Research Article

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

We feel that these five areas addressed here can contribute further to culturally responsive practices in an early childhood setting. As our country continues to grow as a multicultural nation, it is imperative that our early childhood classrooms embrace this rich diversity and provide experiences that affirm all students, families and communities. Teacher, educators, synthesized the current research into the following five frameworks that we believe embody the foundation of culturally responsive teaching in an early childhood setting, which includes the following areas: 1) pedagogy, 2) instructional strategies, 3) literacy, 4) classroom teaching practices and 5) family engagement. In this article we situate each framework within the larger context of research. Next discussing Culturally Responsive Teaching practices by offering ideas on how culturally responsive classrooms look and how to implement this pedagogy and in an early childhood setting with real practices.

INTRODUCTION

The abundant and rich diversity that is seen in our classrooms especially our early childhood and elementary classrooms continues to grow and this begs the question, Are our educational systems serving all of our students in culturally responsive ways that will embrace social and academic success for all students and their families? Culturally responsive teaching can address the needs of all students. Research brings to the forefront the academic and personal success of students whose teachers embrace Culturally responsive teaching (Au 2011; Gay 2002; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014). Culturally responsive teaching incorporates student culture into the classroom as a way for students to understand themselves and others and to conceptualize learning and knowledge (Ladson-Billings 1995). Gunn *et al*. (2014) explain, "Culturally responsive teachers learn about their children's cultures, embrace those cultures in the classroom, and use them to frame instruction" (p. 175). Au (2011) discusses the components of culturally responsive pedagogy and asserts that Culturally responsive teaching (a) aims at school success for all students; (b) builds bridges between experiences at home within a school context, highlighting that the curriculum taught must be relevant and central to the children's lives; and (c) focuses on

the equality of education and celebration of diversity through a social justice orientation. As teacher educators, we offer five areas, among many facets of this approach, which we think embody the foundation of Culturally responsive teaching in an early childhood setting: 1} developing a culturally responsive classroom community, 2}family engagement, 3} critical literacy within a social justice framework, 4} multicultural literature, 5} culturally responsive print rich environments.

While it is important to realize that embracing a culturally responsive pedagogy is imperative for all teachers and their students, we understand that Culturally responsive teaching is complex. One reason is Culturally responsive teaching is fluid and adjusts in consideration of specific contexts. Culturally responsive teaching is also broadly defined and constantly evolving as a theory and pedagogical approach. The five frameworks presented in this article are interconnected. Culturally responsive teaching embraces meaningful interconnections between school, home, and community. In each of these five frameworks, a teacher uses a critical lens and creates an environment that promotes conversation, encourages multiple perspectives, builds relationships, and fosters authentic experiences. Conversation in a Culturally responsive teaching classroom involves students, teachers, and parents

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engaging in courageous discussions, while listening with respect and care. To incorporate multiple perspectives, the teacher utilizes a variety of resources and tools to demonstrate a diverse range of perspectives, allowing for diverse cultural backgrounds to enter the classroom. A culturally responsive teacher builds relationships with students, parents, caregivers, family, and peers within the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching supports authentic experiences through pedagogy and with relevant lessons designed for students to learn about their peers, the real world, and themselves. Each of these components contributes significantly to the interlacing of the five frameworks in an early childhood setting. In this article, we want to discussing Culturally responsive teaching practices by offering ideas on how culturally responsive classrooms look and how to implement this pedagogy in an early childhood setting. In the following sections, we describe each framework by situating it within the larger context of research.

Teacher educators are intentionally, and responsibly, seeking ways to best inform and support the culturally responsive practices of pre-service teachers. However, there are many challenges facing those educators who strive to ensure that their pre-service teachers understand the issues surrounding equity and social justice. In a recent study, Jennings (2007) examined the data from 142 institutions and surmised that the major challenges to the inclusion of diversity within courses was faculty disinterest, faculty discomfort, faculty lack of knowledge, time constraints, and student dis interest and discomfort. Gay (1977) elaborates on this issue by suggesting that, ". . .teacher education curriculum must be designed to help teachers acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills consistent with the principles of cultural pluralism and to translate the philosophy of multicultural education into classroom practices" (p.56-57). Marshall (1990) further explains, ". . .the basic content knowledge that many teachers have studied while training to become teachers may not have included varying cultural perspectives" (p.586). In response to these challenges, and in response to the interests, questions, and concerns of the faculty in a School of Education, two professors worked collaboratively with administrators, faculty, and staff to organize Professional Forums. These Professional Forums were designed to support and engage faculty in the revisioning of their courses as well as their pedagogical practices for pre-service teachers, with the specific goal of enhancing students' understanding of equity, social justice and global issues.

