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Efficacy of Culturally Responsive Teaching with the 7 Cs within an Educational Alternative Services High School English Class

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Alternative Services High School English Class

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"EFFICACY OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING WITH THE 7 CS WITHIN AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE SERVICES HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS," a Doctoral research project prepared by MARK SIMON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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EFFICACY OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING WITH THE 7 Cs

Abstract

The gap in achievement between White students and their African American and Latinx peers has been documented since the 1960s. Since that time, the federal government, scholars, researchers, and educators have worked to remedy this achievement gap, often with programs labeled as educational alternative services (EAS). Yet, despite programs like EAS showing some successes over the last fifty years, the gap in achievement persists. However, in the 1990s a plausible educational framework emerged, one that has presented educators with the opportunity to understand and teach their students by building strong relationships from a cultural perspective. This set of teaching practices is referred to as "culturally relevant," or "culturally responsive." Emdin (2016) offered a more specific pedagogical approach, which uses what he terms the "7 Cs" to develop relationships and create a classroom environment in which students feel safe and comfortable enough to achieve at a higher level. This study measured the experience of a veteran teacher who implemented the 7 Cs into an EAS high school English classroom for the first time.

After nine weeks of implementing the 7 Cs within the EAS high school English class, the students reacted positively to each of the Cs. However, the challenges surrounding the structure of the school, and inconsistent attendance made it challenging for me (teacher/researcher) to stay encouraged. Despite the discouraging effects, I completed the nine weeks feeling as if I had laid a solid foundation for a strong teacher-student relationship with many of my students.

Acknowledgments

This path that this journey of learning and research that I traveled was riddled with barriers, but through the encouragement and support of friends, family, and educators I was able to push myself beyond my own previously believed limits. Specifically, thank you to my Dissertation Chairs' Dr. Genelle Morris and Dr. Linda Samek for your guidance and encouragement to pursue my passion for social justice and what that looks like in education, and offering the knowledge of structure in my writing that was so desperately needed. Also, thank you to my mentor, Dr. Dawn Coffin, who was the first person to truly believe in me within the educational world, and it has been her knowledge and patience with me over the last ten years that has been the greatest part of your leadership and friendship.

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Finally, thank you Carla. Your knowledge is something you underestimate, but it is your knowledge and experiences in life that drew me to you and inspired me as I approached the finish line of this journey. Thank you for your subtle reminders and keeping me focused all the way to the end.

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Chapter One

A growing number of education scholars of color are raising critical questions about the way that research is being conducted in communities of color. Thus, without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities.
(Ladson-Billings, 1995)

Background

In response to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal commissioner of education was tasked with reporting to Congress the research and data surrounding "the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals because of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions" (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 402). James Coleman, who founded the Johns Hopkins Department of Social Relations in 1959, formulated the document which would become known as The Coleman Report. This document was for a long time considered to be "the most important education study of the 20th century" (Kiviat, 2000). Coleman's findings revealed one of the first researched reasons for the gap in achievement levels between Black and White students, which was that the family background of a student was more of a factor in achievement than which school the student attended.

More than 50 years after this groundbreaking report, the school population in the United States has continually grown more diverse. In 1997, White students made up 63.4 %of the public-school population, and Black, Latinx, and other races made up 36.6 % (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Updated data from 2020 revealed that White public-school enrollment has declined to 45.3 %, and Black, Hispanic, and other races have increased to 54.7 % (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). This changing data reveals that the United States public school system faces a changing racial, ethnic, and cultural perspective that could influence educational policymaking for many years to come.

In response to these changing student demographics, educators have continued to ask what can and should be done to close and eliminate the persistent achievement gap between races. These conversations have ranged and varied following The Coleman Report's emphasis on family background (Coleman, 1966), from socioeconomic approaches (Freire, 1972; Reardon, 2011), to cultural considerations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2015), to an emphasis on racism (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). However, despite tremendous amounts of research, discussion and debate, as well as the implementation of common standards for learning and high-stakes standardized tests, the gap in achievement levels between races persists.

Without a clear answer or consistent reasoning to explain this persistent achievement gap, researchers have pointed out that despite the changing demographics within the United States there has been no corresponding demographic change within the teaching profession. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in "2017-18, about 79 % of public-school teachers were White, 9 % were Hispanic, 7 % were Black", and the remaining 4 % were of two or more races, American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander (NCES, 2020). In fact, the percentage of Black teachers actually dropped from the previously reported 1999-2000 numbers.

As these data highlight a continually growing racial and cultural gap between students and their teachers, continued research has also revealed what is termed "the neuroscience backed effect," which means that many students of color have to constantly translate the teacher's cultural perspective into their own before they can comprehend any new content that they are tasked with mastering (Hammond, 2015; Emdin, 2016). Hammond (2015) explains that "culture…is the way that every brain makes sense of the world," so that when the presenter of new content does not share the same culture as the learner, the learner begins the learning process at a disadvantage.

Research Problem

The U.S. educational system continues to fail to provide sufficient financial support and equitable attention to the academic gap in achievement, a gap that has continued to exist decades beyond The Coleman Report (1966). As a result, Black and Brown (Latinx and Indigenous Americans) students have continuously achieved at lower levels than their White peers. These results, based on standardized testing, have persisted despite research indicating that culture directly impacts students' ability to comprehend and store new content. With that in mind, Hammond (2015) states that "the chronic achievement gap in most American schools has created an epidemic of dependent learners unprepared to do higher-order thinking, creative problem solving, and analytical reading and writing called for in the new Common Core State Standards."

A number of studies have focused on researching cultural perspective, responsiveness, and equity within the classroom, and on the results emerging from related interventions (Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji & Wright, 2012; Colbert, 2010; Moore, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Borrero, Ziauddin & Ahn, 2018). However, additional research will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of delivering new content within the classroom through the cultural perspective of the students. New research will also help to determine, more generally, whether "culture is central to how all learning takes place (Gay, 2018), and whether teaching to students "requires recognition of their realities (Emdin, 2016).

Research Purpose

This study examined the research that addresses culturally responsive and relevant teaching practices and their effect on students who fall within the low end of the academic achievement gap identified by The Coleman Report (1966) and historical NCES data. This study also looked to assess whether students who have historically displayed a lack of interest and

engagement in the traditional classroom setting experience an increase in engagement levels and overall satisfaction when engaged with a culturally-based reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2016).

This study's ultimate objective is to determine whether a White teacher can put into practice Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs for Effective Teaching, whether this approach can increase their students' engagement and overall satisfaction over a 9-week quarter in an ELA educational alternative setting high school classroom.

Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was as follows:

What is the lived experience of a veteran educator during the initial implementation of a specific culturally responsive teaching approach (7 Cs for Effective Teaching) in an Educational Alternative Services high school English classroom?

Research Significance and Contribution

This study contributes to the body of research and knowledge which addresses the classroom effectiveness and satisfaction of students who experience a pedagogical approach that places a high priority on the students' cultural perspective (Brown et al., 2019; Desimone & Long, 2010; Durden, Escalante & Blitch, 2015; Ibrahim-Balogun, 2011; Munoz, 2016; Patish, 2016; Wise-Hicks, 2013).

The findings that emerged from this study added to those of earlier culturally responsive teaching studies (Borges, 2016; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2017). This study will also assist in future research through its assessment of a classroom implementation of Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs for Effective Teaching within an Educational Alternative high school setting. Because there remains a gap in specific research addressing the implementation of these 7 Cs for Effective Teaching, this study and future research determined the effectiveness of this particular understanding of

culturally relevant and reality-based teaching practices in relation to student engagement and overall satisfaction.

Since culturally responsive and relevant teaching practices are gaining a more mainstream presence in classrooms, this study will provide future educational doctorate students, as well as veteran and new teachers, with pertinent classroom data that addresses the science of culture in education (Hammonds, 2015). As numerous respected researchers and their findings provide evidence of the effectiveness of culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; 2008; Howard, 2001), this study adds to these existing findings by offering a culturally responsive teaching practice to students within an alternative educational services high school English classroom, who have not found success within the standardized classroom setting. Additionally, this study expanded on previous studies and dissertations that have focused on the traditional classroom setting.

Summary

Fifty-plus years of research and data have revealed a continuous gap in educational achievement that has disproportionally affected Black and Brown students. Additionally, despite NCES reporting that, for the first time in U.S. history, BIPOC students outnumber White students, nearly 80 % of all teachers are White. Science has revealed that culture "is the way every brain makes sense of the world…regardless of race or ethnicity" (Hammond, 2015, p. 22). Therefore, we need continued research and study regarding the practical benefits of implementing a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogical approach within the classroom. This study addressed that need by providing data surrounding the engagement and overall satisfaction following the application of Emdin's (2016) Reality Pedagogy and its 7 Cs for Effective Teaching within an Educational Alternative Services classroom.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

For more than 50 years following the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the subsequent Coleman Report (1966), education has faced a consistent gap in achievement between African American and Latinx students and their White peers. Despite the recent push by researchers and educators, which has gained the attention of policymakers and politicians, the need for a more equitable response in education remains. What a specific equitable response would look like from a cultural perspective, and how to measure the effectiveness of those responsive practices, has been continually debated and researched.

Learning how to reach students from their cultural perspective is something that all educators must continuously research and attempt within their classrooms. Yet, what continues to be missing is a valid and widely studied pedagogical approach that meets the needs of all students, regardless of race, demographics, or culture. The identification and application of such an approach must be a continual goal of educators, leaders, and researchers until the documented educational achievement gap ceases to exist for a substantial growing portion of this country's students. Therefore, if research reveals that culture has a drastic impact on how students learn new content, planning must account for how a teacher's cultural perspective could be holding back their students' ability to comprehend and retain any new knowledge.

Common educational understanding says that when students have foundational knowledge that can spark a connection with new knowledge, the student is more likely to achieve at a higher level. Therefore, one can assume that when a student lacks foundational background knowledge, and is then presented with unfamiliar information, that student would require more initial effort. This subsequent handicapped starting position does not indicate a lack

of ability or capacity to learn. The delayed starting position does, however, reveal the need for an equitable adjustment in how a teacher should deliver content to that student within the classroom setting.

Much of the common neuroscience knowledge available affirms the brain's ability to absorb unfamiliar information. Yet, a more detailed look into neuroscience reveals that our brain's neural pathways have developed over the formative years of life, and the development of those pathways increases the likelihood of easier achievement (Hammond, 2015). With that understanding in mind, this literature review discusses Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Reality Pedagogy, and their potential effects on student achievement levels. These effects include the relationship teachers have with their students, the content and curriculum as a part of their lessons, and their ability to understand and connect the students' cultural backgrounds with the learning process.

Furthermore, this study looks to advance the already available understanding regarding the impact of these pedagogies on the achievement levels of our Black and Latinx students. This vital work is essential in the movement to better understand how and what pedagogical approaches and relationship abilities teachers can utilize in closing the long-established achievement gap.

