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Letter from the editor

New and exciting things are happening at ACT. The online world has opened to us all in ways we could not have imagined only a few years ago. The ways in which we find and consume information continue to evolve. To adapt to this real-time news, we have launched an dynamic blog available for advocates, practitioners, and scholars of constructivist research, theory, and practice. The blog features material that is applicable to educators at all levels of experience. You will find timely information about what is happening in constructivists classrooms around the world as well as information about the origins of our organization and the many scholars on whose shoulders we stand. We are excited to offer this vibrant format where constructivist theory, research, and practice is accessible to teachers in the field, preservice teachers, para-educators, and educational researchers alike.

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Critical Literacy, Transformative Pedagogies, and Muslim Windows and Mirrors in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Each school term I teach a course in Children's and Young Adult (YA) literature. The course is a requirement for students seeking certification in k-6 elementary education and k-6 special education but is also open to any student as a general education offering. This article will describe how the goals of the course, Constructivist teaching methodology, and purposeful text selection resulted in one student finding her voice and image as a Muslim woman mirrored in Children's literature.

Keywords: Children's literature, young adult literature, critical literacy, windows and mirrors

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Abstract

Each school term I teach a course in Children's and Young Adult (YA) literature. The course is a requirement for students seeking certification in k-6 elementary education and k-6 special education but is also open to any student as a general education offering. This article will describe how the goals of the course, Constructivist teaching methodology, and purposeful text selection resulted in one student finding her voice through and her image as a Muslim woman mirrored in text for the first time.

Establishing a Framework for the Course

I turned to the two leading professional organizations for literacy educators, The National Council for the Teaching of English (NCTE) and the International Literacy Association (ILA) to inform the rationale, framework, and goals for the course. The National Council for the Teaching of English, in their 2018 position statement "Preparing Teachers with Knowledge of Children's and Young Adult Literature" called on teacher education programs to "introduce preservice teachers to books for children and teens; develop preservice teachers' understanding of the inherent value of these books for both general reading and classroom use; raise preservice teachers' awareness of the power of these books to affirm lived experience, create empathy, catalyze conversations, and respect the questions, challenges, and emotions of childhood and adolescence; call preservice teachers to embrace the roles of reading advocate a book matchmaker alongside their work as implementers of curriculum; inspire preservice teachers to

commit to reading these books throughout their professional lives; cultivate in preservice teachers a commitment to teaching these books in ways that honor their literary quality as well as their potential to spark personal and social transformation; and, build preservice teachers' capacity for continued growth, learning, and development as advocates of children's and young adult literature" (2).

The International Literacy Association included the following in their 2019 research brief, "Right to Knowledgeable and Qualified Literacy Educators": "Literacy is not neutral. Rather, literacy is socially and culturally situated (Gee, 2015) and racialized (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Too often, literacies aligned with the dominant group are valued and assessed in schools while literacies from marginalized groups are often devalued (Delpit, 2006; Delpit & Dowdy, 2008). In this sense, schools, as sociocultural and political institutions, may act as colonial weapons that perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression (Emdin, 2016), but this reality does not have to be the case. Social justice education can and should be used as a force to challenge such inequities (Kumashiro, 2015). In fact, some believe that to assess and understand teacher quality, a lens of social justice education must be applied (Kumashiro, 2002)" (5).

The goals set by these two organizations are extensive, expansive and visionary – and critical throughout a teaching career. The question I asked myself was how best to set the groundwork for meeting these goal in one single undergraduate course comprised of majors and non-majors.

Setting Reasonable and Actionable Goals

Goal 1: Creation of Mental Bookshelves

My goals for this course are substantial in their significance. Only one of the goals is specific to preservice teachers. I want them to leave the course having built and filled virtual

bookshelves in their minds. I want them to develop a repertoire of high-quality, engaging, diverse texts for multiple purposes. I want them to know just what book to read aloud three weeks before they begin a teaching unit on animal habitats in order to build schema, establish common vocabulary, and create a bank of images for constructing new knowledge. I want them to have developed a broad enough mental collection of texts that they are waking repositories of the right book for the right reader at the right time.

Goal 2. Critical Literacy and Transformative Pedagogy

I want all students to develop and awareness of the ways in which children's literature can serve as a transformative tool, both in terms of comprehension and in supporting children in reading the world through reading the word (Freire, 1970/2000).

Kelly, Laminack, and Gould describe critical literacy as "an awareness, a consciousness about perspective, power, and intention. To become critically literate is to develop the ability to see and think about the story not told, the voice not honored, the information withheld, the message muted" (2). A second goal for the course is that students will learn to examine texts offered to children and young adults through the lens of critical literacy. I want them to think deeply about the substance of the books they are using to fill their "bookshelves." I want them to think deeply about the children into whose hands they will place these books. Do they reflect the lives of the children who will read them? Do they honor cultures and communities and families? Do they open windows or shut doors?

The demographics of the U.S. student populations have become increasingly racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, as indicated in reports by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), whereas the majority of teachers continue to be White females (NCES, 2018).

Central to the concept of critical literacy is the ability to recognize one's own position of power as a teacher or an adult in a child/adult relationship and one's own privilege or lack thereof.

At the turn of the 21st century, attention turned toward children's literature as a resource that could serve as cultural 'windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors' for students (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Cai & Bishop, 1994; Thomas, 2016). Bishop (1990) argued that books could offer readers mirrors in which to see their own faces, windows through which to examine their own reflection alongside a wider landscape and sliding glass doors for moving between their own viewpoint and that of another. It is only in critically examining books that undergraduate students can begin to understand the power and possibility that those books hold as tools in transformational pedagogy.

Goal 3. Falling in Love — Again or for the First Time

A third goal for the course is to have undergraduate students fall in love with books once again or for the first time. To do this, I serve in the role of book purveyor/matchmaker/benign book-drug dealer. I want to fill the room with delicious texts chosen just for them, match students to books that I think they will love and keep them on the hook for the next book and the next book and the one after that.

In their 2014 research article, "The Peter Effect Revisited: Reading Habits and Attitudes of College Students," Applegate et al. found less than half of all college sophomores surveyed could be classified as *Enthusiastic* readers and concluded huge numbers of college students are functionally alliterate — having the ability to read but choosing not to do so. Conventional wisdom would indicate that this would not be true of undergraduate preservice teachers. Surely potential teachers of reading and literacy must be readers themselves — hopefully enthusiastic and expansive readers. However, research indicates that undergraduate preservice teachers tend

to read no more than the general population (McKool & Gespass, 2009). Further compounding the problem, many teachers have never taken a course in children's or YA literature and colleges and universities are eliminating existing courses as states drop children's literature as a requirement for certification (NCTE, 2018). Each year, I conduct an anonymous survey in which I ask students to use a Likert scale to rate themselves on various aspects of reading against statements such as "I am a reader," and "I am currently reading a book for pleasure." These self-perception reports are used solely as supporting evidence for course effectiveness; however, the data from these informal surveys support that of Applegate et al. leading to some disturbing conclusions. The "Peter Effect" refers to the story in the Christian scriptures in which a beggar asks Peter for money and Peter replies that he can't give that which he does not have. It highlights the fact that teachers and other adult mentors cannot give to children that which they themselves do not have: an awareness of possible books, an awareness of and disposition to use books in ways which are characteristic of critical literacy and transformative pedagogy, or the ability to model a love for reading, literacy, and the written word.

And then...COVID-19

My typical modus operandi is to begin the academic term by building classroom community. I arrange desks into tables to facilitate conversation and close interaction. I place stacks of books on group tables and allow students to choose which books they would like to read. I do lots of book passes in which I model "sampling" a book by looking at the artwork, the author, the topic, the genre, the features of the book, deciding if I want to keep it or pass it to the next person at my table. I engage in frequent episodes of "book blessing" in which I personally place a book into the hands of an individual student based on something that I know or have

observed about the student. Each of these practices is supportive of critical literacy, yet each of these practices would be in violation of Covid-19 protocols. We were sitting in desks placed six feet apart. I was teaching from a designated space at the front of the room. We were all wearing masks and were entering and exiting the room using social-distancing practices. How was I to get books into the hands of students and keep all of us safe at the same time? Enter the two-gallon Ziploc bag and lots of course preparation time!

I began by asking students to tell me a little about their hobbies, their interests, and their academic pursuits. I then created personalized book-bags for each student. If you enjoy baseball, your bag may include a non-fiction book about Jackie Robinson, a book of baseball poetry, and two pieces of historical fiction featuring baseball players I think you might not recognize such as Jackie Mitchell, the young woman who pitched for the Chattanooga Lookouts and struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in a single day. This practice supported my class lectures about critical literacy, transformational pedagogy, and representation.

And then...a New Student

Meeting the goals for the course is difficult enough during a typical academic term with typical undergraduate students. Trying to help them build those bookshelves in their minds, finding ways to have them interact with texts as they come to construct understandings about the power of pedagogy, and the power of books as pedagogical tools, and developing a love or long-lost love of reading in order to model that disposition in practice are each lofty goals essential to the development of what Ruddell (1997) describes as *influential teachers.* A monkey-wrench was thrown into this already-difficult academic term when a new student joined my class — an international student who was learning English as a second language.

This student who I will call Sarah was the spouse of a young Ph.D. student at a local university. Her husband's educational subsidy provided by their home country included courses taken by his spouse. She chose to apply for coursework at our college because the student-teacher ratio was more supportive of her language abilities and language-learning goals and because the college offered more individual tutoring opportunities. She chose to enroll in education courses in anticipation of potentially teaching in a religious school when she and her husband returned home. She was not a degree-seeking student and did not intend to apply to the teacher education program. In our predominately-Caucasian, predominately-residential, predominately-Christian student body, she was an adult woman, a mother, a commuter, and an observant Muslim. And – by the way – I am an observant Jew and the wife of a rabbi.

Critical Literacy and the Building of new Bookshelves

Critical literacy and transformational pedagogy begin with an understanding of the lives of students regardless of their age. When we seek to know students, we send the message that they are worthy of knowing. This is critical for establishing a trusting and equitable classroom community and for cultivating agentive learners.

Through our classroom introductions and daily responses I learned that Sarah was mother to a young daughter. I learned that she didn't remember reading a book other than a school textbook, didn't remember having been read to by parents or by teachers, didn't consider herself a reader, didn't read for pleasure, and couldn't name any book written for children. She felt that the course would help her to learn to read English because the bulk of all reading would consist of books written for young people. My goals for her were consistent with those for all other students: read lots of books, add them to your mental bookshelves, learn a variety of ways to use

children's books for aesthetic and efferent purposes, and learn to examine children's books through a critical lens.

New Bookshelves

Books offered to readers should provide opportunities for ALL readers to see themselves, opportunities for ALL readers to see others, and opportunities to discuss the new understandings and possibilities which allow ALL readers to enter and exit one another's worldviews. In order to do this, school and classroom libraries must be representational of ALL readers. I once worked with a wonderful and well-meaning group of teachers in a rural Alabama school district. Their school was almost 100% Caucasian; over 80% of the school population received free or reduced lunch. They had a limited budget and wanted my help creating rich classroom libraries. I spent a few days with them, introduced them to authors, illustrators, and genres that they might consider. On the final day, they presented their book lists with rationale. I noted that almost all the books they chose featured Caucasian main characters. Their rationale was, on the surface, sound: they wanted the students to see themselves in the texts they chose; therefore they chose books set it rural locations featuring children who had similar experiences to the school population. They agreed that in an ideal world they would include books featuring black and brown characters, but since they had a limited budget they opted for mirrors over windows. I asked if they hoped that their students would go on to attend college or university. "Of course!" they answered. I asked if they hoped that their students would feel capable of attending college or university outside the South. "We sure hope so!" they responded. My final question hit the mark for which I was aiming: I asked if they felt like the books they chose provided windows for understanding and interacting with students very different from themselves if and when those interactions finally occurred.

I realized when Sarah became part of my classroom community that the mirrors and windows I provided my students did not adequately represent Muslim experiences or Muslim communities. I shared this with Sarah and asked her if she would help me to review and revise my library to better represent the Muslim community.