The scenario that follows is about Haley, a White teacher armed with training in culturally responsive urban teaching and a fierce determination to close the achievement gap between African American, Latino, and White students. However, she lacks awareness of whiteness. Haley, a white teacher, strides into her urban first period classroom full of students of color. "I can do this. I know how to handle them. I can do this," she whispers to herself. Upon confidently scanning the room and mentally reviewing her prepared welcome speech about who she is, how she refuses to give up on them, and how she choose this urban school because it was her calling something modeled to her in countless "White savior teacher" films she is interrupted with rolled eyes and groans of "oh no, not another one!" Knowing these students consider her "yet another nice White lady, Haley becomes overwhelmed with what to say. She panics and her face turns visibly red. Her palms sweat and a lump forms in her throat. She begins to fear one of them

might call her a racist if she mentions anything about race. "I thought I knew all about them," she cries to herself. Despite learning about their culture, responsive pedagogies, and languages, Haley was emotionally and mentally unprepared to deal with her whiteness, a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions and behaviors that get normalized because of white supremacy. Essentially, Haley's white liberalist educational training, which mainly focused on learning about the "Other" helped her mask and deflect insecurities of learning about herself. Did she really think she could waltz into an urban classroom, rich with students of color,

We have learned a substantial amount of knowledge and information regarding effective teacher professional development from researchers around the world (e.g., Avalos 2010; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999; Dall' Alba and Sandberg 2006; Dana and Yendol-Hoppey 2008; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1996; Reyes 2006; Robert 2000; Webster-Wright 2009; Yendol-Hoppey and Dana 2010). When used as the only professional development tool to improve teacher learning, traditional knowledge transmission professional development that takes a ''one-time workshop by outside experts'' approach has proved ineffective. In response to this limitation, researchers have been suggesting the need for new approaches that acknowledge a more comprehensive understanding of teacher leaning (Albrecht and Engel 2007; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999 ; Halle *et al.* 2010; Hirsh 2009; Zaslow *et al.* 2010a, b). Comprehensive frameworks for teacher learning include opportunities for teachers to not only develop professional knowledge that will inform their teaching but also develop professional knowledge as they engage in and assess their teaching. Among others, teacher inquiry, action research, professional development schools, professional learning communities, coaching, mentoring, and lesson study are a few of those professional development frameworks that facilitate multiple types of teachers' learning. Rasmussen *et al.* (2004) suggested that it is not necessarily the format of professional development that makes it effective, but rather emphases on coherency, research based practices, and capacity building that needs to be assured.

Despite the well documented importance of early childhood education and the need for effective professional development for early childhood teachers, the field of early childhood education has not utilized a unified perspective that combines research, practice, and policy on early childhood teachers' professional development (Apple and McMullen 2007; Kamil 2010; Neuman 2010; Ochshorn 2011). Additionally, despite the growing recognition of young children's early social competence development in relation to school readiness and academic success, few professional development opportunities or studies that support early childhood teachers to serve in that role are reported (Fox *et al.* 2011; Han 2012 ; Hemmeter and Fox 2008; McLaren *et al.* 2009; Morris *et al.* 2010). The purpose of this article is to identify key components for best early childhood teacher professional development practices on social competence by synthesizing relevant literature. In the following sections, the effective professional development paradigm will be reviewed followed by the description of five components recommended for best professional development on social competence for early childhood teachers.

By synthesizing the early childhood Professional Development literature, the following five key components can be recommended to strengthen the Professional Development on social competence for early childhood teachers, {see fig 1}:
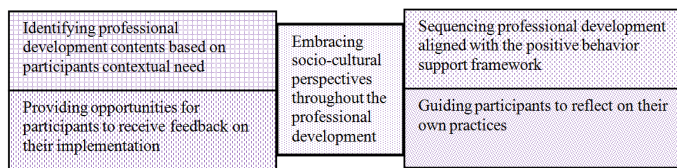

Identifying professional development contents based on participants contextual need	Embracing socio-cultural perspectives throughout the professional development	Sequencing professional development aligned with the positive behavior support framework
Providing opportunities for participants to receive feedback on their implementation		Guiding participants to reflect on their own practices

Fig 1 Components of best professional development practices on social competence for early childhood teachers

Although basics of these components are certainly applicable to strengthen any other Professional Development the focus of this article will be to specifically apply them for Professional Development on social competence for early childhood teachers.