Overview of the Academic Achievement Gap

The achievement gap that was first officially documented by the Coleman Report (1966) was established as being an occurrence of "one group of students (such as, student grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant" (NCES, n.d., para 1). The most significant and long-lasting achievement gap has been between Black and White students (Alliance for Excellent Education,

n.d.). Though to a lesser extent, the gap does apply to Hispanic and Indigenous American students.

The recognition of the achievement gap between Black and White students can be statistically traced back to not only the monumental Brown v. Board of Education (Warren & Supreme Court of the United States, 1953) decision by the Supreme Court, which resulted in the racial integration of public schools, but also to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the report requested by the federal commissioner of education, which was conducted by James Coleman and is known as the Coleman Report (1966). Unfortunately, what the Supreme Court's decision, and the actions which followed it, did not change was the view that many Americans held toward Black and Brown people. Noguera (2007) points out that "throughout most of American history, racial disparities in educational achievement and performance were attributed to innate genetic differences between population groups, and as such, were regarded as acceptable and understandable 'natural' phenomena" (para. 4) This perspective has persisted, though research has since explained the achievement gap as being due to "structural factors embedded in the conventional model of school that undermines the self-efficacy engagement, effort, and achievement of a student who enters kindergarten performing below the level of their more advantaged peers" (Yeh, 2017, p. 1).

The achievement gap was documented during the years following the Coleman Report (1966). Though the decades following the initial documentation of the achievement gap showed improvement in narrowing of that gap, in the last 20 years research has noted a slight increase (NCES, n.d.). Before Coleman's report, the government believed that the gap was due to a lack of equitable funding for schools where minorities attended. Coleman set aside this bias and came

to believe that the cause of the achievement gap was rooted in "a student's family background, coupled with diverse socioeconomic mix in the classroom" (Dickinson, 2016, para. 6).

However, since Coleman delivered his report, researchers have continued to investigate possible root causes for the continued achievement gap. They have suggested as root causes poverty, teacher quality, a lack of engaging curriculum, family background, deficit-based thinking, cultural mismatch theory, stereotype threat, and implicit bias (Griffin, 2015; Hammond, 2016; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Despite these researched-based findings, rather than receiving relevant pedagogical support, public educational institutions have found themselves working with fewer resources, higher expectations, added high stakes standardized testing, and consequently a continued negative trend in the achievement gap.

In 2001, the federal government looked to systemically assist states and local school districts with tackling this achievement gap through implementing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). The goal of the NCLB was to heighten the awareness of the state and local lawmakers, educators, and the public as a whole, of the need for an overhaul in how historically underserved students could be afforded, as a priority, a higher quality educational experience (Griffin, 2015; Moore, 2010; Schmeichel, 2012). Therefore, as a part of the NCLB, school districts began implementing School-wide Improvement Plans (SIP), first to prevent the widening of the achievement gap, and then to start the work of closing that achievement gap (Marshall, 2011). However, as previously mentioned, the slight gains in closing this achievement gap have leveled off in recent years, and in some instances, the gap has widened (NCES, n.d.; Christ & Sharma, 2018; Yeh, 2017; Moore, 2010).

Some researchers have connected the stalling of progress in closing the achievement gap with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top government

educational initiatives (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). Despite the government's belief and hope of the NCLB "holding all students to the same challenging standards; closing achievement gaps; and providing transparency and accountability for the proficiency and graduation rates of all students" (Duncan, 2013, para. 4), states, school districts, and teachers focused on statistical data and assessment scores rather than on differentiated and scaffolded pedagogical approaches that concentrate on the cultural perspective of the students they are hoping to assist.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy - The Beginning

The research surrounding culturally relevant pedagogical approaches has been cited numerous times over the last 30 years (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Moore, 2010; Seidl, 2007; Terry, 2016; Young, 2010). Since the 1970's educational researchers have continually called for reformation of the academic field, and for a driving force of mindful everyday pedagogical approaches and interventions that can begin consistently and positively moving the needle on the opportunity gap (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2006; Powell, 1997). What became clear through this period was the need for a common and agreed-upon pedagogical approach to cultural competence and teaching practices.

In 1994, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) began to lay the groundwork for this kind of pedagogical understanding, and toward that end coined the term "culturally relevant pedagogy." Based on this foundation, Ladson-Billings offered a more specific and defined pedagogical approach in her research article titled "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (1995). In this article, Ladson-Billings described her experiences in this area of research, and the voices that contributed to developing the research into educational practices that would better connect with students of color who have continuously remained behind their white peers in

achievement level testing (Cazden & Legget, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987).

The foundation that Ladson-Billings (1995) and others laid for expanding, defining, and making culturally relevant pedagogical practices mainstream, has led to countless independent studies looking to research its effectiveness. Ladson-Billings (1995) described culturally relevant pedagogy as a "theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate." Her initial research involved eight teachers within relatively small school settings with predominantly low-income, African American, and Black students in the state of North Carolina (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The teachers, recommended by the school and community, were five African American and three White females.

Ladson-Billings' (1995) extensive two-year classroom study, involving collaboration, observations, video, and audio recording, as well as interviews of the teachers, discovered that these teachers' students experienced above-average academic success. What all these teachers shared was their willingness to encourage a classroom community of learners, and to also encourage a high level of academic success for the *entire* community of learners. They also understood that there was a need to make sure that "teacher-student relationships are equitable and reciprocal. All the teachers gave students opportunities to act as teachers" (p. 480). Additionally, the teachers involved made a clear and conscious effort to involve the students in critiquing the mandated curriculum and content that was to be covered. Ultimately, the students in these classrooms continued to achieve higher than average levels, and Ladson-Billings' research raised far more questions than it provided answers.

The Effects

Following Ladson-Billings' (1995) published work, the debate surrounding her findings led to numerous independent studies and adaptions of her culturally relevant pedagogy. However, of the voices who have contributed commentary and research into the advancement and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, T.C. Howard (2001, 2003, 2010, 2017) is one of the most prominent. Through his research and writing, other researchers have gained a more transparent and more defined understanding of how and why this pedagogical approach can positively impact the long-running achievement gap for non-white students within the United States.

Nevertheless, as Howard and Navarro (2016) point out to educators, despite the plethora of school reform efforts – including standards-based education movements, legislative interventions (No Child Left Behind, the Every Student Succeeds Act), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a multitude of neoliberal reform efforts, increased standardized testing, the proliferation of charter schools across the country, and the unprecedented privatization of public education – one constant has remained: students of color continue to underachieve in comparison to their counterparts from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (p. 2). Additionally, in reference to the foundational issues surrounding the need for culturally relevant pedagogy, Howard and Navarro fully believe that culturally relevant pedagogy represents a monumental and foundational approach to teaching, which has elevated the understanding that "students of color possess a rich, complex, and robust set of cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge that are essential for learning and understanding" (p. 4)

Therefore, as an effect of this groundbreaking study and the resulting pedagogical approach to teaching by Ladson-Billings (1995) as well as of voices like Howard (2001) lending

credibility to those findings, we have continued to see research affirming the results. For

instance, one of the earlier studies by Benson (1997) looked to determine the effects of the

culturally relevant teaching of four elementary school teachers and of their perspectives on the

practice. Benson began by interviewing the four teachers and holding a lesson planning session

that provided a culturally relevant context concerning the standard curriculum. Benson examined

"how life experiences shaped the teachers' support of culturally relevant practices" (p. 200)

within the elementary classroom setting. The teachers selected had all experienced the Jim Crow

laws during the 1950s, and two of the teachers lived in segregated communities. The other two

teachers, though they had experienced first-hand the racist period of the Jim Crow laws, did not

live in segregated communities. Despite the differences, the findings of all four teachers'

classrooms revealed what much of the research surrounding cultural relevancy within the

classroom setting has found: "1) the importance of establishing a classroom community; 2)

learning about and maintaining respect for diversity; and 3) valuing the inclusion of multi-

literacy activities" (Benson, 1997, p. 215).

In 2015, Griffin conducted and completed a second study directed toward the

understanding and findings surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching. The research

focused on the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching and learning practices, and more

specifically on whether it contributed to closing the achievement gap between Black and White

students. This study also looked to understand the teachers' cultural competence at a particular

school and what (if any) culturally relevant/responsive teaching and learning practices have

proved to be effective in increasing the achievement levels of Black students (p. 42). The

effectiveness of these teaching and learning practices was measured through interviews,

observations, and the resulting student data. The teachers seemed to vary in their understanding

and practice of culturally relevant teaching practices, but what appeared to be shared among most of them (though not by all) was the understanding that the classroom was a community, and that a sense of community aided in creating a culture of positive learning. However, the study lacked information regarding what "community" means to each teacher and, and about the community's overall identity. Additionally, the teachers believed they understood cultural competency (based on textbook definitions) regardless of their region. However, even those who had received formal training in cultural competency and culturally relevant teaching believed they would benefit from additional professional development opportunities.

Griffin's (2015) study revealed that though teachers often feel they are culturally proficient and use culturally responsive teaching skills, some of the teachers in Griffin's study had less than 1% nonwhite students in their classrooms. Griffin described the implications of this study as revealing an inconsistent understanding of cultural competence and relevancy within the classroom setting. Because of the study's findings, Griffin suggests that "all public school educators should be mandated to attend CRTL (culturally relevant teaching and learning) training, which would make teacher accountability for closing the achievement gap much more feasible" (p. 93).

Other studies have focused upon researching the idea of culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy as an effective tool for increasing student achievement for all nonwhite students in various subjects. Ibrahim-Balogun (2011) attempted to understand the direct influence of culturally relevant and responsive instruction, but specifically for the writing achievement of African American students. Ibrahim-Balogun's study starts with the well-documented reality of African American students underperforming in public education, and used "mini-cases" of two teachers using, and two not using, culturally responsive and relevant instruction. The salient

difference in the two mini-cases was in how the two groups of teachers viewed writing. The culturally responsive teachers "believed writing to be a tool of empowerment," whereas the two non-culturally responsive teachers considered "writing as a tool for communication" (p. 2).

Teachers in each group of Ibrahim-Balogun's (2011) mini case studies viewed the gaining of writing skills from a different perspective, which then affected their practices. The culturally responsive teachers directed their students' focus toward obtaining writing skills for the betterment of communication as a gateway to success in life, meaning the focus was more on the life of the student. In a stark difference, the teachers in the second group focused more on the actual structure of writing and far less on the life success of the students. When it came to gathering the real academic success data, neither group achieved a passing score, although the scores of the students in the culturally responsive classroom were slightly higher than those of the students in the non-culturally relevant classroom settings. Nonetheless, Ibrahim-Balogun (2011) points out, "future implications in the focused area of culturally relevant teaching should be explored to include African American students in a much larger sample and include other students of color" (p. 180).

Finally, in a study applying culturally relevant pedagogy within a teacher's diverse urban science classroom, Milner (2010) looked to understand how this teacher built a more vital cultural competency and how that competency assisted him in building positive relationships with the students he interacted with regularly. Through this study, Milner stated his researched belief as to the importance of a teachers' ability to understand and build cultural competency in their work with all students, but "especially in urban and highly diverse settings" (p. 66).