Antum Panjawani wrote, in support for creation of a higher education course in Muslim Children's Literature: "Lack of representational curricular materials gives rise to ignorance regarding large Muslim populations present in the schools. It marginalizes such students, resulting in them following the popular tropes offered by the educators in the classroom and exposure to the prevalent media outside the classrooms. Such an order defeats a balanced approach to teacher development programs too. For lack of such materials, teachers are left with almost negligible knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding teaching and connecting with Muslim and other minority students" (5).

"The absence of such classroom resources and the lack of wherewithal from the teachers to handle the cultural nuances of Muslim civilizations and societies may lead to 'a pedagogy that commits to making children receptive and docile, and is also one that denies human dignity and freedom'" (Kincheloe 2004, p. 98).

The books on my bookshelves were expansive in comparison to those Sarah had read. She had never seen a popular trade book for children which featured a Muslim child or a Muslim woman. What I did have on my shelf included *One green apple* by Eve Bunting, the *Meet Yasmin* series by Saadi Faruqi, *The day of Ahmed's secret* by Hiede and Gilliland, two beautiful books about Muslim shapes and colors by Hena Khan, and about a half-dozen others. We read the books independently and together, talked about the merits of each book, and decided whether to include each title as an accurate and appropriate representation of an aspect of Islam or of a

Muslim experience or culture. I increased my classroom resources exponentially with many more books on my "to purchase" wishlist. The growing list of holdings and wishlist is included as an appendix to this paper.

What happened because of my pedagogical and philosophical beliefs compounded by the teaching restrictions of Covid-19 and the inclusion of this unexpected yet delightful encounter culminated in a distillation of Critical Theory and Transformational Pedagogy. At the end of the term, I asked Sarah to share with me her thoughts about how or even if the course had been beneficial to her. She told me that the Saadi Faruqi books were her first experiences of reading an entire chapter book without having to look up any English words. She said that she suspected that it was because she *knew* the girl in the book – her experiences, her cultural and religious nuances. She didn't have to work at those things; she could spend her mental energy working on the words themselves. She talked about reading the books aloud to her daughter sharing her new ability to read fluent English in a text that controlled for her growing vocabulary while simultaneously mirroring the familiarity of her culture. She told me how proud she was to see and read about the girl that she was and that her daughter now is wearing a head covering and having conversations with her family and peers about the choice to do so. She told me that one of the best things about the class was that her classmates were learning to talk with her as a peer because the books as windows allowed them to see their similarities and not just their perceived differences. She timidly offered that she was terrified when she found out that I was a Jew – afraid to take the class; equally afraid to drop it. We had a laugh and an un-Covid sanctioned hug as women and as new friends. She left a note a few days after our final class thanking me for helping her find her voice and see her face in books for the first time. She has come back since to borrow books for reading with her daughter and declares herself a reader for the first

time. Building those bookshelves is the first step. Evaluating books for the stories told and untold is second. Using those texts to frame conversations about ourselves and others is the reason we read in the first place.

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thomas, E. E. (1994). Stories still matter:rethinking the role of diverse children's literature today. *language arts*, 112*119.

Appendix

Children's and YA Books Featuring Muslim Characters

Addasi, M. (2017). The white nights of Ramadan.

Ahmed, S. (2021). Amira & Hamza: The war to save the worlds (Amira & Hamza Book 1)

Ali, A.E. (2020). Our favorite day of the year.

Ali, S.K. (2021). Once upon an Eid: Stories of hope and joy by 15 Muslim voices.

Al Mansour, H. (2016). The green bicycle.

Applegate, K. (2017). Wishtree

Azia, S. (2021). Halal hot dogs.

Bunting, E. (2006). One green apple.

Cunnane, K. (2018). Deep in the Sahara.

Da Costa, D. (2008). Snow in Jerusalem.

Dumas, F. (2017). It ain't so awful, falafel.

Eliot, H. (2018). Ramadan (celebrate the world).

Faruqui, R. (2021) Amira's picture day.

Faruqui, R.(2015) Lailah's lunchbox: A Ramadan story.

Faruqui, S. (2020). A place at the table.

Faruqui, S. (2018). Meet Yasmin!

Faruqui, S. (2019). Yasmin in charge.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the teacher.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the builder.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the fashionista.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the painter.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the soccer star.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the friend.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the gardener.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the zookeeper.

Faruqui, S. (2020). Yasmin the chef.

Faruqui, S. (2020). You can do it, Yasmin!

Faruqui, S. (2020). Give it a try, Yasmin!

Faruqui, S. (2021). Yasmin the scientist.

Galat, J. M. (2020). The story of Malala Yousafzai: A biography book for new readers.

Gilani-Williams, F. (2017). Yaffa and Fatima: Shalom, salaam.

Gonzales, M. (2017). Yo soy Muslim: A father's letter to his daughter.

Hamza, N. (2021). Ahmet Aziz's epic year.

Heide, F. P. and Gilliland, J.H. 1995(). The day of Ahmed's secret.

Hiranandani, V. (2019). The night diary.

Hoffman, M. (2002). The color of home.

Ibrahim, H. (2020). What color is my hijab?

Javaherbin, M. (2019). My grandma and me.

Kassem, A. (2019). Magical land of birthdays (Book 1).

Kassem, A. (2020). The birthday basher (Book 2).

Khalil, A. (). The Arabic quilt: An immigrant story.

Khan, A. (2021). Amina's Song.

Khan, A. (2017). Amina's voice.

Khan, H. (2018). Bounce back: Zayd Saleem, chasing the dream (Book 3)

Khan, H. 2018(). On point: Zayd Saleem, chasing the dream (Book 2)

Khan, H. (2021). Crescent moons and pointed minarets: A Muslim book of shapes.

Khan, H. (2015). Golden domes and silver lanterns: A Muslim book of colors.

Khan, H. (2020). Like the moon loves the sky.

Khan, H. (2020). More to the story.

Khan, H. (2018). Night of the moon: A Muslim holiday story.

Khan, H. (2018). Power forward: Zayd Saleem, chasing the dream (Book 1)

Khan, H. 2017(). Under my hijab.

Khan, R. (2018). Big red lollipop.

Kuntz, D. and Shrodes, A. (2019). Lost and found cat: The true story of Kunkush's incredible journey.

Kyuchukov, H. (2004). My name was Hussein.

Langston-George, R. A. (2016). For the right to learn: Malala Yousafzai's story.

Lofthouse, L. (2007). Ziba came on a boat.

Malaspina, A. (2015). Yasmin's hammer.

Marsh, K .(2020). Nowhere boy.

Metler, C. (2021). Planting friendship: peace salaam, shalom.

Mian, Z. (2020). Planet Omar: Accidental trouble magnet (Book 1).

Mian, Z. (2020). Unexpected superspy (Book 2).

Mian, Z. (2020). Incredible rescue mission (Book 3).

Mobin, Uddin, A. (2017). A party in Ramadan.

Mobin-Uddin. A. (2005). My name is Bilal.

Muhammad, I. with Ali, S. K. (2017). The proudest blue: A story of hijab and family.

Nuurali, S. 2020(). Sadiq and the bridge builders.

Nuurali, S. (2019). Sadiq and the desert star.

Nuurali, S. (2019). Sadiq and the fun run.

Nuurali, S. (2020). Sadiq and the pet problem.

Nuurali, S. (2020). Sadiq and the Ramadan gift.

O'brien, A. S. (2018). I'm new here.

Oxley, J and Aronson, B. (2019). Peg and Cat: The Eid al-Adha adventure.

Pinkney, A. D. (2015). The red pencil.

Rafiq, N. (2018). Jannah Jewels book 1: The treasure of Timbuktu.

Rafiq, N. (2012). Jannah Jewels book 2: The chase in China.

Rafiq, N. (2014). Jannah Jewels book 3: Bravery in Baghdad.

Rafiq, N. (2014). Jannah Jewels book 4: Secrets in Spain.

Rafiq, N. (2015). Jannah Jewels book 5: Courage in Cordoba.

Rafiq, N. (2015). Jannah Jewels book 6: Mystery in Morocco.

Rafiq, N. (2016). Jannah Jewels book 7: Triumph in Turkey.

Rafiq, N. (2016). Jannah Jewels book 8: Adventure in America.

Rafiq, N. (2016). Jannah Jewels book 9: Surprise in Syria.

Rafiq, N. (2017). Jannah Jewels book 10: Intrigue in India.

Rafiq, N. (2017). Jannah Jewels book 11: Evidence in Egypt.

Rafiq, N. (2017). Jannah Jewels book 12: Unity in Uzbekistan.

Rashid. Q. (2021). Hannah and the Ramadan gift.

Rauf, O. Q. (2020). Boy at the back of the class.

Rauf, O. Q. (2020). The star outside my window.

Rauf, O. Q. (2020). The day we met the queen.

Robbins, S. J. and Yousafzai, M. (2018). Malala Yousafzai: My story of standing up for girls' rights.

Ruurs, M. (2005). My librarian is a camel: How books are brought to children around the world.

Saaed, A. (2020). Amal unbound.

Saeed, A. (2019). Bilal cooks daal.

Senzai, N.H. (2011). Shooting Kabul.

Soderberg, E. (2018). Disney's daring dreamers club: Milla takes charg.

Taylor, S. and the Khayaal Theatre. (2019). Riding a donkey backwards: Wise and foolish tales of Mulla Nasruddin.

Thompkins-Bigelow, J. (2018). Mommy's khimar.

Thompkins-Bigelow, J. (2020). Your name is a song.

Warga, J. (2019). Other words for home.

Whitman, S. (2011). Under the Ramadan moon.

Williams, K.L. and Mohammed, K. (2007). Four feet, two sandals.

Winter, J. (2009). Nasreen's secret school: A true story from Afghanistan.

Winter, J. (2019). The librarian of Basra: A true story from Iraq.

Wolf, B. (2003). Coming to America: A Mulsim family's story

York Lumbar, R. (2021). The gift of Ramadan.

Yousafzai, M. (2017). Malala's magic pencil.

Zalben, J. B. (2018). A moon for Moe & Mo.

Integrating Early Childhood Pedagogy into Elementary Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

Elementary teachers working with young children have a more thorough understanding of children's development and learning when they also have a strong background in early childhood education pedagogy, which is unfortunately often siloed from elementary teacher training. We documented and qualitatively analyzed the written reflections of a small cohort of licensed elementary teachers as they progressed through their own educational journey in learning how to integrate constructivist early childhood pedagogy into their current teaching beliefs and practices through a series of university courses. Thematic content analysis revealed major themes of change in teachers' practices, intent to change practices, challenges in implementing developmentally appropriate practices, among others. Results are discussed in the context of bridging the training and pedagogical divide between early childhood and elementary education philosophies and training systems, as teachers construct the beliefs and practices they implement in the classroom.

Integrating Early Childhood Pedagogy into Elementary Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Historically, the philosophies and pedagogies of elementary and early childhood education (ECE) have been situated in separate academic spheres. Elementary educator preparation has traditionally focused on preparing for the teaching of academic content, whereas early childhood educator preparation places emphasis on preparing teachers to facilitate child-led exploration guided by constructivist principles (Ritchie et al., 2009). The vignettes below illustrate the internal struggle of elementary school teachers as they grapple with newly learned core principles of early childhood pedagogy, specifically in terms of the active role children play in their own learning. But why is there this struggle?

Response: *I...wonder if...teachers don't feel like they are given choice therefore they don't feel inclined to offer children choice? In preschool classrooms children are offered more choice which fosters skills like self-regulation, eagerness to learn, social connections and making good choices as the authors discuss. If we allowed children choice, even a little bit, it would help to build skills necessary to become functioning citizens of society. Yet, teachers feel the need to control almost every aspect of a child's day and it seems they are almost afraid to trust children. I am not sure if this fear comes from within or if it has been forced upon them by the system.*

Response: *Yes, my views of teaching young children have changed quite a bit. Most dramatically through the lens of student choice and thinking about the curriculum through both student interest and standards. It seems logical, but I don't think I've spent much time considering the possibility of developing curriculum that is student-driven. This will impact the way that I interact and coach teachers. I also think this realization can help support curricular decisions that are being made in my department. With this new lens I'm also better able to make*

authentic connections with social emotional learning, culturally responsive practice, and family engagement in a natural and appropriate manner.

