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Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Professional Development Project

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT

By

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

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Culture plays an important role in education, and culturally responsive teaching can affect elementary students' behavior and academic effort. In the first chapter of this capstone, I will explain what has shaped my educational values and theories. I will also highlight my constructs of knowledge and what biases I hold based on my life, learning, and teaching background. I will explain my journey as an educator and the constant desire to find what my students need to differentiate their learning. I will examine what prior and current theories have inspired me and why are they important for this capstone. I will provide a description of what and who is impacted by this research and why it is imperative to ask these questions. Finally, I will summarize my writing from this chapter and preview what I will be covering in chapter two of this capstone.

My Background and Experiences

It is a complex and interesting journey that has brought me to my current beliefs and philosophy on education. Due to my father's job in the Air Force, I moved quite often as a child and because of this I had the opportunity to experience different types of schools around the world. When I attended Montessori school in London, England, I vividly recall fond memories of small class sizes, ballet and music time, and sit down family style lunches. When I switched to a school in South Carolina, the teachers seemed very mean and rarely let us interact. Although not all the schools I experienced were wonderful, I became an adaptive and well-equipped student who was able to learn from

various school environments. This background also later influenced my interest in anthropology, education, and culturally responsive teaching. My father and mother also played an important role in my cultural development with something we called, explore days, where I would ask about a topic and we would research it together. I had the opportunity to explore nature, hike, camp, and travel to places around the world. My love of culture and people began from my explorations as a child and progressed into my passion for anthropology, which was also the focus of my undergraduate work at University of California, Santa Cruz. The experiences I had as a child have shaped who I am today. This same concept should be applied to all children in school; their life experiences shape who they are which in turn affects their learning.

My first year of full-time teaching was for a first grade classroom at a charter school. I had just moved back to San Diego from Minneapolis, where I had been substitute teaching for a few months, primarily in a school with almost all Somali children. The school, in San Diego, had 97% Somali students, many of which were refugees. I had read that the first year of teaching was hard, no matter what, but I did not even begin to understand how true that would be! There was no class, academic article, experienced teacher that could have fully prepared me for my very own classroom of kids. I was very excited and nervous, so I spent the next several weeks preparing for the first day of school. All children were dressed in uniforms and all the girls wore hijabs on their head. I had a nice sized classroom with plenty of supplies and a plethora of curriculum guides for all of the necessary subjects. As I met the students, lined up outside

the classroom, they were loud and yelling with happiness to each other in Somali. I was greeted by many smiling faces.

My first day was planned out to the minute and I thought we might get to some basic kindergarten review material after lunch. As I started out with this plan, it quickly became evident I would be spending most of the day getting to know these children. They had so much to tell me and all wanted to talk at the same time. We got through the day and learned many things about each other. We set some good expectations for the year and I was so amazed to learn about their lives that were so very different from mine. Their cultural background and educational experience was very different from anything I had studied or seen. There were many things I needed to consider to feel culturally competent to teach these students effectively. The adaptations and changes I made during these first weeks of school were the beginnings of my process to becoming a culturally responsive teacher, although I did not realize it at the time.

These children each had a distinct culture and educational background that would shape their lives and interactions in the classroom for years to come. I needed to reflect on this before I could decipher and plan how I could best teach these children. In Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), reflecting on your own teaching biases is one of the first steps in becoming a better teacher (Gay, 2000). I needed to know my students as well as I knew myself. I began to realize there was a distinct difference in communication styles than I was used to seeing in the classroom. Almost all the students were very verbal and wanted to talk at the same time. They would try to overpower each other with their voices to get their point across. The children were not being naughty or

disrespectful, but rather it was something in their culture that made them gravitate towards communicating in that way. I also realized that they had a very hard time sitting still and needed to move around a lot. These students almost all had no formal education and had not attended kindergarten the year before so this was most likely their first experience in any formal classroom setting. My first year of teaching was a wonderful experience, filled with struggles and accomplishments, that shaped who I am as a teacher today.

