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Developing A Culturally Relevant Curriculum And Breaking The Barriers Of Cognitive And Cultural Dissonance

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DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM AND BREAKING THE BARRIERS OF COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL DISSONANCE

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved children, Richard Bowens III, Ryan Bowens, Rylan Bowens, Jamie Smith and Kalyn Smith as well as my amazing husband, Jameson Smith. Thank you "smithfamilyofseven" for your sacrificial love, encouragement, and prayers. Because of my amazing family, I am truly blessed.

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"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

I give God all the glory and honor for granting me the desires of my heart. My journey has been arduous, yet I am grateful for the lessons and magnanimous people that God has placed in my life along the way.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Most of the curricula majority of the schools uses does not cater to diverse student populations, because the curricula are formulated mainly for white students and white teachers (Dwyer, 2017). The student population in American schools is more diverse, and the school curricula should reflect this diversity. Students of all colors are reluctant to take part in classroom activities or attend school because they do not feel included in the education system. Their teachers are predominantly white and often have preconceived or biased opinions about other ethnic groups (Dwyer, 2017). This leads to dissonance in the classrooms which must be addressed to allow students of all colors to interact effectively in classroom activities. This can ultimately improve their academic, emotional, and social well-being.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was developed by Gay (2000) addressing the problem of minimal educational success in Black American students. It has grown to include other marginalized cultures. CRT promotes students being viewed as culturally different but not culturally lacking. Teachers must understand their students' cultures and accommodate them by incorporating these cultures in the classroom setting to improve the education experience. Gay (2000) states CRT applies the cultural knowledge, previous experiences, frames of reference, and performance methods of various culturally diverse students to make learning more significant and effective for students. CRT involves using the abilities of the students and their potential strengths.

Definition of Terms

*Cognitive dissonance-*the mental discomfort (psychological stress) experienced by a person who simultaneously holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. The occurrence of cognitive dissonance is a consequence of a person performing an action that contradicts personal

beliefs, ideals, and values; and also occurs when confronted with new information that contradicts said beliefs, ideals, and values (Aronson& Laughter, 2016).

Culture- the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group (Banks, 2001).

Culturally competent- Being able to understand, effectively communicate with, and effectively interact with individuals across cultures. A culturally competent individual has a positive attitude towards cultural differences, is knowledgeable about different cultures, and is aware of their own world view (Park, 2010).

Cultural dissonance- This denotes an uncomfortable sense of confusion or conflict that is experienced during unexpected or unexplained changes in a cultural environment (Aronson& Laughter, 2016).

Culturally relevant curriculum- This is a curriculum in which teachers recognize and honor various cultural differences in the classroom, and ensure that their students are able to relate a course's content to their cultural context (Santamaria, 2009).

Cultural responsiveness- The ability to understand the importance of respecting diverse cultures and life experiences and having positive perspectives on culturally diverse communities (Park, 2010)

Culturally sensitive teaching- Such teaching recognizes the importance of integrating students' cultural references in all aspects of the learning process (Aronson& Laughter, 2016).

Problem Statement

Most schools perpetuate the culture of the dominant society in the school. Doing so elevates the values, patterns, and norms of the dominant society with the main goal of assimilating

the minority societies. This is problematic in culturally diverse schools, where all students need to voice their opinions and be taught in a manner improving their educational and social skills. American schools are increasingly becoming culturally diverse, but the teaching methods and staff remain predominantly white. This leads students that are identified as the minority demographically to think their cultures and values are unappreciated in society. The development of an effective culturally relevant curriculum should therefore enable the students to improve their self-esteem and academic performance once they feel appreciated and included in the institutions.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose and significance of this study is to explore how teachers can develop a culturally relevant curriculum and break the barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance to improve student-learning experiences. The study on culturally relevant curriculum and learning is important because it empowers students socially, emotionally, intellectually, and politically through using cultural references to convey information, attitudes and skills (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The study uses school ethnography to show why it is important for educators to develop a culturally relevant curriculum so students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can receive an equal chance to achieve academic success in school. It aims to help carry out multicultural education effectively as schools should conceptualize as social systems.

Education programs have elements dealing with the objectives or meaning, the content, structure, and the methods used for teaching. Meyer et al. (2017) states any successful program must include the aforementioned elements and be consistent with the core processes intermingling to create a whole. Each element should reciprocally reinforce the others for a total educational experience beneficial and interactive for the student. To achieve this, it is important to acknowledge social interaction, communication and cognition. Schools have the function of

inculcating specific knowledge and skills necessary for a student to take part in the community because schools are agents of the central society and mirror the basic cultural patterns of society.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How can we break the barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance to implement a culturally relevant curriculum?

