how these strategies impact student attitudes toward learning. In addition to these observations, the study offers an opportunity to identify how to effect change through policy and planning to achieve an environment that supports all instructional leaders in implementing the strategies of a culturally relevant pedagogy.

In my research about CRP I was able to correlate the examples I witnessed and observe the way students responded to this instructional methodology. It became obvious from my readings and observations that implementation of CRP would strengthen the school's academic profile and strengthen our school climate.

Rationale

This research study was both personal to me as an African American male and important to me as the instructional leader of the elementary school seeking to improve academic outcomes for Black students. The District's efforts to improve literacy were targeted attempts but did not yield the desired results. In reviewing components of the District's literacy program, I met with the building reading specialist. We reviewed student achievement data from various state and District assessments. All students were receiving the same high-quality instruction and had access to the same curriculum and in-school resources, but not all were succeeding as a result. The missing component was the awareness, training, and practice of culturally relevant instruction. In general, teachers are not trained to help students who come from backgrounds different than their own. The economically, ethnically and racially diverse community in which the school in this study is located is the perfect environment to adopt CRP. And the success of such practice impacts everyone in the community. Economically, local schools and their success affect housing values and desirability. In this particular community, families often express pleasure in living and working in a diverse community. But until and unless everyone is succeeding at comparable levels, this diversity is merely window dressing that is primarily benefiting one group of families over another.

Goals

Exploring the District's literacy curriculum, studying school achievement data, and understanding that our students – elementary aged students – really need the foundations that formal schooling provides to continue to succeed into high school and beyond, I looked at the school's current instructional practices. Through this research on CRP, I looked for ways this information might be implemented school-wide, districtwide, through policy and planning. One

important goal was to identify how we make every child feel welcome, valued, and become independent learners, and I determined that CRP is the missing component in preparing all students for future success. CRP has the potential to reduce the achievement gap, to improve the academic outcomes for Black and Brown students and to help these and all students build the self-esteem and skills necessary for continuing success.

As part of the study, it was necessary to observe a master teacher trained in CRP, to see her in action and seek out how best to get support to incorporate CRP practices into the school, the classroom, and the school library. Further, in looking to achieve the goal of having every child feel welcome and wanting to learn, a review of the literature, observations and interviews support the premise that CRP is the missing component in preparing all our students for future success. Everyone talks about the importance of preparing students to be college and career ready, but when they are already falling behind with their foundational literacy skills and ability in the elementary grades, the road to success becomes more and more steep. It is imperative to me as an instructional leader to be that catalyst for change that makes a difference for our students.

Research Questions

My research questions are specific to literacy instruction and address the relationship between the instructor and his or her students. Secondary questions are about the impact of CRP and what is needed to create school-wide implementation.

Primary Research Question:

- How does a teacher implement culturally relevant pedagogy?

Secondary Research Questions:

- What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on students in the class?

- What is needed to create school wide implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Conclusion

Exploring CRP through research, observation, and interviews helped determine how it can be an effective tool for improving elementary literacy instruction to help students feel welcome, supported, and secure in their ability to learn and excel. Observing a teacher using this practice helped put the research pertaining to CRP into a context on how this instructional practice empowers students.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The CRP framework was first identified in 1995 when Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the prior year she published the first edition of *Dreamkeepers,* a book specifically referencing successful teachers of African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Her work is at the foundation of this study. She, and other educational professionals, including Dr. Alfred Tatum and Geneva Gay are recognized experts who dedicated their professional careers to identify, define, and implement practices that transform teaching practices with a student-centered approach.

This section reviews literature that defines and examines both the underlying needs of students and the implementation of relevant teaching specially reflecting on the Ladson-Billings' CRP framework and the work of Geneva Gay, a leader in research centered on culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000). This literature review helped shed light upon the factors that contribute to the challenges students, and particularly African American students, face in today's classrooms where student populations have become more diverse, yet the teaching force remains mostly female and mostly White. According to the National Center for Education Statistics website (2020), the percent of White teachers in 2015-16 was 80%. The literature review helped deepen my personal understanding of how culture, race, socio-economic conditions, and other life experiences impact our students and their learning. And more importantly, it shed light on the importance of having teachers trained to see the role of literacy instruction not only to address academics, but also to be meaningful and relevant to the students (Tatum, 2009). And, finally, the literature review reminded me of the importance of ongoing training to help teachers engage and empower their students using the CRP framework.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As mentioned above, Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" in 1995 (Ladson-Billings, 1995). And in today's schools, where diversity extends beyond racial demographics to include children of various cultural backgrounds from across the globe, this culturally relevant pedagogy is an ever more important component of the classroom environment. Culturally relevant teaching is a comprehensive teaching approach that places emphasis on the needs of students from various cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences in all aspects of teaching and learning within the classroom and across the school (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is a student-centered approach that validates and affirms students of all cultures and backgrounds (Samuels, Samuels & Cook, 2017).

Ladson-Billings' (2009) study of culturally relevant pedagogy explains the importance of educators who understand how to address the diversity teachers see in their classrooms. In her ground-breaking research Ladson-Billings found that classroom teachers have the most influence over the direct outcome of a student's achievement. In *Dreamkeepers,* she examined the practice of eight experienced female teachers from diverse backgrounds: five African American and three White teachers. Based on her study, she created a framework that encompasses the idea that schools need to become culturally relevant to move beyond language and include other aspects of students' culture to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In multicultural classrooms, students need to be validated by being represented in the curriculum, the text they read, and visually represented in their school environment. Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests "schools become *culturally compatible,* in an effort to make schools more accessible to culturally diverse learners" (p. 18).

Several researchers and authors concur with and elaborate on the design for and importance of CRP in the classroom. Geneva Gay (2000), believes this culturally relevant pedagogy is imperative. At its foundation are cultural knowledge and the acceptance of performance styles of ethnically diverse students that helps make instruction more relevant. This also makes instruction more effective. Gay says that culturally relevant teaching builds meaning between home and school, uses a wide variety of instructional strategies, teaches an appreciation of culture, our own and that of others, and incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subject areas and skills taught in schools. And it has been acknowledged that race should be considered when implementing CRP. This acknowledges who children are, how they see themselves and the world includes them within the context of a child's culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Understanding that racially diverse classrooms bring "cultural capital" to a classroom and this opens discussions beyond mainstream norms (Howard, 2003). This is an important aspect when considering how to help students feel affirmed.

The work of Landsman & Lewis (2006) is cited by Ladson-Billings (2009) in defining cultural competency as:

> …helping students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture where they are likely to have the chance of improving their socioeconomic status and making informed decisions about the lives they wish to lead (p. 36).

The three essential components outlined for CRP require that students experience academic success, develop or maintain their cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Practicing successful CRP includes an understanding that: (a) students treated as

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competent are likely to demonstrate competence; (b) teachers providing instructional scaffolding for students to move from what they know to what they need to know; (c) classroom focus is on instruction; (d) teachers extend students' thinking and abilities, (e) teachers having an in-depth knowledge both of their students and the subject matter (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Greater details are provided for language arts teachers to implement CRP in literacy instruction as it is through literacy that students gain the confidence for success in most other subjects.

The literacy instruction techniques include: (a) helping students become classroom leaders, especially those whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are the most tenuous; (b) guiding students in a learning community rather than teaching in an isolated and unrelated manner; (c) legitimizing the real-life experiences of students as they become part of the "official" curriculum; (d) having teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates literature and oratory; (e) having teachers and students engaging in a collective struggle against the status quo; and (f) having teachers cognizant of themselves as political beings (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

No matter a student's culture or background, teachers must attend to students' academic needs. Teachers must create an environment that allows students to feel safe being themselves. Teachers who practice CRP provide students with curriculum that not only builds upon their previous knowledge, but also uses their culture as a vehicle for learning new information. Finally, teachers that incorporate CRP provide students with opportunities to think critically about society and act upon social inequalities (Coffey, 2008).

Gaps

Looking at the disparities faced by people of color from a sociopolitical context, Zaretta Hammond (2015) expressed that there are multiple political, social and economic policies and

practices that create these disparities in access to housing, healthcare and transportation. These factors contribute to the perceived educational performance gap for Black and brown students in our educational system. Research by Gay (2000), Haberman (2010), and Kozol (2005) show that poverty, inequities in school funding, lack of health and social services, lack of representation of minorities in education, and inadequate teacher preparation programs are factors that add to the gaps in academic achievement. Kozol went on to say:

> One of the most disheartening experiences for those who grew up in the years when Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall were alive is to visit public schools today that bear their names, or names of other honored leaders of the integration struggles that produced the temporary progress that took place in three decades after Brown, and to find how many of these schools are bastions of contemporary segregation (p. 22).

Shonkoff (as cited in Middlebrooks & Audage, 2007, p. 4), a researcher in child brain development, categorizes various levels of stress that all humans experience. He defines toxic stress as the result of adverse experiences sustained over extended periods of time. It may "disrupt early brain development, compromise the functioning of important biological systems, and lead to long-term health problems." And important to the context of the school experience, it can impact learning because it can damage the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. Another component of toxic stress is the absence of protective relationships, further supporting the need for the CRP framework in schools to help ensure the very important and necessary component of having caring adults in the lives of our children to help them recover from the damage caused by toxic stress. Schools and school leaders need to develop

collaborative relationships with parents and health care providers to adequately support the developmental needs of children.

Another phenomenon referred to in the literature is the "*demographic divide"* (Gay & Howard, 2000) meaning teachers will increasingly come into contact with students from a distinctively different background - whether it is cultural, linguistic, economic, and/or ethnic - than their own. According to the Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Educational Statistics (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010), "Among both males and females, 83 percent of public school teachers were White, seven percent each were Black or Hispanic, one percent each were Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaska Native in 2007-08."

According to Dr. Kunjufu, students rarely experience an African American male primary or intermediate teacher. "Many boys have told me that they had their first African American male teacher in ninth grade. Reminder, many of our boys are dropping out in ninth grade" (Kunjufu, 2011, p. 92). Non-White students presently comprise thirty percent of the school-age population, and it is estimated that by the turn of the century up to forty percent non-White students will make up the total population in America's classrooms (Delpit, 1995). These statistics represent a gap in minority teachers in diverse classrooms. This gap makes it more difficult to address the needs of students of color when our existing higher education programs lack significant training to prepare teachers to educate students of color. Kunjufu went on to say:

> I spend about three days per week throughout the year, working with White
> female teachers who are sincerely trying to do their very best to improve the
> educational outcomes of African American children. It's not their fault that
> they are not prepared. They were raised in White environments. They took
> few, if any, classes on Black culture, Black learning styles, Black history, in

college. They did not student teach in the inner city, but now they are teaching

there. They have received one to three days of in-service training. They were

not given a mentor, and now they have some of the most challenging African

American male students in the country. (pp.92-93)

Kafele (2009) sought to bring more clarity to the achievement gap between Black males

and their student peers. He believes educators focus on the learning gap, the reasons why

students are not being successful, rather than looking at the metrics. But in addition to this belief

in using the data, he goes on to identify four gaps that contribute to the lower achievement of

African Americans on standardized tests. He outlines four gaps that schools need to close. First

is the attitude gap defined as creating a mindset among educators and students that all students

can achieve at high levels. Educators must commit to making a difference. Students must believe

in themselves in order to achieve. The second gap identified is the relationship gap, defined as

the importance of instructional leaders from the classroom and building level building strong

positive relationships with students so that the students know they have caring adults in their

lives. Students who build strong relationships with their educators are more likely to succeed.

Third is the opportunity gap, defined as the need to create opportunities for students to

experience genuine care, commitment, and fair treatment from their educators. It is important to

recognize that not all students have access to the experiences that enrich their lives. Finally, there

is the relevance gap, that requires teachers plan and implement culturally relevant lessons. If

students cannot apply lessons to their own experiences, they are merely abstract and not relatable

for that student. Addressing these gaps in classrooms and schools improves the academic

outcomes of African American students. Addressing these gaps is not part of the traditional

teacher training program and is something that must be addressed at the school and district level

to improve outcomes for our students of color. Later in this paper I will talk about how to effect that change and why it is so important to leverage diversity as an asset as defined by Zaretta Hammond (2015).

In *Global Achievement Gap* Wagner (2014) states that America is ranked tenth among top industrial nations in the rate of college completion. His data reflects a global achievement gap between American students who are doing well as compared to those in other countries. This means African American students are much further behind when competing in the global market. To address this gap, Wagner identified seven survival skills students need to be successful in the 21st century. His seven survival skills are:

1) critical thinking and problem solving

2) collaboration across networks and leading by influence

3) agility and adaptability,

4) initiative and entrepreneurialism,

5) effective oral and written communications,

6) accessing and analyzing information, and

7) curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2008, p 65).

The components of CRP tie well with helping our students achieve these survival skills, and based upon data from Wagner's research, only about one-third of the U.S. high school students graduate ready for college. Sixty-five percent of college professors report that students are not prepared for college-level work because the students are not able to apply knowledge to new situations (Wagner, 2008). Wagner argues that the seven survival skills need to be taught in school in order for American students to be able to compete in the global market. He sees that while the world is changing, American schools are not. He views schools not so much as

"failing," but rather that American school are obsolete. The skills he identifies would easily be addressed in the context of a CRP as students who are more engaged and empowered become more adept at the skills necessary for survival.

In *Shame of a Nation*, Kozol (2005) talks about the funding gap between White suburban schools and urban public schools, while providing shocking statistics about the gap in graduation rates in America. In 48 percent of high schools in the nation's 100 largest districts, where the highest concentrations of Black and Hispanic students are enrolled, less than half of ninth graders graduate in four years. Nationwide from 1993 to 2002, the number of high schools graduating less than half their ninth-grade class in four years increased by 75 percent (Kozol, 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that in 2015-16, "the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for public high school students was eighty-four percent." However, they report only a 76 percent graduation rate for African American students. These gaps in this country's education system need to be addressed to maximize students' potential to become positive, contributing members of society. Addressing the gaps and using CRP will improve the education system and better prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Brown vs. The Board of Education was argued before the Supreme Court of the United States in 1955 four years after a class-action case was brought by the parents of Linda Brown against the Board of Education of Topeka. They claimed that schools where Black children attended were not equal to schools where White students attended and that this segregation in the classroom violated the "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This landmark Supreme Court decision provided the right for children to be integrated in American classrooms. Integration provided hope that African American children would have

access to the high-quality education that their White peers already had access to. But it is a hope that has yet to yielded consistent academic success for our students of color. African Americans sit in the same classrooms as their White counterparts, yet their academic outcomes continue to have lower academic achievement than their White peers. There is research that documents the myriad of reasons why the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites exists. There is also research indicating implementation of certain pedagogical frameworks are successfully closing gaps in achievement. CRP is being used to engage, validate, and empower minority and non-minority students. This study focuses upon a review of CRP, its success in addressing the gap between academic achievement outcomes between demographic groups, and what is needed to create a school-wide implementation plan for CRP.

Culture Impacts Student Learning

In America, the composition of classrooms is ever changing. We have moved away from homogeneous classrooms reflective of communities where ethnic diversity is lacking, to multi-ethnic classrooms indicating a shift in neighborhood demographics or local attempts to bring more diverse populations together. The school that is the subject of this study is a prime example of the kind of diversity that is more common place than any time since the landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education. As stated earlier in this paper, the school intended to be the beneficiary of this study served a student population 44% White, 24% Black, 19% Hispanic and a small percentage of Asian or students of two or more races. More than a third of the school relied upon free or reduced-price meals. All students in the classrooms experience the same curriculum and instruction, and have access to the same resources. Yet assessment data and other indicators prove that White students have generally outperformed their African American peers. Closing this gap in achievement is important not just for learning, but also as a means to helping

close gaps in earning potential, career choices, advanced educational opportunities, to name a few.

If we hope to change the academic profile for students of color, we must examine the role culture plays in education. Culture refers to an active system of social values, ways of thinking, behavioral standards, and beliefs used to provide order and meaning to our own lives as well as others (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). According to Gay (2010), "The first premise is that culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessments" (p. 8). The idea is that culture is at the center of education, which includes curriculum, instruction, administration, teachers, or performance assessments. Teachers today are faced with the challenge of educating students who come from diverse backgrounds and cultures as well as diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, diverse home experiences, etc. "Culture is the set of values, beliefs, norms, and standards held by a group of people in order to ensure the group's ability to operate" (Okun, 2010, p. 4). Culture is the standard a group of people use to operate among each other. It includes their shared values, beliefs, norms, and standards. These shared experiences affect responses and behaviors. To be able to value all students, it is important for teachers to understand how their culture and the culture of their students affect the educational process. George and Louise Spindler (1994) state:

> Teachers carry into the classroom their personal cultural background. They
> perceive students, all of whom are cultural agents, with inevitable prejudices and
> preconceptions. Students likewise come to school with personal cultural
> backgrounds that influence their perceptions of teachers and other students and
> itself. Together students and teachers construct, mostly without being conscious
> of doing it, an environment of meetings and acted in individual and group

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behaviors, of conflict and accommodation, rejections and acceptance, alienations

and withdrawals (Spindler & Spindler, p. xii).

The Spindlers suggest that teachers and students are *cultural agents.* They bring to school preconceptions, assumptions, and habits acquired by experiences gained from interaction with parents, peers, the mass media, and others. Historically, schools represent a place of cultural socialization. Students are expected to conform to certain norms in order to succeed as scholars. However, the role teachers play in facilitating students' cultural socialization is vital (Okun, 2010, p. xxiv). Tatum (2005) adds that "It is clear that from the available research that using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance" (p. 74). This ties to Ladson-Billings' (1995, 2009) belief that schools need to become culturally relevant. Educators need to recognize their role in the process and include aspects of the students' culture to overcome the negative effects of the dominant culture. And when educators recognize their role in the process, they give the students confidence and greater opportunity to recognize their role in sharing and making their own cultures part of the learning process.

Relationships

Effective teachers are known for their ability to build relational trust with their students. In the Forgotten Link, Howard (2006) noted that knowledge of practice, self, and students are essential elements that keep great teachers engaged and effective in our classrooms. That knowledge of self and students is what helps develop the important relationships that assure and reassure students that they are valued in the instructional environment and beyond. When schools prescribe to the historical factory model of schooling, teachers and students don't have the opportunity to get to know one another making students susceptible to falling through the cracks. (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

According to Tatum (2009), African American boys respond to schooling based on how they perceive they are treated and their perception of how school is going to help them in the future. Educators must find ways to monitor how African American boys feel they are being treated. And as part of the relationship building, students must see how what they are learning in class correlates with how it will benefit them in the future. Dr. Tatum's research shows that African American boys tend to more easily see the benefits of becoming an entertainer or athlete because those are the successful African Americans displayed in the media. The challenge for educators is to expose students to an array of successful African Americans who are making strides in their other professional careers as well, including exposure to and study of historical figures in order to promote a positive self-image about heritage and broaden the horizons for future generations. Even though Tatum's research is tailored for African American boys, the strategies used to help African American boys are also applicable to minority female students.

Kunjufu (2005) echoes the position about the primary career options African American boys see themselves pursuing: sports, rap, and drugs. As was true for me growing up, "unfortunately, they feel more confident pursuing a spot in the NBA than a career in science or math" (Kunjufu, 2005 p. 23). Due to the slim odds of becoming a professional athlete or rapper, African American boys find selling drugs a viable option compared to pursuing professional careers beyond athletics and entertainment. Kunjufu states, "We need to expand our boys' career horizons" (p. 23).

Like the few exceptional teachers I experienced in middle and high school, it is imperative that teachers make a conscious effort to build positive relationships with their students. In a culturally relevant classroom, the teacher is careful to demonstrate a connectedness with each of their students by working to assure each student of their individual importance

(Ladson-Billings, 2009). Students have rich cultural learning experiences outside of the classroom that help shape their identity yet, at times, these experiences are not validated or recognized in school (Tatum, 2005). To help build positive relationships, teachers need to focus on the strengths that students come to school with, not their deficiencies. African American students come to school with strengths that are often overlooked by teachers. Some of these strengths include their unique cleverness, wit, creativity, sensitivity, strong auditory skills, oral skills, visual-picture skills, and tactile/kinesthetic skills (Kunjufu, 2005, p.18). As Howard (2006) notes:

> We must know our students well, both for the purpose of building relationships that work, and also for the purpose of designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are responsive to, and honoring of, our students' actual lived experiences. There is no work more complex, and there is no work more important, than this (p. 132).

Relationships matter to all of our students, but particularly for those who may be struggling. The CRP framework addresses the practices that help professional educators build those positive, affirming relationships with their students. In her *Ready for Rigor* framework, Zaretta Hammond (2013) notes that culturally relevant teachers understand the brain is wired for connection. They work to build learning partnerships with their students. Teachers and students build trust and respect for each other through authentic connections. Once a bond of trust is created, the teacher can leverage that relationship to push students to take academic risks and achieve high standards. Culturally relevant teachers also use emotional intelligence to give feedback that students can take and act on. These teachers are doing the work to check implicit

biases, looking at and practicing social-emotional awareness and developing an awareness of the impact their interactions with students have on the way that students respond.