Educational Pedagogies That Have Influenced Me

I have been an educator for over fifteen years and have experienced many types of schools, learning communities, and educational philosophies. I have had the opportunity to work with children from diverse cultural backgrounds and have learned an immeasurable amount of knowledge from this experience. Educational philosophies, from Montessori to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) have inspired me and shaped the teacher I am today as well. With its groundbreaking application of multi-age classrooms, Montessori students have the independence to do what they need at their own pace. STEAM curriculum, a much more current teaching philosophy, combines science, technology, engineering, art, and math into real world group projects. Responsive classroom techniques resonated with me by integrating elements of depth, complexity, and social emotional learning.

The project-based school I worked with had a lasting and profound impact on the way I look at teaching today and how I view the learning process. "One of the major advantages of project work is that it makes school more like real life. It's an in-depth

investigation of a real-world topic worthy of children's attention and effort"(Chard, 1999, p.3). I observed first hand that Project Based Learning, (PBL) gives authentic, real world learning experiences kids love. I was amazed at the way the teachers worked respectfully with the children and let them guide their own learning. Soon after, I was introduced to exploring the connection between education and neuroscience and how the brain learns and grows. I most recently explored the growth mindset through Jo Boaler (2016) and her theories.

Children should be inspired and invested in what they are learning no matter what educational pedagogy is applied. It is an educator's responsibility to learn what each child needs and set up an environment where that is possible for all participants. I have witnessed that children naturally love learning and it is a teacher's responsibility to encourage that disposition of lifelong learning in all students. My most current interest, the subject of this work, lies in the theory and practice of culturally responsive teaching. In all of my unique experiences as an educator, there has always been one question or ultimate goal I have continued to research, expand knowledge upon, and felt needed more answers; How can a teacher meet all the needs and talents of every single student? Many theorists agree this is no easy question to answer. There are so many extrinsic and intrinsic elements that influence what a child needs to be successful and inspired to learn. In this capstone, I will focus on how culturally responsive teaching can accomplish these educational goals.

The Purpose of this Project

Teachers must adapt our teaching to fit the needs of students and CRT offers specific ways we can do this. It's imperative that students and teachers know each other beyond the subjective cultural experiences that each may bring to the classroom, and that educators possess an understanding of diverse cultures but not stereotype people into a one-size-fits-all cultural mold (Gay, 2000). To create a classroom community you must learn and be sensitive to diversity of your students and their cultural backgrounds.

“Students need to be related to as full, complex, multidimensional people “ (Wyatt, 2018, p.4). In this paper I will ask the question; What does each student need to do their best? How can teachers differentiate to meet all students needs? Specifically, how can we teach students from different cultural backgrounds respectfully and effectively? Is there a way to measure the results of this CRT teaching? I will ask all these questions of myself but also of other teachers in the capstone project professional development training session on culturally responsive teaching.

It is important, now more than ever, to focus on student culture and learning differences. The political environment has changed so drastically in the last few years and respect for differences of race and culture are at the forefront of this shift. Educators have a duty to do everything they can to empower student strengths as well as how to work with each other to make the world a better place. My research question focuses on CRT in elementary schools but can be related to any school age. It is especially important to identify how a child learns best, in the early years, so that teachers can help identify what they need, but also help them learn how to advocate for themselves as they

move through different learning environments. I hope all teachers take the time to get to know their students and observe what they need as a first step in any educational setting. The research will not only benefit the student and teacher but also shape how schools meet the needs of their students and families. It is not CRT's intention to prescribe traits to students just because they are from a certain culture, background, or ethnicity, but rather to use culture as the main avenue to differentiate student learning. It would be quite amazing if this work would in some way influence educational theories in the future. I hope that my work will help teachers see that every student is a unique combination of experiences, talents, interests, struggles, backgrounds, and educational journeys.