2. How can we increase cultural sensitivity in the schools?

This study provides research on the topic to show how these barriers can be broken in the schools and in the classroom to improve student performance and help teachers to better understand them. This study likewise helps educators prepare curricula suitable for culturally diverse classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Gay's (2000) principles of culturally sensitive teaching support the theoretical framework of the study. These principles state all students must receive an equal and excellent education which will improve their cultural, emotional, intellectual, and academic needs. The principles expect that teachers in culturally diverse classrooms will ensure their teaching and instructional methods are effective enough to reach and satisfy all students in a classroom. To become an effective teacher, teachers must first understand their own cultural identities, recognize, and eliminate any racial biases they may have. This will enable teachers to find appropriate strategies to create an all-inclusive classroom to improve student curriculum, which will positively impact learning and interactions.

A culturally relevant curriculum must be designed around the principles and concepts which provide opportunity for students to explore their studies as well as their cultures in the classroom context (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Such a curriculum in American schools will promote

learning with understanding (Aronson & Laughter, 2016), and allow students to effectively connect new knowledge to prior knowledge by analyzing concepts in a logical and rational sequence to build on previous information (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers using culturally relevant curricula are able to create learning activities allowing their students to learn problem solving, social integration, political analysis of current and past issues, and analytical thinking (Craft et al., 2014). This is because culturally relevant curriculum incorporates the students' cultural attributes and uses them as learning tools (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Assumptions

The researcher assumes that schools would increasingly become culturally diverse because of increase in the numbers of racial and ethnic minority population, which create the need for a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. The researcher also assumes the sample group's views represent the majority of ethnic groups and minorities views. This is because research has been shown that most schools use curricula favoring the white minority (Howard, 2016). The researcher also assumes most schools currently use curricula which are not culturally relevant and they need to change to culturally diverse curricula to accommodate the needs of all learners.

Projected Limitations

The study is expected to have inadequate financial and manpower resources. The researcher expects to gather as much accurate data as possible during the life of the study to avoid insufficient data affecting the outcome of the study. The researcher understands that the more data that will be collected the more data the researcher would have to properly analyze. Another expected limitation includes the biases of the participants. Some of the white teachers might be incapable to put aside their biases in their explanations and discussion, however, some of them

can be unaware of their biases. In addition, there would be limitations that are inherent to qualitative and ethnographic studies regarding the sampling strategies, and methodology that restricts the generalizability of the finding. The students conversely were biased towards their cultures and felt that whatever suggestions that they gave would never be carried out. The students were also biased towards the majority culture and offer a tainted view, which made the results of the study questionable. This resulted in many of the participant's choice not to take part in the study or not to give comprehensive details during their interviews.

Summary

Effective multicultural classroom communication is needed because communication is the basis of instruction and strongly prejudiced by culture. Research shows students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds talk, write and think in ways varying from school methodologies and expectations (August et al., 2009). It is therefore important for educators and teachers to create curricula which will accommodate these differences and help the students to assimilate easily into the classroom and community.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Women and Higher Education

Diversity has increased in higher education, with more women enrolling into and graduating from college than men (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). These numbers are set to increase as the American population changes. Students from stigmatized groups still face challenges in attaining education. Their presence in school does not necessarily equate to equality in the education system. Most male teachers in a classroom prefer to interact with white male students rather than with females or students that are the minority (Sadker & Sadker, 1995). This is because boys tend to look for attention and the teachers do not recognize nor reverence the gender and cultural differences among students thus not aware of the inequities of such a situation (Sadker & Sadker, 1995),

Seating arrangements and group work patterns intensify unequal participation especially in higher education. These gender-based and ethnic-based segregated patterns influence how the teachers distribute their attention to the students. In these instances, the teachers rarely do anything to change these arrangements to enhance interactions (Sadker & Sadker, 1995). It is important for the teachers to increase their division of attention between all ethnic groups and genders. The teachers should also engage silent students and use teaching procedures such as shuffling name cards or moving around the room (Sadker & Sadker, 1995).

Challenges and Obstacles

Education researchers have found students fail to transit into the academic culture properly because of cultural discontinuity (Tyler et al., 2008). Many education systems do not have the ability to pass on many cultures because they were created to transmit to the majority, English-speaking culture. In a culturally diverse classroom, students often have different ways of

communicating, behaving, interacting with others and learning. Most teachers do not realize facial expressions, body language and vocal tones differ in different cultures leading to cross-cultural dissonance (Sleeter, 2008).

Shared indicators of language and traditions are inadequate to make sure the cultural differences in the education system are not experienced by families, and cultural dissonance can slow down socio-cultural adaptation. Many teachers in developing countries believe the Western styles of teaching are the best; they ignore the cultural factors in schools (Guthrie, 2011). The best way a teacher can integrate culture into the curriculum is by finding out as much about the school and surrounding community as possible. They must learn teaching methods, how students and teachers work in the classroom, what stakeholders think about the researched learning approaches, and what can be done to improve them (Guthrie, 2011).