Because Milner (2010) agrees with Ladson-Billings' (2006) belief that "there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the work of teaching" as there is no one way to "do democracy" (p. 67-

68), Milner built on the work of others, and moved forward in his study conducted within the teacher's classroom through interviews, observations, reviewing classroom artifacts, and student data. Milner found that the teacher had a solid ability to build a foundation of culturally competent centered relationships with his students. Milner also stated that the teacher "rejected a 'one-size-fits-all approach' to teaching and learning because he had developed some deep knowledge about the students themselves and their specific needs" (p. 78). Milner went on to state that "Mr. Hall clearly credits his student's increased participation, engagement, and grade in the classroom to building and maintenance of a solid relationship with the student, one that demonstrated an interest in the life world" (p. 80) of the student.

Milner's (2010) clear conclusion, based on the data he had gathered over the study, was that "the ability of Mr. Hall to develop culturally relevant pedagogy in his science classroom seemed to be intimately tied to his ability to build cultural competence" (p. 87). Milner continued to describe the results as being a realization that as a foundation to any culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy, "cultural and racial convergence seemed necessary… for academic success" (p. 87).

Advancements

As noted in the literature, Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy lacked a clear practice for researchers and educators to apply to their trade. Instead, and as it is understood by educators across the country, there is no one way of teaching, or pedagogical approach that is a one-size-fits-all for every student (Griffin, 2014; Ibrahim-Balogun, 2011; Milner 2010). However, over the years since Ladson-Billings' (1995) research and development of culturally relevant pedagogy, advancements to this mindset have emerged. Borges' (2016) study into the implementation of one of those advancements, reality pedagogy, was researched in an urban

science classroom. Borges uses a pedagogy that was developed by Emdin (2009) and based on

Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. Emdin called this approach to teaching

students of color in the urban environment "reality pedagogy." Like Ladson-Billings, Emdin

defined his reality pedagogy as "an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of

meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf" (p. 27).

Borges (2016), like many educational researchers, understood the importance and

urgency in gaining an understanding of what can best achieve the engagement of students within

the vital areas of early education, and in the case of her study, science. Borges describes her two-

year study of a classroom teacher and that teacher's attempt to implement Emdin's (2009) reality

pedagogy into their classroom setting. Initially, the teacher struggled with the transition into this

new pedagogical approach. Borges explained the teacher "had a negative relationship with her

students and was consequently going to leave the teaching profession"(p. 129). She had not only

a negative relationship with her students, but also as an unwillingness "to give her power away

by allowing her students to be a part of creating rules" (p. 159). Borges noted that the teacher

initially attempted to implement culturally relevant pedagogy but became frustrated when the

results did not arrive at the desired pace. On this topic, Hammond (2015) explained that teachers

looking to begin moving toward any form of culturally relevant teaching must be wary of falling

into the big trap of "letting a sense of urgency lead to into poor implementation" (p. 43).

Borges' (2016) study revealed that achievement increases when a teacher employs a

personal growth mindset and is open to integrating research-based teaching practices that

connect the subject content to building strong and culturally relevant relationships with each

student. According to Borges' (2016) limited study, when a teacher has a limited understanding

and knowledge of culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy there is an inadequate effectiveness in

that teacher's overall ability to reach the diverse population of students sitting in their classroom. However, when the teacher within Borges' study chose to begin implementing Emdin's (2009) reality pedagogy (which is a culturally responsive teaching) with fidelity, not only did student engagement increase but the teacher connected with and better understood her students' cultural capital. Additionally, while the teacher was initially considering a move away from teaching and into a different career path, her willingness and ability to build solid relationships with her students led to her choosing not to leave the teaching profession.

When attempting to understand and implement culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy, it is vital to consider not only a teacher's pedagogical or teaching practice, but also their classroom management understanding, mindset, and practice (Bondy, Ross & Gallingane 2007; Mosher & Sia 1993; Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke 2003). As in the Borges (2016) study, many novice teachers struggle in the area of classroom management, and this struggle is far more visible in urban classrooms where "up to 50% of those teachers leave the classroom within the first 3 years" (Bondy et al., 2007, p. 327).

In their description of culturally responsive classroom management, Weinstein et al. (2003) offer prerequisites for any teacher, school, or district looking to implement the mindset and practice that is culturally responsive classroom management. First, we must recognize that we are all cultural beings, with our own beliefs, biases, and assumptions about human behavior Second, we must acknowledge the cultural, racial, ethnic, and class differences that exist among people. Third, culturally responsive classroom management requires that teachers understand the ways that schools reflect and perpetuate the discriminatory practice of the larger society. From this starting point, teachers can self-evaluate and reflect upon how they have or have not

considered and promoted a socially just atmosphere within their classroom, and where there is still opportunity for growth.

In a study related to the Weinstein et al. (2003) theory, Bondy et al. (2007) looked to research the effectiveness of culturally relevant classroom management. The study looked at the "teachers' practice during the critical first 2 hours of the first day of school" (p. 331) of "three female, novice teachers, each with fewer than 5 years of teaching experience" (p. 331). The data that was collected focused on interviews and video recordings of the classroom. The four researchers worked together to gather the data and to interpret what the data revealed.

The findings revealed through their collaboration confirmed earlier research that there is a link between a structured and consistent learning environment and how students will learn (Bondy et al., 2007). Bondy et al. discovered that teachers who focused the first two hours of the first day on culturally responsive/relevant classroom management – by developing relationships, establishing clear expectations (rules, procedures, and success), insistence on students be held accountable for the established expectations, and in a strong but compassionate manner and communicating in culturally responsive ways – were able to help students be far more likely to achieve at every level within the classroom. As within any other typical teaching practice, when the teachers in the study implemented culturally responsive/relevant classroom management practice with authenticity and fidelity, the success that followed was consistent and was a clear starting point for ongoing growth.

Multiple studies on culturally relevant/responsive/reality pedagogy/teaching (Borges, 2016; Brown, Boda, Lemmi & Monroe, 2019; Cholewa, Amates, West-Olatunji & Wright, 2012; Christ & Sharma, 2018; Clark, 2017; Desiome & Long, 2010; Emdin, 2009 & 2016; Gay, 2000; Ibrahim-Balogun, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994 &1995; & Milner, 2010) have revealed positive

and plausible evidence confirming the idea that this academic approach offers educators and

students a way to adapt to the changing demographics of any school setting, through an equal

and equitable lens. However, as many of the studies discussed have shown, continued research is

needed to build on the data presented.

Culture and the Brain

Twenty years after Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP, Zaretta Hammond offered a detailed

study and description of how culture directly affects the brain's ability to learn. In her book,

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain (2015), Hammond describes three levels of

culture (surface, shallow, and deep) that significantly impact our learning process. She goes on to

explain that our deep culture "governs how we learn new information" (p. 23). Each of these

three cultural levels offers a kind of learning DNA. Our deep culture is the root of who we are

(how we view ourselves, spirituality, view of family, relationship to all things in the cosmos,

etc.), while our shallow culture connects directly to our social selves (our promptness, food

preferences, honesty, greetings, etc.), and our surface culture is how we visually and audibly

present ourselves (art, music, clothing, etc.). Hammond (2015) argues that by focusing on the

deep cultural archetypes as a starting point, educators "can make culturally responsive teaching

more manageable in a diverse classroom" (p. 25).

Additionally, Hammond (2015) stresses the importance of every educator knowing

educational neuroscience. Hammond believes that a knowledge of this brain science is essential

for establishing "a foundation for culturally responsive teaching" (p. 37). Hammond describes

the brain's structure as having three layers that work together in unison, like the three levels of

culture. Though they function in unison, they each have a specific role in the learning process,

and as educators, we must be mindful of each role. The oldest and lowest part of the brain, the

Reptilian Region (Lizard Brain), is responsible for keeping us safe (breathing, organ function, etc.). This region of the brain acts as the alarm system responsible for directing the student's attention at the beginning of any task. The next level up in the brain structure is the Limbic Region, which assists in the learning process by retaining memories, managing our ever-changing emotions, and recalling information (long and short-term memory). Finally, the top region of the brain, the Neocortex, is where the brain's executive functioning takes place. This region "controls planning, abstract thinking, organization, and self-regulation. It also houses our imagination" (p. 40). The Neocortex Region is where we have what seems to be an endless capacity to gain new information and knowledge. What Hammond suggests is that when educators create a safe environment where students feel cared for and loved, the learning that can take place is limitless.

Hammond (2015) describes how one can build new knowledge and understanding of culture, the brain, and how to prepare for being a culturally responsive teacher. Hammond reveals, through her research and data, that one cannot test prep or simply motivate Black and Latinx students into becoming engaged learners. As an alternative, she describes the "Ready for Rigor Framework"(p. 17) which requires an awareness of culture, teacher-student learning partnerships, information processing, a community of learners, and a learning environment where all cultures and voices are respected.

In general terms, Hammond (2015) believes, through her research-based understanding, that "the problem of the achievement gap won't be solved by simply trying to motivate students of color to become more engaged learners" (p. 152). Instead, through the application of a "Ready for Rigor Framework" focusing on two-tiered learning (strategies for complex learning and self-

reflective teacher growth), students can move from being dependent learners who struggle with complex understanding to being independent learners who strive for complexity and rigor.

Reality Pedagogy and the 7 Cs

Inspired by researchers like Ladson-Billings (1995) and by personal and professional experiences, Chris Emdin (2016) developed what he has called "reality pedagogy." Emdin describes reality pedagogy as "an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf" (p. 27). He goes on to say that reality pedagogy understands that "the teacher is the person charged with delivering the content, the student is the person who shapes how best to teach that content" (p. 27). Like Hammond (2015), Emdin understood that the culture of the teacher dramatically affects how they view their students, and that the culture of the student greatly affects how they interpret new classroom content within the academic environment.

Therefore, with this understanding and research perspective, Emdin (2016) developed what he has called the "7 Cs" for effective teaching. The 7Cs include Cogenerative Dialogues, Coteaching, Cosmopolitanism, Context, Content, Competition, and Curation. Through these 7 Cs, teachers can deliver a pedagogy that Emdin believes will aid them in teaching "in the hood and provide practical examples of ways white folks who teach in the hood can implement… to improve their instruction" (p. 60).

Cogenerative dialogues (Cogens) are similar to the rap cypher, in that a small group from the community gather to share ideas and thoughts. However, rather than using rhyme patterns and stanzas, the cogens allow students to supply input and ideas to the teacher as they develop lessons for the class. Emdin (2016) writes that the primary goal of these cogens is to "elicit information from the students about the learning environment and gain direct feedback from

them on all aspects of the teacher's instruction. That information gained through the cogen was used to improve the classroom environment" (p. 67). By inviting input and listening to students present ideas and opinions regarding instruction, teachers lay the foundation for embracing the culture and creating community.

