

PRE-SERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' INTEGRATION OF CULTURALLY
RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN LITERACY METHODS

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Acceptance Page

Accepted by the School of Education Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Abstract

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PRE-SERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' INTEGRATION OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN LITERACY METHODS

Pulling on the work of culturally relevant pedagogy, socio-cultural theory, and practitioner research, I analyzed my own teaching effectiveness of pre-service teachers in a literacy methods course. Overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education continues to be seen within schools as diversity increases within the K-12 learning environment. Therefore, teacher education preparation must prepare teacher candidates to meet the unique educational needs of students, specifically within high-incidence disability categories such as reading. To address, culturally relevant pedagogy is a pedagogical approach with potential benefits for the meeting the needs of diverse learners. The research looked at how pre-service teachers implement culturally relevant pedagogy within their reading instruction through lesson plans, teacher candidate-university instructor conferences, peer review rubrics and feedback, and teacher candidate reflections. The study occurred over a two-phase implementation process with analysis to determine how pedagogical changes were implemented into my teaching. Overall performance and reflective findings indicated the need for further curriculum and pedagogical adjustment.

Committee Chairperson: Dr. Karen Wohlwend, Ph.D.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Each semester, when a new group of special education teacher candidates enters my reading methods course, I am amazed by the unique perspectives they bring to the world of teaching reading, especially in regard to working with learners with exceptionalities. Often, I see a combination of them pulling on their own experiences of learning to read and what they have seen recently with their practicum teachers in the schools. This combination produces an overall feeling of security and, potentially, limitations for my pre-service teachers; in other words, they use what they know when they first learn about how to teach reading. While it is certainly a strength to use your background knowledge when learning new skills, it is also a necessity to look at the needs of those you are working with and to expand your knowledge base. For pre-service special education teachers, this requires them to recognize the ever-changing landscape of the K-12 classroom, including the diverse abilities of each learner they encounter.

In the United States, classrooms are becoming more and more diverse linguistically and culturally. Despite schools' knowledge of increased diversity, research has shown a clear performance gap between culturally and linguistically diverse students and their peers (Chiu et al, 2017). In fact, schools and classrooms are typically "...not organized to accommodate diversity in students' background knowledge and experiences" (Zeichner et al., 1998, p.166). In order to address this gap and the evolving needs of students, teachers must be adequately prepared to meet the academic, social, and emotional challenges of their culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities (exceptional students). Specifically, teachers must understand the students they are working with in order to effectively teach reading, a skill that integrates itself into a variety of school competencies (Nichols et al., 2000). Using culturally

responsive pedagogical practices within the classroom could be one way to bridge the interval with diverse learners, especially with reference to literacy development and instruction. In fact, Nichols et al. (2000) argue that the gap between students and schools can be brought together through culturally responsive reading instruction (p.2). Culturally responsive teaching is “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Another similar term often heard in relation to teaching diverse learners is culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness that is committed to collective empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Learning to implement and understand the concept of culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy is particularly important for pre-service teachers, or teacher candidates, prior to beginning their careers as full-time educators.

Increased school diversity has specifically influenced the work of special education teachers and special education teacher preparation. Special education teachers seek to promote inclusive learning environments for all of their students to ensure an equitable education is being provided. Responsive teaching practices are described as the way classrooms are designed, lessons are planned, and behaviors exhibited are representative of inclusiveness by recognizing the uniqueness of each student (Sobel & Taylor, 2015, p.34). Special education teachers need to be adequately prepared to teach learners from varying cultural backgrounds and abilities, specifically in the area of literacy. Research has demonstrated that students of linguistic and cultural diversity are overrepresented in special education (Othman, 2018). Specifically, Volz (2019) explains “Racial disparities also are shown within the field of special education itself through the disproportionate representation of some students of color in programs for students

with disabilities” (p.261). It has been argued that the overrepresentation of minority students is the result of teachers not understanding the funds of knowledge, cultural practices, and other knowledge that is elicited from the daily lives of families (Robinson, 2016, p.33). As such, the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education can be connected to the lack of proper preparation of teachers and teachers’ knowledge of working with students from backgrounds different than their own.

Pre-service special education teachers are taught about diversity, the importance of recognizing multiculturalism and being responsive in the classroom (Gay, 2002); however, the role of these pedagogies must further be looked at specifically in regards to literacy and how to best instruct utilizing these practices (Stuart & Volk, 2002). Educator preparation programs (EPPs) have taken various approaches to instructing pre-service teachers in culturally responsive literacy practices. In addition, various methodologies and approaches to implementing successful culturally responsive literacy instruction for K-12 learners have been evaluated by researchers and practitioners. A number of studies have been completed representing literacy related pedagogical practices, and Piazza et al. (2015) identified five instructional themes for diverse learners: dialogue, collaboration, visual representation, explicit instruction, and inquiry (p.6). These themes, in combination with additional practices, could be the first approaches implemented by teacher education faculty for pre-service teachers to experience. Ultimately, this work would translate and be integrated into teacher candidates’ own teaching practices. Developing lessons and activities that purposefully integrate student interests and backgrounds can be done when students complete reading and writing activities that affirmed students' lives (Assaf & Lopez, 2015). In addition, daily teaching and learning activities within the classroom should integrate various home-based literacies, experiences, and talents that are representative of

the students in the class (Othman, 2018, p.175). Some additional methods implemented into teacher education include: after school literacy programs, assignments, and student self-evaluations of their knowledge of culturally responsive literacy instruction (Stuart & Volk, 2002; Assaf & Lopez, 2015; da Silva Iddings & Reyes, 2017). Working with pre-service teachers to see the importance of building connections between school and home with students from diverse backgrounds in a culturally relevant manner is critical. Literacy and academic achievement can be promoted through working to ensure connections between home, school, and the community (Othman, 2018, p.175). One way to build this connection is to engage students in reading stories and books, both fiction and nonfiction, by authors that are representative of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom. Building off of the utilized texts, the inclusion of visual displays, activities, and multimedia materials provide opportunities to promote diversity and conversations with students about their own culture (Ford et al., 2014).

Literacy practices provide educators the opportunity to address gaps in achievement. However, prominent culturally relevant pedagogy pioneers and scholars have expressed concerns and shared reservations about the authenticity of what is being considered culturally responsive instruction. “The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting “diverse” images makes one “culturally relevant” seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.82). Likewise, when looking at teacher education programming having one assignment within courses would be considered ineffective for preparing culturally responsive special education teachers (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Consequently, despite continued attempts to cultivate an understanding of working with students of diverse backgrounds, Scott et al. (2014) determined that teacher education program efforts to reform university programs to address culturally diverse practices continue to

demonstrate limited or even no progress and growth in this area (p.80). This lack of progress in teacher education is cause for additional research and reformation. Despite these evaluations, the actual facilitation of cultural responsiveness is still somewhat of an evasive concept (Samuels et al., 2017).

In recent years, large amounts of literature related to culturally responsive pedagogy have been published. Through the research and well established literature, we see the need for pre-service teachers to be better prepared at recognizing the influence and significance of culturally relevant practices on students with disabilities outcomes and how to apply these same practices (Scott et al. 2014, p.88). Knowledge of this pedagogical approach is imperative for pre-service candidates, as the demographics of school age populations continue to grow in ethnic, racial, and ability diversity. Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that competent special education teachers are available to implement appropriate services for the realities of the evolving demographics (Sobel & Taylor, 2015, p.33).

Teacher education must recognize that prior to attempting to implement and understand culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), pre-service teachers need to have a firm grasp on the meaning and understanding of diversity. While this notion sounds achievable, it can be a challenge itself as reviews of teacher education reveal a variety in the definition of cultural diversity and a lack of clarity amongst teacher education research (Fylkesnes, 2018, p.25). Transitioning into a culturally responsive literacy teacher requires pre-service teachers to examine themselves to understand their worldview, understanding of diversity, and to recognize how this may shape their teaching. Specifically, the outcomes of ethnically diverse students and their learning opportunities are influenced by teachers' knowledge and attitude toward cultural diversity (Gay, 2002, p.613). These attitudes have a direct impact on student performance as

teachers that are considered culturally responsive have high expectations for each student and believe in the learning capabilities of all students, regardless of the student's background (Zeichner et al., 1998, p.167). Attitudes and beliefs are influenced by teacher positioning and experiences, therefore, Cartledge and Kourea (2008) argue for teachers to have a strong self awareness, and that regardless of their own racial and ethnic background, teachers need to know about not only their own, but other cultures. In addition, teachers need to understand how their own beliefs and biases can influence their teaching. Specifically, Scott et al. (2014) extend this by claiming "...teachers must also examine their complexities, attitudes, and behaviors towards the issues of diversity, as these issues may often manifest in methods in which curriculum is planned and how students of diverse cultures are viewed. Therefore, future studies may look at this issue of pre-service teachers' perceptions of how they view responsive teachers, issues of diversity, and biases which impacts research on this topic and implementation in the classroom to impact student's outcomes" (p.88). In order for this to occur, pre-service teachers need to be given intentional opportunities to examine their own beliefs to see how their beliefs work with recommended best practices (Sobel & Taylor, 2015). These intentional opportunities should include reflective moments to think critically about diversity and culture. Furthermore, it is suggested that including a number of course activities can increase cultural competence and awareness such as exploring power and privilege, engaging in diversity dialogue, and understanding personal biases (Chui et al., 2017).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Educating pre-service teachers to be culturally responsive in their literacy instruction is an integral part of a comprehensive education preparation program (da Silva Iddings & Reyes, 2017). Working to develop culturally relevant literacy practitioners can be accomplished both at

the program and course level, specifically in reading methods courses. Special education teachers work with students from a large array of backgrounds and learning disabilities. As such, they must be “...cognizant of the differences between disabilities and cultural/linguistic differences to make informed instructional decisions” (Ford et al., 2014, p.57). A significant portion of the specialized instruction that pre-service teachers will eventually be providing includes working with students with specific learning disabilities. The annual congressional required Condition of Education Report indicated that:

In school year 2018–19, a higher percentage of students ages 3–21 received special education services under IDEA for specific learning disabilities than for any other type of disability. A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. In 2018–19, some 33 percent of all students who received special education services had specific learning disabilities... (Hussar et al., 2020).

With this in mind, it becomes even more imperative for pre-service teachers to be familiar with effective, culturally relevant literacy practices. While the approaches used by special education teachers may differ from that of a general education teacher in regards to grouping arrangements and instructional intensity (Ford et al., 2014), pre-service special education teachers need to recognize the importance of being culturally responsive in their reading instruction, as reading difficulty is often a reason for special education referrals (Klingner et al., 2005).

The work of da Silva Iddings and Reyes (2017) provides significant contribution in the establishment of teacher education practices. These contributions come specifically in relation to diverse field experiences, multicultural curriculum and materials, and building an understanding

of culturally and linguistically diverse children and families (da Silva & Reyes, 2017, p.36). The development of a comprehensive program within the context of teacher preparation will help contribute to the success of diverse learners. In other words, teachers must learn about the various cultures represented in their classrooms in order to move beyond holiday celebrations. This acquired knowledge allows teachers to intentionally plan instructional practices that integrate culturally relevant pedagogical approaches within the learning environment (Ford et al., 2014). Ensuring this comprehensive work is integrated into literacy methods courses is critical. Samuels et al.'s (2017) findings suggest that teacher education programs should increase pre-service teachers' awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy through the use of various assignments and through the integration of purposeful exposure to diversity and social justice issues throughout all courses. This integrative approach contrasts the approach where multicultural courses are taken in isolation, which has been seen as ineffective in confronting pre-service teachers' culturally responsive teaching. as compared to taking multicultural courses in isolation (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). This infusion of culturally relevant instruction would include literacy methods courses.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate my current teaching practices and the performances of pre-service special education teachers with culturally relevant literacy pedagogy within a reading methods course. Pre-service teachers need to recognize their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and be able to apply this understanding into their literacy instruction in order to meet the needs of the diverse, ever-changing landscape of the classroom. I conducted my study to see how pre-service special education teachers implemented culturally relevant pedagogy through their teacher education literacy courses. The results and implications from the study will assist me in making course adjustments, as well as recommendations on how

to instruct pre-service teachers in developing their skills to implement culturally responsive literacy instruction to meet the needs of diverse student populations with disabilities. Culturally relevant literacy instruction provides an opportunity to connect the world of the student and school through the assurance of learning. In addition, the pedagogical approach to literacy encourages educators to provide instruction that meets the needs of students in ways which are aligned to the values and beliefs of each student's culture (Callins, 2006). While initial results from the study will be at the course level, eventual influences can be at the program level. Effective pedagogical practices could be identified and established to ensure teacher preparation is adequate concerning literacy practices for diverse learners. The research findings can positively influence teacher education programs, practicing teachers, and ultimately students of all ages. This is important for teachers and university faculty, especially as classroom diversity continues to increase and the needs of K-12 students change.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study examines my own teaching practices in relation to the skills of pre-service special education teachers related to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy. The goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to utilize a student-centered approach while promoting equality, recognizing the value and contributions of all students from varying backgrounds (Samuels et al., 2017). Through this study I seek to establish the relevance of culturally relevant pedagogy in literacy instruction, evaluate what culturally relevant practices literacy practices are used by pre-service teachers, and analyze how pre-service teachers implement culturally relevant literacy instruction. An analysis of the practices used by pre-service teachers will be completed. Through the research process, the following questions will be answered:

1. How can the implications of teacher candidates' engagement in culturally relevant

literacy teaching inform the course design and pedagogical practices of the instructor?

2. How do pre-service special education teachers demonstrate their knowledge of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy through a self-reflective peer review process?
3. How do pre-service special education teachers integrate culturally relevant pedagogy into their literacy instruction? Specifically, what elements of culturally relevant pedagogy are seen in pre-service special education teachers lesson plans?

Organization of the Study

This study utilized a practitioner inquiry (teacher research) approach as the research project occurred through a course I teach. Practitioner research provides an opportunity to “...break down norms and traditions, as teachers create knowledge about curriculum and instruction...” (Babione, 2015, p. 9) and allows for practices to be adjusted to respond to the needs of society (Babione, 2015, p.30). As the instructor of the course, I have the unique perspective of being a complete participant in the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that a complete participant allows a researcher to fully engage with the participants being observed which can contribute to greater rapport with the individuals being observed. Data was collected through candidate artifacts, observations, and candidate/teacher conferences. The nature of the practitioner inquiry data collection methods provide an inside view of the perspectives and skills of pre-service teachers in relation to culturally responsive literacy instruction.

Summary

Demographic changes and increases in diversity in schools continue to influence the landscape of education and misrepresentation in special education programs, specifically in literacy. As such, educator preparation programs must respond to the needs of students and produce literacy educators that are culturally relevant in their pedagogical approaches. This study

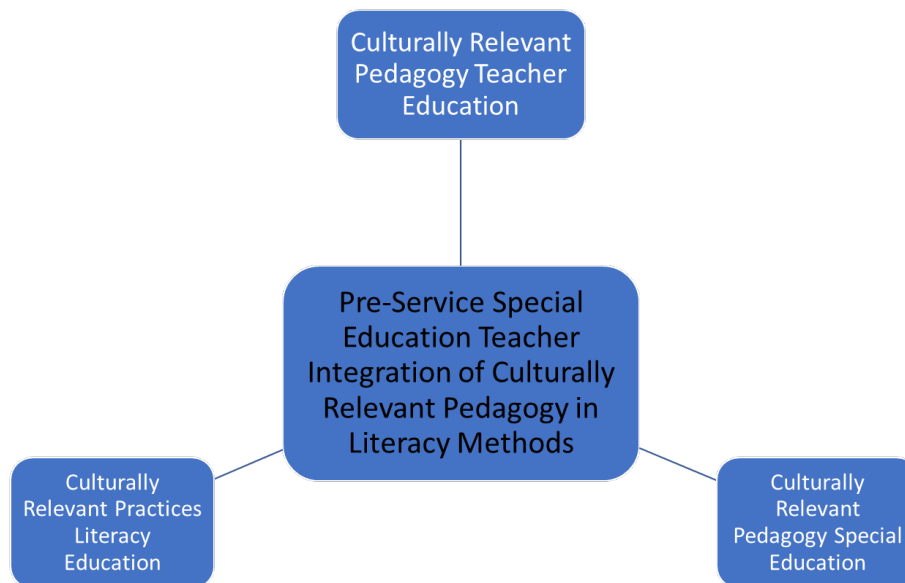
seeks to evaluate my own teaching practices and methods by providing an in-depth understanding of how candidates are responding to the course instruction in relation to meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Diversity within schools continues to change; resulting in schools and teacher preparation programs seeking answers to meet the needs of these students (Scott et al, 2014). Despite seeking solutions, overrepresentation of students of diverse backgrounds in special education continues to be an ongoing problem (Klingner et al., 2005; Robinson, 2016; Othman, 2018). This study attempts to evaluate the practices within a special education teacher preparation literacy methods course at a small, liberal arts university located in the Midwest in order to address increasing demographic changes and ongoing disproportionate representation challenges faced by special education teachers. To respond to the evolving demographics within schools, teachers need to be prepared to effectively teach diverse student populations with disabilities. In recent years large amounts of literature related to culturally relevant pedagogy have been published and built upon (Ladson-Billings,2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogy can be defined as a pedagogy that uses cultural references to convey knowledge and empower students academically, socially, and emotionally (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). This pedagogical approach calls for teachers to use the “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students” (Scott et al., 2014, p.80) in order to build effective practices that bridge the achievement gap and achieve higher academic performance amongst culturally diverse students. Pre-service special education teachers (teacher candidates) need to be provided the instructional tools needed to embrace the backgrounds of each K-12 learner with disabilities that they work with (Scott et al., 2014). Without proper preparation and understanding, issues of domination, access and diversity will continue, and “any one of domination, diversity, access, or design without the others creates a problematic imbalance” (Janks, 2000, p.178).