Howard (2003) offers critical reflection on culturally sensitive teaching strategies, and suggests these strategies are contingent on critical consideration on race and the culture of teachers and their students. Curriculum includes how a learning environment is expressed and any emerging and hidden dimensions. These dimensions are influenced by curriculum decisions made at the societal, institutional, and instructional levels. In this study, the term curriculum refers to "the body of courses that present knowledge, principles, values, and skills that are the intended consequences of formal education" (Toombs & Tierney, 1993, pg. 185). In other words, it is what is taught to students.

For all students to receive a whole learning experience, the learning environment must be personally and culturally inviting to the students. If the focus is only on instruction, students who struggle with the curriculum may become behaviorally challenged and have preconceived thoughts towards the education process (Gablinskske,2014; Howard, 2016). Instructional

strategies must be adjusted to accommodate students, with collective and individual student interaction. This mix of interaction allows students to learn from each other intellectually, emotionally and culturally. The classroom must also be managed with firm, consistent, and loving controls to support students' well-being and performance (Howard, 2016).

Pianta and Hamre (2009) suggest because of the increased cultural diversity in schools, a teacher must structure the learning experience so students' academic performance improves their future lives while the teacher learns their students' cultures. The way students handle cultural transitions while they study directly affects how well they perform in those studies. Teachers should educate themselves on what they can do to avoid harming students when dealing with them (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Some teachers value only a student passing their exams and good class evaluations. The assumption is academic excellence is synonymous to the requisite tools to go to a higher level (Reid & Moore III, 2008). Gay (2010) states a teacher's consciousness to explain theoretical ideas in a multicultural classroom are critical. To refer to one background will not cultivate a culturally sensitive classroom. The racial and ethnic make-up of teachers is mostly white despite increases in culturally diverse students in various institutions (The IRIS Center, 2012).

Individuals often form perceptions about other people based on stereotypes, even when they have little information. This can lead to misconceptions even in a classroom. Some teachers might respond differently to culturally different students. Teacher's stereotypical views can positively or negatively affect their students and their performance in class. Santoro (2009) states nuisances can be forms of misconceptions unknowingly, and when teachers are aware of their mistakes, it can become easier to respond to students more objectively. Teachers must avoid stereotyping students in their classrooms (Santoro, 2009).

A challenge that teachers face when introducing a culturally relevant curriculum is that constructed information may seem to be disjointed. This may lead to stereotyping. By applying the 3Ps of a cultural framework, products, practices and perspectives, in planning (Santamaria, 2009), teachers can make sure culture is explored in a methodical and orderly way while allowing for flexibility. This framework also allows the teacher to connect dissimilar knowledge about the cultures and allows students to relate to and understand a culture properly.

The various inconsistencies in schools such as culture, curriculum, learning materials, attitudes and beliefs of teachers, students, and relationships must be changed, allowing institutions to promote educational fairness for diverse students (Banks & Banks, 2013). To change the institutions, teachers must know how specific groups influence student behavior. Teachers must learn how to help their students interact seamlessly with others from various cultural backgrounds, as this will help students to achieve academic success.

Stressing and Coping

People's beliefs, preferences, ways of knowing, and practices are shaped and directed by their culture (Milner & Palgrave Connect, 2010). All individuals, including whites, have a worldview which is culturally grounded, directed, and facilitated. Culture is deep in all groups of people and shaped by the social context of their education. Irvine (2003) suggests teachers must engage their work in ways allowing them to see with a cultural eye. Many white teachers do not necessarily view themselves as cultural beings, and they also do not believe they are governed by culture (Irvine, 20003). Their curriculum development, as a result, is designed to make their students work hard to catch up with the norm of the white majority. Minority teachers conversely view themselves as cultural beings, but sometimes fail to recognize and understand how culture

shapes their practices with their students. They may understand how culture influences their lives in the community, but fail to transfer those concepts into the classroom.

Teachers continuously develop their teaching identities while students continuously develop their learning identities. The teachers decide what kind of teachers they want to be and how they want to be perceived by their students and the entire community. They try to live up to a certain identity expected of them. By the same token, students live up to a social identity and decide who they want as associates (Milner & Smithey, 2003).

In these developing and technologically growing times, Koehler and Mishra (2009) states a teacher must use innovative ways to keep his or her students attentive and interested in the subject matter being taught. Personalized learning has been adopted in many schools as part of the curriculum. Equity, diversity and inclusivity are widely adopted in curricula, in addition to using knowledge to develop capacity learning (McPhail, 2016). The role of the teachers and learners in personalized learning is aimed to optimize learning resources and student capabilities. This includes a culture of nonstop learning for teachers and educators, so they can produce a curriculum culturally integrated to satisfy the needs of all students. New partnerships need to be formed with the community to integrate community culture into the school system. A curriculum should include culturally relevant material across all disciplines, not just in humanities and social studies (Shizha & Abdi, 2013). Educational programs which do not have the cultural relevance to their target audience are usually ineffective. This leads to high drop-out rates (Coard et al., 2004).

