

**Feedback With Purpose: How Responsive Teaching Builds Trusting Relationships and
Academic Confidence**

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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

Action Research Project Title:

Feedback With Purpose: How Responsive Teaching Builds Trusting
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*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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Abstract

This action research project examines how culturally responsive instruction, following the framework of Banks' (2019) Multicultural Education Theory, impacts student engagement and student-teacher relationships in a 7th-grade language arts classroom. The purpose is to explore how reflection of inclusive practices supports equitable instruction and strengthens rapport with students to increase participation within content lessons. Using qualitative action research and analysis outlined by Sagor (2000), data was collected and reviewed from teacher reflection journals, student assessments, observational charts, and mentor feedback. Triangulated coding and thematic analysis emerged three central themes: 1) cultural collaboration increases engagement, 2) instructional responsiveness and positive feedback support inclusion and content connection, and 3) supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor. Discoveries reveal that the inclusion of student identities and funds of knowledge within instructional content enhances student participation, motivation, and confidence in academic growth. Culturally responsive strategies - like scaffolding vocabulary instruction and structured classroom discussions guiding collaboration on lived experiences - promote student voices and meaningful connections to content learning. Utilizing purposeful feedback, accompanied by social and emotional learning, creates an environment where students feel valued and heard. Ultimately, this study highlights the benefits of reflective, culturally responsive teaching and creating an inclusive classroom where all students feel comfortable learning and taking academic risks. Although limitations of the duration and scope of the study exist, practices that assist in building a foundation for educators seeking to accomplish equity and student-centered instruction are discussed within its findings.

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Chapter 1. Philosophy of Education

Education History

I grew up in the Lower Willamette Valley of Oregon as one of four siblings. My father was a high school Agricultural/Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher throughout my K-12 experience. At the same time, my mother was a stay-at-home parent until I turned 11 years old, working in advertising and later for our local school district. As my parents began to balance their busy schedules, my siblings and I instinctively developed a sense of responsibility in organizing the routines and commitments within our lives as well. Naturally, these experiences taught us to value hard work, understand the importance of time management, and honor our commitments, allowing us to take initiative in our own lives at an early age.

About my academic experiences, I have little recollection of my exposure before the 7th grade. I remember a few memories and individuals, but none of value towards my overall educational focus that drives my study. My first memory of v took significance place in middle school, where I experienced overwhelming frustration, confusion, and negative emotions toward education. I would, at times, have outbursts of anger in school and at home, causing me to feel out of place in both. During my freshman year of high school, nothing had improved or reached reformation, causing my parents to take me to be examined for potential Attention-Deficit /Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). My apathetic regard to this approach concluded with an inability to complete a proper examination for ADHD, resulting in a diagnosis formed from the little information they were able to gain. The doctors initially diagnosed me with Severe Anxiety and Depression. Although they sent us home with helpful information and steps to begin, a transformation in my behavior and attitude had ceased to exist.

My experiences in school continued to create stressful situations, and I felt that I was left

to solve them independently. There was also a lack of educational support within my secondary learning, causing an increase in my daily stressors. I was treated just like everyone else, with the same deadlines, time to complete assignments, and materials while also trying to solve my behavioral confusion. A feeling of loss in academic understanding occurred, creating a feeling of separation from my peers. Distance was created within my learning environments and myself because I could never really grasp the concepts deep enough to be as successful as my classmates. The awareness of my lack of ability to understand basic concepts as easily as my schoolmates led me to believe that there was something wrong with me, or more specifically, something wrong with my brain early on in my high school experience. Towards the end of my sophomore year, I tried different tactics to help myself, like creating early deadlines, asking my parents to sit with me while I worked, or asking for one-on-one assistance from my educators. These strategies became routine after positive results appeared consistently in my behavior and academics, but it still did not create a permanent solution.

In my junior year of high school, I transferred to a new district due to my father receiving a position 45 minutes from our residence. I transferred from a large school district with around 350 students to a small district with 46 students in my grade class. Losing the educators who assisted me during my early high school years caused my behavioral triggers to come back more frequently, which meant school was once again confusing, frustrating, and overwhelming. I felt alone, having no one to express my confusion with or having individuals around willing to support my learning. Something that I knew I could count on was my involvement in extracurricular activities, which is where I would often find solace from my stressors. However, the expectation was that I needed to earn As and Bs in classes to obtain the privilege of being involved. I become increasingly overwhelmed when being behind on assignments, missing a day

in school, or mad at myself for not paying close enough attention during classes, even though I tried my hardest each day. I fought with my new educators (mainly in the subjects of History and Government) because the strategies used in instruction were not something I understood how to learn from. When I would try to express my struggles to my teachers, they were followed with responses such as, "Well, your father can, why can't you?" and "Just because your dad works here doesn't mean you get special privileges" as well as "It's not that hard, just read it and spend more time on it." I initially gave up on asking for help from my educators because it was clear there wasn't something wrong with the instruction; there was just something wrong with me.

After years of trying to solve these challenges and frustrations throughout high school and college, I began to investigate potential solutions once again. In 2023, I was diagnosed with ADHD, something I would have hoped been diagnosed in my first years of high school. This diagnosis opened my eyes to many different areas where help or understanding could have been provided throughout my K-12 experiences.

I am comprehensive in that support throughout my learning was present in my early years when educators worked to understand me and my experiences in life. However, the nature of my challenges was unknown to me, my parents, and my educators. I will never say that I was left behind because my parents did the best they could with the resources available, and educators who took the time to assist me helped me find ways to support my academic learning. I would say that it was a rarity to be viewed as a student rather than a child of a teacher after my school transition. My struggles were present; they showed in my work, my conversations, my personality, and my commitments. There was a lack of support from certain educators because they viewed me biasedly instead of taking the time to understand my background, my personal experiences, and my overall culture.

I am now an educator of middle school language arts (7th and 8th grade) in my second year of teaching. My school district holds an array of diverse learners, ranging in multiple levels of academic and social-emotional ability. As an educator within the district, the responsibility to provide the proper support and guidance during instruction for students falls at my feet to pick up and build on. This responsibility doesn't just end with delivering instruction towards the majority of leveled skills and abilities, but also to gain an understanding that the individual students do not fall under these categories as well. Because of my educational experience and my current position as an educator, this study was built to explore the impacts of student-teacher relationships as well as teacher reflection on cultural inclusions within instruction and evaluate how they impact engagement in a classroom.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

The guiding framework for my research is Multicultural Education Theory. James A. Banks (2019) defines multicultural education as three things: 1) an idea or concept, 2) an educational reform movement, and 3) a process. In his chapter, he goes on to explain that multicultural education encompasses the objective of creating an equal opportunity for education regardless of a student's ethnic, racial, cultural, social class, sexual orientation, and gender attributes. In choosing this framework, the goal was to create an inclusive environment and meaningful instruction that reflects my students and their backgrounds, interests, and overall academic abilities.

Many movements, such as the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the human rights movement of the 1970s, and the feminist movement in the 20th century, challenged education to look at their curricula and evaluate the discrimination (racial, cultural, and ethnic) perpetuated in textbooks. Education attempted to reform starting in the 1960s through the development of

courses and programs of ethnic studies; however, these were elective courses, taken mainly by students who were members of the groups focused on during the class. The issue with this forward step in reform is that White students and educators were not taking these courses even though ethnic studies would have benefited their critical thinking on social issues, created an understanding of an inclusive community, and provided education on how to engage and cooperate in our increasingly diverse world, much of which I aimed this study to explore.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was yet another significant step towards multicultural education reform, requiring educational equity for students with disabilities. The need for diversity in educators, administration, and leaders was pressed by the feminist and civil rights movement, propelling education toward a more inclusive and diverse direction. Banks (2019) states, "Multicultural education emerged from the diverse courses, programs, and practices that educational institutions devised to respond to the demands, needs, and aspirations of the various groups" (p. 6). In this quote, he expresses that multicultural education is in response to our ever-changing world. That we, as educators, must adopt a pedagogy that is built around the diverse needs, demands, and goals of our students.

Multicultural education can be defined in many different ways, but Banks expresses that it should mean a total reform effort by schools targeted to develop educational equity amongst a range of cultural, ethnic, and income groups. Due to the location and demographics of the school in which I teach, this definition matched exactly where I wanted to start my exploration.

Multicultural education, when seen as a curriculum reform, aims towards five dimensions of focus. These areas include 1) content integration, 2) the knowledge construction process, 3) prejudice reduction, 4) an equity pedagogy, and 5) an empowering school culture and social structure. These domains were used as a starting point within my study by providing areas on

which I could reflect in my instruction as well as building blocks on ways to achieve positive rapport with my students to assist them academically.

In deeper understanding, content integration is when teachers use examples from a range of cultures and groups to elicit the lesson according to their subject area. An example of this could be a history teacher proposing the study of various different historical perspectives of westward expansion. Knowledge construction integration refers to the process of teaching within a cultural context. Mainly, it stresses the importance of exploring biases in the way knowledge has been constructed and challenges students to think critically about social and cultural factors. An example of this could be a science teacher assigning students to explore how different scientific theories are interrupted amongst different groups.

The dimension of prejudice reduction is essentially lessons taught with a focus on developing positive attitudes towards different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, which could improve multi-group relationships. Banks (2019) characterizes prejudice reduction, improvement in equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities such as teachers and administrators. An example of this could be programs developed to promote collaboration amongst students of different cultural backgrounds to build quality relationships and cross-cultural understanding. Equity pedagogy is when teachers elicit strategies that respond to the diverse needs of their students. An example of this could be teachers providing differentiation in the form of accommodations or modifications of instruction to support the specific needs of learners in the classroom. Empowering school culture and social structure means promoting equity amongst students via school environments and policies. This encourages the inclusion of students in developing a culture that sees value in diversity, is positive in support of social justice, and can empower microcultural groups. An example of this could be schools

hosting cultural awareness events, looking at a group's participation in sports, levels of achievement, or responsiveness in lesson plans, and accessing the needs of the students.

