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Integration of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Reading Intervention

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INTEGRATION OF CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICES IN READING
INTERVENTION

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Literacy Education.

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DEDICATIONS

To Thomas, you are simply the best.

To Ruby and Simon, all that you are is an asset to all.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“We teach what we value.” Gloria Ladson-Billings

Introduction

A teacher flagged me down in the hallway: “Which alphabet chart are we using? Which one do you use?” This should be a simple question for me as a kindergarten through fifth-grade reading interventionist, but I paused to answer the question. So much depends on student needs and a number of other follow-up questions: What first language does the student speak? What sounds can they produce without prompting? What background experiences could they draw from? Does this alphabet chart need to be consistent for all children or grade levels? Answers to these questions allow me to choose between “itch”, “iguana”, and “ick” to anchor the /i/ sound. Working through the alphabet chart questions turned my attention to deeper considerations of how students are reflected in other parts of the reading curriculum and what teachers do to build connections between students and curriculum materials. Questions like this ultimately led me to consider a larger question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement for elementary students?* Through this first chapter, I provide further context, personally and professionally, that guided me to this question. I will provide the background of culturally sustaining pedagogy and reading intervention framework used along with data regarding my current teaching context which has influenced the development of this question and subsequent teaching strategies. While the foundation of this question

reflects my personal contexts, it is my intention that this project supports student learning elsewhere through a website of supplemental lessons, culturally sustaining classroom practices, and reflective tools for teachers and students.

Context

Currently, my state has the second-highest achievement gap in the United States between white students and students of color (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). This alarming statistic has been the topic of radio programs, bus advertisements, and frequent staff meetings in my building. The discussion typically wanders around equity in discipline practices, curriculum selection, and district policies that may or may not consider religious, cultural, or linguistic diversity. While conversations and understanding of policy and data identify areas of concern regarding student achievement based on race or ethnicity, schools and teachers have the opportunity to take concrete actions to address disparate achievement through making shifts in teaching strategies, text selection, instructional format and other pedagogical changes that meet state standards and support student learning.

As districts strive to increase student achievement and learning, many utilize specialists or interventionists to accelerate achievement for students performing below grade-level expectations (Allington, 2007). Reading specialists diagnose and develop instructional plans to accelerate reading achievement. Reading specialists often debate the merits of explicit phonics instruction against holistic balanced literacy, comprehension-focused strategies. Phonics instruction is often stereotyped as mechanical while balanced literacy is often synonymous with authentic reading (Ehri & Flugman,

2018). According to the National Reading Panel report issued in 2000, explicit phonics instruction improves reading fluency and comprehension. Explicit phonics provides students with strategies to solve unknown words by matching graphemes to phonemes and blending those sounds to form words. Readers are then able to increase reading fluency and with appropriate vocabulary instruction determine the meaning of the text. The most common instructional strategies for explicit phonics instruction use rote memorization and recitation and, like my initial question about the alphabet charts, do not usually lend itself to innovation and high levels of student engagement.

Professional Significance

The teacher asking me about alphabet charts in the hallway would like a consistent, efficient answer. When determining classroom materials, priority should be student-focused decision-making, selecting materials that best meet individual student needs.. Sustaining student diversity requires teachers to know individuals well (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Choosing the best letter-sound anchor for an alphabet chart means a teacher knows the most effective and memorable connection between words and sounds for each student. An alphabet chart includes pictures and words for each letter that provide an anchor for that letter's sound. For some students the anchor seems easy, for others it is challenging. Choosing the best letter-sound anchor requires teachers to know their students' cultures and personal preferences. It is an informed decision. For this reason, it may seem complicated for teachers.

Acquiring personal knowledge and assessing individual student needs requires teacher time. My district, like many others, selected a reading curriculum that includes

materials, such as an alphabet chart. This provides consistency across the district and through professional development opportunities. Similarly, the district selected an intervention program: Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2015). PRESS relies on four pillars: quality core instruction, data-driven decision making, tiered interventions, and professional learning (PRESS Intervention Manual, 2017, p. iv). My district transitioned from site-based decisions about intervention to a research-based framework for decision making and sequencing intervention instruction. This new framework provides consistency between schools in the district and a sequence to provide continuity of service for students between elementary, middle, and high schools. Additionally, interventionists use the provided sequence to compare expected levels of progress for students to their similar peers. When students do not make expected progress as readers with the selected core curriculum, they work with me to accelerate their reading skills. Students not making the expected level of progress may be discussed further with other school staff and teachers in consideration of specific learning disabilities including the potential for placement to receive special education services. My work as a reading interventionist focuses on explicit phonics instruction with first through fifth graders in a first-ring suburb.

Determining the success of reading intervention requires practitioners to reflect upon the data collected and the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Throughout two years of implementation at an elementary school in a first-ring suburb of a Midwest metropolitan area, I have collected data on student reading progress from those that receive intervention support. While some students acquire reading skills at the expected

rate of their peers with intervention support, other students develop skills slower than the expected rate of progress. Of the students I taught, 73% developed reading skills at or above the rate of their peers. Additionally, my data showed that 83% of the students that received reading intervention instruction were students of color but only comprised 64% of the student body. This data similarly reflects the discrepancy of students qualifying for special education services at my school site. Students are selected to receive intervention services from screening and diagnostic tools used from the prescribed PRESS framework to analyze foundational phonemic and decoding skills in isolation and context. From this collection of data points, student groups are determined based on specific skill needs. To impact acceleration of achievement in the current reading intervention model, modifying instructional strategies remains the component within this intervention framework that may produce the most transformative results given the provided structure.

Simultaneously, I have been exploring, through workshops, literature, and conversations with colleagues, how the achievement gap between white students and students of color can be reduced through relationship building, classroom management, and modification of instructional practices and policies. Throughout all of these conversations, I felt disconnected between my own belief in the validity of needed changes and my daily instructional work. The explicit phonics instruction that has been implemented provides content support but seems disconnected from the broad cultural experiences that my students bring to school. This led me to question the equity and effectiveness of this system for all students. The PRESS framework and provided intervention procedures do not specifically identify areas and ways to support cultural or

linguistic diversity but there are opportunities to work within the scope and sequence of the framework to develop procedures and opportunities for cultural and linguistic diversity while growing phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency skills.

Interventionists and classroom teachers need routines and strategies that allow students to personalize content and methods for practice to obtain skill mastery that ultimately leads to increased fluency and comprehension.

Personal Significance

In my first years of teaching, I had not developed the skills to effectively personalize curriculum for students. I relied on the direction of instructional coaches and district-initiated curriculum. I also relied on my naive definition of academic and personal success to evaluate the effectiveness of my teaching. When parents or students failed to meet the paradigm I had established, I felt disappointed. After nine years of teaching reading to fifth graders, I noticed some students and parents engaged in school at various levels. It rattled my sense of communal urgency for students to grow and succeed. I started to wonder if my personal paradigm of success matched others. My slow realization became that the children and families I have worked with did not always have the same paradigm for success, that their epistemologies diverged from my own. As I teach and grow myself, an evolving model for success continues to be shaped by each community that I have had the honor to serve as a teacher.

I have taught in three states, moving to learn from and explore new communities. After attending a predominantly white, private college in the Midwest, I moved to Las Vegas, Nevada to teach. I intentionally sought a school that had a high percentage of

low-income students to fulfill my desire to provide rich instruction and support for the students often overlooked. To the best of my ability and with generous support from veteran teachers, I taught there for three years. As a beginning teacher, I, fortunately, landed in a setting that did not focus on what students could not do, but rather supported teachers through professional development, specifically in language acquisition, to move students along a continuum of learning. Many of my students were native Spanish speakers and we had one English as a Second Language Specialist, “Ann”, in a school of over six hundred students. Ann supported not only my understanding in language acquisition, but she was the first to help me understand the depth and impact even small cultural differences can make in schools. She shared personal anecdotes about her work with students of poverty and their families as well as her learning from students with limited English proficiency. Those conversations helped me understand how my experiences shaped my understanding of the world around me and that not all students and/or families have matching epistemologies.

My next teaching position put me in rural eastern North Carolina (ENC). Again, I was challenged with the culture and epistemology of a community that varied from my own. At the onset of my work with this community, I felt like an outsider as I had a difficult time understanding Southern American dialect, social norms for addressing superiors or elders, and other aspects of ENC culture that felt distant from my own. I was both endearingly and dismissively labeled a “Yankee”. Although my colleagues worked collaboratively with me, I remained an outsider during my time there. Although the community seemed culturally unified, those outside the majority culture found

acceptance challenging. Many teachers made comments about how “underprivileged” some students were or a heavy sigh that parents “just do not understand”. It challenged my thinking and understanding from my previous experience in Las Vegas. Rather than learning more about student and family epistemology, I learned the impact a majority epistemology (in this case rural, white, middle class, evangelical Christian) has over communities.

As I work with new communities, I bring professional and personal educational experiences that shape my expectations of education and how to build teacher-student relationships. Throughout my teaching career, I have endeavored to scaffold and build instructional goals for students to grow to meet and exceed grade-level expectations. It was my hope as an undergraduate student that I would be a person that supported others as they achieved to their fullest potential. As a student myself, I had the experience of constantly teetering on the precipice. I was an eager student, well-liked by teachers and peers, and consistently followed the rules. Although I was considered “high-achieving”, I seemed to always be a late consideration for further academic acceleration: admitted in gifted and talented support well into fourth-grade while most students were placed in second-grade; I surprised my advanced-placement (AP) world history teacher by taking the AP test in the spring; I was admitted late, at spring semester, into the honors college at my undergraduate college after the urging of an insightful professor. There were many times throughout my education that I felt overlooked and finally seen for my capabilities.