The first component in making the Professional Development on social competence for early childhood teachers effective is to identify the content of the Professional Development based on the participants' specific contextual needs. From a macro standpoint, this component draws on the broader teacher Professional Development research which seeks to empower and strengthen the capital of teachers by offering information and resources that they need (Hirsh 2009 ; Joyce and Showers 2002 ; Yendol-Hoppey and Dana 2010). In a study by Robert (2000), a poignant question was raised about the appropriateness and value of dominant Professional Development models when the Professional Development was offered to early childhood teachers in rural Australian context. Robert suggested that the participants' identities and needs should be considered in order to ensure the usefulness of the Professional Development. At the same time, from a micro standpoint, this component supports the unique nature of early childhood social competence development by helping teachers understand the wide developmental variation of appropriateness depending on children's characteristics and/or background such as age, living environment, as well as socio-cultural backgrounds (Han and Thomas 2010 ;Ladd 2007 ; Rose-Krasnor 1997). Such variation, in return, is very likely to impact teachers' needs in terms of what their challenges are or what resources they will benefit from. Snyder and Wolfe (2008), in their comprehensive report recommending three process components of effective Professional Development, presented 'needs assessment' as their first recommendation. They claimed that needs assessment is important in effective Professional Development for various reasons it can give the participants a sense of ownership in the Professional Development process; it can be used for determining a shared focus for the Professional Development agenda; and it can provide baseline data for later Professional Development evaluation. In Han's (2012) study that investigated the effects of Professional Development on pre-school teachers in supporting children's peer social competence, this component was planned as the first Professional Development meeting with the teachers using a focus group method. Instead of bringing in pre-determined contents for the Professional Development project, the researchers approached the participants to find out what they wanted to learn more about or what questions they had about the Professional Development topic. The participants brainstormed their major concerns and

information needs when supporting preschool children's peer social competence. The needs assessment results were then used as foundational information for the Professional Development workshops to ensure the contents were 'teacher-driven'. It was further reported that this teacher-driven component of the Professional Development enabled the teachers to be more responsive and receptive to the information delivered and further empowered them to have ownership of their professional learning, which corroborates with Snyder and Wolfe (2008). Provided that a certain level of knowledge For practice needs to be in place in order for teachers to enact research based practices, identifying the Professional Development contents based on the participants' contextual needs should be the first corner-stone of effective teacher Professional Development. Especially, Professional Development on social competence for early childhood teachers should begin with identifying the needs of the participating teachers, which will also relate to the characteristics and needs of the children they are working with. By attending to the teachers' unique needs and challenges as well as their children's social competence needs, the overall Professional Development experiences could be significantly enhanced.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been referred to by many names: culturally responsible, culture compatible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally relevant, and multicultural education (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Gay (2000, 2010) describes cultural responsive teaching as multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. She refers to culturally relevant pedagogy as the use of "... cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frame of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to an effective... It teaches to and through strengths of the students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (Gay, 2000,p. 29). Culturally responsive education is one of the most effective means of meeting the learning needs of culturally different students (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ford, 2010; Harmon, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2010). Qualitative and observational studies confirm that African American students often learn best in an environment that is relational and personal, has high expectations, has accountability for self and others, and is similar to what is present in an extended family (Boykin *et al*., 2005, Perry & Delpit, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001, 2010; Willis, 2003. For example, Willis (2003) observed faculty and students at elementary schools where African American students performed higher-than-expected on standardized tests. He found the school climate was one where teachers held positive attitudes about students, high expectations of students, and positive extended family relations. Teachers felt responsible for them selves but also for others. An effort was made among faculty and staff to form strong relationships with students and their families. In all instances, teachers used culturally responsive teaching (Love & Kruger, 2005). In 1989, Irvine wrote about the lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African American students and the negative impact on academic achievement Eleven years later, she described culturally responsive teaching as student centered, having the power to transform the curriculum, fostering critical problem solving, and focusing on