Teachers today should also develop effective skills on conflict mediation (Manning & Bucher, 2013) as a means to break cultural barriers. Using too many disciplinary rules may be viewed by some students as being a control mechanism, leading to a rebellion or resistance to

authority. This type of environment hinders options for students accustomed to less strict rules, because they think they cannot negotiate for a favorable outcome. The teacher has to assume a role in building social capital in a positive way. Once cultural, racial and language differences have been accepted, the teacher will understand the standards framing the socialization experience (Bartee & Brown, 2007). Parents are also an intricate element of developing conflict resolution for further guidance. Families can be viewed as callous, because they resolve conflict quietly and unobtrusively, while some prefer a team effort among the school, students, and the family (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

A multicultural education helps a student develop the attitude, knowledge and skills needed to contribute effectively in their communities, the country, and globally (Banks, 2016). School curricula should be reformed to help students achieve the above goals. Such curricula will help male and female as well as minority and the majority students achieve educational success equally (Klein, 2012), and help a teacher to understand how the interaction of different genders and races can influence education (Grant & Zwier, 2012).For a cultural curriculum to be successfully implemented, changes need to be made in the syllabus, teaching materials, teaching and learning methods (Lee, 2007), outlook, behaviors of teachers and administrative staff, and the objectives and culture of the school (Banks & Banks, 2013).

According to Keengwe (2010), it is important for a teacher to combine these elements to develop a framework. Teachers are responsible for learning about their students' cultural identities, and understanding their considerations, so as to accept a paradigm shift of thinking or performing. It is important to balance knowledge acquisition on culture and the skills developed by exposure to new cultural ideas (Evans & Savage, 2015). As demonstrated by Gay (2010), a teacher could be culturally responsive by using cultural information, previous experiences,

outlines of suggestion, and the performance methods of ethnically assorted students to make the learning experience more useful to them. Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teachers as culturally competent and willing to learn new cultures. Gay states different cultures are an asset and teachers must create a caring environment for all students to value different cultures and heritages.

A teacher's acquired cultural knowledge should help guide curriculum development, strategies for instruction, the teacher-student relationship, and the classroom climate (Teel & Obidah, 2008). A teacher should develop a culturally relevant curriculum free from prejudice, racial discrimination, stereotyping, oppression, injustices, and any other forms of intolerance. Mediation of power imbalances based on culture and race in the classroom should be part of teacher responsibility as it represents change for social justice and academic equity. Cultural responsiveness is needed for effective teaching in all learning areas for students (Gay, 2010). When classes are culturally responsive, students will be inspired to learn. Garcia et al. (2010) state teachers' consciousness of students' particular cultural values and beliefs and how they become evident in learning behavior is important to curriculum development. The teacher can use other instructional methods to get common learning outcomes, use a comparative analysis in different ethnic groups, match the teaching style to the learning styles of culturally diverse students, and create conducive learning environments for students. The teacher must be able to teach cross-culturally while systematically and routinely linking the curriculum to other subjects and skills. CRT demands a teacher should be culturally competent to understand the underlying cultural differences in students and gain knowledge about these cultures (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016). This increased knowledge should help the teacher create a curriculum culturally relevant including cultural elements and using cultural content useful to students. The teacher must

understand and promote different ways of teaching and learning in the classroom, because cultural differences in social practices result in different levels of cognitive development (Gauvain et al., 2011). Effective instruction which is accessible to all students is indispensable. Teachers must exercise literacy, content, and pedagogy encompassing culture.
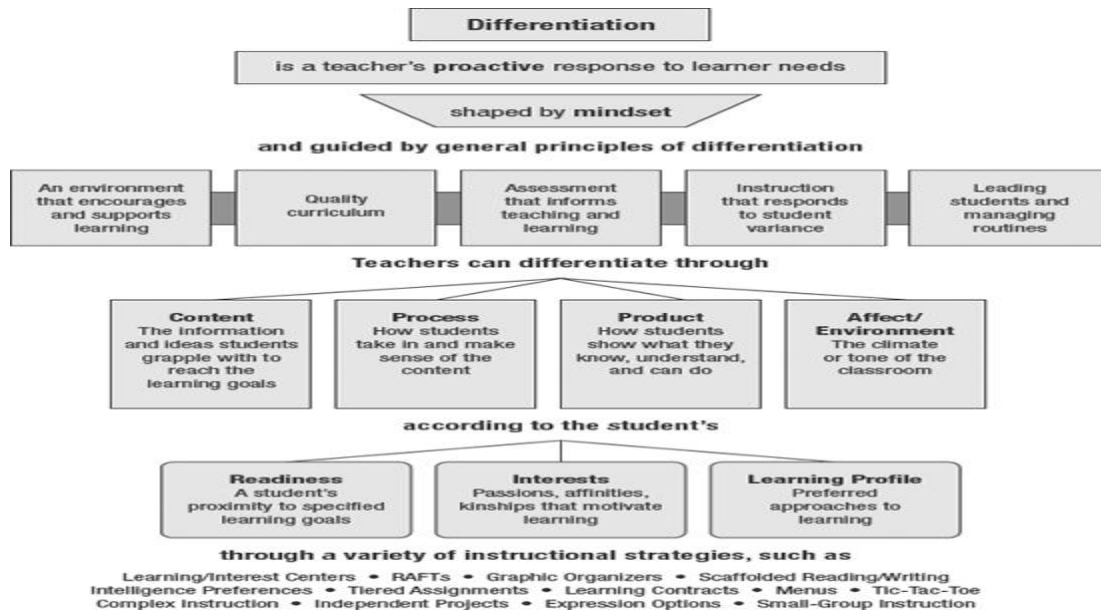
Figure 1: How teachers can effectively apply differentiation in the classroom.[1]