Although academically capable, my teachers failed to fully notice my potential. I never wanted to be seen as “needy”, it countered my home culture. Although students

may be capable, expressing abilities and needs may be difficult. For students who find this level of vulnerability uncomfortable, culturally relevant instruction helps to empower risk-taking and belonging. The goal of this project is to develop students' sense of belonging through culturally responsive instruction. Regardless of the specific outcomes used as a paradigm for success, students should have the opportunity to achieve at the same level as their peers and to the best of their own ability. An achievement gap of this magnitude in my state, and even at a national level, leads me to question the kind of instruction provided for students, the cultural consideration school systems provide for within required curriculum and policies that impact school climate.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

My first introduction to culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) came from reading an article written by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). She, along with many others, have researched and written a theory of valuing the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic heritages of students in schools to support academic achievement. More recently, Django Paris and H. Samy Alim revised the work of CRP, calling for practices that *sustain* rather than give *relevance* to culture. Rather than continuing instruction through systems and curriculum designed with majority white culture in mind, "CSP explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being for communities of color." (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 5). I prefer the goal offered by Paris and Alim to increase the level of educational practices to sustain cultures and, therefore, prefer this term. However, resources supporting classroom practices for this project draw from "culturally

responsive pedagogy” and “culturally relevant teaching” (CRT). The varied use of terms reflects the lengthy history of cultural asset theories.

In 2014, students of color were the majority in U.S. public schools for the first time although this has been common in urban settings for a long time (Paris & Alim, 2017). Educators and researchers called for pedagogical changes in the 1980s and 1990s that would engage growing diversity in school settings, this demographic shift raised the sense of urgency, calling for the transformation of instructional practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). Teachers can foster student cultures through valuing linguistic diversity, engaging in instructional methods that connect to current culturally valued mediums, like hip-hop, and most importantly shift teacher perspectives to understanding students as culturally rich rather than “at-risk” or “culturally deficit”. Effective CSP moves beyond strategies or checklists and into authentic relationship building between teachers and students.

The work and authentic component of CSP earnestly seeks for teachers to build relationships with students to understand, deeply, their epistemologies and values, holding them up as an asset to the student, classroom, and school. It provides a framework needed to sustain cultural and developing individual identities. Culturally sustaining pedagogy asks for majority-based systems and curriculum to shift and evolve to include development of academic support for reasoning ability, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking. Authentic relationships that easily provide information for teachers to select engaging word anchors for an alphabet chart or acknowledge cultural celebrations. Teacher conversations based in CSP include many considerations of how to

meet student needs. Standard curriculum materials may not meet culturally and linguistically diverse learner needs.

Reading Intervention Framework: PRESS

The intervention model adopted by my district to standardize services for academic support is Pathways to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS). PRESS was developed by the Minnesota Center for Reading Research at the University of Minnesota. The goal of PRESS is to “establish school-based systems and practices for all K-5 students to become capable readers” (PRESS, 2016). PRESS provides a framework that responds to multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) or Response to Intervention (RtI) by structuring data analysis of screening and diagnostics to support decision-making. Interventions are then prescribed for small groups of students or whole classes based on the median number of students that need explicit intervention in specific areas (PRESS Intervention Manual, 2015). PRESS identified six interventions for phonemic awareness, progressing from beginning with initial sound identification through phonemic manipulation. Interventions for phonics, fluency, and comprehension progress in complexity as well. Along with interventions and diagnostics, PRESS developed skill-based progress monitoring probes to assess mastery of explicit phonics skills. These probes provide thirty words per probe while additionally calling for fluency measures selected by the teacher.

PRESS is a framework for intervention and provides tools to determine who needs intervention and the instructional routine for developing phonemic or decoding skills, fluency, and comprehension. PRESS, although structured, provides a framework

rather than a robust curriculum including problem-solving ideas for students that do not make progress after providing instructional routines. While students learn systematically and explicitly, variation with multiple modalities or consideration for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students remains minimal or absent. This is problematic considering research and instructional theories that support providing culturally and linguistically responsive instruction for students in all areas. This capstone project seeks to supplement PRESS intervention structures and protocols to meet the needs of diverse student needs that support reading skill mastery through a website of supplemental lessons, culturally sustaining classroom practices, and reflective tools for teachers and students.

Summary

Using the strength of the decision-making framework and systematic progression of PRESS, this capstone project will answer the question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement in elementary students?* In this chapter, I have discussed my personal experiences that influenced my interest and sense of urgency to answer this question. Specifically, the need to accelerate achievement for students of color in my state and support inclusion of CSP in classrooms and school systems. Additional data from the National Reading Panel (2000) determined that explicit phonics instruction supports reading achievement. Through my experiences with multiple teaching contexts and students, I view cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset to support student achievement for all students. Understanding epistemologies and providing supportive instruction in reading intervention supports student achievement.

Chapter Two will provide a review of the current research that supports the efficacy of systematic, explicit instruction for native English speakers and multilingual students through a multi-tiered system of support. Additionally, Chapter Two will provide the evidence-based need for culturally sustaining pedagogy in all classrooms to support culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families as they interact with school systems. Finally, the review of literature will share current literature integrating intervention practices with diverse populations using specific culturally sustaining instructional methods. This review of the literature will provide support for the components that will answer the question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement in elementary students?*

Chapter Three details the project by identifying culturally sustaining instructional components of reading intervention services implemented at my school site and specific instructional changes needed to provide teachers and students tools to effectively reflect, engage and respond to reading intervention. Finally, Chapter Four reflects on the process and success in meeting the project goals to accelerate achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

“The most important variable in teaching reading, I believe, is the quality of classroom reading instruction [...].” Richard Allington

Introduction

To accelerate achievement, we know that best instructional practices in education efficiently respond to learner needs and build engagement with the subject matter. Effective literacy instruction does this but needs to progress further to consistently include culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) instructional practices that support language and reading acquisition of CLD students. Teachers can provide culturally sustaining instruction based on culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) to increase engagement and respond efficiently to diverse learner needs. Integrating culturally sustaining instructional practices in reading intervention is comparatively new to the conversation and ongoing research of CSP and the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework.

Chapter Two synthesizes current research to answer the question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement for elementary students?* This chapter begins with reviewing the literature on reading instruction and intervention as theoretical shifts over time continue to influence teacher preparation and implementation of reading curriculum in classrooms. It continues through a literature review of culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy and instructional practices: definition and implications for the development of

a website to support CSP and reading intervention instruction. Chapter Two concludes with a review of the literature currently available accelerating achievement of CLD students through CSP reading interventions. Literature discussing reading education and achievement has shifted focus as the goals of American education have shifted. This literature review highlights some of those shifts and suggests next steps in instructional equity to support academic achievement for all.

Reading Instruction

History of Reading Instruction in the United States

The purpose and pedagogy of reading instruction in the United States has evolved as population demographics evolved. The earliest reading instruction from colonists provided reading skills to read the Bible (Patterson, Cormack, & Green, 2012). The next shift in reading instruction provided English skills for newly immigrated children. Education provided not only common language skills, but the framework to develop uniform cultural and religious communities. To this end, the United States government forced indigenous children to attend residential schools. During the Industrial Revolution and through the early 20th-century public schools reading instruction shifted from Christian-focused Biblical instruction to morally-rich stories and narratives to reflect true “American” ideals: liberty, individualism, perseverance, self-determination (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000; Patterson, Cormack, & Green 2012). The goal throughout the earliest European settlements through the mid-20th century was single-minded: education, through reading instruction, should produce a homogenous, unified America.

The realization of educational inequality, supported by *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, during the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 60s advanced the idea that unified, homogenous American schools damage some communities (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000). As school demographics started to shift and change to meet integration legislation, reading instruction largely maintained emphasis on explicit phonics instruction supported through early reader texts like *Dick and Jane* and “round robin reading” (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000). Reading skills largely focused on decoding words, reading fluently, and retelling narratives with an emphasis on the moral lessons. Patterson, Cormack, and Green (2012) argued that

...this normative self-shaping mission of reading instruction emerged as a point of contention for mid/late twentieth-century work on ideology, which began to critique the social mission of reading instruction on the grounds that the reading material (or the readers) were repressive of gender, cultural and other differences. (p. 195)

Reading instruction focused on providing singular reading instruction. Reading pedagogies remained unified regardless of educational contexts or diverse learner needs (Shearer, Carr, & Vogt, 2019).

During the latter half of the 20th-Century researchers and educators examined reading pedagogy to include alternative strategies for instruction (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000). From this, instructional practices shifted away from explicit phonics instruction and formulaic readers to whole language reading. Constructivist learning theory argued that learning to read should develop as naturally as learning to

speak (Chapman, Greaney, Arrow, & Tunmer 2018). This pedagogy termed “whole language” emphasized learning each word by sight, rather than blending letter sounds together. This pedagogy persisted through the late 1990s when Congress commissioned the National Reading Panel (NRP) to investigate and determine best practices in reading instruction and make recommendations for the American school system (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Recommendations shifted away from whole language back to explicit, systematic phonics instruction (Carreker, Neuhaus, Swank, Johnson, Monfils, & Montemayor, 2007). As an additional recommendation, distinguishing the NRP insights from the reading pedagogies of the early 20th-century, the NRP determined instructional practices needed increased emphasis in vocabulary instruction and metacognitive comprehension strategies to increase comprehension depth (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). An additional shift in reading instruction came during the adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in most states through united efforts to increase academic rigor and consistency throughout the American education system (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

Summary. The evolution of reading pedagogy in the United States has evolved to include an expansive collection of literature and instructional strategies. Although these changes have been generally responsive to student needs, teachers and school systems still differ in which methods to implement and how to best support students’ literacy skills. Scientific research in reading methods continues to define best practices for teachers to implement in classrooms.