Summary

In this first chapter I have clearly stated my capstone research question and discussed what has inspired me to choose this topic. I have explained what has brought me to the question of CRT and who would benefit from my research on the topic as well as the current political climate and its relevance. In the second chapter of this capstone, I will review the most important literature on the subject on CRT and synthesize what other researchers have found.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

There have been many theorists that have researched and written on the topic of differentiation of classroom education, from Vygotsky to Boaler. Educators will always be striving to discover new ways to differentiate, adapt, and meet the needs of their students. I wish to ask in this capstone, how can culturally responsive teaching can help differentiate student learning in the elementary classroom? In this chapter I will review research related to my capstone question regarding culturally responsive teaching and how differentiated instruction, classroom environments, teacher background, and culture affect it. I will define differentiation, how it is directly related to CRT, and the core purpose of all educators when teaching. I will explain what culture is and how it is manifested in students in the classroom. I will dissect the many facets of CRT and how it can be taught to teachers and realistically applied in the classroom. I will highlight three key researchers, their findings in CRT, and how they apply these strategies to educate teachers on the subject. I will also layout a professional development training for teachers that are completing their credential or would like to expand their knowledge and understanding of CRT.

Differentiated Instruction

In this section I will define, synthesize, and review best practices of differentiation in the classroom. Differentiation is at the heart of CRT and why it works for students. Differentiated instruction and assessment is a framework for effective

teaching that involves providing individual students with different avenues to learning in terms of: “acquiring content, processing, constructing, or making sense of ideas, and developing teaching materials and assessment measures so that all students within a classroom can learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability.” (Tomilson, 2013). Students vary in culture, socioeconomic status, language, gender, motivation, ability, personal interests and experiences. Teachers must be aware of all of these determinants as they educate students. Teachers can develop personalized instruction so that all children in the classroom can learn effectively by responding to student variety in readiness levels, interests and learning profiles. “To do this, a teacher sets different expectations for task completion for students based upon their individual needs” (Ellis, Gable, Greg, & Rock, 2008, p.35). Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and other early social constructivist theorists such as (Blanton, 1998; Flem, Moen, and Gudmundsdottir, 2000; Goldfarb, 2000; Kearsley, 1996; Riddle and Dabbagh, 1999; Rueda, Goldenberg, and Gallimore, 1992; Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2001; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988) had a deep impact on the theory of differentiation. This sociocultural theory is based on the premise that the individual learner must be studied within a particular social and cultural context (Ellis, Gable, Greg, & Rock, 2008).

These theorists have influenced contemporary education with their writings on social interaction, engagement between teacher and student, physical space and arrangement, meaningful instruction, scaffolding, student ability, and the power of content. Students do not all learn in the same way. Differentiation suggests teaching to differences and not to the middle of students academic abilities, meeting the needs of all

students, and engaging them effectively. Differentiation is directed by student diversity, brain research, theories concerning learning styles and multiple intelligences. I will now discuss the importance of student culture.

Culture

In this research I will focus on culture defined as: “the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social or ethnic group: or the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.” (Hofstede, 2010). Culture is a significant way that a person or group of people distinguish themselves from others. I will not focus on socioeconomic status, societal disparities, or spoken language as they relate to culture in this paper. These are all very important aspects of a child’s educational determinants but they will not be covered here. Culture shapes people's minds and is a collective mindset. In education, culture affects what someone considers important to learn, how to learn, the social dynamics of learning, and how the teacher and families relate to the learning process. The way culture is regarded in the classroom and by teachers affects student achievement which has been shown in many academic studies. “Our analyses found that the most significant predictors of student achievement on all three student outcome included the following cultural dimensions based on two different frameworks: (1) a culture’s focus on fostering long-term orientation to include emphasis on perseverance to achieve future-oriented results and (2) a culture’s focus on secular-rational values vs. traditional values. In addition, findings indicate that when mapped geographically, similar patterns emerge among the two cultural dimensions” (Fang, 2013, p.170). This study from Fang (2013)

was based on the Hofstede model of six dimensions of national cultures: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Long/ Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence/Restraint. The cultural context of a student is directly linked to their family culture as well. Culture is not fixed but can change and adapt over time depending on the child's experiences, community, and learning environment. A student's culture, or background, directly affects a student's behavior, initial schemas and beliefs, social and emotional orientation, and academic performance.