I believe that this theory is directly related to my educational history because it involves educators' need to be responsive to their students' needs and highlights the importance of cultural understanding of your student body. Developing instruction that is reflective of your learners and supports their areas of growth, as well as empowering their current level of knowledge, is the root on which my study is built. My history elicits the struggles that can be faced due to stereotyping, biased conclusions, and misunderstandings of cultural background. More importantly, it targets my ambition to become a reflective and responsive educator within my classroom. The five dimensions of multicultural education theory gave me guidance on which areas of reflection of instruction should be considered and provided pathways to adopt practices that made students feel valued and important to the learning environment.

Goals and Connections

As an educator, it is my goal to promote social/emotional learning, support the diverse needs of my students, be a reflective practitioner, create an inclusive learning environment, and foster positive student-teacher relationships. I wanted my students to understand their role in their education as well as see the importance of cultural collaboration within their learning. I want to prepare my students to be critical thinkers in their everyday lives and reflect on their practices as progressive learners and community members.

These goals align with the multicultural education framework because they embody the practices that lead students and educators to understand and respect different cultural backgrounds. The framework also encourages the development of strategies used in instruction to create an environment where students feel recognized and valued. The theory challenges me to

be comprehensive about the knowledge I already hold of my students and the knowledge gained throughout the academic year I get to spend with them. Developing practices that allow students to share their lived experiences and develop skills in independence and collaborative learning encourages me to be more reflective on the effectiveness of inclusive instruction and positive rapport with my students. The five dimensions of focus expressed above within the multicultural education theory contribute ample building blocks in reaching my goals as an educator.

These goals are also aligned with the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (2013), standards were put into place by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to promote cohesion in common principles and foundations of teaching practices necessary to improve student learning that includes all subject areas and grade levels. My goals align specifically with InTASC standard #3: Learning Environments: "The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation" (p. 21) and standard #7: Planning for Instruction, which reads, "The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community" (p. 35).

These standards apply to my goals of promoting social/emotional learning, supporting the diverse needs of students, being a reflective educator, and creating an inclusive learning environment in many ways. Standard three challenges me to collaborate with learners and their families to develop practices that encompass my students' cultural backgrounds. It directs me to understand the importance of providing ample opportunities for my students to collaborate with

one another and create materials that engage the students in self-motivational practices. The standard also increases my attention to making appropriate accommodations necessary for individual and group success, which supports my goals of promoting social/emotional learning and creating an inclusive learning environment.

Standard seven challenges me to create material that is relevant to the learners in my classroom through diverse teaching methods, resources, and pre-knowledge acquisition. It allowed me to focus my exploration of ways that my students are able to demonstrate what they have learned through forms of formative and summative assessments while also analyzing the data to further my instruction. It directed me to be comprehensive in how I use data to assess the needs of my students, identifying different learning supports that would benefit the learners within the class. This standard directly relates to my goals of supporting the diverse needs of my students and being a reflective practitioner.

Summary

Overall, my educational history has led me to study how to become a better educator and mentor to my students. I have learned from my previous educators not to predetermine a student's capabilities based on their upbringing, relationships, or lack of documentation (IEPs, 504s, ELL, etc.). Due to the firsthand experience of being academically misunderstood and observations witnessed of students struggling to succeed due to a lack of support, I wish to not only adjust my instruction but also teach students how to be proud of where they come from and the knowledge that they bring to a classroom setting. I would like to build an environment that increases value in student identity, which is why I have been driven to study how reflective practices can enhance student learning and achievement while also creating positive student-teacher relationships.

Multicultural education theory has the structure to guide my study on how empowering student voices, collaboration amongst students, and making sure every student feels valued and supported can be done through the reflective practices of the educator. The InTASC standards three and seven directly support my goals of promoting social/emotional learning, supporting the diverse needs of students, being an analytical practitioner, and creating an inclusive learning environment within my classroom.

My aim with this study was to challenge myself to see how applying multicultural practices could not only promote the individualism of each student's experience but also help me recognize the importance of equitable education and the elimination of general biases in my pedagogy. This study provided me with an opportunity to examine evidence emulating how such instructional practices contributed to the attention of diversity, critical thinking skills, and engagement that was demonstrated amongst my students.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

When entering into the study, it was imperative that I researched the impact of teacher reflection on cultural pedagogical practices used within instruction pertaining to the outcomes of student participation and student-teacher relationships. My research was fixed on literature that provided me with explanations of the sort of benefits multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching had on student engagement and relationships in regard to specific content subjects and instructional strategies. I reviewed book chapters, journal articles, and doctoral dissertations to provide me with information, resources, techniques, and strategies that I utilized during my study. To develop a foundation of resourceful information to build my study, I conducted research using the following terms:

- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Multicultural Education
- Curriculum Reform
- Urban Educational Practices
- Funds of Knowledge
- Teacher Preparation
- Equity in Language Arts
- Inclusive Classroom Practices
- Social Justice Educational Practices
- Benefits of Multicultural Education
- Benefits of Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Culturally Relevant Writing

- Diversity in Curriculum Design

I used this list of terms to determine quality sources of information by plugging them into Google Scholar and Western Oregon University's library to create a list of literary works to assist in conducting and implementing my research focus. I found six pieces of the material through previous course readings that I had studied over the course of my enrollment in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Western Oregon University. I used the bibliographies of these resources to further guide my search for other material that could be beneficial to my topic by inputting them into Google Scholar. I took time to wade through many sources of reference and publications before creating a series of valuable sources I referred to during my research.

One of the sources was Adjapong and Emdin (2015), which examined the application of hip-hop pedagogy as a demonstration of culturally responsive practice and how it affects the engagement of urban students in secondary science education. The authors perform a case study including interviews, observations, and reflections to analyze the impact that hip-hop pedagogy had on students' interests and learning. The article used the theoretical framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to analyze the overall data. Within the study, Adjapong and Emdin conclude that applying hip-hop pedagogy can be used to bridge the gaps between the classroom and cultural knowledge. It can also be used to engage students and enhance their overall academic performance while empowering them through their identity and strengths. This application was practical for all students, particularly urban youth, in their study. The strength of this case study that stood out was its ability to provide real-life examples of the application of hip-hop pedagogy while offering insights into how educators and students reflected on the practices used in their classrooms. It gave me a complete understanding of what hip-hop

pedagogy can provide to students beyond academic outcomes and ways that I could incorporate similar practices into my own classroom.

One limitation noticed in the study was data being pulled from a singular subject rather than various contents. I was able to expand my skills to develop ways to incorporate similar ideas within my language arts content and find further resources to aid me in this endeavor. Although the study was central to the subject of science, there were many ideas I was able to alter to adopt similar practices within my study. Another limitation was the lack of specific challenges that the educators faced during the implementation of such approaches or how they decided on the approaches that they used. I would have liked to have gained information about challenges encountered when implementing such practices within a classroom to better prepare myself and my students for obstacles that may be faced.

Another source collected was Banks' (2019) chapter 8, which provides an outline of approaches used to improve curricula to support and promote multicultural education for creating an equitable and inclusive classroom. The chapter uses conceptual analysis to express and categorize a multitude of approaches for curriculum reform. It encompasses changes that range from one-dimensional to three-dimensional models. The theoretical approach used in this chapter is rooted in Multicultural Education Theory. The chapter concludes that implementing transformative changes to foster reform in curriculum and to provide an equitable educational environment demands a commitment and willingness from the educator to challenge traditional pedagogy. It also suggests that power dynamics within social constructs are challenged in order to create critical thinking opportunities for diverse learners in the educational environment.

His ability to demonstrate comprehensive analysis of the different levels of reform in education was nothing short of poignant. Banks provide ideas of integration and offer benefits to

each approach he lists. Something I would have liked to gain from this chapter but found information on was detailed explanations of examples that could be used in the classroom. I would have liked to have seen such examples to guide me, almost like a stepping stone, towards implementing similar approaches effectively within the classroom. Having multiple perspectives of examples could have also provided me with which approaches would work best for their diverse learners.

Additionally, I also became familiar with Banks (2019) chapter 1, which examines the foundational characteristics and goals of multicultural education. It provides reasons and ways that multicultural education could be applied in schools. Banks uses a conceptual and theoretical approach within this chapter to address the topic of multicultural education. He manufactures key characteristics and goals by analyzing scholarly literature and frameworks from existing research and findings. He examines historical perspectives, examples of multicultural practice, and multicultural education studies to support his perspective on the implementation of multicultural education in American schools today. His findings were analyzed through the lens of his theorized multicultural education theory. The author concludes that multicultural education is necessary for creating equitable education for all students, especially those students who are from underrepresented and marginalized groups. Banks expresses that multicultural education should be embedded in school curricula and pedagogy to promote an inclusive and culturally responsive educational experience for students. He asserts that professional development is crucial in helping teachers effectively implement multicultural education in order to help students understand the importance of diversity and attain the skills needed to engage in America's multicultural society.

Bank's chapter was very impactful on my understanding of how to approach multicultural education in my own classroom. Banks reflect not only what multicultural education is but also what it should be in regard to implementing reforms in schools. The five dimensions of multicultural education expressed in the chapter allow me to have starting points in developing equity in my instruction and school. He provided me with examples of how the implementation of the dimensions could look, which gave me a starting point in my movement toward culturally inclusive education for my students. The strength of this book chapter is its ability to provide a synthesis of many pedagogical frameworks and practices. The limitation of the chapter that I would have liked to have seen was student data reflection, more specifically, how to approach it. This drove me to find resources that included student-centered data to gain perspectives from students on how multicultural education affects their learning and personal identity to later use myself.

Barnes (2019) explores the strategies for preparing preservice teachers (teachers going through a teaching program to become fully qualified and licensed) to apply culturally responsive teaching pedagogy that includes support for diverse student populations in educational settings. Barnes used a qualitative approach to collect data by pulling information together from multiple case studies, observations, and narrative reflections from teachers who participated in professional development programs focused on cultural responsiveness. The framework used within the article was Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Barnes concludes that preparation programs must incorporate culturally responsive teaching principles to be able to prepare preservice teachers for diverse classroom settings. The author suggests that programs highlight the importance of fostering equity and inclusion of diverse student needs by being a model of such a strategy.

