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Culturally Responsive Teaching to Support Karen Newcomers

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING TO SUPPORT KAREN NEWCOMERS

By

Win World

A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

For my research study, I will specifically focus on culturally responsive teaching related to Karen people and their culture. The purpose of my study is to provide a cultural background and information about Karen people to educators or teachers who work with Karen students so they learn and understand how to apply relevant Karen culture with their teaching so that they will help Karen students succeed in their academic learning. Moreover, the number of Karen students dramatically increased in Minnesota, the purpose of my study is to present and discuss the importance of Karen culture that educators and teachers need to know to support them with their job. The research question is: how do teachers or educators effectively apply culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students? In the following paragraph, I will share and talk about the background of Karen people.

In this paragraph, I wanted to share some brief information about the Karen people who come to Minnesota. This background knowledge will help the readers learn and understand more about Karen people who come to Minnesota. These are the guiding questions that will help the readers to understand why Karen people are coming to Minnesota. When did Karen people come to the Minnesota? Why and how did Karen people come to Minnesota? Karen people came to Minnesota in mid 2005, as refugees. They came from Karen refugee camps in Thailand. Since 1949, there has been a civil war in Burma (Myanmar); Karen people have been persecuted and tortured, including forced labor, rape, human rights abuse, and forced relocation by the Burmese military regime so

that Karen people have been forced to leave their country for their safety. In the early 1980s, Karen people left their country and fled to neighboring countries including Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia (Shrestha-Kuwahara, Jansky, & Huang, 2010). In 2006, there were almost 110,000 Karen in the Mae Sot area of Thailand and more than 140,000 refugees lived in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border (Shrestha-Kuwahara et al., 2010). Karen people do not have opportunities to travel from place to place to visit other families who live in different refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border.

The conditions in refugee camps are very limited, strict and difficult for Karen refugees to build their new life in the future, including food, education, health, and identification. For this reason, most Karen people come to the United States as refugee war victims and have experienced war-related trauma. In 2005, Karen people were accepted by the government of the United States of America to legally resettle to its country through a refugee resettlement program and process (Shrestha-Kuwahara et al., 2010). Since 2005, more Karen people gradually have come to the State of Minnesota as refugees for their future lives, including education, citizenship, freedom of movement, health and safety. Moreover, most Karen refugee children were not born or raised in their native land, and they were born and have spent their life in the refugee camp before they moved to the United States.

Background Information about Karen People and Language

Under this subtopic, I will briefly talk about the language and dialects that different groups of Karen tribes speak. The first question is: Who are the Karen people?

The Karen people are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Within the Karen there are different sub-groups with different languages, customs and religions. The Karen (pronounce kuh-ren) are an indigenous people from Southeast Asian Countries of Burma and Thailand. The word “Karen” is an umbrella term, it can be used for both language and people. Karen people include these subgroups: S’gaw Karen and Pwo Karen. The Karen population consists of smaller subgroups of people who speak different dialects. The Karen language is a Sino-Tibetan language group. Karen languages/dialects include the S’gaw Karen and Pwo Karen. Each subgroup cannot speak, read, and write each other’s dialect unless they learn it. Each subgroup has its own written language and special scripts.

Background Information about the Researcher

Today, we live under globalization in the modern, technological era, so people from around the world come together, work together, and live together in the same communities. Diverse people bring individual cultures and skills into the communities. Especially in the school and workplace, this will be the first place that people share diverse cultural experiences. I believe that if we do not know the different cultures in which we have been living together, it will be a challenge for us to live and work with them. Additionally, it will create misunderstanding of each other when we do not learn to respect each other’s culture or we do not care about the diversities around us. I think it is a good time to learn and share our cultures in the community, such as workplace, school, clinic, or hospital so that we can eliminate cultural barriers. Also, it will help us to avoid misunderstandings and separate one group to another group.

As a Karen person who can speak, read and write Karen fluently and has lived with the Karen community most of my whole life, I still try to learn more about Karen culture. I learn through talking with Karen educators, to the Karen elders, parents, students, read online and offline in different languages (English, Karen and Burmese) to help me understand more Karen culture that I have not learned and experienced in my life before. I feel very confident to share my Karen culture with other people who want to learn Karen culture and language, including food, clothes, traditional ways of life, taboos, and even more related to any of Karen culture. Similarly, I believe that if you want to work well with other people, you need to learn and know about their culture. Learning another culture is the most powerful tool that will break down the cultural barrier, it will also improve understanding among each other. Every single person has an individual unique culture. The word “culture” is a very broad meaning and term, including language, food, music, clothes, and belief. Based on my personal experiences, I felt learning other cultures helped me to understand other people, also to accept individual differences and support one another. Studying and learning another culture is one of my favorite issues because the more I learn about them, and the more I benefit.

Moreover, whenever I have free time, I spend a lot of my time reading about other cultures around the world, and I try to study the differences between each culture and the common similarities among one another. Also, I try to learn about their clothes, history, language, food, folktales and music that will help me to deeper understand how we are different and what we have in common. So, I will apply the knowledge and skills that I learned from another culture to guide me through my work and in my life.

In August 2010, I started to work at Urban Midwest Schools District (pseudonym) as an educational assistant. The Urban Midwest Schools District assigned me to work at Eastside Urban Elementary (pseudonym) and I had many opportunities to work with diverse students, staff, and parents in the school community. Eastside Urban Elementary School is one of the places that provided me with many opportunities to learn about another culture. I learned to understand more about other cultures that I had ever known and learned about them before, including Hmong and Latino cultures. I gained a lot of cultural experiences during my work. Similarly, I also have learned and worked with other cultures in the past that gave me a lot of rich cultural experiences; these cultures included Filipino, Thai, Burmese, Chin, Lisu, Mon, Kachin, Shan, Rakhain, Ethiopian, Cambodian, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Indian, and Chinese. All different cultures taught me to understand how we share commonalities and accept the differences. In addition, when I worked with Eastside Urban Elementary School, it was a wonderful experience with mainstream classroom teachers and English Language Learners' (ELLs) teachers in the different grades. When I worked with diverse students and teachers, I realized that it is so important to know about other culture to support me through my work.

When I began working at my current school, I decided my career path was to become a teacher and I decided to pursue my degree in the educational field. I believe education is the most powerful key to change the way of our thinking, to see our future, and to produce growth and prosperity in the community.

Also, I see that teaching is one of the most important jobs that will educate the kids and advocate for parents to work together to create a successful life in their families as well as in the community. In 2014, I registered at Hamline University to work on my education degree. Moreover, when I studied about educating for equity and social justice issues and I understood more about culture, classism, racism, and sexism in America, that helped me think about doing my capstone research related to culture.

For this reason, I chose to do my research related to the Karen people and their culture because the Karen community of the United States is growing, especially in the State of Minnesota, with more than 9,000 Karen population (Karen Parent Advisory Committee Meeting, personal communication, February 6, 2015). I wanted to share the culture, the language, and the stories related to the Karen people. Additionally, when I worked in the school, some of my colleagues and other teachers frequently asked me about Karen people. Especially when they worked with Karen students, and they wanted to know about the language and the culture of Karen students so that they will know how to work better with them.

The Expectation of This Research

Language and cultural barriers are the most challenging obstacles that Karen people face in the U.S. educational systems because most Karen people have never been to school according to credible local Karen community leaders (Karen community meeting, personal communication, November 7, 2014). English is a new language for many of them. Additionally, Karen students did not receive formal education in their original country of Burma or refugee camps in Thailand. Karen parents and students

often experience culture shock when they first come to American schools because the differences in the Karen educational system and the U.S. educational system is so great according to credible local Karen community leaders. These barriers faced by Karen students led me to my research questions. My research question: How do teachers or educators effectively apply culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students?

These are some of my sub questions that will help guide and support me to provide solid information for my study. In addition, these subquestions will also support me when I collect data for my research study.

- What do teachers need to know about the Karen culture and language to teach students in a more culturally responsive way?
- What do teachers need to know about the educational backgrounds of individual Karen students who are new to the country?
- What educational tools and resources do teachers need to provide for Karen students?
- What do teachers need to know about what prevents Karen students to participate and engage in the school's activities?
- What do teachers need to know about cultural barriers that prevent parents from engaging in their children's education at home or in school?

Based on the questions stated above, I specifically wanted to focus on Karen culture because the population of Karen in Minnesota is growing every year. Since 2005, new arrivals of Karen people have come to the State of Minnesota every single year.

More Karen students enroll in public schools, and most of them are English Language Learners (ELLs) or in the Language Academy Program; “students with interrupted formal education, which includes many refugees, participate in ELL programs and most newcomer students attend this program for at least two years” (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services-BRYCS, 2007) Although the new Karen students bring unique culture to the schools, and sometimes it is challenging to mainstream teachers and English Language’s (EL) teachers who never knew about Karen students and their culture. Similarly, not only Karen students bring diverse culture to the school communities, also the whole community of Karen people brings a new culture to their new community, including health, language, and food.

Based on my work experiences in schools, I have had many opportunities to share Karen culture with the teachers and students at my workplace. Also, I have had experiences to prepare presentations about Karen people, including refugee life in Thailand. These questions are frequently asked by the educators and teachers who work with Karen students. What does the typical life of the Karen people in the refugee camp look like? How do Karen students receive education in the refugee camp? Many teachers asked me how long Karen students have been to school when they lived in a refugee camp. How do Karen parents engage and support their children’s education at home or in school? How does a new educational system in the United States challenge the parents to navigate their children to be successful in school?

I am not a cultural specialist related to Karen culture. Nevertheless I am very competent about Karen culture because I grew up with, and also learned about it in my

whole life as I am a Karen person and I spend most of my life with a Karen community. As a result I felt very confident to talk about Karen people and their culture in this study. Also, I work as an educator with diverse students, I noticed that it is very important to apply culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. I also believe that we need to learn individual students' culture, including their parents' traditional cultural practice at home or in their home countries.

Related to my research study, I wanted to focus on culturally responsive teaching that I will apply in the classroom. These cultural experiences and teaching experiences will bring an effective working performance at my workplace and it will help other teachers and educators in their jobs, too.

I believe my research will be beneficial for teachers and community people who live and work with Karen people and students. Learning and accepting another culture is one of the effective ways to promote racial equity and social justice in the community, including schools and workplace. I see it is very important for me to learn about other cultures, I also need to share and promote my culture to other people in the community because Karen people are the last group of refugees who have recently resettle in the United States. Without knowing about another culture, I felt it was very challenging for me to live and work with diverse communities, especially during this modern day.

Based on my experiences, I have been working and living with diverse communities most of my whole life within different countries. I believe the most important issue is to respect other cultures and accept differences. I see that no matter where we live, where we are from, and who we are; we all come together as one whole

community. So, I have learned that the people whom I live with have individually unique cultures and skills. I realized that when I attended other cultural events, such as the Festival of Nations, Refugee Day, Hmong New Year, or Karen New Year in my community, I was so glad to know more about how other beautiful cultures are beneficial to me, and I can apply this wonderful experience in my workplace and in my community. Similarly, one of the best ways to build a good relationship with students is to learn about students' cultures.

