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CONNECTING WITH THEIR STUDENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF
TEACHERS USING CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERACY PRACTICES IN
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

A Thesis by:
Beatrice C. Acosta

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies
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ABSTRACT

Connecting with Their Students: Understanding the Impact of Teachers Using Culturally Relevant Literacy Practices in Elementary Classrooms

(December 2023)

Beatrice C. Acosta

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Despite extensive research indicating the importance of educators connecting with their students, a significant number of teachers fail to associate classroom curriculum with their students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Even with the best intentions, teachers frequently encounter difficulties in establishing connections with students and seamlessly integrating their diverse cultures and experiences outside of the classroom into lessons. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is one method teachers use to incorporate their students' culture into the classroom so that students see themselves in the lessons and become more engaged in their learning. This study was designed to explore teachers' feelings of cultural competency and their use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in elementary classrooms. It investigated how utilizing this method may help teachers successfully connect to their students. It also explored support from school districts, specifically professional development, which equips teachers to deal with diverse student needs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The call for classroom teachers to create meaningful learning experiences that reflect the lived experiences of their students remains as strong as ever. As classrooms become more diverse, there is an increasing need for teachers who can work with the experiences, backgrounds, values, approaches, and abilities of diverse student populations (Love & Yesbeck, 2022). Gonzalez (2012) recommends that teachers, regardless of whether they come from marginalized backgrounds or not, develop commitment, advocacy, and intercultural sensitivity and competence to better meet the instructional needs of all their students. Gonzalez (2012) also supports the idea that teachers must consider students' learning contexts outside of school. Outside learning contexts are connected to the whole child. They incorporate cultural identity, the expression of their learning preferences, their self-esteem, and most importantly their cognitive and academic skills (Gonzalez, 2012). Teachers who become culturally competent understand the connections between learning, culture, and language in their students (Clark, 2021).

Using culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is one way teachers can begin to connect with their students and incorporate students' culture and lived experiences in the classroom. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is more than just occasionally selecting non-white authors for students to read and choosing diverse topics for students to discuss. It is a commitment to creating a classroom where the daily experiences reflect the students. In 2021, Colleen P. Clark interviewed Gloria Ladson-Billings, the scholar who introduced the term Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, about recent progress that has been made in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in literacy instruction. Ladson-Billings says:

“Many educators may think that because they use diverse texts and visuals in the classrooms, they are practicing culturally relevant pedagogy but if teachers are not ensuring student learning and critical consciousness along with curricular change, they are misinterpreting what culturally relevant pedagogy is attempting to accomplish” (Clark, 2021).

Research Problem

Although research has shown that teachers should implement culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, there are many teachers who do not implement these strategies in their classrooms. Even with the best of intentions, teachers often struggle connecting with their students and effectively incorporating their students’ culture and lived experiences into classroom instruction. This study was designed to explore obstacles teachers encounter when implementing culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms. It also investigated professional development that is provided to teachers in order to explore teachers’ own feelings of cultural competence and cultural awareness.

Specifically, it will answer the questions:

- 1. How are teacher experiences impacted by their use of culturally relevant literature in their classroom?*
- 2. How does teacher professional development specifically prepare teachers to teach in their increasingly diverse classrooms?*

Positionality

I began my teaching career 4 years ago in a public school district in San Antonio, Texas, the 7th largest city in the United States. The school district serves nearly 10,000 students who are economically disadvantaged, with over 20 schools and programs. There are everyday inequities

that the school districts' mostly Latino/a student's face. Children who grow up in poverty and low-income families are sometimes forced into adulthood too soon. Before I began teaching elementary school, I served as a substitute teacher for a high school in an economically disadvantaged school district. There were many teens in the school who held full-time jobs to supplement their household income. There was an abundance of teen parents who also held full-time jobs. These students had to balance work and school and often fell asleep in class.

There were other families in the district who are economically disadvantaged as well and face similar problems. They wonder where their next meal will come from. As a first-year teacher, I taught 2nd grade in a public elementary school. A student in my 2nd grade classroom was always hiding food or storing it in her backpack. She also needed eyeglasses, but the family had a difficult time obtaining the eyeglasses even after the school social worker paved a free and easy path for her guardian to obtain the glasses. It took so long in fact that Child Protective Services had to be called to investigate the reason for not obtaining the eyeglasses. After an investigation was completed on the family, the family was in a daily struggle to find food to feed their large family among other issues. My student was hiding food because she knew once she left school, she probably wouldn't have a meal at home.

My fourth year of teaching has proved to be the most challenging in terms of dealing with challenges that students face. Michael, a student in my current classroom, loves country music and loves to dance. He got himself into trouble in music class one day. Samantha, who is new to the classroom, tends to make snide comments to students for no reason at all, and was caught making fun of Michael because he got into trouble with the teacher. Louis, another student in my classroom who sees himself as the class protector, asked Samantha not to make fun of Michael because, "Everyone gets in trouble one time or another." Samantha and Louis started to

exchange words and Louis made fun of Samantha's mother. Fast forward to the end of music class and Mr. Hernandez, the music teacher, asked me to speak to Samantha. She was crying unconsolably in the corner of the music room. Samantha told me what happened in music class. She knew she was wrong for making fun of Michael but added that Louis didn't have a right to make fun of her mom because she doesn't have one. She doesn't know why her mom left but she left their dad and her siblings, and they were forced to leave their home and move in with a family she did not really know. I stroked her hair and patted her back and tried to explain that Louis was wrong for making fun of her mom, but he couldn't have known she didn't have one. I promised that I was going to speak to Louis about what he said. Samantha gathered herself enough to go to the restroom and then joined us for a classroom discussion about making fun of others. That day, I learned that Samantha was new to the district because her family was forced to move in with relatives. She was having a difficult time adjusting to the new living situation without her mother. The incident with Samantha was a great reminder of why building positive relationships with students and learning about their lived experiences should be a top priority for educators.

It also was an additional reminder of the challenges my students, and so many of the students in our school district face every day; and that those challenges can, and often do, have an impact on their academic success. This then makes it even more crucial for teachers to construct strong relationships early on with their students in order to grow their own teacher cultural competence.