This literature review attempts to situate research related to culturally relevant pedagogy, literacy instruction, and special education teacher education. Specifically, I am looking at foundational and current research that represents an understanding and implementation of culturally relevant literacy instruction by pre-service special education teachers to address overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education. While many interventions and specific reading strategies exist for individuals with disabilities, for the purposes of this study I focused on the intersectionality of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy and pre-service special education teachers. Therefore, specific approaches for students with disabilities have been purposefully left out of this review. Moreover, I have organized three themes that emerged from the literature: culturally relevant pedagogy within teacher education, culturally relevant pedagogy in literacy instruction, and culturally relevant pedagogy within special education. These three themes represent a portion of the intricate intersectionality of knowledge and skills represented in my study in order for pre-service teachers to become culturally relevant literacy practitioners. A visual of how each of these themes contributes to the study can be seen below.



Furthermore, this review establishes the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy for pre-service teachers understanding, evaluates what culturally relevant practices literacy practices and strategies pre-service teachers can use within a classroom setting, and works to see how these practices have been included in special education educator preparation programs.

Theoretical framework

Socio-cultural Theory

My work in education is built on the extension of meaningful relationships and teaching students how to access literacy. This access provides students with the opportunity to expand their worldview and experiences. As a teacher educator, helping my teacher candidates see this relationship between literacy and access is an integral part of the education I provide. As such, socio-cultural theory and its connection to the social use of literacy serves as a foundation of my research and teaching.

Educators need to be prepared to engage in socially mediated literacy practices that yield productive results for all learners. Socio-cultural theory plays an integral part in the field of

literacy (Piazza et al., 2015); thus, impacting preservice teacher literacy instruction. Each learner brings a unique set of skills, values, and distinct positioning into the classroom. Sociocultural literacy studies recognize the need of literacy to connect its practices with the established norms of individuals and groups through specific socially influenced practices; practices that demonstrate values and interests (Gee, 2000). Stuart and Volk (2002) reinforce the socio-cultural perspective of literacy in that the practice is both a social and cultural practice. “Socio-cultural literacy approaches have a distinctive focus on how literacy is practised in communities, and used in everyday spheres of activity” (Mills, 2016, p.35) and “... the distinguishing feature of a socio-cultural literacy approach is the emphasis on describing and validating the varieties of literacy practices that are shared within and between communities, including communities of practice in schools and other institutions” (Mills, 2016, p.37). While shared practices exist and should be sought after, it is critical for teacher candidates to examine how socio-cultural theory recognizes the differences in discourse between schools and homes (Mills, 2016). These differences in discourse allow pre-service special education teachers the opportunity to look at the intersection of socio-cultural theory and culturally responsive pedagogy. Studies situated in socio-cultural theory look at how culturally responsive practices are utilized within teacher education to facilitate the instruction and understanding with preservice teachers; as well as how these pedagogical practices will benefit diverse learners. This intersection demonstrates the importance of making considerations for culturally relevant pedagogy as an integral part of socio-cultural theory.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Today’s classrooms are experiencing a shift and becoming more and more diverse. “The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the school aged population has been well documented”

(Volz, 2019, p.261). The shift in classroom demographics has compelled teachers to closely examine the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.312). As a result, there is a need for educators to be in tune with the backgrounds and needs of their students. Gloria Ladson-Billings argues for culturally relevant pedagogy by explaining the potential implications from incorporating this pedagogical practice into teaching. Culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes instructional strategies and materials that address the various cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds of each student being taught within a classroom (Robinson, 2016). Providing special education teacher candidates with the knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and giving them the tools to implement “good teaching” will translate into their future teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Furthermore, teachers need specific training to influence their perspectives of working with diverse students (Chiu et al., 2017). Making sure teachers have the proper training begins at the university level, and a part of this training requires the commitment of teachers to critically reflect and assess the practices that effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds and those with diverse abilities. Furthermore, the integration of a teaching reflection process allows practitioners to both engage with and evaluate how their own values and beliefs related to equity and social justice are evident through teaching practices and behaviors (Sobel & Taylor, 2015). With this thought in mind, educator preparation programs must evaluate how they are creating culturally responsive pre-service teachers.

Currently, there is an understanding of an argument for the need to educate future teachers (pre-service teachers) in culturally sustaining pedagogy, a step beyond culturally relevant pedagogy, (Paris & Alim, 2017) in the hopes of addressing cultural achievement gaps. This work and the application within my classroom builds off of the knowledge that Samuels (2018) provides

in relation to how there are established connections between, “...culturally competent educators and positive outcomes for students...”(p.29) and “...educators must be prepared and equipped with tools to create and facilitate environments that embrace cultural responsiveness”(p.29). The paper utilizes the established frameworks of socio-cultural theory and culturally relevant pedagogy to promote equality within education, specifically for learners with disabilities, through the education that is being provided within educator preparation program literacy courses. A socio-cultural view of literacy, “demands that we see meaning in the world and in texts as situated in learners’ experiences...” and allow learners to “...recognize and act on the world in specific ways” (Gee, 2000, p.154). In order for this to occur, pre-service special education teachers need to be active agents in their conceptualization of the culturally responsive literacy pedagogical approaches used while embracing the backgrounds of each K-12 learner that they work with when teaching. Therefore, this paper utilizes a culturally relevant pedagogical approach in its analysis of special education teacher preparation literacy practices.

Literature Review

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy within Educator Preparation Programs

There is an ongoing demographic shift and overrepresentation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in special education (Klingner et al., 2005) being experienced in today’s classrooms. Regrettably, educators “...often employ a pervasive deficit paradigm and blame students and their families for lower academic achievement and perceived inadequacies” (Samuels, 2018, p.22). As a result, there is a need for future educators to be in tune with the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and needs of their students. In other words, teacher candidates must work to ensure success for their students by understanding and appreciating the unique background that each student brings to the classroom (Scott et al., 2014). It is both critical

and supported by research that teachers need intentional training related to their own perspectives of working with diverse students (Chiu et al., 2017, p.47). Culturally relevant pedagogy is one pedagogical approach that could influence the approaches used with students from all backgrounds. Culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes a student-centered approach while promoting equality, recognizing the value and contributions of all students from varying backgrounds (Samuels et al., 2017). Since the pedagogy's inception by Ladson-Billings many scholars have both further defined and expanded culturally relevant pedagogy with similar terms such as culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014, Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogy has established a need for teachers to have "... an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). With this thought in mind, making sure teachers have the proper training begins at the university level in teacher education programs through innovative programming and the implementation of immersive cultural experiences in the curriculum (Scott et al., 2014). As such, educator preparation programs must evaluate how they are creating culturally responsive pre-service teachers.

While researchers argue for the integration of culturally relevant practices into teacher education programs (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), the act of developing culturally competent and culturally responsive pre-service teachers has been seen as an ongoing challenge for teacher education programs (Chui et al., 2017). In fact, teacher education programs often offer explorations of diversity that can be viewed as superficial or splintered, with teacher candidates failing to fully grasp the need of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ebersole et al., 2015, p.97). Working towards developing culturally competent pre-service teachers requires educator

preparation programs to provide ample opportunities for teacher candidates to interact with the concept. Various approaches used within teacher education to produce culturally relevant teachers have been utilized and evaluated in the literature; with each approach focusing on a different tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy. Evaluations have been done on the different methods that are employed in higher education to prepare teachers. Some of these methods include after school literacy programs (Assaf & Lopez, 2015), assignments (Ebersole et al., 2016; Nganga, 2015), and student self-evaluations (Cruz et al., 2020; Gay, 2010) of their knowledge of culturally responsive literacy instruction.

However, prior to attempting to implement a culturally relevant pedagogical approach within the classroom, pre-service teachers need to have a firm grasp on the meaning of the term. This includes recognizing various discourses associated with diversity and access (Janks, 2000), understanding their own positioning (Ebersole et al., 2016; Othman, 2018), and valuing the importance of the pedagogical approach. Samuels et al. (2017) found that pre-service teachers view on culturally relevant pedagogy was one of value in which they felt the pedagogical approach provides opportunities for positive relationships, empowering students, and giving a voice to all populations, while at the same time promoting an understanding of multiple ways of knowing (p.54). As a result, it is important for candidates to take this value recognition and put the knowledge into practice by engaging in critical conversations related to diversity. Consequently, an obstacle to developing culturally responsive teachers includes negative teacher attitudes (Gay, 2002, p.614). Teacher beliefs about diversity, race, culture, and ethnicity influence their instructional behaviors; as such, teacher preparation programs “should teach prospective teachers how to become cognizant of their habits of using examples and how to modify them to be more culturally diverse”(Gay, 2010, p.147). Reflective opportunities provide

teacher candidates an opportunity to develop cultural competence, a critical competency of culturally relevant pedagogy (Scott et al., 2014; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). This critical competence includes developing a critical consciousness that allows teacher candidates to analyze and monitor their behavior and beliefs towards diversity (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). However, failing to develop critical consciousness within teachers can have unwanted results, including the preservation of deficit-based beliefs about students and families. After recognizing the critical components of diversity and culture and accessing meaningful experiences with the pedagogy, students can begin to contextualize the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy and put the concept into practice (Cruz et al., 2020).

Once the establishment of one's own positioning has been developed, teacher candidates should engage and connect with the lives of their students. Providing opportunities for teacher candidates to engage with local communities and have an understanding of students' backgrounds have demonstrated success in cultivating growth related to pre-service teachers' understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gonzalez and Moll (2002) argue that effective pedagogy comes from connections between instruction and students' lives. Furthermore, there is a need for educator preparation programs to collaboratively engage with the lived experiences of their students (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p.624). Pre-service special education teachers need to understand that each of their student's backgrounds can be used as assets and can be utilized to support the student's learning (Klingner et al., 2005). To put this into practice, teacher candidates need to understand the tools, experiences, and perspectives that their students are bringing to the classroom; or in other words their students' funds of knowledge. Building on and recognizing a child's funds of knowledge allows pre-service teachers to build a bridge between the home and school by pulling on the cultural and intellectual resources that are available to both teachers and

students (Moll et al., 1992). Our funds of knowledge should not be generic based on a concept of culture, but rather pre-service teachers should be provided the opportunity to see what specific elements exist within a community. In addition, educator preparation programs must provide opportunities and stress the importance of having teacher candidates both connecting with and understanding their students' identities (Klingner et al., 2005).

Community connection can be both in and outside of the school setting. Field and practicum experiences provide another opportunity for teacher candidates to engage with and enact the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Assaf and Lopez (2015) utilized an after-school writing club that allowed pre-service teachers to design lessons that were geared towards the students they were working with backgrounds and interests. The small group opportunity provided preservice teachers with the ability to see the "...value of incorporating linguistic diversity into literacy teaching and provided her the opportunity to reconceptualize students as resources (Assaf & Lopez, 2015, p. 332). In addition, da Silva Iddings and Reyes (2017) found that community involvement and direct interactions with diverse communities provides "...pre-service teachers with a growing awareness that language and literacy learning are inextricably related to cultural identity, and shaped by ethnicity, primary language and social class" (p.44). This reinforces Klingner et al.'s (2005) argument that educators who received their education preparation in an urban school environment are more likely to develop practices that are culturally responsive and continue their employment in schools with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (p.15).

Beyond the scope of various community engagement experiences, specific instructional strategies, skills, and dispositional development must be present in the progression of experiences by culturally relevant pre-service teachers. These strategies and skills must be able

to be implemented by pre-service teachers in culturally responsive ways to influence future students (Klingner et al., 2005). Lesson plan writing is one such strategy university programs have pre-service teachers engage in to demonstrate their competencies with culturally relevant pedagogy. Lesson plans, activities, and units allow candidates the opportunity to combine theory and practice by purposefully integrating student interests and backgrounds. These plans can provide opportunities to reinforce the value of students' lives and meet the needs of a community of learners (Ebersole et al., 2016; Assaf & Lopez, 2015; Othman, 2018). Lesson plan development, when making considerations for cultural responsiveness, requires teacher candidates to carefully assess and select activities and materials that “Acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, incorporating multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. Using a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles” (Nganga, 2015, p.3). While engaging in lesson plan writing is a step in the process for teacher candidates to frequently engage in, pre-service special education teachers need to recognize that rather than seeing culturally relevant pedagogy as a separate unit or entity that supplements an existing curriculum, approaches should permeate the day-to-day curriculum (Ebersole et al., 2016). Culturally relevant instructional materials and activities should be identifiable in day-to-day lessons as opposed to limited lessons (Nganga, 2015).

As discussed above, there are consistent strategies found within the literature to help develop culturally competent educators within education preparation programs. These strategies and experiences will help pre-service teachers understand what approaches they should incorporate into their classroom instruction. However, frequently in teacher education, major concepts and theories (such as culturally relevant pedagogy) are found in isolation (Ebersole et

al., 2016). The ongoing challenges and mandates related to cultural diversity are too substantial for a limited number of professors and program experiences to address (Gay, 2010). In order to develop culturally relevant teachers, “culturally responsive teaching cannot be viewed as a separate unit of study or a stand-alone lesson, but rather an approach and attitude that is fostered in overall teaching” (Samuels, 2018, p.23). Preparing future educators to teach diverse students calls for initial educator preparation programs to expand their instructional programming to fluidly combine pedagogical practices and providing professional development experiences to help obtain knowledge and expand their capacity to be culturally responsive in their instruction (Klingner et al., 2005). Research findings suggest that educator preparation programs should increase pre-service teachers’ awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy through the use of various assignments and through the integration of purposeful exposure to diversity and social justice issues throughout all courses. Specifically, the need is for “...teacher education programs to integrate strategically and explicitly cultural responsiveness and diversity-related content throughout their courses and program experiences” (Samuels et al., 2017, p.58). This need is a result of teacher education programs frequently offering diversity courses as an add on to the program as opposed to being strategically integrated into the curriculum (Ebersole et al., 2016). Paris and Alim (2017) state that an issue contributing to a lack of critical thinking and continued assimilation within teaching is the ongoing attempt to isolate teaching skills and strategies, as well as the pedagogical moves, as opposed to holistic approaches. The development of a comprehensive program within the context of teacher preparation will help contribute to the success of diverse learners.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Literacy Instruction

Educator preparation programs and researchers have evaluated and implemented a variety of approaches to facilitate an understanding of successful culturally responsive literacy instruction. Through these evaluations, it is evident of the need to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities; it is vital for literacy pedagogies to have ties to culturally responsive pedagogy. Samuels et al. (2017) found a need for “...teacher education programs to integrate strategically and explicitly cultural responsiveness and diversity-related content throughout their courses and program experiences” (p.58). Taking this into consideration, literacy courses should be integrating culturally relevant pedagogical practices within the instructional framework in order to develop effective pre-service special education teachers who have the tools to demonstrate and produce culturally relevant literacy instruction.

The area of specific learning disabilities continues to be an area of higher representation for minority students (de Brey et al., 2019). “The seriousness of the disparity in academic performance and literate competence is exacerbated by a range of social and economic problems facing African-American students” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.312). To help address this, “All children should receive culturally responsive literacy instruction that builds on their prior knowledge, interests, motivation, and home language” (Klingner et al., 2005, p.19). Developing lessons and activities that purposefully integrate student interests and backgrounds can be done when students complete reading and writing activities that affirm students' lives (Assaf & Lopez, 2015). This becomes a possibility, “When teachers are able to share lifeworlds with their students and their students’ families, new potentials for thinking, acting, and being become a part of our experience (Croom et al., 2019, p. 7). Moreover, “...teachers need to recognize the influence of culture on learning in students and enhance their opportunities for success by

understanding their differences and incorporating practice that consider student preferences toward learning” (Ford et al., 2014, p.58). By making considerations for student preference and personal connections, positive attitudes and a realization of relevance towards school can contribute to narrowing academic achievement gaps (Othman, 2018, p.175).

The selection of methods and materials is a critical step for pre-service teachers to use when developing their lesson plans. This appropriateness of the methods and materials selection and subsequent use and integration becomes evident within a culturally relevant classroom. Teacher education literacy courses need to prepare candidates to understand that “There is a need for the development of methods and materials that will connect with migrant children’s funds of knowledge and facilitate the incorporation of their experiences into daily classroom curricula” (Stevenson & Beck, 2017, p. 241). When candidates have this recognition, they will see the influence of “...presenting instructional materials like these validates students’ ethnic and sociocultural experiences...” (Stevenson & Beck, 2017, p.244). One such approach to use with pre-service teachers is multicultural children’s literature and in-depth studies of children’s literature to engage in cultural experiences (Rogers et al., 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009). Souto-Manning (2009) found that multicultural children’s literature allowed for the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, “Multiple perspectives (or authorings) became a valid concept in the classroom and children sought to learn from each other and how their peers experienced school” (Souto-Manning, 2009, p.64). In addition, it has become broadly accepted to utilize diverse children’s literature as a means to address themes such as ethnicity, race, culture, and language through texts (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Encouraging pre-service teachers to utilize a plethora of diverse literature pieces in their reading instruction will enable their future students to learn from one another and embrace each classmate’s uniqueness. In other words,

teacher candidates' future instruction and lesson plans should provide their students with "...frequent opportunities to practice reading with a variety of rich materials in meaningful contexts" (Klingner et al., 2005, p.19). When educators implement literature that places "... students' ethnic identities, experiences, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds at the center of the curriculum" (Stevenson & Beck, 2017, p.244), they are following the principles of culturally responsive literacy pedagogy. An example of this integration for teacher candidates to model after can be found in Souto-Manning. Souto-Manning (2009) found that multicultural children's literature allowed for the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy by allowing a first grade classroom to engage in discussions related to civil rights, racism, multiple perspectives, and more. This work can be infused directly into teacher education as well. Opportunities for teacher candidates to read, discuss, and encounter diverse children's literature, including facilitated discussions, can serve as a focal point for teacher education courses and should be a frequent occurrence (Sharp & Johnson, 2016, p.28).