Furthermore, I learned that when we accept other cultures and other people respect our culture, this is one of the ways that will help us to build peace in our communities. It will create a safe environment in our community. Additionally, we also pave the way for the next generation to see diverse people and wealthy culture, as a rich resource in the community because the uniqueness brings the world to look beautiful, attractive, and powerful. For example, if I wanted to build a strong relationship with my students and support them to succeed in their studies, I need to learn and know about their cultures that will help me to understand how to work with them.

Similarly, strong community and healthy people depend on one another like a family. We cannot live by ourselves and isolate from one group to another group in today's society. We belong to one another as one family and one village. I believe we cannot separate one group to another group in this society because strong community people learn to support one another, and they should see each other as a supporter. In order to build a strong community and healthy people, we need to share our individually

unique cultural experiences and background so that we will collaboratively learn how to live and work together.

Summary

In this introduction, I have explained how my research developed. I have explored why I chose to do my research about Karen culture and why it is important for me specifically to focus on Karen culture rather than other cultures because Karen people are the latest newcomers to the United States, and then Karen students bring new culture into the classroom that is unfamiliar to the classroom teachers. For this reason, I wanted to specifically focus on Karen culture and provide Karen cultural information to teachers in order to support them when they work with Karen students. Similarly, culturally responsive teaching sometimes challenges teachers and educators when they do not know about each student's cultural background. A new culture brings unexpected barriers that teachers or educators are not aware and familiar about them so that they cannot teach diverse students to be successful in education. If teachers do not prepare themselves to deal with a new culture, it might be difficult to adjust their curriculum to fit all diverse students' needs. A new culture of students can create racial inequity between the students and teachers because of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and cultural barriers. In this case, it is necessary and very important for teachers to learn about another culture so that they will prepare themselves for culturally responsive teaching. Finally, in this study, teachers and educators will learn about the Karen culture that will support them when they work with Karen students and parents. In the future chapters, I discuss literature review in Chapter Two, methodology in Chapter Three, the results of the research study

in Chapter Four, and conclusion in Chapter Five. In Chapter Two, the literature review will be about the information or findings that support my research study of culturally responsive teaching. In Chapter Three, the methodology will include what research tools or data collections that I will use for my research study. It will also include research method and the setting subjects of a research study. In Chapter Four, it will be about the results and the findings from interview and survey questions that I will collect from participants. In Chapter Five, it will conclude about the major findings, connections to literature, limitation and implications of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Two is to review the literature on the topic of culturally responsive teaching that will help teachers to learn and understand about Karen culture. I specifically will focus on Karen parents and their children who are new to the United States. The research attempts to explain an effective culturally responsive teaching that will help to eliminate cultural barriers between students and teachers. In this chapter, the teachers will learn about how to teach culturally responsive to help Karen students to understand the contents of subjects.

The topic of my research is culturally responsive teaching as it relates to Karen culture. My action research question is: How do teachers or educators effectively apply culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students?

Culturally Responsive Teaching

What is culturally responsive teaching? Culturally responsive teaching is an instructional strategy and pedagogy that recognizes the significance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching can be defined in various contents, including using the cultural knowledge, previous experiences, frames of references, and ethnically diverse students' learning styles to help them learn how they can improve their skills (Gay, 2010). Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are positive perspectives on parents and families, learning with the context of culture, student-centered instruction,

communication of high expectations, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and teacher as facilitator (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Based on the idea of Ladson-Billings, I believe it is very important to know where students are from because diverse students bring new cultures that teachers should understand in order to help their students increase their learning skills. For example, not all Asian American students come from the same countries so they have different educational backgrounds and unique cultures. When teachers identify an individual student's culture and background education, they know how to adjust the curriculum to fit with the student's needs (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The following are questions that teachers should ask students: "What is your race?" "What is your ethnicity?" "What language do you speak?" With this information, teachers can help students meet their educational needs. When teachers identify the different cultural backgrounds of their students, they can know how to work more successfully with them (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that students should continually develop their cultural competence skills. Teachers should build those new skills through culturally relevant teaching and develop lesson plans to fit with culturally responsive teaching. According to Ornstein and Lasley II (2004), "In order to facilitate learning, the teacher must learn to match appropriate tasks with the students' abilities and background knowledge" (p. 348). Karen students bring a new culture to the classroom so teachers need to learn how their culture will impact their learning. In other words, students bring their own point of view about ideas, the world, and learning tasks to the learning process

(Shade et al., 2005). For this reason, teachers need to identify each individual student's culture that they bring to school in order to help them develop their academic skills.

If teachers do not know the new cultures that students bring into their classrooms, they cannot teach effectively and promote academic achievement that is accessible to all students. Shade et al. (2005) clarified that to accomplish this successfully, “teachers must recognize the various tenets of children’s cultural orientation so that they can develop a communication bridge that provides students an equal opportunity to learn and grow into a bicultural citizen” (p. 19). In order to help students succeed in learning, teachers should use culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms (Crenshaw, 2013). This requires educators to know about the Karen values, practices, experience, and language in order for them to effectively teach their newest students.

Cultural competency. Teachers who focus on developing cultural competence encourage students to learn to maintain their “cultural integrity” (Coffey, 2008). Students’ cultures and identities should be recognized by teachers, and teachers need to identify the students’ cultures and learn how to adjust a curriculum to one that is relevant to culturally-based knowledge and past experiences. Teachers must also create new curriculum that builds on their prior knowledge and cultural experiences (Coffey, 2008).

Critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings contended that culturally relevant teachers “engage in the world and others critically,” and in order to do this, “students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Coffey, 2008, Critical Consciousness, para 10). Teachers should provide

students with cultural experiences to explore and learn another culture. So students can make connections between one culture and another culture to help them understand how to work together and support each other as diverse learners. The next part of my literature review will focus specifically on various aspects of the Karen culture, history, and language that has an important impact in the classroom.

What do teachers need to know? Besides the language and cultural barriers, another factor that affects Karen students' academic achievement is socioeconomic status. According to Lerner (2012), it is important to remember that refugee children may experience difficulties in a variety of domains (including social, educational, mental health) and that, notwithstanding some similarities among refugee students, there will also be differences that can only be addressed by finding out more about each individual child's background and needs.

In addition to coping with the after effects of the refugee experience, they live in poverty. Parents struggle to pay for monthly rent and basic needs, so they cannot give their time to support their children's education achievement. This socioeconomic status also creates an academic achievement gap for Karen students when their parents are not able to engage in educational activities at home or school. For this reason, teachers should know how the families' socioeconomic status affects Karen students' academic achievement so that they can help to improve Karen students' academic learning (Gilhooly, 2015).

In addition, health issues also affect Karen students' learning ability. Many children have vitamin and protein deficiencies due to rationing in the refugee camps

(Imran, 2011). Many Karen students are frequently absent from school because of their health problem. When they miss a lot of school work, they get behind the other students. These children need more help to develop their academic skills.

Karen Language and Grammar

Understanding how the Karen language and grammar differ from English will help teachers work more effectively with Karen students (Gilmore, 1898). The Karen alphabet is derived from the Burmese script. Karen grammar presents striking analogies to English. Like English, it depends mainly on the word order for expressing its syntactical relations, and the order of words is much the same as in English (Gilmore, 1898). Below are some examples of word order in both Karen and English:

Table 2.1.

Common similarities of sentence structure and word order between English language and Karen language. Usually, the simple present tense of sentence structure and word order are similar, as shown on the table.

Language Comparison 1

English Language	Karen Language
I go to school.	I go to school.
I like bananas.	I like bananas.

The word order and sentence structures are pretty much the same. However, when spoken the Karen language is monosyllabic (Gilmore, 1898). Its words, with exceptions,

are monosyllables. When Karen people learn the English language and its grammar, the first challenge that Karen students struggle with using multisyllabic words and verb tenses correctly. Please see some examples below:

Table 2.2.

Differences of sentence structure and word order between English language and word order when past tense has been used. The verb tense of Karen language does not change to past tense. The verb is still present tense. In this case, the verb tenses (past tense, past participle, present participle, infinitive verb or plural verb) also confuse Karen students.

Language Comparison 2

English Language	Karen Language
I went to the zoo yesterday.	I already go to the zoo yesterday.
I did my homework last night.	I do my homework last night.

Also, Karen students struggle with plural nouns and verbs adding with “s”. So, when they speak and write, they will miss using the “s” sound. For example, in English, it is "I have two books", but, in Karen, it is “I have two book.” Less proficient English speakers typically have problems with consonant clusters, inserting vowels into them, so that *sky* sounds like /soe'ky/, *slow* will be /sa'lou(ng)/, *crystal* will be /cri sa ta/, and *table* will be /taboe loe/ (Barron, Okell, Yin, VanBik, Swain, Larkin, Allott, & Ewers, 2007).

English words that end in final consonants will also be problematic for the Karen students because the sounds do not exist in their language (Dwe, 2009). Personally, I

think it might be helpful for teachers to know the differences between the English language and the Karen language when working with ELL Karen students. The more teachers know how one language differs from another language, the better you understand how to work effectively with students whose first languages are not an English. For example, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) requires school districts to identify students who speak a language other than English upon enrollment in public schools. To facilitate the process, the NYSED provides a Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ) to be completed by the child's parent (University of the State of New York State Education Department, 2010). Also, Minnesota Department of Education requires the individual school districts to identify students about their home languages other than English upon enrollments in public schools. You can also see Appendix A for the Minnesota Home Language Questionnaire.

Furthermore, most Karen parents cannot speak the English language when they come to the U.S., so both children and parents must learn English in their new communities in order to communicate with English speakers (Gilhooly, 2015). Although a minority of Karen, particularly older men and women who attended English language schools in Burma during their youth, speak English well, most Karen who are being resettled in the United States will have little or no knowledge of English (Barron et al., 2007). Karen students struggle to learn a new language as well as the content of subjects. Also, Karen students have a hard time with English pronunciation, especially with word endings relating to verb tenses and plural nouns. In terms of grammar, Karen speakers

typically encounter problems with English verb tenses, because verbs do not change form in Karen (Barron et al., 2007).

Pronunciation problems cause students to feel nervous because they want to avoid making mistakes in front of mainstream students. It is a challenging issue for Karen students who struggle to learn both English and the academic content of the subjects simultaneously (Gilhooly, 2015). The new language slows them down with catching up to learning the subjects. When students struggle with language, it is difficult to understand and formulate ideas when learning other subjects. Most of their parents are not able to help them with homework because of the parents' own lack of English and prior formal education. Learning the English language and the concepts of the various subjects at the same time is very challenging and Karen students have a difficult time improving their academic achievement.

Nevertheless, when Karen students have enough language to understand what the teachers teach, they can succeed in learning because they comprehend the concepts of the subjects and topics and they can share their understanding and ideas with the whole class. They are more confident and have sufficiently high self-esteem to engage in the classroom.

When students do not have enough language to share their ideas, they have a hard time paying attention and participating in the classroom. Because of their low self-esteem, they avoid participating in classroom activities (Gilhooly, 2015). They may make wrong choices that do not support their learning. These children can be described as shy, timid, submissive, isolated, inhibited, silent, and meek. They have difficulty

expressing ordinary feelings of affection and aggression, have few friends, and avoid social games and play (Ginott, 1965).

It is very important for teachers to understand how to help Karen students increase their self-esteem as they learn the English language (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services-BRYCS, 2007). Explain that learning a new language is very hard and that it takes many years to become proficient. Teachers need to encourage learners as they try to learn English language, and teachers should know how the structure of a child's native language makes it difficult to learn English, such as differences in verb tenses, pronunciation and sentence formation.