Current Best Practices for Core Instruction (K-5)

The National Reading Panel report from 2000 outlines best practices in reading instruction. From the “reading wars” of the late 20th century emerged the recommendation that students should receive explicit phonics instruction along with comprehension strategy instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). In developing foundational reading skills, teachers’ instructional knowledge of five key areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. From recommendations based on the NRP report and other researchers (Ehri and Flugman, 2018; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics skills supports fluency and comprehension at established grade-level norms (Jiban, 2018). Although the progression of skills has been well studied, Morrow and Gambrell (2018) stated there is:

...no single method or approach to teaching language arts that is universally effective with all young children. In contrast, teachers need to possess a broad repertoire of theories and instructional strategies and draw from this repertoire to address students' varied learning needs. (p. 78)

Incorporating a variety of instructional strategies allows teachers to develop instructional plans for students that best meet their needs. Providing the youngest students with firm reading and writing foundational skills alleviates the mechanical barrier to literacy. For many teachers of early readers, this includes decodable texts. The NRP report (2000) argued that “any reading that allows children to apply their knowledge of letter-sound

relationships would appear to fit within the definition” (p. 137). Rather than determine the sole best practice, research shows that teachers with deep knowledge of phonemic awareness and phonics are best prepared to teach students foundational reading skills (Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2001).

The National Reading Panel report (2000) continues to be used to determine which type of instructional strategies deserve funding and implementation. Specific instructional recommendations, supported through quantitative and qualitative research studies include all school districts, but determining the pedagogical or theoretical approach to meet student needs vary depending on the responsiveness of decision-makers and teachers (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). In the nearly twenty years since it has been published dynamic shifts have occurred. Although the NRP report affirmed five foundational areas for reading instruction and instructional recommendations, critics argue it missed essential reading areas: motivation, engagement, and sociocultural instructional practices. The included *Minority Report* by Yarkin (2000) argued that the NRP report lacked complete coverage of some of the most needed topics. Yarkin (2000) provided a minority report highlighting the urgent need to include these topics in the appendix:

[Teachers] called then for the inclusion of ethnographic research in the Panel’s investigations and have since learned that it was not included. They could not see any logic or fairness in that decision.... The research on language development, pre-reading literary knowledge, understanding of the conventions of print, and all the other experiences that prepare young children to learn to read also demanded

the Panel's attention. And finally, the changing needs and strategies of adolescent readers called for a review of the existing research. (Yatkin, Minority Report in NRP Report, Appendix C, p. 6)

Since this report, researchers and authors have included continuing support for reading instruction that increases language acquisition, motivation, and engagement and adolescent readers (Denton, Wexler, Vaughn, & Bryan 2008; Kumar, Zusho, & Bonie, 2018). While it is important to focus on best practices for core instruction, with special emphasis on reading instruction, we must also make sure these best practices engage students. Reading instruction that includes critical literacy and close reading supports reading development at all ages and increases engagement for students.

Critical literacy and close reading are two effective strategies to increase student motivation and engagement. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) elaborated on how critical literacy frameworks increase engagement for readers: "Critical literacy helps us to read texts in deeper, more meaningful ways. It encourages readers of all ages to become actively engaged and use their power to construct understanding and not be used by the text to fulfill the intentions of the author. [...] text and question the author's purpose, thinking, and format." (p. 7). Readers of all ages can read with a critical lens, interpreting author use of power and place, gender and language. Critical literacy requires readers to read and reread with inquiry to make personal connections with the author. Ultimately, readers are encouraged to take action based on the dialogue with the text and other readers.

The term “close reading” generally includes reading complex texts in manageable chunks through a specific lens or for a specific purpose. Critical literacy and close reading may be used interchangeably, however, critical literacy features an urgency for social action based on the discourse between author and reader (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). The goal of close reading is to engage readers in a more robust understanding of the author and text without the necessary condition of social action. Research supports using critical literacy and close reading to encourage readers to connect personally with texts through repeated reading as an effective learning strategy. Personal connections activate positive hormones in the brain and rereading texts transfers content from short-term to long-term memory (Hammond, 2015). To determine which connections persist over time, best practices for developing instructional plans dictated that teachers formally and informally assess student progress.

Assessment-Informed Instruction

Accurate reading assessment provides teachers and administrators with a clear understanding of areas of success and areas of need for students. It also directs effective reading instruction. Different types of assessment and data provide information about groups as a whole and individual students and teachers. Criterion-based assessments provide an overview of how students have mastered the select set of skills based on grade level or content level standards while formative classroom assessments, those that inform instruction, provide the most value for reading teachers (Morrow & Gambrell, 2018). In reading instruction, formative assessments include running records, fluency assessments, word lists, and checklists of reader behaviors, which help teachers identify the skills that

require additional instruction. Morrow and Gambrell (2018) furthered their argument on the overuse and inaccurate use of assessments with the argument that “We are a society enamored with numbers” (p. 323). Current legislation uses percentages of students meeting achievement benchmarks rather than growth in skills. While many data points function collectively to illustrate trends, it limits the perception of successes for students. Assessment should reflect student understanding of the process and product. “Process assessments focus on student strategies, skills, and task performances as they are being used. In contrast, product assessments focus on what students produce as a result of reading. Much attention is given to product assessments, especially tests, often at the expense of process assessment.” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2018, p. 314). Product assessments usually take less overall time to complete and graded faster than process assessment. Process assessments provide an in-depth understanding of student cognitive processes. Gaining accurate information from assessments provides the clearest understanding of strategies that are working and what areas may still need improvement.

Standardized assessments have historically demonstrated a gap between achievement scores for white students and students of color in both math and reading. Although the difference in the gap has increased and decreased throughout the past fifty years of comparison, researchers continue to consider solutions. Ladson-Billings (2006) explained the multi-factor theory of the achievement gap: “We do not have good answers as to why the gap narrows or widens. Some research suggests that even the combination of socioeconomic and family conditions, youth culture and student behaviors, and schooling conditions and practices do not fully explain changes in the achievement gap”

(p. 5). While some school systems consider reading programs to increase achievement, culturally sustaining pedagogy researchers determined that the response to culturally and linguistically diverse students increases achievement more efficiently than integrating “cure-all” reading programs or curriculum.

Capstone Implications. Although reading curriculum and purpose for literacy has shifted throughout the history of reading instruction in the United States, the past twenty years has been guided by the National Reading Panel (2000) report calling for explicit instruction in reading skills and strategies supported by direct instruction in the five reading areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. PRESS reading interventions address each of these skills but does not address the concerns over engagement and motivation issued in the Minority Report by Yarkin (2000). Effective reading intervention must integrate explicit, direct instruction while actively addressing student engagement and motivation to increase achievement. Teacher professional development and resources to supplement reading intervention programs, such as PRESS are needed to support student reading development.

Summary. Since publishing the NRP report in 2000, states and school systems have had the opportunity to pull from this set of qualitative and quantitative data while making policy and instructional decisions. While the findings highlighted the need for explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, others have argued that including thoughtful determination of instructional practices to support engagement and more comprehensive assessments better reflect authentic reading. Reading assessments continue to reflect disparities in achievement

between white students and students of color. States and school systems expectations for reading instruction should reflect theories or pedagogical practices that support all students. The following section provides further clarification of best practices to support students that have not met adequate grade level progress in reading and need additional support to demonstrate proficiency in reading.

Reading Intervention

Reading's complex neurological coordination means that while the task is easy for some, others require more intensive instruction. "About 20 percent of elementary school students nationwide have serious problems learning to read; at least another 20 percent are at risk for not meeting grade-level expectations" (Moats, 2020, p. 4). Reading achievement requirements based on the legislation from the No Child Left Behind Act (2004) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) have increased school district use of reading intervention to accelerate achievement for students that have not met grade-level benchmarks in order to meet legislative guidelines (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). With targeted interventions researchers conclude that 95 percent of all children can be taught to read by the end of first grade (Moats, 2020, p. 5). Effective reading intervention develops individualized learning plans focused on targeting missing skills and accelerating achievement through direct instruction.

Diagnostics

Assessments and diagnostics provide information to make effective determinations about student needs and instruction (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Diagnostic questions are written and organized to determine what skills students have

acquired and what skill areas need further instruction. Approaching diagnostics and assessments requires a comprehensive understanding of what skill areas are assessed and how those skills are assessed to inform instruction. Shearer, Carr, and Vogt (2019) expanded on the function of assessment arguing contextualized assessment builds from “...contextualized instruction [which] focuses on developing the knowledge and skills that are needed to learn and to transfer that learning into action. [...] students apply knowledge to important and meaningful real-world tasks.” (p. 109). Portfolios, including classwork and other types of assessments that demonstrate authentic skill application provides the most accurate assessment of knowledge transfer. Using diagnostic and contextualized assessments, interventionists determine individualized learning plans based on what instruction strategies are or are not working for a student.