The second of Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs is coteaching. The traditional definition of coteaching used within the classroom is when two trained teachers work together to present content to students, and this model has "done little to close the achievement gaps" (Emdin, 2016, p. 86). Emdin's model of coteaching calls for the teacher to become the student and the student to become the teacher, which enables a "redistribution of power in the classroom that returns to the essence of teaching – privileging the voice of the student" (p. 87). This coteaching model is enacted through a preparation state, introduction of coteaching in the classroom, and incorporation of coteaching as a classroom norm. The result is prepared lessons that students deliver to their peers.

The third "C" that Emdin (2016) presents is cosmopolitanism. Emdin explains cosmopolitanism as a community-building mindset that embodies "tolerance, sensitivity, and inclusiveness of other" (p. 105). This "cosmopolitanism ethos" (Emdin, 2016, p. 105) allows students to feel value and worth, "where each student is a full citizen, responsible for how well the class meets the collective academic, social, and emotional goals" (p. 107). In this community mindset, where those within the classroom community share partnership, the student begins to feel a sense of family, worth, and comfort that allows for the limbic region of the brain to open up and start receiving new information.

The fourth "C" is context and content. Emdin (2016) explains that context involves the teacher becoming a part of the community not only within the walls of the classroom, but just as

importantly, the teacher must make their presence known "beyond the classroom and in the community" (p. 141). When teachers display their joy and effort, learning about the community within the community, students are more likely to share that same effort within the classroom community that the teacher created. Additionally, when the teacher better understands and participates in the local community, they are better able to create content that meets the needs and cultural perspective of the students.

Like each of the previous four "Cs," competition is rooted in the culture of the students who happen to live within the urban setting. Emdin (2016) explains the foundational roots of competition within many cultures, which are valid for students in the urban classroom setting. Specifically, Emdin connects competition with the rap battles that many students have come to find as the norm with their communities. By creating classroom competitions that are fusing hip hop/rap into the learning process, students work together to develop rules and norms while at the same time connecting the content they are learning into a competitive form of art.

The sixth "C," clean, describes the attempt to delve into the mind of students and to grasp the art of teaching in the hood. Teaching the neoindigenous, a term coined by Emdin (2016) for African American students and their connectedness to Indigenous Americans, "requires a consideration of the power of art, dress, and other dimensions of their aesthetic" (p. 167). While Emdin explains that this does not mean that teachers must wear the same clothing and outfits their students wear, it does mean that teachers utilize the themes that match the communities in which their students reside. Additionally, clean refers to how the teacher decorates and arranges his/her classroom and refers to how the culture of the students must be the driving force behind their planning of this space. Though many teachers view the classroom as their space, reality pedagogy calls for the classroom to be a community.

The last and 7th "C," which can prove challenging for any teacher, is code-switching. Emdin (2016) explains that communicating across multiple social settings is something that many successful individuals have shown the ability to do, but this cannot be taught until the teacher embraces the students' cultural perspective and social influences. Additionally, there must be a distinction "between code-switching and teaching students to be unnaturally like other for acceptance" (Emdin, 2016, p. 177). Code-switching allows students to continue embracing their authentic self and culture "while appreciating and understanding the codes of other cultures" (Emdin, 2016, p. 178). If a teacher can walk the students through this process and guide them into this skill, they can begin code-switching with fluency and enter any space with confidence.

Synthesis

Research reveals that educators, for more than 40 years, have understood that cultural differences between a student and the teacher, unless recognized and compensated for, can cause a delay in the transference of knowledge (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). However, as this understanding of cultural competency in learning grew, significant research was needed to quantify what a small number of educators and researchers had already begun to grasp and accept. The work of researchers like Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and others continued to develop the foundational understandings and findings of those early scholars, as they researched the idea that for teachers to impact the continued achievement gap significantly they must begin to think and educate in a culturally relevant manner (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). Ladson-Billings (1995) research led to her well-known theory and approach to education she coined as "culturally relevant pedagogy" (CRP).

Like Ladson-Billings' (1995) initial research, most of the available research and case studies surrounding culturally relevant and responsive teaching are qualitative (Maye & Day, 2012; Cholewa et al. (2012); Christ & Sharma (2018); Griffin (2015); Ibrahim-Balogun (2011); Howard (2001). These studies focused on teachers and students (some both and some individually) by using ethnographic research to understand better the actual people involved in understanding, delivering, and achieving culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices.

However, what many of these same studies and detailed research do reveal regarding culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is that it assists teachers in building relationships with their students in a way that lays a foundation of trust, understanding from a cultural perspective (Boone, 2016; Bondy, Ross, Gailingane, & Hambacher, 2007). Cholewa et al. (2012) specifically highlighted the importance of relationship-building by pointing out that the teacher within their study made relationship-building a priority. Through interviewing and observing the teacher, the researchers developed a theoretical schema "depicting three major dimensions of teachers student relationship building" (p. 255), those dimensions being, "emotional connectedness, facilitating conditions of relationship building, and students' affective responses" (p. 255).

The studies and research presented throughout the literature present findings that offer plausible reason for continued research into the effectiveness of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in closing the achievement gap which persists between African American and Black students and their White student peers. Through the work of researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1995), Howard (2001), Hefflin (2002), and others, what was made clear was the overwhelming need for a pedagogical approach that meets the cultural needs and perspective of students outside of the Euro-centric dominant culture. This research connected a teacher's

pedagogical and relational ability to connect to a student to a significant increase in that student's likeliness to achieve at a higher level.

Critique

One of the most visible limitations of the studies within this literature review is the lack of quantitative data addressing the achievement of students receiving the culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy. The limited amount of quantitative data that was gathered within the studies involved in this literature review does not provide a clear answer into whether culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy has a positive effect on closing the achievement gap (Maye & Day, 2012; Moore, 2010; Munoz, 2016; Schmeichel, 2012; Wise-Hicks, 2013). The lack of quantitative data brings into question the validity of the argument that culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy meets Ladson-Billings' (1995) initial goal of closing the achievement gap for African American and Black students.

Additionally, the lack of a wide-scale study was prevalent in several of the studies within this review. Terry's (2016) qualitative analysis of a large urban school district, and of 878 students within that district, was one of the largest. Like other studies which were similar and smaller, it lacked quantitative support for the qualitative findings. Therefore, a wide-scale study involving numerous school districts would benefit the expanding field of culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy. Qualitative and quantitative data is necessarily gathered over a lengthy period. If this happens, the data surrounding culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy will be more reliable and valid.

Chapter Three

Method

Alternative education is not a new concept (Young, 1990). The term "alternative education" has a broad meaning, and the definition often differs from state to state (Porowski, O'Connor & Luo, 2014). The state in which this study took place defines alternative education as being "designed for students who are unmotivated or unsuccessful in the traditional school setting. Students are identified as potential dropouts based on criteria such as retained in grade, high absenteeism, failing grades, or low scores on statewide assessments" (FLDOE.org, n.d.). With this definition, one can assume that the students applying for and receiving the services of an Educational Alternative Program are at risk of not graduating on time.

With the state's specific definition in mind, one can assume that Educational Alternative Programs were an effort to combat the eye-opening statistic surrounding the United States' gradual decline in high school graduation rates (7.1% in 1969 to 69.9% in 2005) (Aron, 2006). More specifically, the school district in which this study took place reported a graduation rate much lower than the national average in 2004 (59.3%) (Aron, 2006). In response to this trend, the school where this study took place was opened in the hope of providing a classroom community for at-risk students to receive an education that is an alternative to the traditional school and classroom setting.

Unfortunately, most of the students who have been labeled as being at-risk all too often find themselves in an alternative educational school setting (like the one this study took place), with a majority being African American and Latinx. In addition to being labeled at-risk, historically, these students have received disproportionate treatment in the traditional school setting and have found themselves seeking out an alternative environment in the hope of

receiving and experiencing a more equitable and culturally responsive experience, including in the delivery of academic content. (Verdugo & Glenn, 2006). Often, these students have received what has been considered a traditional Euro-centric cultural perspective as the instructional catalyst. In fact, most of the students in this study received a specific culturally responsive teaching practice for the first time.

The subject of this qualitative study, using daily reflections and experiences with an initial implementation of the 7 Cs for Effective Teaching, is also the researcher who is an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and Staff Developer within the location of the study. The teacher/researcher holds an English 6-12, Educational Leadership certification, and Reading and English as a Second Language (ESOL) endorsement. Additionally, the teacher/researcher has worked within an Educational Alternative Services (EAS) school for a total of 7 years. The teacher/researcher taught the English III class of twenty students for nine weeks during the 4th block time slot.

The research focused on answering the following question:

What is the lived experience of a veteran educator during the initial implementation of a specific culturally responsive teaching approach (7 Cs for Effective Teaching) in an Educational Alternative Services high school English classroom?

Setting

This qualitative focus group study occured at an EAS high school within the southeast portion of the United States. The EAS high school was constructed in 2004 with the purpose of providing a place for students who have fallen behind their expected track for graduating with their freshman cohort, and where they are offered an accelerated course load that would allow them to get back on track for on-time graduation. Because this EAS school is not focused on

serving one specific area of the community, the students must apply to attend. If accepted, they

transfer from one of seventeen high schools found throughout the school district. Due to the

servicing of the large geographic area, most of the students ride a school bus as their primary

mode of transportation. The school building is situated directly across from the county jail and

only three blocks from an international airport. Additionally, the school and district would be

considered a mixture of suburban and urban communities due to its geographical location.

Traditionally, this EAS school has an enrollment ranging from 200-350 students, which

fluctuates throughout the school year. The 2020-2021 enrollment (at the time of the study) sits at

227 students. More than 90% of the 227 students have less than a qualifying graduation grade

point average (GPA) of 2.0, and the same number have previously received a failing score on the

state's standardized testing for reading and math, which is also a graduation requirement.

Additionally, 90% of the students have struggled with truancy and have missed more than 10%

of the school days during their high school tenure.

Table 1

Enrollment Demographics Schoolwide:

Race of Student	# Enrolled	Percentage of Enrollment
Asian	4	1.80%
Black	85	37.30%
Hispanic	31	13.60%
Multiracial	19	8.30%
White	89	39.00%
Total	228	100%

Note. This table represents the total number of enrolled students broken down into race.
Additionally, it breaks down each race's percentage of the enrollment.

Participants, Sampling Strategy, and Research Design

The veteran teacher taught for nine weeks through purposive sampling within an English III classroom at an EAS high school. The total number of students in this English III classroom began at 20, and the ethnicity of those students were as follows:

Table 2

Enrollment Demographics English Classroom:

Race of Student	# Enrolled	Percentage of Enrollment
Asian	0	0.00%
Black	12	57.00%
Hispanic	1	4.70%
Multiracial	3	14.20%
White	5	23.80%%
Total	21	100%

Note. This table represents the total enrollment in the English classroom and is broken down by students' race.

Through an understanding of Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs for Effective Teaching, the teacher/researcher worked to implement each of the 7 Cs over the nine-week course. As a foundation to these 7 Cs, the teacher led three meetings with four or five students, which Emdin calls Cogenerative Dialogues (Cogens). Through the perspective and feedback provided by the students within the Cogens, the teacher attempted to implement the remaining six Cs. Throughout the nine weeks, and after every class, the teacher recorded an audio journal to describe the experience. The description of those classroom experiences that will drive the results of this qualitative study.