This article has strength in explaining the actional and applicable recommendations for integrating culturally responsive practices. I was able to comprehend the importance of reflexive practices to promote personal growth within students as well as understand equity in cultural knowledge integration, which is why this resource is applicable to my research topic. The article provided steps in creating a more culturally relevant and inclusive classroom that I was able to use during my study. Some limitations of the article are the lack of specific data and the use of an empirical approach to gather direct evidence. I began to look for sources that held reflections from preservice teachers after their first year in teaching to help me understand what practices were helpful to culturally responsive teaching and what practices didn't hold much value toward this focus.

Gay (2002) expressed the need to prepare educators for implementing culturally responsive teaching and to elicit a guided framework for integrating techniques, strategies, and materials into teacher education programs. Gay uses a theoretical analysis and literature review to generate key concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy and supports it by providing examples of suggestions for teacher education programs. This article is rooted in the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy framework and concludes that preservice teacher programs need to make culturally responsive teaching a priority in their instruction. Gay evokes that in doing so, future teachers will be better able to implement such responsive instruction in their classrooms by giving them the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to support diverse students and build educational equity.

Gay's ability to provide a clear and concise framework for teachers to use in their attempt to become skilled in cultural inclusion within the curriculum proved to be a strength, undoubtedly. The article provided me with ways to address systemic barriers that contribute to

inequitable educational practices and obstacles to prepare for in integrating such practices within my classroom. A limitation of the article is the ability to provide data that validates the applications discussed in the article. This led me to be more purposeful in providing adequate evidence to support the conclusions of my own research, giving readers a better grasp of the concepts that I explored.

Johnson and Gonzales (2014) examined how an English Language Arts teacher is able to integrate culturally relevant practice into their classroom pedagogy and classroom management to acknowledge the needs of diverse students. Johnson and Gonzalez use a comparative study method to analyze culturally responsive practice and management techniques in two different classroom settings. The theoretical framework used within this study was Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. The authors concluded that by integrating culturally relevant practice and reflective classroom management techniques, student interest and engagement increase. They express that doing so leads to better learning outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds and creates an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

The authors' ability to provide insight into the diverse challenges and successes of culturally responsive practice in two different classrooms is considered to be a valuable strength within their research. Their findings helped prepare me for introducing a culturally responsive pedagogy within my own classroom and aid in preparation for potential obstacles that could arise. The article also creates a bridge between theory and practice, which was helpful in determining meaningful ways of producing and adopting successful instructional techniques. Limitations of the article fell under an absence of listed strategies that helped the teachers overcome the barriers faced and suggestions for overcoming challenges that may be encountered

by other teachers. This promoted further research to find ways to overcome roadblocks that might arise during the implementation of culturally responsive instruction.

Leichtman's (2018) dissertation explores how secondary school English/Language Arts teachers are able to employ culturally responsive pedagogical practices. This study used qualitative methods to gather data through interviews and observations. Leichtman examined how teachers handle the potential challenges that come from implementing such approaches into their standardized testing and curriculum instruction. Leichtman's findings were analyzed through a Culturally Responsive Theoretical lens. The author's findings offer insight into the barriers that could arise when trying to adapt a curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. The findings conclude that even though teachers can recognize the importance of culturally responsive practices, rigid curricula and lack of instructional support make it difficult for success in every classroom. The author encourages educators to seek professional development, strive for more independence in educational decisions, and help create a supportive school environment that recognizes the diversity of cultures and the importance of academic standards as a collective.

Strengths held within Leichtman's research included the excellent work of gathering lived experiences from both the teachers and students. However, the article was limited in its ability to provide strategies for educators to overcome obstacles such as the ones listed. I was able to utilize the idea of the student experience to further my reflections during my study, which you will later find to be a very effective strategy in increasing engagement, which will later be discussed in Chapter 4.

The purpose of the study source conducted by Moll, Neff, and Gonzalez (2006) was to research how teachers can create an enriching and meaningful connection between a student's home and classroom using a student's cultural and home knowledge, also known as "funds of

knowledge." The authors used a qualitative method, including interviews, visiting students' homes, collecting data on the multitude of different cultural and home knowledge within the class, and making call room observations. Their findings were examined through a sociocultural theoretical framework, suggesting that a student's funds of knowledge and understanding of it can be used to offer a deeper understanding of classroom content. In conclusion, the authors found that funds of knowledge being used to create relevant curricula provide a supportive, engaged, and responsive learning environment for both the students and the teacher. This can also strengthen relationships with students and their families.

Strengths within the article were embedded in the author's ability to provide realistic and practical approaches to integrating funds of knowledge into the class curriculum. The article also highlighted the accurate answers and reactions of the families, students, and teachers who participated in the research, allowing me to grasp a complete understanding and analysis of the content being presented. I was able to be comprehensive in the ways that I could utilize these strategies within my classroom during my research to further my understanding of their effectiveness. Some limitations of the study include examples for teachers to refer to when adopting funds of knowledge instruction in standardized curricula. This encouraged me to further the research in connecting ways to accomplish such instruction to provide an encompassing analysis of my data.

Another source added to my series of information was Sapon-Shevin (2019), which provides teachers with resources and equitable practices for fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for LGBTQ students, resulting in supportive and safe environments for all students. Sapon-Shevin examines the work of existing research, curriculum materials, and practices for LGBTQ-inclusive educational actions. Through these resources, she creates a guide

for educators to use in their classrooms. The author analyzes the resources through a social justice and equity lens. In doing so, she is able to conclude that by implementing LGBTQ-inclusive resources and equitable strategies, an educator can create an environment that empowers student identities while also educating students on fostering a more equitable and respectful school culture for all students. She suggests that this is also beneficial to engagement in educational activities as well.

There are many strengths within this article, as shown by Sapon-Shevin's explanations of actions that can be taken to accomplish the task of creating an inclusive environment. She gives real-life examples and responsive techniques that educators can use right away. One limitation of the article could be the lack of student data. Future research may focus on how students perceive these practices, providing an understanding of how they affect the minds of students involved in diverse learning experiences. I then began to explore ways I could incorporate similar practices within a strict district and rigid curriculum scope and sequence such as my own.

Finally, Street (2005), the author examines how "funds of knowledge" can be used in writing classes to incorporate the cultural backgrounds of students' experiences into their classroom learning. Street uses a qualitative approach in providing examples and explanations of teaching practices that illustrate how to incorporate a student's funds of knowledge into writing instruction. The author uses the funds of knowledge framework to analyze and create writing practices. The author concludes that implementing funds of knowledge into writing pedagogy enriches a student's learning, understanding, and engagement. It also provides an inclusive, culturally respectful, and supportive classroom learning environment for all students.

The strengths of this article lie in providing quality practices that an English Language Arts teacher is able to use. The author not only creates and shares materials easily accessible to

students but also provides valuable points on the specific benefits of acknowledging and incorporating diversity within educational institutions. A limitation of the study may be present is a shortage of data from the author's research or a list of ways or suggestions to overcome the barriers the author had discussed. Future research may examine the effectiveness of academic writing ability to further support use within a classroom.

Summary

When combining these sources, I gained valuable information in regard to implemented practices proven to help mend the divide between diverse cultural learners and the classroom learning environment. Benefits of such approaches are expressed in each of the pieces of literature above to further cement the understanding of how important culturally relevant pedagogy can be for student engagement, content understanding, and academic achievement. These sources elicit key strategies and techniques of multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching as well as how they take place in educational settings. A variety of ideas of integration like hip-hop pedagogy, funds of knowledge, and recognition of a students' lived experiences are used as examples to demonstrate ways in which educators can approach applying certain elements into their pedagogical methods.

The resources also bring attention to the need for educators to develop skills, knowledge, and understanding of how cultural teaching and integration can take place in their classrooms and school districts. Emphasis is placed on reflection and self-awareness that teachers must employ to be able to achieve a culturally inclusive environment for their students. The works highlight suggestions for teachers to meet the needs of their diverse learners by recognizing where a students' starting point of knowledge is and using that knowledge to drive further education in their classroom's content. Collectively, the sources advocate for curriculum reform

and diversity in teaching practices to create an environment that provides supportive and comprehensive learning for all students and creating meaningful lessons that empower student identity.

Chapter 3: Methods Guideline

Introduction

The guidelines of my action research project derive from Richard Sagor's inquiry on this type of examination. According to Sagor (2000), action research "is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action" (p.1). Essentially, action research is an organized form of questioning with examination and analysis of the answers conducted by the person who is taking the action. This form of research is beneficial for many reasons and for educators; it is a wonderful way to develop effective practices within an area of importance to the educator. Action research also focuses on information that is directly relevant to the educator themselves providing evidence that directly demonstrates how their work is impacting student learning and lives.

Regardless of the topic that is being explored, action research is developed in the same seven steps of processing, as follows:

- Step one is when the educator selects their focus of study. As an educator, you must determine which aspects of student learning you would like to inquire about. Once this is determined, you are able to move on.
- Step two is where you begin to clarify your theories. Educators focus on research and theoretical perspectives that are related and relevant to their area of focus. They begin to identify their values, beliefs, and perspectives on the overall topic they will be studying.
- Step three is when the educator identifies their research question(s). The researcher will develop an appropriate research question(s) that guides their investigation and is personally meaningful towards their purpose of investigation.

- Step four is when the educator starts to gather data that is valid and reliable. To ensure that the data collected is valid and reliable, educators must use a process referred to as *triangulation*. Triangulation is the process in which a researcher uses more than one method of data collection to provide evidence for answering their research question(s). This is best done by choosing appropriate techniques and approaches to collection that resembles the students within the class being examined. Ultimately, the educator will be intentional with gathering data that already exists within the classroom setting and identify other forms of collection that could be surfaced through informal and formal assessment methods.
- Step five is where the educator then analyzes the data that has been collected. The educator will use two generalized questions when approaching this step like, “What is the story told behind these data?” and “Why did the story play itself out this way?” (Sagor, 2000, p. 4). In answering these questions, the researcher can better comprehend the area under examination and develop a theory that is relevant to improving the situation.
- Step six is the process in which the educator shares their results in informal or formal settings.
- Step seven is when the educator takes steps to incorporate the informed action in future planning to illuminate repeated mistakes in their development of practice.