Reading Intervention Strategies

As stated earlier, grade-level reading skills impact student access to other academic subject areas and support future career or educational goals. Reading intervention, derived from a multi-tiered system of support like Response to Intervention (RtI), increases instruction intensity through modification of time, frequency, or group size. Thirty minutes per day of intervention is commonly recommended to accelerate reading skills (Shearer, Carr, & Vogt, 2019; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2012). Intervention strategies include other changes to instruction like more time spent on a skill or instruction provided in smaller skill components.

Per recommendation from the NRP report, readers need explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. PRESS

recommends five to six stages of skill development per each skill area (PRESS, 2016). Skills build on the mastery of the previous skill area. In this way, new skill instruction reinforces previously mastered and continues to build on success (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Acquiring skills for decoding provides readers access to comprehend texts.

Carreker et al. (2007) argued:

Decoding skills are especially important for novice or young primary school-aged readers because most written words are unfamiliar to them. This focus is consistent with research that indicates that reading comprehension is robustly predicted by word recognition skill which is most often limited by poor phonological decoding skill. (p. 207)

Consideration of students' decoding skills informs text selection. Texts selected for students receiving intervention should allow readers to feel success; students should be reading instructional, rather than grade-level texts, approximately 96-98% accuracy (Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Determining text complexity is dependent on student background knowledge and text structure. Selecting texts for students receiving reading intervention needs thoughtful consideration. Ultimately, "We need to remember that the same class or school may be effective for one student and not for another" (Shearer, Carr, & Vogt, 2019, p. 114). Allington (2007) similarly argued, "districts cannot expect positive results from a single intervention design, especially one that relies heavily on a single commercial product or material. While some older struggling readers have underdeveloped decoding proficiencies, for instance, a greater number can decode accurately but understand little of what they read" (p. 9). Responsive

reading intervention instruction strategies rely on assessment flexible planning in consideration of student needs as a means to increase reading skills.

Capstone Implications. Providing flexible instruction focused on specific student needs differentiates core reading instruction from reading intervention through a tiered system of support. Most readers, when provided appropriate instructional support, can read at grade level but may need intervention. Teachers providing reading intervention need to carefully select strategies and texts that match readers skills and abilities. Materials and texts selected for this project have been selected based on relevance and student readability.

Summary. Reading intervention supports skill acquisition and transfer so student reading skills accelerate towards grade level benchmarks. Interventionists need to accurately assess student skills and determine what areas need academic support and develop a learning plan to accelerate skill growth. Interventionists, like all teachers, need to engage students in learning tasks. Providing culturally sustaining instructional strategies increases responsiveness to the intervention as students connect with familiar structures and practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Classrooms in the United States are becoming increasingly more diverse. Urban classrooms consist of a majority of children of color and increased linguistic and ethnic diversity while approximately 90% of teachers are white (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 197). The growing shift since the early 1980s has called for framing diverse classrooms as an asset while simultaneously necessitating a pedagogical shift to accommodate diverse

cultural understandings. These theorists, most notably Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006, 2014), named this shift culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP; also culturally relevant pedagogy) in which teachers consider how home cultures shape student understanding of content and how students interact with school culture. Culturally responsive teachers build inclusive classrooms and authentic relationships that increase academic achievement. Recently, some theorists have changed this terminology to include how school systems and instructional practices not only respond to home cultures but sustain culture. Utilizing the term “culturally sustaining pedagogy” (Paris & Alim, 2017), teachers develop classroom communities that not only recognize cultural relevance but honor identities and diversity as essential to academic achievement.

Definition

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) frames educational practices with student cultural experiences in mind (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). This framework fits under the umbrella of culturally incompatible theory: minority culture students are incompatible with majority culture (Whaley & Noel, 2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy accounts for the incompatibility of cultures. Other theorists (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 2003; Whaley & Noel, 2012), argued through social-culture models that African American students demonstrate a strong cultural identity which functions as a strength for students. Cultural compatible theorists “acknowledge the fact that U.S. schooling practices are dominated by European American culture, but also that African American communities consider education a primary tool for Black progress” (Whaley & Noel, 2012, p. 26). Based on the socially contextualized model of African American identity

education is a priority for the African American community. Affinity within the African American culture groups provides support and a sense of connectedness in the face of negative stereotypes. Oyserman and colleagues (1995) found that when race is made salient, African American middle school students tended to perform better on a math task when their awareness of racism and community connectedness were also high (p. 1227). Community connectedness increased through service projects and academic achievement (Whaley & Noel, 2012, p. 28). Positive schemata about personal racial/ethnic/cultural groups allows acceptance of positive affinity group stereotypes, symbols, and role models and rejects negative stereotypes (Kumar, Zusho, & Bondie, 2018). Cultural compatible theorists argue that integrated, supportive cultural communities support educational achievement and cultural identities.

Cultural identity does not manifest uniformly within cultural groups. Generational and personality differences manifest uniquely. Kumar, Zusho, and Bondie (2018) expanded cultural identity by defining personal interaction with culture in three categories: cultural mainstreamers (affinity with majority culture), noncompliant believers (affinity with minority culture), and cultural straddlers (mixed affinity, switching between cultures). Cultural identity is fluid and teachers might essentialize groups based on fixed stereotypes (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Determining cultural characteristics but understanding flexibility of affinity and category supports the original goals of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom.

Although educators and researchers called for pedagogical changes in the 1980s and 1990s that would engage growing diversity in school settings, efforts to increase

culturally sustaining pedagogies stalled with the emphasis of achievement on standardized tests along with standardizing curriculum in support of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2002 (Griner & Stewart, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). The current demographic shift in American public schools raises a sense of urgency, calling for the transformation of current instructional practices. Advocates of culturally sustaining pedagogy argue that “Students of color come to school having already mastered many cultural skills and ways of knowing. To the extent that teaching builds on these capabilities, academic success will result” (Gay, 2010, p. 213). Viewing cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a deficit provides support for non-compliant believers and cultural straddlers to build upon their schemata positively.

Teachers foster culturally sustaining pedagogy through valuing linguistic diversity, engaging in instructional methods that connect to current culturally valued mediums, like hip-hop, and most importantly shift teacher perspectives to understanding students as culturally rich rather than “at-risk” or “culturally deficit” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Often culturally responsive strategies or pedagogy are relegated to “food and festivals” associated with ethnicities rather than deeper culturally significant understandings or symbols. Griner and Stewart (2012) explained, “Culturally responsive pedagogy understood as cultural celebration tends to relegate attention to culture to the margins of instruction, ignore low academic expectations for students, as well as the lived culture of the school and classroom, and ignore power relations altogether” (p. 538). Developing culturally and linguistically diverse students requires careful preparation and constant new learnings. Teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional

development are necessary to make effective changes and provide support in classrooms and communities.

Culturally Competent Teacher Preparation

Culturally sustaining pedagogy and cultural compatibility theorists differ in how culturally and linguistically diverse students need support in schools, but both groups advocate for additional teacher cultural training that supports cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Whaley, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2014) seeks professional development and teacher training that includes instructional frames for academic success, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness (p. 74). Ultimately, teacher preparation and education should prepare “culturally responsive teachers [who] make connections [with] individuals while understanding sociocultural and historical contexts that influence their interactions” (Klingner, 2006, p. 109). Increasing awareness through interaction and building relationships between students and teachers increases student and teacher efficacy (Ware, 2006). Limited research is available regarding most effective training and support for teachers wanting to develop culturally sustaining pedagogy (Bottiani et al., 2018). However, consensus regarding building pedagogical practices is growing despite quantitative studies to support its effects.

Teachers need to understand cultural identity components and “potential obstacles before they can successfully remove them” (Gay, 2002, p.108). Additionally, culturally sustaining teachers build authentic relationships with students to establish rapport and strengthen understanding of individual cultural, ethnic, racial, and/or linguistic epistemologies. Culturally sustaining pedagogy training should build understanding of

the traits of a “warm demander” (Ware, 2006). Warm demanders blend authoritative discipline with high expectations for academic performance while maintaining positive, empathetic interpersonal relationships. The benefits of warm demanders and culturally sustaining pedagogies provide a strong sense of cultural identity and classroom culture (Ware, 2006, pp. 453-454). Culturally inclusive classroom support teachers establish classroom cultures of “mutual aid”. Neuropsychology asserts that brains function optimally in nurturing environments. Positive connections allow the brain to secrete oxytocin, a bonding hormone released during affirming, trusting interactions (Hammond, 2015). Warm demanders support cultural expression, acknowledge obstacles, and provide appropriate scaffolding to move students to excel.

Understanding cultural components may seem overwhelming. If a classroom has thirty students, you may have thirty distinct cultural identities. However, surface culture (clothing, food, and religion, etc.) differs from deep culture (gender roles, sense of time, storytelling structure, etc.). The surface culture of a classroom may have thirty distinct representations while the deep culture may have one or two in a given category (Hurley, Leath, Hurley, & Pauletto, 2019). Research has focused largely on communal versus individualistic cultures. Approximately 80% of surveyed countries were categorized as having a preference for communal understanding. Students with a preference for communal cultures demonstrate higher levels of achievement when given group study time than when given individual, competitive study time (Hurley, Leath, Hurley, & Pauletto, 2019). Similar analysis of other deep cultural understandings allows teachers to group students into fewer preferences overall compared with surface cultural expressions.

Considering deep cultural understanding, teachers must examine culturally sustaining pedagogies in multiple contexts.