Building relationships with students and knowing their lived experiences is not easy, but educators should develop relationships with students for learning to take place. Research has shown that healthy teacher-student relationships have a positive effect on student learning

(Howard et. al, 2020). Teachers should take the initiative to effectively listen to students in order to create trust and positive relationships so that learning will occur. German (2021) supports the idea of developing relationships between students and teachers by indicating that teachers should teach using culturally relevant materials and pedagogy. “Representation is how we include communities and voices that education has historically marginalized and excluded through curriculum...” (p. 33). Baines et. al, 2018, also recommends using culturally relevant teaching in classrooms so that students are competent, knowledgeable about, and feel pride in their own heritage. Teaching using culturally relevant pedagogy and materials appeals to students’ interests because it represents where they come from. Students feel accepted and seen in the classroom and are more likely to want to learn and perform. I chose to stay and work in my school district to implement this method of teaching in my classroom, because the children in this district deserve the same education as children who live in wealthier communities. They deserve this type of education because it offers them an opportunity to change the course of their lives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of issues facing students today involve poverty and a lack of resources. Students are struggling to overcome individual barriers to achieve in the classroom and in life. Some of these barriers are access to food, housing, and other basic needs. They all play a role in the engagement of students and their families in school. Educators can help alleviate some of the issues students face by learning about their students' economic situations and understanding their lived experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) uses the term Culturally Relevant Teaching to describe the kind of teaching that uses student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge.

Yet, many teachers find it difficult to relate to the lived experiences of their students. It is no surprise due to the demographic make-up of teachers and students in schools around the US. The racial demographics of public schools teachers look very different from its student population according to 2020-21 NCES data. In the United States, 79.9% of teachers are White compared to a breakdown of the student population that shows 72.5% of students are people of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Also, a number of studies have documented that teachers, especially those who lack cultural competence, often develop negative perceptions about those students, their communities and their abilities (Ross & Stevenson, 2018) so teachers who do not feel confident in their cultural knowledge of the community may have difficulty creating a culturally relevant classroom.

However, there are many teachers who are culturally knowledgeable about the community they teach in and relate to their students' lived experiences but still have difficulty creating a culturally relevant classroom and crafting culturally relevant pedagogy. Curricular

materials that all students can relate to, and reflect the lived experiences of all students, are scarce. Very rarely do students with diverse backgrounds see or hear themselves in the lessons and curriculum that teachers use. This study investigated how educators, specifically teachers, work to develop culturally relevant pedagogy and how to maintain it. It also explored teachers' own feelings of how culturally knowledgeable they are of their students. Finally, it explored culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy in professional development for teachers, and how this professional development or lack of has impacted teacher experiences in the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

The two main conceptual frameworks that ground this study are culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy and teacher cultural competence. Culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy become the mechanisms through which teachers can connect with their ever-increasingly diverse classrooms. In turn, a teacher's cultural competence is the teacher's ability to demonstrate that connectiveness and their own beliefs and feelings about that ability.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Teachers must continuously adapt their pedagogy to meet the academic needs of their students. To truly engage students in the learning process, educators must know their students' academic abilities and their culture or unique lived experiences. The term Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was first introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings who studied the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of African American students (1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) identified three major domains of culturally relevant pedagogy: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. She defines academic success:

“. . .as the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences. Cultural competence refers to the ability to help students

appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture (p. 75).

Sociopolitical consciousness, according to Ladson-Billings, "...is the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems" (p. 75). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy requires educators to involve culture in the classroom so that students achieve academic success. Academic success is not defined by a single component. It encompasses much more than high academic achievement. It involves the development of social and personal skills. It includes continuous growth and progress, motivation and engagement in learning, and the ability to achieve long-term goals (Ladson-Billings, 1992). In the classroom, teachers should be mindful of the literature that they choose, making sure students' culture is represented. Exposing students to rich multicultural literature and materials will allow students of diverse populations to see themselves reflected in the materials and therefore become more engaged and motivated to learn (Paris, 2012). When students are engaged in their learning, they are able to achieve more in the classroom.

It is essential that teachers pull from a student's background knowledge to facilitate new learning. Teachers need to not only validate their students' experiences but draw from them to support their learning. Students are able to make connections to their own experiences when teachers use materials that the student can make a personal connection with. When educators choose to use culturally relevant materials in their classrooms that reflect their students, students will recognize their culture but also experience the different perspectives of other culture present in their classroom, which develops their cultural competence. Paris (2012) supports the development of students' cultural competence. He defends Ladson-Billings idea of building

students' cultural competence because, "...it maintains their community and heritage ways with language and other cultural practices in the process of gaining access to dominant ones" (p. 94).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) identifies the third major domain of culturally relevant pedagogy as sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness is the ability of a student to use their success in the classroom to succeed in life outside of the classroom. For example, students should examine the society in which they live through a lens which identifies barriers and issues affecting the community and learn about how to make a change in the community by advocating and working for it. Students learn by example. When they learn about individuals who come from the same background as themselves and who overcame barriers to make changes in their community, they are empowered to do the same. Culturally relevant teaching provides a mechanism teachers can use to have children learn about these types of individuals.

Teachers can make their pedagogy culturally relevant for diverse student populations by getting to know the students and their culture, implementing culturally relevant teaching in their classrooms, and challenging students to question the society they live in. Teachers should prepare to meet the needs of individual students and diversity in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of how many languages and cultures are represented in the classroom. Ignoring these differences and thinking that all students are the same regardless of cultural background can create a problem. It is important not to stereotype students into a culture but to get to know them on a more personal level and not a superficial one.

There are a number of ways that teachers can get to know their students' cultures and lived experiences. Teachers can visit the community in which the students live and their home life environment to learn more about their students' culture and how those cultures are represented outside the school setting. In the classroom, teachers should encourage students to

consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have a direct impact on their lives and the community (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Teachers should choose culturally relevant materials to use in their lessons so that students see themselves represented in the classroom and the learning environment. Integrating the community that the students live in with the lessons also encourages students to challenge the issues these students face and will help them succeed later in life by encouraging them to make changes in the community. Teaching while providing real world experiences aids in student engagement and empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Django Paris (2012) offers the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy as an extension of culturally relevant pedagogy that uses Ladson-Billings' work and expands upon it to specifically include language and community.