Informal education and formal education. Most Karen students have received some informal education in refugee camps in Thailand or Burma before they came to the United States (Karen Women Organization, 2013). Many refugee students also fall under the category of Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) (Robertson, & Lafond, 2008). Due to instability in camps and constant movement prior to settlement, children may have never attended school (University of the State of New York State Education Department, 2010).

Also, textbooks, often decades old, and school materials are in very short supply, and what schools there are tend to be understaffed (Karens: Country and their culture, 2015). Moreover, educators also are faced with school children who are traumatized by their experiences of human rights abuses, who are malnourished, and are beset by malaria and other diseases (Karens: Country and their culture, 2015). Some children have never

been to school. They have no knowledge or experience about what a school looks like, and they do not know what education means to them.

Moreover, some children have been to school only a couple of years due to relocation or resettlement to another country. They have not received sufficient education in their lives so they face many challenges when they go to American schools. They do not know how to adjust to their new lives due to the language, culture, place, and formal education system. However, Western countries do not ask whether or not a child should go to school and learn (Gumaer, 2009). Formal education is one of the biggest obstacles that Karen students have to deal with so that they will be familiar with an American educational system. When Karen students do not have past formal educational experiences, they do not have the confidence to engage in classroom activities. They do not do well in the school. Also, Robertson and Lafond (2008) mentioned that students may not be able to read or write in their native language, and may also lack an understanding of the basic concepts, content knowledge, and critical thinking skills that their peers will have mastered. They try to avoid participation and have low self-esteem. It is very important for the mainstream teachers and ELL teachers to know about the educational backgrounds of Karen children. When teachers identify an individual student's needs, they can more successfully facilitate each student's success.

On the one hand, Robertson and Lafond (2008) mentioned that these learners require instruction in the basic concepts and skills necessary for academic success, including how to study and take notes and how to participate in class discussions. On the other hand, student academic success rests on meeting increasingly sophisticated

standards and English-language assessments. So, even when students are not fluent in English or are not formally educated, rather than focusing exclusively on basic and/or remedial skills, it is important to offer lessons designed to develop critical knowledge and use content that reflects students' lives, interests and culture (DiCerbo & Loop, 2003).

In addition, most Karen students are of fall into this category of English Learners who are also students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) students.

According to WIDA Consortium (2015), SLIFE is defined as:

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) is an umbrella term used to describe a diverse subset of the English Language Learner population who share several unifying characteristics. SLIFE usually are new to the U.S. School system and have had interrupted or limited schooling opportunities in their native country. They have limited backgrounds in reading and writing in their native language (s) and are below grade level in most academic skills. (p. 1)

For additional information, you can also see Appendix B for SIFE (Students Interrupted Formal Education) which is the same as SLIFE.

Traditional Practice and Understanding the American Educational System

Not all Karen parents are able to read and write their own language (Ehna, 2013). In Burma, the teaching of the Karen language or any other ethnic language is officially banned in government schools. The right to learn ethnic languages is not endorsed in the national constitution. The Karen people claim that many of their generation cannot read or write Karen due to the language bans (Ehna, 2013). The Karen teachers say this causes

people to lose their history, traditions and language (Ehna, 2013). Most Karen parents have never been to school and they lack educational experiences. Therefore, Karen parents do not know how to get involved with or help with their children's education at home and in the school. The parents heavily depend on their children's teacher, and they believe teachers are primarily responsible for educating their children and helping them to be successful learners. This is their cultural belief that school is the only place for their children's learning and academic development. In Burma, the parents do not worry if the teacher is good enough for their children or if the school has the right ventilation system. Their only worry is whether their child will get an education at all (Gumaer, 2009). For this reason, parents will say that they send their children to school and that the teachers have the responsibility to make sure that their children are successful in learning.

According to Covey (2008), "The home is a child's first school, first classroom, and first playground. Home is the foundation for the education of the mind, the heart, the body, and the spirit" (p. 208). However, Karen parents do not think that they have responsibility for their children's education (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services-BRYCS, 2007). It does not mean that they do not value education, because they still know that education is very important for their children. However, they do not know that they play a vital role in their children's education because they have not had any prior school experiences. When some parents come to the United States, they have no confidence to get involved in their children's school (Adult Learning Resource Center, 2013). They are intimidated and avoid participation in school activities and events due to language and cultural barriers (Adult Learning Resource Center, 2013). They do not

know parents' engagement and involvement help to increase their children's learning and academic growth. Culturally, they believe that children who do well in school are smart and their parents are educated. They think parents who cannot read and write cannot help their kids succeed in education. They do not see themselves as being a part of their children's education. They only depend on teachers. In this case, teachers need to know how to help Karen parents support their children's education at home and to provide resources to help them understand the school curriculum and the school system (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services-BRYCS, 2007). If teachers identify the needs of the parents, they can break down the barriers and promote academic improvement for their students (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services-BRYCS, 2007).

In the United States, teachers experience that outside activities such as camping, going to the library, attending community events or volunteering support students with their learning. When students engage and participate in their outside activities help them to grow their social skills as well as to support them with academic learning in school. However, both Karen students and parents have different learning experiences outside school and home (Quadros, 2013). Outside learning experiences are formally viewed by Karen families when their students go on the field trip with classroom teachers during the school days. The families believe these experiences will help their children to learn and make connections to their school learning. In contrast, if the Karen families go to libraries, zoos, museums or camping, they feel that these outside activities are just for fun. Traditionally, Karen teaching practice also required students to sit quietly, copy the teacher's lecture and blackboard notes into their notebooks (Flaitz, 2006). Parents believe

that students can build and develop their skills just by learning in school from teachers. So, Thus, Karen students mostly learn in school to develop their skills. For example, if the teachers ask a Karen family to go to the public library, their parents do not feel confident enough to take them to the library. The parents do not know that outside experiences and school experiences connect to one another and help the children increase their academic learning. Most of Karen children have different outside experiences to help them in academic learning. Parents also have no experiences to help their children gain skills, knowledge, and ideas from outside activities. For the Karen, it is a huge change when students in the American educational system need to have outside community learning experiences in order for their children to be successful in education (Gilhooly, 2015). Even though parents and students engage and participate in outside activities and events, they do not know how to connect their outside experiences with school. For this reason, Karen children do not feel confident to share their out of school experiences with the teachers and cannot make the connection to outside experiences that will help them improve their academic learning skills. Gay (2010) suggested that “Teachers should help students to develop a critical consciousness of who they are, their values, and beliefs, and what they are capable of becoming” (p. 51). So students will feel confident to share their ideas and experiences to the whole class when their values and beliefs are respected and appreciated. Without an awareness of culturally responsive teaching, schoolteachers may not prompt Karen students to make connections to community experiences such as attending Karen New Year, Wrist-tying ceremony, Don-dancing or Karen National Day. In order to help students, teachers will need to be

aware of these cultural activities and connect these outside experiences through cultural diversity in curriculum content (Gay, 2010).

The American educational system also differs from the traditional Karen educational system. As the students struggle to communicate effectively in English, they and their parents often do not understand the U.S. education system's rules and protocol. In addition, their families are struggling financially, which also affects their schooling (Crenshaw, 2013). Understanding the grading system, or student academic evaluation system, is one example of the issues that Karen parents face because they do not know how to read their child's academic performance evaluation. They usually look only for whether their child fails or passes. They are not familiar with how their children's academic growth is measured in the United States. A report card or student growth evaluation system is very complicated and difficult for the parents to understand their children's academic performance (Gilhooly, 2015). In Burma or Thailand, the grading system is only measured and reported in the refugee camps by two results: fail or pass. So, in the camps, when parents looked at their child's report card, if they saw their child failed they knew that they needed to encourage that child to work harder and put more effort in his or her studies in order to pass the test. If students failed the tests, they had to repeat the same grade until they pass all the tests or they were promoted by the school.

Now, however, when Karen children attend school in the United States, regardless of whether they do well on the tests, they are promoted to the next grade level, but, if we look at academic growth, many students do not really produce a lot of success. In this case, parents do not understand how the U.S. educational system impacts students'

academic growth, whether they fail or succeed in their studies, and, when parents do not understand the impact of their children's education, their children do not succeed in learning.

Education valued by Karen parents. Many Karen place a high value on education, dating back to the mid-1800s when mainly Christian missionaries and Sgaw Karen began to set up village schools (Barron et al., 2007). Today, for many Karen, their number one goal is to gain a better education. Karen parents try to encourage their children to work hard at learning, but they do not know how to help their children engage in educational activities in the communities, such as going to libraries, youth summer camp, or volunteering. They worry that if their children participate in outside school activities, the children will not do well in their school assignments (Gilhooly, 2015). Parents believe that outside activities cannot help the children with academic learning. They do not know how to make the connections between outside school activities with their children's academic learning. This lack of understanding is a barrier that prevents parents from encouraging their children to become involved with outside activities. Therefore, the children do not have many opportunities to gain knowledge from outside activities that could support them in learning.

Acculturation and cultural barriers. Teachers should know that Karen people do not engage in public displays of affection. Male to female physical contact is rare outside the home. Karen people do not like talking about themselves, even to the point of not really wanting to say their name (Dwe, 2009). Karen children feel comfortable working with partners of the same gender, but are not comfortable working with those of

the opposite gender. This cultural barrier makes Karen students avoid engaging in some classroom activities. This is not about gender discrimination--it is one more cultural barrier. The following are some cultural traits and aspects of Karen culture.

- Often, when answering a question that demands an affirmative answer, the Karen will say “no” instead of “yes.” This is a sign of modesty and politeness. Usually, the Karen are polite, and it can be hard to correctly assess their needs (World Relief, Cultural Profiles).
- Karen children are taught not to ask questions of their elders, including their teachers, because it is considered rude and disrespectful (Dwe, & Cook, 2011).
- Karen people think that self-promotion is shameful, so they will downplay their skills (Dwe & Cook, 2011).
- Karen people try to avoid confrontation and conflict rather than resolving problems through discussion (Dwe, & Cook, 2011).
- Their communication style is indirect (Dwe, & Cook, 2011)
- Traditionally, Karen people do not have a family name or last name. There is no correlation of names among a family. Examples, translated from Karen to English, are a father named "Silverstar", a mother named "Whiteflower", a son named "Goldendrum" and a daughter named "Beautiful." Each family member has one unique name.
- Karen people are trusting partners, and they are willing to work with everyone (Dwe, & Cook, 2011).

How immigrants integrate into their new country is greatly impacted by the context of the exit of their home country and the reception of their new country (Crenshaw 2013). Cultural barriers are the first challenges for Karen students that result in their avoidance of participation and classroom activities, particularly when students have to ask questions and share their ideas with the whole class. Usually, quiet students do not want to share their ideas and thoughts with other students because they try to avoid being teased and bullied by other students. When Karen students go to American schools, they are not familiar with American culture so they do not do well on participation and academic learning (Gilhooly, 2015).