However, it must be acknowledged that materials alone are not sufficient (Piazza et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Moreover, Rogers and Christian (2007) point out simply having multicultural books within a classroom does not necessarily provide intentional and meaningful engagement with topics of race and culture. Specifically, pre-service teachers need to understand that they must go beyond reading the book and actually address the issues that are being presented. Furthermore, this reinforces Croom et al.'s, (2019) argument that "We also need to help preservice teachers pay closer attention to how their interactions with students do or do not involve fairness, celebrate cultural and racial differences, and embrace multiple ways of being and knowing" (p. 4). These interactions can include those between teachers, students, and texts. In addition, when stories are about a specific culture it is often from the viewpoint of the

oppressor as opposed to the oppressed. This does not give a full historical perspective (Rogers & Christian, 2007). Pre-service teachers need to be provided with the tools to support their students in how they interpret children's literature in a manner that promotes understanding of matters of race, racism, and anti-racism, especially as children's literature varies in the way it constructs issues of race. In other words, there is a need to disrupt some of the cultural models that occur within children's literature. With this knowledge, pre-service teachers will be able to recognize the themes related to societal issues, which will help them begin to transition "from noticing, to naming, to changing such discourse practice" (Rogers & Christian, 2007, p.41).

To expand upon children's literature, further strategies and elements contribute to the mindsets of both pre-service teachers and their students. As Zapata et al., (2017) discuss in their study involving diverse children's picture books and visual thinking strategies. Elements of discussion regarding picture books provided participants the opportunity to discuss what was occurring in pictures and make connections to their own lives. Discussion allows a space for students to move beyond literal comprehension and understanding to further develop their thinking, specifically with social justice themes. Medina (2010) explored this concept from the perspective of immigrant children's engagement in literature discussion. Medina (2010) argues for "Expanding the limits of what constitutes an acceptable response in a literature discussion and a valid story in students' authoring processes could perhaps help us develop global/local or translocal practices where the students identities, histories, and imaginations are at the core of how they understand literacy events" (p. 58). Discussion opportunities provide students a chance to engage their peers with their personal lives and provide a platform to challenge traditional discourses. Pre-service teachers' understanding of the power of discussion in response to literature can help facilitate a culture of belonging with their future students. This can be

obtained by looking at texts and social practices, literacy events, and learners' positioning (Souto-Manning, 2009).

To practice the integration and development of literacy instruction competencies within pre-service special education, practicum, service learning, and/or after school opportunities can be geared towards literacy instruction and tutoring for diverse and marginalized populations. This provides pre-service teachers the opportunity to practice their knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy in a literacy context by providing a platform that allows candidates to build relationships and understand lived experiences of students (Moll et al., 1992), while applying their literary knowledge. Pre-service special education teachers need to understand that "Literacy instruction should take into account the sociocultural contexts within which students learn" (Klingner et al., 2005, p.19). As this is the sociocultural context that influences students' acquisition of literate behaviors" (Klingner et al., 2005, p.19). "Sociocultural perspectives in literacy education emphasize the importance of incorporating students' linguistic resources, funds of knowledge, and home and community experiences into the classroom" (Stevenson & Beck, 2017, p.243). Assaf and Lopez (2015) utilized an after-school writing club that allowed pre-service teachers to design lessons that were geared towards the interests of the students they were working with. Community involvement can be done through having literacy events and engagements, which provide both families and pre-service teachers the opportunity to interact and be involved in child's programming. Specifically, da Silva Iddings and Reyes (2017) paired pre-service teachers with volunteer families "...in order to learn more in depth about the language and literacy practices of a particular learner in local and diverse neighbourhoods" (p.38). Despite these promising experiences, Daniels (2016) found that because learning experiences differ greatly across many university-based coursework and practicum settings, teacher candidates

often have difficulty implementing the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy during their practicum experiences.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Special Education

It has been argued that the need for culturally relevant pedagogy is especially critical in special education, as issues of overrepresentation continue to exist (Gay, 2002). Furthermore, it has been articulated that culturally relevant pedagogy is even more critical for students with special needs due to the clash between a student's culturally and linguistically diverse background and the culture of the school (Ford et al., 2014). This disproportionality is especially prevalent in disability areas that are considered to be high incidence disabilities such as specific learning disabilities (Othman, 2018, p. 172). "Concern about disproportionate representation is focused on the "judgmental" categories of special education- those disabilities usually identified after the child starts school and by school personnel rather than a medical professional" (Klingner et al., 2005, p.3). Reading and writing (literacy skills), as related to specific learning disabilities, are included in the judgmental categories, in which performance and diagnosis is based on the assessment of education professionals. "The diagnoses of high-incidence disabilities, such as emotional disorders and specific learning disabilities, include "judgment categories" that are based on professional judgment" (Othman, 2018, p.172). In addition, parental involvement in the diagnosis of these categories is often overlooked. In fact, the deficit views employed by educators and professionals of parents and families of culturally and linguistically diverse students has discouraged participation in both the schooling and special education referral process (Klingner et al., 2005, p. 22).

Preparation programs must consciously put in an effort to include knowledge about teaching culturally diverse students regarding classroom practice (Gay, 2002). This work can be

accomplished by ensuring pre-service teachers have experience with implementing culturally responsive instructional practices considered to be validated (Klingner et al., 2005) and learn about multicultural curriculum practices (Gay, 2002). Pre-services teachers need to be aware that when students show early signs of struggling, they should be using culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate evidenced- based interventions, reading programs, and behavioral practices with their students in both a supplemental and intensive capacity (Klingner et al., 2005). Instructing teacher candidates on the benefits of assessment to “... inform curricular decision-making about primary and supplementary materials used that are not only culturally relevant but multi-leveled in a variety of forms: print, visual, auditory, and hands-on” (Ford et al., 2014, p.58) is a critical component to ensuring culturally and linguistically diverse students are being taught appropriately. In other words, teachers should be using data when making instructional decisions related to the needs of their students (Cheesman & DePry, 2010, p.90). In addition, pre-service teacher’s work with goal development for students with disabilities can include reading comprehension focused work that includes materials written both by and about groups in which the student can identify (Gay, 2002). Utilizing multiple approaches allows pre-service teachers to expand their teaching methodologies to reach the needs of their students with disabilities. This is especially critical as content must be taught to a class of students with a range of abilities, and teaching from the dominant lens and culture can cause a mismatch between the culturally and linguistically diverse students and the established curriculum (Ford et al., 2014, p.59). Therefore, the development of these practices will help pre-service teachers to obtain the “... knowledge of specific instructional practices and how to implement these practices in culturally responsive ways that enhance students’ opportunities to learn and reduce the likelihood they will underachieve and be referred to special education” (Klingner et al., 2005, p.15).

Beyond the scope of instructional practices, pre-service special education teachers must have an understanding of inclusive environments that allow CLD students with disabilities to participate meaningfully in the curriculum. (Ford et al., 2014, p.59). Sobel and Taylor (2015) argue that the classroom environment is an integral part of inclusive, culturally relevant teaching practices, as culturally relevant practices include all elements of classroom life. Furthermore, it is the teachers that show themselves as both caring for students and also demanding and promoting high academic achievement are those that are the most effective. To create an inclusive environment, teachers should surround their students with varying images, sounds, and representations of cultural and ethnic diversity (Gay, 2002). To have an understanding of these inclusive environments and approaches, attention should be given to where pre-service teachers receive their preparation and the exposure to diverse learners they receive.

Addressing environmental and academic needs contributes to culturally responsive teaching that is holistic and supportive of the whole child (Othman, 2018, p.175). Helping pre-service special education teachers see the importance of addressing the whole child is a way to establish an understanding of how to build connections and utilize an asset-based approach. “Culturally responsive teaching offers ways to best support diverse learners in an inclusive classroom as it approaches education by looking at the whole child where students are empowered intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ford et al., 2014, p.57). By recognizing the whole child, pre-service teachers can positively impact their students. This is especially important because “For students with disabilities, predominantly those of color in special education classrooms, the quality of their education can be improved by teachers using education programs which reflect

cultural heritages, perspectives, experiences, and instructional practices” (Scott et al., 2014, p.80). These programs carry into specific planning for students with disabilities.

Summary of Literature Review

For the purposes of this literature review, various works were evaluated to analyze the foundational and current research available related to pre-service special education teacher education within the context of reading methods courses and culturally responsive pedagogy. While this review focuses on special education teacher preparation, literacy instruction, and culturally relevant pedagogy, it is evident of a need for additional research and work related specifically to the intersectionality between the concepts. Significant research is available regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and strategies to implement the pedagogical practice, especially in recent years. In addition, there are a large number of studies focused on specific methodologies that teacher education programs are using to develop and prepare culturally relevant teachers. Despite this however, very limited studies focus specifically on the practices related to pre-service special education teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy within their literacy methods courses. While the literature produces an argument for teacher education to produce culturally relevant teachers and for pre-service teachers to be culturally relevant within their literacy instruction, the importance of authentic understanding as opposed to “tokenship” must be clear. As the New London Group points out (1996), “... by creating ethnic or other culturally differentiated commodities in order to exploit specialized niche markets or by adding festive, ethnic color to the classrooms- must not paper over real conflicts of power and interest. Only by dealing authentically with them can we create out of diversity and history a new, vigorous, and equitable public realm” (p.69). With this in mind, educator preparation programs would benefit from research in this specific area.

In this paper, by building on the knowledge of increased school diversity and the overrepresentation of students from diverse backgrounds in special education, I have discussed the foundational arguments and need for culturally relevant pedagogy preparation within special education teacher education programs. In addition, I describe the various approaches teacher education programs have been utilizing in an attempt to produce culturally competent teachers, specifically related to literacy practices. While critiques of the limitations of culturally relevant pedagogy exist in relation to increasing reading performance (Cheesman & De Pry, 2010), further research is needed to discuss the approaches used in teacher education to address the concept. Furthermore, the focus of my study is on pre-service special education teachers, limited research could be found specifically related to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy and pre-service special education preparation. As such, I seek to improve and promote culturally relevant pedagogical practices utilized within teacher preparation literacy methods courses for pre-service special education teachers to address issues of disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in judgmental special education categories.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Researcher Positionality

A critical component of a research study is the identification of the role of the researcher. In addition to my role as the primary researcher, I also served as the course instructor for a reading methods course for pre-service special education teachers (candidates). Through practitioner inquiry, "... the practitioner himself or herself simultaneously takes on the role of researcher." Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.41). The duality of roles allowed me as the university faculty member and course instructor to engage with the research process from the inside (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The course is taken by candidates during their third year in the program. However, while this study took place in a reading methods course, I have previously been the candidates' instructor in an Introduction to Special Education course. Therefore, I have previously and currently am engaged in an instructor/candidate relationship with the participants. In addition, some of the relationships I have with the candidates extend beyond the course, as I serve as an academic advisor. As the instructor of the course, it was important to recognize my position of power in relation to the participants. While my position of power must be acknowledged, it is important to articulate that all elements of the study, including data collection methods and activities, are built into the course as requirements. Therefore, no additional work was required of the teacher candidates. However, my position as their instructor may have influenced the responses from the candidates.

My unique position provided me with an insider lens in that data collection occurs in natural settings (Yin, 2016). As an insider, I was familiar with the course, the assignments, and the experiences that the candidates engaged with over the duration of the study. This naturalistic occurrence reinforces how Babione describes insider studies. "Insider studies are most often

collected in day-to-day activities derived from teaching activities and frequently completed while teaching” (Babione, 2015, p.112). My teaching experience extends for a number of years allowing me to critically engage with the content and candidates. My teaching experience and strong relationships from being the participants’ instructor multiple times allows for me to provide a nurturing and safe environment. I was able to provide the candidates with resources, instructional approaches, and feedback over the duration of their experience. Comparatively, I could relate to their positioning, as a former teacher candidate myself.

Pulling on my previous seven years of experience as a K-12 special education teacher, including four years as a director of special education, there was often a need to redesign or rethink the evidence based methods and approaches that I used when working with my students with special needs. These approaches were the evidence-based practices I had been taught during my undergraduate teacher preparation training. During that time, I worked with a large number of students from all walks of life. Each student brought a unique perspective, behavior, and need to the classroom. This uniqueness challenged me to move beyond the scope of my scripted evidence-based reading programs in an attempt to build relationships and increase motivation. My position as a white, female educator working with students that looked and learned differently than me often came into conversations with my students. I remember the day when my own perspective on working with students of diverse backgrounds changed drastically; a day that occurred when I was a teacher candidate myself. As a student, I always did my homework, always studied for exams, and typically achieved academic success. While I was working toward becoming a teacher, I worked under the assumption that all students worked this way and approached their schooling with the same mindset. I was completing my student teaching at a high school and one of the classes I was responsible for taking over was a direct service English

10 course for students with disabilities. I was working on grading the first essay that I had assigned after officially taking over the class. I worked through essay after essay finding joy in the words of my students. As I finished the last essay, I realized two of my students did not have grades and that I was missing two. My immediate response was panic; I had lost two of my students' essays. What would they think? I am organized; how could this happen? I remember going to my cooperating (mentor) teacher and explaining that I had lost the papers and that I typically never had this type of occurrence. Her initial response was laughter. Embarrassed and confused I asked what I should do to help make this up for the students. My cooperating teacher explained that I did not lose the papers; rather, these two students had a history of not doing their work. It was at that moment I learned that not all students do their homework. Furthermore, it was solidified in my mind that different students may need different approaches. My teacher explained that she often reached out to the parents of these two students whenever there was a big assignment, but felt this was a learning opportunity for me, as a teacher in training. A learning opportunity it certainly was indeed! It was here that I saw the ongoing need for teachers, specifically myself, to be both aware of and responsive to the needs of students. I needed to know what my students were bringing to the classroom and utilize the assets they were bringing. This experience has forever influenced my approach to teaching and continues to influence my approach even as I have transitioned into higher education.

Preparing pre-service teachers requires practitioners to engage future educators in practices that will allow them to meet the needs of and connect with their future K-12 learners. Each K-12 learner brings a unique perspective and diverse background to the classroom, which calls for teachers to be competent in their execution of culturally relevant pedagogy. In order to promote equality within education and support for all learners, pre-service teachers need to be

provided the tools to promote social justice, implement appropriate pedagogical practices, and to embrace the backgrounds of each student that they work with. For the past four years, I have been working in teacher education with pre-service special education teachers. I acknowledge and recognize my position of power in relation to the participants as their course instructor. I see my role as the researcher to be one that facilitates a literacy and student-based experience providing insight into culturally relevant pedagogy in a literacy methods course. I actively share my personal teaching and learning experiences in the hope that my own teacher candidates understand my positioning. My work involves listening to the students and capturing an accurate vision of what is occurring within the culture of pre-service teachers and their work with culturally relevant pedagogy in literacy instruction.

Milner's (2007) framework of researcher racial cultural positionality will help me to work through the seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers within my research. This framework calls for the researcher to engage in self-reflection, self in relation to others, and participant/researcher reflect together (Milner, 2007). The incorporation of this framework will allow me to reflect upon my positionality to provide an accurate representation of my subjectivity. In addition, I will actively reflect with my teacher candidates. These reflection opportunities for teacher candidates will allow them to "...interrogate their assumptions, and investigate the realities of their biases..." in order to work to promote equitable and inclusive classrooms (Samuels, 2018, p. 22). Working in the field of education, I frequently engage with research that has been completed in a school setting. I believe this gives a real world perspective related to my research interests. This perspective allows the researcher to experience and become a part of an event in its naturalistic setting. The established framework works to promote equality

within education and support for all learners through the education that is being provided within educator preparation programs.

The research paradigm that aligns with my beliefs is social constructivism (interpretivist). This philosophic tradition attempts to understand the world in which an individual both lives and works (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivists “...focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.24). Through an interpretivist lens, I hope to understand and evaluate how teacher candidates use their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy intrinsically within their literacy instruction. The qualitative nature of the research through interviews and multimodal analysis will allow me to begin to understand the thought process of pre-service teachers. The candidates’ perspectives and experiences will provide first hand knowledge of their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and their ability to apply their knowledge through their literacy courses. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) explain the epistemological constructivist (interpretivist) stance as “...people construct their own understanding of reality; we construct meaning based on our interactions with our surroundings” (p.103). For example, when I worked as a special education teacher there would be times when teachers would come to me with behavioral problems for my students. While I would recognize and attempt to validate what the teacher would say to me, I would also have a conversation with the student with a disability to hear an alternative perspective. Each perspective, or version, of the behavioral interaction demonstrates the student and teacher’s own reality. This understanding of the different realities would help to “identify the gaps” between the teacher and the student. A breakdown in communication, a missed accommodation, or other incident often contributed to a behavioral occurrence. In these moments, a power dynamic would be observed between the

teacher and the student, but in reality all that would be needed is different supports. This example demonstrates, from my perspective, the need to pay special attention to those that are marginalized because something could be missed or misconstrued based on a perceived reality or experience. I find this connects with my paradigm as well, specifically my example, as we see how the child interpreted the experience and the teacher was different and based on how each person constructed the meaning, which was ultimately impacted by a power relationship. These paradigms allow me, as a researcher, to understand the experiences, perspectives, and skills of pre-service teachers, which will hopefully result in an effective teaching change.