“This approach not only will more accurately embody some of the best past and present research and practice but will also offer pre-service and in-service teachers a way of both naming and conceptualizing the need to meaningfully value and maintain the practices of their students in the process of extending their students’ repertoires of practice to include dominant language, literacies, and other cultural practices” (p. 95).

Paris argues that without resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality, students will continue being asked to lose their heritage and community ways with language, literacy, and culture in order to achieve in US schools. Paris insists that the term culturally sustaining requires that pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people – it requires that they support young people in

sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence (Paris, 2012).

One of the key additions that Paris makes to the CRP framework is focusing on students' language. Language is a critical component to student success. Paris argues that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages and cultures of communities of color in the United States. Teachers must be able to communicate in and establish a relationship with their students in their first or native language. This aspect is crucial to student academic success. Studies show that there are benefits to teaching students in their native language. Research by Sleeter (2001) supports this idea by finding that students who are proficient in reading in their native language acquire English faster because of their existing skills. Teaching students in their native language should be seen as a resource and not a problem. Research with children whose native language is other than English done by Collier and Thomas (2002) found similar results with regards to second language acquisition when the first language was first developed.

Children should be taught in their native language, as this will produce great benefits such as validating their language and raising their self-esteem. Furthermore, if a child is made to function cognitively in the classroom as it is in immersion classes and is not well developed in the second language then the child will struggle significantly (Baker, 2011). The first language should not be taken away by placing a non-English speaking student in a monolingual classroom. Baker (2011) suggests that a predictor of student success in their second language relies on nonstop development in the primary language. Therefore, sustaining a child's native language is critical to overall student success.

Validating a student's culture and language can help guide student success in the classroom. Students become empowered by knowing that their cultural experiences and native

languages are important and can be used in the lessons to enhance their classroom learning (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Another factor that aids student success includes incorporating students' culture and language into the curriculum through literature.

Culturally Relevant Literacy Practices

Literacy instruction extends beyond reading a script from a textbook or following a scope and sequence. It involves connecting with students in hopes of having them connect with literature (Thomas, 2019). Researchers support the idea that connecting to literature should begin in elementary school. Thomas (2019) found that instituting culturally relevant literacy practices during the early literacy stages positively validates students' identities and serves as a foundation for later success. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that upper elementary literacy programs that are integrated into culturally relevant teaching legitimize students' real-life experiences by making them a part of the curriculum. Bishop (1990) also found significant benefits to providing students with diverse texts at an early age, offering them opportunities both to see themselves and see the lives of others through reading.

In elementary classrooms, using literature that reflects the students can be a pivotal piece to their connection to school but also their love of reading. Former bilingual teacher and librarian, P.K. Delgado (2021) contends that adding culturally relevant literature to an elementary classroom library collection humanizes the curriculum and therefore encourages students' desire to read by presenting stories and experiences that are not always included in mainstream curriculum. Students make personal connections to their reading when they see themselves in the classroom literature. Delgado (2021) insists that personal connections lead to "more significant interactions with those texts, validation of self, and hopefully, more meaningful text-related instruction as well" (p. 50). Students develop their identity throughout

time and the foundation of a person's identity is culture (Wallace & Brand, 2012). There are various factors that contribute to the growth of a person's identity; some include the student's ethnicity, culture, language, level of education, gender and age. Wallace and Brand (2012) found that although culture can be transmitted from elders in the community to younger members as they pass down information, they do not learn everything that they need to be able to construct their constantly changing identities. Students' struggle with their own personal identity may begin to rise when there are differences in the culture of the parents and the culture that the student is experiencing here in America (Wallace and Brand, 2012).

That is why it is important for educators to represent students' culture and lived experiences in the classroom, especially in communities where classrooms are diverse. Schools should be welcoming to the families of the community, especially students from other countries and newcomers to America or the community members who may feel like they do not belong (Wallace & Brand, 2012). Environmental print around the school in various languages, newsletters in different languages, and community outreach can be ways that school can connect with the community (Gonzalez, 2012). This can be a great step to helping address the needs of diverse learners as this will let the students know that their home language is accepted in the school (Baker, 2011). Effective communication between the community and educators and application of culturally appropriate materials in the classroom in the students' native language are all factors contributing to a teacher's cultural competence.

Teacher Cultural Competence

As classrooms become more diverse, there is an increasing need for teachers to be prepared to work with students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers should be culturally competent in their students' culture, community, and lived experiences in order to provide lessons that are effective and reflective of their students. Research has shown, however, that teachers often enter the classroom with biases and preconceptions that can limit the educational achievement levels of ethnic minorities (Gay, 2000). Research studies also show that teachers can struggle to connect with students who have different backgrounds than their own (Keengwe, 2010). In a study about developing culturally proficient teachers for dual-language classrooms, Quezada and Alexandrowicz (2019) explore how to develop culturally proficient dual-language teachers and how to prepare them to teach in culturally proficient schools and classrooms. They found that local and national education systems are not preparing future teachers to meet the challenges that diverse student populations can bring. The authors' support dual language programs for all children. They argue that effective dual-language programs can close the achievement gap for emerging English Language Learners and provide a superior education for native English speakers. The authors also promote cultural proficiency – an individual's or a groups' belief system that holds students' cultural backgrounds of language, race, gender, and socioeconomic status as assets on which one is to construct their educational experiences. Cultural proficiency should then be used to develop culturally global dual-language teachers (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019).

Developing cultural proficiency or competence is especially important for educators in culturally diverse schools. In a study conducted by Dalhouse & Dalhouse (2006) investigating teachers' beliefs about teaching in culturally diverse classrooms, the researchers found that

teachers who had little cultural competence had significantly different expectations for students from different racial and linguistic backgrounds. The teachers who lacked cultural competence expected higher levels of discipline problems, lower parental support, lower levels of student motivation and fewer gifted and talented students.

It is important for educators to develop their cultural competence in order to avoid bias, negative expectations, and deficit models (Gorski, 2011). Gorski explains, "...deficit ideology is a worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities - standardized test scores or levels of educational attainment, for example - by pointing to supposed deficiencies within disenfranchised individuals and communities" (p. 153). Educators should be aware of the differences among children arising from cultural upbringing and expectations. Developing cultural competence can assist educators in building relationships with students of different backgrounds. Cultural competence increases the ability to communicate with and relate to others from diverse backgrounds. This can create effective and meaningful relationships between teachers and students where teachers are more open to learn about their students' cultures and lived experiences. Developing a teachers' cultural competence may also change negative expectations about the students they teach. Administrators can assist educators in developing their cultural competence by providing resources appropriate for instruction. One of these resources is professional staff development.