Related to Karen culture, when teachers or adults talk to the children, they cannot look at adults' faces. It is impolite or rude when the children look at the teachers' faces. The children are taught at home to bow down or look down on the ground. This cultural barrier creates misunderstanding among Karen students and American teachers, when they do not know each other's culture. The American teachers who have never had this experience before may think that these Karen children are rude and not listening to them. Lerner (2012) suggested spending a few minutes researching the child's native culture. This will help a teacher gain insight into the child's behaviors—for example, you might learn that in the child's native culture, children do not look adults in the eye because it is a sign of disrespect. The most common cultural style dimensions that seem to have the greatest impact on student-teacher or student-school interaction are communication style, personality or response style, linguistic style, and social interaction style (Shade et al., 2005).

Cultural barriers sometimes cause miscommunication between students and teachers that make it difficult for them to trust each other. For this reason, it is very important for the teachers to know how cultural barriers affect students' learning and decrease students' academic growth. Gay (2010) recommended, "Teachers should know culturally diverse students thoroughly personally and academically" (p. 51). When teachers understand how culture prevents students' participation and engagement, it will help both teachers and students work effectively together toward success. Also, Gay (2010) suggested that "Teachers should enable ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions as well as being receptive to new ideas and information" (p. 51).

How do cultural barriers affect students' success in education? There are many things, both good and bad, that Karen students may try to copy that they see in their new life in America. When they see and learn new things, they do not know whether those things will have a positive or negative effect on their lives. Many immigrant youth try to adjust their lives in the school community when they learn from other students and teachers to fit with American culture and lifestyles (Crenshaw, 2013). Sometimes, they do not make good choices that support them in successful learning. They try to pick up bad things quicker than good things to influence their lifestyles. For example, they try to run away from school and join in gang activities, which give them trouble. They try to end their lives by not choosing to live peacefully. Crenshaw (2013) stated that teachers must create safe spaces where students can have open dialogues about these kinds of experiences. It is very important that the teachers and parents cooperate to solve these

problems to help students make good choices in their new lives. Some Karen children take advantage of both teachers and their parents when they know their teachers and parents do not work together. Therefore, teachers and parents should work very closely to help the children make good choices.

Karen parenting styles. Most Karen family members depend on one another. Most mothers are not comfortable leaving small children in daycare settings and prefer to work shifts different from their husbands (Dwe, 2009). Parents, especially those who cannot read and write, depend on their children to read and write for them. When their children do not listen to them, the parents feel they do not have the power to control them. They feel their children have more education and more knowledge than them. For this reason, they do not know how to discipline their children. Karen parents need parental education in schools so that they will learn how to help their children at home (Gilhooly, 2015). Moreover, they will feel more confident to navigate their children toward making good choices.

Building relationship with Karen students. In order to build a mutual relationship with Karen students and support them to have good experiences in their new schools; these are some of the tips that will help teachers when they work with Karen students.

Dwe and Cook (2011) suggested that teachers:

- Greet students with a smile and welcoming friendly manner
- Speak in a quiet, soft voice and give reassuring smiles
- Ask about their culture

- Explain that what you are doing can benefit the family and that your place is not to judge.
- Explain confidentiality! According to the Karen culture, they do not understand confidentiality or privacy that is important to them and other people. For example, they might think that it is okay or no problem to share their friends or other people's confidential information to another person. There is no privacy or confidentiality among Karen people. In this case, it is very important to explain confidentiality to students to understand what it is about.
- Offer encouragement by complimenting their willingness to learn
- Do not approach issues too directly. You may have to re-ask questions in a different way if you don't receive an answer

According to credible Karen educators who work for school districts emphasized that neither some Karen children nor their parents know the difference between social language and academic language. Rong and Preissle (2009) emphasized that "Oral English proficiency may be necessary, but is not sufficient for academic English proficiency" (p. 87). When children speak English to their friends, their parents think that their kids have mastered English according to credible Karen educators who work for schools (Karen community meeting, personal communication, February 6, 2015). In addition, credible Karen educators who work for the school districts added that parents also did not understand that their children were using social language or academic language, and assume that their children were doing well in school. Similarly, during parent/teacher conferences, some classroom teachers explained to Karen parents about

their children were not on grade level and did not have enough academic language to understand the content of subject and curriculum. Also, Gilhooly (2015) mentioned, “Some Karen students struggled with reading, speaking, and writing English and demonstrated very low language confidence and willingness to communicate” (p. 5). Rong and Preissle (2009) emphasized that “Four to twelve years of second-language development are needed for the most advantaged students to reach deep academic proficiency and compete successfully with native speakers” (p. 87). In this case, the parents should be taught about the types of language their children speak - social with their friends and academic for learning in school (Breiseth, 2014).

Academic Achievement Gap

It helps to paint the need for educators to learn about Karen culture/language and use culturally responsive teaching strategies to help their Karen students have more academic success in school. And it helps to link both culturally responsive teaching and Karen culture together. Most Karen students are below grade level, both in reading and writing in English. English language is one of the factors that affects student academic achievement. Marzano (2003) stated that “The strong correlation between crystallized intelligence and academic achievement helps to explain the strong relationship between background knowledge and achievement” (p. 134). In order to help Karen students increase their academic achievement, Karen students need more extracurricular activities and support in their learning. ELL service does not cover all of the Karen students’ language needs. A lack of English language competency is not the only barrier that puts Karen students below grade level. Another problem is that Karen students have to skip

grade levels based on their ages even though they have never been to school before. Up to this point, the students are judged by the cultural norms of the school or the teacher and are expected to learn in the same way (Shade et al., 2005). This factor affects the success of Karen learners and serves to increase the academic achievement gap between Karen students and mainstream students because Karen students lack sufficient background knowledge of the subjects.

Chapter Two Summary and Chapter Three Overview

This chapter discussed different components of Karen culture based on my research question. The literature can help teachers and educators learn new ideas and gain knowledge and skills toward understanding the Karen culture; this information is beneficial to their teaching when they work with Karen students in their classrooms.

Chapter Three defines my research proposal and the different types of research methods and procedures that will be used to investigate my research question. It also describes the research method, the setting subjects, case study approach, and evaluation involved in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This study seeks to investigate culturally responsive teaching that fits with Karen culture. As indicated in the previous literature review chapter, cultural barriers, language barriers, and the educational backgrounds of Karen students affect their literacy skills when they attend schools in the United States. Ferris and Winthrop (2010) emphasized “It is well documented that for children and youth living in conflict-affected countries, their ability to access quality educational services is much lower than their peers in other comparable contexts” (p. 15). Karen students have little educational experiences in Thailand refugee camps, and they struggle to understand the English language and content of the subjects. There are no learning materials for the students to use, including books, blocks, posters on the walls with the numbers, the shapes, and the letters of the alphabet (Gumaer, 2009). Similarly, “schooling in Burma today is available to very few due to the lack of resources and teachers” (Shrestha-Kuwahara, Jansky, & Huang, 2010). Chapter Two mentioned that Karen students brought new culture, language, and experiences to their new school teachers, including informal educational experiences and nonacademic skills.

Overview of the chapter. In this chapter, I describe my research method. I have chosen to model this study based on previous research studies with culturally responsive teaching that fit with the Karen culture. Second, I describe academic assessment, and instructional methodology. Third, I describe how culturally responsive teaching will be

implemented in the classroom. The final section of the methods chapter summarizes the main points and introduces what will follow in the subsequent chapters. The following statement is my research question: How do teachers or educators effectively apply culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students?

Research method. Since my research question focuses on culturally responsive teaching, it was necessary to include tasks in which meaningful content is part of culturally responsive teaching. I chose the case study approach as a data collection tool for my research study. A case study approach will include interview questions and survey questions. For this reason, I will use the case study tool to collect data from the teachers and I will analyze how data collection and survey will benefit the participants and school communities. In addition, this study will help teachers and educators gain knowledge and skills in order to understand how to develop their lesson plans to meet students' needs and cultural differences. Moreover, the benefit of the study will support teachers or educators when they work with Karen students who are new to the country and bring new culture in the classrooms so that teachers will provide the right educational and learning tools to support Karen students to engage in learning and succeed in learning. For this reason, a case study will support culturally responsive teaching that is an important topic to effectively implement a research question. Also, the case study tool will provide teachers with cultural information related to Karen people to help teachers how to teach students with success based on culturally responsive teaching. Using a case study for data collection will support my research question to be more solid and I will provide the right cultural resources to teachers to use them for their teaching.

Research and setting subjects. The research took place at my school, which is located in an urban, Midwest (Pseudonym) and has more than 135 Karen students. According to my school's website 2014-2015, the demographics of the student population in this school is based on home languages as follows: 62% of students speak Hmong at home, 15% of students speak Karen at home, 12% of students speak English at home, 9% of the students speak Spanish at home, and 2% of students speak other languages at home. The percentage of students of color is 98.25%. The total number of students who attend this elementary school is 685, and 673 students are students of color, but the statistics above did not include preschoolers (4 years old). In addition, 85.7% of the students are English Language Learners (ELLs), 8% of students receive special education, and 91.4% of students are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch.

In this research study, I conducted a case study involving seven third to fifth grade teachers. Four teachers were mainstream teachers and some of them have been working more than 15 to 20 years.

One participant was an English Language teacher (EL teacher) and she has more than 15 years of teaching experience with diverse students from different countries. One teacher was a Latino cultural specialist and she teaches more than 10 years. One teacher was an academic support and has been working at this job more than 23 years. I interviewed and asked teachers about their perspectives of culturally responsive teaching. I used an interview protocol and survey that I collected a data from participants before, during or after school. There were a total of 10 survey questions and 9 interview questions that I asked teachers during my research study process. (Please see Appendices

C and D for the specific survey and interview questions). I created a Google form for my survey and then I emailed the link to participants for my survey.

Evaluation. How did I provide information to teachers related to culturally responsive teaching? I built my prior knowledge and skills on secondary information such as books and online research when doing my research study. Mostly, the criteria and instructional methodology are based on Shade et al.'s (2005) book, *Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms*. I used this book to provide concrete support for my research study as well as other sources that are also used for evidence and confirmation.

Human subjects. In order to make sure that my research could take place without any issues, it was really important that I get consent from a few different parties. First, I needed to request a permission from the school district's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment to give me permission so that I can send a consent letter and a signed consent form to the school principal. Second, after the school district's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment gave me the permission then I sent a consent letter and a signed consent form to the school principal to be signed so that I can do my research at his or her building. Third, I needed to request my advisor's signature or an email stating approval of the Human Subjects Committee: Exempt (Short) Application will be accepted in lieu of a signature when I submitted my proposal to the School of Education Human Subjects Committee (HSC). Next, I needed to submit my research study proposal to the School of Education Human Subjects Committee (HSC) to review and approve my proposal so that I can do my research study. Finally, I needed to send the consent letters and the signed consent forms to school to be signed by teachers so that I

can interview them and conduct the survey with them for my research study. Teachers were the people that I interviewed them and did my survey with them so I ensured that they signed the consent forms and were willing to participate with my research study.