Action research proved to be the most resourceful method when determining how to conduct my investigation. Not only does action research focus on me as the variable, but I was able to see the relevance of cultural pedagogical application in regards to my students. Following this process guided me to become a more reflective and motivated educator, while being guided towards developing strategies that worked with the student population. This process led me to

center my attention on my own pedagogical implementation and focus on ways to promote academic excellence within specific schoolwide priorities. The questions in which I conducted my research around were:

- *What impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instructional practices have on the student participation?*
- *What impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instructional practices have on student-teacher relationships?*

Participants and Setting

To further paint a picture of the study I have conducted, it is important to understand the area and individuals I taught. To protect the privacy of the school in which I performed my research, we will use the pseudonym *Margaret Middle School (MMS)* upon reference. The school was located in a suburban area of town, surrounded mainly by rural fields and small subdivisions under new construction. At the time of this study MMS had an enrollment of 656 students (60% Hispanic students, 35% White students, 3% Multiracial students, 1% Asian students, and >1% Black/African American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander). According to the data collected from the ODE report card, the demographic make-up of the student body consisted of 36% of students being Ever English Learners, 14% of the students experiencing Disabilities, and 35% of our students experiencing poverty. There were a total of 33 teachers, eight Educational Assistants, and three school counselors/social workers with class sizes averaging around 23 students. The ethnic demographics of the educators within MMS consisted of 84% White, 11% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% Multiracial teachers.

The participants within my study was singular class of 7th grade language arts. The student population consisted of a total of 26 learners that contributed to our diverse and positive

educational environment. The ethnic demographic make-up of my 26 students consisted of 58% Latino/Hispanic, 38% White, and 4% American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Moreover, there were 18 male identifying students and eight female identifying students. Within the classroom, I supported, three students were English learners (EL) - two of which were born in America and one that immigrated from Guatemala. Two of the three students scored at an early advanced level in listening, reading, and writing and an advanced level for speaking. One of these students was in their first year of being monitored without a support class and the other was in their fourth year of monitoring. The remaining EL student scored at an advanced level in listening, speaking, reading, and writing and was in her fourth year of being monitored. Additionally, I met the requirements of a student on an IEP, who struggles with math, writing, and social interactions. Furthermore, I had two students on a 504 plan for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Lastly, I worked with one student that was talented and gifted who excelled in math.

Students within the class had varying levels of academic ability. The collective class tested in the 50th percentile of 7th grade reading levels. Students within the class ranged from 5th percentile to 93rd percentile according to our district's standardized computer-adaptive test called MAP (Measure of Academic Progress). Many students within the class benefited from visual supports, sentence frames, graphic organizers, and frequent check-ins. Students also benefited from discussion based demonstrations during the learning process. Moreover, the students within the class brought unique and beneficial additives through their funds of knowledge, making the conversations very diverse in perspectives. I had students that were interested in sports, musical arts, creative arts, cooking, hunting, traveling, and more. My students were very fond of trying multiple ways of demonstrating their abilities and sharing what worked for them and what didn't. The class was verbally active with a few students that

benefited from listening to the conversations to develop deeper understandings. Students were able to share their cultural, social, and individual experiences with each other to promote connection with their funds of knowledge as well, leading to an inclusive learning environment created by the students themselves.

I worked with this class for a total of eight months while conducting my research. It was important that I developed and enforced the expectation that all students would be respectful, responsible, kind, honest, and open-minded within our classroom and each other. I worked to value students as individuals, not just academic learners. I did this by promoting conversations within the classroom on cultural backgrounds and their lives outside of academics. My strengths reside in humanizing myself, sharing with them that mistakes happen regardless of title and status. I also knew most students beyond the classroom, which promoted mutual respect and understanding. Improvements that I considered during my research was connecting with learners that were not as outgoing in the classroom setting as others. I needed to improve my ability to communicate with all students, not just the ones that elicited interest in the day's conversations. I wanted to improve students' connections between content and their funds of knowledge, enabling better integration of support to accommodate all levels of ability in the class. I needed to progress in my skills to reach each student with one-on-one interactions, bettering the understanding of where I was to meeting each students' prior knowledge to guide further academic acquisition.

Data Collection & Analysis

To proceed with my action research project, I was able to collect a range of qualitative and quantitative data that provided comprehensive evidence in both instructional strategies and student learning. By developing a framework for data collection supported by Sagor (2000), I

was able to triangulate data that came from pre-existing and newly developed materials and strategies used within the classroom. My selected sources of data was supported by Sagor's (2000) insistence on utilizing data-rich environments to assess student learning and the impact of instruction to inform educators of quality and beneficial practices for their classroom.

The sources of evidence that I was able to use for my research are teacher reflection journals, informal and formal student assessments, informal observation of student engagement, as well as observation feedback from my field supervisor, mentor teacher, and district supervisor. Sagor (2000) expresses that data collection during an ARP should be triangulated, allowing the researcher to compare their research questions through different types of data collection methods created for the specific needs of the classroom. To examine relationships amongst instructional practice and student achievement, I utilized my teaching reflection journal that recorded information on changes that I had made during my lessons, student behavior and academic engagement, classroom events, and my own cultural takeaways from the day. While reflecting on data gathered in this method, I was able to trace culturally conscious choices made in instruction and connect it with student participation as well as the quality of rapport that I created with students.

Furthermore, informal and formal observations were useful in exploring participation amongst students. I developed graphic organizers to help me keep clipboard notes to capture student sharing, excitement, disengagement, and participation throughout the study. I utilized exit tickets and assessments to produce immediate and formal feedback on student understanding and effort towards task completion over the course of content learning. These resources allowed me to examine student perceptions of content learning and reinforce connections between instructional practices and student engagement with their learning.

Additionally, I was able to gain feedback from both my mentor teacher, field supervisor, and district supervisor to collect data from a different perspective on my instructional practices and their effects on student engagement. I was able to use their evaluations shared during post-lesson conferences and documented reports to strengthen my credibility in the patterns developed through my previous sources of evidence. I consistently used their feedback to reflect on my lessons and make needed adjustments in all aspects of my instructional practice in order to be reflective of my ability to provide an inclusive and supportive learning environment for my students.

To conduct my data analysis, I followed a traditional qualitative analysis procedure, first by transposing my data into a digital format in Google sheets and organizing it through inductive and deductive coding by using all my data sources. Next, I used these codes to group together themes and categories that provided relevant insight about student engagement and relationships to deepen my understanding of the data. A few examples of the codes that had emerged included: *feeling of comfortability, open to risk taking, full participation, collaborative learning, positive talk, consistent feedback, open feedback, scaffolding, positive relationships, meaningful instruction, etc.* I used open coding to develop comprehensive categories of my data, cross referencing my codes across all sources of evidence collections. This allowed me to break down my findings into larger categories - like, *emotional safety, positive peer engagement, collaborative learning leads to positive engagement, and scaffolding is necessary for all* - that I could compare across and further analyze within my evidence. Finally, I then grouped categories that related or embodied similar attributes to one another to create larger themes that would help me articulate ways that my instruction impacted classroom dynamics and encouraged students' comfortability within the classroom. Three total themes had emerged from the process:

1. Cultural collaboration increases engagement.
2. Instructional responsiveness and positive feedback used as a foundation for inclusion and content connection.
3. Supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor.

To ensure my themes conceptually correspondent, I triangulated my findings amongst my various forms of data collection. For instance, I was able to create the theme, *supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor* by analyzing student responses in regard to comfortability with discussions and participation and my outside observation feedback reporting that I create an inclusive and collaborative learning environment. This theme reflects concepts outlined in the framework of Multicultural Education Theory (Banks, 2019) which insists that student teacher relationships and classroom community are essential for learning. Being able to cross reference my themes across my various data collections reinforced the validity and relevance to my research questions. In addition, I adjusted my analysis after receiving feedback from mentor teacher and field supervisor. This helped me re-examine thematic interpretations and contributed to the internal reliability of my study.

Researcher Positionality

This study has allowed me to be reflective in how my educational experience affects my pedagogical approaches. Being an individual who was raised by an educator, I was able to look at education from a unique perspective. I struggled to learn throughout my education and although I had helpful and supportive teachers at times, many educators lacked value for me as a student or as an individual due to biased thoughts about my upbringing and skill levels. When looking back to my early education experience, I was able to grasp the true importance of cultural respect and understanding. I was able to think more critically on the need for breaking

cultural and individual biases in order to learn the invaluable skills each student has to offer the class throughout a year. I was able to understand how equitable education begins with knowing your students culturally, academically, and socially-emotionally in order to create an environment that is supportive for all.

Multicultural education theory helped me create an inclusive community in which all students are able to succeed. By providing me with dimensions of focus, I was able to build upon what culturally responsive education could look like when building positive connections with students and their learning. By creating meaningful student-teacher relationships, I began developing instruction that valued student strengths and differences. I was able to look at my data through the perspective of an individual that knows how important it is to have a deeper understanding of the student than their data points, percentages, leveled assessments. I also learned to take into consideration the added things I knew about my students strengths and abilities, making my data more reliable and valuable for my study.

Chapter 4: Findings Guideline

Introduction

Within this chapter, I share key findings of my action research project, which examines how culturally responsive instruction impacts student engagement and participation in academic content. I explore insights into how intentional practices motivated connection between content and student identities, supported participation, and promoted emotional safety within the classroom.

In an analysis of the data collected throughout an academic year of instruction, I utilized thematic analysis, outlined by Sagor (2000), which is the process of recognizing repeated patterns within organized data, determining themes within the evidence, and employing a comprehensive analysis of the findings. The process began with gathering and organizing a variety of data sources, including teacher reflection journals, informal observations, student assessments, and feedback from mentor teachers and program and building supervisors. From there, I began the coding process, where I labeled consistent patterns in behaviors, outcomes, reactions, and participation observed and shared. For example, phrases like positive collaboration, engagement in discussions, and confidence in risk-taking emerged.