Rationale for Study

In this practitioner inquiry, I evaluated the current practices and performances of my own teaching through the work of my pre-service special education teachers (candidates) with their use of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy within a reading methods course. Pre-service teachers need to recognize their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and be able to apply this understanding into their literacy instruction. This recognition and application will allow pre-service special education teachers to meet the needs of the diverse, ever-changing landscape of the classroom. I conducted a study that focused on how pre-service special education teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy through their teacher education reading methods course. The results and implications from the study further assisted in making recommendations on how to instruct pre-service special education teachers in regards to implementing culturally responsive literacy instruction to meet the needs of diverse student populations with disabilities. While initial results from the study were at the course level, eventual influences could transition to the program level. Effective pedagogical practices could be identified and established to ensure teacher preparation is adequate in their preparation of

teacher candidates with culturally relevant literacy practices for diverse learners. This is important for teachers and university faculty, especially as classroom diversity continues to increase in schools and the needs of K-12 students change (Chui et al., 2017). Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How can the implications of teacher candidates' engagement in culturally relevant literacy teaching inform the course design and pedagogical practices of the instructor? How do pre-service special education teachers demonstrate their knowledge of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy through a self-reflective peer review process? How do pre-service special education teachers integrate culturally relevant pedagogy into their literacy instruction? Specifically, what elements of culturally relevant pedagogy are seen in pre-service special education teachers lesson plans?

Research Approach

The qualitative research approach used for this study is a practitioner inquiry approach embedded in sociocultural theory and culturally relevant pedagogy. As the course instructor of the participants, I engaged in close relationships with the research and participants. My intimate relationship with the research and the participants reinforces the perspective on the ability of qualitative researchers to emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality and the constraints that shape the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln (2011). This intimate possibility becomes an engaging possibility through practitioner inquiry. In addition, the specificity of pre-service teachers in my research questions and the context of the setting in teacher education reinforces the use of practitioner inquiry. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) describe how teacher educators "... have learned to make their professional work a strategic site for inquiry by focusing some of their research and grant getting efforts on work they do with others in inquiry communities as well as on their own courses and programs" (p.43). Furthermore, practitioner research continues to play

an integral role in pre-service teacher education at the university level (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 30).

As an educator, I frequently engage in reflective opportunities and analyze my courses to improve the outcomes of my students. Reflection practices allow me, as both instructor and researcher, to become aware of what I am seeing and potentially what is inhibiting what I see. “Best practices for teaching have identified reflective thinking as a key element to inquiry” (Babione, 2015, p.6). Reflexivity provides an opportunity to ensure I am providing an accurate representation of my experiences, recognizing the assets and limitations (Watt, 2007). In addition, Babione (2015) explains that due to the complexity and uniqueness of today’s classrooms, the reflection process allows practitioners to confront new situations by drawing on their previous experiences to improve future approaches and decisions.

Practitioner (Teacher) Research

Practitioner research is “qualitative research conducted by insiders in educational settings to improve their own practice” (Zeni, 2001 in Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p.5). Specifically, practitioner research highlights the significance of the comprehensive knowledge of groups such as a child, class, or whole school. Additionally, practitioner research allows an insider to intentionally and systematically engage in inquiry about their own classrooms and schools. This approach has the ability to gain insights that provide opportunities for change, reform, and policy (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). Practitioner research plays a role in the contribution to both the intellectual and professional development of the participants and the overall general knowledge based within the studied field (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011). Ultimately, “Teacher inquiry is about teachers studying what is happening in their schools and school communities” (Babione, 2015, p.99) and provides an opportunity to “...explore the

underlying assumptions, biases, values, and ideologies that are inherent in their curriculum and pedagogies”(Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p.3).

A practitioner inquiry approach has a goal of “...challenging inequities, raising questions about the status quo, and enhancing the learning and life chances of students”(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.102) and “...explicitly address concerns related to equity” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.12). As this study evaluates and describes how pre-service teachers understand and implement culturally relevant literacy instruction within a reading methods course to address disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education, a practitioner inquiry approach allows for the study of my own teaching and students in my education preparation teaching context. As an educational research study, the purpose and ultimate outcome is to improve student learning (Masters, 1999, in Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). Practitioner research allows for the “...studies of the role of inquiry in the development of preservice teachers’ ideas and beliefs about teaching, learning, and diversity...” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.31). This notion aligns with the elements of diversity and teaching present in my research questions. Therefore, through the analysis of pre-service special education teachers' engagement with culturally relevant literacy instruction, candidate learning opportunities can be further enhanced as I describe how my own teaching has been influenced by how teacher candidates engage in the development and implementation of lesson plans in an after-school reading tutoring experience.

As the instructor of the course where the study took place, being an insider allows for the systematic inquiry of the study to occur. The concept of utilizing practitioner research as social inquiry or action research has long held the tradition of incorporating a collaborative relationship between teachers, students, and other stakeholders (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Furthermore,

classroom based research allows the research to occur in a highly personal space that can focus on practice and the impact on learning (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). The focus on local contexts through practitioner inquiry is recognized as an opportunity for researchers to be mediators of change and to play an influencing role in the development of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Research Setting and Context

The study occurred in a teacher education reading methods course I teach at a small, liberal arts university in the midwest. Typically the program averages 20 new students per year in the undergraduate program. Candidates engage in a series of prerequisite courses before formal admittance to the teacher education program. Teacher candidates must be formally accepted to the program in order to enroll in the first reading methods course. This course is the first reading methods course in a series of two for candidates. During the first reading course, teacher candidates are introduced to the foundations of reading instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Candidates begin to apply this knowledge in an introductory field placement and after-school program. During the second reading course, candidates focus more on assessment and reading intervention to build upon the knowledge and skills gained during their first reading course.

Preparing pre-service special education teachers requires practitioners to engage future educators in practices that will allow them to meet the needs of and connect with their future K-12 learners. Each learner brings a unique perspective and diverse background to the classroom, which calls for teachers to be competent in their execution of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). To address this, my own teacher candidates are taught the foundations of reading instruction and pedagogical practices to support learners from various backgrounds and abilities.

Throughout the course, pre-service special education teachers performed a variety of tasks that include mini-lessons, read-alouds, small group work, and practicum discussions. After a couple of semesters of hearing the same texts being read over and over (*A Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Pete the Cat*, etc), despite the pre-service teachers receiving encouragement to incorporate texts that challenge their comfort level, I came to the realization of the need to promote a deeper understanding of culturally responsive literacy pedagogy.

This research study took place in a reading methods course for pre-service teachers in a university classroom and after-school practicum experience. Access to both sites was gained due to my position as the course instructor following IRB procedures at my university (Appendix F). My positioning as an insider allows “... the teacher as researcher gains entry to the site by the nature of the work she or he is paid to do and expected to perform” (Babione, 2015, p.112). Phase I of preliminary data collection for the study occurred during Fall 2020 (August-November) and Phase II occurred during Fall 2021 (August-November). For the purposes of this study, nine of the 15 weeks of each fall term were used for data collection.

Course Description

Reading Methods Course

The Reading Methods course lasted for the duration of the Fall semester (15 weeks) in both 2020 and 2021. The class met one time per week for two hours and 45 minutes for 15 weeks during the Fall semester. However, for the purposes of this study the course was used as a field site for nine weeks. Course instructional time focused on cultivating candidates’ awareness of culturally relevant literacy strategies. Candidates learned about different strategies to help ensure their literacy instruction met the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Observations and artifact development occurred during this time. As the study sought to answer

how pre-service teachers understand culturally relevant literacy instruction, it was appropriate for the setting of the study to be within a reading methods course. The setting allowed candidates to implement the literacy pedagogical skills and knowledge they obtained through course instruction. The course includes an introduction to reading methods within the context of the university classroom, as well as application practice within field and practicum experiences.

After-School Practicum

Candidates began their after-school literacy experience in a practicum attached to the course in week four of the semester during Fall 2021 (Phase II of the study). The after-school practicum experience occurred for one hour, one time per week, over a six-week period. The after-school program occurred at an elementary school near campus. Students enrolled in the after-school program were recommended by the classroom teacher and signed up by parents. Candidates taught the lesson plans they developed during the after-school experience and engaged in a peer review process with an assigned partner. The after-school literacy experience allowed candidates to engage in the concepts learned through course instruction and to implement them with second and third grade learners.

Participants

The study occurred during two semesters, over two years: Phase 1 (Fall 2020) and Phase II (Fall 2021). Participants for the study were pre-service teachers (candidates). Pre-service teachers or teacher candidates are defined as university students studying to become teachers. All participants were teacher candidates enrolled in the reading methods course I teach. Teacher candidates in the program typically enroll as a cohort. The cohort enrolls in the same courses and in the same sequence providing a similar knowledge base for all teacher candidates. Historically, the majority of candidates are white and female. Teacher candidates enroll in the reading

methods course during their junior year, after formal admittance into the teacher education program. For Phase I of the study, 23 candidates were enrolled in the reading methods course; 17 out of 23 candidates provided written consent to have their work included in the project. All candidates in Phase I were white and consisted of 15 females and 2 males. For Phase II of the study, enrollment in the reading methods course was 14 teacher candidates; 11 out 14 candidates provided written consent to have their work included in the project. Of the candidates providing consent, one was Latina and 10 were white. The group of candidates consisted of 10 females and one male. The demographic make-up of teacher candidates included within the study are similar to national statistics which indicates that over 75% of teachers are white, females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Candidates were placed in pairs at the beginning of the semester based on the results of their culturally relevant literacy instruction survey (Appendix E). This survey provided insight into the beliefs and understandings of teacher candidates enrolled in the course. Babione (2015) explains that surveys which are open-ended allow participants to provide their own perspective or insight and additional information on the topics being addressed. The partners worked together throughout the semester during course activities and served as a peer support at the after-school experience.

Small groups were then developed by combining two pairs of students or small groups of three. Small groups consisted of at least one candidate who articulated they have limited knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy. Small groups were used to encourage authentic dialogue and engagement with the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy from a variety of perspectives based on self-reported reflections. Because participants were placed based on their self-reported knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy, purposeful sampling provided a

preferable opportunity to “...show different perspectives on the problem, process, or event” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 100) when analyzing data. For the purposes of this study, I assessed the culturally relevant components of the course by looking at the overall performance of individuals and small groups across the cohort.

Data Collection Procedures

Through data collection procedures, I seek to demonstrate a clear understanding of pre-service teachers' work with culturally relevant literacy practices. These multiple forms of data provide a “...systematic way of gathering and documenting information or experiences...” (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011, p.3) and provide a holistic representation of a scenario (Mills et al., 2012). Producing and using a “...variety of data collection tools (interviews, observations, reflective journals and others) and perspectives (child, teacher, parent, researcher) to provide depth” (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014, p. 9). Data collection occurred in two phases, Phase I in the Fall 2020 semester and Phase II in the Fall 2021 semester. Data was collected for nine total weeks during each phase. It began the second week of the fall term and ended at the completion of the tenth week of the term. Data sources consisted of artifacts generated in the reading methods course, instructor-teacher candidate conferences, and video-recordings of candidate taught lessons.

Data Sources

A major source of data collection for the study came from collecting artifacts generated in my reading methods class. Multiple artifacts were generated through this study. The artifacts collected were assignments produced by teacher candidates and “...complement information obtained...” (Yin, 2014, p. 155) from my conferences with teacher candidates. Physical artifacts such as personal or organizational documents, helped “...to convey the depth and multiple forms

of data collection” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.162). To further reinforce this, a range of student work can be collected as artifacts for practitioner research studies (Pappas & Tucker-Raymond, 2011).

Reading Lesson Plan

The first artifact collected was a reading lesson plan (Appendix B). During the Fall of 2021, teacher candidates were engaged in an after school reading program, beginning week 4 of the term. The after-school K-3 reading program was designed for elementary students considered below grade level in a low socio-economic school. The teacher candidates were responsible for teaching three of the six weeks of the program. For the three weeks the teacher candidates taught, they were responsible for producing a reading lesson plan. Reading lesson plans were collected one time per week for the six weeks of the reading program. Each pre-service teacher submitted a total of three lesson plans (totaling six lesson plans collected between the two teachers in each pair). All lesson plans were submitted to the university's learning management system for documentation of assignment completion in my course. The reading lesson plan provided data that showed how pre-service teacher candidates integrated culturally relevant literacy practices into their teaching.

Peer Review Rubric of Lesson Plan and Micro-Teaching

The second artifact collected was the peer review rubric (Appendix C) and reflection. Participants were responsible for observing their partner teach three of the six weeks at the after school reading program, as well as through microteaching in the university classroom. For the three weeks the participants were observing, they were responsible for completing a peer review rubric to give feedback to their partner on their teaching. A peer review rubric was collected one time per week for the six weeks of the reading program. Each participant submitted a total of

three peer review rubrics (totaling six peer review rubrics collected). Along with the peer rubric, participants submitted a written reflection based on the feedback received from their partner. All peer review rubrics and reflections were submitted to the institution's learning management system for documentation of completion. The peer review rubric provided data to answer the research question of how do pre-service special education teachers use a peer review process to improve their culturally relevant literacy practices?

Candidate Written Reflections

The third artifact collected was the participants' final written reflections (Appendix D). The final written reflection was completed once participants completed the six week after school experience and had completed their microteaching in the university classroom. The written reflections facilitated participants through a reflection process that engaged their prior knowledge related to culturally relevant literacy and an analysis of how they had grown as a culturally relevant practitioner through a peer review process. These written reflections served as a catalyst for the discussions that occurred during the candidate-teacher conferences.

Instructor Observations in Class Sessions, After-School Experience, and Instructor Candidate Conferences

Observations occurred during the reading methods course, during the after-school experience, and through the viewing of filmed micro-teaching. During the observations, I took anecdotal notes. Due to my position as the course instructor, the use of jottings, “A word or two written at the moment or soon afterward...” (Emerson et al., 2011, p.29) was used to help remind myself of the events that occurred when I revisited my notes. Jottings served as focal points to add thick description and details at a later time, which assisted in my coding procedures.

Reading Methods Course Observations

The reading methods course met one time per week for two hours and 45 minutes in the university classroom and then one time per week at the after-school program. Observations occurred one day per week for eight weeks, beginning week 2 of the course. The observations length varied from 45 minutes to one and half hours each week, for eight weeks. This resulted in a little over eight hours of observation time from the reading methods course. In the first two weeks, observations were of candidates while they worked on their initial lesson plans and explored the provided instructional materials. For the next six weeks, observations occurred while the candidates discussed their lesson plans and went over the results from the peer review.

After-School Experience

Observations during the after-school experience occurred one time per week for six weeks, lasting one hour each week. This provided me with an additional six hours of observational hours. During the after-field experience time, I was able to transition to more of an observer role, while taking anecdotal notes over teacher candidate interactions with K-12 learners enrolled in the after-school experience and observing the reading lessons being implemented by my teacher candidates.

Audio-Recordings of Instructor-Candidate Conferences

The culmination of data collection occurred through candidate-instructor conferences. These conferences were held at the end of the field experience during the 10th week of the fall semester. Conferences consisted of informal questioning by me in an one on one setting and consisted of casual interactions and conversation (Babione, 2015). A one-time, 30 minute time allotment for each candidate was established for the conferences. However, if additional time was needed, an arrangement between the candidate and myself was made. Prior to the conferences, participants completed the reflection activity discussed above (Appendix D). I used

these answers to facilitate further reflection from the participants about their overall experience in the after school literacy program and the culturally relevant peer review experience. This included asking clarifying questions based on participant responses. Furthermore, this provided the teacher candidates with an opportunity to expand their original reflection by sharing what they had learned about their ability to implement culturally relevant literacy pedagogy and what they learned from their partner. Conferences were audio recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, transcriptions were sent to teacher candidates for review. This review was to ensure the participants felt their answers were accurately reflected in the transcription. This process of member checking helped to ensure data is authentic in its representation (Cho & Trent, 2006).

To ensure data collection aligned with the research questions, I followed the matrix provided in Table 1. Table 1 includes alignment between potential data identifying factors and research questions.

Table 1: Research Question, Coding Alignment, Potential Implications

Research Questions	Data Sources	Coding Identifiers	Potential Revisions to My Practice
How can the implications of teacher candidates' engagement in culturally relevant literacy teaching inform the course design and pedagogical practices of the instructor?	Instructor-Candidate conferences Micro-teaching Videos Candidate Reflections	Course references	Identify strengths of the assignments to retain Identify weaknesses to eliminate or revise through instructional practices and coursework.
How do pre-service special education teachers demonstrate their knowledge of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy	Peer review rubric Reflections Micro-teaching Videos Instructor-Candidate conferences	Use of diverse authors and/or pieces of literature Community building	Changes to assessment tools used to measure candidates' knowledge.

through a self-reflective peer review process?	Observations		Analyze candidates' understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy.
How do pre-service special education teachers integrate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into their literacy instruction?	Lesson plans Micro-teaching Videos Instructor-Candidate conferences Peer review rubric Observations	Children's literature	Opportunities for implementation of additional instructional strategies and tools.
What elements of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy are seen in pre-service special education teachers' lesson plans?	Peer review rubric Lesson plans Reflections Micro-teaching Videos Observations	Instructional strategies Lesson Materials	Use as examples for future courses.