building relationships with students, families, and communities (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Irvine (2002) further explained that the curriculum is transformed with culturally responsive teaching because the subject matter is viewed from multiple perspectives, including the lens of oppressed and dis enfranchised groups. Studies and researchers assert that successful teachers of African American children use culturally responsive instruction and engage in the following: (a) draw on African and African American culture and history, (b) locate 'self' in a historical and cultural context, (c) enable students to create new knowledge based upon life experiences, and (d) view knowledge as reciprocal. Teachers create a community of learners much like an extended family, perceive teaching as a part of their calling, and have high expectations for the success of all students (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001, 2010). To teach using culturally responsive instruction, teachers must incorporate elements of the students' culture in their teaching. They listen to their students and allow students to share their personal stories. They spend considerable time in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom developing personal relationships with their students and families (Irvine & Armento, 2001).

This article draws on the theoretical frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy. Over the years the dominant teaching practice in mathematics (as well as other subjects) for urban students has followed a traditional approach that is based on linear and dualistic thinking (right or wrong, one correct answer) and views the teaching and learning of mathematics as solely objective and culturally neutral. These conceptions and practices in mathematics do not meet the learning and problem solving styles and processes of most urban students and have immensely contributed to their low motivation and lack of interest and success in mathematics learning (Tate, 2005).In fact, most scholars of culturally responsive teaching view cultural bias in mathematics instruction as a major factor affecting urban students' success in mathematics and other science subjects. Consequently, researchers have called for more appropriate and more responsive practices, now described as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000; Tate, 2005). Culturally responsive teaching has been defined as an approach to teaching that uses students' cultural knowledge as a 'conduit' to facilitate the teaching learning process (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Studies on culturally responsive teaching have reported positive effect on students' learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pewewardy, 1994).

In mathematics the notion of culturally responsive teaching has been conceptualized as ethnomathematics (D'Ambrosio, 1997), which is defined as the study of mathematics that considers and integrates the culture in which mathematics arises or how different cultures "go about the tasks of classifying, ordering, counting, measuring or mathematizing their environment" (Oritz-Franco, 2005). Contrary to Western perspective, the concept and discipline of mathematics is not "universal." Despite what some may think, mathematics is only universal to those who share a particular cultural and historical perspective. Drawing on the concept of "afrocentricism" the idea of locating students within the context of their own cultural frame of reference (Asante, 1991) during teaching and learning, Tate (1995) argues that the failure to "center" African Americans in the process of mathematics learning contributes to their failure

to learn and understand mathematics. He explains that failing to provide African American students with curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are centered on their experiences, culture, and traditions, is a major obstacle to providing them with an empowering mathematical experience.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Strategies

Many studies have reported that mathematics instruction has not been "user unfriendly" for minority students because of the unresponsive student-teacher relationship and interaction, classroom environment, and content presentation (Tobias, 1990). Peterson (2005) also talks about what he calls "number numbness" in which students develop a negative disposition toward mathematics learning because of a pedagogical approach that is based on rote calculations, drill and practice, endless reams of worksheets, and a fetish for the right answer. Participants in the study identified effective and culturally responsive instructional strategies that include contextualizing learning by using students' language and experiences to engage in mathematics knowledge construction and skill development, scaffolding mathematics instruction through peer support learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and using culturally familiar examples, manipulatives, and hands-on-minds-on mathematics activities. An example was one teacher's use of hip-hop music and CDs to motivate and help students learn, thus using word problems that relate to students and creating a learning environment that affirms each student's cultural self and sense of belonging. More importantly, participants discussed the need for teachers to help urban students develop effective strategies for thinking and solving problems in a main stream mind frame, given that standardized tests often reflect mainstream perspectives. That is, when solving mathematical problems that do not provide for explanation of work, students would need to think and process differently, like "European, middle class" individuals do. Lisa Delpit (1995) supports this practice and suggests the need to help urban students acquire the social capital and access to the culture of power for success in mainstream America. This idea emerged from a simulated activity and discussion about a standardized test item in which a group of predominantly African-American high school students used their cultural thinking and processing styles to solve, but then failed the item (Tate, 2005) because their approach was "mathematically incorrect" even though their response was mathematically logical. Participants also suggested that culturally responsive mathematics instructional practice must first begin with teachers setting high expectations for all students, holding themselves personally responsible if their students are not achieving, creating motivation by demystifying mathematics as culturally neutral, and scaffolding students' learning to ensure their success (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Finally, participants suggested that culturally responsive mathematics teaching requires teacher self-critique and questioning practice (Shor, 1992).