“Nationally representative database of American elementary school students was used to quantitatively assess the complex ways in which race intersects with social class, affecting parenting strategies that in turn produce various educational outcomes among children reveal that cultural differences in child-rearing occur along class, race, and gender boundaries” (Bodovski, 2010, p.142). Social interactions of students and teachers from diverse backgrounds is also a determinant of learning. It is therefore important to study the influence of culture on classroom communication that influences both verbal and nonverbal interactions. A student's family also plays a huge role in their child's beliefs and way of learning. This schema affects the way these parents interacted with teachers and their child's learning. When an educator has the determination, skill, and dedication to discover their student's culture this is referred to as cultural competence. “It is important to comprehend that we are all biased and naturally make assumptions about others. What is not ok is to stereotype our students and enclose them in perceptual predeterminations” (Muhammad & Hollie, 2011, p. 4).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

With the movement towards re-educating teachers for a diverse population of students, in the late 1990's, CRT emerged. There have been many theories of how to best help students, specifically with minority cultures and backgrounds, close the academic gap in schools. Culturally responsive teaching has been discussed greatly in recent years as a concept that all teachers should research and incorporate into their classrooms. Research has shown that some of the benefits of doing this include closing the academic gap of minority students, gaining support and participation from families, improving student academic performance and motivation, and a feeling of mutual respect and celebration of diversity. Once an educator has learned how to be culturally competent about their student population they can begin to use CRT. Culturally responsive teaching has been shown to be an effective means of addressing the achievement gap as well as the disproportionate representation of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p.29). Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, build bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, and uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles. Culturally responsive teaching should empower students to feel proud about their culture and want to share it. The classroom is a place of diversity on many levels and all should be studied and celebrated to create the best possible learning environment.

The Practice of Culturally Responsive Teaching

One of the founders of CRT is Geneva Gay. She wrote a pivotal book in 2000 entitled *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*. She describes teaching as an personal endeavor where the personal beliefs of the teacher directly drive their instructional behavior. “If teachers have positive beliefs about ethnic and cultural diversity, they will act in accordance with them, and vice versa. Therefore, beliefs are critical components of culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000, p.216). In her important work she defines the seven principles a teacher must incorporate in their classroom to effectively be culturally responsive. The first is to make sure that you have dependable rituals and routines in the classroom. The second is becoming more active in the learning process by traveling through the learning cooperatively by sharing and switching roles. Third, providing choice and expecting authentic work that is embedded in real world multicultural issues. Fourth enable and empower the students in their work. Gay gives a wonderful example of how students should read between the lines of scholarly writing and see that all people are writing from an ‘illustration of their social construction’ of the world. Fifth, she explains that knowledge plus practice, through various techniques such as role playing, translating theory into practice, and other simulated learning opportunities is imperative. Sixth, is to cultivate critical orientations to ‘enhance their own knowing power’. “I want them to be independent, critical, reflective, and quality thinkers and decision makers who are deliberate and intentional in constructing their personal pedagogical positions, and in monitoring and assessing the quality of their culturally diverse beliefs and behaviors” (Gay, 2000, p.231). Seventh, she

talks about making learning personal for each student and creating a trusting and comfortable place for them to share their stories, insights, even mistakes. Gay's research and writing on the topic of CRT gives a detailed overview of the main principles of the educational pedagogy in a way that is realistic and inspiring (Gay, 2000).

A strong case for CRT is made by Gloria Landson-Billings in a 1995 research journal entitled: *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. In this article Landson-Billings asks some very important questions regarding student achievement and the social constructs that come from one paradigm. One of the many important applications of CRT, that this work explains, is related to social relations by teachers to “maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrate a connectedness with students, develop a community of learners, and encourage students to learn collaboratively” (Landson-Billings, 1995, p.480).