After determining an initial set of codes, I analyzed the relevance and consistency of each to place them into larger categories of outcomes. I then cross-referenced the categories with the organized data, ensuring that multiple sources of evidence for comparison on potential themes are to be considered. I finally developed three themes that I observed to be consistent and apparent in multiple sources of data. Through this process of analysis, Three major themes were exposed. The first theme was that assimilation of cultural collaboration increases engagement. The second theme was using instructional responsiveness and positive feedback as a foundation

for inclusion and content connection. The third theme was supportive practices that enhance psychological safety and academic valor. Each theme is discussed with supportive data.

Cultural collaboration increases engagement.

This theme explores my ability to add an element of content integration, one of Banks' (2019) dimensions of focus. This is the process in which an educator uses diverse cultural examples to deepen content understanding and foster inclusion and equity in instruction. This theme encompasses the effectiveness of cultural inclusion within instruction not only to enhance student achievement but also to show an increase in engagement within the classroom and social interactions with peers and the teacher. I was able to use my teacher reflection journal, informal observation of student engagement, and observation feedback from my field supervisor and mentor teacher to come to comprehend how effective cultural collaboration was for student engagement. When students were able to see their identities and experiences reflected in the content and had an opportunity to share their connections with the class, they were more eager to participate, express more agency, and show comfort within the classroom environment.

When reflecting on my journals taken over the course of the year, I wrote that student engagement was significantly higher during content that explored topics that related to character identity and social justice. I also noted that peer collaboration produced answers that encompassed many different viewpoints. Within our poetry unit, we explored a poem called *A Rose That Grew From Concrete* written by author Tupac Shakur. The focus of the unit was for students to make inferences based on evidence from the text and understand figurative language use. I also wanted students to connect the poetry to real-life situations.

We started the lesson by researching the author's life, having students gather information about the author, and learning about the background and culture that the poem initially emerged

from. Students were surprised that they were reading a poem from a common artist that they had heard of. One student had raised their hand before beginning the research and asked, "Is this 2Pac, the rapper?" to which I responded, "Yes," Many students did not know of the rapper and began to ask questions, "Is he still rapping?" "Why is a rapper writing poetry?" and "Isn't he the guy that was friends with Snoop Dogg?" These questions led me to give a cultural lesson on how messages sent in poetry and music can take different forms and reach different audience members.

I then instructed the students to find three facts about the author that answered the following questions: What did he want his audience to learn from his work, where did he grow up, and what was his early life like? These questions led students to conduct their own research on the author, guided by a few questions and expectations. I allowed students to work with partners, sharing their new findings with each other. They were working through different sources, finding information about Tupac Shakur while excitedly expressing to their peers what they were finding. At the end of the task, I had students share their findings. A student had shared, "Tupac wasn't always rich; he actually moved around a lot and didn't have a lot of money." Another shared, "he talks about political stuff and his experience when he was involved in a gang, which actually is part of why he died - when he wrote poems and things, he really focused on himself, like he wanted to improve and help others improve too." Students were engaged in conversations throughout the entire time given for research, sharing with each other their sources and images found. I also had written in my journal, "students were giggling, shouting to have friends see what they were finding, and even calling me over to look at their sources to show how they found what they did." Students continued to explore how Shakur produced work to talk about the importance of self-improvement and embracing change. They

shared that he grew up with a single mother who was a part of the Black Panther Party and experienced poverty. This led us to explore what the Black Panther Party was and work to understand what activism is.

After students had an understanding of our author, we then read Shakur's poem *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*. Students first identified figurative language within the poem, practicing their content knowledge throughout the reading. We then talked about the meaning of each line, developing a more clear statement of meaning. Students had an opportunity to talk about the potential meanings and work together within small groups to support student's growth in this skill. The class worked together to form a clear understanding of what Shakur could have meant with his words and figurative references. Students volunteered answers, provided evidence to support their inferences, and encouraged other peers to participate to deepen their own understanding of the poem.

The next day, students were tasked with relating this poem to a middle school student's life, bringing in a sense of cultural inclusion to figurative language in order to gauge how this would engage students in deepening their understanding while applying their cultural funds of knowledge. I gave the instructions that they needed to work through the lines and produce an inference on what they could mean for a child who is in the middle of their educational career, challenging them to make connections to the cultures they see around themselves. I let students work in groups of 3-5 peers of their choice during this process, encouraging them to ask each other questions and present potential interpretations to solidify one. Students came back together for a class discussion, and Figure 1 provides evidence of connections that they were able to make.

Figure 1*Poem Discussion - Student Responses*

Poem Lines	Student Responses			
	Pair 1	Pair 2	Pair 3	Pair 4
<i>Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete?</i>	“This line could show students talking about another student after we all leave. Kinda like making conversation about someone they went to school with.”	“This line could be the speaker saying the rose is a student that did something cool.”	“The rose could be a student and the question in the line could be showing that their family or teachers are talking about them.”	“This line could be the speaker saying the rose resembles a student that grew up to do something.”
<i>Proving nature's law is wrong it learned to walk without having feet.</i>	“This line could show that the rose did something that everyone at the school didn't think they could do.”	“This line could express that the student was able to prove that he could do something cool even though there were things holding him back.”	“This line shows that the teachers or family were impressed with what the student could do in life, like get a job, go to school, or go pro in a sport.”	“This line could mean that the student learned to do the impossible thing without much support or maybe the student could have struggled with mental or physical health that held them back.”
<i>Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.</i>	“This line talks about how the student didn't listen to the doubts from others and kept moving towards what he wanted to do.”	“This line tells us that the student was able to beat the things holding them back and move towards happiness.”	“This line could mean that the student should always work towards what they want despite what family and teachers could	“This could mean that the student kept trying to reach their dream by learning things on their own and ended up doing a good job.”

			say to not support it.”	
<i>Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else ever cared.</i>	“This line could express that even though his classmates didn’t care in school, the student believed in themselves.”	“This line could mean that the student only needed himself to beat his challenges.”	“This line could mean that the student will teach other students to believe in their dreams, even when people say it's impossible.”	“This could mean that the student will continue to do well because they did well for themselves and no one else.”

Students were able to collaborate about different perspectives and understandings of the text based on their lived experiences and backgrounds. On the surface level of understanding my students, it may seem that they share similar backgrounds and experiences as each other, but that is far from the truth once you begin to learn about their families, values, struggles, and joys in their everyday lives. Exploring this poem in such a way allowed them to make inferences about the author's experiences first, gaining skill in noticing ties between the author's cultural background and using figurative language understanding to create clear inferences on how he promoted a theme of self-improvement in his writing. By helping students connect cultural understanding to the content - as recommended by Banks' dimension of content integration - students were able to take similar steps in creating connections to literature using their experiences to assist them. Having them work in groups furthered their growth in social-emotional learning by sharing, collaborating, and engaging with peers and diverse perspectives on a topic respectfully and effectively. Students created cultural connections with the literature and developed skills on how they could relate to future work using their real lives as a bridge to successful comprehension. Students were engaged, respectful of diverse perspectives, and also were able to show proficiency in the focus of the lesson.

While reviewing my observational notes from my mentors, my supervisor mentioned that my "classroom promotes culturally relevant material," "students are able to connect to cultural experiences," and that "students are engaged and excited about the lessons taking place." This provides further support in the analysis that students respond with positive participation when they are provided with culturally relevant content instruction. Students also are encouraged to discuss content knowledge with classmates in order to enhance their learning through practices that they enjoy. Using student-driven strategies as a form of support for learning and achievement increases student desire to engage in the learning process. I have observed that giving students examples and an opportunity to express their findings with each other before whole-class discussion also makes students feel comfortable in their participation overall. Culturally responsive instruction confirms Banks' (2019) dimension of content integration, leading students to form greater connections and reflect on their identities in relation to the content being taught. Providing students with collaborative practices also increases their drive to participate because they are able to express their findings and gain feedback from peers throughout their learning process.

Instructional responsiveness and positive feedback support inclusion and content connection

Equity Pedagogy is another one of Banks' (2019) dimensions of focus when creating a classroom that is conducive to providing culturally responsive education. Equitable educational experiences that accommodate the many learning styles within the classroom can create a feeling of belonging and connection to the content being learned as well as the classroom environment (Banks, 2019). Throughout the process of the data collection, I was able to gauge how effective specific scaffolding strategies were for student learning and make real-

time adjustments as necessary for students by using my teacher reflection journals, informal and formal student assessments, and observation feedback from my field supervisor, mentor teacher, and district supervisor. There were many strategies that students developed strong academic successes through, but the constant that I decided never to change was positive feedback during student participation. Making instructional adjustments and providing words of encouragement continuously allowed students to feel a sense of importance to the classroom learning environment and promoted content connections during lessons.

By first examining my journal reflections, I noted that students participated most during class and partner discussions. They also learned more through visual content representations and informal writing opportunities. It can be difficult at times to provide opportunities for all of these strategies to take place during content learning; however, I was able to create a lesson routine within the content and academic vocabulary learning that encompassed these findings. The results of this routine showed that students made academic progress when subjected to practices that reflected their learning strengths.

The vocabulary routine that I was able to implement was fairly simple but embodied many aspects of content literacy learning within my vocabulary lessons. It created opportunities for students to listen to content vocabulary, read content vocabulary used in its correct form, participate in content-specific discussions, and develop properly written examples showing academic understanding. This routine utilized scaffolding strategies like visual, written, and listening activities that students had shown success through. It also provided an opportunity for students to participate multiple times within the class period through peer discussions, choral responses, independent practice, and volunteering opportunities. It also gave me an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement in successful uses of content-specific vocabulary and make

adjustments to student responses as necessary. In Figure 2, I list the routine adjustments that I developed from my original routine, along with the routine I began to use.