Cultural dissonance can occur when different schools offer different instructional methods. A student from a certain culture may be used to quietly observing and then emulating adult activities. Another student's cultural practice may be to ask questions to increase their learning. This inquiry-based teaching is not accepted in some communities. A study by Museums and Quay (2009) found many Black and Latino students failed to finish their education or earn a degree because the instructional method used in the classroom was different and unfamiliar. If specific learning approaches differ from a teacher's expectations, the teacher may assume the

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[1]SCD, "Assessment and student success in a differentiated classroom," 2013. Retrieved from
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108028/chapters/Differentiation@-An-Overview.aspx

learner is lazy or defiant. When the student's expectations differ from the teacher's, the student may think the teacher is uncaring, unfair, or insensitive to their feelings (The IRIS Center, 2012). Social and academic language dissonance occurs when individuals communicate well with their colleagues outside class but are unable to do so in the classroom setting. If the teacher does not understand the difficulty of academic language, it is assumed the student is not trying hard enough or has a diagnosed or undiagnosed educational impairment impeding their academic ability. It is important to apply prior knowledge on language proficiency and use effective methods to improve student outcomes. An effective strategy to break cultural dissonance, as illustrated by Gay (2010), is for the teacher to be transparent in instruction and to explain his or her availability and approachability, while also stressing expectations for students to actively take part in class.

Class expectations must be clear and understandable. Inquiry-based instruction is not only suitable but encouraged (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). The expectations during instruction must be reinforced to develop a culturally sensitive classroom. This approach will invite all learners to understand all opinions, even if they are controversial. Students of all cultures must feel accepted and comfortable and know mistakes are allowed. To create this teaching pedagogy, instructors must listen to their students to create an environment of understanding and knowing where the learners' voice is valued more than what they are speaking or writing.

Successes and Attributes

Ladson-Billings (1995) explains for many years' researchers have explored ways teaching could be better matched to the families and communities of students from various cultures. Students should be allowed to use a common language style in their communities promoting higher grades in their studies. Mohatt and Erickson (1981) also conducted research observing teachers using language interaction patterns similar to a student's cultural patterns to positively

influence student academic performance. Improved student achievement was also linked to teachers who combined native languages and the English language. They called this instruction "culturally congruent" and used the term "culturally responsive" to describe analogous language communication of teachers with diverse language skills. Mohatt and Erickson's (1981) observations were done in the students' community environments, where teachers included aspects of the students' culture into the classroom. Park (2010) studied using *talk story* among native Hawaiians as a tool of learning in culturally responsive classrooms. The study found *talk story* was used in teaching language and literacy, and was a useful communication tool in the multicultural classroom.

Many students in successful learning environments recognize and use their own native languages and have knowledge of their communities' social and political customs. Their classroom lessons connect new material to their existing experiences because the curricula recognize the importance of their cultures. Gay (2010) states the interaction between the community and the school also plays an important role in the students' success. A culturally responsive curriculum has respect for different cultures and empowers the students to value all cultures. It also incorporates cultural information into the curriculum, not just adding into the curriculum (Gurung & Prieto, 2009). The classroom gets treated like a community because the student is exclusively taught. This curriculum will address various learning styles to ensure student success.