The transition from preschool to kindergarten takes place in the middle of the early childhood developmental period (birth to age 8). This transition is marked by major shifts in the learning environment and academic goals, placing increased demands on young children (Foster Steen, 2011; Holland et al., 2014; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Indeed, kindergarten is commonly referred to as "the new first grade" (e.g., Bassok et al., 2016). Most critically, at the heart of this split lies a paradigm shift in teaching philosophies (Ritchie et al., 2009), the consequence being a desperate mismatch between the values, beliefs, and practices from early childhood to elementary models of education. Developmental scholars, have long lamented (e.g., Walsh, 1989) the transition to kindergarten as too focused on academics at the expense of the whole child, and a split in the core beliefs and practices at this young age is not ideal for fostering children's learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Jackson et al., 2017; Lickess, 2008; Ritchie et al., 2009).

Elementary teachers working with young children (meaning K-3 grades) may have a more complete understanding of young children's learning when they integrate the beliefs and practices that undergird ECE pedagogy with their elementary training (Graue et al., 2004; Parker & Neuhart-Prtichett, 2006; Ritchie et al., 2009). For example, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) that center the child as an active creator of knowledge, and emergent curriculum in which the teacher capitalizes on children's natural interests to help them co-construct meaningful project work. Here, we present an investigation of a small cohort of licensed elementary teachers (teaching primarily kindergarten) as they moved through their own educational journey in the area of ECE pedagogy in a series of university courses. We used

qualitative thematic coding analysis to understand how this group of teachers conceptualized ECE pedagogy within the context of their elementary training beliefs, as well as how they incorporated this new knowledge into their classroom practices.

Early Childhood Pedagogy

The early childhood education (ECE) field draws on social constructivist philosophies (e.g., Piaget, Vygotsky) to conceptualize how children learn in the classroom (Murray, 2015). Constructivist theories situate children as active agents in their own development, recognizing that children draw on "physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understanding of the world around them" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 13). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers guidelines for early childhood teachers about developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) that reflect this constructivist viewpoint (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The guidelines state that young children need active experiences with materials and others in the classroom, which are to be informed by the teacher's knowledge of child development as well as each child's individuality and sociocultural context. Early childhood pedagogy also places great emphasis on children's ownership of the learning process (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Learning opportunities in the classroom are often led by the child (instead of the teacher), leaving room for children's interests to guide curriculum planning. During the emergent curriculum process, teachers facilitate activities according to children's "needs, interests, and abilities" while also incorporating early learning standards to meet academic goals (Cassidy et al., 2003). That is, rather than starting with standards and moving to lesson planning, early childhood educators often start with children's interests and integrate standards into the curricular activities. For example, in a project focused on children's interest in dragonflies, a group of children might be

focused on studying and documenting dragonfly behavior (literacy), while another might be focused on categorizing the parts of a dragonfly (science, mathematics), and perhaps the project culminates with the group creating a dragonfly model using various recycled materials (science, art, social/emotional).

Empirical studies support DAP and emergent curriculum as effective ways to support young children's learning (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Cornelius-White, 2007; Frede et al., 1993; Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Schweinhart et al., 1986; Stipek et al.,1995). In a seminal study, Stipek and colleagues (1995) examined the learning outcomes of preschool and kindergarten children in didactic versus learner-centered classrooms. Even though the children in highly didactic classrooms scored higher on measures of literacy than children in learner-centered classrooms, multiple measures of motivation toward learning were universally and significantly lower for the children in didactic classrooms, making a strong case for giving children space to play an active role in the inquiry process as a way to cultivate motivation for lifelong learning. A meta-analysis including over 300,000 children also found that many elements of child-centered education such as respectful relationships, non-directivity, adapting to unique child differences, and constructivist teacher beliefs were associated with positive cognitive and behavioral student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Moreover, in comparison to teacher-directed approaches, child-centered teaching practices have been associated with improved math and reading development across first grade, even when children vary substantially in initial math and reading skill levels (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Further, for children entering first grade with average to high initial reading skills, teacher-directed practices *negatively* impacted children's reading skill growth (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Taken together, there is solid empirical evidence for the importance of child-led practices in cultivating positive educational outcomes.

This is not without critique. Some research has found little systematic effect of DAP on children's achievement (Van Horn & Ramey, 2003) or parent-rated social skills in grades 1 to 3 (Van Horn et al., 2012). However, the core tenets underlying DAP and emergent curriculum emerged out of the constructivist philosophies of Piaget and Vygotsky, are supported by the bulk of quasi-experimental and correlational research to date, remain the gold standard for early childhood pedagogy (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and are squarely aligned with the principles of learning science which places emphasis on learning by the active construction of knowledge rather than rote memorization (National Research Council, 2000). In developmentally appropriate classrooms, teachers facilitate child-centered, hands-on experiences that foster active understanding. Here the learner is part of the entire inquiry process rather than a vessel to be filled with information. The entire premise of DAP is based on children's hands-on exploration of topics, guided by a knowledgeable teacher. It is exactly this perspective that we sought to bring to a small cohort of licensed elementary teachers (who had received no previous training in ECE-specific pedagogy) through a series of university courses.

Teacher Beliefs About Early Childhood Pedagogy

Over the course of their pre-service training, teachers construct their own understanding of the manner in which knowledge is transmitted to children, including the role they play in the learning process (Buehl & Beck, 2015). This lays the foundation for the practices and curricula teachers implement in the classroom (Fives & Buehl, 2016; Thoonen et al., 2011; Vartuli, 2005). Beliefs and practices exist in a complex reciprocal relationship that develops over time (Buehl & Beck, 2015). Beliefs and practices are not devoid of context – they are situated within the individual teacher's knowledge and experience, as well as impacted by structural elements of the classroom, availability of school resources, and more (Buehl & Beck, 2015).

Research with pre-service elementary teachers suggests that ECE-specific training is associated with greater endorsement of a constructivist viewpoint (File & Gullo, 2002). Pre-service elementary teachers with ECE training are also more likely to endorse DAP beliefs and less likely to endorse teacher-led teaching practices for K-3 grades than pre-service teachers with no ECE training (Smith, 1997). There is also some evidence that endorsement of constructivist practices fades in favor of teacher-directed methods across preschool to third grade classrooms (Vartuli, 1999). Although, elementary teachers with ECE certification are more likely to endorse and implement child-centered learning than those without certification (Buchanan et al., 1998; Vartuli, 1999).

Despite endorsing child-centered classroom practices, many elementary teachers find them difficult to implement within the structural constraints of adopted learning standards and curricula, diminishing their willingness to veer from didactic approaches (Buchs et al., 2017). Teachers in the early elementary grades in particular are operating within a context of increased demands from administrators and parents to ensure children are prepared for standardized assessments (Goldstein, 2007). Engaging in teaching practices that are incongruent with one's belief system can negatively impact teachers and the classroom (Buehl & Beck, 2015). This is critical because in a study of over 700 kindergarten classrooms across six U.S. states, teacher beliefs about child-centered practices were a stronger predictor of observed classroom quality than how long they had been teaching or their education credentials (Paro et al., 2009). Moreover, belief misalignment from preschool to kindergarten teachers across the transition to kindergarten has been associated with children's diminished social and academic outcomes (Arby et al., 2015). P-3 initiatives are working to address this mismatch by establishing structural alignment across ECE and elementary models (including teaching practices and instructional

quality; Kauerz, 2019; Reynolds et al., 2010). There is some evidence that comprehensive P-3 alignment is linked to better academic performance in high school and yields high rates of return on investment (e.g., Reynolds & Temple, 2008). P-3 initiatives encompass a wide range of structural and process changes (e.g., smaller class sizes, reducing school mobility, increasing parent involvement, etc.). Within this area in inquiry, a qualitative analysis of exactly how elementary teachers conceptualize beliefs about early childhood pedagogy and incorporate these beliefs with their existing classroom practices is warranted.

The Present Investigation

Here we present a qualitative analysis of the developing beliefs of practicing elementary teachers, while taking a set of university courses on early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Specifically, we used thematic coding analysis to analyze their written reflections about 1) their beliefs and understanding of ECE pedagogy in the context of their elementary teacher beliefs and 2) reported changes in their current classroom practices as a result of this knowledge.

Method

Participants

Ten licensed elementary school teachers (from an urban public school district in a Western state) participated in a set of university courses on early childhood curriculum and pedagogy to obtain an ECE endorsement on their elementary teaching license. These teachers taught in a variety of early elementary settings such as kindergarten, K-3 special education, first grade, K-3 dual-language classrooms, and one served as a K-3 literacy coach. The majority of the teachers were female (1 male teacher). The teachers reported as white (60%), Hispanic (30%), and African American (10%). Teachers had to have at least one year of experience teaching kindergarten to be eligible for participation in the program.

Procedures

The teachers were invited to partake in a series of courses at a large public university to add early childhood licensure to their existing elementary credentials. This effort was part of a state grant to enhance literacy instruction across the school district, with the explicit intention that these courses would lead to improved teaching practices by improving teachers' ECE-related knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The teachers took a series of courses on child development, developmentally appropriate practices, and early childhood pedagogy. The course on child development focused on developing understanding of typical child development for ages 3 to 8. The teachers conducted live observations of multiple children an analyzed their physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional milestones. This helped lay the foundation for understanding how to facilitate developmentally appropriate practices in the next course, where the teachers were introduced to the basics of ECE constructivist philosophies and emergent curriculum. The final course on ECE pedagogy was taken in an early university summer session when teachers were still working in their district classrooms. This course focused on developing and implementing emergent curriculum, using materials to engage learning, developing intentional practices, and cultivating a view of children as capable and active learners. Through a series of assignments, the teachers were asked to implement ideas from the course into their current classroom practices. The teacher reflections that emerged from this course became the subject of this investigation.

Each week during the four-week pedagogy course, the teachers completed a written reflection to a series of three questions. The first question asked the teachers to briefly and objectively describe something that occurred that week that related to a topic they learned in the course. The second question asked them about the implications for noticing this event in terms of

how it would impact their future practice and to reflect upon what they might change, what they thought about, and how they want to grow as a teacher. The third question asked them to address any questions or issues that emerged during the week. We obtained ethical approval by the university's Institutional Review Board prior to analyzing their written reflections and the teachers each provided informed consent for us to use their written words and demographic information in this investigation. We organized each teacher's four weeks of reflections into one "case" document, which was deidentified and assigned a pseudonym. The weekly responses varied substantially in length between teachers and weeks.

Thematic Content Analysis

We assessed the 10 cases using thematic content analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2016). We used a grounded theory approach to allow for flexible coding and expansion where necessary (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory takes an inductive approach to generating theoretical ideas. In this investigation, it means that the details in the teachers' written reflections were the basis for analyzing patterns of repeated concepts and generating codes that captured common themes throughout. First, we read through each case to generate familiarity with the content. Next we generated thematic codes based on the familiarity with the content, and also guided by the factors that previous research on ECE pedagogy and teacher beliefs and practices deemed important. We developed 9 primary coded themes, many of which had a number of subthemes. The cases were subjected to a systematic line-by-line coding. We used an iterative approach to coding so that the scheme was flexible enough to allow for new codes to emerge or further expansion upon existing codes.

Next, all 10 cases were examined and coded by a second external coder using Dedoose software (Dedoose, 2015). An initial test of 22 excerpts yielded a Cohen's kappa statistic of .60

which indicated less than acceptable agreement between the primary and secondary coders (Cicchetti, 1994). All coders met to examine the current coding scheme and address any differences in coding. The majority of the error occurred on items from the excerpts that needed to be coded for multiple codes but were instead only coded for one by one of the coders. Some other issues arose when excerpts were taken out of context and it was difficult to ascertain (without view of the full reflection) which code(s) would be most appropriate. Once the full reflection was provided, the coder almost always re-coded the excerpt in agreement with the initial coding. All disagreements in coding were resolved through discussion and consensus between the raters. Further, definitions of themes were revised to be more specific for future coding.

Findings

We found three primary themes (with subthemes) that captured the teachers' reflections. The three primary themes were prominent throughout the reflections and were the themes that had the most relevance to ECE pedagogy and changes in teachers' beliefs and practices. Other themes also emerged, but with less frequency. Here we describe each of the three main themes, including excerpts from the teachers' reflections that exemplify each theme. For a complete list of all themes, please see Table 1.