Teacher Professional Development

Professional staff development for teachers is one way to further develop teachers' cultural competence. Professional development opportunities provided by their school district and other outside organizations may help educators commit to finding ways to be as responsive as possible to the inequities students experience in and out of school. They can learn about

techniques and strategies which can be implemented in classrooms so that all students will feel supported, inspiring them to succeed.

Teachers should create multiple learning environments for meeting the needs and interests of all students but not all teachers are prepared to do so. If teachers are not given the tools, training, and resources to enact these changes in their classroom, often their commitments fail to be actualized. Dunbar, et. al., (2019) insist that school leaders and teachers can be impacted in their culturally relevant pedagogical practices as well as in attitudes and perceptions regarding connecting with students in culturally diverse classrooms. Gorski (2008) also found that student-teacher relationships are influenced by teachers' attitudes. He states that, "teachers attitudes inform the way they teach and relate to students, so professional development should include opportunities to reflect on these attitudes and why it can be so difficult to let go of them" (p. 168).

Research completed by Mellom et. al, (2018), also supports the need for professional development for teachers due to the negative attitudes about emerging English language learners. Drawing on qualitative data collected as part of a mixed-methods study on the effects of teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy on emerging English language learners' academic outcomes, the authors argue that while teacher attitudes towards emerging English language learners often remain prejudiced, professional development training mitigates those negative attitudes over time.

This study examined teachers' feelings about professional development they have received regarding teaching students of diverse populations. It also investigated if professional development has aided in developing their cultural competence. Finally, it explored teachers'

feedback about professional development they would like to receive to aid their classroom practice.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study involved qualitative research methods and analysis. Qualitative research involves the collection of and analysis of narrative data. Mertler (2022), describes narrative data as observational notes, interview transcripts, and transcripts of video and audio recordings. Unlike quantitative research, the focus of qualitative research tends to be on the quality of a particular activity rather than on how often it occurs or how it might be evaluated. The choice to use qualitative research methods for this study was intentional. I wanted to hear the stories of the teachers who use CRP in their own words, describing in detail their own feelings about their practice, their needs as teachers and support or lack of support from the district on this subject. Using qualitative instruments and methods allowed for this type of in-depth inquiry to occur.

Mertler (2022) identifies several approaches to conducting qualitative research. One of the approaches to conducting qualitative research is case study research. Case studies are in-depth studies of specifically identified programs, activities, people, or groups. The purpose of a case study is to understand a problem in great detail. I chose to conduct a case study in order to examine teachers and their pedagogical practices in their classrooms.

Participants

Purposeful sampling is a targeted approach to selecting participants for a study (Mertler, 2022). I chose to use this intentional selection of participants because these participants are teachers who are successful in connecting with their students and therefore possess the information needed to address the research topic and provide insight into answering the research questions. I currently work as a fourth-grade teacher in the school district in which this study was conducted. I have held the same position for three years. The participants for this case study

included three fourth grade teachers who are on my fourth-grade team and currently teach in the same school where I teach. They were selected as participants in order to explore their feelings about the curriculum and teaching practices used in their classrooms and examine if these practices aid in connecting to their students. I wanted to obtain their views on professional development provided by the school district in which we teach. To protect the participants' identity, pseudonyms were assigned to all of the participants. Two of the participants are tenured teachers. Seth has been teaching elementary school for six years in the same school district. Zoe has been teaching elementary school for fifteen years in the same school district and the same school as where her career began. She is the most tenured employee of the school where I work. The third participant, Owen, is a new teacher. This is his first-year teaching, teaching in an elementary school, and the fourth grade.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection was used for this case study. Qualitative data collection includes observations, interviews, or examining existing documents (Mertler, 2022). For the purposes of this study, the data collection included:

- 1) digitally audio-recorded semi-structured individual interviews and
- 2) written questionnaires

Before I collected any data, IRB approval was obtained (Appendix A). An email was sent to the participants providing background information about the study and requesting their participation (Appendix B). Consent was obtained from the participants and then I provided the written questionnaire to the participants.

Mertler (2022) describes a form of data collection for a qualitative study as written questionnaires or surveys. A survey or written questionnaire is described as a set of written

questions given to respondents for the purpose of learning about their individual perspective on the topic (p. 91). The first part of data collection was written questionnaires that the participants completed on their own. These written questionnaires were provided to the participants one week prior to their semi-structured interview taking place. The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions about their own cultural competence and any professional development they have received pertaining to working with diverse populations of students (Appendix C).

The next set of data collected was a semi-structured interview. Mertler (2022) describes semi-structured interviews as an interview "...where the researcher asks the respondent several base questions, but also has the option of following up a given response with additional questions, depending on the situation" (p. 197). The digitally audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted with each individual participant. The individual interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The interviews were conducted in a convenient and quiet location at the school where the participants work. They were conducted after hours in the school library. The digitally recorded semi-structured individual interviews consisted of seven questions pertaining to each teacher's feeling about their use, or lack of use, of CRP in their classrooms (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

After participants completed the written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, an inductive analysis of the data was completed. Parsons and Brown (2002) as stated in Mertler 2022, describe the process of qualitative data analysis as a means of, "...systematically organizing and presenting the findings...in ways that facilitate the understanding of these data" (p. 207). They further describe a three-step process for conducting an inductive analysis of the

data: organization, description, and interpretation, which guided the analysis of the data collected.

The first step in analyzing the data collected is organization. It was necessary to have a plan that included a timeline for the participants and myself to follow in order to collect the data. The data collected is composed of written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The written questionnaire was given to the participants one week before the semi-structured interviews were conducted. The participants completed the written questionnaire on their own time and were asked to return the questionnaire to me within one week. All of the participants complied with my request. When the participants returned the written questionnaire to me, we scheduled a time and date to conduct the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at my place of employment, after school hours in the school library. The interviews were audio-taped. The interviews were around twenty minutes in length and occurred approximately one week after the participants completed the written survey.