Another crucial article regarding the practice of CRT is: *Reflections on Culturally Responsive Teaching: Embedding Theory into Practices of Instruction and Behavioral Support*, by Randall De Pry and Elaine Cheesman. In this work, De Pry and Cheesman describe how CRT can be used through Response to Intervention (RtI) and School-Wide Behavior and Support models to foster academic achievement and a positive school climate. This article uses some very simple diagrams to explain the relationships between culturally responsive teaching, instructional support, evidence-based practice, and behavioral support for students. (De Pry and Cheesman, 2010) These two writers also discuss the guiding principles of CRT as it relates to their research. These principles note that effective teaching is culturally responsible, that teachers should know their

students well. In addition, teachers should have a clear teaching cycle, each behavior expectations, and demonstrate caring.

Based on these guidelines, schools can use CRT to shape their teacher reflection, instructional approaches, behavioral support, academic performance, and overall school moral positively. “Our Schools will be begin to develop the capacity to meet the diverse academic and social/behavioral needs of learners; and in so doing nurture the tremendous promise that each student brings to our schools through the implementation of culturally responsive instructional and behavioral support strategies” (De Pry and Cheesman, 2010, p.14).

Areas of Growth

Some would argue that CRT has done a good job researching the the need for cultural inclusion, but has not gone far enough in the way of evidence-based research and real applicable techniques. Many educators are still under the impression that being culturally responsive merely means learning about extrinsic cultural traits, such as students holidays, crafts, music, culturally related literature in the classroom. In reality that is only a small piece of the pedagogy. The deeper meaning of culturally responsive teaching comes from what intinsic cultural traits students have. Family traditions, social norms, values, how one expressive themselves, and how learning is approached are all examples of intrinsic cultural traits. One technique that addresses this gap in theory to practice is with a technique called Explicit Instruction, or EI. EI depends jointly on what information is presented and how the learner processes that information. From this perspective the teacher leads but with a greater emphasis on the ways in which students

actively construct and process knowledge (Goeke, 2009). Another CRT tool, that has been studied in many contexts, is the art of cultural storytelling. An example of storytelling is mentioned in research done by Cheesman and Gapp from 2012:

Integrating Storytelling into the Mindset of Prospective Teachers of American Indian Students: A Grounded Theory. “The specific intention is to illuminate the pedagogical methodology of storytelling as an authentic educational communication mechanism for giving voice to American Indian students. We address some academic concerns of American Indian students to assist discovery of culturally meaningful, proficient educational and social solutions to problems within American schools” (Cheeseman & Gap, 2012, p.30). Students can also benefit from something called culturally responsive behavior support where the disconnect between school expectations and cultural student and family values is explored and resolved (Cheeseman & Gap, 2012).

Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter I have reviewed research regarding culturally responsive education and how differentiated instruction, extrinsic and intrinsic cultural aspects, response to intervention, explicit instruction, and cultural storytelling play an important role in student learning. I have thoughtfully reviewed an extensive body of literature on the subject of culturally responsive teaching and gathered a plethora of information from a wide range of research on the topic. Four main theorists were found to be the most helpful in this research; Geniva Gay, Gloria Landson-Billings, and Randall De Pry and Elaine Cheesman. I have extensively highlighted the main research of each of these

educational theorists that have contributed to the body of knowledge and practice of CRT.

Preview of Chapter Three

In Chapter three I will detail my research methods utilized for the capstone project. I will provide information regarding the where, who, what, why, and how this project will take place. The school, classroom setting, and the participants in this study will be discussed. A detailed description of what the professional development project will encompass and how it will take place will be provided. I will explain why this research is important to me and education as a whole. Finally, I will synthesise the chapter and introduce the project findings and reflection in chapter four.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Overview

In chapter two I reviewed the most recent and relevant research about my capstone topic. I defined differentiation, culture, and culturally responsive teaching. I also highlighted research on CRT and used specific academic writings to outline how CRT should look in the classroom. The goal of this capstone was to create a professional development presentation to train teachers in culturally responsive teaching and how to implement it in their classrooms. “I think living and learning should be filled with significance, enjoyment, inquiry, and action. And I believe all of these are best achieved when personal struggles for academic betterment and the joys of achievement are shared with others” (Gay, 2000, P.218). I hope that this professional development helped the educators participating reach a higher level of teaching for the sake of their students. In the professional development process we specifically reviewed the foundational theories of CRT, reflected on constructs of knowledge and culture, reviewed what elements were essential, provided specific examples of what CRT looks like in the classroom, and asked ourselves where we were in our journey to becoming a practitioner of CRT. Within the professional development, I shared personal experiences, my culture and constructs of knowledge, and journey of teaching to culturally responsive teaching. I asked the participants to be open about sharing their culture and teaching experiences, as

well as their beliefs and uncertainties about teaching and moments of validation of CRT when used in their classrooms.