A timeline of data collection and collection specifics are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Phase II Data Collection Chart and Timeline

Data	Collection Method	Frequency/Duration	Time Frame
Lesson Plan	Learning Management System	3 times x 2 participants	Weeks 4-6 for partner A. Weeks 7-9 for partner B.
Peer Review Rubric	Learning Management System	3 times x 2 participants	Weeks 4-6 for partner B. Weeks 7-9 for partner A.
Field Experience Final Reflection Survey	Microsoft Forms	1 x per participant	Week 10 of the semester
Observations	Field notes	1 hour for 8 weeks (in-class) 1 hour for 6 weeks (after-school experience)	Weeks 2-9 of the semester
Candidate-Teacher	Audio recording or	1 x 30 minutes per	Week 10 of the

Conferences	Zoom recording	participant	semester
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Data Analysis Procedures

Prior to data analysis, collected data was downloaded from the university’s learning management system, and uploaded to the university’s secure database. Data was organized on the database through the use of a naming system. Organization of the data allowed me to locate collected data and artifacts easily while preparing for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once data was organized, I reread the work and begin to memo by adding reflective notes. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe memoing as helping “in this initial process of exploring a database” (p.187). Memoing provides an opportunity to identify emerging ideas from the data. When memoing was done, coding began with initial codes. By engaging with the memoing process, I had more exposure to the data, which will allow me to “...feel more secure knowing and feeling what is important in the data record and what is not, and thus code what rises to the surface” (Saldana, 2013, p.15).

Coding allows the researcher to “... take a specific event, incident, or feature and relate it to other events, incidents, or features, implicitly comparing and distinguishing this one from others” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 180). Code names were in-vivo codes. Using in-vivo codes to analyze data allowed me to select codes that are consistent with meanings in the context of the data by using words directly from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The code names provided insight into the information found through the data, specifically providing a description and evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The codes were put in a table to identify sources of overlap and to begin to identify themes. Due to the nature of my research questions, data generated frequently used vocabulary related to the topic of culturally relevant pedagogy, it was imperative

to clearly differentiate between codes. Once initial codes were completed through the data sources, a thematic analysis was completed.

As Braun and Clarke (2006) state, “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p.79) and “...involves finding repeated meanings across a data set...”(Xu & Zammit, 2020, p.2). I organized the codes into themes using inductive thematic analysis through the observations, artifacts, and instructor-candidate conferences (across all data). This analysis was done keeping in mind Braun & Clarke (2006) who argue that analysis is a continuous on-going process that is constantly moving between the coded data and the analysis of the data that has been produced. Furthermore, the use of inductive thematic analysis identifies themes closely related to collected data. These identified themes allowed me to capture data related to the research question and represent patterns discovered across the data sets. Once themes were established, they were grouped and organized into categories to be interpreted. By developing themes and incorporating thematic analysis, my collected data was able to be organized to provide insight into my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data is described to provide an account of the findings from the study by capturing the “...repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86) to establish what was learned (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finding the repeated patterns was critical to interpreting the overall phenomena of the research questions and study (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Upon completion of the thematic analysis, I checked to ensure clear connections between my findings and the research questions.

Validity

To establish validity and credibility, multiple approaches were used. I demonstrate the validation of my findings by providing multiple sources of data through triangulation. As stated

in Anfara (2002), “accountability of the researcher in documenting the actions associated with establishing internal validity (triangulation), theme development, and the relationship between research questions and data sources” (p.33). In addition, using qualitative research allowed me, as the researcher, to provide a thick description by providing detailed accounts of my research to enable my readers to effectively understand the surrounding social conditions being studied through my work (Yin, 2016).

Ethical Issues

One potential ethical issue is the data collection and analysis is with the work of my own students. Specifically, practitioner research creates an intersection between inquiry and practice, which can cause the line between researcher and practitioner to be blurred (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). While participants' grades are not influenced by their participation in the study, concerns over whether or not participants feel coerced based on my position of power as their instructor may exist. Babione (2015) states teachers can work to address this potential issue of conflict by obtaining informed consent, protecting the participants, and maintaining confidentiality. Therefore, it was critical for me to articulate plans for the study with the candidates to maintain and further build their trust. This communication was done the first week of the semester with appropriate permissions. Related to my positioning as a practitioner is the issue of privacy for the participants. Proper steps were taken to anonymize all data and field site information to help to maintain their privacy.

Another potential ethical issue related to my positioning as both an insider and outsider in the role of researcher. I possess the position of insider due to my relationships with the candidates and my role as their instructor. Yet, I am also an outsider as the course instructor as I do maintain my position of power. Yin references this positioning as doubling up. “Such

“doubling up” can create unwanted complications. You take a great risk that your study and your original affiliation will negatively affect each other” (Yin, 2016, p.63). While it can and has been done successfully, there are risks involved when identifying as an insider. But, on the other end of the spectrum, there are benefits. Specifically, insider research has the ability for the researcher to develop a strong familiarity with both the cultural and contextual conditions of the research site (Yin, 2016).

Contingency

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a discussion was held with teacher candidates and members of the education division regarding contingency plans in the event of the need for the university course and related activities, including field experiences, needed to be revised with a transition to virtual learning. During the 2020-2021 academic year, candidates enrolled in the reading methods course attended face-to-face and engaged in face-to-face field experiences following recommended Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) quarantine and mask guidance. In preparation for increased cases, virtual teaching options could have been integrated as needed per university and health official guidance. Continuing this practice, the 2021-2022 academic year was again face-to-face. Increases in Covid-19 cases were monitored and the university never transitioned to a virtual mode during data collection. All established course assignments were submitted and expectations for the study continued as planned. At the completion of data collection, the university did not transition courses to a virtual learning experience and face to face learning continued as normal.

Summary

This study evaluated the culturally relevant pedagogical practices used by pre-service special education teachers in relation to their literacy instruction over two phases of

implementation. Given the statement of problem and review of the literature, issues of overrepresentation in high incidence disability categories of special education continue to exist for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Othman, 2018) and performance gaps continue to exist (Chiu et al., 2017). Research has demonstrated, as seen through the literature review, a need for culturally relevant teachers. Therefore, it is critical for teacher candidates to engage in active learning processes to demonstrate their knowledge of culturally relevant literacy practices. Practitioner inquiry allows for an emphasis on local contexts, "...which are recognized as inevitable mediators of change and shapers of practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.56). Through the analysis of artifacts, observations, and candidate/teacher conferences over the course of two phases, I established how pre-service special education teachers in my course use culturally relevant literacy practices.

Chapter 4: Phase I Preliminary Analysis and Synthesis

In Phase I Preliminary Analysis and Synthesis, I describe the initial implementation and findings from my culturally relevant literacy lesson planning cycle and teacher candidate experiences during the Fall of 2020. I describe the minimal data collected and the findings from data analysis. The analysis from Phase I resulted in identified changes to my own teaching practice. The implementation of these changes is further described in Chapter 5 for Phase II of the study.

Reading Methods Course Context

I began teaching reading methods several years ago. When I began teaching the course I quickly worked to maintain the “status quo” and implemented the curriculum and assignments that had been utilized for a number of years. All teacher candidates majoring in elementary education and/or special education are required to take a series of reading methods courses. The courses are designed to teach the foundational skills related to reading (such as phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension), best instructional and assessment practices, and interventions for exceptional learners, such as students with disabilities and English Learners. The course referenced in this study is the first in a series of two reading methods courses. Teacher candidates enrolled in the reading methods course are required to engage in a series of field experiences in two different settings. While the settings of the field experiences have historically varied, the majority of field experiences have been in a suburban, high performing elementary school.

Throughout the course, teacher candidates would participate in and develop a number of different learning activities. A large focus of the learning activities centrally focused on the lesson planning and instructional routines of teaching reading and literacy practices in areas

identified by the National Reading Panel. These areas include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel (U.S.) & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (U.S.), 2000). In addition, pre-service teachers studied reading intervention techniques for struggling readings and ways to differentiate reading instruction and assessment. Despite the content being grounded in evidence-based practices, it was evident an element of instruction was missing when it came to teacher candidates working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Educator Preparation Programs are responsible for ensuring teacher candidates are prepared to teach K-12 students from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, learning abilities, and diverse perspectives. This responsibility is reinforced through accrediting bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. Throughout the program, candidates are taught to respond to the needs of diverse learners including socio-economic diversity and cultural and linguistic diversity. However, despite having the interwoven culturally relevant approaches in several courses and direct instruction on culturally relevant pedagogy in a number of other education courses, it was evident that candidates were still struggling to integrate and connect the need for culturally relevant pedagogy specifically within their reading instruction.

As I gained more experience teaching the course, it became clear to me that there was an inherent need for direct and explicit instruction surrounding culturally relevant literacy pedagogy within the context of the reading methods course. I identified the need for candidates to be both purposefully and meaningfully engaged in literacy practices from a culturally relevant pedagogical lens, specifically when working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and learning abilities. When I began teaching the course, I noticed

candidates consistently selected reading materials consisting of the “educational classics” and were often at an inappropriate grade level. For example, pre-service teachers would frequently utilize books by Dr. Seuss, which often include nonsense words or content that K-6 students are unable to connect to their own lived cultural experiences. The material selection was based on my pre-service teachers' own educational experiences and interest. The selections failed to expand the pre-service teachers’ knowledge and exposure to new or previously unexplored materials. To address this, I integrated a number of more culturally relevant instructional activities in assignment additions prior to Phase I of the study. These changes are further detailed below in Phase I and II. The course assignments and instructional activities implemented were selected strategically and based on the research implications described in Chapter Two.

Phase I Findings: Initial Changes

The first instructional activity addition made to the reading methods course was the implementation of a culturally relevant lesson planning cycle. For Phase I of the study, teacher candidates wrote lesson plans, taught the lessons to their peers, and engaged in a peer review process with an assigned peer. The initial cycle included the development of a lesson plan requiring candidates to highlight what elements of the lesson plan they considered culturally relevant, teaching the lesson to a partner in class, and having the partner provide informal peer feedback. The purpose of assigning partners was to establish a cooperative and collaborative learning culture within the reading methods classroom. Cooperative learning has been proven to stimulate higher-order thinking, increase achievement, and enhance memory (Berry, 2003). The informal feedback shared between partners consisted of telling one another what was done well and what they liked about the lesson. Based on my review of the lesson plans produced by candidates, elements of culturally relevant pedagogy ranged from a strong home connection

based lesson to writing a lesson centered around a read aloud with diverse characters. Feedback between the partners was limited and almost never constructive. Rather, it was friendly and maintained a “you did a good job” aura. While the overall initial learning experience brought to the forefront what a culturally relevant literacy lesson could look like, candidates lacked a comprehensive and in-depth experience with the concept. Furthermore, the teacher candidates were not willing to engage in constructive conversations with their peers regarding the lesson and their experiences. Therefore, for Phase I of the study, two main additions were made to the lesson planning cycle: the implementation of a peer review rubric and the intentional partnering of teacher candidates based on their background knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Peer Review Rubric

In an attempt to expand the peer feedback experience and to encourage both collaboration and dialogue between peers related to the topic of the integration of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy, a peer review rubric was developed for Phase I of the study. Rubrics can be used to assess “...a range of authentic learning tasks” (Yoshina & Harada, 2007, p.11) and “...make quality the standard for assessing both teaching practices and student achievement” (Yoshina & Harada, 2007, p.11). The initial rubric used was quite vague and focused on materials, instructional delivery, and student engagement. Limited language within the rubric related to literacy culturally relevant pedagogical practices. As such, limited improvement to the peer review experience was observed and further modifications to the existing rubric were made for subsequent semesters. Image 1 shows the initial peer review rubric provided to teacher candidates:

Image 1: Phase I Peer Review Rubric

	3	2	1
Commitment to teaching and student learning	Consistently demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students. Has a well-established culturally responsive learning environment that encourages student questions and involvement.	Often demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching student questions and involvement. The environment is unestablished and lacks components to encourage student engagement.	Exhibits a lack of enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students. Discourages students' questions and involvement.
Meeting teaching objectives	Teaching content and methods clearly meet lesson objectives.	Teaching content and methods geared to stated lesson objectives.	Teaching content and methods do not meet stated lesson objectives.
Instructional Materials (Readings, Media, Visual Aids)	Incorporates various instructional supports, such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc.	Incorporates some instructional supports such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc.	Fails to provide students with instructional supports
Teaching Methodology	Uses a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations in-depth and clear.	Uses limited teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations clear.	Fails to use a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles. Explanations unclear and unfocused.
Presentation	Consistently speaks audibly and clearly with correct grammar. Models professionalism and use of humor is positive and appropriate. No use of vocal fillers such as "um, ahm un, like, you know".	Speaks audibly and clearly with correct grammar. Models professionalism. One to four uses of vocal fillers.	Speech is inaudible and unclear. Unprofessional and use of humor is negative and inappropriate. More than four vocal fillers used.
Organization	Summarizes and reviews lesson main points frequently during the lesson. Consistently explains directions and procedures.	Summarizes and reviews lesson main points at the end of the lesson. Explains directions and procedures.	Fails to summarize main points during the lesson. Does not provide clear directions and procedures.

Based on collected data, the lesson plans focused on a character of diversity and the peer feedback was minimal despite the implementation of a rubric. In fact, the rubric became more of a checklist for the partners during the peer review process as opposed to serving as a potential tool for the facilitation of discussion. Table 3 provides the overall cohort (17 candidates) results of the initial implementation of the rubric.

Table 3: Phase I Peer Rubric Results

Rubric Element	Candidates Scoring a 3	Candidates Scoring a 2	Candidates Scoring a 1
Commitment to teaching and student learning	16 (94%)	1 (6%)	
Meeting teaching objectives	17 (100%)		
Instructional Materials (Readings, Media, Visual Aids)	14 (82%)	3 (18%)	
Teaching Methodology	13 (76%)	4 (24%)	
Presentation	15 (88%)	2 (12%)	
Organization	15 (88%)	2 (12%)	

The results of the survey indicated the majority of teacher candidates demonstrated mastery in their lesson deliveries, as scored by their peers. In addition, it was apparent the language and categories of the rubric focused more on the delivery of the lesson as opposed to the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Lesson Plan Cycle: Baseline Self-Assessment

For Phase I of the study a change was made to the course’s original lesson-planning cycle. This change included a baseline self-assessment on candidates' knowledge and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. In order for me to help gauge an idea of where candidates felt their knowledge base stood on the concept, an oral introductory questionnaire was given during class prior to the pre-service teachers engaged in the lesson planning cycle. The questionnaire was administered during class, with me orally presenting questions and candidates writing their answers on a piece of notebook paper. Questions consisted of: What is culturally relevant pedagogy? What is your experience with working with exceptional and diverse learners?

How do you see culturally relevant pedagogy working within your literacy instruction? What types of strategies have you seen in your field experiences related to culturally relevant pedagogy? Candidates answered the questions in class as I asked the questions. Answers from candidates varied in both depth and experience. As such, when it came time for candidates to begin the culturally relevant lesson planning cycle, I grouped candidates who believed they had minimal experience with candidates who believed they were well versed in the concept. After grouping the pre-service teachers, the peer review lesson planning cycle was implemented. While I hoped the questionnaire would spark the candidates' minds, a similar pattern existed within the cycle. Image 2 provides an example of a pre-service teacher response to the self-assessment questions. The pre-service teacher describes the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, while also acknowledging potential bias. In analysis of responses, this sample provides evidence of a strong knowledge base.

Image 2: Phase I Baseline Self-Assessment Sample

- ① Teaching while being aware, respectful, and appreciative of all the different culture + diversity that students in your classroom bring.
- ② Possibly bringing in texts/stories that relate to different cultures
- Understanding that students may know/not know certain vocab/ word play based on culture.
- ③ Rural + small
- ④ I don't have much experience with linguistic diversity. In high school, however, my English teachers did a good job of including texts that highlighted/were about other cultures.
- ⑤ I have not seen many teachers include culture to be honest.
- ⑥ I think that I could potentially be biased with my culture/literacy instruction because it feels comfortable and natural to me. Because of this, I need to be aware of that and purposefully include culturally responsive pedagogy.

While this particular example shows a pre-service teacher using complete sentences to formulate thoughts, some responses from other candidates consisted of one word answers such as “Never heard of it”. This type of short response, further reinforced my belief in the need to intentionally assign partners for peer review. Furthermore, establishing parameters and a more systematic approach to the baseline knowledge assessment could provide more insight into the knowledge and skills of my pre-service teachers.

Phase I Findings Summary

Despite the integration of the peer review and lesson planning cycle, pre-service teachers interpreted culturally relevant literacy instruction as the integration of a read aloud with characters from diverse backgrounds. Historically, the interpretation and definition of diversity in texts has evolved over multiple semesters. Previously, pre-service teachers focused on race and ethnicity as their only interpretation of diversity. This definition has since evolved and expanded in more recent semesters. As the candidates are studying special education, the definition of diversity includes learners with disabilities and exceptionalities. The evolution of the term diversity further brings to light an ongoing challenge: teacher education programs' inability to address issues of diversity due to lack of consistency in defining the term diversity itself. Future semesters may benefit from having the class develop an operational definition of the term diversity to work from over the course of the semester. Additional exposure and familiarity with diverse children's literature and authors would benefit the candidates. The peer review lesson planning cycle continues to be implemented over the course of the semester. However, while the cycle formerly was implemented at the end of the term, it is now brought to the attention of the candidates during the first half of the 16-week semester.