Preservice and in-service teachers need time to consider culturally sustaining pedagogies in their formal curriculum (standards and required content), societal curriculum (media portrayals of ethnic groups, etc.), symbolic curriculum (images, symbols, icons, etc. that reflect ethnicities), and students as individuals (Gay, 2002; Ware, 2006). Formal curriculum often includes narratives from majority culture and needs to be examined for narratives that may be absent from the required curriculum materials. For example, teachers may expand epistemologies used in formal curriculum to develop historical narratives of indigenous or minority voices, spoken rather than written narratives, and images. Societal curriculum includes mass media representation and other social representations while symbolic curriculum includes displayed images, symbols, icons, etc. that correspond to ethnic, cultural, or racial groups (Gay, 2002). Culturally sustaining teachers consider these curriculums while planning the physical space, deliberately including motifs or symbols that are reflective of students and intentionally using or addressing stereotypes in mass media in a critical literacy lesson. Although surface cultures appear dissimilar, Hurley, Leath, Hurley, and Pauletto (2019) stated that deep culture structures are reflected in variable surface culture expressions (types of music) but maintain essential elements rooted in the deep culture (e.g. polyrhythmic structure) (p. 3). Therefore, culturally sustaining pedagogy requires knowledge of individual students and deep culture epistemologies. Teachers working to

build their awareness of student cultures also need to develop an understanding of personal epistemologies.

Culturally sustaining teaching requires “inside-out” work (Hammond, 2015). Entering into culturally sustaining teaching demands understanding connections and intersectionalities between cultural, linguistic and ethnic spheres. Understanding personal connections and intersectionalities prepares teachers to better observe and connect with students. This requires a “...engaging in self-reflection, checking implicit biases, practicing social-emotional awareness, and holding an inquiry stance regarding the impact of our interactions on students” (Hammond, 2015, p. 53). Hammond (2015) continued the argument stating that “The true power of culturally responsive teaching comes from being comfortable in your own skin because you are not a neutral party in the process” (p. 53). Positioning culturally responsive or sustaining pedagogy as politically and socially engaged within shared classroom space relieves the ideal of neutrality and replaces it with inquiry, developing theories, and understanding without judgment. Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy reflects ongoing personal and professional inquiry to ensure that all students achieve and classrooms function as communities benefiting from multiple perspectives.

Capstone Implications. Culturally sustaining pedagogy and the culturally compatible theory both suggest that communities develop epistemologies that strengthen and define a group. For culturally and linguistically diverse students, affirming culture strengthens positive connections within the classroom. This affinity may provide confidence or vulnerability in school settings. Regardless, teachers and schools can build

relationships to support students creatively and actively as they achieve academic success. In my geographical context and school, culturally and linguistically diverse students do not demonstrate academic achievement at the same level as students who are native English speakers and students of the majority culture. Through ongoing relationship-building, culturally competent and sustaining teachers celebrate student cultures in the classroom.

Kumar, Zusho, and Bondie (2018) argued the intersection between achievement motivation and culturally responsive/relevant education (CRRE) depends on culturally inclusive classrooms. Increased initiation, perseverance and goal-directed behaviors manifest when the classroom environment affirms the cultures of students. Culturally and linguistically diverse students achieve at lower levels than white students as a result of historically unfair educational practices, poor quality instruction, and fewer opportunities and resources that prevent diverse individuals and groups from full participation in education (Artiles, 2011). Culturally sustaining pedagogy benefits all students (Kumar, Zusho, & Bondie, 2018). However, comprehensive academic interventions for underachieving students need, in particular, to be based on culturally sustaining pedagogy to maintain and increase achievement motivation and neuropsychological benefits that promote trust and safety (Hammond, 2015). Intervention pedagogy, including reading, requires relational trust between students and teacher, teacher efficacy and self-reflection, and culturally sustaining strategies to increase achievement motivation.

Summary. This section reviewed current and influential research in culturally sustaining pedagogy. CSP includes self-reflective teachers engaged in understanding

culturally and linguistically diverse students through observation and classroom culture building. Classroom teachers provide core instruction in the form of whole groups and small groups. They must work in collaboration with interventionists to provide individualized instruction for students not demonstrating mastery of skills at grade level. Interventionists, like classroom teachers, must provide CSP to increase achievement motivation. The following section includes integrated culturally sustaining pedagogy and reading strategies for underachieving students in reading intervention instruction .

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Reading Instruction

Culturally and linguistically diverse students need teaching environments with reduced risk. Given adequate education and support through ongoing professional development, classroom teachers can develop environments and instructional practices that reduce stress to increase student engagement. All subject areas and classrooms need culturally sustaining pedagogy. Reading skills impact achievement in multiple subject areas and are essential to accessing information and career goals. It is especially important to build strong reading foundations for students. CSP supports engagement by reducing stress and risk through building authentic relationships. Hammond, in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), argued that classroom environments support physiological responses in the brain that support or negate access to the memory system. “It’s through the nervous system that individuals build the physical foundation for positive, receptive relationships” (Hammond, 2015, p. 45). The ethos of the CSP classroom supports all students to access academic content.

Culturally sustaining instruction

Culturally sustaining pedagogy influences instructional practices to support student learning. Sustaining instructional practices capitalize on brain structures established within cultural practices. Some common examples of this include oral storytelling, incorporating first language, and connecting content with cultural understandings. For example, culturally sustaining instruction in one Hawai’ian school included efforts to impact the community through service projects to reinforce the cultural expectation to contribute to the quality of life in Hawai’i (Keehne et al., 2018). Not all instructional moments need to support deep reflection and interpersonal interaction. However, once a positive classroom culture has been established, most instructional time reflects sustaining practices.

Culturally sustaining literacy

Culturally sustaining instructional strategies that support literacy capitalize on cultural use of language and communication expectations. Klingner and Edwards (2006) supported the framework for culturally responsive literacy based on Wiley (1996): *accommodation*, *incorporation*, and *adaptation* when working with CLD students and families. The *accommodation* stage seeks teacher “understanding [of] communicative styles and literacy practices among their students and accounts for these in instruction” (p. 109). Building relationships with students through low-risk activities (game playing, morning meeting, informal conversations, etc.) help to build this relationship. *Incorporation* seeks a mutual understanding of how school and parents define and value literacy as a part of cultural practice, teachers “cannot assume that we can only teach

families how to do school” (Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 109). School and home interactions build on funds of knowledge to develop a diverse set of understanding and systems. In the *adaptation* stage, schools can provide students linguistic and cultural capital by providing asset-based understanding of student first culture in relation to school culture. This includes incorporating texts and literacy practices found from represented cultures, like oral or image-based storytelling, alternative narrative patterns, and group storytelling, etc. Hammond (2015) described how this framework borrows the neurological pathways established to build understanding of new content and aid information processing. This framework serves not only as a practical reminder of the stages of incorporating cultural literacy understanding in the classroom, but irritates divergent instructional strategies between American schools and education systems in other cultures.

Classroom routines in the United States typically rely on the pattern of initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000). Other cultural norms communicate through interjections and collaboration between classmates. In literacy instruction, building classroom structures for more active response through partner or small group conversations sustains student cultural need for rapid interaction (Acosta & Duggins, 2018). Simultaneously, students that prefer to limit conversation with adults may feel more apt to share ideas with peers. Working through the framework for culturally responsive literacy will help determine the type of interaction needed. Responsive and sustaining instructional practices and interventions: “balance between skills and holistic practice, greater student engagement, teachers with an extensive

knowledge of reading instruction and second-language acquisition, supportive learning environments” (Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 110). Teacher knowledge of student home cultures and personal preferences builds authentic relationships that serve as the foundation for learning and teaching, especially in diversity of literacy education.

Summary. Culturally sustaining literacy instruction diverges from traditional IRE routines common in American schools. Through intentional interactions and deliberate observations of students and families, teachers can develop a shared understanding of literacy. Many culturally sustaining literacy practices depend on communal interactions like conversations and storytelling. However, like traditional reading intervention strategies, there is no strategy or instructional method that will work for all students, even students with the same home culture. Teachers must continue to build relationships and deepen understanding. Darling-Hammond (1997) wrote succinctly, “No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process (p. 8). Additionally, race, ethnicity, and language do not necessarily determine one set of epistemologies. “Our task is to find ways to access their funds of knowledge and understand their home-based ways of learning as starting points for designing more authentic learning experiences” (Hammond, 2015, p. 140). Relevant research in this area is still limited as Klingner and Edwards (2006) illustrated: “Researchers typically provide inadequate information about participants in their reports, making it hard to determine if a practice should be considered appropriate” (p. 111). Determining effective instructional strategies becomes dependent on teacher practice and self-awareness.

Summary of Literature Review

Reading instruction has evolved significantly throughout the history of American education. Current research findings support balancing explicit phonics instruction with authentic, engaging reading opportunities that support reading achievement. Teacher understanding of phonics, phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension development impact student achievement more than a specific reading curriculum or series. Similarly, effective reading intervention includes explicit, systematic phonics instruction and appropriately selected texts that can be read with minimal teacher support. The most effective teachers have a clear understanding of student needs and culture.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy depends on robust teacher knowledge of students and cultural practices. CSP teachers must develop personal cultural awareness and be willing to self-reflect on individual culture to understand CLD students and families. This project includes self-reflection tools for teachers and students to promote further understanding of interactions and relationship building. Additional resources are provided to support personal and new cultural understanding. In classrooms that minimize risk and understand cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset, CLD students increase achievement. The goal of CSP for CLD students is to reduce the achievement gap. CSP strategies can be used in multiple contexts.