Figure 2

Step-by-Step Vocabulary Instruction Routines Used By Educator: Original vs Developed

<i>Step - by - Step Vocabulary Instruction Routine</i>	
<i>Original</i>	<i>Developed</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher sits at the document camera and models notes for students. Teacher writes the title and asks students what the story might be about based on the title. 2. Teacher begins by telling the students how many vocabulary words we will be covering. 3. Teacher writes the vocabulary word and has students perform a turn and talk about the word before the definition is given. 4. Teacher calls on students to volunteer answers to potential definitions. 5. Teacher then gives the students the definition and a verbal example of how to use the word properly. 6. Teacher then moves onto the next word and continues this process until all the words have been covered. 7. Teacher gives an independent practice of the vocabulary and monitors students during the task activity to assist students as needed. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher presents a powerpoint that provides a visual of the title, author, and image on the cover of the story. Teacher has students guess what the story might be about based on the title and image on the introductory slide. 2. Teacher begins by telling the students how many vocabulary words we will be covering and what the expectations are for participation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Note: Teacher presents the vocabulary words and definitions in red for students to independently take notes on needed information. b. Expectations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Write the information that is written in red in their notebook. ii. Politely ask for more time if needed. iii. Stay quiet during independent “think” time. iv. Be a polite listener when classmates are

Figure 2

	sharing by looking at the student and not speaking.
	v. Take turns during discussion opportunities.
	vi. Raise your hand before sharing your answers.
3.	Teacher begins by switching to the slide and reads the vocabulary word and the part of speech the word will function in.
4.	Teacher shows two images that depict the word and allow students time to independently think about what the word could mean based on the images and part of speech.
5.	Teacher then provides two sentences that use the vocabulary word in a sentence to describe what is taking place in the pictures (1 sentence per image).
6.	Teacher allows students to turn and talk with their table partners on what they believe the word means.
7.	Teacher brings attention back to the front of the room and asks for volunteers to guess what the word may mean.
8.	Teacher then presents the definition and relates the meaning to the examples that were given by students and allows them to write the information down in their notebooks.
9.	Teacher repeats this process until all the words have been covered.

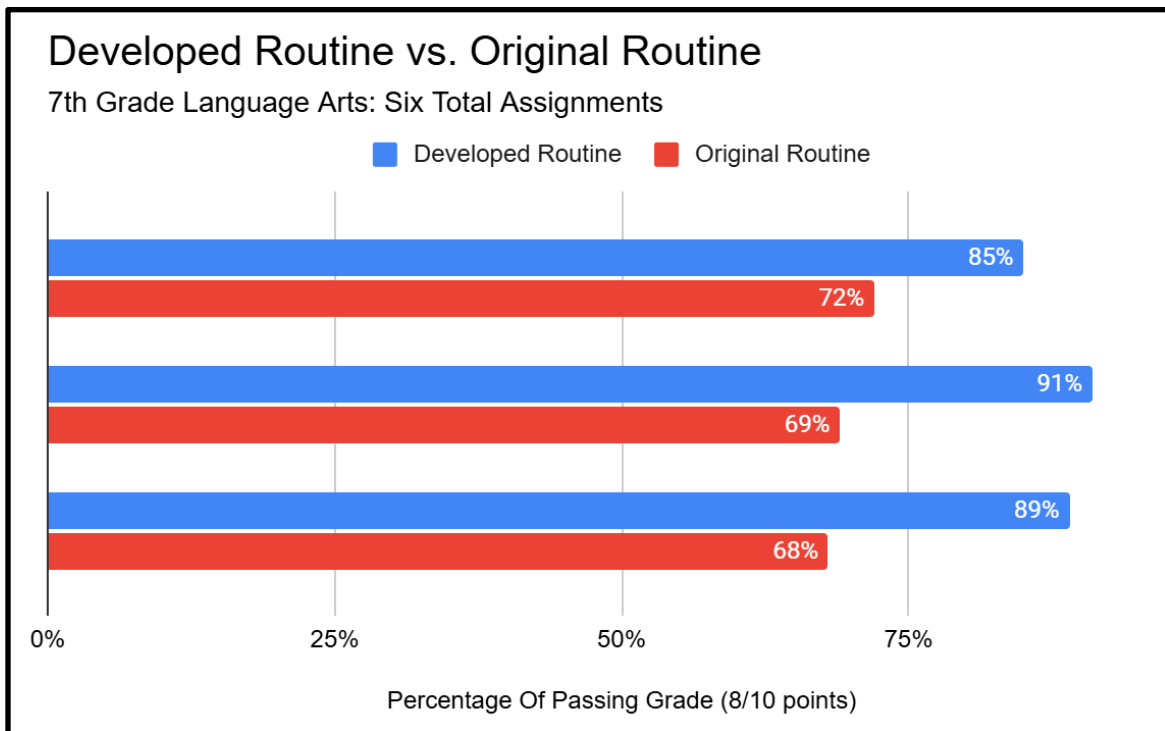
Figure 2

10. Teacher gives an independent practice of the vocabulary and allows students to use peer support if needed. The teacher will monitor student participation and provide support when needed.

I was able to analyze the success of this routine by taking scores of independent practice assessments and gauging student successes between the two vocabulary routines. In Figure 3, I was able to see data pulled from my 7th-grade language arts class and their academic success in six independent vocabulary assessments given over the course of six different texts read within the class. You will see that my original routine was less effective than the newly developed routine provided above. Students were less likely to understand and apply proficiency in their vocabulary when using strategies that did not take their strengths into consideration during the lesson planning. When you look at the developed routine, you will see that there is at least a 23% increase in vocabulary proficiency when comparing the least proficient numbers in both the original and developed categories. This presents clear and concise evidence that creating opportunities for students to participate in content learning while providing supports that work for their learning styles increases connections with the content understanding.

Figure 3

Comparison of Original and Developed Vocabulary Lesson Routine.

Figure 3

I gained feedback from my students after using this routine for vocabulary lessons anonymously, making sure they could freely speak as they wanted. This was done through a Google form that asked the following question: What helps you learn vocabulary before a text? Below, I provide three student responses that encompass the majority of students' opinions towards the vocabulary lessons that had been taking place.

Student Response 1:

I like when you give us pictures and sentences. It helps me understand what the words mean and I don't feel the pressure of being wrong because I don't have to volunteer if I don't know what it means. I also like that I get to hear what other people think the word means because I can kinda figure out a guess if I needed to.

Student Response 2:

I like that you make my guess sound right even when I am wrong. I like volunteering and I don't feel the pressure of being wrong because you do this every time. I also like the pictures because they help me guess better.

Student Response 3:

I like that you give picture and sentence examples when we learn new words. I feel like I can come up with a meaning when I get to see the word in a sentence. I also like that I get to talk with my partner before we share to check that we are getting the word correctly before sharing it with the class.

These responses helped me understand that the developed routine embodies those areas that my students felt nervous about when participating in class. Most of the respondents preferred to discuss what they thought the vocabulary words meant before being asked to share ideas with the class. They had said that it removed the pressure of being wrong and that my feedback provided them with comfort if they were wrong. Having students provide this feedback to me gave me assurance in producing materials and practices that reflected the needs of my students.

Being responsive during my instructions and providing students with positive feedback created a learning environment in which students felt they could grow. Using scaffolding practices to support students with different academic abilities increased students' confidence in participating and overall achievement within the classroom. Creating an equitable learning environment must start with listening to what the students need and not assuming what works well for the majority. Using a new routine for learning can make a large difference in building a student's identity within your content, but being a reflection on how your students are responding to such activities is really where the equitable intention lies for future lessons within the classroom.

Supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor

Another dimension that Banks (2019) expresses a need to focus on is prejudice reduction in order to foster positive and respectful attitudes toward cultural differences. This dimension is crucial in the process of creating a classroom environment where students feel safe and supported throughout their academic growth and development. Within my classroom, there are many strategies that I utilize to provide educational opportunities for students to deepen their social-emotional learning and appreciation for diversity. These practices created a foundation for students to excel in what I call "academic valor" - students' willingness to take risks by participating when being uncertain and showing confidence in themselves to grow within their learning. This theme emerged through the process of analyzing the feedback from my mentors as well as my students.

First, I would like to provide an overview of a few practices that I use to create a supportive and safe environment for my students. One of my practices is omitting negative statements/words. It embodies the idea that statements that can be heard as negative are not to be used within the classroom environment. An example of this is not allowing students to use the words stupid or shut up. At the beginning of each year, I give students this rule and explain to them that there is never a time when these "offensive" words are fully perceived in a positive way. This is best done at the beginning of the year before all the students know each other. I explain this rule by providing them with a "stranger" analysis of a real-time situation. I asked students to give me an instance where they believed using either the word stupid or shut up would be a positive remark. I have students provide sentences and ask the other students if they agree. Then, ask them whom they would typically use these sentences towards. Most say friends and family, which leads me to ask, "What if a stranger said this to you?"

I ask them to imagine a random person walking up to them and saying one of the examples. I asked them how they would react. Most students say that it would be awkward or weird if a stranger came up and said that. I then asked them to imagine if a teacher walked up to them and said one of those sentences: How would that make you feel? This usually gets the students to gasp in shock, saying that it would be rude or insulting. I tell the students that I agree, and that is why we shouldn't use this language in a classroom, even if it is to our friends because you never know who can hear you. I explain to them that everyone starts out as strangers at first, and they aren't aware of how other people would perceive these comments. I tell them that to create an environment where everyone feels they can learn, it is important to feel safe, including mentally and physically. This leads me to talk about the idea of "time and place," that there might be times or places where they can use this type of language (or any others along the same line); however, in my classroom, it is not one of them. Positive talk is not only an expectation that I have of my students but also allows them to reflect on how they speak to each other. It provides an opportunity for students to develop an understanding of how their words can lead to people feeling uncomfortable or could be mistaken for something different. It is very useful in helping students understand what conversations are encouraged and which ones can be left for another time.