Culturally Responsive Literacy

Culturally responsive teaching is clearly situated within the discipline of literacy. Language is the symbolic representation of culture. The ideological approach to literacy acknowledges that literacy is "inherently entwined with culture and heritage" (Lazar, 2011, p. 8).

... literacy practices serve legitimate communicative purposes for all families, but their value is determined by the power that specific communities hold in society.... power relations exist in society and determine how different literacies are valued. It is often assumed that the literacy of nondominant or underrepresented groups are nonexistent or inferior to those of middle-class white Western societies...." (Lazar, 2011, p. 9).

Lazar (2011) states that literacy is a set of cultural practices that can be used to create meaningful classroom instruction. Students bring funds of knowledge and experiences with them into the classroom and teachers access students' funds of knowledge to motivate students and lead to student engagement.

As summarized by McMillan (2003), teachers' assessment decision making is a process by which teachers balance the demands of external factors and constraints with their own beliefs and values. Good assessment practices therefore involve the art o compromise (Carless, 2011). Building upon these insights, we argue that Assessment Literacy is better understood as teacher assessment literacy in practice, which consists of various compromises that teachers make to reconcile tensions. As teacher assessment literacy in practice is constantly negotiated between teachers' conceptions of assessment and the macro socio-cultural, micro institutional contexts and expected knowledge base, it reflects a temporary equilibrium reached among tensions. Such equilibrium may be disrupted by changes in any of the various factors. For example, when the institutional context changes through local policy adjustment (e.g., promulgation of school accountability testing), new tensions for teacher assessment literacy in practice arise. Accordingly, teachers may need to make newcompromises to reach a balancing point among the tensions generated by context, knowledge, and conceptions. These compromises may take many forms. They can be internal to assessment itself, such as compromises made between multiple purposes that a single assessment task is intended to serve (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). They can be internal to the teacher, such as tensions between beliefs in using assessment for improved teaching and learning and a new policy using assessment for school accountability and accreditation purposes. Therefore, teachers need to make compromises in their decision making and action taking about whether to treat assessment as a quality assurance mechanism or learning oriented tool. Compromises can also be required because of contextual factors external to assessment (e.g., class size, teaching schedule, etc.) that impact on the kinds of assessment practices that are feasible (Carless, 2015). For example, despite believing that performance assessment is more bene ficial to student learning than paper-and-pencil tests, a teacher may have to compromise such beliefs when confronted with a class of 50-80 þ students, requiring new strategies of assessment compatible with personal conceptions.
Critical literacy is an active and reflective approach to reading texts that involves exploring and constructing knowledge in order to better understand and challenge unequal social relationships (Coffey 2008; Freire 1970). By analyzing attitudes and values represented in or omitted from texts, teachers and students can understand and then challenge long held cultural, linguistic, racial, gender, class, and other biases (Giroux 1987). Hidden meanings and messages behind words

and images used in spoken and written texts can be uncovered. Critical literacy may start with analysis, but the goal is social action that will lead to social justice and changes in power relationships within a society (Freire 1970). Teachers of young children who engage in critical literacy in their classrooms take the intelligence of young children seriously and believe they can "use their intelligence in the service of creating a better world for all" (Nieto 2004, p. xi). Children know when they are treated unfairly, and they question ways things are done in their school and community that result in unequal treatment of individuals or groups.

Culturally Responsive Practices in the Classroom

So what does informal family engagement look like? Many of these informal activities are parent initiated and can occur any time and place, not just in the home. For example, parents can read aloud picture books to their child and encourage the child to ask questions about the words and pictures. Other informal activities may include parents engaging the child in environmental print. The parent can point out signs, such as stop signs, and reinforce children's learning as they point to fast food places, for instance McDonald's or Wendy's. On an informal level, it has been suggested that parents and children together can watch children's shows that deal with literacy (Doyle and Zhang 2011; Walker-Dalhouse and Risko 2008). There are also several strategies that can be used for formal parental engagement. Assignments sent home that require parental guidance are good ways to engage parents. However, this can a challenge if parents are not in a position to help their children with homework. A parent said that she did not have time after she got home from work to help her daughter who struggled with reading. She was quite excited when it was suggested that she could listen to her child read as she prepared dinner or while she washed dishes. Sometimes parents just need another voice to support them. Folder games are a valuable practice that can engage parents. Another way for parents to participate in literacy at home with their children is through the use of literacy bags sent home by the teacher that contain books children would probably not be able to read on their own and/or activities that the child can complete with an adult. Most importantly, according to Barbour (1998), these bags "empower parents to be teachers of their own children" (p. 73).