High Quality Instruction

In order to improve academic performance and close the achievement gaps and enhance the outcomes and futures for students of color it is imperative that teachers provide all students with high quality instruction. Dr. Alfred Tatum, who is a recognized leader in African American male literacy, developed three principles that allow teachers to connect and engage students with text. The three principles are: for educators to:

a. *reflect before we reject:* show they care and encourage students to recognize the active role they play in their own literacy development,

b. *use communications to build positive relationships* rather than being quick to send a student out of the room for immature behaviors, and

c. *aim wide* to truly understand that literacy instruction goes beyond just teaching a student how to read a book. It requires educators to be responsive to the attributes and deficits students bring into classrooms, which must not be disregarded or ignored (Tatum, 2009, p. 20).

Tatum (2009) suggests that unless we provide sufficient exposure to meaningful texts. Young minorities struggle to move past the turmoil they have experienced in their lives and educators have to re-conceptualize the role of literacy instruction to be meaningful and relevant to the students and their own experiences. With the support of educational professionals, students must be made to understand that the student also has a role and that achieving academic excellence will help guide their future. Cultural relevance in instruction requires encouraging students to relate the content within his or her own cultural context. This means that teachers

must engage enough to know more about their students. And that is what allows teachers to do what Dr. Tatum believes important to helping young minorities reconceptualize their role in literacy instruction – create a curriculum that empowers their students. Finally, educators must use a culturally responsive approach to their literacy instruction. According to Tatum, the four things teachers need to focus on are 1) academic excellence, 2) cultural, social and emotional development, 3) having authentic discussion, and 4) identifying ways to overcome obstacles.

Teachers have to integrate knowledge from the fields-education, sociology, anthropology, and social work to their instruction (Tatum, 2005). Dr. Tatum recognizes that this is beyond using curriculum to ensure student success. He says that a teachers' positive rapport with his or her students, and an understanding of the culture and communities their students come from is not enough to suggest that a teacher is culturally responsive. Student receptiveness to instructional approaches that promote excellence is one of the key indicators of culturally responsive teaching (Tatum, 2005). "Teaching is about providing students not with a textbook curriculum but with a thinking curriculum that will serve them well into adulthood in a world that may be quite different from the one we live in today" (Wagner, 2008, p. 215).

When students live in poverty or do not have the supports at home, they cannot come to school ready to learn. Children whose parents are low-wage earners with two jobs to keep a roof over their heads have not had the same at-home experiences as those who live with a stay-at-home parent or caring grandparent. A child who comes to school hungry is not ready to learn. And while subsidized meals are an important part of meeting children's needs, meeting their hunger for learning and feeling valued also play a role. Students learn best when their basic needs are met and they feel a sense of belonging. Students care about learning when their teacher meets their need for affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge (Tomlinson, 2002).

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The youngsters want to know that they are significant (affirmation). They want to know that they make a positive difference in the classroom (contribution). They seek to discover meaning and relevance (purpose). Children need consistent support to build their capacity to guide their own learning and future (power), and they need the encouragement that comes from being pushed just to a point of discomfort as they learn to solve the problems they face (challenge).

Well-trained teachers not only affirm their students and engage them in learning activities; they also have a variety of instructional techniques in their toolbox to guide their students toward a deeper understanding of text. The practice of scaffolding instruction provides a more supportive learning environment where students are met where they are academically and taught the skills needed to move forward. As students grow in their understanding, they tend to feel more comfortable as they build a trusting and valued relationship with their teacher. Thus they are more willing to ask questions, provide and receive feedback, and offer peer support.

The increased demands of Common Core Standards have encouraged the use of scaffolding to help students that are reading below grade level standard develop the skills needed to read complex grade level text. Contingency is often the first characteristic of scaffolding in that the way a teacher identifies the level of support necessary is contingent upon the student's level of performance (van de Pol,Volman, & Beishuizen (2010). This kind of engagement, its origins and elements were discussed in a 2017 study, *Interactional Scaffolding for Reading Comprehension: A Systematic Review* (Reynolds, 2017). The educator's role is to help a reader prepare by ensuring that students have prior knowledge of the subject matter and then providing some exposure to and comprehension of the vocabulary in the text. This level of teacher engagement and interaction helps teachers guide students toward a deeper understanding. The

practice of scaffolding instruction affirms students, helping them to be successful thus gaining the confidence to be partners in their learning.

School districts have obligations to the students they serve. It is their responsibility to provide the curriculum and materials that ensure high quality instruction can occur. Further, district administration has a responsibility to ensure that high-quality educators are hired to provide instructional leadership in their classrooms. And the level of teacher engagement and interaction that is necessary to forge the important relationships between teachers and students takes skills and training. These practices require a lot of our professional educators, but they are imperative because these leaders guide future generations for independent and successful adult experiences.

High Expectations

Having high expectations for all students is an effective strategy to aspire students for academic success, and it is essential if the academic profile of students of color is going to improve. Merely saying "all children can succeed" is not enough. It takes digging into the data, learning more about our students and their lives. It takes planning, communicating and implementing lessons that demonstrate the belief that all students can learn. Literacy standards are established by the state. Districts and schools have the responsibility to find meaningful ways to help all of their students meet these standards and excel in ways that prepare them for continued education or meaningful careers. There must be an expectation that all students in the class can and will learn. Teachers must see the potential of all their students while recognizing the inequalities in the educational system that has and continue to hinder African American students.

According to the Illinois Literacy Standards website (2020) grade three literacy standards include requiring students to be able to ask and answer questions, understand text, write opinion pieces that support a point of view, and demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar when writing or speaking. Students who come into the classroom at kindergarten with background knowledge and experiences that are more culturally traditional may begin their academic experience ahead of those who do not. This is why it is important to validate and welcome the experiences of all students. A classroom using the CRP instructional model will know how to speak with and reach every student in the classroom. Teachers must be able to see and speak to the endless possibilities of their students of color. Ladson- Billing added:

> If a teacher looks out at a classroom and sees the sons and daughters of slaves, how does that vision translate into her expectations for educational excellence? How can teachers who see African American students as mere descendants of slaves be expected to inspire them to educational, economic, and social levels that may even exceed their own (Ladson-Billings, 2009 pp. 35-36)

 It is the teacher's responsibility to help students see their possible selves in a positive light, and it is their responsibility to have high expectations for all of the students in the classroom.

In Dweck's study of good teachers, she notes that some teachers think that lowering standards for their students helps build self-esteem and provides students with successful experiences. However, lowering standards leads to misguided poorly educated students that feel entitled to easy work and praise. (Dweck, 2007). Tomlinson, on the other hand, notes the need for teachers to have a pervasive expectation of growth as outlined in *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classroom* (Tomlinson, Miracle & Martin, 2001). The goal of differentiated instruction is to get students to grow and teachers should be excited about the

growth of each individual learner and the growth of the whole class. "Teachers need to provide learning experiences that push students a little further and faster than is comfortable" (Tomlinson et al., p. 22). Differentiation sets high expectations by giving students multiple options for taking in the information present, processing and making sense of ideas, and having the opportunity to express what they learn, and can be an important part of the CRP.

Best Practices for Implementation

In 2011 48% of the student population in this country came from homes that are culturally and linguistically diverse (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Ten years prior, that percentage was 39%. As classrooms become more culturally diverse, so too must teaching and learning. Aceves & Orosco note that generally teachers use their own experiences as the basis for instructional practices, whereas teacher using culturally relevant teaching practices apply interactive, collaborative teaching methods, strategies that support the students' experiences and background. Whereas Zaretta Hammond, Geneva Gay and Tyrone Howard talk about the critically important role CRP plays in today's classroom. CRP requires changing the mindset of teachers, restructuring teacher attitudes about cultural experiences and diversity. Ideally this would be accomplished through teacher training programs at the university level (Gay & Howard, 2010). Unfortunately, it is not currently part of most teacher training programs. Thus, schools and districts that value the importance of engaging all of their study body must also engage in the kind of work it takes to build a school-wide or district-wide implementation.

Before diversity can be leveraged as an asset, teachers must be able to reflect upon the challenges that may interfere with their acceptance of students who are different from their own background, race, class, language, or gender (Hammond, 2015). Helping teachers arrive at this place starts with surveying teachers to gather baseline data about their beliefs about students and

their (the teachers') perceptions of how effectively they implement strategies to ensure

engagement from all of their students. Later in this study I will outline how our school gathered

data and began the process for implementation of CRP in our literacy instruction.

Conclusion

Researchers report on the value of strong student-teacher relationships, and on the

importance of embracing culture. Yet most teaching programs have not integrated these

concepts into the training teachers receive. Colleges and universities prepare their

students seeking a bachelor's degree in elementary education to understand curriculum,

to teach content, but few dig deep into the importance of cultural relevance for students.

And we know that students who are affirmed, engaged, and supported have more positive

attitudes about school which, in turn, helps our students become more self-motivated for

academic success.

It is clear from the literature that we need to think and apply different strategies to

address the learning needs of Black and brown students. A CRP framework is the missing piece,

but everything - from classroom materials and school resources, differentiated instructional

strategies, scaffolding instruction, and being aware of social injustices that impact and

historically have impacted the current situation for people of color in this country – plays a role

in creating the environment where students thrive and develop to meet the expectations that

caring adults have for them. It is important for educators to understand how economic disparities

are linked to issues of race, class, and gender. Students need to now how to think critically and

work together to address the social justice issues in their school and community. The

sociopolitical issues students are concerned about become part of their everyday curriculum as

teachers help students use their innate skills to better understand and critique their position and

context. Ladson-Billings stated, "providing opportunities for students to critique society may encourage them to change oppressive structures" (Coffey, 2008).

As reported in the various research studies, the goal is to provide equitable opportunities for all students to have access to a high-quality education in an environment where there are high expectations for the children and resources to make it happen. Teachers need to be trained on how to use a student's culture and background knowledge to learn new skills, build connections, and move students to achieve grade level success and beyond. In the next chapter you will see the methodology I used to learn how one skilled teacher implemented CRP to improve the academic performance of her diverse class.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology for the study. The research method for this study is qualitative. This means I embarked upon a systematic approach to learn more about CRP and how it might best be implemented and expanded as an instructional approach for the school and district that are the subject of this study. The research design did not measure outcomes. Rather, it is an evaluation of the CRP framework, and an exploration of how to teach students within the CRP framework, how to prepare teachers to do so, and to identify ways to create systematic change within the District.

According to Baxter, et al., (2008), the "qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources." Yin (2013) suggests you consider how to answer the "how" and "why" questions when using a qualitative case study design. As part of this study, I conducted interviews, observations, and a focus group. I reviewed curriculum, student data, and literature to glean a deeper understanding about cultural relevancy and how it can be brought into the elementary school classroom. I explored how one teacher, who was trained under Dr. Alfred Tatum, is implementing CRP in her classroom. I developed interview and focus group questions, studied school district policy and reviewed information with the school improvement team about the students in our school.

Data collection methods included interviews, classroom observation, and student focus group conversation. Data collected included interviews and classroom observation notes, written transcripts of interview(s) with the teacher and from the focus group session(s). Interviews and focus groups were sometimes less structured in order to allow for a free flow of conversation. This strategy helps the interviewee feel comfortable to tell their story. It also allowed for the

opportunity to pick up on participants' non-verbal cues. This more open-ended conversation also felt more respectful of participants, something often overlooked in these settings (Oltmann, 2016).

Participants

Dr. Kelly Bernstein was selected as the teacher to observe as part of this study. She is a veteran teacher who values equity in education. She holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership and studied under Dr. Alfred Tatum. Dr. Tatum is the Dean of the College of Education and Director of the University of Chicago Reading Clinic. He is a well-known African American educator and author who specializes in professional development and research particularly aimed at improving literacy, especially for African American boys in urban communities. In addition to serving as Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Tatum has authored or co-authored almost 70 academic papers and publications. Most of his writing is on the topic of adolescent literacy and literacy development of African American males.

Dr. Bernstein was selected because of her ethnicity, educational background, philosophy of education, and her professional experience. As previously mentioned, the majority of classroom teachers are White females; thus, for this study, I was interested in observing a White female instructor. Dr. Bernstein also was selected because she has done extensive study of culturally relevant teaching and has chosen to embed culturally relevant teaching into her instructional practices. Her school principal and fellow staff members recognize her as an excellent teacher. And as I was to learn from speaking with her students, they too recognize her as a special and talented instructor. I was excited to study her instructional practices because of her work under Dr. Tatum. It is also important to note that based on her exemplary work with Dr. Tatum, she was featured in one of his videos modeling best practices in literacy instruction for

minority students. It was a benefit for me to study Dr. Bernstein because she teaches in a diverse setting, similar to the setting in which I plan to support teachers in the implementation of culturally relevant teaching.

In addition to Dr. Bernstein, eight of her students were selected to participate as part of a focus group. In order to select students for the focus group, the research project had to be approved by the District administration. Once approval was received, forms requesting permission to participate were sent home with all of Dr. Bernstein's current students. Two weeks were given for the forms to be returned to the school signed by an adult parent/guardian allowing for student participation. A time was scheduled, with consent from the building principal, to conduct the focus group during the school day.

Data Gathering Techniques

Interviews, observations and focus groups were used to gather information to address two questions of this research study. The primary question: How does a teacher implement culturally relevant pedagogy? And, the secondary questions: What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on the students in the class? and What is needed to guide a schoolwide implementation of CRP?

The primary question was addressed through teacher interview as well as classroom observation. The interview settings allowed the participants to share experiences with me and allowed me the opportunity to look for the themes that emerged. Classroom observation afforded the opportunity to see first-hand what the CRP framework looks like in the classroom. Information for the first secondary question was gleaned primarily from the student focus group. However, some insights were taken during the classroom observation. My previous experience in classroom observation was a benefit in conducting this type of research. The classroom

observations, teacher questionnaire, student focus group as well as the literature review and my knowledge as an instructional leader all were used to inform what is needed to create a school-wide implementation of CRP and respond to the last question presented in the Introduction.

To afford us a greater opportunity to use time efficiently, I provided Dr. Bernstein with a questionnaire asking for background information, education and teaching experience (Appendix A). This questionnaire included questions about her teaching philosophy as well as how she views a culturally relevant pedagogy. It also sought to build a profile of her training and experience as an educator. And lastly it was designed to learn more about the school environment with respect to cultural relevance practices and teacher training. After reviewing the questionnaire data, two formal interviews were held, facilitated by a set of questions for the teacher to respond to (Appendix B). The questions were designed to gather information about how this teacher implements culturally relevant teaching and while I intended to adhere to the questions, I also allowed for the more open-ended conversation that Oltmann (2016) expresses as more respectful of the participants. This free flow of conversation allowed a more natural and comfortable atmosphere and gave the opportunity to interject questions throughout. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and subsequent to these formal interviews, several follow-up phone conversations occurred to seek clarification, gather additional information, or seek elaboration on the teacher's responses. The interview questions were designed to gather information on how this teacher implements culturally relevant teaching.

Three classroom observations were held. School administration approved the observations at the request of the teacher. The first classroom observation occurred at the teacher's school in the library during one of her reading and language arts block in her schedule. This observation time was planned with the teacher and students being made aware that I would

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be observing for purposes of a research study. The second and third observations were in the teacher's classroom during her reading and language arts curriculum block. The only difference was that in the third observation there was a mix of all the students from the teacher's three reading and language arts classes. For both the second and third observations, I called in the morning on the day I planned to be there to let the teacher know I was coming to observe her classroom. These observations were not scheduled in advance, allowing me the opportunity to capture the day-to-day implementation of her teaching practices. All observations were an hour long, and notes were taken during the observations. Parts of the observations were audio recorded. After the observations, follow-up phone conversations were held with the teacher to talk about the steps she took to prepare and plan for the lessons. The teacher also provided me with documentation of her planning. This facilitated my understanding of the strategies used in her lessons.

In order to document the teaching practices observed in the lessons, two domains from the Danielson's observation framework were used. The domains used were classroom environment and classroom instruction. Domain 2, Classroom Environment is comprised of five components: Creating an environment of respect and rapport; establishing a culture for learning; managing classroom procedures; managing student behavior; and organizing physical space. Domain 3 is focused on instruction and is comprised of observing: communicating with students; using questioning and discussion techniques; engaging students in learning; using assessment in instruction; and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. (Danielson, 2011). In connection with these two domains, I conducted the observations using the lens of culturally relevant teaching described by Gloria Ladson-Billings.

One student focus group was held to observe Dr. Bernstein's current students and gather feedback on the impact Dr. Bernstein's teaching style had on them. On the day of the focus group, the principal gathered the students in the cafeteria. Eight students participated. They all sat together at one long cafeteria table. The principal introduced me and briefly reminded the students why we were gathered together. To help create a welcoming and safe atmosphere for the students, I thanked them for their participation and shared information about my research and myself. I also shared my desire to learn how to better support teachers and student learning. I explained why I wanted to hear from them. I told the students that sometimes as adults we think we are doing the right thing; however, it does not have the desired impact for students and student learning as we hoped. I also expressed that they, as students, have a voice, input, and experiences that are valuable to research and practice. Next, I briefly explained how the focus groups would work and shared that if at any time they felt they no longer wanted to participate, they could be excused. Before answering the questions, each student shared his or her name and something about him or herself.

Most of the students had seen me in their teacher's classroom during the classroom observations. When I started asking questions, I tried to make sure everyone participated, and no two or three students dominated the conversation. The initial focus group questions can be found in Appendix C. However, just as I did with the teacher interviews, I tried to have a more open and free flowing conversation with the students. While I held the conversation with the students I and another adult took notes.

The qualitative data gathering techniques of interviews and observations along with the written questionnaire, interview questions and focus group questions were the evidence used to identify the themes outlined in the findings section.

Ethical Considerations

I ensured that this research project was conducted ethically. First, I approached the District administration to obtain permission to use the school, and to include the teacher and her students as part of my research project. All students were provided a consent form (Appendix D) and those participating had appropriate parent/guardian permission to be part of the focus group. Student names were kept confidential. The additional adult notetaker for the focus group provided all notes to me and these, along with my own notes, recordings and transcriptions can be accessed only by me.

All participants willingly shared their experiences in the interviews and focus group settings. The teacher's efforts to ensure positive relationships with her students begin before they walk into her class at the beginning of the year. She knows these children who enter her classroom and she is open and allows them to know her. When the teacher talks about what it takes to create a culturally relevant environment, you can hear her passion for building a brighter future for all her students. And when you see her in action in the classroom, it is inspiring. The students unequivocally expressed appreciation for their teacher and how she pushes them to dig deeper into questions. These themes are outlined in greater detail in the findings section of this study.

Data Analysis Techniques

For this study, the qualitative data analysis (QDA) was used to help analyze the data I collected. Jorgensen (1989) defines QDA as:

> A breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable piece the researcher sorts and shifts them, searching for types, classes, sequences,

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processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (p. 107).

Like Jorgensen's description of the QDA method, Charmaz (1983) analysis is done by the disassembling and reassembling occurs through the "coding" process. Charmaz states that:

Codes serve to summarize, synthesize, and sort many observations made of the data...coding becomes the fundamental means of developing the analysis.... Researchers use codes to pull together and categorize a series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they identify in the data (Charmaz, 1983, p. 112).

All data collected was coded and analyzed. This included teacher response to the questionnaire, notes and recordings from interviews, notes and recordings from classroom observations, follow-up phone calls, and notes taken during the student focus group.

Following interviews with the teacher and the focus group with the students, I reviewed my notes and recordings to identify the main ideas and themes. A set of keywords were used to code or tag the data to analyze the notes and my recollections from the interviews. For the classroom observations, I used the Danielson observation framework concentrating on the domains specific to classroom environment and instruction within the context of CRP. Again, I took notes and analyzed the notes based on keywords that were tagged from the interviews as well as themes that emerged from our conversations. Following each interview and observation with the teacher, I identified points for clarification and spoke with her via telephone to ensure that the themes that were emerging represented her perspective about a culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom.

Limitations

There were limitations to my research in that it involved only one teacher and a small group of her students. Additional observations of this and other teachers using CRP would strengthen the research. Time restraints as well as cognizance of the additional work that my study placed upon the participating teacher were important considerations in determining the number of observations and interviews. The research also was limited by the number of students able to participate in the focus group. The group size was limited to the number of students whose parent or guardian signed the appropriate form granting permission for their child to participate. It also would have been beneficial to have follow up conversations with the students who did participate, but there was no opportunity to do so. Taking students away from instructional time was one consideration for limiting the focus group to one session. Finally, the research is limited because there is a missing voice – parents whose children are engaged in literacy instruction using the CRP. Future research in the area of CRP implementation might benefit from learning how aware parents are of the shift in their child's level of engagement at school.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations listed above, enough data was collected to inform the study. Seeing the CRP put into action in ELA classes, reviewing literature from experts who define and support CRP, and speaking with students and a teacher engaged in this type of instruction informed this study. Throughout the interviews and observation process, I developed a deeper understanding about the importance and relevance of culture to help students become more engaged. I witnessed how this teacher is using scaffolding in her literacy instruction supporting the importance of ensuring that students have prior knowledge of the subject matter (Reynolds,

2017). I personally witnessed incorporation of both literacy and oratory as supported by Ladson-Billings (2009). The classroom environment was respectful, well-managed, focused on instruction, and the teacher communicated with her students in an engaging manner as expected under the Danielson framework.