Chapter Three Summary

Chapter Three described the research method, academic assessment, academic assessment method, and instructional methodology. This chapter provided a lot of information and educational tools related to research study to help teachers build culturally responsive teaching with confidence when working with diverse students who come from different cultures and educational backgrounds. Chapter Four discusses the results of the research study, including a case study. I analyzed and summarized my final findings from the case study with teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

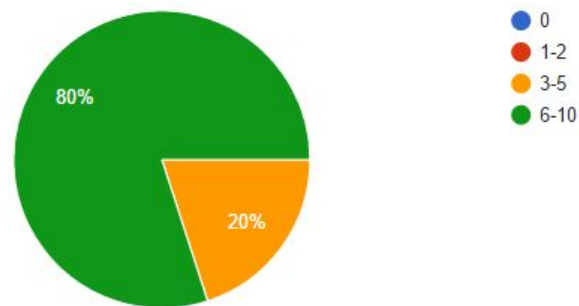
The purpose of the study was to promote culturally responsive teaching that will support educators or teachers with their teaching when they work with diverse students, especially Karen students. Also, the information in this chapter will explain and show the participants' responses to the survey questionnaires and interview questions based on the research question and the research topic. The research question for this study was: How do teachers or educators effectively apply culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students? The interview and survey portion of this case study was conducted with Urban Midwest Schools District's elementary school's teachers who teach in different grade levels from grades 3 to 5, including regular classroom teachers, EL teachers, and academic support teachers. All of these teachers were non-Karen educators. There were 7 teachers who participated in my interview study and 6 teachers who responded to my survey questions. The data collection took about 45 minutes for each interviewee and the survey took at least 2 minutes to complete with consent. There were 9 open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D) and 10 survey questions for my study (see Appendix C). The purpose of this case study was to gain the perspectives of teachers and educators who work with Karen students. This research study will help us to understand how to support Karen students to be successful in their learning. For the case study, the real names of the teachers or educators will not be used, but pseudonyms will

be used instead of the real names of the teachers or educators. This study took about 3 weeks in order to complete the interview with the teachers and educators.

Results from the Survey

There are 6 teachers who responded to my survey questions. All the survey questions are based on my research question. For the survey, I collected from third grade teachers through sixth grade teachers.

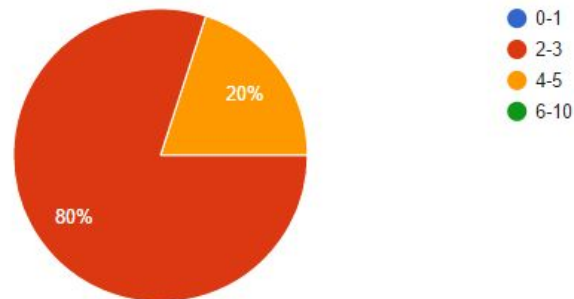
1. How many Karen students do you have in your classroom? (5 responses)



According to the responses from survey question 1, most of the classroom teachers have more than 5 Karen students in their classrooms and some teachers have less than 4 Karen students in their classrooms.

2. What is the average length of time (in years) your Karen students have been to the country?

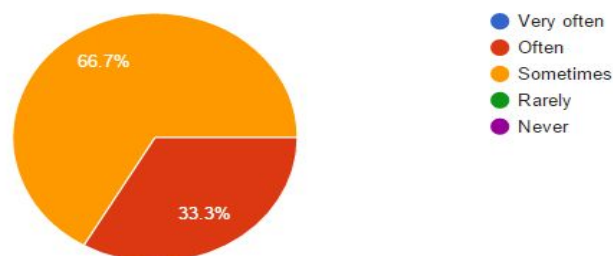
(5 responses)



Based on question 2, the data clearly indicate that the average length of time Karen students have been in the country is 2-3 years. Only a few Karen students have been in the country 4-5 years, so most of the Karen students have been in the country less than three years.

3. How often do Karen students volunteer to share their ideas to the whole class?

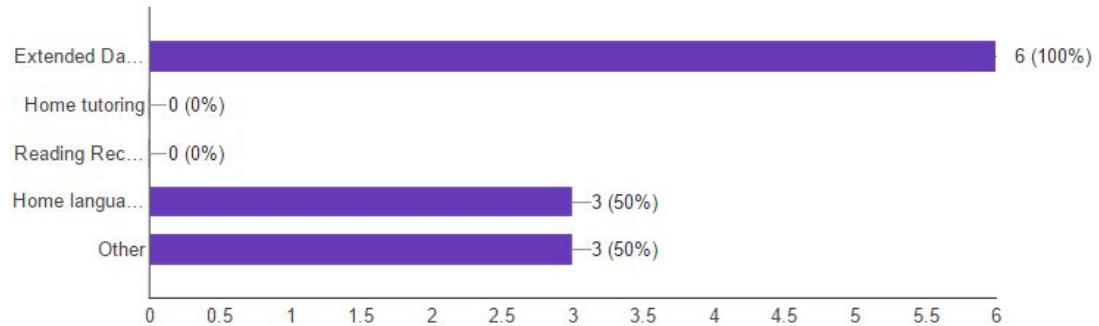
(6 responses)



According to question 3, the majority of Karen students sometimes volunteer to share their ideas with the whole class, and only a few Karen students often share their ideas with the whole class.

4. What resources and educational tools are available for English Language Learners? Please choose as many as apply.

(6 responses)



Based on question 4, six participants answered that English Language Learners received 100% of Extended Day for Learning (EDL) and three participants answered that 50% of home language support for Karen students. It means that especially EL Karen students get academic help in Karen language at least 15 minutes to 30 minutes in most of the day.

5. What resources and educational tools are available exclusively for Karen students? Please choose as many as apply.

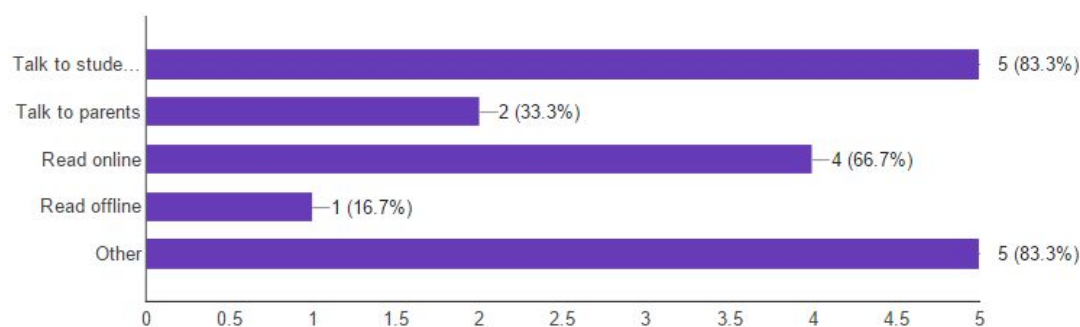
(5 responses)



Based on question 5, three participants answered that Karen students receive 60% of EDL and 60% of home language support. Other support included English Now, academic support teachers for 30 minutes during small group math learning, ESL teachers during writing, bilingual support (educational assistants, teaching assistants), and some books in their language.

6. How do you research, study or learn about Karen culture? Please choose as many as apply.

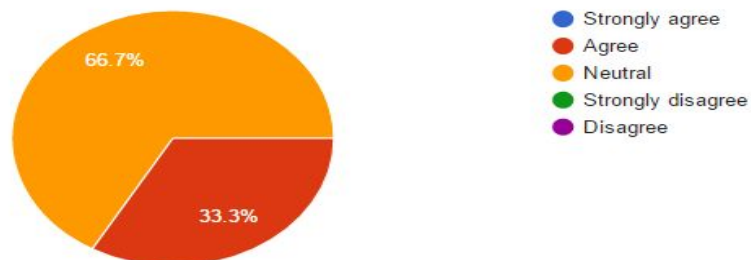
(6 responses)



Five teachers or educators learn about Karen culture through talking to students and other sources (talking to Karen staff, district training and travel) according to question 6. Four teachers read online, two teachers talked to parents and one teacher read offline to learn about Karen culture in order to help them with their teaching.

7. I plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped my students' learn.

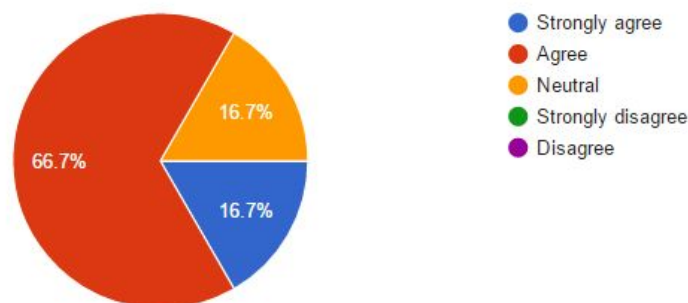
(6 responses)



Survey question number 7 showed that four participants are neutral to plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped their students' learn, and two participants agreed that they plan and assess to determine culturally responsive teaching practices have helped their students' learning.

8. I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultures and experiences.

(6 responses)

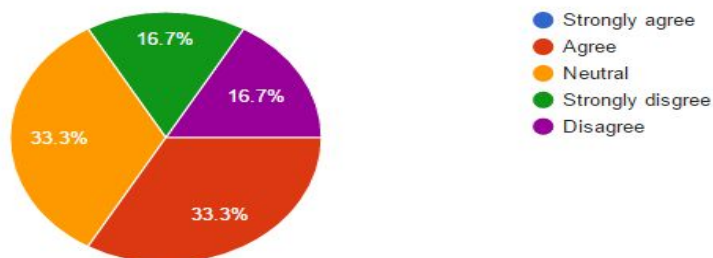


Based on survey question 8, four participants agreed that they plan their lessons to capitalize on their students' cultures and experiences. One teacher strongly agreed that he

or she planned his or her lessons to capitalize on his or her students' cultures and experiences.

9. The books, handouts, and other materials that I use to teach reflect multicultural awareness, including Karen culture.

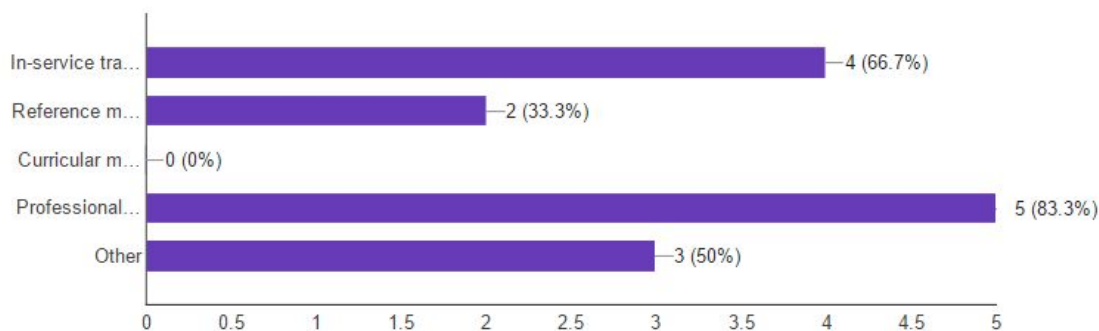
(6 responses)



Survey question 9 showed that two participants agreed that the books, handouts, and other materials that they use to teach reflect multicultural awareness, including Karen culture, but one participant strongly disagreed and one participant disagreed with the books, handouts and other materials that they used to teach reflect multicultural awareness, including Karen culture.

10. Have you ever received any support to help you understand how to work with Karen students effectively? Please choose as many as apply.

(6 responses)



According to question 10, four teachers answered that they have received in-service training to help them understand how to work with Karen students effectively and five teachers have received through professional development. Three teachers responded that they have received support to help them understand how to work with Karen students effective through asking Karen staff and colleagues. Two teachers have received support from reference material and work. However, curricular materials did not support teachers to work with Karen students effectively.