Culturally sustaining reading intervention strategies necessitate explicit knowledge of student cultural preferences and areas of needed support, accurate assessment and diagnostics to effectively determine areas of student academic need. Using a framework developed by Wiley (1996) to seek *accommodation, incorporation*

and *adaptation*, teachers can collaborate with students and families to determine definitions of literacy and cultural competencies for information processing. These three components have been used to develop teacher support materials for integrating CSP and PRESS reading interventions through knowledge of student and teacher, teaching with integrated reading strategies and relationship building systems, and ongoing teacher learning to develop deeper sets of understanding.

Next Chapters

This chapter examined the literature supporting effective reading intervention with a frame of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Chapter Three will provide specific steps of including CSP in reading intervention using the PRESS framework at an elementary school in a first-ring suburb. Chapter Four will share reflections of the development and strengths of this project. Research in CLD literacy is growing. In addition to the theoretical impact of CSP, this project seeks to gain practical knowledge of strategies that positively increase reading achievement through the PRESS intervention framework.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

“No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process.” Linda Darling-Hammond

Overview

The literature review in Chapter Two developed the need for teachers to build environments and practices that support academic achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. When CLD students’ perception and feelings of risk are reduced or even mitigated, students are better able to learn academic content. Home cultures and languages provide structures and practices for learning. Viewing home cultures and languages as strengths, culturally responsive teachers utilize multiple cognitive opportunities for students. “Culturally responsive teaching offers a way to reintegrate information processing into everyday instruction because many of the learning strategies families of CLD students use at home resemble the cognitive routines taught in advanced classes” (Hammond, 2015, p. 125). Integrating similar cognitive methods and strategies into classroom environments and instructional routines support the mastery of academic content. As I prepared for conversations with teachers over the course of the school year, I knew that I would need to plan for conversations to shift towards discussion of productive strategies that can be included within the current intervention framework. I wanted to provide a website as additional, easy-to-access support with resources that teachers would be able to use for further decision-making. Based on reflective practices, teachers develop cultural knowledge through relationships to select

the best integrative CSP strategies to supplement reading intervention lessons to accelerate student reading achievement that answers the question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement in elementary students?*

Throughout my study of this topic, I considered how the interaction between teacher, school system and home impacts student identities. Students may have a fluid identity or affinity to institutions or larger cultural groups. As educators, responding to student cultural or linguistic diversity needs to be similarly fluid and flexible (Griner & Stewart, 2012). In this chapter, I describe the strategies I included in the PRESS reading intervention framework to sustain culturally and linguistically diverse students. The chapter includes a description of the participants, timeline, and resource components for the website project. It discusses the relevance of CSP to the reading intervention classroom and curriculum and integration into the PRESS reading intervention framework.

Participants and Setting

The participants in my reading intervention instruction were kindergarten-fifth grade students at a first-ring suburb of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. This conventional, pre-kindergarten-fifth grade public elementary school has a total enrollment of approximately 440 students. Of the student body 33% of students identified as white, 30% of students identified as African-American, 30% of students identified as Hispanic, 7% of students identified as all other selections. Additionally, 75% of students receive free or reduced lunch. Classroom instruction is provided by twenty-three general

education classroom teachers, with class sizes of approximately 22 students per classroom teacher. My school has one instructional coach and one reading interventionist providing literacy coaching.

Students selected to receive reading intervention services did not meet the grade-level benchmark on the NWEA MAP Growth Assessment administered to all kindergarten-fifth grade students twice per year and were in the lowest 15% of demonstrated skills in respective grade levels on diagnostic assessments of phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Approximately 12-16 general education students per grade level received reading intervention services at my school depending on the size of each grade level cohort (approximately 18% of the school population).

Reading intervention instruction took place in a pull-out setting, small groups of four to six students with similar goals moved to a resource classroom for fifteen to twenty minutes of instruction. Most groups met daily, while some groups met on alternate days. Progress monitoring was completed every ten instructional days and flexible grouping ensured students received instruction in targeted skills. Reading intervention instructional time occurred during a period of time during the day in which all students received individualized or differentiated instruction. Some students received accelerated academic instruction, math intervention with a licensed teacher, and some students received differentiated, targeted instruction from their classroom teacher. Pull-out instruction worked effectively in this model as each student receives instruction to support individual academic skills while not missing whole group instruction or the introduction of new

content. Additionally, students from multiple classrooms received instruction on the same skill area, increasing the efficiency and time allowed for service of instruction for the interventionist.

Reading intervention instruction supports classroom core reading instruction through biweekly collaboration conversations between the interventionist and classroom teacher to align reading goals and confer about effective strategies. These meetings often included teachers who provide instruction for English-language learners and special education services allowing for conversations about additional skill areas or strategies that work well for individual students. These conversations continued throughout the school year to ensure student needs were met and services were well aligned for individual students.

Design Elements and Use

Strategies and goals shifted throughout the school year in response to student needs, assessment schedules, and scheduled breaks. With this consideration in mind, I developed a website with three main pages: *Know*, *Teach*, and *Learn*. Since building relationships between school and home increases the effectiveness of CSP, *Know* includes questionnaires, journals, and assessments to address potential underlying issues related to ethnicity or race. “Building effective learning opportunities for students across ethnic and racial groups can be initiated by holding respectful and dialogic conversations with families and students to engage and address issues related to race and racial literacy” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 110). Building connections and relationships between home and school are important to do at the beginning of the entrance into intervention

service. Usually, this would be within the first three weeks of school or within the first week of working with a student.

Cultural and linguistic strategy implementation with the integration of explicit reading intervention instruction will be ongoing throughout the school year. The *Teach* section of the website includes modified PRESS reading intervention lessons, visuals to support student choice, and student skill reflection visuals. In my experience this past year, older students were better able to accurately determine progress and reflect on strategies that worked than younger students, especially given the time constraints of the lesson. Brief, yet consistent, lessons intensified the urgency to build quality relationships and integrate culturally sustaining practices with reading intervention skills.

Culturally sustaining resources were also added in the third section, *Learn*. This section includes materials from diverse voices, opportunities to join community organizations that support culturally and linguistically diverse groups, and models of others integrating culturally sustainable practices. The resources in this section have been curated from recently published materials to best reflect ongoing use of CSP and reading intervention. All materials for this project have been collected and shared on a website to serve as a central resource for interventionists and teachers. Using these lesson frames and supplemental materials, teachers can practically apply theoretical knowledge in their instructional practices.

Theoretical Frameworks

Culturally Sustaining Theory in Practice. Culturally and linguistically diverse students benefit from classroom environments and instruction that support culturally

derived preferences and linguistically appropriate expectations. Hammond (2015) focused on how the brain responds to effective culturally responsive systems. Students outside of the majority culture tend to experience heightened levels of stress which impedes their ability to learn specifically by increasing alarm systems and blocking memory systems through. “Dependent learners experience a great deal of stress and anxiety in the classroom as they struggle with certain learning tasks” (Hammond, 2015, p. 50). Relationship building works to relieve the stress of majority socio-cultural expectations or microaggressions experienced daily and allows the information processing necessary for learning to occur. Hammond (2015) described the neural pathways that allow information to flow from input to long term memory for many CLD students as dependent on oral traditions that include “story, song, movement, repetitious chants, rituals, and dialogic talk. They are all forms of elaboration and rely heavily on the brain’s memory system.” (p. 127).

Teachers can reduce stress and risk in culturally sustaining classrooms through relationship building, including connecting to backgrounds and allowing for language differences and partnering with students to collaborate on goals (Hammond, 2015; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013). Relationship building remains an ongoing endeavor; I continued to build relationships with students I have previously worked with and established relationships with new students. Morrow and Gambrell (2019) suggested that “[...] teachers share their own histories to reify telling one’s own experience for building positive identities in classroom communities.” (p. 109). Considering the scope of this project, I included instructional practices that increase content skills in phonemic

awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension with the assumption that ongoing relationship building through daily conversations based around open-ended conversations and active listening are maintained.

Social Constructivist Theory

According to Hammond (2015), gaps in student achievement between white students and students of color have arisen due to enabling dependent learners. To increase CLD student efficacy, collaborative, culturally sustaining teaching strategies and environments should be established. Shifting student efficacy is based on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory that learning happens with the assistance of others. Peers support peers and teachers act as partners (Gay, 2002). In learning new material, a person (student or teacher) who has mastered a skill functions as a support for the novice. In addition to instructional support, Hammond (2015) suggested a *therapeutic alliance* based on three shared understandings: agreement to tackle a specific goal, the tasks necessary to reach a goal, and a relational bond (p. 93). In this addition to the social constructivist theory, teachers support student efficacy through goal setting and partnering rather than a more authoritarian approach. Ongoing partnering with students and families supports the effective integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining strategies.

Tiered Reading Support

Integrating culturally sustaining pedagogy may seem daunting considering the cultural and linguistic diversity of contemporary classrooms. Cultural archetypes highlight similarities between seemingly discrepant cultures providing opportunities to

seek commonalities. Increasing the efficiency of CSP through commonalities allows for practical classroom use. Hammond (2105) suggested considering *collectivism vs. individualism* and *oral vs. written traditions*. In structuring lessons and learning, I used strategies and methods with variable individual and group tasks and written or oral questions and storytelling. Additionally, including “translanguaging instruction” allows multilingual students to work in small groups or partners to compare and process texts in their first language. “This instruction makes explicit to students that their linguistic knowledge is useful for learning a new language and for text comprehension.” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 111). Linguistically diverse students will be given the option to discuss or write in the language of their choice. Morrow and Gambrell (2019) argued that “When students’ interests direct their goals for learning and problem solving, there is a likelihood of increased motivation, finding relevance and connections to content goals, choosing to read more widely, and increased confidence” (p. 107). The goal of reading intervention strategies should be to provide students with options to meet academic goals.