As a current employee at this EAS school, and in this case, the teacher/researcher of the class, I ensured that the established relationships that I had with the students would not be used to influence the data obtained. A limited number of the students within this class had previously had me as a temporary teacher while the school looked to hire for an unfilled ELA position. However, through this time, I was able to deepen the positive relationship with the students. Through these foundational relationships, I believe I established a solid baseline for beginning the process of implementing the 7 Cs.

As the teacher and researcher of this study, I have ten years of educational experience. Most of those ten years within education have been spent teaching English Language Arts (ELA) and as an instructional coach, focusing on restorative practices and culturally responsive teaching practices within an EAS environment. In addition to my state-issued certification credentials, I hold a master's degree in Educational Leadership while currently pursuing my Educational Doctorate.

Daily Reflections

At the end of each class, I recorded an unplanned and purely reflective audio journal based on that day's experiences. The reflections focused on the implementation of the 7 Cs and how I feel the students may or may not be reacting. The goal of the reflections is to capture the natural reactions of a teacher as they navigate the school, district, and state requirements while also attempting to connect with students from their cultural perspective through the 7 Cs. These daily reflections were the measurement for the data collection.

Audio Recordings

The use of audio recordings were utilized to ensure an accurate account of my reflections. The audio recordings were used to transcribe my responses daily. When I could not make an

audio recording directly after the class, the next day's audio journal made a note of the change. Additionally, the daily reflective audio files are stored on a Google drive that is password secured and owned by the researcher, who has exclusive access to the account to ensure the anonymity of the students taking part in the focus group.

Research Ethics

Due to the location and specificity of the type of school where this study took place, references to the students are made in general terms. Any reference to a student is noted simply as "student." There are no references to gender, age, name, or location of the student made throughout the study, including in the daily reflections. Additionally, the school's name, city, district, and state are omitted to support confidentiality. As a part of the coding process, any term, phrases, or other communication that could provide a reader clues into the location or name of the school, district, or state were changed to ensure that privacy is maintained.

The data gathered from the audio recordings are shared anonymously to ensure no individual student is identified, nor the school's location made known. The confidentiality of all participants is maintained to ensure all identities and personal information are not made available. Additionally, the audio recordings are stored on a password-protected Google drive, with only the researcher accessing this drive. Two years after the final focus group, the files will be deleted from the drive. The researcher has committed to permanently deleting the recordings once the two years have concluded.

Bracketing

As a certified ELA teacher with a Reading and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement, and ten years of educational experience, my entire tenure has been spent working within the EAS and Title 1 school setting. Through these ten years, I have served as a

classroom teacher, and for the last four years, I have served as the Multi-Tiered Systems of

Support (MTSS) coach and staff developer at the school where the research will take place.

These experiences have allowed me to develop strong and foundational relationships with a

number of the students, and many of those students were in the classroom that is the focus of the

study.

I have studied and put culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices in every classroom

I have been given the opportunity to teach. My belief in the effectiveness of CRT on students

who have been historically marginalized is rooted in the research surrounding CRP and CRT.

However, I had not previously attempted Emdin's (2016) 7 C's for Effective Teaching. I do

acknowledge the bias that I likely brought to this research and sought to keep this in check as I

collect and analyze the obtained data.

As the researcher, I led the focus group discussions, and I also taught the classroom and

implementing the 7 Cs for Effective Teaching. In preparation for class, I studied Emdin's (2016)

book *For White Folks Who Teaching in the Hood… and the rest of ya'll too*, to better understand

the details behind the 7 C's and how best to implement them into the classroom setting. The

knowledge gained from this study is relevant to my current position. It also expanded my

knowledge and understanding, which will continue to expand my professional and personal

development as a teacher, coach, and educational leader.

Data Analysis

The data for this research was acquired by transcribing audio recordings from the daily

reflections. Denham and Onwuegbuzie (2013) pointed out that scholarly voices have had

"concerns that undocumented, non-rich inclusion, or omission of non-verbal communication as

data, could contribute to limitations such as rationalization as well as the lack of awareness by

the researchers." However, because I was the teacher and researcher for this study, I tried to ensure my emotions and overall feelings were a part of the reflection through vocalization and description.

A two-stage coding process was utilized to analyze the data gathered through the use of the audio recording. The first stage, descriptive coding, was used to make literal interpretations of the verbal communication of the audio files. The second stage, in-vivo coding, allowed the researcher to code literal interpretations gained from the first stage in the teacher/researcher's own words. Because the premise of this study was to measure the lived experience of a veteran teacher's attempt to implement the 7 Cs, it was essential that the coding allowed for literal interpretations based on the teacher/researcher's own words.

Finally, in describing the expected outcome for an educator implementing the 7 Cs, Emdin (2016) explains the importance of "connecting content with the positive emotions that come from strong relationships based on acceptance and belonging." Therefore, the themes that emerged throughout the nine weeks are the teacher's thoughts and feelings regarding how students were accepting, feeling a sense of belonging, and building relationships within the classroom, as well as whether the students felt connected to the content that was covered. Additionally, the researcher studied and reflected upon trends in connection with students' academic success and the previously mentioned themes. After all, as Hammond (2015) points out, educators must not simply look to engage students with CRT strategies. Instead, CRT should be utilized as a "powerful tool for accelerating student learning."

Chapter Four

Findings

The work to become truly effective educators in urban schools requires a new approach to teaching that embraces the complexity of place, space, and their collective impact on the psyche of urban youth. This approach is necessary whether we are talking about preservice educators about the embark on their first year of teaching, those who have been in the field for a while, or the millions of people who have been drawn into the dysfunctional web of urban education as a parent, policy maker, or concerned citizen. Addressing the issues that plague urban education requires a true vision that begins with seeing students in the same way they see themselves. (Emdin, 2016, p. 23)

For many alternative education teachers, starting a new nine-week class would just be another day in the middle of a semester. For me, as the teacher and researcher in this study, this nine-week class was an open-door opportunity with tremendous potential, and I was excited and optimistic. That excitement and optimism were rooted in the chance to measure and analyze my own experience while implementing Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs for Effective Teaching. As a teacher who has made culturally responsive teaching (CRT) a priority, this study would provide specific data surrounding a culturally responsive approach to teaching and its potential effectiveness within the Educational Alternative Services (EAS) setting.

Over these nine weeks, like so many previous times within the classroom, I experienced numerous ups and downs. However, the daily audio recorded reflections provide explicit and detailed information of a veteran EAS teacher's experience implementing a specific perspective on CRT as a pedagogical approach.

Implementing the 7 Cs for Effective Teaching

Week 1

Leading up to the first day of the 3rd quarter and the 2nd semester, I took the time to review the roster to learn the students' names and begin speaking with them about our upcoming class.

Because of the global pandemic, the school district delayed the start of the school year by two weeks in the fall, and because of that late start, the 2nd semester did not begin until January 20th, 2021. There were several students on the roster who I was familiar with, and I knew they would be good choices to ask and convince to be a part of the Cogenerative Dialogues (Cogens) that would take place three times over the 9-week class.

The level of excitement that I had going into this class was tremendous. One of the students even commented about how "cheesy" I sounded as I talked excitedly about the upcoming opportunity to teach the class. In preparation for the class, I was able to get a class set of the book *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017) donated through a social media post. Each student would keep their copy of their donated book. I chose this book to help address the challenge of one of the 7 Cs, Content and Context. This school services the entire school district and the school districts encompass the whole county. Therefore, there is more than one specific community in which the students live and work. This book would potentially allow for more open and relevant conversations surrounding the communities where the students live.

Additionally, when it comes to Content and Context, Emdin (2016) suggests spending time "visiting places where youth spend time around the school." Because of my administrative position, this was something I regularly had taken part in before teaching this class. Emdin also suggests visiting places "further away from the school and closer to home communities of the students," so over the week leading up to the class beginning, I visited a local neighborhood and a couple of the local malls where students have talked about hanging out. Over the next nine weeks, I visited a couple of sporting events and a couple of places of employment where students work.

As the first week began, due to my previous years of administrative work at the school, I felt as though I had a good starting relationship with a number of the students on the class roll. Yet, I planned to strengthen those relationships through the Cogen conversations, which would then lead to Coteaching opportunities, and a classroom community where Cosmopolitanism would assist students in feeling "like the classroom is a place where they can express vulnerability" (Emdin, 2018) and which would ultimately result in higher student satisfaction and passing numbers.

One of the 7 Cs that I connected with was Clean. Emdin (2016) describes Clean as being a way for teachers to "change the world and dress well doing it." Even though a large percentage of my students are at or below the poverty line, they still love to come to school wearing the latest trends and styles as often as possible. I grew up in a lower-middle-class city, and I remember having the same passion and desire to have the nicest jeans, t-shirts, and sneakers. As I grew older and I could purchase things myself, my love for sneakers grew. While I cannot afford to be a "sneaker head," I do own several pairs of name-brand sneakers that students seemed to notice and comment on regularly. Over these nine weeks, I wore nice jeans, Polo and Nike brand shirts, and either Nike or Jordan sneakers. The conversations I had that would seemingly open up doors for later conversations and trust-building were numerous. Additionally, my knowledge of the music that students were listening to, in connection with the posters I ordered, again seemed to give me equity in the students' minds.

Cosmopolitanism is a crucial part of the 7 Cs. In my ten years of experience, I have learned that one of the challenges of teaching within an EAS school would be the students' lack of desire for growing and experiencing community. Therefore, I ordered posters of music artists who students have mentioned as being their favorite. Also, I ordered posters of successful

African American and Hispanic women. I added a chalk art wall and a counter space to allow students to write ideas, memories, and even their names. By adding each of these mentioned cosmetic enhancements, the goal was to develop what Emdin (2016) described as Cosmopolitanism, which is "developing deep connections among students across differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, and academic ability as they work to ensure that they move collectively toward being socially, emotionally, and physically present and committed to the classroom they share."

Entering the first day of the class, I was full of excitement and anticipation. Each day, and to build competition within the class, students entering on time would receive a ticket, and they would earn additional tickets as they turned in assignments. Those tickets would be saved and used to purchase the posters hanging in the class at the end of the nine-week class. Additionally, when students took part in their roles and responsibilities, they also earned additional tickets. Because these rewards were funded entirely by me, I could not afford to offer large prizes. Yet, because I listened to the students, I hoped that the Cosmopolitanism was strong enough to see the value in the community and the potential rewards.

The first week of class was filled with building community through interpersonal circle discussions. However, because of the COVID-19 protocols in place, students were required to stay socially distanced and wear masks throughout the school day. The students focused a lot of the discussion time on the current pandemic protocols. Still, eventually, we discussed the classroom expectations that we developed together, the goal for the nine weeks of learning, and introduced the class book we would be reading, and how I received the class set of books.