In the future chapters I will discuss my finding and interpretations of my research. The findings further impact the change leadership plan.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the interview, classroom observation and survey findings in the context of implementing the CRP as defined by Ladson-Billing (1994). For this study, the school where I observed and interviewed the teacher and students is a public middle school located in one of the northern suburbs of Chicago. As an Illinois public school, most of its funding comes from local tax dollars – property taxes represent three-quarters of the District's revenues. The District adopted a balanced budget, as it had for more than a decade prior. The budget allocated almost 80% of expenditures for educational costs, which include faculty and staff salaries and benefits (District Budget-at-a-Glance 2013-2014 Fiscal Year).

The school in this study was home to 611 middle-school aged students, more than half of whom identified as low income. This means their families are living below the poverty line. In 2016 the student population was about one-quarter White, one-quarter Hispanic, more than one-third Black, with the remaining students identifying as either Asian, or two or more races. Mobility rate was below 10% but higher than the overall District's mobility. More than 70% of the educational professionals hold master's degrees or higher, the school principal has a six-year tenure, and approximately 85% of the teachers return each year.

According to Leah Shafer (2018) a good school culture starts with strong and overlapping interactions among all members of the school community. In the annual Illinois 5Essentials Survey of students and teachers, more than 90% participated from the school in this study. Collaborative teachers, which measures the level of collaboration to promote professional growth was rated as having achieved "most implementation." Collaboration among teachers in the school helps build a stronger culture within the school. Effective Leaders (which measures

whether the principals and teachers implement a shared vision for success), Ambitious Instruction (which measures the level of instructional challenge and engagement), Involved Families (which measures whether the staff build strong external relationships) rated at the next level of implementation. It appears, at least as is self-reported by teachers and students, that the culture at the school includes strong and overlapping interactions among the various stakeholders: students, teachers, families, and administrators. The only area that did not have high ratings was Supportive Environment, which measures if the school is safe, demanding, and supportive.

The school has an instructional leadership team responsible for examining student growth and instructional trends. Their established goals included improving student engagement, using formative assessment to help students meet their learning potential and deepening the school's and faculty's understanding and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. In addition to an active Parent Teacher Association, the school has a parent advisory team that works together with faculty and administration on long-term strategic planning for the future of the school. Literacy resources include an in-school library as well as digital access to hundreds of thousands of books.

The diversity of the school in this study, with its mix of cultures, races, and class, is a perfect environment for culturally responsive teaching. It was one of the reasons the school was selected for the study. However, it also was selected because of the teacher's reputation with her peers and administrators as an excellent teacher. I was honored to witness this skillful teacher who was able to demonstrate key aspects of CRP in her teaching practice.

Observation

While observing Dr. Bernstein, I highlighted the congruence in her teaching with the components of CRP, seeking to identify her relationships, instructional quality, expectations and the critical consciousness apparent in her teaching practices.

Dr. Bernstein showed me how a White middle-class educator teaching in a diverse classroom can improve the schooling experience and outcomes for students of color. Her implementation of CRP benefited each of her students, not just the students of color. Dr. Bernstein built positive relationships with each of her students, she demonstrated her high expectations for each student, she was able to bridge students' home and school life together, she challenged her students to think critically about historical and current events while pushing them to take action. Dr. Bernstein also helped students see their possible self by using culturally relevant literature. A review of Dr. Bernstein's end-of-year data evidenced how her teaching practice is yielding the intended result of higher overall academic achievement for her students.

Findings – Teacher interviews and classroom observations

Major finding: engaged students

As previously described, the data gathered are from a series of interviews and classroom observations as well as follow-up phone conversations with the teacher. As a former teacher, assistant principal, and in my current role as a school principal, I have experience with classroom observations and personal knowledge of what good teaching looks like. Observing Dr. Bernstein's class was an exercise that afforded me the opportunity to see exemplary teaching as defined by the Danielson model for classroom management and instruction. The Danielson Framework for Teaching, first published in 1996, is a research-based tool outlining the components of effective classrooms and teaching (https://danielsongroup.org). The components

of the Danielson Framework I used in the observations and interviews are from Domain 2 (see

Figure 1) and Domain 3 (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Danielson Framework for Teaching Domain 2: The Classroom Environment
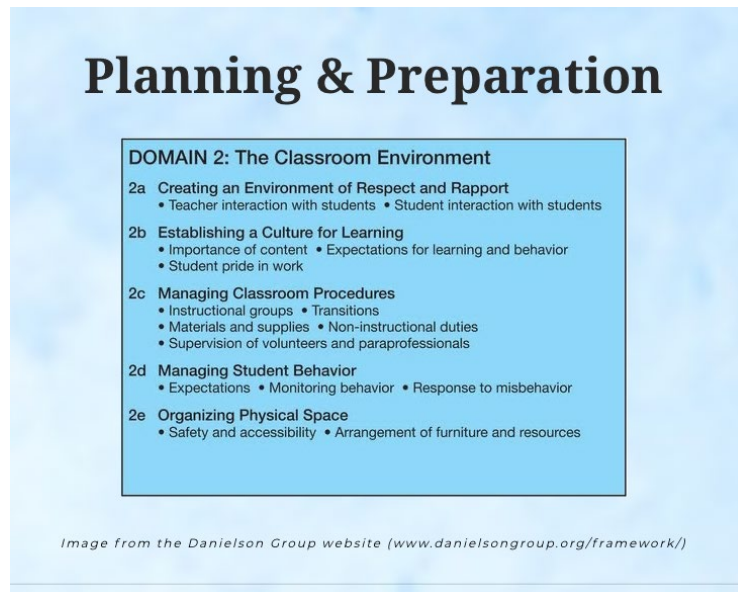
Figure 2: Danielson Framework for Teaching Domain 3: Instruction
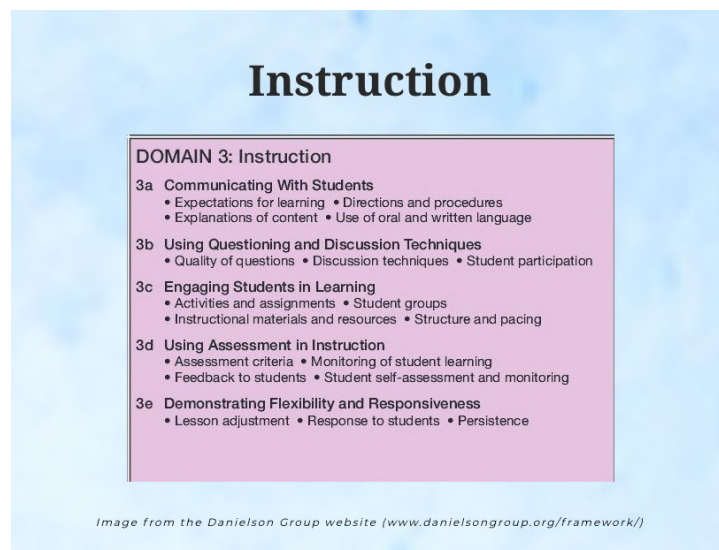
Dr. Bernstein communicated with students in ways that demonstrated her deep

understanding about how to clearly set expectations and engage the students in ways that help

them see themselves as responsible for their learning. In our interview, she explained to me that

in teaching reading comprehension and decoding skills, she uses the books her students choose. Dr. Bernstein shared that her teaching is centered around the students' interests. She asks the children what they want to read. She guides them, but asks what they want to learn about, and uses their input to help select the literature that will help them become involved in their learning. When you ask about the children's hobbies and interests and then use that information to select the books you will use in teaching comprehension and decoding, you already have a captivated audience. Dr. Bernstein said, "When students become involved with having choices about what they will learn they are more invested." And it was obvious during the classroom observations that her students are engaged, active participants in their learning.

In addressing ways to improve teaching and learning, Wagner (2008) said that students who are more engaged and empowered become more adept at the skills necessary for survival. If the goal is for every child to be college or career ready, it is imperative that classroom environments support communicating with students so that they not only understand the content presented, but also experiences strong relationships with their instructor, high expectations, high quality instruction and the critical consciousness that are all components of the CRP. Dr. Bernstein's students benefit from all of these critical components. And the student outcome data that I reviewed reveals these highly engaged students are benefiting from this instructional environment.

Component 1: Relationships

Dr. Bernstein saw and valued the skills her students brought to school. She shared her stories with her students, engaged them in conversation, and interacted with her students outside the classroom and the school. In this way she demonstrated care for each of them as a person, something that helps the students connect to her, the curriculum, and each other. I recognize that

this is an exceptional teacher, going well above and beyond what we typically expect from our teachers, but Dr. Bernstein feels that without establishing these relationships, she cannot effectively teach her students. She shared that, "Relationships are everything. I can't effectively teach someone I don't know." She, like most teachers we know, reviews the academic profile for each of her students. Additionally, she feels it is more important to "know them as a person." And she understands that relationships are a two-way street. She further explained, "They also need to know me." Evidence that she did build positive relationships came from the students themselves. One student stated, "She treats everyone like they're her own kids." Another said, "She uses her time for us."

Dr. Bernstein's understanding of her role in the classroom is reflective of Stephen Brookfield, author of *The Skillful Teacher* (1990) who states that relationships are the "affective glue" in teaching and learning.

> Trust between teacher and students is the affective glue that binds educational relationships together. Not trusting teachers has several consequences for students. They are unwilling to submit themselves to the perilous uncertainties of new learning. They avoid risk. They keep their most deeply felt concerns private. They view with cynical reserve the exhortations and instructions of teachers. (p.162)

We learn from neuroscience that the "brain feels relaxed and safest when we are connected to others that we know and trust to treat us well" (Hammond, 2015, p. 73). Gloria Ladson-Billings also states, that "culturally relevant teachers intentionally demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.72).

Other observable traits apparent in Dr. Bernstein's teaching were how she engaged students to express concerns in a variety of atmospheres based on comfort levels. Particularly

evident were her ability to excellently address teacher and student interactions outlined in Domain 2 of the Danielson Framework and achieve a classroom of engaged students as outlined in Domain 3 (Danielson Framework, 2011). She ensured that students had text they can relate to, and she treated each student with respect, acknowledging their contributions and how these contributions informed the classroom discussion. She consistently offered the opportunity for honest and candid discussion, and let her students have a voice. Her expectations for the students were apparent not only in words, but in her actions. She expressed these feelings during the interviews, and I was able to witness them in action while observing her classroom.

Dr. Bernstein helped me understand the myriad of ways she makes herself part of the students' lives. Her teaching philosophy is simple, "know the children that sit in front of you." But making that a reality means that she must develop meaningful relationships that are key to academic success. At the beginning of the school year, Dr. Bernstein sends home questions for parents to fill out to help her get to know her students. She uses the information to help her become more connected to her students. And because she understands that relationships are two-way streets, she also is willing to share her personal experiences. Just as Dr. Brene' Brown has captured audiences around the country through her understanding of the power of vulnerability in storytelling (Brown, 2010), Dr. Bernstein has captured her students. She says that academics are important, but she knows that if a student feels like you don't care enough to listen to their everyday life, "why would they want to spend 180 days giving you their best work if you didn't give them 30 minutes of your time." She added, "All in all, it's time well spent. I regain those 30 minutes twenty times over during the school year."

Component 2: High Expectations

During our interview, the teacher explained that she demonstrates high expectations for her students in a variety of ways. In interviewing and observing Dr. Bernstein, I noted her unique ability to teach the core aspects of the curriculum creatively outside the prescribed box. The curriculum offers the academic content tied to state standards. But it is the teacher who takes that curriculum and presents it in a way that helps students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success. As mentioned before, Dr. Bernstein is a talented teacher who has mastered ways to model what she expects her class to do. She demonstrated the ability to teach the core aspects of the curriculum by using students' prior knowledge to help them make connections to the new skill. When her students demonstrated a better understanding of the concept, she scales back her level of support until her students could apply the skill on their own. Dr. Bernstein was able to scaffold her instruction because of her knowledge of the curriculum and where her students were academically. And because of the relationships she has established with her students, she is able to truly understand how to segment the lesson to ensure that each student is able to do the expected work in a manner that allows them to be successful, and thus gain confidence, along the journey. She does not reduce her expectations for the students based on ability. Rather, she begins where they are and helps them see where they are expected to be at the end of the lesson.

I was very impressed by the way that she ensures her students develop the critical consciousness by ensuring that they see themselves in the texts and classroom resources because she believes that these positive influences let the students know that they too are expected to succeed. When you walk into Dr. Bernstein's classroom there are positive quotes from famous people who represent the same culture as her students. The books on the shelves are written by

and about people who look like the students she meets every day. Real life experiences are talked about and used as read aloud or writing examples. The teacher helps students move away from vocabulary that stereotypes so that the students can learn to identify many types of racism. Dr. Bernstein says that "By showing children that they are not alone in the classroom and their voice, culture, and experiences are valued they feel a sense of belonging" Her classroom resources also demonstrate the high expectations that she has for her students and represent what the experts in culturally responsive teaching believe. Tatum (2005), Kafele (2009), Gay (2000, 2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) all support the notion that educators must use a culturally responsive approach to their literacy instruction. Dr. Bernstein's classroom exemplifies this culturally responsive approach.

Component 3: High Quality Instruction

When I interviewed Dr. Bernstein, she explained how she understands each of her students and how to scaffold instruction in a way to ensure that they will not become overwhelmed. She explained how she knew if she just gave her students the assignment they would be overwhelmed. Instead she broke the assignment into manageable parts and then at the end had the students put all the parts together to meet the requirement of the assignment. She did not try to lower her expectations for the outcome, but rather met the students where they were so as not to overwhelm them into paralysis. Dr. Bernstein's pedagogy in managing the assignment for her students demonstrates a sense of rigorous instruction defined by Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, Krathwohl & Masia, 1984) as including remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Her ability to scaffold assignments starting with what the students already know is masterful.

In one of the lessons I observed, Dr. Bernstein asked her students, "How do you know she is strong and brave? Why is it important?" She asked the students to explain their answers by showing how they could support it in text. In *Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that students treated as competent will give it back. Students who are challenged to achieve and treated as competent are more likely to achieve at high levels. And when teachers do not challenge or do not make students feel competent, these students behave in the manner in which they are treated.

Dr. Bernstein's students know how she feels about them and what she expects from them. One student told me "She pushes us, she tells us to try again, she does not want us to fail. If we get something wrong, she wants us to correct our mistakes." Another student summed it up nicely by saying, "She gives us more than and helps us out. . . no one gets to slack off."

Dr. Bernstein uses literature in her classrooms that her students can relate to. She explained that a key to her teaching is knowing her students and making sure that the texts put in their hands represent them. She shared that when she learns about a student's interest and doesn't have books on the subject, she researches to find appropriate leveled books for her students on the topic of their interest. Students are more likely to read when they have topics they are interested in. She uses a wide range of materials so that the children can see themselves in examples. By doing so, connections and positive reinforcements are made.

Howard (2006) notes the importance of knowing "our students well, both for the purpose of building relationships that work, and also for the purpose of designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are responsive to, and honoring of, our students' actual lived experiences" (p. 132). The teacher I observed for this study not only has strong relationships with her students, she also teaches the curriculum in ways that enhance their knowledge in

context affording the benefit of moving away from stereotyping, to building upon what they already know, and stretches them to do their best. As mentioned before, the student academic outcomes for her students show favorable growth.

Component 4: Cultural Consciousness

Another outcome to look for when using the CRP is cultural consciousness – helping the students develop an awareness of and ability to analyze inequalities so as to develop the sense that everyone has a role in helping to change these systems.

Dr. Bernstein shared her own story with me about how as a young girl she felt she was just going through the motions in school. She described herself as disconnected from the school culture and never felt it was a place where teachers invested in students. Later, in high school, she experienced a teacher invested in her. In response, the young Dr. Bernstein developed a dedication to the teacher and the school. This was a teacher who made her feel smart, took time to get to know her, and she said at that point she decided she wanted to become a teacher. Her decision was "due to the fact that I felt I didn't have many great teachers who understood my needs. Therefore, by studying education I could come back to the community in which I grew up and help children that felt as I had when I was their age." Being aware of her aspirations since high school gave Dr. Bernstein a long time to think about what kind of teacher she wanted to be. She has demonstrated her ability to be not just a classroom teacher, but a mentor, a role model, and a leader for her students. She is part of their community. "Teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community and encourage students to do the same" (*Dreamkeepers,* p. 41)

Critical consciousness is seen as an empowering and motivational tool in the classroom setting, especially for students who traditionally have not done as well in our public schools (El-

Amin, Seider, Graves, Tamerat, Clark, Soutter, Johannsen & Malhotra, 2017). Dr. Bernstein recognizes that the students she teachers are young boys and girls. However, because of the relational trust she's established with her students and because of her deep knowledge about the community where the school is located, she also understands that these students witness and sometimes experience first-hand injustice. These kind of things that can create a negative or misguided opinion about things that can be done to change the system. The students need to see what El-Amin, et al., called the "bigger picture" (2017). Because Dr. Bernstein is aware that critical consciousness is an important part of helping youngsters excel, she makes time to let the students talk about sensitive issues, including an opportunity to relate historical events into a context seen today.

Student Focus Group Findings

While much of the time was spent with the teacher, both in interviews and during classroom observation, we know the most important considerations is how CRP is serving students. When we talk about student outcomes, we generally rely on achievement data as a source to inform achievement. And, Dr. Bernstein did share student data with me that evidences their growth. In a classroom where CRP is implemented, we also look for engaged students, motivated students, students who are validated, and have the relational trust necessary to allow them to face the challenges the curriculum presents. Just as it was remarkable to watch this excellent educator lead her class, so too was it remarkable to see the engagement of her students.

The students are validated in ways described by Ladson-Billings (2009). The teacher ensures that the students see themselves in the classroom resources from what is posted on the walls to the literacy selections available for both read aloud and silent reading. In fact, the students were quick to share that in Dr. Bernstein's class they are provided with options of books

to read. One student expressed, "I like that we get to pick the books we want to read". They liked having the option to read books they enjoyed and could relate to. This supported what I learned from the teacher during our interviews. Dr. Bernstein shared that she adds books to her classroom library every year with funds provided by her school principal and, like most teachers, from her own money. But she waits to see what her students identify as areas of interest before making the investment in additional reading material for the classroom. And the students recognized and appreciated this small accommodation.

As cited by Ladson-Billings (2009), cultural competency was defined by Landsman & Lewis (2006). They spoke to the idea of helping students to "recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices" (p. 36). During the focus group session students were able to express how this is happening – sharing the ways in which their teacher is making them more aware of their own history – some saying that they had not had this experience before. One of the female student's stated, "we read and talk about real life and she even comes to our events outside of school."

The teacher is obviously successfully helping her students feel that they are treated with competency, another of the practices of successful CRP outlined by Ladson-Billings (2009). This was evident from the way they talked about how the teacher is "pushing us" to do better. Making us "try again" rather than accepting an incorrect summation as the correct answer. I described above how the teacher scaffolded lessons (another example of a successful implementation of CRP) so that the students could use the knowledge they already had to critically address the project in steps that were ultimately assembled into the complete project. The students didn't comment on this but talked more freely about how they feel good about the work they are doing

in Dr. Bernstein's class. One student shared, "sometimes it is hard, but I feel she wants me to get to college." While another student said, "she does not give you the answers but she guides you."

The relational trust that the students experience was highlighted in one comment after another both during the focus group session and as part of the classroom observation. Students are eager to participate in class. The tone when speaking about this class and their teacher is respectful, but not reverent. Dr. Bernstein has successfully created a place where her students feel safe being themselves and believe in their ability to achieve (Kafele, 2009). During the observations I witnessed the trusting relationships that Dr. Bernstein built with her students, but to hear one of the students in the focus group say, "She treats us like we are her own kids" solidified it. Another student shared, "She cares about us."

If we measure success by engagement, willingness to participate, appreciation for the opportunity to learn, and mutual care, these students are among the most successful students I've seen in a middle school classroom.

Interpretation

Eight students and one teacher participated in the interview and observation portion of the study. Together with the students I saw during the classroom observations and focus group session, a picture was painted of the value of CRP. Both the teacher and students I interviewed believe that the way that their classroom instruction is managed is benefiting them. The teacher because she is seeing her students more engaged and participating in their learning. The students because they are experiencing the relational trust that gives them the courage to take risks. The students I interviewed and witnessed participating in class showed a satisfaction level with literacy instruction that goes beyond what I've observed in other classrooms. For example, students used positive language when facing challenges.

Most of the literature review focused on how CRP motivates students of color, but in both the classroom setting and in the student focus group I saw that across the spectrum of race and culture, all students were benefiting. Using a CRP in the classroom certainly requires a deeper commitment from the teacher – to learn more about her students and their families, to participate in community events, to identify reading materials beyond what may be recommended by the publisher of the curriculum. And as a committed educator who cares deeply about her students - their success in the classroom, and their preparation for the future – their success affirms her commitment. The teacher is experiencing success as an instructional leader, giving her an even deeper satisfaction in her career choice.