These are admirable goals, but how do they apply to young children? How can a child of 3, 4, or 5 years of age critically analyze texts and then take action on social issues? Isn't childhood a time to explore the environment through play and not a time to be introduced to the problems of the world? When planning for critical literacy with a social justice emphasis, teachers should consider the following principles of critical literacy: challenge common assumptions and values, explore multiple perspectives, examine differences in relationships of power, and reflect on ways to take action on social issues (Lewison *et al*. 2002). Critical literacy starts with the everyday texts young children are exposed to: conversations, picture books, songs, TV shows, commercials, news broadcasts, game boards, internet games, iPad and iPhone apps, and other oral and written texts. Guided by their teachers, they learn to critically analyze these texts, to ask questions, and to collaboratively solve problems. They also create their own texts through dictation, audio recording, artwork, dramatic

play, and invented spelling. Teachers facilitate critical analysis by exposing children to a variety of texts that present differing perspectives, encouraging discussions about social issues within the texts, looking closely at illustrations in picture books to interpret character's feelings, teaching children how to collectively work through problems, and suggesting ways the children might take social action.

While standard curricula for preschool or junior kinder-garten may not focus on critical literacy, teachers can create spaces in their classrooms for critical literacy. Several teacher researchers have provided examples of how critical literacy curricula can be negotiated with children while following curriculum guidelines. A teacher might consider setting up an instructional space, as Maria Vasquez (2004) did, in which children explore and question their world through inquiry based learning, collaboration, class meetings, a learning wall, and time for reflections. A significant aspect of this environment is class meetings where children engage in discussions of issues and topics they encounter in and outside of the classroom while asking questions they want the class to explore. Students can then expand their exploration by conducting surveys, writing letters, involving the community, and obtaining signatures on petitions. In classroom spaces, teachers can incorporate discussions of various versions of literature, such as folk tales, as a way to examine multiple perspectives (Souto-Manning 2009). For example, a teacher might read Paul Galdone (1970) and James Marshall's (1989) versions of The Three Little Pigs for children to examine the pigs' point of view. Then they can contrast this to Jon Scieszka's (1996) The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs that tells the story from the wolf's perspective. As another example, students can be read books about social issues written from different perspectives. Students then can question their beliefs of right and wrong and make connections to different ways of thinking and speaking in different contexts. Critical literacy has a notable impact on children and affects their interactions with others, as in Vasquez's (2004) classroom where her students felt compelled to share with future classrooms important ideas they had learned from their curricula: "Listen to other kids," "Remember other people's feelings." "You have to share with other kids." "You can be strong from your brain" (p. 142).

We would like to encourage teachers to take a minute and examine the books displayed around their classrooms. Look closely at the books in the reading center and in book baskets. Make a mental note of the variety of fiction and non-fiction texts. Is there a rich variety of texts? Are the pieces of multicultural literature in the classroom only developed around special holidays or traditions? Are most of the books only told from a European perspective? For example, in many early childhood classrooms fables and fairy tales are shared, such as the beloved Charles Perrault (1954) classic, Cinderella. In conjunction with the European tale, teachers can offer variants of Cinderella that present a multicultural perspective such as The Rough-Face Girl (Rafe 1992), which portrays a young Algonquin Indian Girl. Domítíla: A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition (Coburn 2014); The Way Meat Loves Salt: A Cinderella Tale from the Jewish Tradition (Jaffe 1998); or The Persian Cinderella (Climo 2001). Multicultural versions of the Cinderella text might also be combined with a map, primary source photographs, nonfiction books, and other books that also describe that culture, people, and place. Building these

types of text sets can offer students multiple and diverse perspectives on how the cultural group represented in the text is multi-dimensional.