Table 1. *Definitions and Examples of Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example Quotes	Frequency of Theme *n* (%)
Change		This code was implemented any time a teacher reported that they *did* change something about themselves or their teaching practices. This code was used for change in actions, awareness, and observations.		
	Building Relationships *- with parent* *- with child*	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *did* change specifically in regard to building relationships either with the children or their parents.	Teacher E: *I felt really good about listening to the parent instead of getting upset and defensive, and changing my attitude, behavior, and overall method of teaching!*	5 (50%)
	Children's Interests	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *did* change specifically in regard to the children's interests.	Teacher F: *I have currently changed my center time to have more choices to promote personal choice and freedom.*	3 (30%)
	Communication Practices	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *did* change specifically in regard to their communication practices	Teacher J: *I have been really mindful when a student wants to talk with me. I take the time now to listen to them and really give them my complete attention to they feel special.*	7 (70%)
	Increasing Flexibility in Classroom	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *did* change specifically in regard to increasing flexibility within their classrooms.	Teacher E: *In my 4th grade Math group I had 2 students who finished their work early. So instead of letting them play a game or wait patiently until everyone finished (a complaint I had from a parent) I let them help other students. This let them feel important, validated, and good about themselves.*	2 (20%)
Intent to Change		This code was implemented any time a teacher reported that they *intend* to change something about themselves or their teaching practices. This code was used for change in actions, awareness, and observations.		9 (90%)

	Building Relationships	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *intend* to change specifically in regard to building relationships either with the children or their parents.	Teacher F: *I learned that building positive relationships with young children is an essential task and a foundational component for good teaching and building understanding.*	1 (10%)
	Children's Interests	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *intend* to change specifically in regard to the children's interests	Teacher G: *As a teacher we need to let the students explore by taking notes and building upon their knowledge, so it is relevant to them.*	4 (40%)
	Children's Needs	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *intend* to change specifically in regard to the children's needs.	Teacher F: *I would like to better my understanding in responding to the individual child's needs more deeply.*	3 (30%)
	Children's Nonverbals	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *intend* to change specifically in regard to the children's nonverbals.	Teacher A: *The implications of noticing this for my future practice is that nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal communication with young children. With that being said I will be more cognizant of my nonverbal communication, including body language when listening to children.*	3 (30%)
	Increasing Flexibility in Classroom	This code was implemented if the teacher indicated they *intend* to change specifically in regard to increasing flexibility within their classrooms.	Teacher B: *Despite being a teacher who makes students talk a lot and do a lot of things with no teacher talking, I do think it is still not enough. I have to create more paths to make students take ownership of their learning without having to stay behind them guiding them somehow.*	5 (50%)
Challenges		This code was implemented any time a teacher expressed that they were having challenges with implementing what they had learned in this course in the classroom.		8 (80%)

	Autonomy in Classroom	This code was implemented any time a teacher expressed that they were having or were aware of challenges with autonomy in the classroom that might make implementing what they had learned in the course difficult.	Teacher E: *I thoroughly enjoyed the Curtis and Guiney article but wonder if this is a systematic issue where teachers don't feel like they are given choice therefore they don't feel inclined to offer children choice.*	2 (20%)
	Putting DAP into Practice	This code was implemented any time a teacher expressed that they were having or were aware of challenges of implementing DAP into practice in the classroom that might make implementing what they had learned in the course difficult.	Teacher F: *I just feel that there is some struggle between what is DAP for students and what the district wants our students to be able to do.*	6 (60%)
	Requirements / Expectations	This code was implemented any time a teacher expressed that they were having or were aware of challenges with specific requirements or expectations that might make implementing what they had learned in the course difficult.	Teacher H: *With all the requirements of NAEYC, QRIS...how does one really find time to be this intentional, present, insightful teacher we all read about in our textbooks?*	5 (50%)
Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)		This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned developmentally appropriate practices.		5 (50%)
	DAP - Yes	This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned a circumstance in which developmentally appropriate practices were/should be used.	Teacher J: *I will use the DAP book as my go to document next year to ensure what I'm doing is developmentally appropriate.*	5 (50%)
	DAP - No	This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned a circumstance in which developmentally appropriate practices were not used.	Teacher A: *I wish I could rewind and use what I have learned with all of my past kindergarten students. I feel like I cheated them because I did not always to what was right for them developmentally.*	1 (10%)
Value		This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned that they valued or notice the value in practices they learned about within the course. Teacher E:		4 (40%)
	Observations	This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically	Teacher E:	4 (40%)

		mentioned that they valued or notice the value of observations.	*I learned about the importance of observation from the assignments we had to do.*	
	Student Choice	This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned that they valued or notice the value of student choice.	Teacher A: *I was having a conversation with a colleague of mine, earlier in the week about the importance of choice, kid watching, and observation with younger children.*	2 (20%)
DAP Benefits Teachers Too		This code was implemented any time a teacher specifically mentioned that implementing developmentally appropriate practices benefits them in addition to the students.	Teacher E: *I think it made for an overall more positive environment for both the students as well as myself, and I think it was more relaxed and calm.*	2 (20%)

Note. $N = 10$. Example quotes are brief excerpts from the reflections the teachers wrote for the course

Theme 1: Change

The first theme described is that of "change." This code was implemented any time a teacher reported that they *did* change something about themselves or their teaching practices as a result of learning more information about early childhood pedagogy. This code was used for change in actions, awareness, and observations in classroom practice. This code emerged in 100% (10) of the reflections.

(Teacher J): I have been really mindful when a student wants to talk with me. I take the time now to listen to them and really give them my complete attention so they feel special.

(Teacher E): My views of preschool have changed completely. I have a better understanding of the importance of early childhood education and how intentional, purposeful play IS learning! I have learned about the importance of developmentally appropriate practices which has changed the way I teach. I now try to make everything I teach developmentally appropriate, hands on, visual, and fun.

This overall theme came through via four subthemes which included (1) building relationships, (2) children's interests, (3) communication practices, and (4) increasing flexibility in the classroom, all of which are characteristic of the constructivist foundation of ECE pedagogy. Definitions for each of these subthemes are provided in Table 1. The theme of "building relationships" emerged in 50% (5) of the reflections. This theme was further broken into building relationships with the child (2%) and building relationships with the parent (3%)

(Teacher F): I decided to let her try. It was something that I never tried with her – to be able to be a class leader, which involved performing our classroom expectations all the time. I wanted to build upon our relationship towards trust and understanding.

The theme of "children's interests" emerged in 30% (3) of the responses.

(Teacher D): My views are changing based on my newly acquired knowledge about children. I'm advocating for better practices within small group instruction to allow for choice and interest.

The theme of "communication practices" emerged in 70% (7) of the responses.

(Teacher A): I see my growth as a teacher coming two-fold, expanding my listening and communication skills not only with children through the use of LADDERS but also with adults. I think this will positively impact my communication in a general sense.

The theme of "increasing flexibility in the classroom" emerged in 20% (2) of the responses.

(Teacher E): I am really trying to slow down, talk to kids, ask them questions, watch what they are doing, and give them more positive feedback. I think it made for an overall more positive environment for both the students as well as myself.

Theme 2: Intent to Change

The next theme described is that of "intent to change." Similar to the previous theme, this code was implemented any time a teacher reported that they *intended* to change something about themselves or their teaching practices. This code was used for change in actions, awareness, and observations in the classroom. This code emerged in 90% (9) of the responses.

(Teacher B): So, for my future practice I think I will still try to organize classes where students work more independently, as they want, where they want, because a desk is not giving them any knowledge just a comfortable place to sit down.

(Teacher G): I need to make sure I am connecting with all students and really supporting all of the learners within my classroom.

This overall theme came through via five subthemes which included (1) building relationships, (2) children's interests, (3) children's needs, (4) children's nonverbal communication, and (5) increasing flexibility in the classroom. Definitions for each of these subthemes are provided in Table 1, which are again indicative of the constructivist foundations of ECE pedagogy. The theme of "building relationships" emerged in 10% (1) of the responses.

(Teacher F): I learned that building positive relationships with young children is an essential task and a foundational component for good teaching and building understanding.

The theme of "children's interests" emerged in 40% (4) of the responses.

(Teacher I): The second thing I learned is to take the whole child into consideration, their development, social and emotional needs, experiences, culture and interest.

The theme of "children's needs" emerged in 30% (3) of the responses.

(Teacher F): I would like to better my understanding in responding to the individual child's needs more deeply.

The theme of "children's nonverbals" emerged in 20% (2) of the responses.

(Teacher A): The implications of noticing this for my future practice is that nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal communication with young children. With that being said I will be more cognizant of my nonverbal communication, including body language when listening to children.

The theme of "increasing flexibility in the classroom" emerged in 40% (4) of the responses.

(Teacher A): If/when I go back into the classroom I feel like I will be so much more effective with my practice and can incorporate DAP into my classroom to maximize students' interest and achievement. Giving students choice is huge and I would definitely incorporate more of that into my day and trust the children

Theme 3: Challenges

The "challenges" code was implemented any time a teacher expressed that they were having challenges with implementing what they had learned in this course in their classroom. This code emerged in 80% (8) of the responses.

(Teacher I): Many times our schedules are jam packed with what is required, as a matter of fact, just this week we were given the required minutes to spend on each subject and to be honest those times left zero minutes for observing and just sitting and having a conversation with a child.

(Teacher C): With so many expectations being thrown at teachers today, it is really hard to keep up with the paperwork in addition to trying to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom.

This overall theme came through via three subthemes which included (1) autonomy in classroom, (2) putting DAP into practice, and (3) requirements/expectations. Definitions for each

of these subthemes are provided in Table 1. The theme of "autonomy in classroom" emerged in 20% (2) of the responses.

(Teacher A): I thoroughly enjoyed the Curtis and Guiney article but wonder if this is a systematic issue where teachers don't feel like they are given choice therefore they don't feel inclined to offer children choice.

The theme of "putting DAP into practice" emerged in 60% (6) of the responses.

(Teacher E): I have difficulty taking what I know I need to teach and putting it into the big picture, such as yearlong lesson plans, or even quarterly lesson plans. Then having assessments to go with each part, it all seems so overwhelming, I'm not sure where to start. So how do I put all the pieces together and relate it to common core? Or do I start with common core and break it down into teaching pieces? It all causes me tremendous stress!

The theme of "requirements/expectations" emerged in 50% (5) of the responses.

(Teacher H): With all the requirements of NAEYC, QRIS, and The Goddard School quality system, how does one really find time to be this intentional, present, insightful teacher we all read about in our textbooks?

Additional information regarding the themes that emerged, their definitions, and additional example excerpts can be found in Table 1. These themes focused on using DAP, the value of ECE pedagogy, and how DAP benefits teachers as well as children.

Discussion

In this investigation, we examined elementary teachers' reflections on how to integrate developmentally appropriate practices and early childhood pedagogy into their current teaching beliefs and practices. Qualitative analyses of their written reflections revealed three major themes: Change, Intent to Change, and Challenges. The analyses provided valuable insights as to

how practicing elementary teachers reflect upon the constructivist underpinnings of early childhood pedagogy and integrate it with their current classroom practices. These findings have implications for bridging the training and pedagogical divide between early childhood and elementary education philosophies and training systems.

Reflecting and Integrating New Pedagogical Ideas

Taken together, the teachers' reflections demonstrated that they integrated new beliefs and understanding about ECE pedagogy with their current beliefs about elementary education (as illustrated by the themes Change and Intent to Change). The sub-themes in these categories demonstrate that the teachers were working out their understanding of many constructivist underpinnings of developmentally appropriate practices and ECE pedagogy such as building and sustaining relationships with young children, following children's interests in the classroom, giving children space for autonomy and choice, and tuning in to listen to children. The question of whether or not teachers turned these beliefs into actual classroom practices is discussed in more detail below, but the message of these reflections is one of formulating new ideas and beliefs around many aspects of ECE pedagogy.