The students appreciated that they were able to read content that they found relevant. They willingly engaged in the discussions when the teacher pushed them to develop a deeper understanding of the content they were reading. I interpret their responses to my questions during the focus group as indicative of the positive experience they have in Dr. Bernstein's language-arts class and believe that the confidence it gives them will assist them in taking more risks and seeing more challenge in other content areas and grade levels. In educating our youth, nothing can replace a high-quality teacher who sets high standards, meets students where they are, provides a high quality instruction, and rewards the students for their successes. Dr. Bernstein is that kind of teacher. CRP gives her a framework in which to practice her craft that most benefits her students. Schools and school districts can learn from the experiences of the students and teacher in this study. The CRP framework can be made more widely available as a way to better reach the diverse student population that enter today's classrooms.

Judgments

In preparing for the interviews and student focus group, I identified research questions to guide the flow of communication. As an African American male whose life experiences include both institutional racism as well as caring educational professionals who believed in me, I used the questions to help build a deeper understanding of CRP in the classroom. The literature review gives insights about why and how CRP is important. Only by observing and talking with the students and teacher was I able to bring into focus what I had been reading about. For this study, the primary research question was designed to learn more about the implementation of CRP:

  o How does a teacher implement culturally relevant pedagogy?

After witnessing the teacher in her classroom and the school library with her students, interviewing and speaking with her on the telephone, I became aware of how important it is to train teachers to attain this intentional way of moving beyond their own and embracing the culture and values of others. Most of us look at life through the lens of what we personally have experienced. The National Center for Educational Statistics website reported that 80% of the teachers in the United States in 2015-16 were White. This percentage is slightly less than the percentage of White teachers in the U.S. in 2012, but the classrooms of students are ever more diverse. The school that is the subject of this study is part of a district that actively recruited minorities. They reported 77% of their professional educators were White in 2015-16, 14% Black, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Asian (Illinois School Report Card, 2015-16). Without proper training in the practices of CRP, it is more difficult for teachers to understand and respond favorably to the diversity of races and cultures they see in their classrooms. I believe that teachers are well intentioned. Most of them enter the career of teaching because they care deeply about children and education. CRP is the framework that can help teachers move beyond their

own personal experiences and develop the tools for not just understanding what their students are experiencing, but helping the students know that their culture and experiences are relevant to the classroom, instruction, and the broader society. In this way, the teachers are rewarded and experience greater satisfaction when their students are successful. Surveys and other research show that teachers satisfied with their career choice who wish to continue pursuing teaching as a career identify making a difference for students as the primary source of their satisfaction. This was reported in the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at Harvard Graduate School of Education, there is a study on why teachers stay in their chosen career ((Moore-Johnson, Harrison-Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Thus, we can conclude that finding ways for teachers to be successful with more diverse classrooms of students is one way to keep teachers satisfied and retain our highly qualified educators.

The secondary research question for this study was designed to identify the impact that CRP has on students.

- What impact does culturally relevant pedagogy have on students in the class?

My personal experience as a teacher and principal in a diverse community was useful in helping me quickly identify some of the differences in the classes that were part of this study. The students, without exception, were active participants in their learning. And their success is more than anecdotal, it is also documented in the student data profile for Ms. Bernstein's students. The students in the classes I observed all demonstrated that they are experiencing a very positive classroom environment where they feel safe about participating, courageous enough to make a mistake, and not overwhelmed by the expectations. This I attribute to the teacher's ability to scaffold instruction appropriately for students to succeed.

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Ladson-Billings (2009) says that the literacy instruction techniques include helping build leaders of students whose backgrounds are most the most tenuous. Seeing students step up and respond to discussions that dove deep into the literature was an example of this. She goes on to speak to the importance of legitimizing the students' experiences within the curriculum. Seeing the students respond to the curriculum with robust discussion and express to me during the focus group how much they valued the opportunity to have literature that they wanted supports one of the many literacy instruction techniques described in the literature (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Because CRP is a comprehensive teaching approach that is student centered (Samuels, et al, 2017), students feel affirmed and validated and respond by becoming stronger, active participants in their learning.

The final secondary question was used to frame the future for the school where I served as principal.

- What is needed to create a school-wide implementation of CRP?

Using my personal experience, my role as principal, this research and my understanding of the culture of the community and the school, framed the recommendations for change.

Recommendations

One classroom in one school where CRP is being implemented successfully is not sufficient to change outcomes for students in the community. To fully understand the impact of CRP, a first step would be to expand the study to identify all teachers in the District who currently employ this pedagogy in their literacy instruction. A next step would be a review of student data from all District classrooms where teachers are using CRP. And if the results show similar trends of success for students in these classrooms also achieving academic success then the District can plan for ways to prepare more of its teachers in the implementation of CRP. Each

school has a school improvement team. These teams can be tasked with ways to identify and replicate this kind of success schoolwide and districtwide.

The teacher who is the subject of this study works in a middle school with students who have not benefitted from an enduring exposure to the principles of CRP. Beginning CRP at the elementary grade levels offers the best way to give students the support and confidence as they matriculate. With support from the District administration and local community stakeholders, including the board of education which determines policy, a sustained effort can be undertaken to expand the implementation of CRP to benefit greater numbers of the students we are preparing for their futures.

CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

After having witnessed student success and teacher satisfaction in the classes that were the subject of this study, the findings suggest that the CRP framework is a model that may work to improve the teaching and learning process. As previously mentioned, I believe that there is merit in implementing CRP at the elementary level. It would give our students an early jump on understanding who they are, how they have a role in their own education, and it would ensure that our students' school experiences include caring adults with whom they have relational trust.

In my role as principal, I plan to lead a school committed to the pedagogy of culturally responsive teaching. The challenge is that not all teachers understand the value in building relationships and providing students with opportunities to see themselves and their life stories within the literature they read. From CRP, we learn how important it is to let children tell their stories without judgment, and this can take time and patience. As a former teacher myself, I understand the many demands upon a classroom teacher, making it difficult to keep the pace of the curriculum while giving space to scaffold lessons so that everyone achieves success, taking time to build relationships, and modeling high expectations. Studying Dr. Bernstein brought to light the way in which this can be accomplished. It takes dedicated educational professionals and sound leadership. It takes thoughtful lesson planning, and I believe with the right support and change in mindset it can happen at a school level.

When I started this study, I was thinking about how White female teachers could improve academic outcomes for students of color in my school. As principal of an elementary school in the community where I grew up, I was excited about the prospect of making a difference in my own community. I wanted my students to have better outcomes, and I wanted to affirm the

teachers who were already taking steps to embrace the critical components of a CRP in their classrooms. I decided to observe Dr. Kelly Bernstein because I was excited about the possibilities of implementing CRP at my school. The initial phase of my change leadership focus on literacy, engaging teachers to focus on the use of culturally relevant materials, engaging teachers to develop the mindset of a CRP, helping increase their knowledge of what culturally relevant teaching is and supporting them in implementing the appropriate practices. The following section will outline my change leadership approach and how I planned to bring CRP to the school where I served as principal.

Envisioning the Success To-Be

To create a vision for the future, it is important to analyze the current context, conditions, culture, and competencies. Professional development is an integral part of the planning for changing the culture of a school or a district. Fortunately, the District is committed to improving student outcomes and invests in its teachers by affording time for instructional improvement teams to meet and plan for the schools. However, leading a change that calls for school-wide or districtwide adoption of CRP requires an examination of our teaching staff and the training they already have.

Context

I had the wonderful privilege to be appointed as principal of an elementary school in the community where I grew up. The school serves a diverse population of kindergarten through fifth grade students in a community that is home to a major university. The community is as well known for its diversity as it is for its lakeshore. This small town is home to just under 75,000 residents, and is not only racially and ethnically diverse, but also has vast socio-economic diversity. There are families living below the poverty line and families living in multimillion-

dollar homes. Children from these diverse backgrounds are attending the same schools. Thus, the

school where I served as principal reflects that kind of diversity as well. One of the kindergarten

classes at the school had students from six different nationalities. About one quarter of the school

population receive free or reduced-price lunch, a statistic that mirrors the percentage of the

school's African American population.

The diversity we celebrate also presents us with challenges. In the late 60's the

community desegregated its schools by busing African American students to schools previously

serving all-White populations. To this day, African American students are bused into schools to

give the schools more diverse demographics. Unfortunately, unless personally motivated to do

so, teachers have not been trained to meet the complex needs of students from various cultural

and ethnic backgrounds and experiences across the District.

Our school is faced with an achievement gap between African American students and

their White peers. Almost 25 percent of the student population is African American, yet only 67

percent of the 3rd through 5th grade African American students met or exceeded state standards in

reading compared to 98 percent of the White students who met or exceeded those standards. My

role as school principal is to ensure all students receive a high-quality education and are prepared

to successfully advance to middle school. The goal envisioned is to raise the academic

achievement in reading for our African American students in the school. To achieve the goal, I

plan to introduce the implementation of CRP across the school. I understand the role teachers

have in helping our students become successful. Just as Dr. Bernstein and I personally

experienced the benefits of caring teachers who believed in our ability, instilled in us a drive

toward professional careers in education, I want that success for the students in the school I lead.

My life and the opportunities I have are largely because of my education. The world is changing

quickly, and many of the future careers will require students to be prepared with postsecondary education and/or specialized career training. I believe the work that we do at the elementary school level is a predictor of positive life outcomes. It's the foundation for future learning, according to a report titled *Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation* (Hernandez, 2011).   Sparks (2011) said that a student is four times less likely to graduate high school on time if they cannot read at grade level by third grade. "Add poverty to the mix, and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time than his or her proficient, wealthier peer." And it is shown that those who earn a bachelor's degree earn 50 percent more during their lifespan than those with just a high school diploma, with their unemployment rate similarly about half that of adults who complete only 12th grade. Better health conditions and better job satisfaction also are experienced more by those with a college degree (Barrow, Brock & Rouse, 2013).

To help our students succeed in the future, they must first experience success at the elementary, middle and high school grades. CRP is one of the tools that will be effective in accomplishing this success. Our professional educators and school and District administration can begin by becoming more aware of the culture and backgrounds of the students in our classrooms. And the goal is to have everyone in the school community develop a deeper understanding about cultural relevance and what it means for the students and their success.

Culture

In America, the look of our classrooms has changed. We have moved from homogeneous classrooms, reflective of communities lacking ethnic diversity, to multi-ethnic classrooms indicating a shift in school demographics. If we hope to change the academic profile of African American students, we have to examine the role culture plays in education. "Culture refers to a

dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavior standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others" (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Tatum (2005) states that, "It is clear that from the available research that using an instructional approach disconnected from students' culture creates student resistance" (p. 74).

With intentional planning and decision-making, the school has an opportunity to create an environment supportive of students' cultures, where students benefit from having relational trust with their teachers and feel connected to their learning. This change in the school culture is the most critical component of creating an environment of change. Identifying how to create this culture of change begins with learning more about what our educational professionals believe about their students, how they support them now, and what they think would happen if we adopted a more culturally relevant approach to our instruction. CRP is a proven pedagogy to engage minority students in meaningful learning experiences. With the instructional leadership team at the school, we can begin the conversations to learn more about where we are and what it will take to build a true action plan for change.

The questions we will ask our faculty and staff will be informed by what was learned from this research study. Questions may include the following:

- Do all of your students feel comfortable and self-assured enough to participate in your classroom?

- How much do you know about your students' backgrounds and experiences outside the classroom?

- Do your students see themselves in the curriculum and text that they read in your classroom?

- Are your minority students achieving at the same level as your non-minority students?

- Give an example of how you scaffold a lesson to ensure that all of the students are able to accomplish the desired outcome.

Additional data can be obtained through conversations with the families in our schools. School leadership and the instructional improvement team can use the information from our faculty and staff and our families to identify the "as-is" framework for our school as we create the foundation for the "to-be" framework that will be described in greater detail in the next chapter of this study.

Conditions

The school and District where I serve as principal have a demonstrated commitment to improving student outcomes. There is districtwide adoption of curriculum and each school has a school improvement team tasked with using data to identify student needs. Building upon these conditions, including our use of resources, is important to overall success. A complete overhaul would pressure the systems in ways that may not be most beneficial to the students, faculty or families.

Currently the District provides a yearly allocation for school library resources. There are efforts to ensure that curricula materials help our students see themselves in the curriculum. Faculty have frequent opportunities for professional development, both at the school level and as directed by the District administration for either content-area or grade-level training. Content-area training affords a unique opportunity for teachers to attain greater exposure to content across grade levels, something that helps grade-level teachers see the bigger picture about expectations for student success as they matriculate.

To enhance literacy at the school where I serve as principal, staff can use the building-level professional development hours to plan for implementation of CRP across the school. They can identify library and classroom resources to support this school-wide effort. Additionally, a communication plan will be designed so that our families are informed about our plans to better engage all our students. There are many opportunities to engage with our families, beginning with kindergarten registration and including curriculum events at the school, as well as parent-teacher conferences and ongoing communications that teachers and I have with our families throughout the year. All of these channels offer opportunities to communicate what CRP is and how its implementation will benefit all our students.

Finally, it is important to understand that a stand-alone school-level implementation is not sufficient to sustain the implementation of CRP. The conditions of our school can also benefit from District leadership who support the implementation of CRP. Districtwide teacher training can incorporate the concepts from the CRP framework to better prepare teachers to be culturally competent, to build relational trust with their students and to understand why these components of CRP are beneficial for all our students.

Competencies

Understanding what culturally relevant teaching looks like is a challenge. In my research, I did not discover a wealth of online resources demonstrating culturally relevant teaching in action. Most of the research involves small case studies. However, we know that teacher competency in CRP is not just integral to its success, it is the foundational guidance that gives us an opportunity for successful implementation and outcomes for students. For our school to build capacity in CRP, our teachers must be competent in the CRP framework. They must be proficient in promoting positive cultural, racial and ethnic identity.

As I conducted this research, another lesson that emerged is the importance of seeing CRP in action to fully understand how it is used to engage students and improve their academic outcomes. For faculty to gain that competence, in addition to professional development in the pedagogy of cultural relevance, classroom observations and conversations with teachers who have implemented CRP will be important. As previously mentioned, the District affords each school opportunities for on-site professional development. With the guidance of the instructional leadership team resources that support CRP in the classroom can be rolled out to improve our faculty's understanding and see real-life examples. Dr. Bernstein is featured in a video produced with Dr. Alfred Tatum that offers another resource that can be used during the in-school professional development. These strategies will help improve the competency at the school-wide level and can serve to set an example of what is possible at the districtwide level. As our teachers become more proficient with implementation of CRP, we expect to see improved student outcomes, especially for our African American students who currently do not achieve success on par with their White peers. This would be a launching pad for proposing the policy changes that can make CRP an integral part of the District's literacy instructional practices.

Conclusion

When students leave elementary school and matriculate to middle school unprepared to read at grade level, they need additional resources to help improve their skills and access grade-level curriculum. If students are not brought to grade level in middle school, they move on to high school lacking the skills to meet academic expectations. In some cases, a lack of academic success creates other issues, including behavioral and social difficulties. There is a correlation between low academic achievement and incarceration. There is a grave cost, not just to the child who is unprepared to be a productive member of society, but to society itself. According to the

Illinois Juvenile incarceration data, it costs taxpayers almost $130 million per year to incarcerate juveniles. That means it costs substantially more to incarcerate a youth than it does to educate that same child in a school in the District where I served as principal. Implementing CRP is one way to help address the achievement gap between Whites and minorities with the ultimate result being less money spent by taxpayers to care for incarcerated youth, and reduced need of support services to address the lack of skills and education necessary to compete in our global society. More importantly it will help to continue to reduce the number of youths who are incarcerated. According to *Juvenile Justice in Illinois: A Data Snapshot*, (Kaba, 2014), there were about 46,800 juvenile arrests in 2012, and of those arrested, 59% involved African American youth (p. 4). Yet, African American youth represent only 18% of the population. If we can use our per pupil expenditures to ensure that students stay in school and successfully achieve, we know that we not only improve the trajectory for their lives, we also improve their future opportunities for success.

The goals of this "to-be framework" are to increase faculty and staff knowledge about and implementation of CRP, a proven pedagogy to engage minorities in meaningful learning experiences, to implement the plan, and to see higher academic achievement for our struggling students. Teachers will learn about and participate in practices that demonstrate that all students can learn and that they (the teachers) hold all students to high expectations. Teachers will increase their ability to scaffold instruction for students to give them the techniques necessary to help them achieve at high levels. By implementing CRP, teachers will create more positive relationships with African American students, helping to reduce office referrals, improve student motivation and engagement, all while building student social consciousness.

Culturally relevant pedagogy lays the foundation for creating a culture of high expectations for all students, places a value on building positive and strong relationships with students and families, and provides teachers with strategies to support not only their African American students but, their diverse student population. Ladson-Billings' (2009) study explains the importance of educators understanding how to address the diversity teachers see in their classroom. In her research, Ladson-Billings found that classroom teachers have the most influence over the direct outcome of a student's achievement. Ladson-Billings' framework encompasses the idea that, "schools need to become culturally relevant to include multiple aspects of students' culture in order to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (p. 19).

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTION

Introduction

The framework used to develop my change plan is informed by lessons learned from the case study centered on the 4 C's outlined in the *Change Leadership* book (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). They are context, culture, conditions, and competencies. To get the desired results using the 4 C's, schools and districts look at where they are (as is) and establish a goal for where they want to be (to be). The 4 C's approach suggests schools think systematically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and districts. Central to this framework is improving teaching and learning, which connects with my goal of improving African American achievement in reading.

The four domains were used to develop my change plan and are explained as they exist now in the As-Is Outline (Appendix E) and as I envision them in the future in the To-Be Outline (Appendix F). The As-Is outline focuses on the school as it exists and uses this information as a foundational piece to build upon the strengths and challenges to get to where we want "to be." The goal is to achieve a change plan that ensures a culturally relevant instructional environment where all students are prepared for success now and in the future.

To lead change in the school environment, it is important to acknowledge the strengths of the environment. In the school that is the subject of this study, those strengths include a small population, a strong Instructional Improvement team at the school, an administration that supports implementation of strategies to improve achievement, school libraries and curricular materials that are selected to be representative of the students we teach. Our school has an involved parent population, we have many highly qualified teachers, and there are opportunities both districtwide and school wide for teacher training. That being said, there also are challenges. The strategies for change acknowledge the strengths and address the challenges. Some of the

challenges are inherent to the school. Others are universal, for example, cultural biases that exists around African American dialect and the belief that since most White students are successful with current teaching practices so too should our African American students be successful using those practices. The school I envision is one where all students regardless of their race perform at high levels academically and where discipline data better reflects the demographics of the school because teachers implement a culturally relevant pedagogy. From this research study as well as my personal experiences, I know that as students' self-esteem grows and they become independent learners, they will be more engaged in their own learning. This in turn will lead to a decrease in office referrals for black and brown students. It creates an environment where all of our students are viewed as valued contributing members of their classrooms, and take ownership of their learning. It will also lead to more of our black and brown students having the skills to read and write at or above grade level.

To effect change, we must be strategic and purposeful. This will begin with evaluating our teaching staff, tools, classrooms and school to identify the conditions and areas of competency in culturally relevant practices and environments. The need to build broader understanding necessitates a communication plan to help all our stakeholders understand the importance of this pedagogy for changing the trajectory of student achievement so that all of the students in our school benefit from the instructional practices.

Context

The context in this study refers to a small elementary school located in a diverse community in a suburb north of the city of Chicago. As described earlier, the school is home to just under 400 students with more than one-quarter of the students receiving subsidized meals at school. Several programs and services are offered at the school, including before and after-

school care, a number of extracurricular programs, and a host of enrichment opportunities. Specific to literacy instruction is a Smart Start program for kindergarten through third grade students and their families. The program focuses on the foundations of literacy and offers information about at-home activities that parents can do to promote literacy.

The Illinois State Report Card identifies several categories of academic success. They were: "warning" "below," "meets," or "exceeds" state standards. In 2012-13 seventy eight percent of the students at the school met or exceeded state standards in reading. Digging deeper, 92% of White students met or exceeded state standards in reading while only 56% of their African American peers did so. This is a school in a district where annual per pupil spending exceeds $8,500. All students in the school benefit from the same curriculum and instruction. They sit in classrooms with the same instructors. Yet, just as we see across the country, African American students are seriously underperforming in academic achievement as compared to their White peers.

For purposes of this research, context also refers to the skill that demands all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners and citizens in the particular aspirations, needs and concerns of the families and communities that the school or community the district serves (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). The school has numerous opportunities for students to develop these skills. For example, since the school serves kindergarten through fifth grade, there are ample opportunities for older children to be leaders at the school. Some of the strategies and actions to be taken to improve the context of our school to ensure all students get the experiences necessary to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens are outlined below.