Overall, the survey showed that the Karen students who attend the Urban Midwest Elementary School (pseudonym) receive educational tools that will support them through their studies. Most of the classroom teachers plan their lessons to capitalize on their students' cultures and experiences in order to help students succeed in learning. In addition, the teachers of Urban Midwest Elementary Schools have learned about Karen cultures in many different ways in order to support them when they work with Karen students.

Results of Interview Questions

Based on my interviews with participants, I analyzed and discussed the significant interview results in the following paragraphs.

Question one. The common findings from question one that I have received from all participants: What unique benefits do Karen students bring to your classroom? The unique benefits that Karen students bring to the classrooms, include a positive behavior, cooperative attitude, cheerful attitudes, and are very open to learn and work together with other diverse students. Teachers reported that Karen students are highly motivated to

learn and appreciated each other. They prefer to work with partners and in small groups to support one another; also they understand the need of flexibility and patience. They bring a spirit and the desire to learn and they want to do well. They recognize school as an opportunity to access many things in life to improve their skills and achieve in their studies. Moreover, they bring a strong curiosity and a self-discipline to challenge themselves to try new things and take risks. In addition, Karen students also bring their cultural knowledge and a different perspective, different worldview, and new language into the classrooms and the school. They actively remember different sights, smells, sounds that American born students will need help to understand; they bring bicultural, bilingual and trilingual skills into the classrooms, and they are used to hearing and speaking a variety of languages such as Burmese, Thai, Pwo Karen and Sgaw Karen. The unique benefits that Karen students bring into the classrooms are beneficial to teachers so that they do not have to travel to other countries to learn another culture. However, Karen students also bring new challenges into the classrooms which means they may need extra support from the English Language Learners department to provide an academic language program for them.

Question two. What unique challenges do Karen students bring to your classroom? The common findings on question two showed that it is harder to accelerate learning for Karen students than it is for Spanish speaking students because Karen and English are so different (characters, words, and grammar structure). Also, another challenge can be fragmented schooling experiences (some students have been to schools and some have not); it is very hard to jump into school in fourth grade if you do not read

and speak English well and if students have had interrupted education in general. Some of them often do not read and write their language. Educators reported that based on educational background of Karen students, it takes time to catch up with their mainstream students. Karen students usually are below grade-level in the areas of reading, writing, and math due to schooling experiences. In addition, the language barrier of the dominant language and the lack of the background of the students in regards to their language, culture and social norms, educators do not know about the culture and how they can interact better with Karen students. Moreover, some Karen students from birth to age 5 have had to deal with health issues like sickness, malnourishment and malaria. Similarly, Karen students suffered traumatic pasts and mental health issues, and their families have experienced war, economic hardship, and loss of family members. These traumatic experiences also affected Karen students' learning and academic growth so it can be challenging emotionally and economically to adjust to a new country.

Questions three and four. What kinds of culturally responsive teaching strategies do you currently apply to ELLs? Are there some kinds of culturally responsive teaching strategies that you exclusively apply to Karen students? The common results from questions three and four showed that educators or teachers looked at individual students' cultural backgrounds and home language when they applied culturally responsive teaching to ELLs and Karen students. They also looked at students' progress, not deficit, so they can teach students to be successful in learning. In addition, they use simple words; mainly with new to country Karen students and language academic students, instead of using grade level academic language as well as using pictures and

doing a lot of language scaffolds and body language to support students. Educators or teachers also helped students to understand by connecting to students' pictures and asking them to tell us those words in the Karen language, and then turn and talk in their native language. They encourage students to express their thinking for their first language and then with another speaker to work together to come out with their words in English. Moreover, teachers helped students look at the culture of each book read and compare that culture to theirs. Educators or teachers used cultural references in learning and solicited cultural sharing to support students. They tried to find different ways to create social-emotional connections with their students. They mixed Karen students with first year language academic students with other Karen students who have been in the U.S. longer to help them and guide them. Furthermore, teachers applied incorporating a variety of cooperative routines: partner work/group work, write-pair-share. There are three different strategies that teachers have applied with their responsive teaching, including call and response, teacher-students learning partnership, and contact and conferencing with students. They gave students opportunities to reflect upon their understanding about what is being taught and working on what they have and what they know. Teachers also modelled for students what they want them to do and set a very clear expectation about how to do it. In order to engage students and teach concepts, teachers used movement, music and visual images, including charts and graphic organizers.

Question five: What do you think are the best ways to help ELLs succeed? In order to help ELLs succeed in learning, educators and teachers emphasized that students should come ready to school everyday and attend class everyday. Teachers said that they

have a lot of potential and they can do it; they are motivated to learn at their own pace, at their own levels where they start at. Also, the students need to understand that speaking more than one language is a sign of cleverness, not shame. Educators reported that EL students need to understand that effort will lead to success and they must have patience, self-determination and always challenge themselves. In addition, it is very important for the students to know that when their parents cannot speak English they have to take care of themselves, become independent and self-determine for themselves. Moreover, lessons need to be comprehensible; and we need to teach them structure to use and how to do the first thing in the classroom. As teachers, we need to encourage them to watch and to do, listening and doing except for reading. Students need a lot of practice to develop their skills and will be able to understand the contents of the subjects and topics. Also, as teachers we need to honor students' ideas of their experiences so that they will feel more confident to share their ideas with other students. In addition, teachers also teach students sentence starters and using these sentence starters consistently in order to help students develop their skills and understand how to start writing the sentences. The scaffolds need to change as the students' skills increase; they need appropriate scaffolds to help them access and understand grade level material. So, one method of instruction and speed of progression will not globally fit all students. One of the best ways to help students is to get people of all ages, teachers, TAs (teaching assistants), EAs (educational assistants), volunteers or whoever represents students to help as well. These people need to work together to help students succeed in their academic learning. Also, extra support,

co-teaching and academic support in the classroom mean more opportunities to help kids succeed.

Question six. What do you think are the best ways to help Karen students succeed? According to interviewees, the best way to help Karen students succeed is basically having a partnership with the families so they know what is expected from the school and what the kids are learning. Teachers said that communication between the teachers, families, and the students having the partnership and everybody is working together to help students. As teachers we need to motivate Karen students to work harder because they do not have anyone else, just themselves. The bottom line for them is for teachers to give students their time because Karen students who recently are new to the country will take time to develop their skills and improve their academic skills. Moreover, teachers also mentioned that we always need to build strong relationships with students to feel comfortable to ask questions when they need something or they don't understand what to do. Being really positive is very important for teachers, and really paying close attention to what they see in the child so they will know how to work with him or her effectively and meet his or her needs. In addition, teachers need to encourage Karen students to bring their language and culture to the classroom. Also, teachers need to learn the background knowledge of the students and connect new content to their background knowledge. For this case, teachers will understand how to engage their students in learning and increase their understanding of the concept of the subject. Similarly, teachers need Karen language books and a reading curriculum to teach students to read and learn about their own culture. So, it will support Karen students to

learn their culture and engage more in learning. Several teachers stated it might be also great if schools continue to build outreach programs and in school program that honor Karen culture.

Question seven. Based on your experiences, what do you think are the most important things you have learned about Karen culture that have supported your teaching of Karen students? The results show that educators or teachers that emphasize learning Karen history and culture will help them to effectively work with Karen students. Teachers learned that the culture might include learning how their names are structured and what they stand for helps us compare it to other cultures that use the same form for naming their children. Karen people do not have last names so it is important to call students by their full names and not drop the last part of their names. It is also important to know that Karen people have different groups and speak different dialects. Similarly, learning about the Karen sentence structure, grammar, the holidays and music helps teachers with teaching strategies. It is also good to know the importance of dance and how it is used to strengthen community relationships as well as an artistic expression of cultural pride and value within the Karen community. Some teachers shared their experiences about understanding the background story of each student that comes into the classroom as the most important piece of information. When the Karen students share their perspective and culture with the class, it opens up a windows for the students who are not Karen. In addition, Karen students are very hospitable, very humble, curious, and it gives a sense of one thing to improve teachers. They can be very funny, outgoing, happy, and comfortable with people, lot of Karen kids like to touch, like give hugs and

when they sit on the floor they like to lean in and get closer to you. As teachers we always respect the Karen students. Some of them who come to the U.S. have no school experience, and school is not natural for them. So, understanding that often Karen student's education has a lot of rote learning that has helped teachers create activities that feel comfortable for Karen students and give them a sense of accomplishment as they learn English.

Question eight. What are barriers or challenges that exist in implementing culturally responsive practice? Teachers mentioned that curriculum and schedules are challenges that exist in implementing culturally responsive practice. Teachers said they may be accepting the diverse cultures, but they are not adjusting curriculum. For example, teachers may accept and be welcoming students, but may not be adjusting themselves to teach culturally responsive with/to the students. Our educational system does not allow the time for building relationships without sacrificing the pacing of content. Teachers tried to find the time that is needed to adapt or supplement the current curriculum. It might be great if the district has more classes on the Karen culture because they have limited knowledge of students' culture. Teachers suggested that Karen folktales be translated into English to use with Karen students in order to support students to connect their ideas of what they already know. Moreover, teachers feel that they cannot communicate directly with the Karen parents because of language barrier. In addition, teachers felt that the general populations and our leaders need to be educated about the culture of the Karen people because not a lot of people know about them. Also, political

parties, social services, and community leaders need to be aware more about Karen culture.

Question nine: Is there anything about the Karen culture and language that you would like to learn more about? Why? Educators or teachers would like to learn more about Karen foods, customs, folktales, significant events, ceremonies, and more history. One teacher would like to know more about Karen “Deep Culture,” in relation to the work of Zaretta Hammond, whose work is being used by staff at the school. Deep culture is “the worldview, core beliefs, and group values” in order to help us know how to create a classroom environment that recognizes and supports these perspectives and values. Also, they would like to learn about the roles of men and women in Karen culture in order to help us to practice culturally responsive teaching in terms of gender. Similarly, educators or teachers would like to learn more about family dynamics or interpersonal dynamics, addressing the parents; also the tradition that makes the family unique. It might include family functioning, support system, family and community support for each other; how does the community form the networking to support each other? They would like to know more about communication styles, including communication styles between school officials and the parents.

The Overall Results from the Interview Questions

Overall, my research study found that teachers reported that Karen students are highly motivated to learn and appreciate each other. Also, teachers felt they brought unique benefits to the classrooms, including Karen culture, language, clothes, foods, and biculturalism. In addition, most Karen students are bilingual speakers or trilingual

speakers. Furthermore, they have been living with diverse communities when they lived in Burma or Thailand, and they understand what a diverse community looks like. Karen students also have cheerful attitudes and are curious and very open to learning new things.

However, Karen students also bring barriers and challenges to the classrooms, including lack of school experiences or little school experiences in the refugee camps. One of the biggest challenges is when Karen children come to the United States and, even though they have never been to school back in their native country, they are placed at appropriate grades based on their ages. It is very hard for these Karen students to catch up with other students due to no school experiences, no academic experiences, and the English language barrier. Some of them do not even know how to read and write their Karen language. Also, my research study found that some of the challenges that Karen students bring into the classrooms include lack of common language, social norms, traumatic past, mental health issues, their families' experiences of war, economic hardship, loss of family members and culture.