After all the data was collected, the next step in an inductive analysis is description (Mertler, 2022). In this phase of analysis, coding occurs. Coding narrative data includes developing a coding scheme where all codes have an important connection to the research questions. The narrative data was coded with one or more of the categories depending on the responses of the study participants. The written questionnaire data was analyzed using pre-determined codes. In order to code the semi-structured interviews, transcribing the data collected was necessary. Once all of the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed by a third party. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and then organized using pre-determined codes.

The next step in the process of inductive analysis is to describe the main features or characteristics of the categories resulting from the coding of the data (Mertler, 2022). Emerging themes came from this process of data analysis. With my initial coding of the data, three original themes emerged which were: (1) cultural competency, (2) curriculum challenges, and (3) lack of teacher autonomy. With my second round of coding, one additional theme emerged. That theme was district support. All data was then reanalyzed to reflect the four themes: (1) cultural competency, (2) curriculum challenges, (3) lack of teacher autonomy, and (4) district support.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Barriers and inequities pressing on families and students impact educational engagement in the classrooms and overall performance of a student. If teachers are not culturally competent about their students, it can be difficult for these teachers to connect with their students because they do not understand their students' lived experiences outside of the classroom. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a tool educators can use to connect to their students. Teaching students while keeping their culture and backgrounds in mind may help students become more engaged in learning therefore increasing academic success. It can also help students overcome the barriers they face outside of the classroom and helps them succeed not only in school but in life as well.

However, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy is not always an easy task for educators. School districts are tasked with finding culturally appropriate curriculum teachers can use in the classroom, but these materials are not always available. Finding materials to relate to every student is challenging so teachers are often not provided with the curriculum to teach using culturally relevant pedagogy. Although curriculum may be scarce, professional development for teachers is an avenue school districts could choose to provide training for teachers on how to develop and implement culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. This study was designed to find out about teachers' experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy. It was also designed to explore professional development provided by a local school district and the teachers' experiences and needs in this area. This will inform the public and the school district about the teachers' experiences and their own feelings of cultural competency when dealing with issues the children in the school district are faced with.

Cultural Competency

The first theme that the participants expressed was their own feelings of cultural competency and what it means as a teacher to be culturally competent about their students. Students need teachers who recognize them as important individuals in their classrooms and understand that students learn best by using their culture and backgrounds to learn new concepts. Teachers need to develop their cultural competency in order to best facilitate their students' learning. Part of developing their cultural competency is getting to know their students. The teachers demonstrated that they understood the importance of cultural competency.

Owen stated that, "...as a teacher, it means being able to respect and embrace the cultures students walk into classrooms with." Zoe stated that "It means I acknowledge other peoples' beliefs and I am considerate of as well as understanding of how someone's culture might be different than mine and therefore, as a teacher, I seek to embrace the differences we all have to offer." Seth expressed that, "I represent only one culture in my classroom; therefore, I have to get to know my kids, their customs, beliefs, and background in order to teach the whole child."

All three of the teachers conveyed sentiments that indicated being culturally competent about their students' culture is necessary in order to connect to and effectively teach the children. Zoe stated, "I have to take their culture into consideration when teaching in order to engage the whole child." Seth had a similar response to Zoe's: "I try to find out the lived experiences of all my students, regardless of color. It's necessary in order to identify with and teach my students." Owen, who is new to the district and in his first year of teaching wrote, "...unless you grew up in this community or a community like this, it's hard as a teacher to be able to connect to students and understand the issues in the community, parents, and all of the issues our students face on a daily basis."

The participants understood the importance of cultural competency and its role in connecting to their students. Zoe explained that connecting to students of a different background than hers is especially important. She explained how she tries to get her African American students to share their culture with her: “I ask questions about their traditions and what they listen to and do outside of school and I show interest in what they tell me. For example, I play music in my room every day. If a student tells me about their music interests and I haven’t heard about it. I look it up and try to play it in the classroom; either in the morning or while the kids are up and selecting a partner to complete the next activity. I also share my culture with them and then hope that they will share out with me as well.”

Developing a teachers’ cultural competency is crucial to student success in the classroom. Teachers should ensure that their students are engaged in lessons and become active participants in their learning. If teachers are struggling with ways to develop their cultural competency then support should be provided so that all teachers have the opportunity to do so. Teachers learn from experience and most importantly, rely on one another for support in creating an environment conducive to learning but teacher support should also be provided from administration and the school district where they work.

District Support

Another theme that emerged from coding the written questionnaire and surveys was District Support. District Support for teachers is crucial in developing quality teachers who can teach students in diverse classrooms. Students bring in their positive and negative experiences from outside the classroom therefore, it is important that teachers receive support with the many issues and experiences that having a diverse student population can bring into the classroom.

Only one of the participants communicated that he received positive support from the school district when dealing with issues of race or cultural barriers. Seth provided an example where the district multilingual program helped his campus bridge a gap between campus staff and parents and students from another country. He stated, “We had an influx of Asian Americans from Burma one year. The district multilingual program provided a night for our campus to learn about culture, language, and their customs because of the cultural and language barriers between us.” He also added that the district “...provides flyers in English and Spanish for our bilingual parents and provided a translator when I had to communicate with non-English speaking parents.”

However, the other two participants did not feel supported by the district when dealing with issues of race. Zoe states, “I think this is one area where my district can grow. They don’t specifically support learning about or discussing issues of race in any way.” She goes on to state, “...it’s very hard when the classroom teachers are the only ones fighting to get culturally relevant texts into the curriculum.” Owen agreed with Zoe about a lack of district support for culturally relevant teaching. He stated, “Our district does not support culturally relevant teaching. Everything I know about culturally relevant teaching is because of individuals I work with, or from classes in my master’s program that support and encourage using culturally relevant materials.”

When asked about district support for teachers such as professional development for teachers on incorporating culture or culturally relevant pedagogical practices, all three of the participants agreed that there is a lack of district support in that area. Owen stated that, “...we’re not given those opportunities or provided that type of support.” Zoe agreed by stating that, “the district does not offer staff or professional development on connecting with our students or

culturally relevant pedagogy.” Seth added, “the district does not provide opportunities such as professional development to connect with students or how to use culturally relevant materials in the lessons.”