Strategies and Actions

   To ensure the development of students to be valued and seen as contributing members of their classrooms and learning, the school would provide the supports and structures necessary to accomplish this goal. The school improvement team has begun the process for identifying an implementation plan as outlined in Appendix G, School CRP Framework and Implementation Plan. As previously mentioned, there are several supports and programs available in the school. And they are successful in serving the needs of some of our students. The school must build upon these resources through outside partnerships local community organizations to support this effort. Some of the organizations that offer an opportunity for important partnerships include the local YMCA that offers after-school care and summer programming; Youth & Opportunity United (Y.O.U), a local non-profit that provides after-school and summer programing for students in need; The Chessmen Club of the Northshore, one of the nation's oldest African American male organizations working to empower local African American youth; Family Action Network (FAN), whose mission is to connect parents, educators, and professionals through collaborative programming that educates, inspires, and positively impacts the broader community; Shorefront, a local organization that collects, preserves and educates people about African American history of Chicago's suburban Northshore; local colleges and universities including Northwestern University; and community health care providers including the Northshore University HealthSystems to provide supports that can help our students meet the challenges of the 21st century. We will provide academic, social and wellness supports with these community resources. There will be a conscience effort to ensure that service providers look like those they are serving. These partnerships will give our African American students greater

opportunity to see people who look like they do, who have experienced success in business and in life, and who have a deeper understanding of the culture of the students we are trying to reach.

The school's student activity fund, established in compliance with school board policy related to use of activity funds, will be used to provide students with access to learning experiences that help build their background knowledge and a sense of pride in their culture. Teachers will value student's culture and recognize the skills and experiences that African American students come to school with. Teachers will be provided high quality training to implement CRP. The school's distributive leadership team of teachers will promote and support the school plan to implement CRP. Students will have the skills to function in class and in their communities. They will be knowledgeable and appreciate their culture. Students will have the ability to critically think and analyze information for themselves. Students will work collaboratively with classmates, and students will advocate for social change and equality. Students will demonstrate their leadership skills in various capacities throughout the school year. Students will show concern for their peers. More African American students will participate in rigorous academic competitions in school and in the community.

Culture

Culture is defined as "shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p.102).

Many African Americans come to school with a deficit in prior experiences as compared to their White peers. More of our African American students require assistance with school meals, book fees, and other resources. Their use of language includes a vernacular that often

results in the perception of low intellect. These are the stereotypes African American students face when they come into the classroom.

I heard a speaker, at the National Council of Educating the Black Child (NCEBC) conference, who shared that African Americans are the only group that has linguistic variations associated with ignorance. That comes from the deficit paradigm of the 1700's. It blocks African Americans from being able to come up with methodologies to facilitate children's acquisition of the language in school that they must have proficiency in to function effectively in the school system. There is no "th" in French. When people hear the French speak, they admire their accent when they speak English. When a European doesn't have the "th" we call it an accent, but when African Americans do not use the "th" it is an indicator of ignorance. The correction of African American language is a poorly designed, demeaning or dehumanization. Overcoming these biases about language and intellect is an important part of helping our African American students see themselves as capable and empowered to succeed.

Strategies and Actions

Instructors of literacy must become more aware of the bias they bring into the classroom. Similar to schools across the country, the majority of the teaching force at our school is White. A comprehensive plan is necessary for implementation of CRP as a tool for helping teachers become "more cognizant of themselves as political beings…" (Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRP is not a curriculum; it is an instructional pedagogy that changes the way educators work with their students.

Literacy instruction includes both literature and oratory. With CRP, literacy techniques include "apprenticing students in a learning community rather than teaching in an isolated and unrelated manner" as well as "legitimizing the real-life experiences of students as they become

part of the 'official' curriculum…" (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The school will undergo a comprehensive approach that begins with identifying the teachers who currently practice culturally relevant practices in their classroom, to identifying the teachers most willing to adopt change and thus become school leaders to facilitate school-wide change.

Teachers will embrace learning, be open to feedback from others, and implement culturally relevant pedagogy. Building on the progress the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) in changing the culture of our school building, teachers will be willing to share strengths and weaknesses while working together to improve the areas in which they struggle. The goals are for: a) a culture where teachers and students see the students' strengths and help students make the connections to develop areas that need improvement; b) an environment where minority families feel welcomed and are actively engaged in the school community; c) a place where all parents feel valued and have a voice in what happens in our school community and are involved in the planning and implementation of school wide events; d) a school culture where teachers understand that culture and heritage are embedded in the education of students; e) an environment where teachers have an understanding of how current teaching practices reflect European culture values; f) teachers to feel comfortable differentiating learning based upon students cultural orientation; g) students to become bicultural as they learn more about other cultures as well as their own; h) students and teachers to develop a value of other cultures and ethnicity groups; i) faculty, staff, students, and parents to enjoy coming to the school; and j) students to become confident and take ownership for their own learning.

Conditions

Conditions are "the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangement of time, space, and resources" (Wagner & Kegan, 2006 p. 101). Time, space, and

resources are critical components that influence student learning. Monetary resources and time will be allocated to training teachers in the implementation of culturally relevant teaching. Monetary resources for culturally relevant professional development will be provided through both the school PTA and the District. Throughout the year the District has a series of days where students only attend half of the day and the second half of the day is for buildings to have the opportunity to address their own professional development needs. Those half-day Wednesdays will be used in our school to engage in staff development activities to increase teacher knowledge of CRP. Teachers will share practices that have been effective with minority students. The school and classroom libraries will become rich with culturally relevant materials, and the hallway and classroom art and decor will reflect the diverse student population.

Strategies and Actions

In order to increase staff's understanding of culturally relevant teaching, the school resources can be used to bring in experts to provide in-depth training on CRP during the half days when students are not in attendance. From these experiences, teachers will be given a task/practice to try in their classroom. During the next staff meeting, teachers will make their practice public by sharing with a small group of colleagues how things went in their class. In staff meetings and grade level team meetings teachers will collaborate to improve upon implementation of task/practice change. Utilizing funds from the district and school PTA, we will build each classroom library to increase culturally relevant literature. Hallways and classrooms will reflect the curriculum by displaying images to help students see their possible selves.

Competencies

Competencies refer to improving educational outcomes through professional development. Professional development is a common approach to support teachers' pedagogies; however, competencies are effectively built when professional development is focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed, and collaborative (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Teachers will know how to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and understand the critical role culture plays in student learning.

Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests schools become culturally compatible in an effort to make schools more accessible to culturally diverse learners (p. 18). Ladson-Billings outlines practices of successful culturally relevant teachers whose practices reflect the following:

1. Students treated as competent are likely to demonstrate competence.

2. Teachers provide instructional "scaffolding," for students to move from what they know to what they need to know.

3. The focus of the classroom is on instruction.

4. Teacher extends students' thinking and abilities.

5. Teachers have in-depth knowledge of both the students and the subject matter. (p. 134-136)

Ladson-Billings provides more details for language arts teachers to implement CRP in their literacy instruction. The following techniques are a part of CRP literacy instruction:

a. Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are the most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in the classrooms;

b. Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way;

c. Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the "official" curriculum;

d. Teachers and students participated in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory;

e. Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo;

f. Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings (pp. 126-128).

Most teacher training, unless it is specifically geared toward helping teachers develop culturally relevant teaching, is not designed to meet the needs of diverse learners. The teaching force in our school have solid foundational skills, but many may not be flexible enough, have the belief that all students can learn, or that the students can help positively transform what happens in the classrooms. The teachers are mostly competent in teaching the way they were taught.

Strategies and Actions

The school has a teacher retention rate over 90% and a majority of faculty hold a master's degree or higher. Working to transform their thinking in terms of teaching in a way better suited for the diverse learners in their classrooms and, helping them do that without implying they are not competent is the challenge. The question is how to move away from what we are doing without judgment or criticism of current skill sets and instead focus on what will best meet the students' needs. Based upon the way in which we were taught to teach, we know that teachers do well with educating our non-minority students. And, because their White students are successful, it is difficult to change the mindset that it should work for everyone.

To begin with, we have the proof that it is not working for everyone. Teachers develop the mindset that this is not the result of their teaching, but that of the child. As this is the current mindset, our work is to develop a culture where our building mindset helps teachers become

willing to engage in learning some different practices and apply practices proven to help minority and diverse learners achieve success. It requires an environment of trust and collegial support, and this is a faculty that has demonstrated time and again their willingness to support each other.

Conclusion

The district administered a survey that includes several questions relevant to implementing a CRP teaching framework. Teaching staff in our building responded and their responses, which identify their acceptance of certain culturally relevant values and their perception of efforts toward achieving cultural competency in the classroom. Responses are outlined in Figures 3 and 4 below:

Figure 3: *Cultural Engagement Assessment*

		How I value the statement					Frequency I perform the action				
	Cultural Engagement Assessment	1.Unimportant	2.Somewhat important	3.Usually important	4.Essential		1.Never	2.Sometimes	3.Usually	4.Always	Total
A	I display pictures, posters and other materials that reflect the cultures and ethnic backgrounds of children served	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.83% 5	79.17% 19		0.00% 0	25.00% 6	58.33% 14	16.67% 4	24
B	I ensure that the book/literacy area has pictures and storybooks that reflect the different cultures of children and families served in my classroom	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.33% 2	91.67% 22		4.35% 1	4.35% 1	43.48% 10	47.83% 11	23
C	I read a variety of books exposing children in my early childhood program or setting to various life experiences of cultures and ethnic groups other than their own	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 24		0.00% 0	12.50% 3	29.17% 7	58.33% 14	24
D	I plan trips and community outings to places where children and their families can learn about their own cultural or ethnic history as well as the history of others	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	41.67% 10	54.17% 13		13.04% 3	65.22% 15	13.04% 3	8.70% 2	23
E	I select videos, films, or other media resources reflective of diverse cultures to share with children and families served in my classroom	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	41.67% 10	54.17% 13		4.35% 1	39.13% 9	43.48% 10	13.04% 3	23
F	I am cognizant of and ensure that curricula I use include traditional holidays celebrated by the majority culture, as well as those holidays that are unique to the culturally diverse children and families served in my classroom.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.83% 5	79.17% 19		8.70% 2	8.70% 2	43.48% 10	39.13% 9	23
G	I encourage and invite parents and family members to volunteer and assist with activities in my classroom	0.00% 0	25.00% 6	25.00% 6	50.00% 12		14.29% 3	28.57% 6	28.57% 6	28.57% 6	21

Figure 4: *Teacher Engagement Assessment*

	Teacher Engagement Assessment	How I value the statement				Frequency I perform the action				
		1.Unimportant	2.Somewhat important	3.Usually important	4.Essential	1.Never	2.Sometimes	3.Usually	4.Always	Total
A	I reflect on how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, and cultural experience influence behavior, performance, and climate	0.00% 0	4.00% 1	4.00% 1	92.00% 23	0.00% 0	12.00% 3	32.00% 8	56.00% 14	25
B	I reflect on how cultural variations and nuances of communication related to verbal and nonverbal cues such as gestures, timing, walking, eye glances, dress, and presentation style	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	20.00% 5	80.00% 20	0.00% 0	16.00% 4	44.00% 11	40.00% 10	25
C	I use curriculum materials that describe historical, social, and political events from a wide range of racial, ethnic, cultural and language perspectives	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.00% 2	92.00% 23	4.17% 1	20.83% 5	37.50% 9	37.50% 9	24
D	I help each student understand his or her personal perspective, of "self" as one of many cultural perspectives	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.00% 4	84.00% 21	4.00% 1	12.00% 3	48.00% 12	36.00% 9	25
E	I provide curriculum material on social, economic, and political issues related to ethnicity, gender and exceptionality	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.00% 7	72.00% 18	4.00% 1	32.00% 8	40.00% 10	24.00% 6	25
F	I use information about students' families, culture, and communities to connect to learning activities	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	12.00% 3	88.00% 22	0.00% 0	8.00% 2	44.00% 11	48.00% 12	25
G	I use culturally relevant visual representations of all cultural groups	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32.00% 8	68.00% 17	0.00% 0	28.00% 7	44.00% 11	28.00% 7	25
H	I use culturally relevant books, pictures, and bulletin board items	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	36.00% 9	64.00% 16	0.00% 0	20.00% 5	44.00% 11	36.00% 9	25
I	I recognize culturally relevant events	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32.00% 8	68.00% 17	0.00% 0	32.00% 8	40.00% 10	28.00% 7	25
J	I use manipulatives, models, artifacts, and concrete representation of concepts	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	32.00% 8	68.00% 17	0.00% 0	24.00% 6	44.00% 11	32.00% 8	25

Based on self-assessment the teachers in our school, for the most part, acknowledge that they understand the value in the statements of what should happen in a culturally relevant classroom. However, overall few are putting into action on a regular and consistent basis the actions that support this culturally relevant teaching and learning environment. This baseline data shows the need for a change leadership plan.

In order to enact my change leadership plan, I will use Wagner's Framework for systems change (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). They state, "By attending the phases of a change process, leaders can lay the groundwork for movement along the continuum towards the greater purpose and focus, engagement, and collaboration that are vital to successful change efforts" (p. 133). In

Wagner's Framework there are three phases: preparing, envisioning and enacting. In order to prepare for this change process there are several pieces of data to collect and incorporate into the change plan. Wagner refers to data as going beyond learning, achievement, and performance data. It includes both qualitative and quantitative information directly or indirectly relevant to student success as well as information about the teaching environment and education professionals in the building.

The quantitative data that will inform this change plan includes student assessment outcomes from the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), Measure of Academic Performance (MAP), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy (ISEL). Qualitative data will include a staff survey to determine their current knowledge and understanding of CRP. Additional data will include an inventory of the school and classroom libraries to assess the number of books with stories about and featuring African Americans, as well as those written by African American authors. There will be a need to conduct focus groups or to survey minority parents and students about how current curriculum and teaching practices impact them.

As stated in the research, there are several factors that may contribute to the academic achievement gap for Black and brown students in our education system. Students in poverty often lack adequate social and health services necessary to deal with the stress, trauma, and turmoil they face in their day-to-day lives. Students who live in poverty typically attend schools with limited resources, that at times includes teachers who are not qualified to meet their needs. (Howard, 2010). The community where our school is located has a wealth of resources, but also serves a very diverse population. These resources include a nationally recognized health care

center and several community organizations that will help coordinate services and care for students and families in need.

I initially saw CRP as a way to differentiate to meet the needs of African American students who were not being successful. Ladson-Billings' (2009) three pillars weren't just about learning about African-American culture, they had the element of high expectations and academic rigor, along with helping students connect to the material which they are learning, which I thought was largely connected to differentiated instruction with the addition of culture being recognized. As I continued my research, I became more engaged in the social advocacy piece as a way to get students involved in being able to make sense of why they come to school, and to make a positive difference for their academic and social emotional well-being. Below I've highlighted goals of the change plan for our school.

Goal One: Increase teacher knowledge

The first goal is to try to increase teacher knowledge about what culturally relevant teaching is, and what it looks like in the classroom. The conversation began during a full-building faculty meeting. We reviewed and discussed school-wide data and the disparities in academic and behavioral profiles for our students, breaking it down by students' racial/ethnic backgrounds. In this way, the groundwork was being set to help staff recognize how the data was evidence of the need to do something different. At about this same time, the District created instructional leadership teams who helped with planning and implementing professional development. The school's instructional leaders met regularly and engaged in conversations with the District's director of literacy, as a team. The conversations centered around defining and understanding what culturally relevant teaching is. Educational professionals in the school began to read articles to help inform and deepen our understanding about CRP, allowing for more in-

depth conversations throughout the building and during whole-staff meetings. The literacy director and I provided articles for the faculty to read. People from the team attended workshops and overall, more staff became engaged in a willingness to grasp the concept of a CRP based upon our individual conversations during observations, other one-on-one conversations, and our collective conversations in meetings. Faculty were reading about culturally relevant teaching, watching video clips of Gloria Ladson-Billings speaking about culturally relevant teaching, looking to tie CRP into the work in which some of our staff members are familiar, specifically into the Common Core college- and career-ready standards.

The instructional leadership teams help support the vision and the learning process to get us from where we are to the place where our school is embracing and implementing CRP. In the beginning it was a struggle to get the team on board because they did not have the background knowledge or understanding about the CRP and its importance in teaching where diverse groups of students come together in the classroom. Most of the members of the team are currently on board with concept as they have increased their own knowledge about the pedagogy. In fact, as we have embraced this concept most of the professional educators in the building, including myself, have developed a better understanding about what we are trying to achieve. There's more commitment to the work than there was in the past and some of that is due to the new testing and new Common Core standards which we were learning about and preparing for as well.

The school was partnering with a local professor who had done work related to how culture impacts students' learning. Arrangements were made for this professor and others to work with the school's instructional leadership team to plan and present professional development around cultural competency and diversity training. He and another professor were scheduled to present at our library about diversity. The plan included the possibility of having

some of our elementary teachers visit Dr. Bernstein's classroom, inviting her to our school, and sharing the video work she'd done with Dr. Alfred Tatum. This was an important part of the plan because seeing how a master teacher implements this pedagogy is one way for our educational professionals to distinguish between what they are doing and what is expected in a culturally relevant learning environment. As I observed, Dr. Bernstein has a mindset that lets each of her students know how much she values them. She sees them as an integral part of their learning and her teaching.

Working with the school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), the plan is to develop professional learning opportunities to increase faculty understanding of culturally relevant teaching and how it can be implemented in their classrooms. Summer offers an opportunity to research works written by Gloria Lansing-Billings, Geneva Gay, Alfred Tatum and others who can enlighten us on culturally relevant teaching. Other expert outside consultants will be invited to staff meetings to provide professional development. We will conduct a survey of faculty's knowledge of culturally relevant teaching. We will conduct walk-throughs in the beginning of the year to see if we can identify elements of CRP taking place in the classroom. We will bring in teachers who are currently using CRP to share with the staff why they have chosen to use this method of teaching and how they implement the strategy. We will also take staff to visit schools that implement CRP.

Goal Two: Resources to support CRP implementation

The second goal is to ensure there are enough resources to support teachers' efforts to implement a CRP in their classrooms. To attain this goal, teacher libraries will be equipped with additional multicultural literature, including *Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and several articles specific to culturally relevant teaching. Another step taken to move in this direction is the

school's subscriptions to Flocabulary, a learning program that uses educational hip-hop music to engage students, increase vocabulary and improve content knowledge. Flocabulary is aligned to state and national standards and offers a variety of video clips from which teachers can select a topic, main idea, and make up a rap to teach students the main idea of a story. The songs engage students, helping to capture their attention and making it easier for them to remember and apply what they learn. Other strategies to support the goal of ensuring enough resources to help teachers support their students in developing the academic language that is critical for success include bringing in noted experts in the power of purposeful language in the classroom.

Goal Three: Changing teaching practice for improved student achievement

The third goal is to see the result of changing teacher practice. The strategies for achieving this goal include clearly identifying the practice changes that we want to see in the classroom. Teachers will be expected to go a bit more in-depth in the areas identified and we will establish a level of accountability to ensure that the things we want to see happening in the classroom are, in fact, taking place. Teachers will be encouraged to make their practice public by sharing with their colleagues, asking for and offering feedback to facilitate the process of identifying the artifacts that are evidence of achieving our goal to implement CRP across the school.

One strategy we tried is living into the idea that all students can learn and achieve. That's when the conversation around the book *Mindset* (Dweck, 2008) comes into play in trying to shift teachers' thinking based upon the research that the brain can grow and develop, and we can learn new things. A dialogue needs to be held about how this applies to our classrooms and how we interact with students to build the positive relationships that let them know we believe in them. As the building leader, I am trying to put myself in their shoes throughout this change process. I

was not taught to teach this way, and we are on this journey together because we see that what we were doing was not working for all students.

As the principal I will meet with our building reading specialist and the District's literacy director to plan how we will provide reading support to our students. This approach brings the District's leaders of reading instruction to the table to discuss and present best practice strategies to improve the academic achievement of our low performing students. A National Louis University (NLU) reading instructor will participate in the meeting to help review student reading assessment data on the DRA and the ISEL. Based on the data, we will select the students who will most benefit from an extra 30 minutes a day of guided reading support with the building's reading specialist. The reading specialist will push into the classroom where I feel teachers need support in their guided reading instruction. The reading specialist will support students while modeling quality reading instruction for the general education classroom teacher. We will select texts on the students instructional reading level and relevant to the students in the group.

Historically, students in the extended day program are low-income minority students. The plan includes discussion about the extended day reading program for 3rd-5th grade students identified by reading achievement scores, race, and socio-economic class. Teachers selected to work in the after-school programs will be those willing to implement culturally relevant teaching strategies with these small groups of students. The primary purpose of this change initiative is to address the needs of these students in an environment and with teachers who value their culture and experiences, believe in their ability to succeed, the students will feel valued and connected to their learning and we will see an improvement in their test scores. The benefit of starting with the students in the extended day program is that it will serve as evidence of the impact culturally

relevant teaching has on student achievement. The target population will receive quality instruction that values them as learners in an environment that is empowering and nurturing with curricula and materials students can relate to. These students will receive one hour of reading and writing support after school twice a week. Teachers will work with the students to find texts relevant to the students that also allow the teacher to teach the strategies needed to improve reading levels.