Fig. 1 Teachers in the United States by Race, 2012 (Teacher) and 2008 (Student)
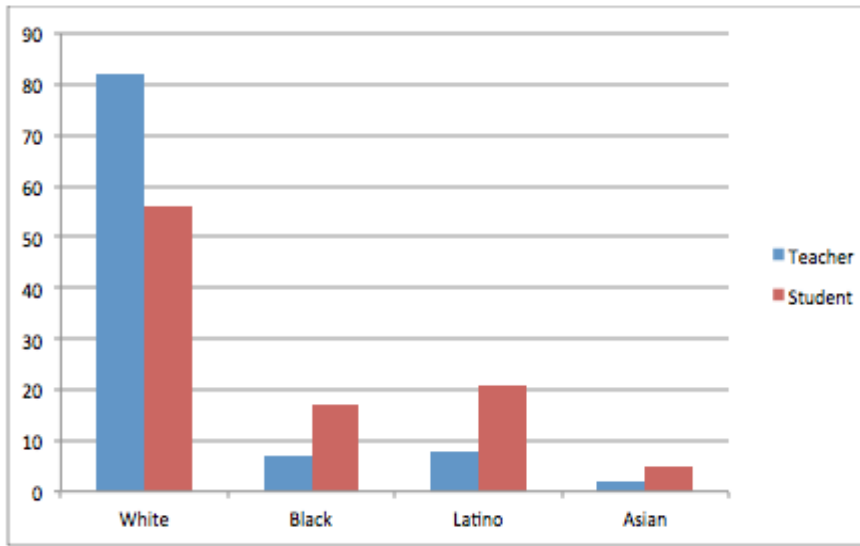
Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, "Number and percentage distribution of teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by selected teacher characteristics," Selected years, 1987-88 through 2011-12.

Figure 2: Teachers in the United States by race, 2012.[2]

Research shows technology has changed learning in the classroom as teachers explore digital technology to make learning more meaningful and useful and ensure students are vigorously engaging in discussions (Tamim et al., 2011). It helps teachers create better and more effective learning materials and curricula to properly teach the cultures found in the school environment. A teacher can use these technologies, such as smart phones and computers, to access online and web-based programs to teach the students in formal and informal settings (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010). This is because they offer genuine communication in an interactive environment to support teaching a culturally relevant curriculum (Lee, 2009). Technology has become the approach to interact, participate and construct in society. Through using such media, students depend less on written words and become more occupied with freely exploring actual cultural content which is easily accessible, because they have more power over collecting and using

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[2]National Education Association. "Increasing racial diversity in the teacher workforce: One university's approach." 2017. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/home/65429.htm

materials and resources (Fried, 2008). These resources help teachers tailor the media to make a culturally relevant curriculum and the learning process more applicable and available to the students (Moore, 2006). Technology allows students and teachers to explore deeper into information gathering and set up interactive learning scenarios.

Motivation and Encouragement

Howard (2016) suggests several principles for culturally responsive teaching. He stated in modern classrooms, teachers must consider race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, family background, gender, and learning style. Howard further believes cultural competence involves the will and ability of teachers to form real and positive relationships with students in the classroom. Teachers must lead and teach effectively to help students perform better in their class work and also interact better with their peers from different cultures. Howard states students should know their teachers, understand them, like them. Schools should be willing to incorporate their students' cultures and communities into the curriculum to increase student academic performance. A teacher, especially one from a different culture, should see the potential in all students and be committed to their success. Teachers become physical role models bringing diverse family history, values, and experiences to their students (Gay, 2010).

Educators have the experience and potential to help students understand the cultural complexities of the world (Milner & Palgrave, 2010). A cultural education is knowledge-based and teaches students the best of what has been created and introduces them to a wider range of cultural creativity than they can get outside school. It also revolves around analytical and critical skills related to other subjects without reducing those subjects to mere facts, but provides historical context and meaning (Evans & Savage, 2015). Cultural education helps students to take part in and create new cultures for themselves using their skills. Developing a culturally

responsive curriculum helps teachers question the relationship between students, the teachers themselves, the school and the curriculum, and society (Evans & Savage, 2015). A culturally sensitive teaching has notions of self and the students, information perception, and social relations. To successfully teach a culturally diverse classroom, a teacher must be aware of the assumptions they make based on their own cultural inclination and make certain these assumptions are avoided when you are teaching students with diverse backgrounds (Evans & Savage, 2015).

Chipangura and Aldridge (2016) explains learning environments can suppress or encourage the abilities and interests of students, and help to bring social, racial, and gender equity to the school system. Their study found exposure to multimedia and cultural interaction promoted a more positive learning environment and improved student engagement in their class work. Schools need to offer differing environments adequately matching individual student academic needs to help the learning environment connect with learners with varied interests, abilities and backgrounds. A curriculum breaking cultural barriers improves the total learning experience for students and makes schools responsive to the differences and similarities among students.

The introduction of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century in 1996 brought awareness to the significant function of culture in the school system while defining culture as an integral part of the learning environment. To achieve a culturally comprehensive curriculum, changes must be made in the school culture including all subjects not just limited to mathematics and sciences (Lee & Buxton, 2012). Many educators think culture cannot be incorporated into mathematics and science, and become resistant to change. Banks and Banks (2013) state a teacher must understand the concept of multicultural education before practicing and applying it to student lessons. The teacher should be encouraged to find out how to adapt or

modify teaching methods to include a multicultural student population with different abilities and learning styles. The next focus would be on integrating the content into an existing curriculum, instead of dwelling on knowledge construction.