Another practice that I believe is very important is modeling my expected behaviors. I share with my students that the number one rule within my classroom is being honest. This is best done by explaining to my students that bad days happen regardless of who you are or how old you are. I tell them that they can share this with me before or during class and express the need for attention or to be independent in learning for the day if needed and that I will do the same. Upon exploring my data within my journals, I found two entries where this practice was

modeled and provided an environment where students felt comfortable enough to be a part of the solution.

Journal Entry 1:

“Students have been very absent due to family commitments, sports, theater, choir, etc... I find that they are not using their time wisely in class or finding time out of class to work on things [school assignments] that are required of them, leading to lessons being changed, ruined, or impossible to follow through with. What should I do? Welp, I tried having them decide how they will use their time and hold them accountable to their class decision. They loved it, which surprised me, but I look forward to finding out if they hold themselves accountable! We shall see, but if it works, I am going to stick with this tactic!”

Within another journal entry, I had written about how my students had expressed their feeling of being behind in class, which led to a lot of students discussing the same concerns and complaining about how they would have to miss activities because they needed to get work done in other classes as well. I had wrote:

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“Students have been very absent due to family commitments, sports, theater, choir, etc... I find that they are not using their time wisely in class or lack in finding time out of class to work on things [school assignments] that are required of them, leading to lessons being changed, ruined, or impossible to follow through with. What should I do?

January 23, 2025

“Welp, I tried having them decide how they will use their time and hold them accountable to their class decision. Today I let them decide what we were going to do in the next 2 weeks and let them discuss and vote. They actually really enjoyed it! It was fun to watch their debating side come out in most students - I look forward to finding out if they hold themselves accountable! We shall see, but if it works, I am going to stick with this tactic!”

In this instance, I paused the class and opened the floor for discussion on how we could work together to find a solution. Students expressed a need for a work day, to which I responded that we needed to stay on track. I then brought up our next two weeks of responsibilities and walked the students through my plan for daily instruction. I informed the students that if we gave up whole class annotations for independent ones, then we could squeeze in a workday at the end of the week. I let them know that if I were to do this, then they would have to be very focused during our next reading. The students began discussing with each other, weighing the pros and cons of the decision. This led me to create a pros and cons list based on class responses. Students who wanted the workday gave solutions to the cons that were expressed, giving the class an opportunity to vote on what decision they wanted to make. I ended up giving them their workday, and the results were extraordinary. Students felt an obligation to make sure they held up their promise to be focused during the next week. We were actually able to get through the next week of instruction faster than I had anticipated, which allowed students to work with each other through the annotation process and have an opportunity to do a whole annotation review. At this, I began to frequently give students an opportunity to make instructional decisions as a class.

Another entry talked about how my social-emotional levels are with my class. The entry read:

"I shared with my kiddos today that I was too tired to be "perfect". I liked being able to do this to show them that struggles are natural and it is okay to ask for help or to show up even when you're not at 100 [percent]. My students were very kind and helpful when I did this, and I had some students open to expressing their struggles too - it felt like building an environment of support for me and other students in the room when I did this. I always wanted to not share my personal feelings with students, however something this small seemed to show how support comes in all forms."

In this instance, I told my students that I had to stay up late writing an essay for an assignment that I needed to finish, and that led me to only get a couple hours of sleep. I expressed that I wasn't feeling like I wasn't able to operate at my full potential. Something I am well aware of is that when I am tired, I tend to forget the little scaffolds that I use in everyday class, like slowing my speech down or double checking my spelling mistakes, resulting in students poking fun or not engaged in content learning. The day I expressed my need for help, my students responded with encouragement towards me, some saying, "You got it, Miss Neville, I'll make sure to tell you if you are speaking too fast" and "I'll be sure to look out for anything I see," and - my personal favorite because it is often used by myself in class - "everyone needs help, just let know what kind of help!"

We proceeded with the class, and the students approached any corrections with a raised hand and would politely let me know if I missed a letter at the end of a word or if I missed a period during a sentence. I even had a student raise their hand, wait for me to acknowledge them, and say, "Miss Neville, could you repeat that? You weren't speaking too fast; I just zoned out." I

would respond with a thank you for every correction and move forward with the lesson. What surprised me was the student interactions after the class. Students came up and began asking me what I wrote about in my paper or about how close we were to the weekend so I could catch up on sleep. Personally, I was astonished by how students took on the role of supporting me in my time of need, all because I let them know where I needed to be helped. This was something that I encouraged them to do, and when I modeled this expectation, the results were nothing short of a show of growth in their ability to create an inclusive environment for everyone.

One of the last practices that I continuously use within my classroom is the ability to provide time for students to share their lives outside of the classroom with each other and myself. I did this every Monday and called it "Weekend Reviews." Every Monday, I would simply set aside time for every student to share what they did during the weekend if they would like. I would learn about students' hobbies, interests, families, religions, and more. My students love to hear me share about my weekend as well, telling them what I was up to when I wasn't teaching and sharing the joys that I have outside of the classroom. Students were reluctant at first, but only a month into providing this opportunity, I had over eight students in a period share personal experiences with the class. I began to ask the whole class questions at the end of the reviews, including those students who didn't want to share things like "Who got to sleep this weekend?" and "Who wishes the weekend was just one more day longer?" This allowed me to connect with my students beyond content learning and even gain insights into the different cultural backgrounds that my students came from. I was surprised to see a variety of students volunteering during different times of the month and would gauge class participation based on students' feelings at the start of the week. Students began asking questions to each other about

their experiences and even created new connections with peers through what they were learning during this time.

To gain a greater understanding of how these practices affected my students' feelings of comfort within my classroom, I looked to my mentor's feedback for further data. While analyzing my mentor's feedback, I noticed that I was receiving comments on how my students interacted with each other. They spoke to the respect that my students had for one another during discussions and how students were participating in content conversations past the provided questions posed. Students showed an ability to not only participate in the content learning but also develop in showing respect and curiosity in appropriate forms of discussion and questioning.

Mentor Responses (Student Participation):

- Peer discussions and respect for conversations are evident.
- Students ask questions openly, free of judgment and being wrong.
- Students listened and asked questions during discussions with peers.
- All students engage in content learning at a high level.
- Students are not afraid to collaborate or ask questions when they have them.

I also analyzed the feedback that was given regarding the routines and procedures that I have within my classroom to encourage social-emotional learning among students and to build rapport with my students. The ability to see these results not only from one perspective but from others who visited the classroom shows that my students were responding well to the practices that I had put in place to encourage risk-taking in content application in the classroom.

Mentor Reports (Teacher Practices):

- Candidate is exceptionally talented at developing a classroom that provides the best possible environment for learning. Her positive interactions with students as well as masterful use of routines and procedures set the stage in this regard.
- Candidate is a master at building student rapport, this translates beyond student-teacher relationships to student-student relationships.
- Students know the expectations and behaviors they must emulate.
- Several positive statements are continuously utilized to promote student participation and confidence.
- Students find you relatable and want to talk with you (good rapport). Candidate has clear boundaries but still is warm and responsive to students.

By implementing supportive and emotionally aware teaching practices, students felt comfortable participating in academic activities. Students focused on learning with a growth mindset, showing academic valor by continuously putting effort into lessons taught within the classroom without the fear of being judged or providing answers that could be seen as incorrect. When providing opportunities for students to develop connections with each other and the teacher, prejudice notations are free from the learning environment. Students begin to learn that the people around them have different experiences that they never knew about or information that could change their perspective on how they view topics, ideas, or opinions. By modeling the behaviors that are expected and enforcing expectations of these behaviors, students form relationships of mutual respect for themselves, their classmates, and the educator.

Summary

The discoveries from this study emulate three primary instructional practices that not only engaged students but also supported them throughout their academic success. These key

strategies include cultural collaboration, instructional responsiveness accompanied by positive and consistent feedback, and the use of supportive strategies to foster social and emotional safety. These approaches worked to empower student identities and engage learners with academic concepts taught within the classroom. In addition, these practices encourage student participation and academic growth by utilizing inclusive, student-centered instruction where students feel valued, seen, and heard. The relevance of these determinations is rooted within multicultural education principles, more specifically focusing on equitable education, cultural relevance, and the creation of community within a classroom. In sum, these themes illustrate how purposeful, responsive teaching can reinforce both academic achievement and classroom relationships. Although the outcomes of the data provide evidence of the importance of responsive and rapport-driven education, I would be amiss not to address the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Limitations, & Conclusion

Introduction

This study examined the outcomes of culturally responsive instructional practices on student participation and student-teacher relationships within a 7th-grade language arts class. The foundation followed to create the study was outlined and approached using Banks' (2019) Multicultural Education Theory as a framework to ground the research. Multicultural Education Theory focuses attention on how instructors are able to make strategic decisions that encourage student identity, cultures, and academic participation within the overall learning environment. The issue that this study was able to address resides in the absence of pedagogical decisions being made that not only reflect the diversity of learners within a classroom but also empower and value students' lived experiences and prior knowledge, a problem that results in disengagement and lack of student-teacher rapport.

The purpose of the research was to explore how culturally responsive instruction increases equity within academic and social-emotional learning. I focused my analysis on the two research questions: 1) what impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instruction practices have on student participation, and 2) what impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instructional practice have on student-teacher relationships? Using qualitative action research methods allows me to determine the three major themes: Cultural collaboration increases student engagement; 2) instructional responsiveness and positive feedback survey as a foundation for inclusion and content connection; and 3) supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor.

This chapter will formulate an interpretation of these findings using existing literature and educational frameworks. I shall discuss the limitations of the study and offer a comprehensive conclusion that can be beneficial to future practices for continued professional growth.