In identifying teachers for the extended day program, we plan to select teachers who demonstrate that they care about their students, believe their students can learn, value their students' experiences, and believe they can improve reading skills, and plan lessons that build bridges between home, school and the real world. According to Maria Wilson-Portuondo (n.d.), an educational consultant for Decision Analytics, "A caring adult can make a big difference in the educational outcomes of any child that is at risk of experiencing educational failure." The teachers selected to teach in the extended day program will be provided training in culturally relevant teaching and allowed time to collaborate with each other while preparing lessons. We will document the lesson planning process they go through to incorporate information they know about their students' learning needs and culture to create lessons relevant to their students. To provide learning opportunities for the rest of our staff, we will video record quality lessons that demonstrate different elements of culturally relevant teaching.

This process will help us build capacity while meeting the needs of some of our most at-risk students. It also provides all of our professional educators an opportunity to expand their knowledge about how to plan lessons that are culturally relevant as they learn from teachers working in the extended day program. The staff will also be able to see culturally relevant teaching in action and its impact on students by watching videos, talking with colleagues, and

continuing their reading from the resources we are bringing into the school. One of the elements that hinders the implementation of culturally relevant teaching in a school that is as diverse as ours is the pressure to align with the dominant culture's methodology of teaching, which is how our system trains educators. The extended day program allows teachers to work with a small homogeneous group of students.

Ladson-Billings (1994) reminds us that culturally appropriate social settings are also learning opportunities. Thus, one of the elements of the plan for engaging students, broadening their knowledge, and implementing CRP at our school will come from our partnership with S.O.U.L. Creations, a local organization that helps blend academic, social and cultural elements through the study of drum, dance, composition, narration, and performance. Our plan is to have S.O.U.L. Creations founder, Dr. Gilo Kwesi Logan, speak to an assembly of our third-fifth grade students about his personal experiences and testimony of more than eight years of travel to 23 countries, including North and Central America, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, and West Africa. As Dr. Logan shares what he's learned from his travels about different cultures, the presentation will bring to life the elements of diversity, social justice, and deepen the students' cultural awareness and connections.

Further, the plan will incorporate workshops facilitated for each grade beginning in third grade. Each workshop will be tailored to help students develop broader cultural awareness, knowledge and strategies in a fun and interactive manner. This is accomplished by having students participate in individual and small group activities, discussions and writing (when appropriate). In the workshops, students will learn about different cultures; learn about prejudice and stereotypes and their impact on people; develop awareness of cultural similarities and

differences among various cultures; gain knowledge about and better understand the experience of being different; and develop listening skills, critical thinking, and the art of asking questions.

Some of the early measures of our success is that the leadership change effort is demonstrating that connection to our students lives beyond the classroom. There are a host of other ways that our teachers engage with students in after-school programs, sports activities, and events. I meet with a group of boys on Saturdays using the Brainology program developed by Carol Dweck. Brainology is an online blended learning curriculum that teaches students how to develop a growth mindset. One of our first-grade teachers invited first and second grade African American students to an after-school program developed to foster a love of reading. A book drive was organized for primary grade students to ensure that they can create literature-rich home environments. Implementing change is a process, and sometimes it is difficult to accept the slow and steady pace of that process, but having these examples of how our school is embracing this change is rewarding and affirming.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The organizational chart for a public educational institution has the elected school board at its top level. A school board is elected into office by the residents of the school district and, according to the Foundational Principles of Effective Governance published by the Illinois Association of School Boards (https://iasb.com/conference-training-and-events/training/training-resources/foundational-principles-of-effective-governance), a school board's primary task is to define, express and redefine the district ends (priorities) to answer the question "who gets what benefits for how much?" These ends are often defined through goals and policy that guide leadership. The superintendent of a school district is the only person who reports directly to the school board and is responsible for identifying implementation strategies to meet the board's goals and policies. School principals and other administrative officials report to the superintendent and are responsible for implementing the strategies adopted to meet the board's goals. Thus, it is important for stakeholders to want to see change that improves the academic outcomes for the District's African American students and students in poverty. Also, it is important to have a superintendent with a vision for how to get there; building leaders and educational professionals trained to accomplish the District's goals.

Illinois Context

The State of Illinois Constitution (Article X, Education) says a "fundamental goal of the People of the State is the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities" and goes on to promise provision of an efficient system of high-quality public education. Today's highly technical world and global society demand that children are prepared from an early age to pursue continuing education and be competitive in a rapidly moving, global society.

Many efforts have been made to address the achievement gap, yet African American students across the state continue to be outperformed by their White peers. It appears that there is a perfect opportunity to place a greater focus on strategies to improve outcomes for student subgroups who traditionally struggled, including African American students, and those who are identified as living in poverty. They are entitled to the belief that their "educational development" is not limited by the perceptions of "their capacities." CRP is a tool that can help our schools accomplish the fundamental goal for Illinois education.

School District Context

In the District where I served as an elementary school principal, efforts to meet the state standards and address the achievement gap include implementation of several programs, strategies, and curricula models. Recent examples are Response to Intervention, creation of an African-Centered Curriculum program at one elementary school, a two-way English/Spanish immersion program offered at several elementary schools, Direct Instruction, various reading intervention strategies, and differentiated instructional practices. Over time, there was improvement in the achievement results for African American students and it appeared that efforts to close the achievement gap were having some success. However, as the following state data show, the District faced an even wider academic achievement gap between its African American and White students in 2013.

According to the Illinois School report card for the District (2013), African American students lagged behind their White peers in reading 21 to 23 percentage points over the period 2009 through 2012. With the change in performance-level cut scores on the 2013 ISAT, the reported gap between White and African American students widened to a forty-two-percentage point difference. In the school where I served as the instructional leader, 56% of African

American students met or exceeded the state's reading standards compared with 78% of White students. No educational professional can accept these outcomes as satisfactory.

According to the District's official Opening of Schools Report (2013-14), there were 7,667 students enrolled in the District. The overall distribution of students was 43% White, 26% African American, 19% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 8% Multi-racial and the balance is made up of American Indian or Pacific Islander. Thirty-eight percent of the children in the District were identified as low-income. According to the same year's state School Report Card, 93% of White students met or exceeded standards in reading on the ISAT while only 51% of African American and 54% of Hispanics met or exceeded state standards in reading. Further, a review of the District's out-of-school student suspension data revealed that African American and Hispanic students made up 87% of out of school suspensions compared to 9% of White students. These statistics did not vary much in the years following 2013, and clearly these data points support the need for a strategy that reaches our African American students.

The diversity of the District's student population combined with the student achievement and suspension data clearly highlight the need for a change to improve the academic profile and learning experiences for students across the District. All students in the District benefit from the same curriculum and have access to the same day-time resources at school. It is impossible to believe that many more African American students do not have the potential for a much higher achievement profile. Further it is impossible to believe that the significantly higher percentages of African American students face out of school suspensions are not a result of biases that may be overcome with a teaching force trained in the pedagogy of a culturally relevant environment.

The Common Core state standards adopted in 2010 outline the expectations for what students should learn in English language arts for each grade from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade.

The standards tell us what students should know, but not how to ensure that all of our students successfully achieve the standards outlined. Most elementary teachers are tasked with teaching all subjects from English-language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. But the changing demographics where schools serve more diverse student populations make it ever-more important for teachers to have training in CRP to meet the needs of the students who sit before them. A two-year CRP teaching program provides teachers an opportunity to learn how culture impacts learning. A focus on building teachers' cultural competence while increasing their knowledge of the historical and present day contributions of minorities, will introduce them to effective teaching strategies to educate and empower minority students. Mandating this through District policy would demonstrate the school board's and District's commitment to all learners while increasing the academic profile of the District.

To truly sustain a CRP to ensure that students not currently benefiting from the District's curriculum and instruction requires a change in the mindset at not just at one school, but across the District. Outlined below are strategies and analyses for a change that would facilitate bringing CRP into all District buildings.

Culturally Relevant Instruction Policy

The District has made serious efforts in the past to address the achievement gap. A variety of instructional programs and practices have been implemented over time to address the needs of struggling students. One strategy that has not been employed is a commitment to train teachers in the effective implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Existing policy supports this change:

Policy: Educational Philosophy and Objectives

The District's educational program *will motivate each student to learn*, foster self-discipline and *self-esteem* and provide for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding needed to realize *each student's full potential* while in school and as an adult.

To advance this purpose, *it shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent to implement an instructional program which reflects the highest standards and expectations* of the community and which has been developed in cooperation with the teaching and administrative staff.

Instruction shall be offered through a *multicultural curriculum which fosters an understanding and respect for the inherent worth of all cultures and groups* by clarifying, through objective scholarship, the historical forces, conditions and values of ethnic/cultural groups. The District shall coordinate and articulate instruction among the elementary, middle and high school grades.

The *primary measure of program effectiveness shall be the quality and quantity of student knowledge, skills and understanding.* [Emphasis added.]

The objective of the above philosophy statement is for all individual students and all student subgroups to achieve at high levels. As noted, African American students have continued to lag behind White students in the District as measured by ISAT. After a change in performance level cut scores in 2013, the gap between African American and White student achievement levels widened, thus making the case for the need to implement culturally responsive instructional practices. Following is the District's policy for teacher qualifications with recommended changes highlighted in bold and italics:

Policy: Teacher Qualifications

A teacher, as the term is used in this policy, refers to a District employee who is required to be certified under State law. The following qualifications apply:

1. Each teacher must:

a. Have a valid Illinois certificate that legally qualifies the teacher for the duties for which the teacher is employed.

b. Upon hiring, provide the District Office with a complete transcript of credits earned in institutions of higher education.

c. On or before September 1 of each year, unless otherwise provided in an applicable collective bargaining agreement, provide the District Office with a transcript of any credits earned since the date the last transcript was filed.

d. Notify the Superintendent of any change in the teacher's transcript.

2. All teachers with primary responsibility for instructing students in the core academic subject areas (science, the arts, reading or language arts, English, history, civics and government, economics, geography, foreign language, and mathematics) must be *highly qualified* for those assignments as determined by State and federal law.

The Superintendent or designee shall:

1. Monitor compliance with State and federal law requirements that teachers be appropriately certified and *highly qualified* for their assignments;

Ensure that all teachers employed by the District participate in a District-sponsored Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) training program to prepare faculty to address the mission, goals, and expected academic outcomes for all students enrolled in the District.

2. Through incentives for voluntary transfers, professional development, recruiting programs, or other effective strategies, ensure that minority students and students from low-income families are not taught at higher rates than other students by unqualified, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers; and

3. Ensure parents/guardians of students in schools receiving Title I money are notified: (a) of their right to request their students' classroom teachers' professional qualifications, and (b) whenever their child is assigned to, or has been taught for 4 or more consecutive weeks by, a teacher who is not highly qualified.

The addition of language that ensures training in CRP achieves, through District policy, a commitment to mandate CRP training for teachers across the District. That change supports the goals and objectives outlined in the District's policy 6:10 stating its educational philosophy and objectives, including "the responsibility of the Superintendent to implement an instructional program which reflects the highest standards and expectations of the community…" and which … "fosters an understanding and respect for the inherent worth of all cultures and groups by clarifying, through objective scholarship, the historical forces, conditions and values of ethnic/cultural groups" (2013).

A recent PDK/Gallup poll shows that most Americans "believe the local school board should have the greatest influence in deciding what's taught in the public schools" (Bushaw). & Calderon, 2014). This makes the call for effecting change through policy a powerful call. Adopting a policy that supports implementation of CRP training is a way for the local school board to demonstrate its commitment to identifying ways to improve achievement outcomes for all enrolled students, particularly minority student populations. It also ties in to the District's parent involvement policy that includes a commitment to "encourage parents/guardians to be

involved in their child's school and education" and "seek input from parents/guardians on significant school-related issues."(School Board Policy 8:95, 2014) Adopting a CRP policy that helps teachers learn how to utilize the backgrounds, knowledge and experiences of their students, at least broadly speaking, will also help accomplish the social goals outlined in existing policy.

Research-Based Instructional Practices and Services for Culturally Relevant Instruction

It is important to build capacity for a deeper understanding of CRP. It is, of course, not feasible to expect all teachers to receive two-year training in CRP from the point of inception of the initiative. However, as previously mentioned, the District has a schedule for professional development. Speakers are often invited to address the entire teaching community at the beginning of the school year. Inviting Dr. Alfred Tatum, Zaretta Hammond or Gloria Ladson-Billings to address the District would set a tone for the coming school year. Teachers new to the District have additional days of training in the summer prior to the opening of schools. This is an opportunity to offer an introduction to the culturally relevant instructional practices that are expected of our professional educators. Additionally, the District offers opportunities during the summer for returning teachers to participate in District-sponsored professional development specific to new initiatives. This too offers a chance to engage our teachers in the implementation of CRP.

Using funds earmarked for teacher training, the District can begin a cycle for its educators to become fully trained in CRP. We can begin by providing the program for teachers in our elementary grades and moving up through the grade levels so that as students matriculate, they continue to experience instruction in a culturally relevant environment. The effort would need to be supported by a commitment to hire teachers already trained in this pedagogy.

And, to build capacity districtwide, implementation of the strategies outlined in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015) can be used to guide teachers on how to optimize student engagement and move students from being dependent to independent learners. Ms. Hammond, a former writing teacher, has established herself as a facilitator in linking instruction, equity and literacy. She offers two-day workshops that makes a manageable integration of cultural relevant teacher training available.

At the building level, instructional leadership teams can help their schools prepare for the change by establishing book groups to read and discuss *Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 2009) or *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015). Additionally, Ms. Hammond's Ready for Rigor framework outlines expectations for creating students who are "ready for rigor and independent learning" (Hammond, 2015). These resources, along with the mandates for two-year training will serve to prepare the District to implement the research-based strategies shown to offer success for students who traditionally have not experienced that academic success.

Continued Teacher Training, Including Culturally Relevant Competencies

A policy mandating CRP training creates the opportunity for CRP to become part of the professional development planning for educators and instructional leaders in the District. It guides new hires so that teachers new to the District are trained in CRP. The implementation of a policy mandating a two-year teacher training program focused on building teachers' cultural competencies exposes teachers to broaden their understanding of (1) the history of African-American linguistics in hopes to lessen the possibility of teachers judging students as unintelligent simply because they speak a different dialect (2) African-American history and literature to help teachers gain an appreciation for the love of language found in the African-

American culture and build upon the strengths of their black students' language skills. (3) Historical struggles faced by African Americans to gain access to quality education, making it more difficult for new teachers to draw the conclusion that African American parents don't care about their child's education (Ellwood, 1990). It is also important to help teachers translate African American history into current context to avoid generalizations about a group of people and train teachers how to learn about and incorporate into their instruction information about their own students, their families, and their communities (Ellwood, 1990). "Effective teaching involves in depth knowledge of both the students and the subject matter" (Ladson-Billing, 2009, p.136). A two-year program would provide teachers with a framework to support students becoming actively engaged in addressing social justice and equity issues in society.

Educational Analysis

In the Illinois Association of School Boards Foundational Principles video on effective governance (2014) it is explained that one of the fundamental duties of a school board is to sit in trust for the entire community. They are described as "elected trustees" of the community. A foundational principle for school boards is that the board clarifies the district's purpose by defining what it seeks to achieve for its school community through policies that guide the district. Adopting a policy that supports CRP training is a way in which the local board demonstrates its value in seeking out ways to enhance achievement outcomes for all of the district's students, and particularly its minority student populations.

Primary grade education is the foundation for building a promising future. Assuring that all students have that strong foundation and are college and career ready is an imperative not just for those students who historically have succeeded but also, and perhaps more importantly, for those who traditionally have struggled. Schools across the country are looking for strategies to

address the achievement gap between African American and White students. The District where I served as elementary principal, a diverse community of more than 7,000 students, faces this same struggle.

The District's board-adopted goal for student achievement begins with a statement that the goal is to "improve academic achievement for all student subgroups." (2011) There are several measures by which the goal is assessed, including ISAT results.

The District's mission statement is *educating each student to succeed in and contribute to our global community by cultivating creativity, compassion and the pursuit of excellence* (2011). The mission is included in the philosophy statement at the beginning of the school board's policy manual (District *Philosophy,* 2011). Other policies that support this mission statement include those defining teacher qualifications, policies related to instructional goals, and policies advocating strong home-school partnerships. Expanding existing policies to support the goals and objectives outlined in this study is one way for the school board and District to demonstrate their commitment to the goals and objectives of their mission.

Before we address specific policies or policy change recommendations, it is important to define the difference between policy and procedures. Policy statements serve the purpose of guiding actions and decisions. They define and help inform the public about what is important to the institution. Thus, a policy mandating teacher training in culturally responsive practices demonstrates a commitment to achieving the mission and goals of the District, but it does not define how that commitment will be implemented. Typically, policies are broader in scope and rely upon very specific procedures for implementing and effecting the policy's intent. Procedures are the written document a District develops to relay how a policy will be implemented. Thus, a

policy may mandate CRP training. How that training is incorporated into the District's professional development plan is left to procedure.

Developing a procedure that requires incoming teachers to learn and implement CRP would greatly impact the District. It would experience improved academic achievement from all ethnic groups as teachers improve their ability to differentiate instruction to best serve each individual student in their classroom. As teachers increase their classroom libraries to reflect the demographics of the students in their classrooms, all students will be exposed to a wide range of literature and introduced to different perspectives. Underrepresented groups will see themselves reflected in literature, which helps improve engagement. Students will have the opportunity to see themselves represented in relevant and relatable curriculum. "Students' real-life experiences are legitimized because they become part of the "official" curriculum" (Ladson-Billings, 2009 p.127).

In planning lessons, teachers will have the ability to scaffold students' learning by creating a bridge between home, community, and school. "When teachers provide instructional scaffolding, students can move from what they know to what they need to know" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.134). Teachers will have the knowledge to incorporate strategies that has been proven to have a positive impact on African American students. When teachers have the mindset that all students can learn they are more committed and persistent in challenging themselves to find the right strategies to help their students learn. "When students are treated as competent, they are likely to demonstrate competence" (Ladson-Billings, 2009 p.134).

As a result of implementing this policy, we will see schools and students taking a more active role in addressing issues of social justice and equality for all. Students and staff will begin to question things like, out of school suspensions and low academic achievement among

minority students. Student voices will be heard in an effort to bring about a positive change within their schools and communities.

Economic Analysis

The local goal through CRP is to improve achievement profiles to the point that additional supports and extended day academics are no longer necessary. This would make a policy for CRP a positive budget decision for the District. But perhaps more importantly, it speaks to the future opportunities for students who traditionally fail in our public schools.

The District currently has a budget for professional development. Making CRP part of the District's professional development plan sends a message about how important we believe education is to the future of our nation - because closing the achievement gap in elementary and middle school is a first step in helping to close the poverty and education gap. Not only is education a basic right, guaranteed to our children, it is also the door to opportunity thus helping to break the cycle of poverty. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics table on earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment shows higher wages earned and lower unemployment rates for those with advanced degrees (2013). If we fail to help our students achieve, we fail them and future generations. Fewer African Americans hold advanced degrees and higher percentages of them live in poverty than their White counterparts. According to 2013 Census data, 195,000 African Americans hold doctoral degrees compared to 2,747,000 White Americans. Fifteen percent of the people in the United States live below the poverty standard. This includes 27% of the African American population and just under 10% of the non-Hispanic White population. (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor & Smith, 2013).

Social Analysis

Strong academic achievement outcomes for students, and particularly the need to improve the profile for underachieving students, are more than local issues. In the Children's Defense Fund Portrait of Inequality report (2012), they highlight a lack of quality education among contributing factors to the "devastating *Cradle to Prison Pipeline.*" And, as noted above, African Americans make up the preponderance of the prison population. Therefore, state and local government must be made to understand the connection between culturally responsive pedagogy to academic learning. As this becomes more clear, advocacy can be generated for greater buy-in from state or national boards to support teacher training beyond the grade-level curriculum standards that teachers must impart, and include CRP policies as the way to accomplish the goal of improved academic learning for all of the students.

Research shows that many teacher preparation programs view student diversity as a problem rather than a resource, that some teacher conceptions of diversity are individualistic, focusing on personality factors like motivation and ignoring contextual factors like ethnicity (Paine, 1989). CRP reduces the incongruity between home and school (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This pedagogy influences perceptions and enhances the practice of professional educators so that their teaching styles and teacher language – verbal and otherwise – create an environment that supports all of their students. With CRP, teachers learn to examine their practice, recognize the value of their student's knowledge and experiences, become more self-aware, and gain a culturally responsive literacy to carry into their day-to-day teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teacher training in the District is designed to keep teachers current with content curriculum and implementation of the District's instructional initiatives. While CRP is more a

philosophy than an instructional initiative, one could argue that because its objective is improved achievement it is a necessary component of any instructional initiative.

Political Analysis

Culturally relevant pedagogy includes establishing a strong home-to-school bridge. (Ladson-Billings 2009) This has been recognized, for example, by the Connecticut State Department of Education. That state adopted a position statement on culturally responsive education in May of 2011. Their Culturally Responsive Education Handbook (2012) outlines parent and family engagement through cultural competence, cultural responsiveness and cultural reciprocity (p. 72). Policies that support implementation CRP can have a positive unintended consequence of promoting stronger home-to-school relationships by improving communication in ways that remove some of the behaviors or practices that serve as barriers and interfere with meaningful family engagement with their schools and their child's teacher. As noted in the Analysis of Need section, the U.S. Department of Education requires districts to adopt a parent compact with its families in Title 1 schools.