The specific language the teachers used in their reflections was especially illuminating because it demonstrated that they were framing their new beliefs relative to their prior teaching experiences (meaning that this information was novel and differed from their current practices). For example, Teacher E chose to prioritize her relationships with the children "instead of" getting upset. Teacher F explained how she made changes to the activity centers in her classroom that allowed the children more choice in their learning. Teacher J noticed that she took more time to listen to children than she used to. Teacher B recognized that her current practices were "not enough" to help children take ownership of their learning. Responses within the subtheme Value

also reflected new understanding of ECE pedagogy, in particular recognizing when active learning should be used. These themes and responses illustrate the teachers' developing awareness of learner-centered practices, the cornerstone of constructivist ECE pedagogy (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). This is also consistent with quantitative research demonstrating that teachers with ECE-specific training are more likely to endorse beliefs about the active nature of children's learning (Buehl & Beck, 2015; File & Gullo, 2002). Beliefs about the nature of children's learning are the foundation for classroom practices (Fives & Buehl, 2016; Thoonen et al., 2011), and their reflections indicated that the teachers were wrestling with new ideas about how to support active learning in the classroom by fostering high quality relationships (Harme & Pianta, 2006) and child-centered practices (Cornelius-White, 2007; Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Paro et al., 2009). In terms of training, these results reinforce the need for pre-service teachers (or licensed teachers working towards ECE endorsement) to have substantial time over the course of their own educational journey to learn about child development and DAP so they have adequate time to cultivate their own beliefs about ECE pedagogy.

Making Changes in Classroom Practices

The theme Change captured actual changes teachers made in their classroom practices, as indicated by their written reflections. The majority of changes were relationship-based. For example, taking steps to become in tune with, or listen to, children, as well as build better relationships with their parents. This is an encouraging finding because relationships lie at the heart of ECE pedagogy. For young children, active learning in the classroom emerges out of a positive and secure relationship with the teacher. ECE classrooms are typically evaluated on process quality, meaning the quality of interactions in the classroom because young children need a positive and secure base for exploration and learning (Lippart et al., 2018; Rimm-

Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The teachers also discussed many instances of improving communication with young children such as being more mindful in their conversations and slowing down to really listen. These changes serve to not only build strong relationships, but also contribute to a child-centered view of education with careful observation and intention on the part of the teacher.

Other sub-themes reflected changes teachers made to enhance children's active learning, such as offering children more choice and autonomy in the classroom, as well as teachers recognizing when they themselves need to be more flexible. Choice, autonomy, and flexibility are all hallmarks of ECE pedagogy that stand in contrast to more didactic teaching methods (Holland et al., 2013). Indeed, Kauerz (2019) characterizes the dichotomy between early learning and K-12 as "the difference between prioritizing the teaching of children vs. the teaching of content" (p. 599). It is not our opinion here that didactic teaching methods have no place in early elementary classrooms. Researchers have suggested that a combination of child-centered and teacher-directed activities provides the best delivery method, often depending on the particular skill/content and individual child (e.g., Huffman & Speer, 2000). However, understanding and integrating ECE pedagogy provides elementary teachers with a more complete picture of children's active learning and development across the early childhood period, a picture that is often lost in many traditional elementary educator preparation programs (Lieberman & Bornfreund, 2015).

While the theme Change was the most prevalent throughout the reflections, it should be noted that teachers also reported intent to change in many of the same areas. We are unable to speculate on the exact reasons why teachers did not implement some of the intended changes. However, as predicted based upon previous literature (e.g., Buchs et al., 2017), the best

intentions are often impeded by challenges, which we discuss in more detail below. Nonetheless, the results here underscore the importance of practicum-based experiences and sufficient time in ECE classrooms for all teachers licensed in grades K-3. While some states have reduced the overlap between early and elementary teaching licensure (e.g., by requiring an early childhood license for all teachers in pre-K through 2nd or 3rd grade classrooms), many continue to have substantial overlap in licensure bands (e.g., birth-2nd grade and K-6). Overlap like this means that some teachers of young children have substantive training in early childhood development and pedagogy while others do not. It is likely that change in teaching practices requires more exposure and opportunities to both observe and practice in more child-centered classrooms. Such opportunities would be facilitated by requiring all teachers of early learners to obtain an ECE license or endorsement.

Struggling to Implement New Practices

Nearly all teachers mentioned challenges in integrating the aspects of ECE pedagogy learned in the university courses with their current teaching practices. This is in line with previous research demonstrating that teacher beliefs and practices exist in a complex reciprocal relationship and are not devoid of context (Buehl & Beck, 2015). Even though the teachers were clearly reflecting on many new pedagogical ideas, change in practice was not always realized (as evident by the theme Intent to Change).

Interestingly, all of the sub-themes within the theme Challenges were related to structural aspects of the K-12 education system that hindered their perceived abilities to implement child-centered practices. For example, Teacher E expressed that teachers are probably unlikely to offer children autonomy in the classroom because teachers themselves feel that they have little choice. Teachers also mentioned incongruent beliefs between the district and DAP, as well as having too

little time or resources to be "intentional, present, [and] insightful" (Teacher H). For many of the teachers, they felt that what they were learning as "best practices" would not be supported by others at their school. This disconnect between endorsed beliefs about ECE pedagogy and actual practices in the early elementary grades has been reported by others' research (e.g., Buehl & Beck, 2015; Buchs et al., 2017), and reflects the pedagogical divide that remains between ECE and elementary school systems. In short, the structural constraints of elementary schools (e.g., academic standards, testing requirements, large class sizes, limited resources, administrators with little ECE knowledge) often preclude teachers' abilities to incorporate child-centered practices. The teachers' concerns and worries captured in the theme Challenges underscore the importance of better alignment across the early learning continuum so the structural elements of early education support teachers in applying best practices for young children's learning. These concerns also underscore the need for improved understanding of ECE by educational leaders in elementary schools. As noted by Kauerz (2019), when principals are "versed in child development and the specific teaching and learning strategies that are most appropriate for young learners," their teachers are provided opportunities to teach in developmentally appropriate ways (p. 604). Given that principals are second only to teachers in influencing student outcomes, leadership preparation for elementary administrators must include specific strategies that are unique to ECE (Kauerz, 2019). Only then will teachers have the latitude to practice what they have learned.

Limitations & Future Directions

Several limitations of this investigation should be acknowledged. First, our sample is limited to ten teachers from one university in one U.S. region. Further, there is only one male student in the sample (however, women do make up the vast majority of early childhood

workforce). Though this study can illuminate the potential importance of ECE training for this specific sample, it is not intended to be interpreted as a generalizable sample. We recognize that these limitations should be addressed in continuations of this project and future studies. Nonetheless, this qualitative study provides evidence that practicing elementary teachers integrate beliefs and practices about ECE pedagogy and DAP with specialized supports, and offers a rich foundation from which quantitative research can expand. Future investigations should consider how teachers integrate their beliefs about ECE pedagogy with observed practices (e.g., observational measures such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System). In particular, how teachers negotiate these issues within the structural constraints of the elementary education system, as well as how teachers respond to other contextual factors such as children's identity characteristics (e.g., ethnicity and socioeconomic status; Stipek, 2004). These findings will help refine pre-service preparation and continued teacher training, as well as aid in P-3 alignment efforts.

Conclusions

Using qualitative thematic content analysis, we examined how this group of teachers conceptualized early childhood pedagogy in the context of their elementary educator experiences, as well as how they incorporated this new knowledge into their current classroom practices. Teachers endorsed many important elements of constructivist ECE pedagogy, made some changes in their practices, expressed intent to change, as well as expressed challenges in integrating new ideas about ECE pedagogy within the structural constraints of their current classrooms. This investigation demonstrates the importance of continued educational experiences for early elementary teachers. Moreover, the results underscore the continued rift between ECE and elementary training systems.

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Teachers as Learners: Actionable Strategies for Culturally Sustaining Instruction

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Abstract

This article describes a professional development opportunity focusing on culturally sustaining instruction with direct application to unit design and lesson planning. Drawing upon the work of educators of color and their vast research, professional development was planned to increase teacher critical reflection, culturally sustaining practice, and anti-racist, liberatory practice for the academic success of all students.

KEY WORDS: Professional development, instructional practices, culturally sustaining pedagogy

Empowering Teachers as Learners: The Fierce Urgency of Now

More than ever, now is the time for educators to embrace constructivist and critical constructivist practices. Our students deserve a dialogic classroom centered on democratic citizenship and empowered social action. Students who learn in classrooms where reflection and imagination are deeply rooted in social justice and personal responsibility are the future. Today, it is imperative that educators build opportunities for students to bring personal and communal experiences to their learning. Teachers who create space for choice and encourage all voices to participate in questioning, interpreting and constructing ways of knowing, de-center dominant constructs of knowledge that limit opportunity. To empower students to express and produce their growing understanding and knowledge in new and innovative ways, especially knowledge that honors community and cultural truths, experiences, language, and spirituality, is vitally important in an increasingly pluralistic society. Most importantly the critical constructivist classroom encourages students to see the world in new and powerful ways that embrace all cultures, languages, genders and identities, and abilities.

Teachers as Learners: Actionable Strategies for Culturally Sustaining Instruction

Teachers have been inundated with timely professional development capturing the latest and greatest educational trends and edu-celebrity inspirational phrases of the year. These soundbites of information have failed to be internalized and applied in a manner that truly benefits teaching and learning, they have failed to show measurable impacts on student achievement, and they are often replaced as quickly as they were adopted (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

As a district Technology Specialist and English Language Arts Curriculum and Instructional Coach, I witnessed all levels of teaching and learning as I worked with teachers and

students. Within teaching and learning environments, I also saw varying levels of culturally sustaining pedagogy and intentional instruction to meet the needs of all students. Most keenly, I came to understand that many teachers had a deep desire to reach and teach all of their students in deep and impactful ways but lacked the strategies, the collaboration opportunities, or the time necessary to learn and apply new instructional practices.

After four months of observation and brainstorming, my district provided limited funding for professional development opportunities for high school teachers. I jumped at the chance to engage teachers who desperately wanted to serve all of their students in ways they had not yet fully explored. In order to support the needs I observed, I focused on culturally sustaining pedagogy and modern instructional practice. In developing this training, my questions were:

- Can teachers be *willing* learners through a longer cycle of professional learning, collaboration, and embedded time for creation and application?
- How do culturally sustaining pedagogy and inclusive, antiracist teaching strategies become part of a teacher's belief system, their lived teaching experiences and practice?
- How does this actionable change in a teacher positively impact a student's belief in their personal academic achievement?

Subjectivity and Positionality

As a white, midwestern, heterosexual female of privilege, I fully comprehend the audacity of yet another white educator trying to fix the educational system failing Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Students of Color. I initially designed professional learning to increase technology use to open opportunities for struggling learners to increase access, spaces for voice, and alternate ways of learning content, concepts, and skills. What I learned was that many teachers understood something in their instruction needed to shift in order to reach marginalized

students--and it wasn't just using technology. I began reading and researching educators of color and their decades of research for teaching and reaching non-white students. I attended conferences, webinars, watched speeches, read book after book, researched articles and *listened.* Then I redesigned professional learning to delve deeply into critical reflection about race, power, and racist systems in education while providing instructional practices that were actionable and applicable immediately. Most importantly, I cited the researchers and authors of color that *did the work* long before I embarked on this journey.

This is not my brain-child. This has been a compilation of brilliant Black, Indigenous, and People of Color educators' theories and research, and empirical evidence that should be part of critically reflective, culturally sustaining practice in every school.

My lived experiences have always pushed me to be an advocate and an activist. It was my six-year-old self that looked around my community and knew that I wanted to teach: teach differently. It has only been in the last five years that I have learned to become an accomplice and a co-conspiring educator in the work to dismantle an inequitable and unjust system of educating *some but not all.* It is in this current role that I continue the work by opening spaces, stepping aside and giving my colleagues of color the time and space to advocate for change, ensuring that creators, thinkers, and researchers of color are authentically cited and recognized for their work, and supporting this work in every way possible. As part of the educational majority, I have unearned privilege and power that many of my Black, Indigenous People of Color colleagues are not afforded and even excluded from. I also recognize that it is imperative that I use that positionality to push in hard where my colleagues of color may not be welcome to do so (Love, 2020). This dichotomy of amplifying, making and ceding space for others, and actively working to create change is often difficult in emerging antiracist spaces. It has been in leaving the classroom and finding others who are desperate to build a new system, that I have

found my life's work.