Based on the past performance of candidates and feedback during the peer review process, it is evident the peer review rubric used during the lesson planning cycle needs to be more elaborate and explicit in its integration of culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Data indicates candidates consistently rate their peers as effective practitioners of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Finding connections between the college classroom and the required course field experience could help to solidify culturally relevant literacy practices in future day to day instruction. Specifically, candidate interpretation of their cooperating teachers' performance

related to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy was discovered through informal class discussion. Candidates indicated that their field experiences specifically related to the reading methods course offered limited support for enhancing culturally relevant literacy practices of the candidates. In fact, candidates shared that their cooperating teacher really just went through their day to day reading workshop routine. This knowledge encouraged me to explore the possibility of modifications to the field experiences required for the course, while continuing with the lesson planning cycle during the university classroom time. Table 4 provides a summary of identified curricular changes to be implemented in Phase II of the project.

Table 4: Phase I Identified Curricular Changes

Curricular Revision	Aim	Citation
Peer Review Rubric	Increase Substantive Feedback	Yoshina & Harada, 2007
After-school reading program	Content Application	da Silva Iddings, A.C. & Reyes, I., 2017
Enhanced Planning Cycle	Cooperative Learning Culture	Berry, 2013
Filmed Lesson Instruction	Review Lesson Implementation	Wass & Rogers, 2021
Final Reflection	Increase Pre-Service Teacher Insight into Learning	Wass & Rogers, 2021

Summary

Over the course of multiple semesters, the instructional strategies and activities related to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy that I have integrated have evolved within my reading methods course. Each term, I reflect upon my observations of my pre-service teachers and the results of the activities. From the findings, I make a determination as to whether or not I need to modify, eliminate, and/or add content. Focusing on course specific changes helps me to identify

specific areas of strength and areas for improvement within the context of my own teaching. The integration of a practitioner research approach has facilitated the evolution of my own teaching and the identification of future pedagogical practices.

Chapter 5: Phase II Analysis and Synthesis

In this chapter, I describe Phase II of my research study. I demonstrate how I further revised my reading methods course to address the needs I identified in Phase I. I implemented the modified course activities and revisions to the culturally relevant literacy lesson planning cycle and experience in Phase II during the Fall of 2021.

Phase II Modified Course Activities and Revisions

In order to answer my research questions on how my candidates' engagement with culturally relevant literacy instruction will impact my teaching and to see how the candidates were demonstrating their knowledge and integration of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy, I incorporated new pedagogical practices into my course. After engaging in my own self-reflection on the responses of the baseline self-assessment of the pre-service teachers and reviewing the lesson plans submitted in Phase I, I decided additional changes needed to be made both with the instructional approach taken within the course and the activities that the candidates engage in. The entire lesson planning process was more formalized in that reflection surveys have been made electronic and have requirements for how much information is shared. Initial and final reflections have had questions added to further expand candidates engagement with culturally relevant pedagogy and how it connects with literacy practices. Three major additional curricular components were added to the peer review lesson planning cycle for Phase II: implementation of filming lesson plans, pre-service teacher/university instructor conferences, and a final reflection component. In addition, a field component and small adjustments were made to the previously implemented approaches, as described below.

Filming Culturally Relevant Literacy Pedagogy Lessons

First, as a part of the lesson planning cycle, teacher candidates were required to teach their developed culturally relevant lesson plan to an assigned peer. The teaching occurred during class time simultaneously. Due to the different partners teaching in different locations, I was unable to fully observe a whole lesson in order to check on different groups. This approach failed to allow me to fully analyze my view of the lesson and compare it to the feedback of the peer.

To address this, Phase II of the study required candidates to film their lesson so that both their assigned peer and myself could watch it. Filming the lessons allowed me to revisit and review the teacher candidates' lesson instruction. I could also get a better idea of how their peers reviewed the lesson. The practice of filming is considered a preferred approach in teacher education and allows for follow up conversations between me as the instructor and the teacher candidates (Wass & Rogers, 2021, p.38). The filmed lessons also provided an opportunity for the candidates to review their own communication skills (Wass & Rogers, 2021, p.39).

University Instructor/ Teacher Candidate Conferences

Second, candidates were required to schedule a student-teacher conference with me upon the completion of the peer review process. The initial implementation of the conferences consisted of a small checklist to ensure teacher candidates had completed all elements of the lesson planning process. Candidates briefly shared what they learned and how they could use this knowledge in the future. No formal notes were taken during the conferences. Therefore, providing a more enhanced and intentional conference for pre-service teachers could provide me with insight into the growth of my teacher candidates and the effectiveness of my teaching.

Final Written Reflection Component

Third, a final reflection component was added to Phase II to provide an opportunity for teacher candidates to actively think about their growth in knowledge related to culturally relevant

literacy pedagogy and their work with peers. Peer observation allows teachers to engage in a reflective process, which can further facilitate discussions related to best practice. Furthermore, peer observation provides an opportunity to develop a teacher's confidence, increase awareness of student learning experiences, and enables unique insights into one's own teaching practices (Wass & Rogers, 2021). This final reflection served as an opportunity to bring the lesson planning cycle full circle and back to their initial baseline self-assessment on their knowledge and understanding of culturally relevant literacy practices. It allowed teacher candidates to reflect on the peer review process in connection to their own teaching and that of their peers.

Additional Changes

To enhance the understanding of pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding culturally relevant pedagogy, an inquiry component was introduced to the candidates, where candidates needed to first review and reflect on their foundational knowledge related to culturally relevant pedagogy and how it can be used within literacy instruction. Candidates first completed a self-assessment on their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, watched a video, and completed readings related to the topic. The purpose of the reading and video was to serve as a reminder of the concept and how to use the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy within the context of the classroom.

Once the initial reflection was completed, teacher candidates engaged in a revised literacy lesson planning cycle consisting of various components to bring culturally relevant practices to the forefront of the planning and teaching. The lesson planning cycle included: informal observations completed by me during class, literacy lesson plan development, lesson plan implementation that is filmed, a peer review with an assigned peer, reflection completed by the pre-service teacher over the planning and peer review process, and university instructor/pre-

service teacher conferences. Throughout the process, candidates were encouraged to pull on their experiences and observations of classroom teachers from their field experiences.

My pre-service teachers engaged in a series of lesson planning cycles to apply their knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy into their literacy instruction. Candidates were tasked with identifying the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy that were present within their lesson plans.

To enhance the peer review process from previous taught semesters, rather than assigning candidates a partner, candidates were placed in a small group of three to four pre-service teachers. Placing candidates in small groups helped to eliminate potential communication issues and enhance the overall collaborative environment (Fuentes, 2013, p. 94). This grouping provided me an opportunity to observe candidates as they engaged in dialogue about their own experiences with diverse learners, cooperating teachers, lesson planning, and engaging in intentional processes to ensure teaching and learning is culturally relevant.

To build upon their course work, field experiences specifically related to the reading methods course were enhanced to provide students an opportunity to utilize their knowledge of culturally relevant literacy pedagogy and to work from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While previous terms required candidates to complete a specific number of clinical hours in a reading and writing block at a suburban school, a new field experience was added to enhance teacher candidates' experiences working with students. Candidates served as a reading tutor in an after-school reading program at a local school with a significant Hispanic population. The addition of a supplementary field experience allowed candidates to apply their knowledge in skills in a setting not constricted by the day-to-day expectations of a K-12 school and gave them the freedom to plan lessons and activities individualized to the students they were assigned to. In

designated pairs (as referenced in Chapter 3), candidates were assigned to one K-12 learner in the after-school experience to allow for a collaborative peer experience. This allowed one candidate to work with the K-12 learner in a one-on-one setting, while the other partner observed and could provide feedback.

Phase II Findings

For the study, I analyzed the cohort of pre-service teachers' work. In addition, I selected one small group of three pre-service teachers' work with culturally relevant literacy instruction to examine closely for focal areas. The small group was created from the responses garnered in the baseline self-assessment. The group was representative of diverse background knowledge and produced responses and work samples that varied in quality and approach. Candidates participated in small groups to complete an ongoing culturally relevant literacy experience including a lesson planning cycle and field experiences. I collected data from a series of artifacts, observations, and university instructor- teacher candidate conferences.

Artifacts

Lesson Plans

One of the initial artifacts I collected and analyzed was the pre-service teachers' lesson plans. The lesson plans showed me how my candidates were implementing culturally relevant literacy practices into their lesson planning and how they could recognize it themselves. Asking my pre-service teachers to purposefully include and identify elements of culturally relevant pedagogy within their lesson plans provided me insight into their skills and mindset.

Over the series of lesson plans candidates consistently highlighted the children's literature being represented in the lesson plans. Children's literature is consistently recognized as a strategy to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Interestingly,

the children's literature was not limited to race and ethnicity, which had previously been a summation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Specifically, one student utilized a book entitled, "Special People, Special Ways" by Arlene Maguire. The book served as a catapult for discussions of disabilities and treating individuals with learning differences with respect. While multiple candidates identified their included books in their lesson plans, whether as a mentor text or a read aloud, each candidate approached their use of children's literature in a unique way. While the use of the children's literature varied somewhat by candidate, I was able to see the integration of instructional strategies learned during the course in concurrence with culturally relevant pedagogy.

Image 3: Candidate Lesson Plan Example

Lesson Plan Template

Grade: 4th

Standard: 4.RN.4.2 Combine information from two texts on the same topic in order to demonstrate knowledge about the subject.

Objective: SWBAT combine information from *The Name Jar* and an article about names in Korean culture and write a paragraph about the names chosen in Korea based on a rubric.

Material: *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

Pier. (n.d.). *South Korean culture - naming*. Cultural Atlas. Retrieved September 13, 2021, from <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/south-korean-culture/south-korean-culture-naming>.

White board and markers- teacher writing notes

Paper/pencil- students writing notes

Intro/Hook: At the beginning of the unit/lesson, students will draw Korean names out of a jar. The name that the student draws is their “new name” for the remainder of the lesson. This will familiarize students with the different pronunciations of names in Korea.

Instructional Method: (Be Specific- Step by Step)

-Intro: getting students used to the different names, which they will be asked to call each other by that name

-We will read *The Name Jar* aloud as a class

-Students will break off into groups and discuss and take notes on what they read and what’s significant. They can compare their names and relate to how the character feels

-Students will then read the article about how Korean naming works and the significance (may be a read aloud as a group)

-The students will point out key information and the teacher will make a list of items on the board

-Students will identify similarities among the book and the article

-Assessment: Students will write paragraphs about their own perspective on how names in Korea come about. They will show their knowledge by describing how names come about and their meanings. They will be graded on a rubric.

Assessment:

Students will write a paragraph explaining their understanding of names in Korea. They will be graded based on a rubric.

Accommodations/Supports/Enrichment:

While reading, students can be aided the entire time with other students or staff, depending on the level of accommodation needed.

Assign students to search for more texts that elaborate on the names in Korea and challenge them to write more than a paragraph on their understanding, or to come up with their own names and significances.

Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching (**highlight throughout**):

The included sample lesson plan shows one example of how one of my pre-service teachers highlighted components of culturally relevant pedagogy throughout the lesson plan. The candidate utilized both children’s literature and a nonfiction article related to the topic. Through the integration of multiple sources, I am able to see the candidate attempting to move her students to a higher order of thinking.

Peer Review Rubric for Lesson Plans and Micro-Teaching

With the lesson plans serving as the foundation for the peer review process, my pre-service teachers analyzed the small group's lesson plans and utilized micro-teaching within the university classroom to develop their knowledge and skills. Micro-teaching is a teaching approach that allows teachers to practice a smaller lesson or concept to a small group of students. It allows for the complexities of an authentic teaching situation to be scaled back, but still allows the teacher to receive feedback after teaching the lesson (Remesh, 2013). While teacher candidates were able to observe one another during the after-school reading program, the data from the peer review process failed to yield additional information applicable to the project. However, with the use of the peer review process did provide an opportunity for teacher candidates "... to improve themselves and be helpful to others, working in partnership with a respected peer is both engaging and supportive of joint accountability for learning outcomes" (Eisen, 2002, p.9).

The Peer Review Rubric was updated from 2020 for Phase II of the project to be more inclusive of culturally relevant concepts with a greater focus on content as opposed to lesson delivery. Meeting teaching objectives was replaced with Connections to Home and Community and Presentation was removed from the Initial Phase I Rubric. Image 4 provides an example of a scored peer review rubric and subsequent feedback.

Image 4: Candidate Peer Review Example

	3		1
Commitment to teaching and student learning	Candidate consistently demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students. Has a well-established culturally responsive learning environment that encourages student questions and involvement.	Candidate attempts to demonstrate enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching student questions and involvement. The environment is unestablished and lacks components to encourage student engagement.	Candidate exhibits a lack of enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students. Discourages students' questions and involvement.
Connections to Home and Community	Candidate integrates the students' home and background information throughout the lesson. This includes but is not limited to: asking questions about the home, instructional materials, and student discussion opportunities.	Candidate attempts to integrate the students' home and background information into the lesson. This includes but is not limited to: asking questions about the home, instructional materials, and student discussion opportunities.	Candidate references the students' home and background information but fails to integrate it into the lesson.
Instructional Materials (Readings, Media, Visual Aids)	Candidate incorporates various culturally relevant instructional supports, such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc	Candidate incorporates some culturally relevant instructional supports such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc.	Candidate fails to provide students with culturally relevant instructional supports
Teaching Methodology	Candidate uses a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations in-depth and clear.	Candidate uses limited teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations clear.	Candidate fails to use a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles. Explanations unclear and unfocused.
Organization	Candidate summarizes and reviews lesson main points frequently during the lesson. Consistently	Candidate summarizes and reviews lesson main points at the end of the lesson.	Candidate fails to summarize main points during the lesson.

	explains directions and procedures.	Explains directions and procedures.	Does not provide clear directions and procedures.
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Elements of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy observed (List):

- The book pertained to CRP
- The book fit the standard
- Talked about the learning of culture, and how you should embrace who you are
-

What other activities could be done to enhance engagement related to a students' culture?

- possibly connect it to real life situations
- talk more about what makes you, you and why it's important

Overall Praise:

- Good vocals
- Showed pictures while reading out loud
- Good visuals

Overall Polish:

- Maybe involve more of the students background
- engage more of the students, and stop during book and have a discussion

Overwhelmingly, candidates encouraged their peers to ask more questions during their lessons. For example, one peer suggested, “maybe involve more of the students’ background, engage more with the students, and stop during the book and have a discussion”. However, as demonstrated in Table 5, candidates consistently scored their peers with all 3s on the provided

peer review rubric, providing limited constructive feedback. While there is one outlier identified in rubric scoring, the overwhelming majority articulated that candidates felt their peers were mastering the stated concepts.

Table 5: Phase II Rubric Results

Teaching Category	# of candidates scoring a 3	# of candidates scoring a 2	# of candidates scoring a 1
Commitment to Teaching and Student Learning	11 (100%)		
Connections to Home and Community	10 (91%)	1 (9%)	
Instructional Materials (Readings, Media, Visuals)	11 (100%)		
Teaching Methodology	9 (82%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
Organization	10 (91%)		1 (9%)

Candidate Self-Reflection Questionnaire

As pre-service teachers finished their in-class peer review cycle and continued to engage in their after-school reading experience, a final self-reflection questionnaire was completed. Teacher candidates were asked how they implemented cultural responsiveness, how they could modify lessons, how students responded to teaching, how the peer process influenced their thinking, and how their own understanding of culturally relevant literacy instruction has evolved from the beginning of the term.

Compellingly, teacher candidates reported a previous misconception of associating a culturally relevant pedagogical outlook with race. This matched the previous trends that I have seen in my courses during my teaching. One student specifically shared,

“At the beginning, I thought culturally relevant was only about race and ethnicity. I thought you only could be culturally relevant by reading a book to the whole class about one culture that maybe 5 students can relate. I've learned that CRP is more than race, but any kind of diversity among students from gender, disabilities, and much more. Not only can you read about differences, but create fun, interactive activities that all students can relate to in some way. CRP isn't about drawing attention to one culture but teaching students to accept and relate to each other's differences in some way.”

In addition, pre-service teachers all articulated the use of children's literature as a strength, but further identified ways for expansion. For example, one candidate shared, “I think the book did make connections and helped students gain a better understanding of what other cultures are like”. Similarly, another candidate reflected, “I could have talked about it more, and connect it to the outside world today, and maybe spark more of a discussion”.

Instructor Review of Observations and Conferences with Candidates

I observed candidates during their university class time, while they were teaching lessons both in the university classroom and the after-school experience, and engaging in the peer review process. It was interesting to see how teacher candidates played multiple roles as teacher, reviewer, and, at times, the student during video micro-teaching experiences. As the course instructor, seeing the video micro-teaching lessons and the corresponding peer review rubrics allowed me to understand the thought process of my teacher candidates. Furthermore, while my observations allowed me insight into how my pre-service teachers were applying their knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy, the observations really provided me with further understanding into the ways my own teaching could be modified. Seeing my candidates' strengths and areas of improvement, as well as incorrect use of instructional strategies contributed to my own needed professional growth. These observations also contributed to the ensuing instructor-teacher candidate conferences.

Observations in the context of the after-school experience allowed me to remove myself from an insider to more of an outsider role during data collection. I observed my candidates' authentic responses to learners with exceptionalities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Specifically, I observed my candidates ongoing interactions and lesson implementation in response to the K-12 learners' needs. In the one-to-one teaching environment, candidates were observed seeking to build relationships with their assigned learner. Informal conversations related to the children's likes and dislikes, family weekend plans, and friendships could be heard on a daily basis. These conversations occurred before my pre-service teachers began teaching their lessons allowing them to connect with learners on a personal level. However, despite evidence of attempts to build connections and relationships, lessons implemented continued to be generic in nature and did not respond to the specific knowledge gained from these personal connections. Evidence of being responsive to the interests of the students was based in providing the K-12 learners with opportunities for choice in their learning. Meaning, the K-12 learner could select a topic of choice for various literacy activities.