School Setting

This professional development took place online within Cava San Diego (California Virtual Schools) Schools, part of the k12.com program. This school is nationally based, serving over 15,000 students in grades K-12. Cava Schools demographics are comprised of a large amount of Title 1 students from Hispanic, African American, and Asian households. The students come from various religious, economic, and educational backgrounds. There is also a large percentage of students with ELL (English Language Learning) or Special Education needs. These families come to CAVA and a virtual school for many reasons. For some, a belief in non-vaccination draws them to the program, for others, concerns with school safety in today's environment makes a homeschool option more desirable. Others come based on special education needs that are not being met in a traditional brick and mortar schools, because extra support is needed from family members, or due to social/emotional considerations. This CRT professional development was created for all teachers regardless of the type of classroom in which they teach. However, the context of my own classroom provided specific examples.

Participants

As I have mentioned, this professional development was designed for all teachers but contains specific examples based on my current position at CAVA schools. The teachers here are mostly trained at a Masters Degree level and have at least five years

experience as elementary school teachers. The virtual teaching world is a great fit for professionals with busy or growing families, for those homeschooling their own children, or those with personal situations making teaching in a brick and mortar school not as desirable. I work closely with the fifth grade teaching team and have my own classroom of thirty-one students. Most of the teachers, including myself, directly instruct the students twenty hours a week in mathematics, language arts, and science. We also work with students individually when extra support is needed.

Project Description

This section of the chapter three will give a description of the professional development presentation that was offered to teachers at my current school. This presentation could be adapted to be used at any public, charter, private, virtual, brick and mortar school, or as part of a teacher credentialing program. The professional development provided was completed in one day and took approximately five hours. If a presenter wished to extend with supplemental activities, including classroom observations and reflections with mentor feedback, this professional development could be ongoing for a few weeks to a whole year.

I chose to utilize PowerPoint through Blackboard as my presentation software in order to enhance this professional development opportunity. Blackboard offers audio and video of the presenter and writing tools, microphones, web sharing capabilities such as videos and documents, and breakout rooms for peer collaboration. This presentation was highly interactive and based on Adult Learning Theory, by Malcolm Shephard Knowles. Knowles states adults learn best when they are able to play an active role, have an

internal motivation to learn the material, and are invested in the outcome of its results (Knowles, 1984). I included these principals by offering opportunities for paired-shared and small group discussions, reflections on current strategies, and opportunities for thoughtful consideration of how teachers would like to grow. I also included activities to keep the participants engaged and interested, such as teacher tool handouts and videos, and paused often for participant feedback and collaboration. We discussed what teachers are already doing to educate, with culture in mind, and also why is it crucial to include culturally responsiveness into our daily teaching. It was imperative to ask the participants what they hoped to gain from this professional development so as to consider what aspects were of particular importance.

The presentation began by discussing how we, as educators, can accomplish culturally responsive teaching in our classrooms. It is important to remember that CRT is not something used only at certain times of the day but rather a whole new way to teach and think about how to reach students of all cultural identities. We then watched a video that introduced culturally responsive teaching called Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, from the Teaching Tolerance website. Then, I asked the participants to reflect on the video and discuss what elements of CRT we were already doing in the classroom. We then moved on to highlight anything from the video that was inspiring or exciting for our classrooms. I outlined the goals of the professional development presentation and handed out a KWL (know, want to know, and what I want to learn) sheet on culturally responsive teaching that we referenced throughout the presentation. (Donna Ogle, 1986) I have found that these KWL graphic organizers are extremely helpful in organizing the

learning process. We then tackled the dilemma of our own constructs of knowledge and how we could use these qualities as advantages in our teaching.