When asked about professional development they would like to participate in or attend, the participants’ requests included professional development that would assist teachers with communicating with their students. Seth, “would enjoy the opportunity to attend professional development that would support teachers dealing with issues of culture or race.” Zoe expressed an interest in professional development to help promote equity among her students. She stated, “I would like for all of my students to see themselves in the lessons. I have Asian Americans and African Americans who would be more engaged in learning if the district would give us some training on how to make our lessons more culturally relevant.” Owen added, “...they should provide us with professional development on ways to connect with students through the lessons.”

A teacher who understands the knowledge of a community and their students can have a tremendous impact on those students. It helps students’ classroom experiences connect to the outside world and in turn helps them connect their outside world to their classroom experiences. Another aspect of developing culturally relevant pedagogy is using curriculum that is culturally relevant to the students. An abundance of these materials should be available to teachers, but this study showed that this is not always the case.

Curriculum Challenges

Every school district operates differently. In some districts, teachers have autonomy to use curriculum of their choice while teaching and some do not. The district I work in does not allow teachers to have that autonomy, so I chose to find out if teachers were conforming to the

district procedures where opportunities to incorporate culturally responsive materials in the classroom are limited or if teachers were using culturally responsive materials of their choice.

Of the three participants, only one of the teachers is using culturally responsive materials of their choice. Zoe is a bilingual teacher and uses culturally relevant books in her classroom whenever possible. Zoe stated, “I have and use a lot of books that connect to my students’ background, their language, their customs, and their traditions as well.” She explained that she doesn’t always shy away from the district curriculum but instead finds ways to incorporate the books in a lesson. “I like to use books that connect to my students’ background. For example, if I’m teaching a reading TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills – state standards for what students should know and be able to do) where they have to connect or find similarities and differences between two books genres, I might use a book about La Llorona from one version and then use another book about La Llorona from another version and then have the kids compare those two. I find that the students are more engaged because they're familiar with the myth or the legend and they become more engaged in the learning. I can also use a choice book to address a TEKS about how a character changes instead of using a book from the adopted curriculum. I might use *Zulema y la Lechuza* by Xavier Garza, where the character changes because they get scared whenever they see a Lechuza coming in through their windows. I would use that book because Leyendas are a big part of my students’ rich oral storytelling passed down from generation to generation.” Although Zoe admits to using her own choice books for some lessons, she still addresses concerns about the lack of curricular choices available to other teachers and students. “I know about these stories because I come from the same background as most of my students. I also chose to use these stories because I know how effective it is to teach students in this manner. The district should have everyone teach with these materials and provide

this type of training to new and current teachers to make them aware of the resources available and the benefits of teaching in this manner. I received this training while in my Master's program at UTSA, otherwise I wouldn't know the benefits of teaching in this manner and I probably wouldn't know how to incorporate these books in the lessons."

The other participants admit to not using culturally relevant materials in the lessons because they are not provided with the resources. Owen, who is a departmentalized Math teacher, meaning that he shares his Reading/Writing responsibilities with another teacher stated, "I do not provide culturally relevant lessons to my students because I need to understand how organizational cultures operate. I don't want to offend anyone so I should do more on my part because I do want to use resources that connect the lessons to my students, but I don't know what resources to use. The district could do a little more too, by providing that training and those resources." Seth, who had a positive experience with the district multilingual department admits to not always using culturally relevant materials in his classroom: "I try to use instructional materials that are relevant to my students but this conflicts with what I'm supposed to use. The reading curriculum & reading materials that our district wants us to use are not always culturally relevant to my students."

Student learning experiences should help them become lifelong learners. When curriculum choices are limited, educators should utilize other opportunities to provide rich learning experiences for their students. Teachers can use their communities as resources. They can use their students' backgrounds to facilitate their learning experiences as well as the students' lived experiences while still conforming to curriculum that the district provides. Along with curriculum challenges, the participants attributed a lack of teacher autonomy as a reason for not using these resources in the classroom.

Lack of Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy refers to teachers having the freedom to make decisions about their own teaching. Teachers should have the freedom to use resources of their choice while administering curriculum and meeting state standards. Two of the participants attributed a lack of teacher autonomy as a reason for not implementing culturally relevant lessons in their classroom.

Owen relayed that, “the district doesn’t allow flexibility with our teaching materials or the amount of time we spend on subjects, so I’ve been complacent in implementing culturally relevant teaching.” Seth provided a similar response to why he doesn’t always use culturally relevant materials: “I would like to teach a lesson in my students’ language, read aloud a book with characters they can relate to that look like them, or even provide a parent/school project to help students of a different culture feel more connected to our school but I don’t because it’s not in the curriculum. We have to use the district provided curriculum for everything we do.” Zoe, the participant who regularly uses culturally relevant texts in her lessons also attributed a lack of teacher autonomy due to not being able to incorporate other aspects of culture in the lessons: “I would like the freedom to incorporate more of the culture and the identity of the students into what we’re teaching. I want to be able to celebrate their culture...like the posada and Hispanic Heritage month.”

Because she was the only teacher who consistently implements culturally relevant materials in her lessons, she was asked about how regular use of this pedagogy has impacted her connection with her students to which she replied: “It helps connect their funds of knowledge (like what they bring to the classroom) with the content that the students are learning in the classroom. They take what they already know and relate that background knowledge to the new information. My students are more engaged in the lessons because they see themselves in there.

When we research about and then celebrate their heritage, they feel respected and a part of their learning too. They learn about successful people who come from the same background, sometimes the same neighborhoods as them who have succeeded or made a difference in their communities for people like them and they see the possibilities. I'm very close to my students, their families, and the community where I teach, and they go to school and live and this helps shape that connection between us and make it strong.”

The final step in completing an inductive analysis is to interpret the data. During this step, (Mertler, 2022) states that Parsons & Brown, 2002 recommend, “...looking for aspects of the data that answer the research questions, provide challenges to current or future practice, or may actually guide future practice” (p. 210). The next chapter will discuss and determine if the research questions were answered and the benefits and implications of this study and possible future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

With the growing diversity in classrooms, the demand for teachers who can effectively educate the students within these diverse settings is on the rise. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy emerges as a valuable resource for teachers, enabling them to successfully teach diverse student populations and empower students to confront the challenges they encounter, and ultimately, making a positive impact in their communities. To address these issues, school districts play a crucial role in supporting teachers by offering professional development opportunities that equip them with the necessary skills to navigate these complexities.