Legal Analysis

School districts are governed by an elected board that, among other things, are tasked with approving school board policy. Policy is one way that the board advises stakeholders about the district's priorities. School district administration are then tasked with identifying the resources (human resources, programs and curricula) necessary to achieve the priorities set out through policy. The Illinois State Board of Education, by way of the Illinoi School Code, has authority to issue or endorse license requirements for teachers and identify the requirements and qualifications. Districts can require more, as would be the case should the District decide to adopt a policy requiring its teachers be trained in CRP. The legal authority that allows the

District to proceed with an action plan to implement CRP is supported by several existing Board-adopted policies. These include the following:

- *Educational Philosophy and Objectives* that includes a commitment to instruction offered through a "multicultural curriculum which fosters an understanding and respect for the inherent worth of all cultures and groups by clarifying, through objective scholarship, the historical forces, conditions and values of ethnic/cultural groups."

- *Curriculum Development* policy that gives the Superintendent authority to recommend curriculum aligned with the District's "educational philosophy and goals" as well as ensuring continued "evaluation of the curriculum and instructional program." This policy further supports the concept of seeking to ensure culturally relevant classroom resources by its provision that curriculum review includes a coordination with the process for "evaluating the instructional programs and materials." Lastly, this policy would allow for implementation of CRP to begin at one school or one grade insofar as it gives the Superintendent authority to recommend "experimental educational programs and/or pilot projects."

- *Curriculum Content* policy supports CRP in its mandate that curriculum include "Black History…as well as the struggles and contributions of African-Americans."

- *Title 1 Programs* policy supports instruction that includes parent involvement and a parent-involvement compact for schools receiving Title I funds.

- *Instructional Materials* policy supports implementation of CRP in its call for ensuring that the District classrooms and media centers have varied instructional materials to provide a "quality, appropriate learning experience for all students" that "contribute to the sense of the worth of people, regardless of sex, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin…"

- *Library Media Program* policy invites faculty to recommend additions to the library media center collections.

- *Field Trips and Recreation Class Trips* policy can be used to support CRP through its provision that field trips must offer an "educational value."

- *Community Resource Persons and Volunteers* policy encourages school use of volunteers to, among other things, be used to "enhance students' educational attainment." This policy affords an opportunity for some of the community partnerships described in this study.

Existing policy offers many ways to accomplish the principles of a culturally responsive teaching environment that reshapes curriculum, sees the teacher as the facilitator, offers student-centered approach to learning within the context of culture, and communicates high expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Perhaps the most startling concern is the number of undereducated adults who make up the nation's prison population. The disproportionality seen in prison populations is like the disproportionality seen in suspension and discipline data for schools. African Americans make up approximately 26% of the student population in the District but account for more than 75% of office referrals. In this country, African Americans are more likely to be incarcerated than

Whites. (Pettit, 2012) The Children's Defense Fund *Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign* predicts that one in three African American boys born in 2001 are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime. This is a rate more than five times greater than what is predicted for White males. (Children's Defense Fund 2012)   Reducing prison populations has both a social and economic impact.

Finally, let us examine the moral and ethical issues embedded in the goal for a policy to implement CRP training. According to Diffen.com, ethics define how things are according to the rules and morals define how things should work according to an individual's ideals and principles. Thus, in this case, ethics are the standards set by the district whereas morals are the personal principles that we adopt. Ethically speaking then, the policy to implement CRP training to embed this belief system into the classroom and school environment is supported by the State of Illinois Constitution (Article X, Education). As noted earlier, the state constitutes makes a fundamental goal of the state to address the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities. The ISAT results demonstrate that for at least one specific population of the District's students, this fundamental goal is not being met. And this is where the moral imperative lies.

Historically, schools have been a place of cultural socialization; therefore, teachers play a viable role in facilitating students' cultural socialization (Okun, 2010, p. xxiv). Learning happens through the lens of one's culture. Because culture influences students' attitudes, values, and behavior, educators must take into account one's culture when developing the instructional process (Gay, 2002). When students are taught within a context of their personal experiences and cultural frames of references, research suggest they learn more effectively and are more engaged in learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

After my first couple of years of teaching in a racially diverse middle school, I realized that some of the strategies I used in my class were not taught in my teacher preparation program. When speaking with other colleagues who struggled with or were successful with their students, they too shared that they did not get the necessary training from their teacher preparation programs. I realized I was using strategies that teachers who had a major impact on my life used when teaching me. In *Dreamkeepers,* Gloria Ladson- Billings (2009) states that many teachers complete their teacher education programs without learning about culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). With the cultural and racial diversity in today's classrooms and the need to close the opportunity and achievement gap between White and African American students, there is a need for teachers to implement CRP. I am recommending our District adopt a policy that requires all new teachers to be trained in implementing CRP. The implementation of CRP would strengthen the academic profile and social climate of our schools. As cited by Geneva Gay in her work published by the Journal of Teacher Education (2002)

> Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It assumes that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (p. 106)

The District has policies that demonstrate its commitment to ensure that its curricula depict cultural diversity in an unbiased way. Beyond materials in the classroom, it is important that those who teach the curriculum also are trained to ensure that they can embrace their students' backgrounds and culture in an unbiased way. Policies help ensure that the school board

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and administration keep a focused eye on an area deemed important. Having assessments to measure implementation and impact helps to keep teachers and principals focused on improving and implementing CRP. As the saying goes, "what gets measured gets done." The following chapter will look at the importance of assessments.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) reduces the incongruity between home and school (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This pedagogy influences perceptions and enhances the practice of professional educators so that their teaching style and choice of vocabulary create a classroom environment that supports all of their students. With CRP, teachers learn to examine their practice, recognize the value of their student's knowledge and experiences, become more self-aware, and gain a culturally responsive literacy to carry into their day-to-day teaching and learning. The goal is for teachers to become proficient in CRP; the objective is for students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic background, to experience improved achievement.

The District's current mission statement supports implementation of CRP into the training plan for professional educators and administrators. Tweaks to current policies that encourage family involvement through practices learned in a CRP will help to create an environment that embraces cultural experiences, knowledge, and backgrounds, cultivating more meaningful family engagement. The policy to implement CRP supports the existing parent involvement policy that includes a commitment for the superintendent to "encourage parents/guardians to be involved in their child's school and education" and "seek input from parents/guardians on significant school-related issues" (School Board Policy 8:95, 2014). Implementing CRP and helping educators learn to use the backgrounds, knowledge and experiences of their students and their students' families, at least broadly speaking, creates

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greater opportunity for meaningful interaction with families. These interactions help remove the barriers some populations might perceive as existing between them and the school. More importantly, through the practices used in a CRP, professional educators will be more aware of their role in cultivating these relationships.

Further, the recommended partnerships with community organizations to support the enrichment of our students beyond the school day will serve to broaden the reach of our effort. Many of our teachers work in or work with the leaders of the afterschool and summer programs offered by local community organizations. Using these connections to empower our students to become independent learners serves to benefit the entire community. It also broadens the spectrum of supports for our families most in need.

Conclusion

Policy change and use of adopted policies support implementation of a CRP in the District. These are initial steps in helping to change the mindset of District stakeholders to address the achievement gap that has existed throughout history. The difficult task is in the implementation plan, or as previously described, procedures for implementing policy. Training in the practices of a culturally responsive pedagogy requires a commitment of time. Teachers and administrators already have a lot on their plate. They are tasked with implementing recently adopted common core state standards into their curriculum and instruction. There are new state assessments, new state reporting requirements, state-mandated surveys to administer, and increased demands for communications. In our diverse school system, teachers must be able to differentiate instruction to meet the wide spectrum of students from various backgrounds. There is a myriad of documents, letters, and reports necessary to maintain required state records, communicate with parents, and respond to central office requests for information.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study makes the case for the need to implement CRP in the District in order to achieve the goal of ensuring that all students and student subgroups are successful, and particularly those who have traditionally not seen the level of success experienced by their White peers. The CRP framework addresses many of the District's existing goals and is consistent with existing policy. The District has already undertaken several strategies over the years to address the achievement gap between its African American and White students, but none has proven successful or sustainable. Implementing CRP creates an opportunity for success as is already shown with the students who experience the instructional capacity demonstrated by Dr. Bernstein. We want to see that kind of engagement and level of success for all our students.

Discussion

Years of research, various methods of instructional practices have been employed across the District for many years. Program evaluations occur on a regular basis in the District, and data is used at both the building level and District level to identify patterns, seek out the students who most need resources to support their achievement. The District has a vastly diverse population, including a number of students with disabilities, students for whom English is not their first language, students who need enrichments, and students who need a proven framework to improve their academic outcomes.

The relationship between promoting improved academic outcomes and culturally relevant educational practices is documented across various sources. Research shows that "culturally relevant examples have positive effects on the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2001). According to the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational

Systems, "in culturally responsive classrooms and schools, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally-supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement" (2008). The imperative for improved achievement is documented in local, state, and national student achievement statistics by demographic groups, with White students outperforming their African American counterparts. Data document the relationship between the undereducated and prison populations as well as the disproportionality of African Americans in that population (Petit, 2012). All of these statistics point to the need to address the underachievement of African Americans.

Reviewing the data for the District's students, as well as the end-of-year data for the students in Dr. Bernstein's classes, was enlightening as improved student outcomes are being seen in the classes where CRP is being used as the instructional model. Measuring success goes beyond the data points on assessments as the principles of culturally relevant teaching suggest that students experience academic success, develop or maintain their cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness to challenge the status quo of the current social order. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The last of these principles is a good fit with the ideology behind Common Core state standards designed to help students think critically and communicate globally. Using the Gary Howard Equity Institutes' flow chart for assessing the 7 principles for culturally responsive teaching (Figure 5) I, as administrator for the building, can begin to look for evidence demonstrating how CRP is being implemented.

7 Principles for Culturally Responsive Teaching

1
Students are affirmed in their cultural connections

2
Teachers are personally inviting

3
Learning environments are physically and culturally inviting

4
Students are reinforced for academic development

5
Instructional changes are made to accommodate differences in learners

6
Classroom is managed with firm, consistent, loving control

7
Interactions stress collectivity as well as individuality

Relationships Precede Learning

Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms, 1997, Shade, Kelly, and Oberg. Order from: APA Order Department, PO Box 92984, Washington, DC 20090-2984

Gary Howard Equity Institutes @2010   www.ghequityinstitute.com

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The most critical aspect of implementing CRP is comprehensive teacher training. And, it may also be one of the most difficult to accomplish, particularly as most of the District's teaching force is not trained in this pedagogy. Currently the District offers several days of training for new teachers prior to the opening of the school year. During that time, teachers new to the District are introduced to mandated reporting, how to access and use district-sponsored technology tools, content-area curricula, and a host of other topics. Other training occurs throughout the school year when grade level or content-area teachers periodically are pulled out of class for half or full day professional development sessions designed to help them gain content mastery. These sessions are in addition to District-sponsored training that occurs during the

summer to offer returning teachers an opportunity to prepare for new initiatives, programs, or curricula. Finally, the District has a series of monthly half-day instructional improvement sessions, about half of which are planned and carried out at the building level. The remaining sessions are scheduled for content-area or grade level teamwork and planned districtwide. Even if the District used all of the allocated days for CRP training, it would take a substantial amount of time for teachers to master the pedagogy. Schools will have to supplement their implementation strategies with site-based book groups dedicated to reading *Dreamkeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and/or *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015), using some of their site-based professional development to view and discuss Dr. Tatum's video on teaching African American males, learning more about Flocabulary, and taking the initiative to view clips on culturally responsive teaching and learning. A list of resources similar to those developed by the San Joaquin County Office of Education (Appendix H) can be developed to facilitate on-site teacher training. The school also will use modules developed by the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems on culturally responsive pedagogy and practice (http://crisisresponse.promoteprevent.org/resources/national-center-culturally-responsive-educational-systems-nccrest) along with the Ready for Rigor Framework developed by Zaretta Hammond (2013) (Appendix I). The more resources placed at the disposal of our professional educators, the better opportunity there is for a smooth transition to serving our students in a culturally responsive environment that supports them, their cultures, backgrounds, histories, and experiences.

To ensure well-planned implementation of CRP, there may be a need to revise both professional development and future hiring practices. The District may wish to seek out candidates whose pre-service training includes culturally responsive instructional practices. They

then can become part of the building-level teams that support their colleagues in this journey. Culturally responsive communities of learning will need to be established to support an integrated learning environment. And, changes may be required in the professional development planning and schedules.

Local goals are important, but the impact upon the future of the nation is also something to consider. Research shows that closing the achievement gap is a first step in helping to close the poverty and education gap. Addressing the disparity in percentages of African Americans who hold advanced educational degrees or live in poverty begins with a sound educational foundation. Education is not just a constitutional right; it is the door to opportunity. If we fail to help students achieve their fullest potential in the elementary grades, we fail future generations as well. This is seen in the nation's poverty rates, its prison population statistics, and in the percentage of African Americans who have attained advanced academic degrees (Pettit, B. 2012).

Leadership Lessons

Beyond the understanding of a need for change, there also is an understanding about the need to find budget-neutral solutions. While the initial implementation is grounded in using the existing extended day programs, one of the goals in adopting a CRP is to see an improved achievement profile for all students and alleviate the need for additional academic supports and the extended day programs. Thoughtful planning long before the beginning of a new school year must occur to successfully train a cadre of teacher leaders, instructional coaches, school psychologists, social workers, and others who can work within their schools to advocate and support their colleagues in gaining explicit knowledge about cultural diversity and implementing CRP in their schools. CRP is more than changing perspective or gaining a sociocultural

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consciousness. It is more than self-reflection, acceptance of knowledge and experiences. It requires a commitment to gaining a deeper knowledge about cultures and the significant contributions of various ethnic groups (Gay, 2001). It requires teachers to change their language, to develop an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Villegas, 2002), to be more strategic in the way they teach the curriculum to their students, adapted to reflect cultural values and communication styles of different ethnic groups.

Culturally relevant teaching is not in conflict with current thinking and implementation of the state standards designed to improve student knowledge and skills to better prepare them for success in college, careers, and in life. In fact, CRP goes hand in hand with the goals of common core insofar as they are designed to improve academic outcomes for students and advance life-long learners.

It is important for the principal/leader to be the lead learner while going through this process. One must be authentic and willing to share their thoughts and concerns while learning alongside their staff. The true power of CRP comes from being comfortable in our own skin because we are not a neutral party in the process. We can never take ourselves out of the equation. We must commit to the journey. This means we must do the inside out work required:

1. Developing the right mindset: Do I believe all students can learn? Do I believe I can learn and implement strategies to improve black and brown student learning.

2. Engaging in self reflection: What evidence do I have to support my belief?

3. Checking our implicit biases: How are my biases impacting the school?

4. Practicing social-emotional awareness: What are my triggers?

5. Holding an inquiry stance regarding the impact of our interactions on students: How are my decisions and actions impacting students?

Modeling doing the inside out work will help the staff be more willing to do the same (Hammond, 2015).

In order to increase the impact of teachers learning that results in practice changes leaders have to educate staff on the connection between CRP and Brain research pointed out by Zaretta Hammond in her book Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain:

1. The brain seeks to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others in the community.

2. Positive relationships keep our safety-threat detection system in check.

3. Culture guides how we process information.

4. Attention drives learning.

5. All new information must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to learn.

6. The brain physically grows through challenges and stretches expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning.

7. To help students create a counter-narrative about themselves teachers should use images, poetry, and quotes to ignite students' imagination about what is possible.

In order to set the stage for change, one must acquire and allocate resources, utilize multiple methods to increase teachers' knowledge about CRP, and build trusting relationships that create a safe place for staff to take risks. In order to create sustainable change, you have to have a true picture of where your school is at (As is), a clear picture of where you want to be in 3 – 5 years (To be), and most importantly a professional development plan. The professional development plan needs to be focused, job-embedded, collaborative, include multiple ways to receive actionable feedback, and be continuous. The continuous cycle of professional

development: increase knowledge, apply practice change, reflect, make practice public by sharing the experience with others, get feedback, and repeat the process.

Conclusion

Professional educators are the target audience, students and their families are the primary beneficiaries, and all of society ultimately benefits from a generation of children who develop a love of learning and an attitude and commitment to success. Time may be one obstacle to successful implementation of something as all-encompassing as CRP. However, the imperative for this shift in thinking cannot be denied. The District must make this commitment to change and allocate the necessary resources to support it. The gap between African American and White student achievement levels is unacceptable. Minority students, and particularly African American students, have been underachieving for far too long. Historical and ongoing efforts relied primarily on programs and services rather than on the impact a professional educator's perceptions have upon their practice. The objective of the policy change is improved learning, improved student outcomes, narrowing the learning gap between African American students and their White counterparts, and creating a culture that ensures the success of each and every student in the school system. Beyond the constitutional right to a free and public education, there is a moral imperative to address this gap in achievement. CRP is a philosophy that supports a climate where everyone believes in success for their students which translates into improved student outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Questionnaire

How long have you been teaching?

I have been teaching for 9 years. I started teaching in [this community] in 2003. Before teaching in [this] District, I worked as a unit supervisor in a residential facility for children who have been physically and sexually abused. I put together children's educational plans, did their individual case reviews, court dates, as well as supervised home visits when court mandated.

Why did you decide to become a teacher?

While growing up I always felt as if I was just going through the motions while in school. I felt disconnected from the school culture and didn't feel it was a place where teachers invested in students. It wasn't until I had a great high school teacher my freshman year, who was invested in me did I feel dedicated to school. This teacher made me if smart and took time to get to know me as an individual. I decided to become a teacher, due to the fact I felt I didn't have many great teachers that understood my needs; therefore, by studying education I could come back to the community which I grew up in to help children that felt the way I did when I was their age.

What is your teaching philosophy?

My teaching philosophy is simple. KNOW THE CHILDREN THAT SIT IN FRONT OF YOU! Teaching can only occur when you truly know the population that enters your classroom. Meaningful relationships are key to student success. The more children feel

that you're truly invested in them as a person as well as connected to their lives, the more they will want to strive for success in your classroom.

What is the makeup of your room/school?

I will pull this data for you later.

What does "culturally relevant Pedagogy" mean?

Culturally relevant pedagogy means providing children with meaningful, relevant text and/or materials that they can connect to in order to teach the curriculum. When children see themselves in the text, they feel validated.

How do you implement CRP in your classroom?

I implement CRT in my classroom by knowing my students and putting text in their hands that represent them. I used and provide a wide range of materials so children can see themselves in examples. By doing so, connections and positive reinforcements are made. When you walk into my room there are positive quotes from famous people that are the same culture as them. The books on the shelves are written and about people that look like them. Real life experiences are talked about and utilized as read aloud(s) or writing examples. By showing children that they are not alone in the classroom and their voice, culture, and experiences are valued allows them to begin to feel a sense of belonging.

When did you start (CRP)and what has been the impact?

Where did you learn about CRP?

I first learned about CRP through Dr. Alfred Tatum.

Are there other teachers in your building implementing CRP?

There are a few teachers in my building that implement CRP in their daily practice. Most teachers teach the curriculum that is provided which only cater to the White population. Students of color often feel left out and disconnected in the learning environment.

Is there school wide professional development at your school? If so, what is it?

The staff is working with the University of Texas through an online course and will receive nine credit hours for a one-day training before school started around the mind/mindset. What does effort look like? Teacher asked students about their effort and to identify what their best effort looks like and what feelings and emotions come with effort and what does it look like when you do not put in your best effort and what does your feelings and emotions look like. The training is helping teachers to support students asking for help. The teacher believes that if you can change the way students think about learning in middle school you have met half the battle.

The teacher shared some of the literature she is reading and her effort to share resources with her school principal.

The teacher's goal this year is to get people to come in and speak to her students (mentor). The teacher is trying to get people to talk to her students about mindset and effective effort and connect with some local people in the community to mentor and connect with the students.

How would your students describe you?

My students would probably describe me as caring, fair and open-minded.

APPENDIX B

Teacher Interview Questions

What characteristics do students of color, as a group, bring to your classroom?

How much of what you know about teaching students of color did you learn as a result of teacher training either pre-service or in-service?

If you could revamp teaching education so that teachers would be more effective with students of color what change would you make?

What role do you feel parents play in a child's education?

Can you please describe the type of relationship you have with your students' parents?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Questions

1. Do you feel your teacher had high expectations for you? What made you feel she did or didn't?

2. Were all the students given the same tasks to work on? If, not how were they different?

3. Do you feel your teacher challenge(ed) you to think critically? If, so how did she challenge you?

4. Do you think your teacher is knowledgeable about teacher reading and language arts? What makes you think that?

5. How knowledgeable do you feel your teacher is/was about you as person and learner?

6. How did she try to learn this information?

7. Did you feel you could be yourself in your teacher's class? What made you feel this way?

8. Were you empowered to take ownership of your learning? If, so how?

9. Did you have choices of what or how you learn?

10. How would you rate your learning experience?

11. What did/do you enjoy the most about class?

12. What would you change?

13. What has had to greatest impact on you?

14. What was/is it like being a student in Dr. Bernstein's class?

15. Do you feel valued in her class?

16. Was there anything different in her class?

17. Do you feel you became a better student, reader, writer while a student in Dr. Bernstein's class?

18. Do you feel you could be yourself in Dr. Bernstein's class?

19. What aspect of her class do you value most?

20. What would you change?

21. Do/did you feel empowered as a student?

22. Based on what you've learned in this class, are there things in the world that you think should change? If so, what have you done or what are you going to do?