By using Gay's (2010) content integration theory, a teacher can use examples and information from different cultures when showing important concepts, generalizations, and theories in subject discipline. Teachers of cultural content and examples should be based on logic and not be false or manufactured (Lorenzo et al., 2009). The opportunities for a social studies teacher to use cultural examples in their lessons are more than a science teacher, but both can find ways of ensuring the lessons are unbiased. Teachers, for example, can explain the scientific relevance of color differences or the prevalence of certain diseases among specific human groups.

The knowledge construction process gives a teacher the opportunity to use methods, questions and activities helping students understand how cultural perspectives and prejudices in a subject influence how knowledge is advanced (Matsuda & Silva, 2014). Teachers must be able to educate students on the influence of assumptions and perspectives not limited to the influences, conclusions and generalizations they make. When this process is used, teachers gain the ability to show students how knowledge is formulated and affected by the cultural, racial and social class positions of communities.

Corno and Anderman (2015) state teachers should help the students to build up higher-level thinking skills as well as empathy for the victims of expansion and growth of the country, because the students will have to reflect, compare and contrast evidence before coming to a conclusion. Many young children enter school with negative cultural and racial attitudes reflecting their parents' positions. Developing an effective culturally relevant curriculum will help these students develop more positive cultural and racial attitudes (Levy & Killen, 2008). A

teacher can improve intercultural relations in their class by employing culturally sensitive curriculum.

Another method to curriculum development includes guest speakers from culturally diverse communities sharing their experiences with the students. Banks (2015) suggested using oral history, autobiographies, film, and video productions to effectively teach about cultural diversity as the teacher instructs from the viewpoint of the subordinated ethnic group, instead of the viewpoint of the dominant group. Problems, questions, case studies, examples and analyses are also useful in showing the impact of legal legislation and in changing the tendency of students to generalize while preparing them to work in diverse communities (O'Donnell, 2012).

Loewenberg et al. (2008) suggest a teacher must know his or her students' interests, demographic backgrounds, previous and current levels of knowledge and experience, and the reason for learning, or motivation in, a particular subject. This will help the teacher to align his or her courses and teach with content suitable to stimulating students' ability to learn for themselves. Teachers need the skills to balance listening and talking because teaching is about conversation and communication (O'Donnell, 2012). One way to achieve this is for the teacher to formulate learning goals for a topic, and then describe the main principles of the topic, the argument structure, and examples to the students. The students would then respond using class discussions and activities. Afterwards the teacher would reflect on the student's responses, give them feedback, and modify the descriptions of the topic in a meaningful way for the students. A study by Spronken-Smith and Walker in 2010 showed by repeatedly discussing a topic, the teacher allows the students to use their developing knowledge of their work and compare their own ideas on the subject matter with the teacher's ideas, while gradually changing their misconceptions on the subject.

Conclusion

A culturally relevant curriculum is critical in students' overall development as it helps them to learn in an environment which accepts their values, beliefs, and attitudes. This increases their self-confidence and awareness of self and their capabilities as individuals. By ensuring the curriculum is geared towards improving student education, the teachers also learn better approaches and methods they can use to improve the learning environment.

Black (2006) suggested recommendations for educators to handle cultural dissonance. She recommended they be familiar with ethnocentrism and know and understand their students' cultural heritage. This would help them to better understand the best curricula adaptable for their schools. The teachers should also teach cultural diversity and understand the different values in different cultures, including the social, political and economic views (Gay, 2013). Having awareness of such dichotomy will create a curriculum best suited to the school and is all-encompassing. The educators should also believe all students can learn, and create a learning environment where all students are accepted and appreciated. Culturally responsive curriculum methods can thus improve student behavior and achievement.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The research study included an approach where a preliminary study was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of the study. Different aspects of the study which include cost, time, adverse events and other factors which could affect the outcome of the study were assessed to determine feasibility. The study was concerned with the determination of the appropriate individuals to be included in the research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This helped determine the participants to be recruited to take part in the research study by identifying factors such as demographic characteristics of the participants, the geographical regions and the schools to be included.

The research used school ethnography to discover the trends and opinions which inform a culturally diverse curriculum and its application. The researcher used observations and interviews to collect data for the study. The review of literature was proven useful on learning about previously implemented curricula, and how they affect student learning as well as interaction in schools.

Design Appropriateness

This research study used school ethnography to discuss cultural dissonance and how to develop a culturally relevant curriculum. School ethnography discusses everything happening to students, teachers, and the administration inside the school (Gardner & Martin-Jones, 2012). It includes more than documents, and explains what is unknown to the students and teachers alike. This also includes the hidden curriculum, in which pre-existing social agreements are reproduced, especially the power relationships in these agreements (Walford, 2008). The systematic study of education systems helps to explore cultural differences and identify their connection to education,

because all institutions have their own world views or ideologies perpetuated through the students and their teachers (Earick, 2012).