Harnessing a student's background and integrating their cultural heritage into lessons and literacy activities has proven to enhance student engagement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally sustaining pedagogy, an extension of culturally relevant pedagogy, takes this approach further by utilizing a student's native language to holistically educate the individual (Paris, 2012). It is imperative for teachers to prioritize the incorporation of both these tools into their teaching practices. This study examined how teachers are navigating CRP and CSP in their teaching. It also examined how school districts are equipping their teachers to deal with the issues their students bring into the classroom.

After analyzing data from the written questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the following information transpired:

The first data set that was analyzed was from the written questionnaire responses. The data addressed question #1. This research question is about teacher experiences and their use of culturally relevant literature in the classroom. The participant responses to this question revealed that two of the teachers, Seth and Owen, are struggling to use culturally relevant literature in

their lessons. The district provided curriculum and the expectation to use only their materials while teaching affect teacher implementation of using culturally relevant materials in the lessons and therefore, hinders a teacher's ability to develop and maintain culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Only one participant, Zoe, admitted to teaching using culturally relevant pedagogy but also admitted to going against district procedures to do so. Of the three participants, this teacher has the most teaching experience of the participants, teaches Reading and Writing and is a Bilingual teacher. She teaches in a self-contained classroom where she has autonomy to teach all subjects in her classroom. She holds a master's degree in Bilingual Education and a second master's degree in Curriculum & Instruction as a Reading Specialist. She admits to learning about how her cultural competency is a crucial part of connecting with her students through her master's programs.

The next data set which included responses to the question #2 in the study about professional development that has prepared teachers to work with and connect to students in diverse classrooms indicates that the participants have not received this type of professional development. While one teacher, Seth, did receive support and does feel supported in certain areas, such as support from the district multicultural department, the other participants indicate that they have not received professional development to aid teachers in discussing issues of race with their students nor has the district provided curriculum that is culturally relevant to their students.

The participants learned about their own teaching practices and where they can grow as educators. While only Zoe feels confident implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and does so regularly, Seth and Owen are struggling to do so because they admit to not knowing how to do so, lack the materials, or do not feel they have the autonomy to do so due to district

requirements. All three of the participants identified and elaborated on additional supports and resources they need to be more successful in the classroom and connecting to their students.

My own classroom instruction benefitted by the findings of this study. I learned about ways that teachers are implementing culturally relevant materials in their lessons and how they are using culturally relevant pedagogy to connect to their students. Most importantly, I learned how crucial it is for teachers to establish a strong and meaningful connection with their students. A strong positive student-teacher relationship creates a conducive learning environment where students feel valued. When students know that their teachers value their lived experiences, they are motivated to engage in their learning. Effective communication between students and teachers does facilitate academic success. Teachers who connect with their students can tailor their teaching methods based on their student experiences. These connections can have a lasting impact on a student's educational journey, contributing to their overall growth and success.

This study also showed how leveraging students' cultural experiences can make learning more relevant and engaging. By connecting lessons to familiar cultural contexts, teachers can make complex concepts more relatable enabling students to grasp and retain knowledge more effectively.

Limitations to the Study

I recognize that there were limitations to this study. The participants are faculty members of the same school and grade level as me. This could have influenced their willingness to participate in the study because we are on the same team and have an established relationship. We share in lesson plan writing for the grade level so the results could have been different if the participants were in different grade levels. Another limitation is that the number of participants in the study was small. This study was conducted during summer school due to time constraints

and having to obtain IRB approval before collecting data. The sample size was small because teachers were on summer break. The data could have yielded different results if the participant sample had been larger.

Future Research

More research in the field of teacher-student relationships can help educators adapt to the changing needs and demographics of their students. School districts would benefit from more research about the benefits of providing teacher training in the form of professional development to ensure that teachers remain effective and responsive in their teaching approaches. Such training and research are essential to continually improve the quality of education.

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Beatrice C. Acosta began her teaching career in August 2019 as a 5th grade Teacher at Bexar County Academy in San Antonio, Texas. In December 2019, she was hired as a 2nd grade Teacher in the Edgewood Independent School District where she is currently employed as a 2nd grade Teacher. Her experience in Edgewood ISD includes teaching 4th grade for 3 years.

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
SAN ANTONIO

Office of Research and Health Sciences

Central Academic Building, Suite 411
One University Way, San Antonio, Texas 78224
Phone: (210) 784-2317 | irb@tamusa.edu

To: Dr. Karen Burgard

From: Dr. Dawn Weatherford

Date: June 6, 2023

Re: Exempt Determination: Protocol 2023-39

The IRB protocol application submitted by you titled, **“Connecting with Their Students: Understanding the Impact of Teachers Using Culturally Relevant Literacy Practices in Elementary Classrooms”** has been reviewed. This application falls under the Exempt Review, Category 3, as listed under the Code of Federal Regulations, title 45 part 46. Any changes to the exempt research must be reviewed by the IRB in advance of implementation.

The determination for this Exempt research expires June 5, 2028.

Before the determination expires, the research will be due for renewal if it is still ongoing. Please notify the IRB Office by May 5, 2028, to avoid a pause in data collection.

Upon completion of the research, a completion report must be submitted to irb@tamusa.edu.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dawn Weatherford".

Dawn Weatherford, PhD
IRB Chair

PLEASE NOTE: It is the responsibility of the primary researcher to amend their IRB protocol to add any future individuals who will be handling research data before they join the study. These individuals must be added to the approved protocol via a protocol amendment and must complete the CITI online course before they may handle research data or interact with human research subjects. If new individuals are not added to the protocol and trained **PRIOR TO ANY HUMAN SUBJECTS CONTACT**, the IRB may revoke the primary researcher’s approval to conduct the research project.