Project

This project examined four intervention lesson frames provided by PRESS in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. I have termed these “lesson frames” as they are partially scripted but allow for variation in targeted skills. Toppel (2012) argued that a scripted curriculum provides challenges to developing a truly culturally responsive curriculum. Curriculum writers, when writing scripted lessons, cannot take into account the needs of specific classrooms or students. Scripted programs do offer an example of a learning progression for a specific skill and a model of teacher

talk. Thoughtful curriculum writers suggest alternatives ensuring teachers understand responsive instructional techniques. While this curriculum only suggests a script, it also does not provide alternatives. For example, Phonics 3 teaches students to blend two- or three-sound words in Elkonin (sound) boxes but the teacher determines how many sounds and which progressive list to use along with which books to read for application. The suggested teacher script and provided progressive lists frame the lesson. While I used the suggested learning progressions for each lesson, I considered CSP strategies to ensure student needs were being met. For each lesson, I suggested:

1) *Grouping strategies*. Reading tends to function as a solitary activity, especially in older students. To support collaborative problem-solving, students choose to work in variable size groups. Hammond (2015) suggested considering preferences for students that have developed communal neural pathways to support learning. Offering independent, dyad, or whole group options sustains the efficiency of neural pathways.

2) *An alternative teaching script*. Modifying teaching scripts provided allows instruction to pause so students can “chunk and chew” (Hammond, 2015). The “chunk and chew” method provides language processing time and transfer from input to working memory. Alternative vocabulary reduces the cognitive demand for the student allowing more effort to be placed in practicing skills.

3) *Supported practice strategies*. PRESS provides few for modeling targeted skills. Teachers read from suggested scripts and show, using some manipulatives. Hammond (2015) recommended using songs, chants, repetition, and movement to

support learning. I added opportunities throughout these lesson frames to suggest areas to add songs, etc. to increase the type of modeling options for students.

4) *Personal practice options*. PRESS offers limited options for repeated practice. Through this project, I expanded the practice options to include multimodalities (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019) and grouping options. Additionally, encoding is not included as a component of the PRESS lesson framework. Writing and drawing have been demonstrated to increase comprehension (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Adding alternative modalities not only provides options for students but also increases reading skills and comprehension.

5) *Culturally and linguistically diverse texts*. For this project, I will select texts that reflect the variety of student instructional levels, skill objective, and cultural and linguistic diversity of students within my school site and intervention groups. Diversity of texts supports developing reading motivation, engagement, and positive self-identity (McIntyre & Hulan, 2012). Selecting decodable texts supports skill application and allows for more authentic assessment.

6) *Student assessment materials*. PRESS includes skill-specific progress monitoring probes and suggests supplementing with fluency probes but makes no recommendation for a reading comprehension-based progress monitoring. CSP suggests increasing student voice and choice for instruction and assessment. PRESS-provided progress monitoring probes offer isolated words for assessment. Adjustments to assessment offer contextually supported application of skills and comprehension based assessment.

Self-reflection and progress toward established goals was added as support for 3rd-5th grade student assessment. For all students, self-assessments regarding the use of strategies were included during the closure of the lesson. Hammond (2015) argued that partnering with students to develop and review goals increases student efficacy and supports efforts to accelerate achievement in targeted skills.

Published PRESS interventions include effective reading intervention strategies but do not include sufficient variety and modalities to support CLD students. To support student engagement and motivation, additional options need to be included within the PRESS lesson framework. These shifts offer instructional strategies to accelerate reading achievement and support positive identities of CLD students.

Summary

Accelerating reading achievement and sustaining culturally and linguistically diverse students is the heart of this project. This chapter connected the diverse student population at my school site with culturally sustaining pedagogy. CSP encourages teachers to build relationships to reduce stress for students in the classroom. Partnering with CLD students, teachers set goals with students to increase student efficacy. Working in partnership, either with the teacher or peers, students learn better together and with support. To support reading achievement, teachers need to use effective reading strategies. The work of this project was to reframe PRESS reading interventions with CSP strategies. As Gay (2002) reminded teachers, “Teachers need to develop rich repertoires of multicultural instructional examples to use in teaching ethnically diverse

students.” (p. 13). Developing a variety of instructional options to support CLD students addresses the lack of CSP strategies missing from PRESS reading interventions.

In Chapter Four, I provide a reflection on how modified reading interventions impacted student reading achievement throughout the school year. It includes suggestions for further improvements to the reading intervention plans and the next steps needed to support student reading achievement at my school site and others.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

“Even teachers with the best intentions and practice are not the best people to speak for any students--the students must speak for themselves.” -Gholdy Muhammad

Overview

Chapter Three described the process and components of integrating culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) into the Pathways to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2016) reading intervention curriculum. This reading intervention framework calls for additional cultural and linguistic support to provide more meaningful and intentional reading instruction for students. The project components were compiled on a website for teachers through shareable documents and other supporting resources. These resources guide teacher decisions for curriculum materials, like an alphabet chart mentioned in Chapter One, or strategies for students that do not seem to acquire skills or respond to teaching at the same rate as other students. PRESS integrated with CRP fosters academic achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

Chapter Four provides a reflection of the project created to answer the question: *How can culturally sustaining pedagogy integrate with a specific reading intervention framework to accelerate reading achievement for elementary students?* I reflect on the strengths of the project and review the adjustments made from feedback from user groups. Additionally, I reflect on opportunities for teacher implicit bias training and culturally sustaining pedagogy resources, further study in text selection, and teacher

preparation programs. This includes suggestions for further improvements to the reading intervention plans and the next steps needed to support student reading achievement at my school site and others. Finally, it provides considerations for culturally responsive pedagogy during distance learning amid the 2020 global pandemic. In considering how best to reflect on the scope of this project, it feels necessary to include the evolving educational landscape. I conclude with reflections on my growth throughout this project and as an educator, a necessary component to evolving and strengthening instructional practices.

Project Strengths

Reflexive and strategic teaching responds to student needs based on knowledge gained through assessment and observation. Throughout the process of this project, I have determined that teachers need robust knowledge of the students they teach *and* the content, to best shape curriculum and instructional plans to meet the needs of students. Reading researchers Shearer, Carr, and Vogt (2019) and Allington (2007) supported varied curriculum and methods to meet student needs. Responsive reading intervention instruction strategies rely on assessment flexible planning in consideration of student needs as a means to increase reading skills. Within this project, I have provided questionnaires with a focus on the relationship between literacy experiences and cultural understandings of students and their families. Questionnaires complement other tools (“Interview Questions”, etc.) to establish relationship baselines between teachers and students. Teachers also establish personal baselines for self-reflection on personal goals and implicit bias towards cultural knowledge. I believe knowledge and awareness of self

and students center the work in developing robust culturally responsive pedagogy in reading intervention.

Using PRESS diagnostic tools with the addition of word-meaning assessment (pictures and vocabulary questionnaire) provides teachers with an additional understanding of student literacy and language knowledge. PRESS Intervention Manual diagnostic procedures recommend using provided phonemic awareness and decoding inventories (Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2017, p. 6). To assess comprehension and fluency, teachers must select comprehension and fluency inventory measures and passages. I provided generic fiction and nonfiction questions to be used with teacher-selected passages. These questions aim to reduce academic language and increase high-level thinking by using questions like: “Would you be friends with [this character]? Why or why not?” Including meaning-making support while reducing the cognitive load develops an understanding of student comprehension and vocabulary skills. Even in the most foundational skills of reading, phonemic awareness, teachers and students need to focus on developing meaning from tasks. These diagnostic materials support teachers in knowledge-seeking that develops a culturally responsive and linguistically informed understanding of student assets, therefore, allowing teachers to develop comprehensive intervention plans for individual students.

PRESS provides teachers with routine suggestions for providing materials that support student background knowledge and connect with student interest. The central focus of PRESS is developing reading skills, however, in my supplemental materials, I have focused dually on knowledge of students and knowledge of the content to provide

the most effective and culturally responsive reading instruction. In adding these supplemental materials to suggested intervention frames, this project has shifted the focus of teaching time to supporting student efficacy and cultural and linguistic diversity. To develop these routines and relationships, teachers will either need to extend intervention blocks of time or reduce teaching time, especially initially, to allow for more time developing relationships with students. It is necessary to balance establishing teacher-student relationships and reading instruction to effectively teaching content. Relationship building remains an ongoing endeavor and necessary to build classroom communities and reduce feelings of risk (Hammond, 2015; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Culturally responsive teaching in this way demands less time, initially, on content and more time learning about who you will teach. I had not fully anticipated this time shift at the outset of this project, but after completing the PRESS lesson frames, it became apparent that initial relationship building activities need to take precedent and be maintained throughout instructional sessions.

Building time to deepen understanding for students supports more effective instruction. As I collected and created supplemental materials for increasing cultural awareness of students and families, I realized that developing intrapersonal understanding was needed as well. Therefore, I included multiple resources for teachers to begin building an ongoing understanding of self. Building an understanding of self helps teachers to understand why certain curriculum or pedagogies are selected and can help shift into new practices that are more culturally sustaining. I developed a year-long teacher self-reflection journal. This journal includes reflection questions to be answered

in reflection of personal educational experiences, experiences with colleagues, weekly experiences and learning of students and in reflection of interactions with families. Building teacher knowledge and understanding of self and others is reflected in resources collected about culture groups experiences through books and media. Exploring and learning about other cultures, especially cultural groups represented within specific schools sites, increases teacher use of culturally sustaining pedagogy. When students feel supported and culturally validated, researchers claim they achieve academically higher levels. Theorists argued through social-culture models that African American students demonstrate a strong cultural identity which functions as a strength for students (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 2003; Whaley & Noel, 2012). Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy reflects ongoing personal and professional inquiry to ensure that all students achieve and classrooms function as communities benefiting from multiple perspectives.