We then delved into the seven distinct principles of culturally responsive teaching, as defined by Geneva Gay. These seven principals are; rituals and routines, learning cooperatively, choice and authenticity, teaching to enable and empower, knowledge and practice, cultivating critical orientation, and the value of the personal as powerful. I then shared a handout that included each principal with room to write notes as we reviewed them and did activities. We watched a powerful short video after reviewing how teachers can enable and empower their students, from The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CCRTL), called Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning. We discussed the importance of each student understanding that they are critical contributors of academic knowledge. I also encouraged the participants to share their personal experiences throughout the presentation by sharing some of my own experiences. Explaining that by modeling this behavior, teachers can encourage students to do the same in the classroom. The close of the presentation included a final reflection into what we had learned from the professional development and what questions were still unanswered. Finally, I handed out a resource on websites related to CRT and we discussed some ways to extend the development of the teacher's culturally responsive teaching strategies further.

It was my hope that teachers participated in this professional development with the desire to better their teaching, specifically through differentiating with CRT. I

sincerely hope that this professional development presentation was valuable and gave educators inspiration and real tools to enact CRT in their classrooms!

Summary of Chapter Three

The effectiveness of this professional development was determined by the reflections of the participants, observations from peers, and feedback to the presenter. The overall atmosphere and learning community was undoubtedly improved from this training on culturally responsive teaching. Students will feel safe, respected, empowered and an important part of not only their classroom but their school and community if CRT is at the center of your classroom (Landson-Billings, 1995). Students will feel their culture is represented in their classroom community and their individual differences are celebrated. Teachers will benefit from a stronger classroom community that can solve more of their own issues and collaborate on projects at a higher level (Gay, 2000).

Preview of Chapter Four

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, my hope is that CRT will close the gap in performance between students, gain support and participation from families, improving student academic performance and motivation, and add a feeling of mutual respect and celebration of diversity to the classroom. I have highlighted some of the important evidence in the implementation of CRT practices and what possible positive outcomes it can have for students and teachers. The next chapter will summarize the conclusions of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Overview

This project was dedicated to teaching educators about culturally responsive teaching through a professional development presentation and activities. The presentation was appropriate for teachers in any grade or teachers in training. The information presented benefits all school-age students as well as the teaching practices and mindset of the educators involved. My hope is that this project has brought up and addressed the questions: Why is culturally responsive education important? What do teachers already do to foster a positive, culturally appropriate, classroom environment? What can teachers do to take their teaching to the next level and transform their methods to fully address all the needs of each student? In other words: how can culturally responsive teaching help differentiation in the classroom to include all students? This final chapter will conclude the major learnings, research, implications and limitations, possible extensions in future projects, and overall benefits culturally responsive teaching this capstone paper and project hold for education.

Major Learnings

Once I reviewed all the literature on culturally responsive teaching, I realized that although I initially had wanted to focus on elementary education, it was more beneficial

to explain the theory and practice as a multigrade pedagogy. The overall theory of how culturally responsive teaching is developed is not grade specific and only the actual projects students complete are designed based on their grade and level. This distinction is something easily explained and open for the teachers interpretation, based on the needs of their students. I gave many opportunities, to the participants of this professional development, to discuss and reflect how each facet of culturally relevant teaching can be applied to their classroom. When the presentation and partnered activities were complete the teachers had a real guide as to how they could make it work for their classrooms. All of these practices in professional development were created with Adult Learning Theory in mind.

I found that once I started writing the professional development project, my capstone started to come together and everything flowed much easier. I was able to take the parts of the current research literature, that seemed the most valuable to teachers in the classroom, and organize it into a presentation. I did not want to make a training where teachers did not come away with something they could merely use in the classroom; I wanted them to be inspired to try to make their classroom culturally more responsive. I made sure to create a professional development session that was reactive to the groups reflections and focused on what those teachers already knew and wanted to find out.