Empowering Teachers as Learners: The Professional Development Cycle

Educators were invited to participate in professional learning conducted during school hours and continuing biweekly over a nine-week period. Our district invested in this opportunity and provided substitutes for up to 30 total participants per instructional cycle. Each learning cycle included a fairly balanced participant pool from two midwestern high schools, and the final iteration (3 were offered between 2018 and 2019) included middle school teachers.

My first communication was to send an invite via email with details and a link to calendared meeting dates in our system so that substitutes would be assigned upon commitment to attend (see Figure 1). The professional learning had two ways to earn professional credit: professional development points for re-licensure/in-district salary enhancement or 3 hours of college credit. This incentive of college credit for re-licensure and larger salary movement brought participant numbers at the set capacity. To be prepared for our first session, educators were asked to arrive with a previously designed curricular unit and a willingness to explore new instructional strategies benefiting all students' academic success.

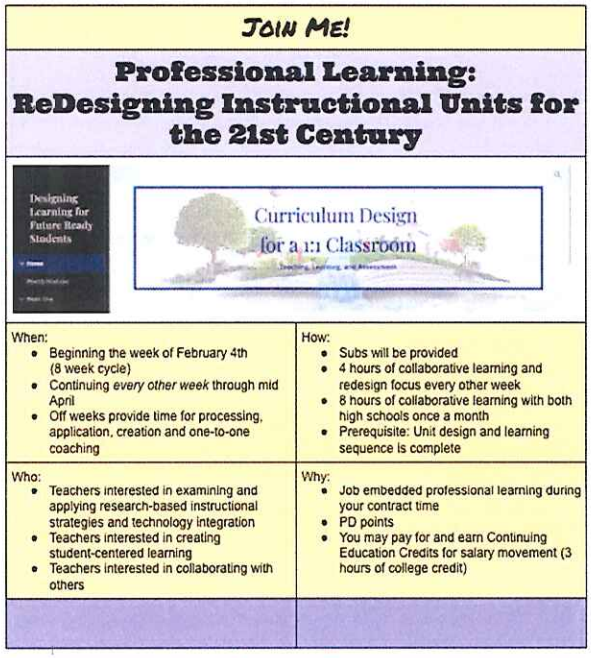


Figure 1

Professional Development: Culturally Sustaining Practices

Every other week, participants engaged in cross-content, cross-grade level, and multi-building small group cohorts cycling between face to face instruction and independent learning and application of knowledge. During the face to face meetings, I facilitated specific instructional design--what to add to a developing unit and lesson plans using the Culturally Sustaining Unit Design and Six Pillars of Focus (see Figure 2). Underlying all pillars was the district mission of culturally responsive teaching and learning. Together, we engaged in discussion not only about instructional strategies but the importance of intentional design: building student self-efficacy, developing metacognitive strategies, and designing learning to support multiple ways of knowing. During these sessions, teachers also engaged in collaborative work sessions. I provided a basic template design to get us started with priority elements.

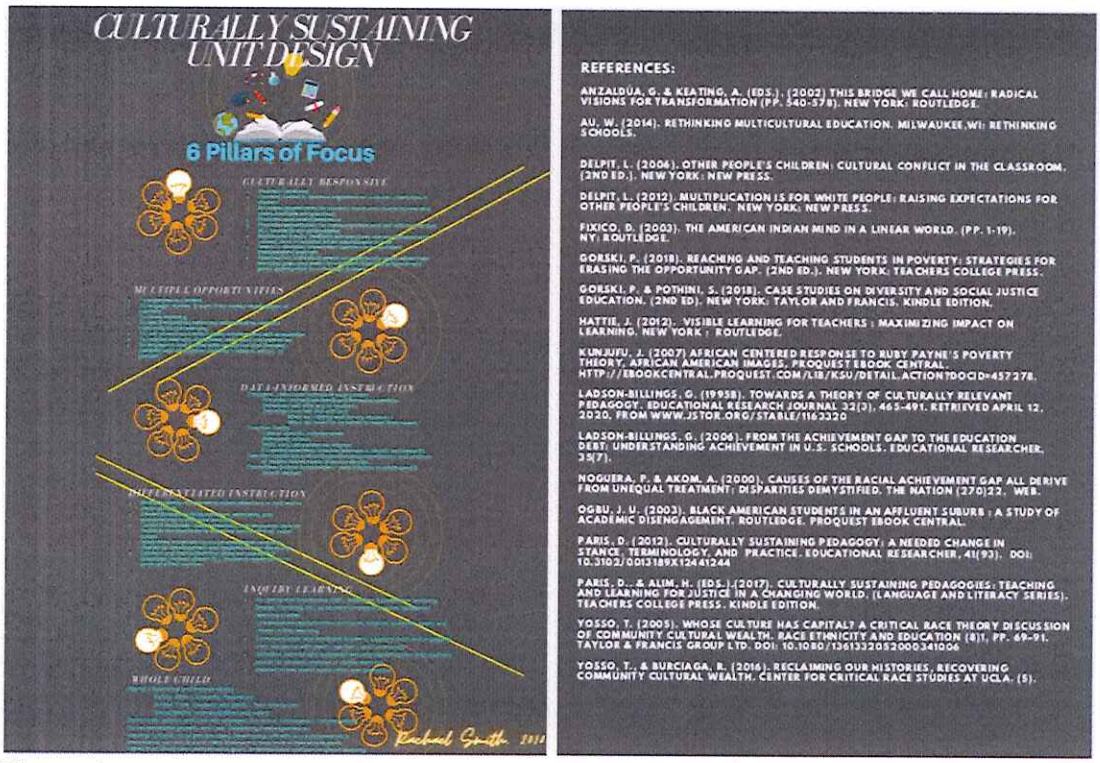


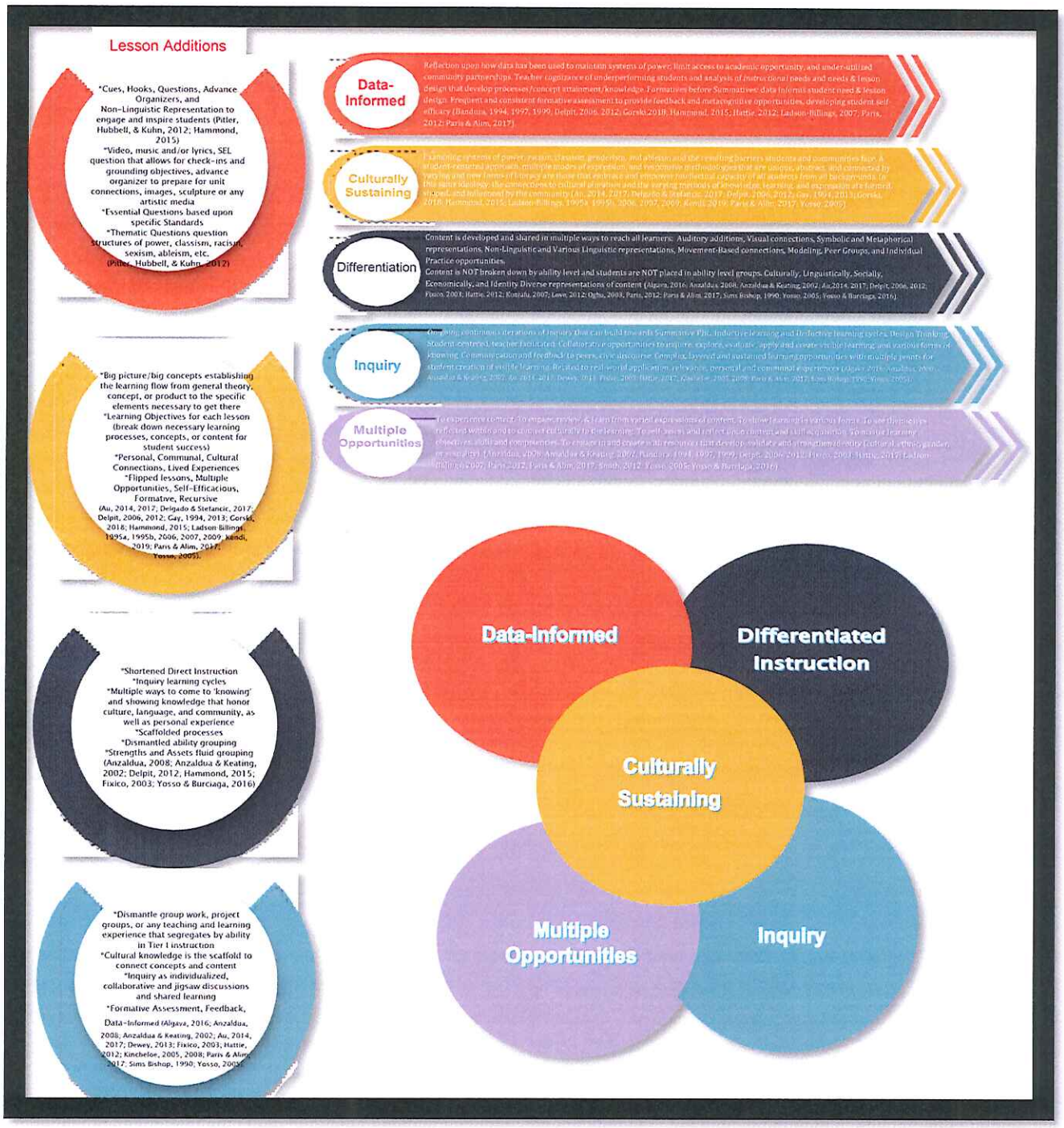
Figure 2

The following week, I met with participants during their plan time or after school to

support the application of these instructional practices within their unit planning documents. I observed classrooms and students. There was often immediate application of these strategies within lessons and keen observation by these teachers of student behaviors and attitudes as they sought to improve student learning experiences.

Unit Design:

During the first week of face to face professional learning, we began looking at the potential of Understanding by Design and backwards mapping (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and *Rigorous Curriculum Design* by Larry Ainsworth (2010). Our first priority was to establish standards and learning objectives and the unit summative assessment. Once each participant had an understanding of where they needed to focus student learning and how they would summatively assess that learning, we began building out the sequence. This attention to unit design asked teachers to create a visual representation of their essential standard-based questions and/or thematic questions and to refer to it frequently with students. Using this visual representation as a roadmap, students had the opportunity for clarity of purpose, they could activate prior knowledge, draw upon connections, and begin formulating questions. Additionally, by using clear lesson objectives, educators intentionally considered process vs procedural knowledge necessary for content and concept acquisition.



Instructional Practice: Data-Informed Instruction

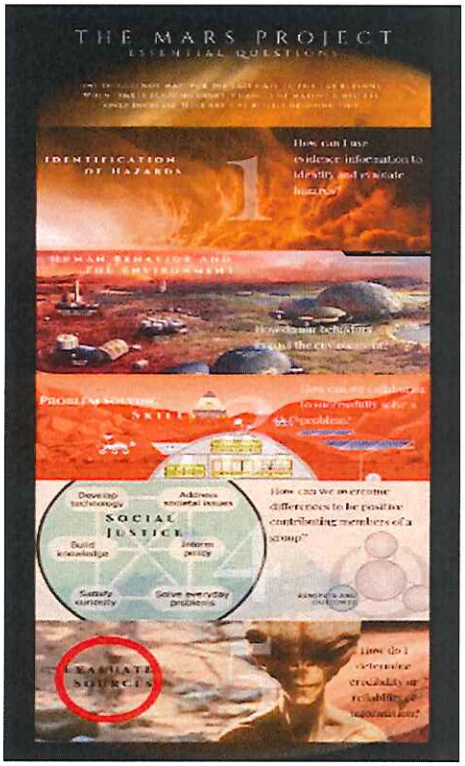
Using data-informed instruction, teachers learned to plan lessons that build upon assets and skills and provide valuable scaffolding and opportunity for various learners. Throughout the

professional development cycle, our learning often was recursive and we discussed the many uses of formative data from first week to final week: quantitative data and qualitative data. In discussing the power of data-informed instruction, participants were challenged to understand each student's individual needs, develop relationships, and honor experiences to increase teacher clarity and effectiveness, as well as increase student self-efficacy (Hattie, 2012; Bandura, 1994, 1997, 1999; Hammond, 2013, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017). Discussing data created opportunity for critical reflection and introducing the significant racial inequities that appear in deficit ideologies. This discussion and research articles, authors, and challenges to Ruby Payne, Grit ideology, and others was ongoing and continuous during our professional learning (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Gorski, 2018; Kunjufu, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2017). This information was invaluable in order to recognize individual and whole class needs and articulate learning objectives that provide educators with *their* roadmap for instructing *all* students with high expectations and intentional shifts of support.