Researchers and teachers have long recognized the importance of reading aloud to children as a key role in the literacy development of young children (McNair 2013). For example, read alouds might include introducing children to concepts of print, developing background knowledge, vocabulary, language patterns, and rich exposure to genres. In addition to this sample of key concepts of literacy development, multicultural literature can engage students in deep conversation about social justice issues. However, we must take into consideration how to engage readers in these conversations. Simply reading the book will not provide students with these meaningful conversations. We encourage teachers to preplan focal questions that will allow students to discover multiple meanings from the book, and then students and teachers make new meanings through their conversations and insights they bring to the text (Singer and Smith 2003). Bennett, Gunn, and Leung (2016) also advocate using multicultural literature in conjunction with various instructional approaches, such as literature circles, response journals, and other forms of guided written and oral discussion of concepts portrayed in multicultural texts. Harper and Brand (2010) suggest the use of comprehension and vocabulary strategies with multicultural literature through a handson approach with early childhood students, such as concept maps, Venn diagrams, open-mind portraits, vocabulary cubes, and vocabulary puzzles.

Infusing multicultural literature in the early childhood curriculum encourages children's empathy and bonding with others. When comprehension and vocabulary strategies are taught in conjunction with multicultural literature, children make meaningful connections to the global messages contained in the multicultural literature. (Harper and Brand 2010, p. 233) Print-rich environments are key to early literacy success. Centers including writing tables, a variety of texts, and signs and posters that children use for literacy (not just seasonal decorations) will help them communicate daily, affirm their identity, and show them they are a part of the community in which they live (Strickland et al. 2004). It is most effective if these wall spaces are produced by both the teacher and students (Reutzel and Clark 2011). In addition, these signs and displays should be available both in English and in students' home languages if there are English language learners in the classroom. However, all students should be able to see their cultures in addition to the culture and identity of the wider society affirmed in their classroom and around the school (Cummins 2011).

Culturally responsive teaching is a socially just response to teacher education for redefining, reframing, and reconceptualizing deficit perceptions of urban students of color to students who are culturally rich and equipped with their own reserves of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The seminar works in culturally responsive teaching explicate this and is demonstrated by Gay (2000), who argues that culturally responsive teaching moved a teacher epistemological orientation of teaching students of color from "don't have, can't do" to "do have, can do" (p. 181). While this is a shift from deficit to dynamic thinking (Ford & Grantham, 2003), it is not a makeshift cure all of prior racist practices that

initially denied students of color a place for educational freedom. hooks (1994), stated, "I lost my love of school" (p. 3), to describe experiences of being taught by racist White teachers after racial desegregation. hooks' perception can be viewed as a clear expression of how students of color experience the school system and the complicit role intentional or not of teachers them selves. Thus, culturally responsive teaching is not merely a response to teaching better. It is a civil rights movement that reclaims hope and mirrors Bell's (1992) parable of "Afrolantica." Like Bell's parable, this hope is propelled and substantiated by the deep cries of scholars of color, their allies, and their fight for their children who could no longer be denied the right to a fair education because of systemic racist practices. Likewise, culturally responsive teaching is not a simple intellectual revolution. It is a rationally emotional revolution based on the humanizing project of racial justice for all; and not just about the cultures of Black and Brown students but about how these students were racially positioned in a racist system that made and continues to make culturally responsive teaching an avenue for fighting back. From the shadows of a racist society, culturally responsive teaching provides an educational future for students of color, and it provides an avenue for them to reclaim their worthiness for proper consideration of their educational needs. This is exemplified in book dedications, critical inquiries, and ending remarks of scholars of color who pioneered cultural responsiveness in teacher training and teaching. For example, Gay's (2000) conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching is about learning, respecting, and recognizing the cultures of students of color, implying a pre-existing disrespect and lack of recognition of students of color. She dedicates her book to "Vida: a shining star who illuminated what many others considered impenetrable darkness," as well as to "students everywhere." These remarks demonstrate that it was never just about the scholar; rather, about equity for all students, especially students of color. Nor were these remarks about best practices in a colorblind fashion but instead about a dedicated project for humanity. Notwithstanding the minimization of the cultural wealth (Yosso & Garcia, 2007) of students of color, Gay wrote passionately about culturally responsive teaching as an alternative to normative White ist teaching. Additionally, Ford and Grantham (2003) argue that deficit thinking is the culprit for racialist views of students of color. They describe deficit thinking thusly, "when educators hold negative stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly" (p. 217). Extending this definition into a racial analysis, these negative, stereotypical, and counterproductive views are simply racist attitudes held by teachers who happen to be almost ninety percent White. Though absent of a racial analysis, critical whiteness studies have established that Whites who invest in whiteness inoculate themselves with a sense of authority, superiority, and purity (Thandeka, 1999) that directly impact how they perceive those racially defined as non-White or Other (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). To assume this does not surface within the context of the classroom is erroneous as it in advertently maintains how whiteness is upheld in schools and society.