**Texas A&M University-San Antonio
College of Education and Human Development
CONSENT FORM**



Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study

The risk to you is minimal as the data that will be collected will be outside of the school day and will pertain to educational practices that you experience on a daily basis per your regular job duties. You will not be exposed to any physical, psychological, or social risks as part of this study. If you decide, you may withdraw from the process at any point with no harm. If changes to the potential or actual risks or benefits to you occur, you will receive a report of significant new findings and/or be asked to re-consent. In order to minimize risk, participants can stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in the study.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. Reports resulting from this study will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future personal or professional relations with the Co-PI for this study, Mrs. Acosta, or Texas A&M University - San Antonio. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Karen Burgard, the Co-Principal Investigator, Mrs. Acosta, or the IRB of Texas A&M University-San Antonio, at the following address: One University Way, San Antonio, Texas 78224.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB Chair at irb@tamusa.edu, or by phone (210) 784-2317.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

The signature below affirms that you are at least 18 years old, have received a copy of this consent form, have understood the above information, and agree to voluntarily participate in this research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-SAN ANTONIO INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.
Phone: (210) 784-2317, Graduate Studies and Office of Research





Texas A&M University- San Antonio

IRB Protocol Application

IRB OFFICE USE ONLY

Last Name: Burgard (Acosta)

IRB Log# 2023-39

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Complete Training

- PI, Co-Investigator, and anyone interacting with potential participants and/or identifiable participant information or biospecimen must be listed in the protocol and complete necessary training.
- Refresher training must be completed every two years.
- More details can be found at: <http://www.tamusa.edu/graduatestudiesandresearch/irb/index.html>

2. Complete Form

- Form must be typed and free of typographical/grammatical errors. *Handwritten forms will not be accepted.*

3. Attach Documents to Application (*Be sure to label and reference material*)

- Training documentation: Social and Behavioral Research *and* The Revised Common Rule CITI completion report for all investigators
- Consent documentation (*as applicable*): consent protocol, consent form, assent form
- Recruitment materials (*as applicable*): flyers, letters, scripts, e-mail, etc.
- Procedural materials: Survey, Interview, Focus Group Questions, and/or Questionnaire
- Additional documentation (*as applicable*): Any other documents referenced in this application
- Signature Assurance page signed by each listed investigator (e.g., PI, Co-Investigator, Additional Investigator)

4. Submit Application

Submit the complete IRB protocol (application and required documentation) to Graduate Studies and Office of Research by the following submission options:

- Email completed scanned copy to irb@tamusa.edu,
or
- Deliver completed original copy of IRB Proposal Application documents to IRB in CAB #435

Please see Scheduled Meeting Dates for IRB proposal applications that require IRB Full Board Review.

Incomplete submissions will be returned and you will be notified of the missing material. Applications will not be reviewed until all required material is received.

**If you have any questions or need assistance completing this application, please call
The Office of Research at (210)784-2317 or e-mail irb@tamusa.edu**

DO NOT BEGIN RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS UNTIL IRB APPROVAL IS RECEIVED

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INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

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 Faculty Staff Doctoral Student Graduate Student Undergraduate Student
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List additional Investigators: (all investigators are required to sign the Signature Assurance page)

Is this study part of a Thesis or Dissertation? Yes No
Is this study part of a Graduate Research Project? Yes No

PROJECT

Project Title: Connecting with Their Students: Understanding the Impact of Teachers Using Culturally Relevant Literacy Practices in Elementary Classrooms
Anticipated Start Date: April 24, 2023 Anticipated End Date: September 30, 2023

Funding Status:
 Externally Funded* Internally Funded* Funding Under Review* Not Funded
 Other (describe): _____

Funding agency: _____

**Must include a draft of the grant application. Once grant is completed/submitted, a final draft must be submitted to the IRB.*

Does this protocol require approval from multiple IRBs?
 Yes (describe): _____
 No, only A&M-SA IRB

Indicate the review category. You can visit the [Electronic Code of Federal Regulations](#) for assistance.

Exempt (select one of the exempt categories below) §46.104

- Category 1
- Category 2
- Category 3
- Category 4
- Category 5
- Category 6
- Category 7 N/A
- Category 8 N/A

- Expedited
- Full

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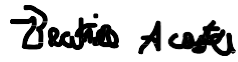
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Principal Investigator's Signature:



Date: 04/08/2023

Co- Investigator's Signature:



Date: 4/8/23



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APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email

Hello (Teachers name),

I am reaching out to you because I would like you to take part in my graduate research study.

I would like you to participate in a recorded interview and answer a written response questionnaire.

If you complete this survey and participate in a recorded interview, your answers will be treated as completely confidential. We will not release any information that would identify you as an interview participant or let anyone know how you answered the survey questions. You are free to not answer any questions that you choose.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research study is for educational researchers to learn about teachers' experiences in using culturally relevant/sustaining practices and their own feelings of cultural competence regarding teaching in their diverse classrooms.

Time Commitment: The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The written questionnaire will take about 20 minutes of your time. The dates in which this takes place will be flexible and you as the participant can choose whichever dates work best for you.

This research has been approved by the Texas A&M University- San Antonio Institutional Review Board (IRB), and Edgewood ISD.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please reply to this email if you agree to participate.

Regards,

Beatrice Acosta

4th grade Teacher, Co-PI of thesis study, and TAMU-SA graduate student



APPENDIX C

Written Questionnaire

Written Response Questionnaire

I want to thank you again for participating in this study. I'm going to give you a short survey based on your feelings towards your own cultural competence and how you as a teacher feel about teaching in a diverse classroom. Please write your responses in the space below the question. If you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not need to complete the survey. Ready?

Indicate your name and title here: _____

1. How would you describe teacher cultural competency? What does that term mean to you?
2. What are your feelings about your own cultural competence teaching in a classroom such as yours that has populations that are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse?
3. Describe any professional development you've received that has assisted you in developing your cultural competence.
4. What professional development would you like to have, either delivered by the district or at an outside conference or workshop, that would assist you more in working with diverse populations of students?



APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Hello, thank you for participating in this study. I am going to ask you a few questions with the possibility of clarifying and follow up questions. This entire interview should take approximately 30 minutes of your time. All your answers will be kept private and there will not be identifiable information connecting you to the responses. You are free to not answer any questions at any time and can withdraw from the interview at any time should you choose to do so.

Ready?

1. What do you think culturally relevant pedagogy is?
2. Do you use culturally relevant materials in your classroom? How?
3. Can you provide some examples of how you ensure your students of color get to see themselves in your lessons?
4. How easy do you find interacting with students at your school who are from a different cultural background than your own?
5. How often do you participate in professional development opportunities that help you explore new ways to promote equity in your practice?
6. Can you describe the specific support that your school provides the faculty and staff in learning about, discussing, and confronting issues of race, ethnicity, and culture?
7. What other types of support might you want to be provided in order to better meet the needs of your diverse population of students?