1. Backwards Design: Start with carefully constructing the Summative (Ainsworth, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998)
    a. Deconstruct the process, conceptual knowledge, and skill(s) for the unit
    b. Frequent learning checkpoints to achieve the summative
2. Add Essential Standards-based Questions
3. Develop Thematic or Concept-based Questions that connect skill, content, and real-world relevance
4. Provide a detailed, clear, picture of the unit essentials for students to refer to often and to keep lesson sequence consistent and clear
5. Use data of student learning, formal and informal, to realign lessons and examine needs: process, concept, skill, deconstruction and alignment of lesson to standards

and skills

Following this first meeting, participants were asked to begin redesigning the opening sequence of their units. I provided a template to begin embedding important educational considerations discussed and to further explore the research and theories presented in week one.



During the independent learning and application week, participants created an image or graphic representation of their unit standards-based essential questions and/or thematic questions and the essential skills students would acquire and practice throughout the unit (see Figure 3). Each independent week, teachers posted their new lesson additions to our Google+ community site (now Google Current communities). In this way, they were accountable and transparent with each other about what they were trying and what they were still struggling with.

Figure 3

Feedback was encouraged and deeper learning through application and continued exploration was expected.

Our second and third face to face meetings (week three and five of our cycle) continued examining clearly designed lesson intentions while participants explored the 6 Pillars of Focus (see Figure 2). The centering of these pillars in all of our work and design called upon the research and evidence of BIPOC educators. Each pillar connected with the others and supported shifts in teacher beliefs, instruction, and student self-efficacy as a result of teaching and learning. Each practice was actionable, applicable, and utilized in lesson design. What also appeared for many teachers was an increased awareness of cultural, linguistic, and conceptual inclusion, but

also increased student beliefs in their own academic potential because these educators *believed* in their students' intellectual capacity. Each instructional practice supported multiple pillars of educational focus.

Continuing our lesson redesign, we explored the use of cues, questions, hooks, advance organizers, and non-linguistic representations of knowledge (Pitler, Hubler, and Kuhn, 2012) and the similarities to Zaretta Hammond's (2015) instructional strategy of Ignite. In Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain,* opening activities support the use of beginning of lesson engagement or inspirational tasks that activate prior knowledge, utilize personal and communal experiences to draw connections, ignite the curiosity of learners and build the necessary cues for learning.

Instructional Shifts:

1. Cues, Hooks, Questions, Advance Organizers, and Non-Linguistic Representation to engage and inspire students (Pitler, Hubbel, & Kuhn, 2012; Hammond, 2015)
2. Visual, Auditory, Written, and/or Kinesthetic learning
    a. Multi-layered and multimodal connections to major recurring concepts
    b. Multiple ways to come to 'knowing' and showing knowledge that honor culture, language, and community, as well as personal experience (Anzaldua, 2008; Anzaldua & Keating, 2002; Delpit, 2012; Fixico, 2003; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016)
3. Carefully deconstructed lesson design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998)
    a. Big picture/big concepts establishing the learning flow from general theory, concept, or product to the specific elements necessary to get there
        i. Essential Questions based upon specific Standards
        ii. Thematic Questions

iii. Learning Objectives for each lesson (break down necessary learning processes, concepts, or content for student success)

Instructional Practices: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Whole Child, Differentiated Instruction, and Inquiry Learning

Together, we examined the potential impact of designing and planning regular engagement activities so that students made further connections and began embarking on content connections. Student personal, cultural, and communal experiences were also honored in well-designed opening activities and the addition of creating intentional space for all students to offer their voice and perspective, building relationships, and opening doors for content relevance (Muhammed, 2020). Igniting student's curiosity or engagement activities also had the power to center a student who was disconnected and disengaged (Hammond, 2015).

Zaretta Hammond (2015) refers to a student's fight or flight response as a deep cultural threat and that to better understand a student's engagement and connections, teachers must understand the levels of culture embedded in learning scenarios. Teachers were asked to take the first five minutes of class and with an Ignite or engagement activity, create a safe space to think, share, or connect. These high impact strategies supported Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (practice 2) and Whole Child development (practice 3) as well as Multiple Opportunities to engage in content (practice 4), and Inquiry learning (practice 5).

Instructional Shifts:

1. Engage: provide the roadmap, discuss specific lesson objectives and ignite curiosity (Hammond, 2015)
2. Use a cue, hook, question, advance organizer, and/or non-linguistic representation

a. Video, music and/or lyrics, SEL question that allows for check-ins and grounding objectives, advance organizer to prepare for unit connections, images, sculpture or any artistic media (Pitler, Hubbel, & Kuhn, 2012)
b. Personal, communal, cultural connections (Yosso, 2005)
c. Personal, local and immediate connections to lived experiences (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016)
d. Conversations moving from personal to community, to national, to global
    i. Activating prior knowledge
    ii. Connecting to deep schema
    iii. Creating mind maps physically and metaphorically
    iv. Spiritual and cultural connections: abstract to physical (Anzaldua, 2008; Fixico, 2003)

3. Instruct: shift to inquiry, short direct instruction, visible learning checkpoints
    a. Flipped/Flipped-In lessons
    b. Multiple Opportunities to reengage/relearn/retrieve content
    c. Developing self-efficacy through metacognitive opportunities
        i. Pause and reflect upon learning goals, practice, outcomes
    d. Inquiry lessons
    e. Formative checkpoints
    f. Recursive cycles of learning

While we began redesigning current lessons within a unit, we discussed dismantling deficit ideologies present in white-centric curriculum and dominant narratives and practices embedded in our classrooms. These discussions took time and delicate inquiry. Many educators struggled acknowledging that giving students multiple opportunities to engage in content is not

enabling laziness or dumbing down learning. Research proves quite the opposite, especially when that opportunity engages experience, culture, language, and multiple ways of expressing knowledge (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Fixico, 2003; Gorski, 2018; Gorski & Pothini, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Hattie, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Here we paused to discuss Multiple Opportunities from the 6 Pillars of Focus. In this session we discussed the myth of learning styles and the power of activating schema in multiple ways using sensory or kinesthetic content engagement, frequent learning checks, and student learning retrieval (Agarwal, 2019). Teachers examined the shift from frequent auditory lecture to the use of non-linguistic additions, visual aids, adding student movement, video, and frequent learning checks. We began to design intentionally to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Creating lessons that were open and transparent and accessible outside of the classroom provided additional opportunity to learn content and skills. Providing flipped or flipped-in lessons (self-created or outsourced from Kahn, YouTube, NearPod, etc.) as an additional point of content opportunity had an impact on student learning while it increased clarity of lessons. When teachers explored the layering of meaning and relevance to what they were studying through music, images, or interactive advance organizers, creating inquiry learning opportunities and carousel rotations and jigsaw activities, they began to share the responsibility of learning with students. Empowering students to inquire and share their learning: to incorporate cultural and communal knowledge and traditions, varied understandings, to increase access through varied modalities and cultural ways of knowing, and various experiences also developed learners with culturally sustaining intentions and began to authentically develop and support the individual student self-efficacy necessary for lifelong academic achievement. Additionally, adding stop and check points, or Hammond's lesson design 'Review' for student understanding, long-term memory acquisition through retrieval and metacognitive practices were intentionally designed and placed in units so that students

developed self-efficacy and ownership in the learning journey (Agarwal, 2019; Hammond, 2015). Varied and creative formative assessments allowed students to express knowledge in various ways: in written, oral, artistic, performance-based, hands-on, or linguistically diverse snapshots. Standards-based formatives also ensured the product and process could be replicated in the high stakes testing still required of students in public schools.

During our off weeks, four and six, participants worked independently or in small self-selected groups to further redesign their units and lesson plans. They were asked to consider previous research and suggested instructional practices that support the 6 Pillars of Focus in Culturally Sustaining Unit Design. Each off week, they worked to build and incorporate specific strategies explored: Flipped/flipped-in lessons, multiple opportunities to engage in content, student voice and perspective, inquiry lessons, formatives, etc. They created and applied these to their unit redesign, in routine and purposeful placement for maximum student access and growth. These additions were shared in our Google+ Community site for feedback and further exploration of other's work.

Instructional Practice: Differentiated Instruction

This professional development session sought to interrupt deficit ideology in many ways beyond teacher beliefs and was designed to interrupt deficit practices. Research and readings from Lisa Delpit (2012), Paul Gorski (2018), Django Paris (2012) and others were briefly discussed as they pertained specifically to our lesson design. In this session we discussed the racist ideology of Ruby Payne, and the centering of blame on communities, families, and poverty. Instead, we discussed the responsibility of educators to recognize the failure to meet student needs beyond those of the dominant white narrative of schooling. In this way, teachers also began to really open up to various ways of allowing students to express knowledge, broadening our project-based learning experiences, reviewing our teaching of process and

procedure, inductive and deductive learning strategies, and examining why some students lack access to dominant white experiences that define knowledge in our textbooks and standardized assessments. In doing so, teachers began to plan for better guidance, tighter instructional practices, and intentional routines of supporting ways of knowing, expression, and learning that are disparate from the dominant structures. At the same time, participants were exposed to the racism of lowered expectations and the generational harm segregated practices instill.

Instructional Shifts:

- Democratic--one person/one voice, all participate for good of the cause (Dewey, 2013; Kincheloe, 2008)
  - All voices honored and heard
  - Developing explicit time for Courageous Conversations (Singleton, 2005)
- Specific roles are defined
  - Increase independence as content, concepts and processes are successfully acquired (Hammond, 2015)
- Specific inquiry, processes and background knowledge, inductive reasoning and reporting steps are clearly designed and outlined
- Scaffolding of learning and outcomes based upon individual ability while group learning is centered on the achievement of all, the success criteria and growth
- Dismantle group work, project groups, or any teaching and learning experience that segregates by ability in Tier I instruction

In this session we discussed the decades long practice of differentiation based upon ability level and the resulting *decrease* in educational achievement that occurs for students in the lower level groups (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Gorski, 2018; Hammond,2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ogbu, 2003). Often, professional learning participants spoke on behalf of their gifted and

advanced students and mentioned these students needed separate work and should not be grouped with lower students. Here, we used Zaretta Hammond's (2015) work and her grouping based upon strengths and assets and revolving experts.

According to Hammond (2015), no child is an expert in everything and no child is bereft of any usable knowledge. The key is to be an educator who authentically and deeply understands the skills and assets of all students. In this way, teachers encourage and design partnerships and small groups. In discussing assets and strengths, participants envisioned the social emotional responsibility of a supportive classroom environment as students worked in partnerships and small groups. In this shift our empathetic leaders were paired with our students that needed more scaffolding, explanation, and encouragement. The middle level students were dispersed according to their skills and abilities and we encouraged students to empower each other to learn deeply and contribute powerfully. In these shifts, educators expected and encouraged students to move fluidly as strengths and assets empowered contribution.

To do this, we examined our responsibility as adult-leaders. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2016) says, "Perhaps it is time to once again reaffirm John Dewey's notion of curriculum that emerges from experiences of the learners. And, such a curriculum will depend heavily on the skill of our nation's teachers" (p.104). This responsibility included establishing a classroom environment that interrupts racism, ableism, classism, and sexism.