Project Strengths Summary

Permitting and planning for needed time to develop culturally sustaining pedagogy through self-reflection, intentional relationship building practices, and thoughtful questioning demands allocated time but beneficially strengthens cultural identities and academic achievement. The strength of my project balances time equally between relationship building tools and activities and reading content skill development through PRESS intervention lesson frames. However, resources are not simply limited to students and curriculum, but encouraging teachers to explore and further investigate multiple perspectives, including their own. Throughout the development of the project

materials, I prioritized a depth of understanding that supports targeted reading intervention and student identities, however, there are still opportunities to strengthen these components.

Project Opportunities

Throughout development of the materials to support the goals for this project, there are a few opportunities available for further development. In Chapter Three, I shared my intention to select poems, chants, and songs to engage students in learning reading skills and content. I also intended to provide culturally diverse leveled texts. While exploring a variety of resources, I realized it would be presumptuous of me to select specific titles. Rather, I have included websites and diverse authors with authentic voices from which teachers and students may select materials. Including students in the selection process increases engagement. Integrating student voice and choice throughout instructional plans depends on teacher knowledge of students and resources available. Although I considered students that I have taught and anticipate teaching in the upcoming school year, monitoring engagement with texts and materials depends on observable or stated feedback from students. Therefore, the selected authors and publishers reflect materials that I have found useful for my students. Student and family questionnaires, frequent “interview” questions, and the use of a variety of texts provide feedback for culturally responsive teachers. I cannot possibly develop effective materials for all students, but can rather share materials that would be models or examples for teachers. The work in reading intervention is to support students, families, and teachers to make the best instructional decisions to accelerate achievement.

Although I referenced the often used multicultural education that focuses on “food and festivals” associated with ethnicities rather than deeper culturally significant understandings in my literature review, through conversations with others and personal reflection, I feel it would be helpful to provide cultural overview information for teachers and staff (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Rather than supplant the need for ongoing relationship building and deep cultural understanding, including authentic perspectives which would provide needed expertise could shortcut initial, superficial learning. For example, I was unfamiliar with the Muslim practices for Ramadan. A brief overview from a member of the local Muslim community would have helped me engage with and understand my Muslim students’ culture and respond more effectively to their holiday excitement. I would be able to move more meaningful conversations rather than an uninformed inquisition. Authentic voices should and could move conversations and knowledge beyond the basics (what, when, etc.) and into nuanced, rich dialogue between teachers and students. Teachers often benefit from direct support and modeling of effective engagement and instruction.

After reflecting on the provided support in this project, I feel teachers would further benefit from practical support through video-recorded lessons, with students, to share with teachers the balance between relationship-building, student choice and content instruction. I shared brief videos to demonstrate reading to support parents during distance learning related to the spring 2020 Covid-19 pandemic but I soon realized, through feedback from other teachers and parents, that systematic breakdown of

instructional interventions would provide clarity and increase teacher efficacy in integrating CRP and PRESS reading interventions.

One of the unexpected opportunities in this project was to share CRP and distance learning. Amid the global Covid-19 pandemic, most schools transitioned to distance or virtual learning for the remaining 2020 school and potentially the 2020-2021 school year. I felt a strong need to provide culturally sustaining pedagogy and relationship building supports for distance learning settings. While school contexts will likely fluctuate throughout the ongoing pandemic and 2020-2021 school year, consistent relationships and established routines can support academic achievement. The provided resources urge flexibility and understanding throughout learning and teaching to provide students and families with ongoing support.

Project Opportunities Summary

The frequent changes to families, students, and teachers provides ever-present need for support in CSP and reading intervention. Teaching demands ongoing self-reflection and knowledge of students. Using varied tools for learning supports student achievement by empowering students and equipping teachers with the necessary resources and models for effective education. While this project meets some of these needs, there are opportunities for further development. Additionally, this project cannot ameliorate the need for policy changes at local, state and federal levels.

Policy Implications

To strengthen the efforts of this project, significant changes to teacher preparation in implicit bias training and reading instruction should be required of all teachers.

Monitoring and acknowledging implicit bias increases efficacy in CRP and student engagement. During my research I learned, unsurprisingly, that seventy-nine percent of public school teachers in the United States identify as white, far exceeding the forty-eight percent of white students in public schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Implicit bias training serves to support student cultural identity and move beyond superficial references to cultural heritage. Griner and Stewart (2012) explained that cultural understanding needs to move beyond superficial cultural expressions. In her work on implicit bias, Staat (2015) argued acknowledging unconscious stereotype thinking may shift conscious actions. She stated, “Thanks to the malleable nature of our brains, researchers have identified a few approaches that, often with time and repetition, can help inhibit preexisting implicit biases in favor of more egalitarian alternatives” (Staat, 2015, p. 32). Many teachers need time to develop a deepened understanding of their personal culture and the differences and similarities they may have with student and family home cultures. Developing culturally and linguistically diverse students requires careful preparation and constant new learnings. Teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development opportunities are necessary to make effective changes and provide support in classrooms and communities.

Policy Implications Summary

You cannot look at students and families to understand how to respond to their culture without first understanding your own set of understanding. Culturally sustaining pedagogy benefits all students (Kumar, Zusho, & Bondie, 2018). However, comprehensive academic interventions for underachieving students need, in particular, to

be based on culturally responsive pedagogy to maintain and increase achievement.

Implicit bias training, introduced in teacher preparation and supported throughout district and state professional development, seeks to mitigate inaccurate assessments of student needs. Therefore, targeted instruction focuses on accurate data. The needed next steps for this project include implicit bias training and thoughtful conversations with colleagues currently established in reading intervention and district leadership.

Next Steps

For this project to ultimately be successful, it needs to be accessed broadly and systemically. As my current district uses both PRESS reading intervention and has undertaken steps towards establishing more equitable instructional practices and policies, I plan to share this work with the district Curriculum and Instruction Team. Developing a professional development schedule and goals to monitor outcomes will be supported by presenting and sharing these resources with my fellow interventionists. Already, I am in conversation with the professional development team and my school to introduce the teacher self-reflection journal as a tool to support professional development sessions on critical race theory. This is an exciting step forward considering the uncertain 2020-2021 school year.

As previously stated, uncertainty in the coming months due to Covid-19 school closures will impact availability for professional development opportunities. However, including distance learning CRP goals and strategies will strengthen teaching and conversations for academic priorities once students and teachers consistently attend school in buildings together. Taking time to build relationships during distance learning

will reinforce those habits once face-to-face instruction resumes. While significant shifts in teaching and learning occur, this provides the opportunity to look for other opportunities that shift education into more meaningful ways.

Gholdy Muhammad (2020) shifts culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogical models to consider “historically relevant literacy” (HRL) which ..aligns with these [CRP] models on “responsiveness and “relevancy” as well as other cultural models in education, but is more pointedly centered on the literacy histories of Black people and a practical framework that teachers can use to guide and shape instruction. (Muhammad, 2020, p. 48)

Cultural asset theories support students’ cultural identities while HRL includes the legacy of literary excellence to provide an additional model for students and teachers as they work together to develop relevant and authentic learning experiences. Integrating the HRL model into current curriculum and instruction needs further exploration and collaboration with teachers, families and students. Muhammad focused the historical literary legacy of the Black community. Further research and classroom experiences incorporating HRL with other cultural communities is needed. The strength of any culturally sustaining teaching framework depends on including multiple voices and perspectives.

Conclusion

Throughout the process of creating supplemental materials to build culturally sustaining practices in the PRESS intervention framework, I have learned that engaging in curriculum design requires many perspectives. I have shared the collection of my

personal experiences and lessons learned, synthesis of current research in CSP and reading intervention instruction, and reflections on developing interwoven CSP supplemental materials for PRESS. Throughout writing and researching I have learned that I enjoy exploring and tracking the web of knowledge created by previous researchers and thinkers. The interconnectedness of researching topics continues to interest me especially in determining what information to include and how to establish a cohesive theme that reflects my understanding of the importance of equitably educating students.

Equitably educating students through personal self-reflection and understanding has been my mantle since learning about Minnesota's achievement gap. When I returned to Minnesota after teaching out of state, I knew that most teachers were female and white but the persistent achievement gap amidst comparatively overall high academic achievement befuddled and disappointed me. Overcoming my own implicit biases and understanding the lived experiences of my students and their families has transformed my professional and personal life. My personal experiences generally reflect the majority culture and I had come to regard them as "normal". Through the past years of conversations, reading, media, and other sources I have come to disband a standard for "normal" and increase my awareness of the impact of policies. My position as a white, female elementary teacher further emboldens my resolve to increase my awareness so as not to perpetuate an ineffective educational and social system. Through the research and writing required to support this project I have been able to gather strategies, theoretical frameworks, and like minded thinkers to guide my conversations with colleagues. I relish the opportunity to share newly found resources with classmates, colleagues, and

instructors. This process gave me added feedback especially when highlighting different parts or elements of the text than I did. This also mirrors the learning process of culturally responsive teaching. As I interact with authors, I learn more about their knowledge and transfer it to my own similarly, as I teach students, I learn more about them as learners and thinkers that informs my instruction.

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