Moreover, according to the interview questions three and four show that teachers applied several culturally responsive teaching strategies to help students succeed in learning, including providing visual aids (pictures, charts, and graphic organizers), simplifying the words, incorporating a variety of cooperative routines, partner work, group work, writing pair-share, and encouraging students to use their first language when doing turn and talk; teachers applied different strategies to meet and fit with Karen students' needs. They use simple words to help Karen students understand the concepts

of the topics and lessons. They use pictures or images to support students to make connections and tell about these pictures in their own language. Teachers applied this strategy to help students engage and improve their thinking skills and learning. Some of the teachers said that they tried to learn about their students' education, their cultural background and language structure or grammar in order to help them know how to plan the lessons to be appropriate and relevant to their students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Based on interview question, seven teachers mentioned that learning Karen history, culture, sentence structure and grammar are very important for them to support them with working with Karen students. Furthermore, teachers added that learning how their names are structured and what they stand for help them to make Karen students feel comfortable in the classrooms. In addition, teachers also responded that understanding the background story of each student that comes into the classroom is the most important piece of information to help teachers with guiding and supporting students to succeed in school.

Also, based on the interviews, teachers mentioned that curriculum and schedules are challenges that exist in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices at their school. One of the participants emphasized that the school should have Karen folktales that are translated into English to use with Karen students. In addition, the research study indicated that the educational system does not allow the time for building relationships without sacrificing the pacing of content.

According to the interviews, I found that most of the participants are willing and interested to learn about Karen culture, including foods, customs, folktales, significant events, ceremonies, and history in order to support them when they work with Karen students at their school. In addition, these participants would like to learn more about communication styles between school officials and the parents. It might include family functioning, support systems, family and community support for each other. How does the community form a network of support for each other? Based on the interview, I also found that a teacher recommended that Karen parents should have an affinity group in Urban Midwest Schools District's elementary to discuss issues their students face in this school and help the teachers come up with solutions to help Karen students succeed in their studies. One of the participants suggested that the teachers could possibly live with Karen families, Hmong families or Latino families in order to understand and help teachers know how they live so that teachers will know how to help students succeed in school. Therefore, all of the participants would like to learn more about Karen culture in order to support them with their teaching so that they can help their students succeed in their classrooms.

Chapter Four Summary and Chapter Five Overview

In Chapter Four, I analyzed and summarized the results of my data collections, including both interview questions and survey questions that I received back from the seven participants who work with Karen students at Urban Midwest School District's elementary school. The results of my case study showed that all of the participants have applied culturally responsive teaching when they work with Karen students and they also

use different culturally responsive teaching strategies that meet with Karen students' needs and cultures in order to support Karen students to be successful in their learning. Also, my study showed that these teachers learned about Karen culture that will help them with planning the lesson plans and create cooperative classroom instructions that fit with students' needs and improvements. Therefore, all of the outcomes or results from my research study are outlined and highlighted on Chapter Four, including the perspectives and experiences of 7 different teachers. The next chapter will be Chapter Five, and it will conclude the whole project of the capstone, including the research study and information that the researcher has learned through the capstone process.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers or educators effectively applied culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Karen students. In chapter five, I review and address my research project, including what I have learned through my capstone process, as a researcher. In addition, I want to answer the questions that I have received from the participants during my research study process, including the questions that the participants would like to know about some of Karen cultures such as family dynamics, roles of gender, and communication styles.

The previous chapter four discussed the results of the data collection that took place at an Urban Midwest Elementary School between the second week of May and the first week of June, 2016. In this chapter, I present major findings, limitations, answering the feedback and questions from the participants, and conclusion.

Major Findings

Based on the literature review, my experiences as a cultural insider, my experiences as teacher, and the interview responses, below are my four major findings.

Culturally responsive teaching. During my capstone research study, I have learned that the participants applied a variety of effective culturally responsive teaching strategies that helped their Karen students succeed in their classrooms. Based on interview questions three and four, teachers looked at individual students' cultural backgrounds and home language in order to identify and recognize the need of students.

Additionally, the teacher-participants also learned each student's educational backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses in order to help them with planning lessons, and provide the right educational tools and support to students.

Cooperative instructional strategies. Based on interview question one, I also found that teachers applied positive behavior, cooperative attitude, group work, partner work, and learning to work together with other diverse students. Teachers used cooperative instructional strategies in their classrooms in order to engage diverse students to share their thinking and ideas with other students. Also, they mixed students from different cultural backgrounds to work together and support one another to achieve their goals. I strongly support cooperative instructional strategies that teachers have applied to engage students in learning.

Family partnerships. According to interview question six, I found that one of the best ways to help Karen students succeed is basically having the partnership with the families so they know what is the expected from the school and what the kids are learning. Also, communication between teachers, families and the students have strong partnership and everybody is working together to help students succeed in their learning. Teachers also encouraged Karen students who have been in the United States a little bit longer to help new coming Karen students with some interpretation. Moreover, teachers also learned about Karen culture, including basic words, traditional practices, and history in order to support them when they work with Karen students.

Resources. Based on interview question eight, the data also indicated that teachers found that there is very limited resources such as bilingual Karen books are not

available for both teachers and Karen students to use in the classrooms. Also, the data demonstrated that the participants found that the curriculum and schedule are challenges that exist in implementing culturally responsive practice and these challenges deeply impact the foundation of the participants' culturally responsive teaching practices.

Connections to Literature Review

Culturally responsive teaching was introduced by Ladson-Billings in 1994 and Gay in 2010. "Culturally responsive teaching defied conventions of traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color" (Gay, 2010, p. 36). Based on the interviews, teachers applied different culturally responsive teaching strategies when they worked with EL students and Karen students in order to help their students succeed in academic learning. Also, teachers learned about Karen culture to help them understand how to work effectively with Karen students who brought new culture into the classrooms. According to the interviews, some Karen students came to the classrooms with no school experience and school was not natural for them. It took time for them to adjust to their school life and to become familiar with daily learning routines, so teachers emphasized that it was very important to use nonverbal communication when they communicated to Karen students who cannot speak English and were new to the country. Moreover, teachers also said that they provided and gave students enough direction to actually be successful in their life. Teachers encouraged Karen students to bring their language and culture to the classrooms as well as gave them opportunities to share their perspective and culture with the class to open windows for the students who were not Karen.

In order to apply effective culturally responsive teaching to Karen students, teachers also emphasized that they needed Karen language books and a reading curriculum to teach students to read and learn about their own culture. Teachers believed that this culturally responsive teaching strategy will engage Karen students in learning when they learn their language and culture. In addition, students can make connections to their own experiences and connect new content to their background knowledge to develop their skills.

Limitations

Based on question number 8, the researcher found that the participants had limited knowledge of Karen culture, including the family communication system and family dynamics. Also, the participants found that the language barriers impacted the communication between Karen students and teachers. Instead of teachers directly using verbal communication to talk to the students, they have to use non-verbal communication to communicate with Karen students so that they can understand each other. However, the non verbal communication was not really effective to identify what students need and what they are interested in. Also, the participants felt that they cannot communicate directly to parents when they wanted to share great things or news about their children with parents. For example, if the kids did good things at school, the teachers wanted to directly share with parents so they will have a better relationship. Instead of direct communication with the parents, the teachers had to use Karen educational assistant or speaker to communicate with parents for them.

Moreover, the data also indicates that the teachers faced challenges when some of their Karen students lack school experience or had little school experience in Burma or Thailand. They were below grade-level in reading, writing, and math and they had a hard time to catch up with their peers. So, these are the limitations I found from the participants during my research study. The next section, it will be considered and discussed about implications.

Implications

Now, my small research study is completed, and the results and limitations that I learned through my capstone process has been presented. In this section, I will discuss instructional methodology, academic success, and language content of curriculum.

Instructional methodology. This study will help teachers or educators gain the skills and ideas they need to develop their own instructional methods that are relevant to Karen students. Osa, Nyana and Ogbaa (2006) stated that culture can be a veil that prevents us from understanding students from other backgrounds and cultures, and it also can prevent them from understanding us. Unfamiliarity with cultural communication differences can lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and even unintentional insults. These strategies can be used by all school staff members, including school libraries. Osa et al. (2006) emphasized that “School librarians need to develop certain competencies and sensitivities—beginning with an acknowledgement that these differences exist—before they can effectively interact with students from different cultures” (p. 22). So, it is very important to provide teachers with instructional methods

that are related to culturally relevant teaching. This instructional method will support teachers when they work with diverse students.

In summary, the study of an instructional methodology provides teachers or educators with educational tools about culturally relevant teaching, including academic success, cultural competency, and critical consciousness. These components will help teachers learn to improve their instructional methods and techniques to produce academic growth and achievement for different students.

Academic success. To help students achieve academic success, students must receive the tools and relevant resources to improve their own skills and understanding of what they learn. Furthermore, teachers need to develop their lessons to meet with students' needs. Robertson and Lafond (2008) suggested that, if possible, teachers build the native language content and literacy instruction in order to build on English. Otherwise, they should work on pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading strategies from current trends in literacy. The use of graphic organizers is very helpful to make learning visual and to incorporate thinking skills, and it can be done without any writing. Use reading logs and journals to incorporate reading and writing.

Language content of curriculum. In order to eliminate the academic achievement gap between English Language Learners and mainstream students, teachers should teach the content of language and curriculum that will increase the students' understanding of the concepts of the subjects. Moreover, the curriculum should be applied to accommodate the different learning styles of students. In Burma, children's

learning styles are not discussed (Gumaer, 2009). In the U.S., it would be good if the teachers discuss learning styles with their students in order to help the students discover their own preferred learning styles that will help them engage more successfully in learning and assist them to understand the concepts of subject and curriculum. Students will increase their understanding when they are allowed to use their learning style (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The content of a subject and curriculum should be compatible with students' learning styles and their unique culture. Students learn best when they can apply their own learning styles as they learn a new language and the new concepts of a subject. Lemov (2010) emphasized that great teachers engage students so that they feel like part of the lesson. School should be meaningful and purposeful, and that students should have choices in their learning (Henkin, 1998). Similarly, when working with Karen students, teachers should teach the language content that will help students to interpret the correct meaning. For example, the word “forest” to Karen students will be interpreted differently than a mainstream learner. Karen learners will interpret the word based on their past experiences during the war, and they may associate “forest” with war, fleeing, hiding, displaced, hungry, and escape, whereas American children will associate the word with trees, hiking, camping, and wild animals. In this case, teachers should adjust a curriculum to their students’ learning experiences in order to help them understand the content of the language used in a subject.

Shade et al. (2005) stated that the curriculum should be focused on expected cultural behavior or cultural norms such as completion and cooperation, individualism and collectivism, reticence and expressiveness, formality and informality, and

interactional and interpersonal interactions. These values will reflect on the climate, policy, and procedures designed to enforce cultural styles perceived as important (p. 82).

Therefore, instructional methods, academic success and the language content of curriculum need to be considered by the teachers in order to support them with their teaching when they work with Karen students. The next section, it will be about answering the feedback and questions from participants.

Answering the Feedback and Questions from Participants

Related to interview question nine stated that “Is there anything about the Karen culture and language that you would like to learn more about? Why?” In this section, I would like to answer the feedback and questions about Karen culture that I received back from the participants. It will include family dynamics, roles between gender, and communication styles.