I have seen situations where White women hear a racist remark, resent what has been said, become filled with fury, and remain silent because they are afraid. That unexpressed anger lies within them like an undetonated device, usually to be hurled at the first woman of color who talks about racism (Lorde, 2007, p. 127).

Culturally responsive teaching is not only a pedagogical methodology for combating the racist practices of classroom teaching, it is also an approach for reintegrating knowledge that was initially marginalized due to systemic racism. Culturally responsive teaching evolved, in part, as a result of racist practices, which did not account for students of color nor recognize the importance of the racial and cultural experiences these students brought into the classroom. Although cultural elements are essential, the dynamics of race and culture can never be separated because the very structure of race initially stratified which culture counted and which did not (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Addit ionally, culture and race cannot be used interchangeably because culture refers to "a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavior standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as others" (Gay, 2000, p. 8), whereas race is defined as "a socially constructed category" (Solorzano, 1998, p. 128) used to enact structural racism. Beyo nd ideo logical interpretations, Bonilla-Silva (2001) provides a materialist interpretation of racism, which acknowledges the "social edifices... erected over racial inequality" (p. 22). Although culture defines the value system for which groups of people exist, race and its enactment through racism and white supremacy is how groups of people are structured within a society that maintains a hegemonic power (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, without a racial analysis of the purpose, positioning, and liberating employment of culturally responsive teaching, we inadvertently silence the main societal problems of education. Suffice it to say that we cannot cure a condition if we focus solely on its symptoms and possible treatments, and not on the root cause of the condition. Culturally Responsive requires teachers, or Critically Responsive Educators, to hold high expectations and believe all students can succeed; scaffold instruction and meet individual students' needs; have conscious awareness of self and other cultures; and recognize that teaching is flexible and fluid, not rigid and static (Grant and Ladson-Billings 1997; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014). Critically Responsive Educators must first know them selves, understand their own culture, and have a conscious self awareness before they can teach others (Bennett in press; Howard 2006). Conscious self awareness builds on other aspects of cultural responsiveness, in particular, sociocultural consciousness (Villegas and Lucas 2002).

Family Engagement

Family engagement is a critical component to early literacy development. There are numerous benefits, both social and academic, to family literacy engagement for the adult and child. "Parent involvement is important because it acknowledges parents in the lives of their children, recognizes the diversity of values and perspectives within the school community, provides a vehicle for building a collaborative problem solving structure, and increases the opportunity for all students to learn in school" (Banks 1993, p. 335). Research has shown that children who have early interactions with books are more likely to show greater interest in books and are also more likely to become regular readers them selves (Robinson 2012; Teale 1984). In addition, parents who read consistently are likely to have children who also engage in reading (Newman *et*

al. 2016; Phillips 2015). Most importantly, during the adult-child interaction while reading a book together, the family spends quality time as they read and complete activities. Family engagement with literacy does not have to be difficult, and building a genuine partnership between parents and educators is essential. Teacher can show parents how to use their experiences and the resources they already prossess for formal or informal activities.

CONCLUSION

This article provides five foundational areas to support a culturally responsive early childhood classroom setting, in this article five cultural practices are culturally responsive for early childhood, which includes the following areas: 1) pedagogy, 2) instructional strategies, 3) literacy, 4) classroom teaching practices and 5) family engagement. Teacher must emphasize there is not a set script or specific equation that leads to culturally responsive classrooms because culture is multifaceted and continually changing and evolving, as Ladson-Billings (2014) suggests. In culturally responsive classrooms, certain basic tenets are present, such as "academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness" (p. 75). However, we feel that these five areas addressed here can contribute further to culturally responsive practices in an early childhood setting.

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