As candidates completed their field experiences, peer reviews, and engagement with lesson planning, I was able to hold one-on-one candidate teacher conferences to discuss their knowledge and skills related to culturally relevant literacy instruction, as well as how they were personally able to connect with the concept throughout the term. It was promising to hear each of the pre-service teachers share their misconceptions about using culturally relevant pedagogical practices within their literacy practices, but also to hear how they feel they have grown and need to continue to grow. Thematic analysis indicated a clear use of materials: one candidate did share "I feel like I'd like to find a balance between the materials and the learning environment. It seemed like most of the people in my group really focused on the materials since there was a

book and stuff.” Hearing this variation in conversation, provided further insight into the ways the peer review process impacted the development of the teacher candidates. The conversations with teacher candidates did not seem to fully align with the results from the peer review rubrics. The rubrics indicated a perceived level of mastery, whereas during the conferences candidates continued to indicate a need for further understanding despite experiencing growth in their knowledge and skills related to culturally relevant literacy instruction.

Emerging Codes and Major Themes

Using thematic analysis to analyze artifacts, candidate final reflections, observations, and student conference, specific themes were identified. To determine my themes, I defined codes that emerged during data analysis.

Emerging Codes

Table 6: Codebook for Emerging Codes

CRP Codes	Definitions	Range of Response Examples
Culturally Relevant Children’s Literature (socio-economic status, disabilities, race)	Candidate discussion of children’s literature, read aloud, or lesson planning reference to children’s literature.	“I am Enough” by Grace Byers Promotes self-worth and celebrates the uniqueness of each individual.
Cultural Celebration Ethnicity	Critical discussion of cultural or holiday celebration as related to the lesson.	Tourist Curriculum “Mulan’s Lunar New Year”
Home Connection	Dialogue or engagement with the home and/or community.	“Teacher will explain her background growing up”.
Interaction and behavioral response	Candidate’s response to experiences of students and dialogue in relation to content.	“Why do I need a new name?”
Potential Change	Reflective responses in response to the lesson planning cycle. Identified	“Not only can you read about differences, but create fun, interactive activities that all

	areas for improvement.	students can relate to in some way.”
Misconceptions	Candidates describe their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy.	“I would say that there aren't very many limitations because the book covers a topic so broad that a teacher could do anything with it.”

Major Themes

Three major themes emerged from coding and collected data: candidate teaching strategies and lesson materials, teacher candidate- K-12 learner personal connections, and practitioner teaching improvements. These themes emerged across multiple sources of evidence, demonstrating the validity of the findings through triangulation. I describe the emergent themes and examples of sources of evidence through Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9.

Theme 1: Candidate Teaching Strategies and Lesson Materials

Table 7 shows that my teacher candidates integrated culturally relevant pedagogy into their literacy instruction by including diverse children’s literature and providing opportunities for discussion included in their lessons. The peer review process reinforced ideas of using diverse pieces of children’s literature and further expanded upon opportunities for pre-service teachers to have more meaningful and intentional engagement with the included lesson materials. For example, in one small group my teacher candidates produced a large variety of children’s literature and used different instructional strategies to engage in the story. The university instruction-teacher candidate conferences provided good insight into how the peers felt about the lesson materials.

While the above referenced data sources indicated candidates intentional use of books and materials representative of diversity, according to their own understanding, a general

approach to the lesson plan development and materials selection indicated candidates were not specifically responding to the students they were working with in their practicum and microteaching requirements failed to provide guidance for the teacher candidates direction in development. For example, during microteaching candidates selected materials and created lessons based on their own definitions of diversity. While this was acceptable for the purposes of the university classroom, when applied within the context of the field experience, the same scripted lessons were used as opposed to developing specific lessons responsive to the academic learning and cultural perspectives of the students in the after-school reading program. Teacher candidates continued to select materials based on their own definitions of diversity for their field experience just as they did in the university classroom. An example of this can be seen in Table 7 under Peer Review, where a candidate indicated a book was read aloud to bring awareness to a topic but did little to build connections. It was only when a candidate was put in a position of needing to adjust their teaching that intentional responsiveness in regard to teaching strategies were used or when choice was being provided to the students. For example, in Table 7 under Observations, one candidate integrated the use of Spanish during their time with the assigned K-12 student.

Table 7: Theme- Candidate Teaching Strategies and Lesson Materials

Theme: Candidate Teaching Strategies and Lesson Materials	Lesson Plans- Children's Literature	Instructional Support/Lesson Plans	Peer Review and Candidate- Instructor Conferences	Observations
	"I am Enough" by Grace Byers	Predictions T-chart	"I feel like it was literally just a read aloud. The book brought awareness but it was not appropriate in how connections were	Teacher candidate provides K-12 learner choice in independent book selection.

			made”.	
	“Festival of Colors” by Kabir Sehgal and Surishtha Sehgal	Compare and Contrast chart	“Doing whole class discussion about comparing the texts help to know students understood the readings, and that they were able to hit the standard of bringing them together.”	Teacher candidate has K-12 learner write a book on a topic of their choice- based on interest.
	“The Name Jar” by Yangsook Choi	Turn and Talk	“I think that its easier to incorporate than you think at first. You think it has to be this really elaborate discussion of diversity. But really there are a lot of different materials and easy ways to integrate and when I was looking for books there are a lot of books. For this lesson I just kind of figured as long as I found a good book that it would be fine, but then I realized it could be a discussion.”	Teacher candidates working with student on reading assignment. Teacher candidate integrates Spanish words to help engage student. Teacher candidate increases use of Spanish throughout lesson.
	South Korean culture-naming Pier. (n.d.). South Korean culture-naming. Cultural Atlas. Retrieved September 13, 2021, from https://culturalatlas.sbs.com .			
	“Special People, Special Ways” by Arlene Maguire			

The identified theme of lesson materials reinforces multiple elements found within the literature related to culturally relevant pedagogy literacy instruction. Researchers consistently point to

lesson planning materials (Ebersole et al., 2016; Assaf & Lopez, 2015; Othman, 2018), children's literature (Rogers et al., 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009; Stevenson & Beck, 2017), and instructional strategies such as discussion (Medina, 2010; Rogers & Christian (2007)). Through the identification of these elements from obtained data, it is evident that my teacher candidates have grasped some of the articulated culturally relevant pedagogical concepts. This includes utilizing children's literature as a way to build connections and providing opportunities for dialogue and discussion. However, a disconnect between purposeful selection of lesson planning materials that is responsive to the needs of specific K-12 learners exists. For example, as shown in Table 7 under Peer Review, one candidate shared they thought they could simply select a good book to make their instruction culturally relevant. In addition, children's literature selections (examples provided in Table 7) were selected by the teacher candidates based on their own personal interest or exploration, as opposed to purposeful selecting materials that would connect with the K-12 students at the after-school program. While candidates sought to further build connections through dialogue and providing choice, scripted lesson plans were still followed based on teacher selected materials as opposed to being responsive to what the teacher candidate had learned about the K-12 learner. Based on information in Table 7 it is evident that candidates were willing to include diverse children's literature and discussion but did little to intentionally adjust lessons from week to week based on the needs and backgrounds of the K-12 learners in the after-school program.

Theme 2: Teacher Candidate- K-12 Learner Personal Connections

Table 8 demonstrates the different areas in which the theme of personal connection is illuminated. While multiple lesson plan artifacts that were collected included elements of

connection between the content and the learners, as shown through the example quotes, teacher candidates continued to recommend that the area of connection was further developed.

Table 8: Theme- Teacher Candidate- K-12 Learner Personal Connections

Theme: Teacher Candidate- K-12 Learner Personal Connections	Peer Review Rubrics	Candidate-Instructor Conferences	Lesson Plans	Final Reflections	Observations
	“Possibly connect it to real life situations”	“What I could have done better was probably like making it more like connected to the outside world”	“Students will be asked what a book/movie is and how does it relate to them”	“I see how important it is to implement CRP in instruction. The books I choose can be specific to diversities in my classroom. The posters around the room can encourage acceptance and help students to embrace their differences.	Teacher candidate engages in active questioning with their assigned student about the K-12 learners’ week. “What have you done since I last saw you?”
	“Talk more about what makes you you and why it’s important”	“ And maybe like ask the students like you know what do they do that is special to them that connects to their culture and stuff like what festivals or like types of food do they eat”	“They can compare their names and relate to how the character feels”	Within reason, I can let students express their differences in the writings the compose, too.	
	“Maybe involved more of the students’ background”	“I think if you look at your students and figure out ways to engage them you are being culturally relevant. But like through the discussions and questions you can	“Teacher will explain her background growing up”.	Even the setup of the classroom and the peers students are sitting with can be influenced by CRP.”	
				“One thing that could be changed about the lesson is I could add another activity that engages the students. This could be having	“Do you have a favorite type of animal you like to read about or do you have any pets?”

		engage the students and figure out what they are interested in.		the students make a family tree to find out the different cultures within their family. After that they will meet up with a student that had a different family culture and discuss similarities and differences between their cultures.”	
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I see the identified theme of personal connection as both a strength and area for improvement from the data. The concept of connecting lessons and instruction to both the instructor and students’ lives is prevalent in the literature throughout Chapter Two (Stevenson & Beck, 2017; Croom et al., 2019; Klingner et al., 2005). While the data demonstrated that some teacher candidates intentionally worked to build these connections, other teacher candidates needed to develop this area by simply diving into instruction and materials they had pre-selected. For example, as Table 8 demonstrates under Final Reflections, one candidate discussed the opportunity to engage in a family tree project with their students to enhance one of the lessons already developed. This insight from the candidate demonstrated that while they missed the intentionality in the initial lesson development, they were able to articulate a way to make the lesson more intentional in their planning for the integration of culturally relevant practices in the future. Furthermore, this reflection provided evidence of intentional connections being sought by the teacher candidate to their K-12 students. These findings were evident in multiple data sources, reinforcing the need for this area to be developed by me as the practitioner and the teacher candidates.

Theme 3: Practitioner Teaching Improvements

Table 9 shows the different ways for practitioner improvement that emerged from the data analysis. Major contributing data elements included the peer review rubrics, candidate-instructor conferences, final self-reflections, and observations. Each of these elements provided insight into the different ways that the pre-service teachers’ experience and application of culturally relevant literacy instruction did not meet the expectation. This information was used to identify areas for improvement and implications for practice.

Table 9: Theme- Practitioner Teaching Improvements

Theme: Practitioner Teaching Improvements	Peer Review Rubrics	Candidate- Instructor Conferences	Final Self- Reflections	Observations
	Limited changes in multiple rubrics.	“I think I’ll research it more in a way so I have a better understanding. I can work it into more lessons. If I looked into it more I could look at it differently and I really want to look at it differently.”	“Some instruction was not the greatest, so I found myself repeating and rewording directions when it came to students asking what they were supposed to be doing. I also feel when I was reading, my tone and questions could have been more interesting and interacting, especially since it was a longer book.”	Lack of incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches in teaching beyond children’s literature books.
	Limited dialogue with candidates.	“I feel like some teachers don’t even like talk about that kind of stuff. Like	“I like to think that teaching culturally relevant literacy will still be a sticky thing	Limited constructive criticism or challenging discussions

		recognize how important it is especially now a days cause there is a lot of stuff going on with like culture so i think its something that's not really addressed in the classroom sometimes. And it needs to be more known in the classroom and students should be more aware of it.”	to teach obviously by teaching one lesson over it, but I don't want to hurt any of my student's feelings. I genuinely think that teaching cultural literacy is important for the fact that we are all the same but our differences are still good.”	between small groups.
	Lack of detailed elaboration for peers.			Lack of critical questioning during class.

For the theme of practitioner teaching improvements, I was able to identify areas of my teaching that need to be further enhanced based on the results of my teacher candidates’ engagement with culturally relevant pedagogy. Moreover, the areas of dialogue through critical conversations (Gay, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003), community connection (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Assaf & Lopez, 2015), and lesson planning development (Ebersole et al., 2016; Assaf & Lopez, 2015; Othman, 2018) are present in the literature and supported as areas for growth in my teaching through my own research findings.

Summary

The use of thematic analysis allowed me to identify three central themes from my study and data collection. These three themes include: Practitioner Teaching Improvements, Teacher Candidate- K-12 Learner Personal Connections, and Candidate Teaching Strategies and Lesson Materials. These three themes each align with my research questions and helped me to further

determine practitioner changes needed for my reading methods course in order to help further develop my teacher candidates' use of culturally relevant pedagogy within their literacy instructional planning, learning strategies, and assessment opportunities. Furthermore, the identified themes showed me how the changes implemented in Phase II promoted growth in the engagement with culturally relevant pedagogy while still leaving room for practitioner changes. This work will help ensure the proper preparation of teacher candidates as they work with K-12 students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Chapter 6: Reflection

Reflection

Continued changes and updates to the reading methods course have fostered a desire within myself to encourage teacher candidates to engage in practices that integrate the learning characteristics and backgrounds of each unique student they encounter. This encouragement for them can also be applied to myself. While I pride myself on developing and having a classroom learning environment that is comfortable, warm, and safe for my teacher-candidates, I can see that there are other ways that I can integrate culturally relevant pedagogy within my own teaching and curriculum to help model for my teacher candidates. While engaging in candidate-teacher conferences, pre-service teachers were able to articulate how their perspective has changed and how they can see a need for teachers to engage in culturally relevant practices. In addition, these intimate conversations provided me with additional insight into their journey towards being a teacher and how they are shaped by their experiences, just like we see when we discuss Funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

In order to ensure I had answered my research questions both adequately and thoroughly, I used my thematic analysis to identify both the helpful revisions and the areas of improvement within the answers to my research questions from Phase I and Phase II. I outline these findings through the table and further describe these reflective findings to my research questions below.

Table 10: Reflective Findings

List of Revisions	Helpful Revisions	Further Improvement
Peer Review Rubric	Rubrics were more content focused.	Provide teacher candidates with training to engage in productive peer review processes.
Filmed Lesson Instruction	Allowed me to watch the full	Film multiple lessons, engage

	lesson implementation.	in multiple peer reviews.
After-School Literacy Program	Allowed teacher candidates to apply their knowledge and skills with K-3 students.	Further articulate expectations for the sequential planning and further explore opportunities to engage the home.
Final Reflection	Provided an opportunity for both teacher candidates and myself to see growth.	Have peers share with one another once completed.
Pre-service Candidate-University Instructor Conferences	Allowed me to extend the reflections from the pre-service teachers.	Complete another term to determine if further change needed.

Helpful Revisions

Through data collection and analysis, I was able to identify positive outcomes specific to my reading methods course and my pre-service teachers’ integration of culturally relevant literacy instruction. These positive outcomes helped me to recognize the areas of my teaching that should be maintained as evident by how my pre-service teachers were incorporating culturally relevant teaching practices into their literacy instruction. Through this identification, I was able to pinpoint elements of my own teaching and course design that can be retained and/or modified.

One identified positive outcome is the bookend reflections, including my university instructor-teacher candidate conference, pre-service teachers were required to complete through an initial self-reflection and a final self-reflection. These reflections helped to bring the learning experience full circle for the teacher candidates, and I was able to see shifts in perspectives and understanding of culturally relevant teaching. Through both the final reflections and the candidate-teacher conferences, my pre-service teachers articulated previous misconceptions and how their thinking has changed. Encouragingly, teacher candidates also indicated that the work

was not done, demonstrating a commitment to reflective practices within their teaching. This is a strength from my teaching that I intend to retain as I continue to teach the reading methods course.

Another positive outcome was the vulnerability and authentic reflection I saw within my pre-service teachers. Having informal one-on-one conferences really provided me further insight into the mind and thinking process of my teacher candidates. These conversations opened my own eyes and challenged my own understanding of how my teaching of culturally relevant pedagogy was working both within my course and at the program level.

An additional positive outcome that presented itself through data and analysis was my pre-service teachers' ability to identify elements of culturally relevant pedagogy within their developed reading lesson plans. The peer review process and small group work also challenged each candidate to look at their lessons differently and, in some cases, identify additional ways the culturally relevant pedagogical practices were being incorporated or ways that the concept could be further enhanced and developed.

Identified Areas of Improvement

Consequently, although I celebrate the identified strengths in my teaching and how my pre-service teachers are utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy within their literacy instruction, specific areas for improvement have been identified to further answer my research questions related to my own practice and the work seen from my teacher candidates.

A major challenge for pre-service special education teachers is understanding of diversity and being responsive to diverse learners' needs when an intersection between disabilities and cultural and linguistic diversity exists. While the failure to agree upon a common definition of diversity exists across teacher education programs, the lack of consistency in understanding the

term appears to influence the lesson development and teaching practices of teacher candidates. Without a solidified definition of interpretation of diversity, teacher candidates inconsistently implement culturally relevant practices across the course both in the university classroom and after-school experience. Candidates' attempts to expand their definition of diversity through different material selection led to performances both through artifacts and the peer review process that maintained an appearance of random material selection based on the inclusion of characters with different learning needs or backgrounds different from that of the candidate. Continuing to work towards understanding the intersection between literacy concepts, disabilities, and defining diversity can help to influence the application of culturally relevant practices for teacher candidates.