Discussion

While conducting my research over the span of the eight-month study, I was able to utilize techniques and practices that were studied and developed by scholars within the profession of education. More specifically, I was able to utilize Banks' (2019) tenant content integration, which focuses attention on creating material that advocates for culturally diverse materials and perspectives to be embedded within content learning opportunities. When having students explore the background of authors and the experiences that they have endured, students build confidence and engagement amongst students. This directly relates to Adjapond and Edmin's (2015) research on hip-hop pedagogy, which focuses on student engagement increasing when cultural knowledge is recognized and reflected within content instruction. In my classroom, students were surprised to learn about a piece of literature written by a widely known rapper. This simulated conversations around researching the author, guiding students to carry on conversations and create connections between activism, identity, and content-specific structures. My findings also supported Moll, Neff, and Gonzalez's (2006) emphasis on including students' homes, communities, and funds of knowledge within academic instruction. Developing a framework of material that is outlined around my students' funds of knowledge led my students to not only participate in academic conversations but also to develop skills in finding personal connections with the poem being explored. Students were able to engage with the content, grow in their comprehension of identity, and develop skills that aligned their personal experiences to the work of another author.

Gay (2002) expresses that culturally responsive teaching means moving past surface-level inclusion and creating lessons that support cultural identities within the classroom. Instruction that guides students through the process of developing a cultural understanding of others and into the mindset of creating a connection with one's own lived experiences creates a deeper and more meaningful impact for future academic success. For example, the above lesson on the poem *The Rose That Grew From Concrete* by Tupac Shakkar not only required students to gather information to support inferences on the author's intention of the literary piece but also engaged students in the multi-perspective application of content understanding. The collaborative practice of having students compile their experiences into one group response allowed learners to gain insights and knowledge about each other's cultural understanding of the literature being examined. Providing students with opportunities to share, listen, and infer based on their prior knowledge and apply their newly learned knowledge helped create an environment where students felt safe to learn academic and social-emotional concepts.

Furthermore, Banks' (2019) dimension of equity pedagogy - highlighting equitable learning by adjusting and adopting practices that meet the needs of your students - is directly tied to the theme of instructional responsiveness and positive feedback as a form of inclusion. Creating vocabulary lessons that deepen connections between students' prior knowledge and new content resulted in students becoming more confident in their participation and increased academic achievement within content vocabulary applications. Gay (2002) expresses the need for educational strategies that embody and validate student learning preferences and experiences. By intentional lesson planning, I was able to build opportunities for students to verbalize ideas with peers before volunteering answers and provide immediate, positive feedback, regardless of correctness. I was able to create a classroom environment that supported students' feelings of

comfort and safety in taking academic risks. A student had expressed, "I like that you make my guesses sound right even when I am wrong," which encompasses Gay's focus on attention towards creating emotional safety as a foundation of growth and engagement. Likewise, Barnes (2006) declares that culturally responsive educators need to develop skills in responding to the needs of students through flexible instruction and affirmation. My newly developed vocabulary routine shines as an example, allowing students to comprehend the content learning through multiple modes of delivery and practice. By reinforcing their participation with positivity, I was able to remove the pressure of peer embarrassment, causing students to perform at higher academic levels than before. This approach is also developed through the finding of Johnson and Gonzalez (2014), who explored how culturally responsive classroom management and instruction supports learner engagement within English language arts classrooms. By building a lesson around a similar idea, I realized that the use of positive feedback and structured peer support embedded in lessons created a stronger sense of belonging and partnership in students' overall learning. As these practices developed feelings of value within student participation - even in the form of guessed answers - learners were more willing to add to the academic conversations, which developed stronger group understanding.

To continue building strong student-teacher relationships through responsive instruction, I was able to draw strategies from Sapon-Shevin (2019), who suggests that inclusive classrooms are areas where all students feel valued, safe, and respected. I built my classroom norms centered around respectful conversational strategies, encouragement of identity expression, and working towards building positive relationships from student interactions with not only content but other peers in the classroom. My students were constantly engaged in demonstrating a willingness to listen to each other, share personal experiences and stories, and see vulnerability as a form of

progression in learning rather than an embarrassment to one's identity. Providing students with an opportunity to reflect, share, and engage in meaningful discussions aligned with Street's (2005) expressed strength in enriching student learning through utilizing the funds of knowledge that students bring with them to the learning environment - more specifically when engaging with literacy content. Although Street focused attention on writing practices, I was able to invite students to draw on their own experiences to help cultivate meaningful discussions and relationships, which worked towards building trust among students and myself. Leichtman (2018) examined challenges that may arise during the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, highlighting the struggle of instructional constraints that may dull the full adoption of such instruction. My study contributes to offering realistic and replicable strategies to enhance positive student identity but also creates an environment where students practice respectful peer interactions and relationships and reduce fear of judgment. The routines that I had followed and implemented - eliminating negative, non-punitive language in the learning environment, facilitating opportunities for students to practice respectful communication skills, and encouraging experience sharing - did not require additional materials. It was merely building a foundation for students through intentionality and consistency on my part to accomplish a safe, engaged, and positive learning environment for all students within the classroom.

When brought together, the three themes that I was able to analyze from my study demonstrate how culturally responsive pedagogy increases student engagement and overall student-teacher relationships. When you apply these principles with intention and consistency, followed by reflection on practice strategies and achievement, you will see students develop ownership within their learning and peer interactions. By creating opportunities for students to draw on their funds of knowledge, process information through preferred learning styles, and

foster emotional comfort within the classroom, I was able to learn more about the abilities and areas in which I needed to meet my students with support. My strategies and approaches aligned closely with the work of Banks (2019), Adjapong and Emdin (2015), Gay (2002), Moll, Neff, and Gonzalez (2006), and others who highlight the transformational importance of responsive instruction. The results gathered confirm that cultural responsiveness is not just subjected to a common practice amongst all subjects and classrooms but is an evolving practice rooted in teacher reflection and purposeful responses to student identities and needs. While the data affirms the impact in my classroom, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study.

Limitations

Given the overall successful impact this study had on my class, as described above, there were theoretical, methodological, and practical limitations worth noting. One theoretical limitation that arose was between my findings and the tenets of multicultural education theory outlined by Banks (2019). While my analysis confirmed reflection in the dimensions of content integration, equity pedagogy, and prejudice reduction, it did not fully address the broader dimension in the creation of an empowering school culture or structural, institutional changes. My research was centered on student-teacher relationships and instructional practices within a single classroom rather than focusing on efforts to promote transformative school-wide learning, including curriculum and policies set by the building. As a result, this study examines the partial application of the overall framework of multicultural education theory. A future implication for further research is to examine how responsive classroom practices align with institutional systems and how collaboration amongst professional learning communities might influence equitable strategies beyond individual subjects and classrooms.

Methodologically, limitations arose in both its scope and duration of the study. The study took place in a single 7th-grade language arts classroom, using a traditional qualitative method of analysis. The data was collected through methods such as journal reflections, mentor feedback, student responses, and classroom observations. Although the data collected was both meaningful and informative, they produced results that reflected the specific group of students during a specific moment in time. The study lacked long-term academic tracking and multiple classroom comparisons to further discuss the impact beyond the current group of students. This can limit the generalizability of data findings and cause difficulty in determining the impacts responsive instructional practices have on student learning over the course of their academic careers. Further study on the subject should potentially look for data collection across multiple classrooms and subjects or consider researching a singular class for multiple academic years to better determine the lasting impact of the effectiveness and portability of culturally responsive instructional practices.

Additionally, a practical limitation is that the success of the study was determined by the unique classroom environment and relationships that I had worked to build with my students. Many of the academic strategies used during the study were developed by the increasing knowledge gained about my students and their identities. As my knowledge about my students increased through instructional practices - Weekend Reviews, positive feedback, and discussion-based learning - I was able to create material that reflected their learning within the content. Teachers in differing situations may not uncover similar results without further scaffolding or preparation. Moreover, there were times when I needed to make responsive decisions during lessons or during specific situations, which may not be attainable in schools with fixed curricula and limited scope and sequence flexibility. Future studies may consider examining how culturally

responsive practices could be implemented amongst diverse educational settings and educator ability levels or develop professional development support that ensures teachers are equipped to create inclusive and identity-valuing learning environments.

Conclusion

The intention behind this study was to challenge myself to reflect on the current academic practices and strategies that are utilized within my classroom and explore how creating multicultural educational opportunities can eliminate bias, support educational equity, and increase student engagement. I developed my framework by using Banks' (2019) multicultural education theory, providing me with a guided focus on examining my two research questions: 1) what impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instruction practices have on student participation, and 2) what impact does teacher reflection on culturally responsive instructional practice have on student-teacher relationships, decisions impacted students' participation? My findings provide ample examples and evidence to support the idea that such practices and intentional instruction encourage and improve student participation (both academically and socially) and the overall quality of student-teacher relationships.

As the reflective process of the study came to a close, the three themes emerged as key elements to my study: cultural collaboration increases student engagement; instructional responsiveness and positive feedback used as a foundation for inclusion and content connection; and supportive practices enhance psychological safety and academic valor. These themes work to show the value of the multicultural framework and guide my growth as a committed educator to building an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

This study gave me an opportunity to not only investigate student responses to culturally responsive instruction but also examine how my own experiences and educational practices were

shaped by my own educational experiences. I was able to grow in my knowledge of how beneficial intentional practices support all students. I developed a better comprehension of ways to use lesson reflection - from educators and learners - to better respond to the needs and abilities of my students. I have gained an understanding that the above practices should not be considered additional support but rather a foundation for transformative teaching and learning amongst students. By valuing and prioritizing student identities, abilities, and funds of knowledge, I was able to redefine what success looks like within my classroom. I learned that multicultural education is accomplished through effort, intention, and commitment to growing as an educator for meaningful impacts on student academic learning.

In the final analysis, I will continue to stay committed to empowering students' identities through practices that allow them to learn positive and meaningful communication skills, feel safe in academic risk-taking, and create connections between content learning and their shared or individual experiences. I will continue to build rapport with my students by encouraging positive behaviors and participation through intentional feedback opportunities and meaningful interactions. This research has further reinforced my belief that a reflective educator is a teacher who goes beyond textbook frameworks and theories to develop instructional strategies that deepen learning experiences for young learners within their classrooms. It is a continuous learning process for the educator and is adjusted as more knowledge is gained. I plan to continue this work within my career by growing in my reflective practices, collaborating with colleagues, and maintaining a student-centered approach to my pedagogy.

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