Literature Review

There was a wide range of research on the need for culturally responsive teaching and how it relates to the differentiation of each student. There have been many

conversations, over the last few decades, regarding how to teach students from varying cultures and how to do it in a classroom filled with students who all need something different. The most recent research has been in culturally responsive teaching. I found that Geneva Gay gave the most cohesive theoretical explanation and specific examples in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, from 2000. She lays out seven key principles that must be considered when developing the CRT model for the classroom and does so in clear and relatable way. There are also some key theorists, from the last few years, that have studied and tracked implementation of CRT in classrooms. These main theorists included Budeva, Cheeman, DePry, Fang, Griggs, Irvine, and Landson-Billings to name a few.

Implications

I have been told, by many teachers, that culturally responsive teaching is highly desired by school districts and is something educators want to know more about. The teachers I have spoken with all say that they would be interested in finding out more about the model and how to actually apply it to their classrooms. We currently have the opportunity to attend many types of professional development sessions, at our school, if you have time to fit it into the day. Teachers are required to attend at least one professional development a quarter. CAVA, in particular, is very focused on achievement based programs, specially that relate to mathematics. The theory and practice of culturally responsive teaching can be used in any program but is best suited when applied across all subjects and classroom activities.

Limitations

I teach with an online school and some of the elements of CRT are more applicable in a brick and mortar environment. The online classroom has the capability to recreate some of the elements of CRT but would need to adapt the curriculum and class times to do so. There is valuable information that any teacher could use in a traditional or home study program. A school, that gives teachers a large amount of freedom in their classrooms, would be able to do the most with the CRT curriculum.

The professional development itself took five hours, but could encompass a whole day depending how much the presenter and participants wanted to expand upon. There is no direct cost for this professional development but it took teacher planning time to complete it. The session was held in Blackboard using interactive whiteboard tools, microphones, webcams, and breakout rooms. These online tools would work well in lieu of a typical classroom setting where professional developments traditionally take place.

Future Research

The project and presentation could take many directions forward, depending on how much individual teachers, grade collaboration groups, schools, or whole districts wanted to invest in culturally responsive teacher training. Observations of teachers and their classrooms could be made before, during, and after this training as well as longterm check ins throughout the year on how CRT was working in classrooms. The professional development could also be expanded into multi-day sessions that could meet once, every few months, throughout the year. I also thought about the possibility of the creation of a website that included the most up to date research, teacher tools and a blog where educators could share ideas with each other.

Benefits to Education

The benefits of the project could be widespread and long lasting. The work put into making a teacher's classroom culturally responsive can be extensive and takes time. The classroom culture, of a culturally responsive classroom, takes time to culminate because you are developing trusting relationships and moral/ social codes with the students. However, once this happens, the classroom is a new environment that can facilitate the CRT methods. Another benefit is that teachers are bettering their practice and widening their scope of teaching. They are reaching more students by connecting with each one through their culture and changing the mindset of students that may have felt marginalized or left out before (Cheesman & DePry, 2010). Research has shown that if you can rekindle a sense of excitement about learning students do better. Culturally responsive education can also be a catalyst in cultural understanding and instilling tolerance, acceptance, and celebration of the beauty of diversity.

Summary

In this capstone paper and project it was my hope to share what I have found so valuable in culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as "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" (Griner and Stewart, 2013, p. 589). I have made it a priority to be a respectful and culturally sensitive educator that strives to meet every student's needs.

Culturally responsive practices in classrooms have been shown to be an effective means of addressing the achievement gap as well as the disproportionate representation of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students (Cholewa, 2014). Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, and uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles. CRT should empower students to feel proud about their culture and encourage them to want to share it with others. The classroom is a place of diversity and all students should be celebrated to create the best possible learning environment! I found in CRT that you can actually recreate the classroom environment in a way that would meet the needs of each student and celebrate their cultural differences and talents.

I have spent many years developing this paper and project and put my whole self into the process. I feel that I have had the opportunity to experience and learn so much in my fifteen years of teaching from professors, academic peers, teachers, administrators, my own child, and my students. I do not feel that I have ended that learning journey but have only paused to reflect and share my passion for culturally responsive teaching. Becoming a culturally responsive teacher is a never-ending goal of celebrating and empowering students culture to benefit their learning.

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