While candidates were willing to provide feedback to their peers on ways to enhance their lessons and instruction, it was evident that the conversations and dialogue within the context of the peer review process was limited. Providing candidates with explicit training on how to engage in meaningful conversations and giving them the confidence to provide constructive criticism of their peers will be critical for pre-service teachers to continue to grow in their understanding of culturally relevant literacy practices. Eisen (2002) explains that the use of context specific issues can be helpful for learners and “Addressing actual problems also facilitates customization, thereby increasing the potential for transfer of learning to occur” (p.9). Keeping this in mind, context specific use of the peer review process with culturally relevant literacy practices can increase the mastery level for candidates. Furthermore, I was able to identify in my own practice the assumption I possess that my pre-service teachers are proficient in using peer review as an agent of change. Intentionally utilizing class time in the future to

promote a more meaningful and in-depth peer review process will be beneficial for my future teaching practices, ultimately influencing the preparation of my teacher candidates.

Through my observations of pre-service teachers in the classroom and during their field work, peer review process, and reflections, I noticed a hesitancy to engage in conversations related to controversial or uncomfortable topics, specifically when the topic referenced race. When my pre-service teachers would engage in dialogue related to the purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy and the ways it can be beneficial, whether with their peers or myself, they often “scooted around” the topic. Frequently, I would hear the phrase “with everything that is going on in the world”. However, it would never be any more specific than that. I found myself asking, what specifically are my teacher candidates trying to tell me here? Working to provide a space that allows my pre-service teachers to clearly express and articulate what “everything” means to them within their own context and experiences can potentially influence how I support my pre-service teachers in the university classroom. In order to fully embrace, understand, and implement culturally relevant pedagogy through literacy instruction, I need to work to move my teacher candidates outside of their comfort zone and for them to be okay with discussing what they view as controversial topics.

Another identified area of improvement was the application of the integration of culturally relevant literacy practices within the context of the field experiences. While a new field experience was added to the course in an attempt to enhance the overall learning experience and work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for pre-service teachers, the disconnect between theory and practice was clear. Certainly there were occasions where I saw my pre-service teachers attempting to connect with their K-12 students on a personal level, I did not see the active and intentional planning that was practiced within the

university classroom for the peer review process. Seeking to enhance connections between the university classroom and the field experiences would be helpful in ensuring my pre-service teachers are grasping and seeing the potential benefits of the practice. For example, to prepare candidates for their field experience and to facilitate being responsive to K-12 specific learners' needs, K-12 learner scenarios could be developed for my candidates to develop lessons for. In the scenarios, candidates would be provided with demographic data, performance data, and disability information. Candidates would then be responsible for developing lesson plans and instructional activities responsive to the learner provided in the scenario. With this practice in the university classroom, candidates could then apply this knowledge and understanding with the K-12 learners in their field experiences. Not only could this evolution in educational experience provide an opportunity for intentional culturally relevant practice, but can also further serve the intersection between disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

A potential missed opportunity is the lack of intentional community connection. Although home and community connection is mentioned on the peer review rubric, beyond the scope of lesson planning the pre-service teachers never engage with K-12 learners outside of the context of learning. Therefore, pedagogical practices utilized by the students within the context of the field experience were not purposefully responsive to the needs of students enrolled in the after-school program. Working to integrate more opportunities for community engagement and connecting with the home and families of K-12 learners could help to further develop pre-service teachers' understanding of culturally relevant literacy pedagogical practices.

Implications for Future Practice

Through the description of recognized strengths and weaknesses from the reading methods course in relation to pre-service teachers' application of culturally relevant literacy practices, it is apparent there are a number of potential areas to modify for future practice.

The first implication for future practice is to intentionally improve and enhance the peer review process. "Like any skill, cooperation must be taught, practiced, evaluated, retaught (if necessary), and practiced again. Over the course of time, students will improve their cooperative skills." (Berry p.42). By providing multiple opportunities to practice the peer review process, pre-service teachers can improve in their ability to provide feedback, ultimately working to improve their peers' literacy pedagogical practices.

In addition, opportunities for classroom discourse and discussion related to current events, educational initiatives, and potentially perceived controversial topics influencing the lives of both pre-service teachers and K-12 students are needed. Pre-service teachers' avoidance of topics they perceive as controversial demonstrates the need for further inquiry, opportunity for dialogue, and additional exploration. While I can certainly implement this within the context of my own reading methods course, there are possible implications for programmatic changes to encourage pre-service teachers to meaningfully engage in topics they could encounter during their teaching career. Despite going through an ongoing lesson planning process and peer review work, candidates still indicated a lack of mastery and comfort. I acknowledge being uncomfortable could serve as a strength as it shows the pre-service teachers are questioning experiences and perspectives, there is an identified need to have a stronger understanding of the concept.

The lesson planning process, in and of itself, lacked purposeful considerations for working with students with disabilities. Further revisions to the lesson plan template for both

microteaching with the university classroom and the field experiences would require teacher candidates to intentionally plan for individuals with disabilities utilizing culturally relevant approaches can further help to provide a seamless transition between the intersection of disability and culture. Changes to the lesson plan template itself will include, but are not limited to: accommodation considerations to instruction and assessment and identification of K-12 learner demographics and dis(abilities). These changes further promote intentional use of culturally relevant pedagogy specific to individuals with disabilities.

A final implication, and perhaps the one with the power to influence major changes within my teaching, the reading methods course, and in pre-service teachers' culturally relevant literacy pedagogical practices, is the further enhancement of the after-school field experience and to increase the engagement with the community. My own lack of intentionality in the planning and assignment development in relation to the field experience left an identifiable gap between the culturally relevant practices utilized within the university classroom and the instructional practices utilized and incorporated into the field work. A redesign of the assignments and expectations within the field experience could serve as a catalyst for change in the connection between theory and practice for pre-service teachers' intentional use of culturally relevant pedagogy. Specifically, teacher candidates utilized a general approach to diversity when teaching at the after-school program. Pedagogical approaches used by the candidates failed to specifically respond to the cultures, backgrounds, and funds of knowledge of the K-12 students. Furthermore, providing teacher candidates with the tools to immerse themselves with the families and communities of the future K-12 students they work with could serve as the missing link between theory and practice. Intentional work in my course revisions to facilitate family and home

connections between my teacher candidates and the K-12 students being served can help to solidify by candidates understanding of culturally relevant literacy practices. For example,

Concluding Thoughts

Culturally relevant pedagogy has the potential to serve a changemaker within teacher preparation programs, specifically reading methods courses. However, the ongoing inability of teacher education preparation programs to pinpoint a definition of diversity continues to be a challenge for both teaching faculty and teacher candidates. As culturally and linguistically diverse students continue to be overrepresented within special education within the K-12 schools, specifically high incidence disability areas such as specific learning disabilities, it becomes even more important for educator preparation programs to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively teach students from varying backgrounds. This practice of effective teacher preparation is crucial as the landscape of higher education and K-12 schools continue to change. Findings from the study demonstrate the ongoing need for teacher candidates to work with culturally relevant practices at the course level. Furthermore, indications for future program modifications to examine the holistic integration of culturally relevant pedagogy across the program curriculum provides an untapped opportunity to produce teachers as agents of change in addressing disproportionality in special education.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Pre-Service Special Education Teachers Integration of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Literacy Methods

Purpose:

I am Professor Juanita Oberley, of the Division of Education at the University of Saint Francis and doctoral student at Indiana University. I am conducting a study on and analysis of how preservice teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy through their teacher education literacy courses. I would appreciate your participation in this study, as it will assist in making recommendations on how to instruct preservice teachers in regards to implementing culturally responsive literacy instruction.

The research completed will be done utilizing a naturalistic approach. All data collected will be from course homework and in-class assignments already established into the course experience. These include: lesson plan development, lesson plan implementation for peers, peer review, lesson plan video, reflection, and instructor/student (faculty/pre-service teacher) conferences. The assessments used will be collected throughout the course, examining an assessment cycle with a peer review and video component. No additional time or commitment is required from participants as it is built into the course expectations.

Explanation of Risks and Benefits of the research:

No risks are associated with this study. All data for the research will be pulled from class assignments required by the course. In addition, no information about grades will be utilized. Your participation is 100% voluntary and will not impact your class performance. To ensure your confidence that your grade and class performance will not be impacted, the following steps have been made/will occur:

1. Explanation of the study by Mrs. Oberley
2. Collection of informed consent by a USF Faculty member unrelated to the course.
3. Permissions stored by the USF faculty member until the end of the course.
4. Evaluation of data will occur at the end of the course.

This research will benefit pre-service teachers and university faculty members by seeing how culturally responsive pedagogies can be implemented into literacy instruction. This could positively impact the instruction that future pre-service teachers will receive.

Explanation of the safeguards:

All data collected will be gathered from Canvas (assignment submission), stored in locked drawers (Mrs. Oberley's office), and secured document storage. No student name(s) or other identifiable information will be available. All information will be safeguarded and be deidentified. Information will be made anonymous through the removal of names on student samples of work.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. If at any time you do not wish to participate, you may withdraw. Deciding not to participate will not impact your performance or involve any penalty or loss of benefits. Your participation in this study has no impact on your course performance and/or grades.

Inquiries:

Once the study is completed, I am happy to provide the results to you. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact:

Juanita Oberley
2701 Spring Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46808
260-710-0788
joberley@sf.edu

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participation in this study, please write or call:

IRB Chairperson
University of Saint Francis
2701 Spring Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46808
260-399-7700
irb@sf.edu

I have received an explanation of this study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

This research project has been approved by the University of Saint Francis' Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects for a one-year period.

Name; _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Lesson Plan Template

Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction

Finding your foundation:

What is the definition of CRP?

What are some methods and strategies for this to be used in the classroom during your reading instruction?

Part 1:

On the lesson template provided to you, develop a literacy lesson using cultural responsiveness. You may use the resources provided to you, go to the library, or search the internet. (Ex: MLK, Abeula and the 3 bears, etc)

Part 2:

In your assigned groups, teach and film your lesson using all manipulatives and supports. Peers need to be filling out the review sheet.

Part 3:

In your assigned groups, discuss your peer review rubrics.

After your discussion, complete the following reflection:

What component of your lesson implemented cultural responsiveness?

How could you have changed the lesson to include this component?

How did the students respond to your instruction?

What are the strengths of your lesson?

What are the limitations of your lesson?

What types of CRP do you see on regular basis within your practicum settings?

Part 4:

Student-Teacher Conferences-

Bring your lesson plan.

Peer Reviews.

Reflection

Lesson Plan Template

Grade:

Standard:

Objective:

Materials:

Intro/Hook:

Instructional Method: (Be Specific- Step by Step)

Assessment:

Accommodations/Supports/Enrichment:

Elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching (highlight throughout):

Appendix C: Peer Review Rubric

	3	2	1
<p>Commitment to teaching and student learning</p>	<p>Consistently demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students. Has a well-established culturally responsive learning environment that encourages student questions and involvement.</p>	<p>Often demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching student questions and involvement.</p> <p>The environment is unestablished and lacks components to encourage student engagement.</p>	<p>Exhibits a lack of enthusiasm and excitement towards teaching and students.</p> <p>Discourages students' questions and involvement.</p>
<p>Connections to Home and Community</p>	<p>Candidate integrates the students' home and background information throughout the lesson. This includes but it not limited to: asking questions about the home, instructional materials, and student discussion opportunities.</p>	<p>Candidate attempts to integrate the students' home and background information into the lesson. This includes but it not limited to: asking questions about the home, instructional materials, and student discussion opportunities.</p>	<p>Candidate references the students' home and background information but fails to integrate it into the lesson.</p>

<p>Instructional Materials (Readings, Media, Visual Aids)</p>	<p>Candidate incorporates various culturally relevant instructional supports, such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc</p>	<p>Candidate incorporates some culturally relevant instructional supports such as slides, visual aids, handouts, books, organizers, games, etc.</p>	<p>Candidate fails to provide students with culturally relevant instructional supports</p>
<p>Teaching Methodology</p>	<p>Candidate uses a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations in-depth and clear.</p>	<p>Candidate uses limited teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles and backgrounds. Explanations clear.</p>	<p>Candidate fails to use a variety of teaching strategies to address diverse learning styles. Explanations unclear and unfocused.</p>
<p>Organization</p>	<p>Candidate summarizes and reviews lesson main points frequently during the lesson. Consistently explains directions and procedures.</p>	<p>Candidate summarizes and reviews lesson main points at the end of the lesson. Explains directions and procedures.</p>	<p>Candidate fails to summarize main points during the lesson. Does not provide clear directions and procedures.</p>

Elements of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy observed (List):

What other activities could be done to enhance engagement related to a students’ culture?

Overall Praise:

Overall Polish:

Appendix D Reflection Questions

Culturally Responsive Literacy Lesson Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on your lessons and teaching by answering the following questions.

Each answer should be a minimum of 5 sentences.

* Required

1. What component of your lessons implemented cultural responsiveness? *
2. How could you have changed the lessons to include more elements of CRP? *
3. How did the students respond to your instruction? *
4. What are the strengths of your lesson? *
5. What are the limitations of your lesson? *
6. Discuss the CRP practices you see within the context of your practicum settings. *
7. What feedback from your peer did you find the most helpful? *
8. What stuck out to you or what did you learn from observing your partner? *
9. Discuss how you see CRP playing a role in your future literacy instruction. *
10. How has your view of Culturally relevant literacy instruction developed (if so) from the beginning of the term? *

Appendix E Initial Survey

Culturally Responsive Literacy Initial Self-Reflection

This self-reflection is designed to have you think about how your positionality and life experiences influence or impact your literacy instruction.

* Required

1. In your own words, what do you know about culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogy? (Minimum of 4 sentences) *

2. What do you think culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogy would look like during reading/writing (literacy) time? (Minimum of 5 sentences) *

3. What are your personal experiences with cultures or diversity different than your own? (Minimum of 3 sentences) *

4. What strategies of culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogy have you seen your practicum teachers use, specifically during literacy instruction? (Minimum of 3 sentences) *

5. How might teachers challenge themselves to move beyond their comfort zone? How do you think your experiences shape your lesson development? What can you do to ensure your lessons are culturally responsive to the needs of your class? Be sure to reflect on each question carefully. *

Appendix F: Committee Chair Letter of Support



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Literacy, Culture,
and Language Education
Bloomington

October 9, 2020

Juanita Oberley
Special Education Program Director
University of Saint Francis
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Juanita,

I am pleased to write this letter in strong support of your research proposal that will document how pre-service teachers view themselves as practitioners of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the context of a university reading course. The study seeks to identify teacher education students' receptiveness to teaching practices that respond to increasing learner diversity in K-12 classrooms. To identify students' views on culturally responsive literacy teaching, you plan to review and analyze student reflections, class videos, class discussions, and course assignments generated in a literacy methods course in the teacher education program at the university where you teach. The study will begin after the university course is completed and grades have been posted. This research is part of your doctoral studies in the Literacy, Culture, and Language Education Ed.D. program at Indiana University. In my capacity as your advisor and dissertation research chair, I will be supervising the proposed dissertation research as it moves forward through all phases of the dissertation.

This letter confirms that the Indiana University Office of Research Compliance has been notified that you plan to rely on the IRB in at your employer's university for the review and monitoring of your research activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Wohlwend".

Karen Wohlwend, Ph.D.
Professor of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education
Indiana University
201 N. Rose Avenue, 3042 Wright Education Building
Bloomington, IN 47405

cc: Andrew Neal, Research Compliance Associate
Human Research Protection Program
Office of Research Compliance
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405

Appendix G: IRB Approval

**University of Saint Francis
Institutional Review Board
Human Subjects Review Committee/ACUC/IBC
Institutional Review Board Approval Form**

Protocol Number: 16034717142-HSRC

Review by (underline one): HSRC ACUC IBC

Date Reviewed: 11/09/2020

Principal Investigator: Juanita Oberly

Faculty Advisor: NA

Protocol Title: Pre-Service Special Education Teacher Integration of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Self and Practice

Study Site(s): University of Saint Francis

Type of Proposal:

- Original research
- Replication or extension of previous research
- Quality Improvement/Evidence-Based Practice Project

Items submitted for review:

- CITI Certificate
- Initial protocol
- Abstract
- Informed Consent Form (if applicable)
- Approval letter from outside institution
- Other – explain: Data collection tools; Letter of support from dissertation chair;

Type of Review:

- Full Review
- Expedited Review
- Exempt Review

Approval:

- Approval granted on 11/09/2020
- Approval granted on _____ for a period of one year.
- Conditional approval* granted on _____ for a period of one year.
- Not approved*
- IRB approval is not required:
- Other

*Comments:

please include the USF IRB email address in the contact information on the consent: irb@sf.edu

The committee performing this review is duly constituted and operates in accordance and compliance with local and federal regulations and guidelines.

<u>Stephanie Oetting</u>	<u><i>Stephanie Oetting</i></u>	<u>11/09/2020</u>
Printed Name (Chair or designee)	Signature	Date

IRB Committee Approval Form sjo 10/12/2020

**Curriculum Vitae
Juanita Oberley, Ed.D.**

Professional Education

Indiana University *Bloomington, IN*

Doctor of Education: Literacy, Culture, and Language Education
May 2022

Ball State University *Muncie, IN*

Master of Arts: Special Education
Graduate Certificate: Autism
December 2015

University of Saint Francis *Fort Wayne, IN*

Bachelor of Science: Education
May 2010

Certifications

Indiana Teaching License

- Special Education 6-12
- English/Language Arts 6-12

Professional Crisis Management (PCM)- Restraint Certification

Professional Memberships

Council for Exceptional Children

International Literacy Association

Indiana State Literacy Association

Presentations

2022

Executive Function Support for Students

February

Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Special Education Summit Keynote

March

2021

Why now is a great time to be a teacher Webinar Panelist

January

Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

September

2020

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): the Basics

April

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): the Basics

August

2018

Keep Calm and Teach On

October

2017

Building an Inclusive Classroom

September

Building an Inclusive Religious Education Classroom

September