Family dynamics. What makes a sense of community? What traditions make the family unique? What days are important for Karen people? All these questions are asked by participants who wanted to know about the family dynamics of Karen people. Karen people prefer to live together in the same community so that they can easily support one another. Even though the extended family prefers to live in the same house and share the rooms or spaces so that they can keep the family close and tight. The parents always want their children to stay with them whether they are married or not. Even if they are over 18 years old or are married, as long as their children are related to them, parents still support them financially and economically. The food, the clothes, the poems, and folktales always make the family unique. Karen people love gathering and invite all their friends

and neighbors to join with them. They frequently have a lot of social gatherings and family gatherings to keep them close together. So, hospitality and social gatherings make the family unique, as well. Especially, the Karen New Year is the most significant event for the family. Family members from around the country come back to celebrate the New Year together. During the whole week of the Karen New Year, the family members do not go to work, they are busy preparing themselves for the New Year day, including gathering, cooking for friends, visitors, and family members who visit from different places. The New Year brings back peace, love, collaboration and unity among the family members and in the community.

Roles of gender. What are the roles between female and male? How do the parents play their roles for their household or family? How do we address the parents? Now and then, female and male always share the roles to support one another. For example, men learn how to make the baskets and women learn how to make clothes. They work together in different parts of jobs in order to support each other and make the family successful. A husband and wife always work together as a team to make their family life successful and strong. The roles of the parents depend on the family. In some families, mothers are the head of the households and in some families, fathers are the head of the households. Also, in some families, both mothers and fathers are the head of households. It can depend on a husband or wife's preferences of who wants to be the head of household. The head of the household also depends on the experiences and knowledge of a husband or wife. If both agree to share their roles, both husband and wife are the heads of the household.

Furthermore, Karen children are never allowed to call and say their parents' names. Culturally, it is rude and impolite to say the names of their parents, so many Karen kids do not know their parents' name when you ask them. Similarly, they also have a hard time or hesitate to tell their parents' names to you even though they know their parents' names.

Communication styles or system. How do many Karen parents communicate and what is their communication styles between school officials and the parents? How do they communicate the issues that arise in the school? How do the families and communities support each other? How do the community form the network to support each other? These are very great questions that the teachers should know about. Due to the language barrier, Karen parents do not feel comfortable or do not have confidence to communicate directly with the school officials. They prefer to speak through interpreters. Parents who are new to the country and do not have experience with phone conversation, when they hear someone speak English on the phone they will hang up their phone. They will never call this number anymore unless they find someone who can speak English to call for them. In addition, they also have a hard time to follow the instructions on the phone, including leave the message, dial (1) for operator or English, dial (2) to for school attendance or even more. Following these instructions makes the Karen parents who cannot speak English more nervous and confused. If the parents want to communicate to the school officials, but no Karen workers at there; they will find someone who can speak English to call for them and talk with the school officials. If they cannot find any person, they might forget or ignore it.

Moreover, if the parents receive any messages or letters from the school, they will try to find someone to read for them and interpret for them in Karen language. If they know any Karen staff working at the school, they will contact Karen staff first about the school issues. If there is no Karen staff, they will find someone to help them. However, some of the parents do not care about the school issues due to lack of school experiences, educational backgrounds, cultural and language barriers. However, most of the families will find their way to communicate with school. They will go to social services or non-profit organizations to help them with school issues.

Back in Burma or Thailand, Karen people use word-of-mouth and personal selling communication tools to communicate to one another. Personal selling communication tool means that community people walk to the neighbor houses and tell other people about the news because there are no radio, television or internet to broadcast the news to the communities. Also, the community leaders call a meeting to share the news to the whole communities and ask all people who come to the meeting to share the news to other people who are not able to come to the meeting. If any issues happen in the community, everybody knows about the news. They do not have the radios, televisions, internet or the newspapers to read what happens around them back in Burma or Thailand. They just depend on one another to receive the news and to know about what happens in the community or around them. A lot of Karen parents do not even know how to read and write their own language so they learn the news from their friends, neighbors or other people. For example, if one or two people know about what happens, they share with their families or friends, and then their families or friends spread the news to other

families or friends so that the news will be spread all over the community. Everybody, including children, youths, and adults will know about what happens. This is the way that Karen people communicate and spread the news in their community. In addition, the community leaders and religious leaders share the news and events through community gatherings, churches, and monasteries. These are the communication styles and system that Karen people use to communicate to one another.

Karen people believe that community is a place where everyone lives and works together to promote peace, unity and prosperity as well as to support one another and build a strong community for the next generation. Places like churches, monasteries, or Karen community organizations play huge roles to bring Karen people together to form networks in order to support one another and build a strong community for their people. In addition, significant Karen events like the New Year, Karen Wrist-tying, Karen National Day and Karen Martyr Day, bring more Karen people to collaborate and support each other. Similarly, Karen community sport tournaments can also play a huge role to link Karen people to form networking among youths, men and women to support one another. Therefore, more Karen people (children, youths and adults) get involved and engage in the community because of churches, monasteries, significant events and sport tournaments.

In addition, in order to help Karen students succeed in learning, we need to motivate and encourage them to study hard. Also, they need extra support in the classrooms to improve their academic skills and increase their English language skills (reading, writing, and speaking). My research study found that Karen students need to be

encouraged to bring their language and culture to the classroom so they can share with other students and teachers to learn and understand about Karen culture. It will help both teachers and non-Karen students to break down cultural barriers in the classroom communities. Also, teachers should always build a strong relationship with students to feel comfortable to ask questions and engage in learning activities. Similarly, teachers need Karen language books and a reading curriculum to teach students to read and learn about their own culture.

The school needs to find the time that is needed to adapt and supplement the curriculum; and actually acquiring culturally responsive curriculum. Also, political parties, social services, and community leaders need to be aware more about Karen culture and need to be educated about the culture of the Karen people because not a lot of people know about it. It might be great if the school district has classes on the Karen culture for teachers.

Conclusion

When I review and summarize the results of my research study I have learned that all participants challenge themselves to learn about Karen culture in order to provide culturally responsive teaching that fits with Karen students' needs. It is very important for teachers to understand the culture of their Karen students so that they will know how to educate them to be successful in school. Rong and Preissle (2009) suggested that "To build rapport and model learning, teachers and support staff who work with ELL learners should learn some phrases and expressions in the languages that their students speak" (p. 88). Teachers should learn about their refugee students who bring different cultural

background in their classrooms, including language, background education, and family stories. These background knowledge and experiences will support teachers with teaching and lesson plans. Here are the recommendations that schools need to be considered for further study.

- Schools should focus to work more with Karen community organization in order to understand how to provide a better service and program for Karen students. Weinstein-Shr & Quintero (1995) suggested that schools should collaborate with community leaders and seek to understand the differences and similarities among the partner agencies (p. 23 & p. 33).
- Schools should consider to work with social services so that they will know how to help immigrant or refugee children to find available resources to improve their economic conditions, health care and language learning (Rong & Preissle, 2009).
- Schools should consider to develop and implement culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in order to meet with Karen students' needs and improvement. Rong & Preissle (2009) emphasized that "Asian children from non-Western cultures who are asked to study only European values and history many perceive their own cultural heritage as unimportant or inferior; even history textbooks and cultural activities with Asian history included tend to focus on Chinese and Japanese history and tradition but neglect the other Asian groups" (p. 163).

- Schools should advocate educators and school staff to learn about diverse cultures of students so they will prepare themselves when they have new diverse students in their classrooms.
- Schools should identify the impact of culture on the psychosocial and educational needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse children and family
(Gopaul-McNicol & Thomas-Presswood, 1998, p. 1)

Finally, when I am done with my research study at Urban Midwest Schools District's elementary schools' teachers, I learned that practicing culturally responsive teaching in the classroom is very important to help diverse students to improve their skills and studies. Teachers need to receive more cultural classes in order to help them to provide effective culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. So, I found that the recommendations above are very significant topics that will help me to find out more for my further study in order to understand how these recommendations will benefit with practicing culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. To share these important findings, I will share with staff at my school. I will make myself available to staff at other schools in the district, share with Saint Paul Public Schools, and submit an article to MinneTESOL.

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Appendix A

Minnesota Home Language Questionnaire

Dear Parents and Guardians:

In order to help your child learn, your child's teachers need to determine which language your child uses most. Please respond to the questions below by checking the appropriate box.

1. Which language did your child learn first? English Other (specify):

2. Which language is most often spoken in your home? English Other (specify):

3. Which language does your child usually speak? English Other (specify):

PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION

I hereby verify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Name (Printed)

Signature – Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix B

SIFE (Students Interrupted Formal Education)

What are SIFE students?

- SIFE students are defined as newcomers from other countries to the U.S. and these SIFE students who have been to schools in their native countries just two or few years then they move to the U.S. (Robertson and Lafond, 2008).

- SIFE students are also defined as students who have attended U.S. schools since kindergarten but have language and literacy gaps due to ineffective instruction (Robertson and Lafond, 2008).

- SIFE students are also defined as students have attended school in one location for a few months, then moved to another location for a few months, and perhaps had some weeks in between these changes when they did not attend school (Robertson and Lafond, 2008).

Appendix C

Survey Questions

1. How many Karen students do you have in your classroom?
 - A. 0
 - B. 1-2
 - C. 3-5
 - D. 6-10

2. What is the average length of time (in years) your Karen students have been to the country?
 - A. 0-1
 - B. 2-3
 - C. 4-5
 - D. 6-10

3. How often do Karen students volunteer to share their ideas to the whole class?
 - A. Very often
 - B. Often
 - C. Sometimes
 - D. Rarely
 - E. Never

4. What resources and educational tools are available for English language learners? Please choose as many as apply.
 - A. Extended Day for Learning (EDL)

B. Home tutoring

C. Reading recovery

D. Home language support, please write _____.

5. What resources and educational tools are available exclusively for Karen students? Please choose as many as apply.

A. Extended Day for Learning (EDL)

B. Home tutoring

C. Reading recovery

D. Home language support, please write _____.

6. How do you research, study or learn about Karen culture? Please choose as many as apply.

A. Talk to students

B. Talk to parents

C. Read online

D. Read offline

E. Other, please write _____

7. I plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped my students learn.

A. Strongly agree

B. Agree

C. Neutral

D. Strongly disagree

E. Disagree

8. I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultures and experiences.

A. Strongly agree

B. Agree

C. Neutral

D. Strongly disagree

E. Disagree

9. The books, handouts, and other materials that I use to teach reflect multicultural awareness, including Karen culture.

A. Strongly agree

B. Agree

C. Neutral

D. Strongly disagree

E. Disagree

10. Have you ever received any support to help you understand how to work with Karen students effectively?

A. In-service training

B. Reference materials

C. Curricular materials

D. Professional development

E. Other, please write _____

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. What unique benefits do Karen students bring to your classroom?
2. What unique challenges do Karen students bring to your classroom?
3. What kinds of culturally responsive teaching strategies do you currently apply to ELLs?
4. Are there some kinds of culturally responsive teaching strategies that you exclusively apply to Karen students?
5. What do you think are the best ways to help ELLs succeed?
6. What do you think are the best ways to help Karen students succeed?
7. Based on your experiences, what do you think are the most important things you have learned about Karen culture that have supported your teaching of Karen students?
8. What are barriers or challenges that exist in implementing culturally responsive practice?
9. Is there anything about the Karen culture and language that you would like to learn more about? Why?