At the end of the first day, I was optimistic but also discouraged. On the first day of the quarter, only 11 of the 20 students were present. This low attendance number made it difficult to

feel confident in the community-building discussions that were taking place. The attendance for the first week was inconsistent, with the first two days having 11 of 20 and the remainder of the first week seeing 6 of 20 and 7 of 20. Additionally, of the students who showed up for this week, only four were there each day, and those four students were invited to the Cogen held on Thursday of that first week.

A majority of the students who attend an EAS high school have experienced many failures, which is especially true for the students in this English 3 class. Therefore, I attempted to balance each class with community building (Cosmopolitanism) and the school and district's academic content. Each day, the said community-building went well, but when we would shift into content, like reading and discussing *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017), most students would get their phones out and put their headphones in their ears.

The first Cogen was held on the fourth day of class, and the meeting went well. Three of the five students I invited showed up. We discussed their previous high school English classes, what they liked about the class time, what they liked about the teachers, what areas of improvement the students thought we could make in our class, and how they could help make the class a great experience. The students' answers seemed to be more in line with what they thought I wanted to hear. Examples of the answers or comments were, "We could put our phones away" and "We could listen better." Though the discussions were good, with plenty of smiles, and even though I felt as though I had a good foundational relationship with those students, it would take a lot more time for their classmates and me to earn their trust.

In the Cogen, I also discussed two other topics, which were their thoughts on the tickets and interest in Coteaching the class. The students in the Cogen liked the idea of the tickets, but they wanted more opportunities to use the tickets. I asked for ideas, and like most teenagers, the

students wanted cash. Since that was not an option, I asked for additional ideas, and they

mentioned snacks. When we discussed coteaching, we talked about what it was and how we

would do the coteaching. The students initially said, "no way." However, after we talked more

about it, and after I explained it a little more, letting them know that they would be left alone,

and that we would plan together, two of the students showed a small amount of interest. As

Emdin (2016) says, teachers using these 7 Cs have many goals, but one of those goals is for the

teacher to teach "in a way that reflects the needs of the student by creating classroom spaces

where teachers are being trained by their students." In this case, I felt the students were training

me to understand that they needed to grow in their confidence.

In addition to the discussions within the Cogen, I asked students to give their thoughts on

what I am teaching and how I am delivering the lessons. Interestingly enough, all three students

said they liked what I was doing and how I was doing it. They liked my use of media and how I

used the readings and writings centered on people who look like them. However, when I asked

why most of the students did not complete the assignments and did not want to participate in the

lessons, they all just laughed and said, "That's just how most of us are."

This first week was very challenging for me. With the inconsistent attendance and the students

showing their lack of confidence, my concern began to grow because I would not have enough

time (only nine weeks) to work toward building a strong classroom community where students

feel comfortable and confident. Without a doubt, I felt that if I gained the students' trust, the

students could gain the trust of each other, and their confidence would increase. I understood that

building trust would be difficult, but that building trust would be essential if I hoped to make a

difference in their academic experience.

Weeks 2-4

Over the next three weeks, there was an ongoing issue with attendance. This attendance issue meant, per school requirements, that I had to make many phone calls and send emails to reach out to and inform the parent or guardian of the student's attendance and their current grade. Because this is one of the core issues that result in students applying for and attending an EAS high school, it is a priority for the school to keep up with any student missing a large number of days. As part of staying current on attendance issues, teachers are asked to call and email the parent or guardian any time the student misses a week or more of school. If the student has an "F" in the grade book for more than a week, teachers are expected to call home and document that call. Therefore, I was responsible for trying to reach out to families of more than ten students.

However, within the classroom, I continued to build a strong classroom community despite the inconsistent attendance. One of the problematic issues that arose was the roles and responsibilities we as a classroom community needed to establish. In weeks two and three, as a class (those in attendance), we attempted to develop specific roles and responsibilities. The first attempt at this task allowed students to sign up for a role/responsibility after discussing them in a classroom circle. However, no one wanted to take on any of the tasks, even after offering six or seven tickets to students who signed up for and completed their tasks. During the third week, the second attempt I made resulted in me assigning a role/responsibility for each regularly attending student. However, as it was with the first attempt, students refused to complete the task assigned. When asked why, one student said, "Because I go to work when I leave here, and they pay me… you don't."

If I had been a new teacher and I was experiencing the challenges that I had encountered in the first couple of weeks of class, I would have been wholly discouraged and may have considered giving up. However, at this point, as a veteran teacher, I was not and did not. Yet, despite my frustration with the lack of attendance and turned in assignments, I had to look inward and see if this was because of something I was or was not doing. Was I listening to the students enough? Was I adjusting and differentiating my teaching method enough for all students to feel safe, comfortable, and connected based on their cultural perspective?

Therefore, during week 3 of the class, I held another Cogen and invited five students. Again, three of the five students attended this meeting, and the conversation immediately turned to how and what content was being presented. Interestingly enough, all three of the students stated that how and what I was teaching was good, and that they just need to do the assignments. At the same time, as a passionate and veteran educator, I refused to believe that I could not help provide a lesson or environment that would inspire my students to take part in and complete the lessons and assignments.

Over these three weeks, I had the privilege of visiting a student's place of work, and they were surprised and a little embarrassed. I also attended another student's sporting event, and it was evident that they were proud of what they were doing. While attending that student's sporting event, I also ran into other students from the school, and it was nice to have the opportunity to say hello. They were surprised to see me, and to be honest, it was kind of embarrassing for me as well. That reaction alone told me I needed to be out in the community more often if I genuinely had hope of being a culturally relevant teaching professional.

Lastly, over this time, I also introduced another one of the 7 Cs: Code-switching. Emdin (2016) points out that "some of the most successful people in the world have an uncanny ability

to fit in across multiple social settings." I pointed this exact quote out to my students. Additionally, we talked about the reality that most of what they will see in school, and throughout life, is that you will experience several different cultural perspectives. However, I needed to ensure that while we want to expand our code-switching ability, we do not need to diminish our cultural perspective and communication methods.

The students who responded positively to the discussion surrounding Code-switching, and the subsequent chart that hung on the wall, were the two Latina students. I made a list of commonly used words in English classes and even some common phrases used every day in other classes, and then we began brainstorming how or what we would say at home and with our friends to replace those words. It was interesting to see the students struggle at first, but it was great to see them connect their common language to what they considered only academic terms when they caught on. Also, it was just as interesting to hear the White students admit that the words presented were not much different than what they use at home, but different from what they use with friends.

Overall, this three-week time period was an emotional roller coaster. When the students were in the class and had discussions, not lessons, they were engaged and willing to participate. The moment I started a class lesson, the students withdrew and began using their phones regardless of the content and delivery. The same reaction took place when we started reading our book, *The Hate U Give*. While I do not understand why the students refuse or are apprehensive about doing anything that resembles classwork, I was committed to not giving up.

Weeks 5-7

Heading into the second half of the 9-week class, more than 50% of the students were not passing the class, but at the same time, the attendance rate for the first half of the 9-week course

was less than 50% as well. I continued to call home and send emails to parent/guardians, and over the first 4-weeks, I only received one response from any of the calls and emails.

Additionally, over the first 4-weeks, I attempted to implement the following Cs from the 7 Cs:

1.   Cogenerative Dialogues (Cogens)

2.   Cosmopolitanism

3.   Context and Content

4.   Competition

5.   Code Switching

6.   Clean

The Coteaching "C" was discussed with the students in the first Cogen, but they did not show any interest. During Week 6, another Cogen was held, and we would again discuss Coteaching, and I encouraged them to work with me and complete a lesson. Surprisingly, the female students stated that they wanted to participate in Coteaching, and we set a time for them to come back and begin the lesson planning process. However, those students did not show up for the arranged time, and when I followed up they stated that they had forgotten.

Over the next few weeks, we continued to read our class book, *The Hate U Give.* During week 5, I introduced the final project for the book. Each student would be given a choice to choose one of four final projects:

1.   Students could plan and create a video book trailer for the book.

2.   Students could write and perform a song (not genre-specific) that showed their understanding of the book. The recording could be completed with the teacher who has recording equipment or on their own.

3. Students could write and perform a poem in connection to the text

4. Students could also choose to write a traditional book report

Each of these choices had a specific rubric to guide the students in their progress and subsequent completion. Additionally, students were given one day a week to work on those final projects in class. Over the next three weeks, only one student chose to work on the project in class, even though I continually walked around to offer assistance and support. Despite the lack of participation, each week, they were given 45 minutes to work on that project in preparation for turning it in the last week of class.

The attendance rate remained under 50%, and the passing rate also remained under 50%. Each week, I completed an individual meeting with the students (as long as they showed up for class) to show them what they needed to complete and ask how I could assist them. Additionally, as mentioned in the last Cogen, I offered additional support at the end of the school day. One of the many challenges at this school is that more than 90% of the students ride a bus, and the bus leaves 30 minutes after our class ends, so the assistance I offered was during their lunchtime. We only had about 20 minutes, and I contribute this reality as the reasoning for only one student showed up for the additional assistance over the remainder of the class.

During week 5, we held our third, and what ended up being our last, Cogen. Once again, three of the five invited showed up, and we talked about how the class was going and what ideas they had for increasing the feeling of community and participation in the class. One of the students expressed that they did not have time to come to school every day because they had to work and go to school, and because working means they are tired. While I understand their struggle, the current way school is set up means I cannot adjust what the State says needs to be learned over a set period.

As much time as I spent attempting to implement the 7 Cs as much as possible, a majority of time was spent adjusting to the students' inconsistent attendance, students being moved out of the class, and new students enrolling and being placed in the class. Like in any family, organization, or community, constant change and inconsistency make it challenging to create a strong classroom community where safety, trust, and vulnerability can be fostered. Students who have not experienced success in a classroom can experience a culturally relevant and encouraging learning environment, but under these circumstances it became more and more challenging to stay positive and feel like I was making a difference.

Rolling into week 7, I was tremendously discouraged. I received two new students who showed up the first day and then never showed up again. Because the classroom community never reached a consistent level of trust, when new students showed up, my plan of welcoming them into our classroom community did not feel authentic because I was the only one excited that they were in the class. The other students ignored them – even when we had our classroom circle discussions, the students were very stand-offish to the new students, leading them to not say anything and not participate in the class. With only a couple of weeks remaining, and one of those weeks involving testing, it would be difficult to get them up to speed and make them feel a part of the community. In addition, in these six or 7 weeks, I was unable to create a classroom environment in which students felt empowered to learn and take chances. Enrolling a student into a class for the last couple of weeks made it nearly impossible to build an authentic relationship with them.

Weeks 8 and 9

The beginning of week eight revealed that we would be unable to finish our book. Additionally, only one of the consistent 7 students was on track to complete their project. As a

matter of fact, as of our last project workday, that one student was the only one who had truly begun to work on their project. Unfortunately, as a teacher, we cannot force students to complete any work. Instead, we can only rely on relationships and motivation to encourage or even bribe the students into working on and completing an assignment.