Instructional Shifts:

1. Collaboration in Maths/Science
2. ALL contribute to finding solutions
3. Struggling students are supported by peers, but the work is done by them, not for them
4. Groups work together and there is an absence of performance competition--rather the goal is that ALL team members could solve the equations independently after the group

has worked to complete the challenge

5. Tiered assignments--don't specify easy, mid, and high. Let the group jump in where they are comfortable. To show mastery of the hard problems as a group they can justify their process and answer, collaboratively solve a similar problem and with practice independently
6. Modules or rotation stations
7. Real-World connections and relevancy
8. Complexity requires collaboration & communication

As previously established and during this instructional session, teacher participants were asked to explore the importance of setting up routines for mastery and cognitive practice, review, and reigniting engagement through the further development and embedding of repetition and practice: how do students 're engage' with content through multiple opportunities? We asked how they also reinforce effort by providing metacognitive opportunities and individual moments to pause and process, as well as routine and intentional moments to develop the self-efficacy of our learners. Examples included:

- Video capture of lesson
- Flipped or Flipped-In lessons
- Extra/Different ways to engage in content beyond the classroom (YouTube, Khan Academy, Nearpod, blogs, Wakelet resources, PearDeck, online homework posting, collaborative work)
- Connecting Perspective/Experience to differentiate content and maintain rigorous standards and skill attainment

Additionally, teacher participants continued embedding inquiry lessons and project-based learning components of the summative assessment. These examples built upon:

1. Hook or Cue or Anticipatory Set
    - Use a story, video clip or challenge to set up the lesson

- Use a thematic connection with exploration in a different media/medium

2. Series of lessons
    - Inquiry to bridge disciplines, create interdisciplinary connections
    - Inquiry to allow for personalized research, connections, questions, and understandings
    - Inquiry to promote culturally responsive classrooms--
        i. what is YOUR experience
        ii. how is YOUR culture, language, identity represented?
        iii. or what voice is missing here? (Anzaldua, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Paris & Alim, 2017; Smith, 2012; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016)
3. Inquiry to promote discussion--first digitally, then whole class
    - Inquiry as individualized, collaborative and jigsawed discussions and shared learning
    - Courageous Conversations (Singleton, 2005)
4. Development of Design Thinking (Luka, 2014) or Project Based Learning (based upon Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain,* 2015).
5. Recognize a student's cultural displays of knowledge and understanding
    - Cultural knowledge is the scaffold to connect concepts and content
    - Promotes and designs for effective process, concept, or skill-based knowledge acquisition for ALL learners
    - Promotes intellectual and emotional safety in the classroom so that students are safe to take intellectual risks and problem solve deeply and powerfully
    - Disengages from individual competition and roles
    - Uses assets and strengths from students in building components of the project
    - Relies on teacher guided skills development and content learning throughout the unit while empowering the student-led differentiated inquiry and learning to build the summative project
    - Clearly outlined and instructionally guided

To complete our professional learning, the final two meetings were intensive to completing redesign and creatively building effective additions to units. In week nine, I made classroom rounds to observe changing teaching and check in with participants as they finished their units and turned them in for assessment.

Analysis

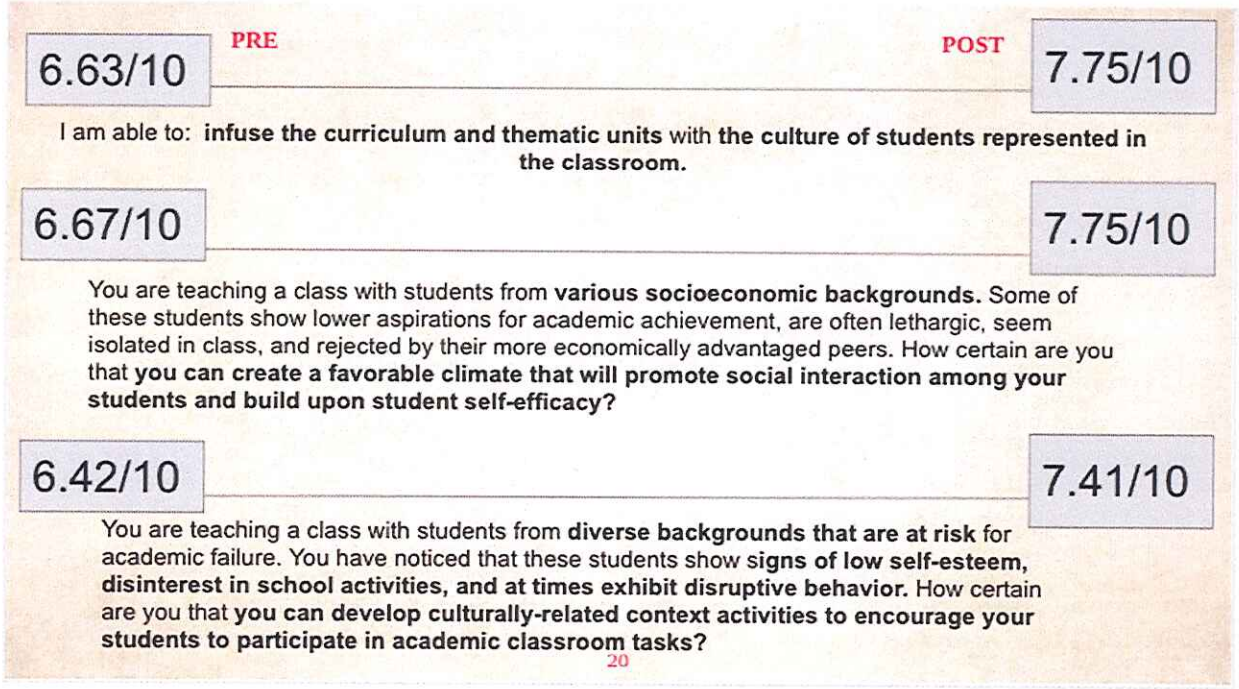
I believe the professional development offered to participants across both buildings was highly effective. Given repeat opportunities to continue exploring this actionable and critically reflective learning, teacher-participants would potentially increase their capacity for culturally sustaining instruction and development of student self-efficacy. Further analysis over time of specific student data: attendance, discipline referrals, grades (quantitative and qualitative) and standardized tests proficiency, as well as student self-efficacy surveys would significantly contribute to the overall discussion of this learning as effective or not effective.

I believe one major component that contributed to participant shifts and confidence in culturally sustaining instruction was the opportunity to learn during the contract day. There is ample research that job-embedded professional learning has a higher return on investment as well. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) and John Hattie & Arran Hamilton (2018), professional development accounts for 1% of the school budget and often shows a return on investment of only 1% over the course of a year. Additionally, a 1% increase in teacher quality (as result of district investment in professional learning) resulted in a 3-5% reduction of student failure rate on state competency exams. Increased teacher efficacy and teacher quality also drastically reduced attrition rates across districts (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In order to determine the true efficacy of the professional learning offered above, further data and analysis would be needed, but it is clear that supported professional learning impacts learners.

In analysis of the Spring 2018 participant cohort via pre and post survey responses, 24 of

27 completed the nine-week cycle by attending all face to face sessions, one on one collaboration and classroom observation, and completed a unit redesign including the practices and instructional strategies learned throughout the professional development. From this participant cohort, there were three mathematics teachers, six science teachers, five social studies teachers, five English teachers, two ESOL teachers, three speech pathologists, and one student transition coordinator. Of the 25 participants, five were in their first four years in the profession.

Upon completing the professional learning, participants were asked to complete a post-assessment survey to compare to the pre-assessment survey given at our first meeting. Based upon these two surveys, participants showed a 10% increase in confidence in their ability to use the instructional practices, teaching strategies, and to develop their students' self-efficacy (see figure 4). Additionally, survey results showed participants were more aware of supporting and sustaining non-white students in their lesson preparation, delivery, and learning tasks.



(figure 4)

Disaggregated data of learning participants showed one participant dropped significantly

in their assessment of their confidence from a 79% to 68% post survey response. This participant was a first-year teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages. Understanding the notable drop in confidence would provide an excellent follow up study. Further analysis shows eight participants scoring greater than a 10% increase in confidence and seven scoring at 15% or greater confidence. Two participants scored themselves having increased 27% in confidence at the end of the nine-week professional learning cycle.

Participant Reflections on Unit Design and Instructional Practices:

I have been much more mindful of providing multiple opportunities for students to engage with content as well as maintaining focus on the whole-child. I've strived to do these from the beginning of my teaching career because it is best-practice for ELLs but I'm also realizing that it is best practice for students in general. I feel validated when I consider whether to continue using google classroom and providing multiple opportunities for self-assessment and collaboration. Many of my colleagues seem to shy away from these things because they are content-driven instructors but ultimately, I want to empower students to be successful no matter what field of study they pursue.

I'm focusing on designing a unit that incorporates the pillars of culturally responsive teaching, inquiry learning, and multiple opportunities by: offering students choices on assignments; inviting and celebrating students' voices in the classroom via warm ups at the start of class, writing assignments, and PxBLs; and providing a unit calendar and Google slides so students have access to supplemental texts, objectives, terms, and questions.

In our science project, we have incorporated multiple opportunities to respond and

differentiation by allowing them choice in the project, culturally responsive and whole child by trying to show how this project (the real project) will affect humanity and culture in the future, inquiry learning by having them and their groups take the lead on finding out information and integrating it into their projects, and Data-informed by having checks for understanding and bell work every day, and allowing for reteaching as the data shows us it is needed.

I started with two videos to hook the students. Also, I used a problem to start the students thinking and working together to figure out a problem. They worked on their own and then they worked with a group. My students were 100% engaged in the problem. They are hooked and were successful.

Our conversations during our PD have made me feel that trying new things in the classroom is worth the time and the effort. I have learned from my colleagues about helpful tools and strategies that they have incorporated in their classrooms. I have also learned about ways to promote change in the school that will improve student learning. This PD has been one of the highlights of my entire school year and has made me believe that this is a school district that I want to continue to be a part of. Thank you so much for your guidance and support.

My great takeaway involves grouping of students. I always felt guilty grouping high level and low kids together, thinking it hurt the high kids. I have changed my thinking on this, thanks to your discussion in class. Now I see the low kids flourishing and discussing more within groups, and I realize it is not hurting the high-level kids at all! If anything, it is teaching them to be more understanding and self-aware of how their words can influence others. I have had several success stories regarding this!

Limitations of Professional Learning

Some strategies and unique lesson designs increase student engagement because by nature, the newness is engaging. Once the specific lesson additions become ingrained strategies and expectations, it is possible without creative planning they could become stale and lose effectiveness. However, the 6 Pillars of Focus are specific to ideology and broader planning concepts centering student needs and developing their self-efficacy. These have been shown to increase student engagement and achievement as teachers continue learning about culturally sustainable practices and supporting individual student efficacy--especially that of marginalized students. What is needed for broader antiracist and liberatory educational institutions, instruction, and resources is further educator reflection, research, and collaboration to read, apply, and share the work of BIPOC educators that have advocated for this work for over a century.

Potential Opportunities

The sustainability of any job embedded professional learning is always in question. There is a significant cost associated with providing substitute teachers and releasing teachers during the contract day. Very few districts have professional learning set aside regularly throughout the school year that would cover this depth or time commitment.

It has been suggested by participants that the college credit opportunity and the district professional development points are an incentive to complete the learning cycle. Perhaps offering a nine-week cycle that met every other weekend on a Saturday and one afternoon the following week would also allow districts the opportunity to provide learning without the enormous cost of substitutes.

Additionally, participants frequently sought follow-up observations, co-planning, co-teaching, and feedback as they continued to implement their learning. They embody *teachers as learners* and have significantly contributed to the growth of their colleagues in understanding

and implementing culturally sustaining practices.

Bounded Qualitative Case Study: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and the Development of Student Self-Efficacy as a Pathway to Equity

During the 2020-2021 school year, this professional development became part of a bounded case study involving six participants who had been involved in the learning cycle of 2018-2019. From that research study, a Culturally Sustaining Teaching and Learning Framework was created to evaluate the sustainability and presence of this professional development. The research study examined each of the instructional practices from this professional learning and the embedded thematic appearance of teacher critical reflection, culturally sustaining practices, and the development of students' self-efficacy.

The research study may add to a body of study regarding student self-efficacy and academic efficacy as, "Evidence showed the depth of a teacher's critical reflection did impact student self-efficacy. Teacher beliefs matter" (Smith, 2021). Culturally sustaining practice, critically reflective teachers, and the routines of self-efficacy development are culturally sustaining pedagogy in action. The convergence of these three are reflection, practice, and advocacy that benefits all students to learn (Smith, 2021).

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