APPENDIX D

Parent Consent Form

Dear District Parents/Guardians:

Hello, my name is Fred Hunter and I have been the principal of [Name Redacted] Elementary School   for the past 3 years. I am currently pursuing my doctorate degree in the area of *Educational Leadership - School Superintendent* at National-Louis University.

I am writing to ask you for consent for your child to participate in a focus group to learn about their learning experience in Dr. Bernstein's class. I'm looking to find the impact her teaching methods has on students. In this study, I am looking to examine how Dr. Bernstein plans and implements reading and language art teaching strategies in her diverse classroom. In the end, I hope to learn the strategies that promote greater learning opportunities for students.

Your child's name will not be in my research. I am only interested in the teacher's strategies and how they impact her students. I would greatly appreciate you giving written consent by signing this form and sending it back to school with your child as soon as possible. All forms should be turned in to **Dr. Bernstein in Room 312.** I thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation as I continue to pursue my educational studies.

The focus groups will run approximately 30-45 minutes and they will be held at [Name Redacted] school. Parents/Guardians who give their child permission to participate will receive additional information at a later date.

If there are any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, [Name Redacted], my *NLU Chair* for my research or [Name Redacted], *Principal,* at the numbers listed below. Either of us would be more than happy to meet with you if you would like further information.

Thank you,

Fred Hunter   [Name Redacted] *Principal*   [Name Redacted], *NLU Chair*
[Contact information redacted]
……
(Please check one box)
   ☐**Yes, I agree to**   **or**   ☐**No, I do not**

Give my child _____permission to take part in
           (**Print your child's name here**)

Mr. Hunter's dissertation research at [Name Redacted] School.

Parent/ Guardian's Signature: _____
  (Please sign on the line**)**

All students in the elementary school have access to
the same curriculum and instruction
but do not achieve at the same levels.

CONTEXT
- Small elementary school in diverse community
- African American student achievement lags behind their White peers
- 24% of the school population receive subsidized meals
- Faculty has limited understanding of CRP

CONDITIONS
- Strong Instructional Improvement Team at the school
- Support from Administration to implement strategies to improve achievement
- School libraries and curricular materials support literacy instruction

CULTURE
- High expectations from parents
- High expectations across District
- District committed to teacher training at school and District level
- Cultural bias

COMPETENCIES
- Highly qualified teaching staff
- Many veteran teachers on school faculty
- Involved parent community
- Limited awareness of cultural relevance

Our elementary school students are engaged, empowered, and our African American students have achievement profiles more similar to our White students

CONTEXT
- Small elementary school in diverse community
- African American student achievement on par with White peers
- 24% of the school population receive subsidized meals
- Support for CRP at all levels of the organization – board, administration, faculty and staff, families and students

CONDITIONS
- Strong Instructional Improvement Team at the school
- Support from Administration to implement strategies to improve achievement
- School libraries and curricular materials support literacy instruction and the principles of CRP
- Continued collaboration with District's literacy director
- Teachers trained in CRP to serve as on-site coaches for colleagues

CULTURE
- High expectations from parents
- High expectations across District
- District committed to teacher training at school and District level
- CRP integrated into the daily instruction
- Community partnerships designed to expand African American students' awareness of culture
- Community partnerships designed to provide services and supports to those in need

COMPETENCIES
- Highly qualified teaching staff
- Educational professionals well-trained in CRP
- Involved parent community
- Engaged students who take an active role in their learning
- African American student achievement on par with white peers

School Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Framework and Implementation Plan

Impact

Action

Values

Students	Teacher
Community Values	
Administrators/Other Adults	Families
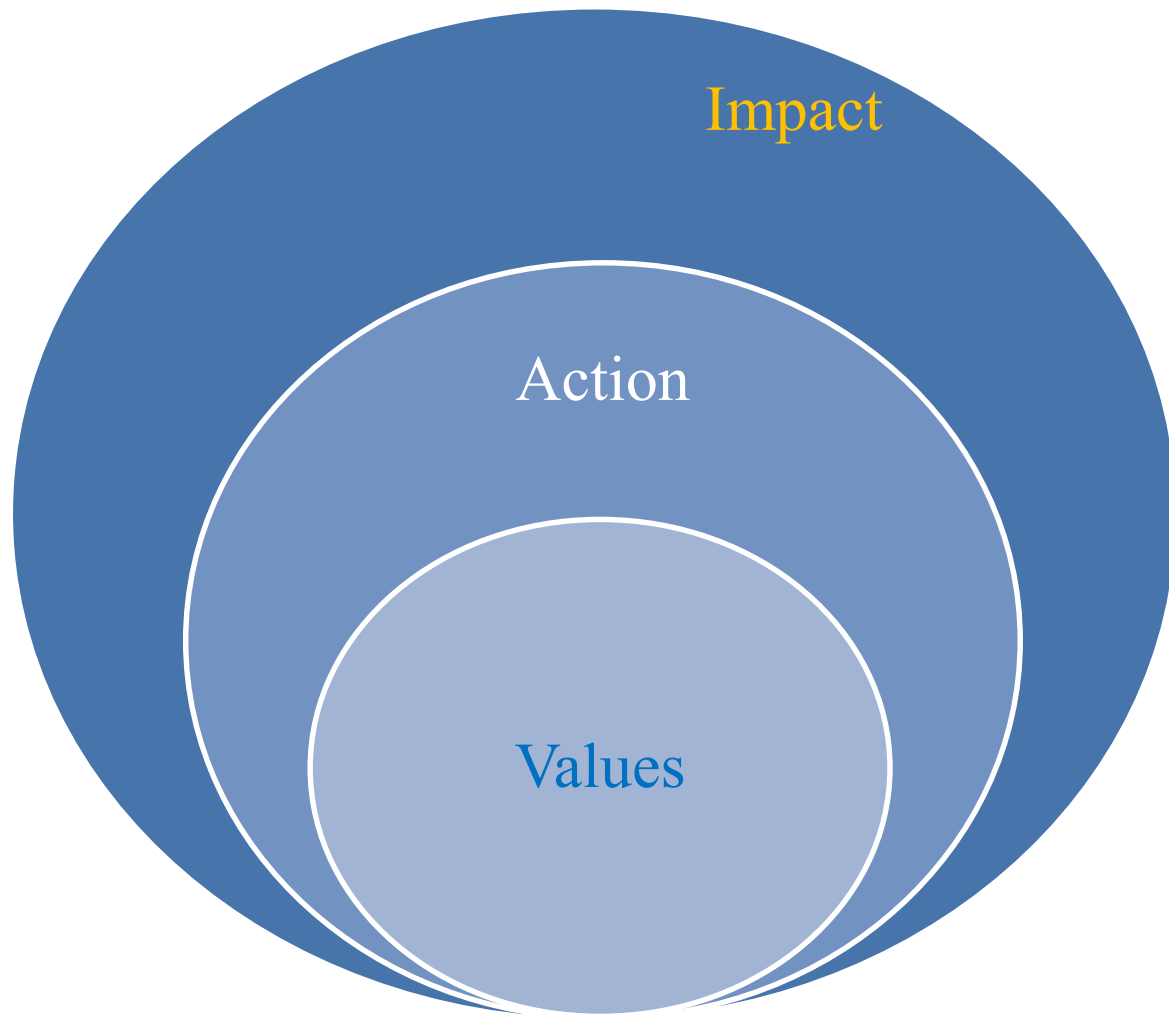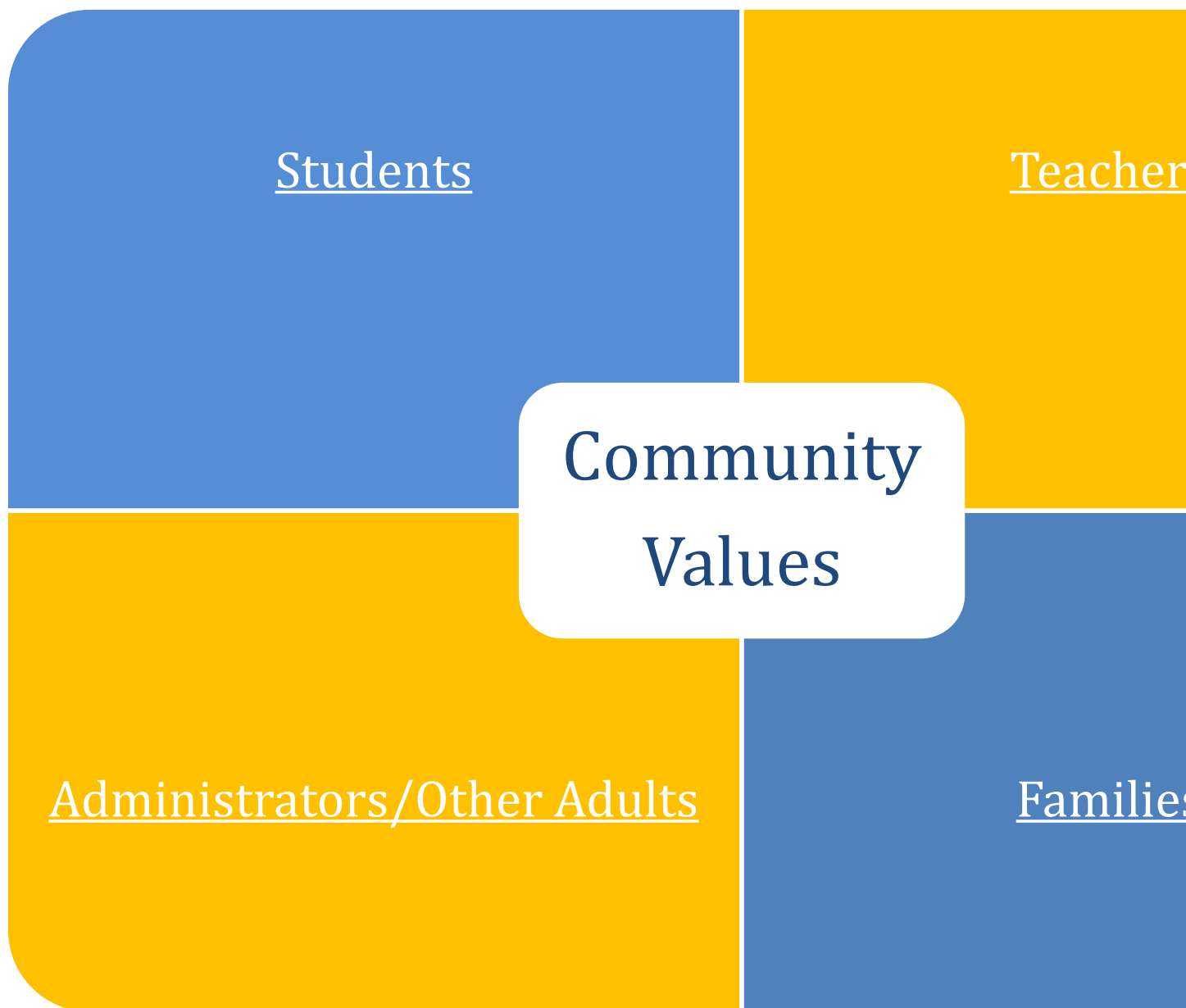
Rationale for This Framework

-to articulate and create visioning around the institutional, instructional and personal manifestations of culturally relevant teaching

- to contextualize the factors driving the initiation of, and commitment to, this praxis at our school

Problems of Learning

What's going on with African American student learning?	What evidence do we have?	What needs to change?	Why are we prioritizing these aspects of student learning?	

Problems of Practice

How are institutional, instructional and personal practices affecting student learning?	What evidence do we have?	What aspects of each do we need to work on to improve student learning?	Why are we prioritizing these?	What supports are needed to help adults at our school successfully make these changes?
		Institutional		
		Instructional		
		Personal		

Rationale for implementing a Culturally Relevant Teaching framework at our School

What research grounds these problems of learning and practice? What makes us think that making these changes will improve student learning?

"Culture goes much deeper than typical understandings of ethnicity, race and/or faith. It encompasses broad notions of similarity and difference and it is reflected in our students' multiple social identities and their ways of knowing and of being in the world. In order to ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed and accepted, and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture." (from Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy)

Gloria Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant teaching as a" **pedagogy that empowers students** intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically, by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attributes." (Ladson-Billings, 2004) This kind of teaching "integrates a student's background knowledge and prior home and community experiences into the curriculum and the teaching and learning experiences that take place in the classroom. There are three central [student-centered] tenets underpinning this pedagogy: **(1)** holding **high expectations** for all students, **(2)** assisting students in the **development of cultural competence** and **(3)** guiding students to develop a **critical cultural consciousness**." (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy)

Tyrone Howard looks at the **importance of the cultural capital** that students bring, and how institutional racism preferences the capital that informs the values of students/cultures in the

center/mainstream…i.e. White students. CRT requires the commitment to acknowledging, valuing and building on the cultural capital **of students not in the mainstream**.

Geneva Gay talks about culturally relevant pedagogy as **harnessing the power of caring**. She defines culturally relevant teaching as "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse that make learning more effective and relevant…**teaching to and through the strengths of students**".

Villegas & Lucas see it as teaching to student strengths, by valuing and building on students' cultural capital. . . seeing that capital as opportunities for enriching learning rather than as student, community or cultural deficits.

Dispositions and skills (mindset) of culturally relevant teachers and school leaders (Villegas & Lucas):

- 1. Socio-Cultural Consciousness: Work to acknowledge and understand how personal, cultural and institutional attitudes, beliefs and practices are informed by the social, historical and political context in which we have and do live; and how these impact students and their families.
- 2. High Expectations: Check own biases about who is smart; use a strength-based perspective
- 3. Equitable and Inclusive Education as Fundamental: See change agency as one of the roles of teaching, and as a critical factor in order to ensure high levels of achievement among all students.
- 4. Constructivist Approach: Use an inquiry stance that weaves in students' own experiences and involves them in co-construction of knowledge for themselves and others; students see themselves in the curriculum.
- 5. Deep Knowledge of Students: Build strong relationships with students, and their families and caregivers; work toward mutual respect and ongoing collaboration between school and home.
- 6. Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices: work from a framework that includes high expectations, academic rigor, ladders to meet high expectations; also build on students' prior knowledge, use varied teaching approaches, and stress collective as well as individual learning

Building A Legacy of Culturally Relevant Teaching at our School

Detail the CRT journey thus far, including a timeline of practices/conversations, stakeholders involved in original decision-making, specific actions taken, and any tangible/intangible results.

Teachers

Families

CRT Journey

Principal & ILT

Students
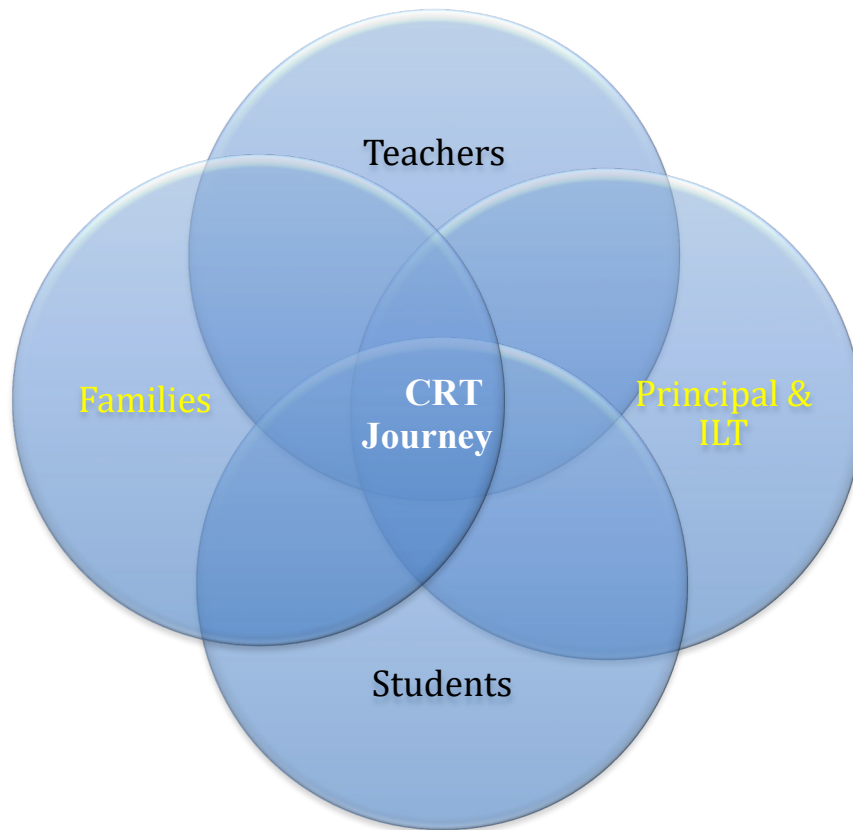
Priorities And Action Items

-Vision: Clarify the goals that guide the CRT work, making explicit connections to our school's core values, principles and school improvement goals.

-What do we want to accomplish by the end of the year?

-What do we want to look, feel, sound like a year from now? Two years? Five years?

-Who are the other stakeholders? How do we bring them into the work?

-How and what do we communicate to stakeholders?

-Embed an overview of the **general** theory of action (plan for moving forward) to articulate the broader thinking around how you plan to move forward (what "inputs", stakeholders and responsibilities, expected results/goals)

	Inputs	Stakeholders	Responsible Party(ies)	Results/Outcomes	Evidence
Immediate Action					
Short Term Action					
Long Term Action					

Problem-Posing

- **Assume that there will be resistance.** It is likely that thinking about teaching in this way will stir things up and encounter some form of backlash. We can anticipate this and build it into our planning.

- **Identify obstacles to change and assess the risk.**
- **Identify opportunities and assets that may help us further our goals.**
- **Develop strategies based upon the obstacles, risks and opportunities we've identified**.

Impact Focus

Think through and articulate plans for documenting and sharing the impact of the CRT journey:
-how will you know that culturally relevant teaching has become a unifying thread in the life of the school community?

       -what indicators will show that our students are benefiting mission?

       -how will curriculum, conversation, expectations, etc. reflect the CRT journey?

       -how will the community look, feel and sound because of the CRT journey?

Sample: Culturally Responsive Teaching Video Clips

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching/Pedagogy Video Clips

* Gloria Ladson-Billings Cultural Competency (3:10)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccEu7r2IwM0&feature=related

* Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (8:53), 2:40 – lesson example
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=_uOncGZWxDc&NR=1

(You will see a lot of what you already do. You will also see that interwoven into the teaching fabric is culturally responsive teaching – reflects student background, is culturally validating and empowering⋯) -- Culturally Relevant Material: Amelia's Road

* Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (4:40)   (1:08 – 3:00) (3:52-4:15) (Gay, 2000)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGTVjJuRaZ8&feature=related
Why is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Important?
Teachers take the students' everyday lived experiences and bring those into the classroom to make learning more relevant, meaningful, and effective. CRP builds on students' prior knowledge

Culturally Responsive Teaching (9:59) – 6:23 – social justice issues -
short clips illustrating teachers within the classroom
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONtNAKA97v8

* Culturally Responsive Teaching (Multiple Histories) – (3:00)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKK2nuFxfbY
Looking at multiple histories⋯how people change their trajectories

Panel: Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching (48:03) Experts
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrnLKDSpflc

NEA – Effective Teaching in Diverse Classrooms (2:05)
EducationalImpact.com – Introduction to a CREDE Pedagogy Professional Development
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d4cU4dPOQ8

The Culturally Responsive Teacher (1:59)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfa7VWxtS7k

READY for RIGOR

A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

AWARENESS

- Know and own your cultural lens
- Understand the three levels of culture
- Recognize cultural archetypes of individualism and collectivism
- Understand how the brain learns
- Acknowledge the socio-political context around race and language
- Recognize your brain's triggers around race and culture
- Broaden your interpretation of culturally and linguistically diverse students' learning behaviors

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

- Reimagine the student and teacher relationship as a partnership
- Take responsibility to reduce students' social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microagressions
- Balance giving students both care and push
- Help students cultivate a positive mindset and sense of self-efficacy
- Support each student to take greater ownership for his learning
  - Give students language to talk about their learning moves

Affirmation

Wise Feedback

Instructional Conversation

Students are Ready for Rigor and Independent Learning

Validation

INFORMATION PROCESSING

- Provide appropriate challenge in order to stimulate brain growth to increase intellective capacity
- Help students process new content using methods from oral traditions
- Connect new content to culturally relevant examples and metaphors from students' community and everyday lives
- Provide students authentic opportunities to process content
- Teach students cognitive routines using the brain's natural learning systems
- Use formative assessments and feedback to increase intellective capacity

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Create an environment that is intellectually and socially safe for learning
- Make space for student voice and agency
- Build classroom culture and learning around communal (sociocultural) talk and task structures
- Use classroom rituals and routines to support a culture of learning
- Use principles of restorative justice to manage conflicts and redirect negative behavior

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