The competition for the tickets had run dry, and that was even after I purchased snacks and gift cards that they could bid on with their tickets. The Code-switching chart continued to grow, and that was a bright spot. We even followed one of Emdin's (2018) ideas to have a set amount of time to speak only in a specific kind of code. The students loved it, and we made that a regular event. The celebration of a specific cultural code made the students feel comfortable, even if for only ten minutes.

The closer we came to the final week and the daily tests (which took seven days), the more the students did not show up. This round of testing was the third round for this school year, and it was apparent that the students were over it and tired of being told they did not receive a passing score. Additionally, we had to complete a final exam for my class, and the test was a very similar test that I gave as a diagnostic test at the beginning of the nine-weeks. However, I did adjust the questions and writing based on the input from the Cogen meetings we had. For instance, one question asked students to respond if they believed our country is divided with a minimum of three paragraphs. Instead, the students stated that it would be better to give them three different topics to respond to because this would increase their chance of having more knowledge about the topic. It was a great suggestion and a change that I made on the final exam.

One of the last regular lessons we did together focused on perspective, and I used media to give a creative example concerning perspective. This lesson led to a tremendous conversation about empathy, which led to the lesson on five story elements. The lesson went great, and all

seven of the students wrote at least half of a creative story using the five elements. I believe this would not feel like a big deal for many teachers, but for me, because of the struggles I had faced over seven-plus weeks, this was a huge win. The writing was not great, but the students felt comfortable enough to take a chance and write. It was the first time I felt that working the 7 Cs was finally starting to pay off.

Week 9

As this last week of the class began, the reality of the final project not getting completed by nearly all students became a reality. At this point, I had to choose if I would count this against the students, and watch almost any student fail the class, or throw out the assignment and include questions about the book on the final exam as a replacement. I chose the latter of the two. However, I felt as though questions reflecting their knowledge of our class book needed to be included on the final exam, and the questions focused on parts of the book that most students were familiar with.

Attendance remained low during this last week, but I wanted to get feedback from the students. I created a Kahoot game that was meant to be fun, prepare them for the final exam, and get some feedback. Overall, the students who were there and completed the Kahoot were happy with the class, felt comfortable, and felt they learned a lot. I do not think I can rely on that feedback for a few reasons. First, there were only six students in the class that day, and second, the answers were not anonymous.

The last day was a fun day of discussions about life, what classes they had next, and listening to music. All exams were completed, and the pressure of school was momentarily gone. Overall, there were numerous ups and downs, and because we did not come close to mastery on any of the standards, I have been conditioned to feel like the nine weeks were a failure. However,

the relationships I built with the students who regularly showed up were as strong as any I had experienced over the ten years of education. My struggle as a teacher was in trying to handle administration, wanting to know why so many students did not pass, and what I could have done differently to ensure those students pass the class. I was required to account to administration and answer why any students were failing and what I was willing to do to allow those students to pass. Regardless of what I had done – the extra work outside of the class, the focus on ensuring the voices of the students were heard, and the positive outlook I brought into this class as a veteran teacher – I felt like it was not enough. Despite the positive relationships and small wins I experienced over the nine weeks, the feeling that came over me was that of failure.

Summary of Findings

Over the nine weeks of an English 3 class, I experienced many ups and downs, but as a teacher I maintained a positive attitude and excitement about implementing Emdin's (2018) 7 Cs for Effective Teaching. I was able to implement all of the 7 Cs in some form, except for Coteaching. As a veteran teacher, I had no doubt that nine weeks was not enough time within the context of an EAS high school to build the necessary relationships and classroom community that could change the mindset and view of education that my students have held or developed. However, I believe that given more time, the 7 Cs would have aided me in creating a classroom environment where higher order thinking and learning took place.

Additionally, as a teacher who had never implemented this specific culturally responsive teaching, after nine weeks, I felt as if I was starting to grasp an understanding the cultural perspective of my students. By welcoming their voices, I could begin making the changes required to inspire the students and guide them into becoming strong learners, who would be confident to enough to participate in Coteaching their peers. The 7 Cs assisted me in cultivating

relationships with my students by listening to them and developing an understanding of their

perspective. Through the creating of this classroom community, I became a more self-aware and

socially aware enough to recognize that while they are students, they have so much to give and

teach me.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Summary and Discussion

This study looked to analyze the experience of a veteran teacher who implemented a culturally responsive teaching practice in an EAS high school English 3 classroom. As the veteran teacher of focus in the study, I experienced a wide range of emotions over the nine weeks of the class, based entirely on the common struggle of EAS schools, the lack of attendance and participation, and the pressure of passing/graduating students. However, what I also experienced was the joy of developing positive relationships with a few students who regularly showed up for class and participated in the conversations, and who also attempted to complete the assignments.

With attendance having a significant impact on the degree to which I was able to implement the 7 Cs for Effective Teaching, and with the pressure that the administration puts on the teacher to attempt to get the students to show up for class, I found myself focusing less on the 7 Cs, and more on the expectations of the administrators. Unfortunately, for many of the students who end up at an EAS high school, what led to their falling behind the state's graduation pacing was their struggle with getting to school on a consistent basis. What I have learned as a veteran EAS teacher is that there is not one specific root cause for a lack of consistent attendance. Therefore, what I learned as teacher of these students was that it takes empathy, understanding, a willingness to hold steady to high expectations, the ability to listen, and most importantly a monumental aptness to display patience.

Research Question Discussion

What is the lived experience of a veteran educator during the initial implementation of a specific culturally responsive teaching approach (7 Cs for

Effective Teaching) in an Educational Alternative Services high school English

classroom?

For a number of years, I have wanted to measure the effectiveness of a specific culturally

responsive teaching practice, and after ten years of experience within the K-12, this study gave

me the opportunity to do just that. Therefore, I entered this process with tremendous anticipation

and a number of years studying and implementing a culturally relevant mindset, but never in an

EAS high school. Going into this study my foundational worry was purely the attendance issues

that plagued an overwhelming number of students at that particular high school. In my previous

experience as a teacher at an EAS middle school, attendance was already a root cause for student

struggles, and it was routinely the cause of frustration.

The frustration I felt at my previous EAS school turned out to be the same emotional

response I experienced at the EAS high school where this study took place. I found that my

frustration with the inconsistent attendance made it difficult to build solid and trust-filled

relationships that are essential when implementing each of the 7 Cs. Yet, despite this frustration,

as a teacher I ensured that I did everything possible to walk into the classroom each day with a

smile and an authentic desire to greet the students in a positive way, as well as to provide a

positive disposition through the class time.

In spite of the attendance issues, I was greatly encouraged after my first Cogen. The

students were intrigued with the idea that they would have a say, that they would be providing

feedback to me as the teacher, and they were also interested in how their voice would help in

shaping the ways the content would be delivered over the nine-week class. I found this C

(Cogenerative Dialogues) to be a tremendous opportunity for building strong foundational

relationships that could then turn students into leaders of positive influence within the classroom.

Over the nine-week class, my attempt to effectively implement each of the 7 Cs felt inadequate. Each day I would attempt to convince myself that regardless of how prepared I was, how culturally responsive I believed I was, or even how much I thought I had built strong relationships with my students, I still had much to learn from my them. I found myself also believing that if the students did not show up on a consistent and regular basis, my efforts would fall flat. There is nothing more discouraging for an educator, regardless of their years of experience, than to feel like you have not made a difference in the lives of your students, and in my experience as a leader in K12 schools, every passionate teacher can (and most likely will) feel this way at one point or another. Yet, at the end of the nine-week course, I found myself wondering and pondering if, as I conducted this study, that my bias regarding regular attendance may have influenced the data. Ultimately, this question remains unanswered, but can be viewed as a plausible factor affecting the outcome.

An Educational Alternative Services school is one of the most challenging atmospheres for a teacher. Much of this is due not to the students, but to the teachers who lack the desire or ability to build authentic relationships that are the foundation for effective teaching practices and student-achievement. After completing this study, I felt that the 7 Cs for Effective Teaching provided me a cultural roadmap for how to effectively understand and respect the cultural perspective of all my students. Yet at the same time, it did not alone guarantee the necessary effort required by each of the students to become a successful and independent learner.

Heading into this study of implementing Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs I was guided by Hammond's (2015) research into how culture greatly impacts a student ability to learn within a classroom environment. Therefore, as a teacher/researcher, when things felt as if they were not going well, I found myself reviewing my gathered research and attempting to determine what I

was doing wrong and poorly, that might be contributing to the lack of consistent attendance and participation. This led to my own personal feeling of discouragement and doubting my own knowledge and abilities as a veteran teacher. Unfortunately, the school where this study took place did not have an established culture of support and encouragement, and for me this resulted in me leaving and returning every day feeling alone in my frustrations and struggles. However, aided by what I can only credit as my veteran experience and intrinsic motivation, I assured myself continuously that this was a normal feeling that if continually validated or entertained could potentially lead to burnout and even a disgruntled view of my students.

The nine-week class left me feeling as though it was too short of a time frame to effectively implement Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs. Though Emdin did not suggest, or even hint, at a specific time frame that is most effective for implementing the 7 Cs, what is implied throughout his book is that an entire school year would the best amount of time to experience the greatest impact. In reality, just because I was passionate, prepared, and determined does not guarantee that my students will respond in a way that is measured by administration, or even myself, as a success.

Ultimately, as a veteran teacher, who has spent a majority of my teaching career at an EAS, I found implementing Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs during a nine-week period extremely challenging and not enough time to make a determination of its efficacy within an EAS high school. That being said, what cannot be ignored is the strong relationship focus and foundation that the 7 Cs aided me in creating with my students. In my more than a decade of experience in K12 and EAS, I have learned that genuine and strong relationships lead to strong learning gains, and the likelihood of academic success increases.

Discussion of the 7 Cs

It is imperative that as the teacher and researcher in this study that I offer more depth of description to each of the 7 Cs in connection to my experiences. While some of the following thoughts were shared in Chapter Four, I believe any educator/researcher would benefit from additional commentary, considerations and implications of these 7 Cs in the classroom environment.

Cogenerative Dialogues

Without a doubt, the Cogenerative Dialogues (Cogens) were where I felt the most comfortable, as an equity minded and relationship focused educator. Each of the Cogens allowed for authentic discussions where I could truly measure the cultural perspective, goals, and academic growth of the students. These Cogens provide the structure needed for teachers to build classroom leaders who can grow in their understanding of learning, and given enough time and support they can also assist their fellow students in their learning process. The Cogens were the foundation for each of the remaining Cs because of the value it places upon the voice of students (stakeholders).

Coteaching

As a teacher, I found Coteaching to be the most challenging aspect of the 7 Cs. Working with students within an EAS high school, the reality for a large majority of the students is that they have faced a number of academic challenges which have left their confidence damaged. Therefore, in this case study, and the students I was working with during this study, I realized that asking them to take part in coteaching in a short nine-week class was not an academically realistic task. However, I believe with more time spent encouraging and working with my

students within the Cogen, regardless of their academic past, they could become comfortable enough to feel like the classroom expert and have the confidence enough to Coteach their peers.

Cosmopolitanism

As a veteran educator, I learned early on the importance of having a strong foundational relationship with my students. Therefore, Cosmopolitanism, as explained by Emdin (2016), felt like one of the more natural Cs to implement during the 9-week class. Much of what it takes to implement the 7 Cs requires the educator to have, as Hammond (2018) points out, a mindset rooted in culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, heading into this study I did everything possible to ensure that I did work to know and understand what culturally responsive teaching practices are and how they can be implemented within the classroom.

Though within the nine-week class, I do not feel we were able to create a classroom family, I do believe we made progress toward making that happen. The biggest hindrance to creating this family classroom atmosphere was the lack of consistent attendance and the school's constant moving and adding of students into and out of the classroom. This made giving and maintaining classroom roles and responsibilities nearly impossible, regardless of my natural ability to understand and speak the language, as explained by Emdin (2016). Because I was unable to build this classroom family feeling, what I did not see in the classroom was the vulnerability required to grow personally and academically.

Context and Content

Because of where I grew up and what I experienced, I walked into my classroom having similar backgrounds and experiences as my students. This has been the case throughout my educational work experience, and as a result it has enhanced my social capital and equity with those students, and this nine-week class was no different. However, Emdin's (2016) Context and

Content "C" was where I felt I gained more connection with the students whom I was able to see and converse with within their own context. I felt that the connections I had with those couple of students grew tremendously while seeing and talking with them as they worked hard at a job, or an athletic event. Yet, at the same time, I believe those students' understanding of me grew just as much. And while my understanding and use of Context did not necessarily translate into Content gains, I believe with additional time the likelihood of Content gains would have increased.

Competition

Competition is a part of every culture I have encountered in my life, and this competition has always had a place within the classroom. However, for students within the EAS environment, I have found that academic competition is not looked at with the same level of excitement. Yet, with the teacher's consistency and willingness to adjust any competition based on the feedback of one's students, I agree with Emdin's (2016) understanding of competition. However, because of my limited time frame and lack of consistence attendance, I was unable to successfully put into place anything that resembled a rap battle. However, students submitted playlists of songs to me, and if the student's name of was drawn at the end of the week, their playlist was played. Students earned those tickets by being at school and participating in the class activities for the day. I believe that with additional time, I could have turned this simple competition into something much more significant, like the rap battles that Emdin describes. The foundation and relationships were there, but the time was not.

Clean

Walking into the school with a fresh pair of Nike or Jordan's, it is usually one of the first things students notice about me, and at this EAS high school, this was also the case. The

conversations that were started with a simple discussion about the shoes they were wearing

always allowed for a foundation of likeness that a lot of teachers struggle to attain. Sneakers and

conversations were not the sole reason why I believe I had more classroom participation than

other teachers, but it was an outward sign and expression to my students that I understood where

they were coming from. Should a teacher who has no understanding of sneakers go and purchase

shoes in an effort to connect with students? I would say that my students enjoyed talking about

shoes out there more than they enjoyed talking about my shoes, so my knowledge of sneakers

was far more important and valuable than wearing a pair.

Code Switching

One of skills that I have had for most of my life is the ability to adjust to many different

types of environments and situations. However, prior to reading Emdin's (2016) Code Switching

paragraph, I had never previously considered this to be a skill that was necessary. However, what

I have come to realize is that this was in fact my white privilege, in that it was not required

within the professional environment. This is due to the fact that most of the professional world

(yes, even in education) is Euro-centric and that translates to a comfort communication zone, or

what comes naturally to me based on the culture I was raised in.

Therefore, the results revealed that when it came to teaching students to navigate multiple

spaces, I had to listen to the students and understand their natural communication methods and

show them what they would look and sound like in different spaces. The challenge that I faced as

the teacher was ensuring that the translation that we came up with was respectful and

appropriate. As teachers navigate this particular "C", it is important that social awareness and

self-awareness are discussed and practiced when discussing the translations for the different

spaces. Also, this should not be a one and done, but something that is revisited regularly. It can

be done similarly to how Emdin (2016) explains within his book, when they pick a specific way of communicating (usually in respect of one of the students within the classroom) and have the students do this for a set period of time. It is challenging, but beneficial to all students.

Implications for Educational Practitioners

Chapter Two covers a number of different understandings and ideas surrounding culturally responsive teaching, but Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs offered a specific set of ideals and practices that could be implemented within the classroom. Each of the 7 Cs looks to build on the viewpoint that relationships and cultural understanding of each student allows for the teacher to understand the cultural lens of each student, and then adjust how the content is delivered based on that knowledge.

Each of the 7 Cs offers a teacher the opportunity to build strong relationships with their students, and of those 7 Cs the Cogenerative Dialogues allowed for tremendous opportunity for me as the teacher to hear student voices in a way that allows for honest feedback on how things are going and where the class is heading. This information can be used to adjust and influence how the content is delivered, and even more importantly what content is delivered. This does not mean that the teacher is deviating from the school, district, or state content and standards, but it does allow for space within the classroom community to assist in what can be added to the required content to better connect with the differing cultural perspectives within the class.

By singling out Cogenerative Dialogues the intention is not to dimmish the remaining six Cs. Rather, what should be implied is that I believe Emdin (2016) places this particular C as the first he speaks of because it can create a space that truly allows the voices of the students to be of the highest priority. In fact, it is because of the foundational importance of Cogenerative Dialogues, and the time it takes to build strong classroom voices and leaders within those

dialogues, that I believe nine weeks is not enough time to fully grasp the effectiveness of

Emdin's remaining 7 Cs within the EAS high school, or any other school/classroom setting.

What must not be overlooked in future research and studies is the attitude of the teacher

within the classroom. I believe that if a teacher lacks self and social-awareness, and the desire to

truly understand and build positive rapport with the students in the class, the potential for causing

more damage or harm to the students' view of education increases. This damage or harm can

manifest itself into educational trauma which could potentially lead to the student(s) entering

their remaining classrooms with additional barriers to achieving at their highest probable levels.

This understanding is based on Hammond's neuroscience research on how we learn, the

bottom up understanding of the learning process within the brain structure, where it will become

even more difficult for future teachers or educators to help move the student from the brain stem

(survival state) and the Limbic System (emotional state), and into the prefrontal lobes where the

higher-order and rigorous thinking and processing takes place. When more classroom and

school-based trauma is developed, the time and energy it takes to move a learner out of the

protect and emotional areas of the brain, and into the executive area, increases.

Therefore, before a teacher or educator enters the classroom with the hope of being a

culturally responsive teacher, their social and emotional development and lens should be in a

continuous state and openness to self-awareness, social awareness, self-management,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). With these social emotional

learning skills, teachers can then pass them on to their students, while at the same time providing

a voice and platform for those same students to share and influence what is being included in the

content, and how that content is subsequently delivered the classroom community. After all, the

goal of K-12 education is not to create standardized test-takers, but rather to cultivate lifelong

learners who are productive and just-minded citizens with the ability to think and process information independently and for the greater good of a society.

Future research into culturally responsive teaching, whether that be a specific process and pedagogical approach like the 7 Cs or another perspective, should ensure that the length of time is taken into consideration just as much as the approach. I believe many of the frustrations that I experienced with attempting to implement a complex pedagogical approach into an EAS classroom, and for a short nine-week period of time, could have been limited if I had been allowed an entire school year. Many of the students within the EAS environment have experienced many relationships where the positive adult in their life has only been around for a short period of time before moving on. Therefore, this should be limited, if not eliminated, as much as possible when EAS studies are planned out.

Finally, what cannot be ignored was the lack of consistent attendance that persisted throughout nine-week study. While each student had their own reasoning for their lack of ability or desire to attend school consistently, based on my more than ten years of experience, the only reasonable assumption that can be made is that if students experienced a culturally relevant and responsive educational experience at an earlier age they would be more likely to enter the secondary level as an independent learner.

Conclusion

I believe this study reveals tremendous potential for the 7 Cs to create a classroom community where individual cultures can be recognized, celebrated, and integrated into the content, a classroom in which student voices can be heard and respected, with the expectation of moving students into higher-order thinking and the gaining of new knowledge within the Educational Alternative Services environment. While this study did not witness the achievement

of higher-order thinking, I believe the foundational relationships built through the implementation of the 7 Cs created a classroom community feeling that would have led to an environment where students were free to grow emotionally and academically at levels they had not previously experienced.

Yet, what cannot be ignored from the case study is how the structure of the EAS high school, especially in regard to the classes only being nine weeks, and a second nine weeks to make an entire year-long class. For me, as the classroom teacher within this case study, the structure of the EAS system itself was a hindrance to creating and cultivating the type of relationship that will lead to higher-order, or rigorous learning. Therefore, what seems like a system in place to support struggling students can essentially turn out to hurt those same students even more, academically speaking. Though more of those students would leave the school with a high school diploma, they would leave remaining, as Hammond (2018) points out, dependent learners.

Despite this flawed alternative educational system, a culturally responsive teaching practice like Emdin's (2016) 7 Cs has tremendous potential in leading to a diminishing, if not an elimination, of the achievement gap. The data from this study is not conclusive in that understanding, but as a veteran teacher of more than ten years who has focused upon growing and implementing a culturally responsive and relevant teaching practice, when given the appropriate time and resources, tremendous academic gains can be made. Yet, this cannot be done without an analysis of the systems in place that may be contributing to what appears to be a lack of effectiveness. With continued research, with a longer and wider scope, I believe this data signals tremendous potential for systemic effectiveness.

Personal Notes

The experience of this qualitative study revealed something about myself that I had not considered prior to entering the classroom again after four years, and that was how much the inconsistent student attendance affected me personally. Each day I felt as though it was my fault that students could not attend regularly. This internal struggle was one that is normal within an empathic educator's mind, but it is one that we must learn to manage if we are to be the kind of teacher that our students within the educational alternative setting requires. If the school is going to be considered an alternative option for students who regularly miss school, the alternative school's system cannot just be a scaled down version of the standard high school system.

Instead, as McGregor and Mills (2011) study of a variety of schools across South East Queensland found the life circumstances that led students to alternative education required the schools to be more flexible regarding attendance and curricula that "sought to support students obtaining part-time work through short courses such as barista training" (p. 859) while at the same time offering the required courses that would make them eligible for a state certified graduation. Yet, the school where my qualitative study took place, lacked the ability to adjust to the cultural realities of the students they served, and as a result this added additional pressures on the teachers who worked to educate the students. These additional pressures and role ambiguity are a factor in the link between teacher stress, depression, and burnout, and should not be overlooked (Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009).

Finally, the Cogens that Emdin (2016) discussed and used within this qualitative study show tremendous potential for leading the change away from the Eurocentric minded educational system that we have here in the United States. Much of how we approach education is centered upon a how the White Eurocentric civilization has been pushed as being superior, and as a result,

students entering these educational environments who do not share that same cultural perspective and experience are forced into uniformity rather than authenticity (Baker, 2012). However, by allowing the voice of a diverse population of students to assist the predominately Eurocentric minded leaders in deconstructing and reconstructing our educational systems, we are more likely to end up with schools that are structured to meet the social emotional, cultural, and educational needs of students.

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