Research Question

This qualitative research study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How can we break the barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance to implement a culturally relevant curriculum?

2. How can we increase cultural sensitivity in the schools?

The study provided research on the topic to show how these barriers can be broken in the communities and in the classroom to improve student performance and help teachers to better understand them. This study aimed to help educators prepare curricula suitable for culturally diverse classrooms.

Research Objectives

This research was undertaken to:

1. Learn how educators can develop a curriculum that is culturally inclusive.

2. Explore how the barriers of cultural dissonance can be broken in the education system.

Population and Sampling Frame

The sample consisted of eight (8) Black American students and two (2) White American teachers. The selection of the teachers was based on race. The selection of the students was based on age, race, and class. Additionally, the students that were identified by the school administrator were based on students' academic records showing academic and social challenges. Although many students profile were aligned with the requirements, yet a handful of students completed the required forms to participate. The students that participated in this study were based upon a fixed prerequisite by the researcher. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the

students and teachers to participate in the study. In the purposive sampling the school administrator was asked to select 8 students and 2 teachers to take part in the study. The students were from low-income families and more affluent suburban families. The schools will mostly be in middle-income communities, where most of the student population lives.

Recruitment and data collection are the fundamental components of research studies which can determine the success of the study (Bryman, 2016). Recruiting participants requires the researcher to identify suitable demographic characteristics of the individuals to be included in the study. As the study was concerned with developing culturally competent curriculum, it was suitable to select and recruit individuals from schools with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study identified regions with schools having diversity regarding race, ethnicity and gender to determine if they have a culturally competent syllabus to address the needs of all students.

Before the researcher visited the schools, the invitation letter was sent to the various school administrators. The invitation letter requested permission to be allowed to take part in the study. Detailed aims and objectives of the study were included in the invitation letters. After the response was received from the schools, the researcher visited the schools to identify the individuals to take part in the study. Two schools were identified to take part in the study where two teachers and eight students were selected. The researcher considered all students aged 14-17 years old eligible to take part in the study.

Teachers, students, and their classrooms were studied, and literature on various educational institutions was used to gather data on the subject. The researcher studied eight (8) students and two (2) teachers to discover their routines and cultural backgrounds. Two schools took part in the study, one in a low-income urban area and one in a more affluent suburban

location. Many of the students were from middle-income communities, where the majority of populations live. The schools had students from various cultural backgrounds yet at minimum 40% of the population consisted of students who are Black Americans. In these schools, a culturally relevant curriculum was absent, and the students utilized the existing curriculum.

Geographical Location

The data was collected from two contrasting districts in a Midwestern state. The reason that these two schools were selected was because of their diverse demographics in separate districts relating to culture and race, yet differing in their socioeconomic (SES) category. The figure below illustrates the trend in demographic amongst teachers and students.
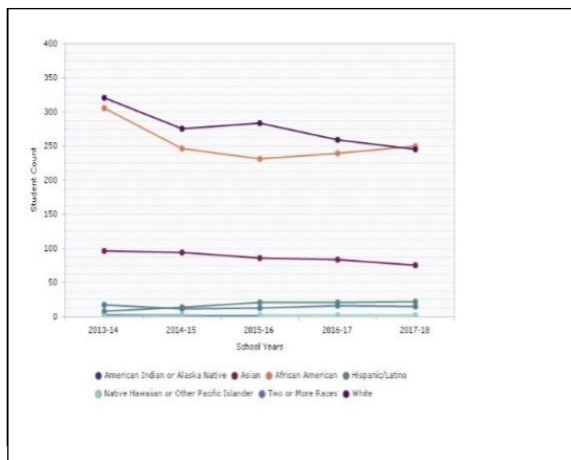
Figure 3: School 1 Student demographics.[3]
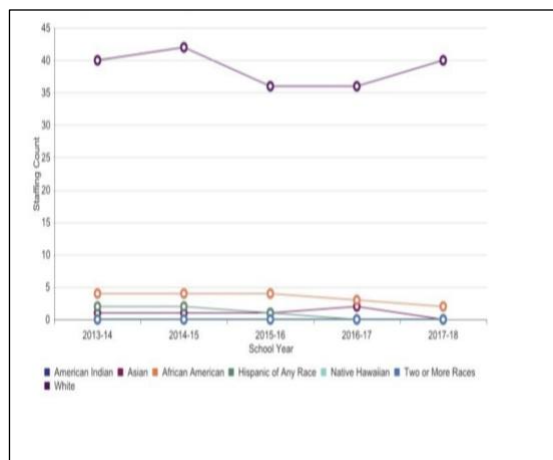
Figure 4: School 1 teacher demographics.[4]

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https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StaffingInformation/StaffingCount3/StaffingCount3.aspx
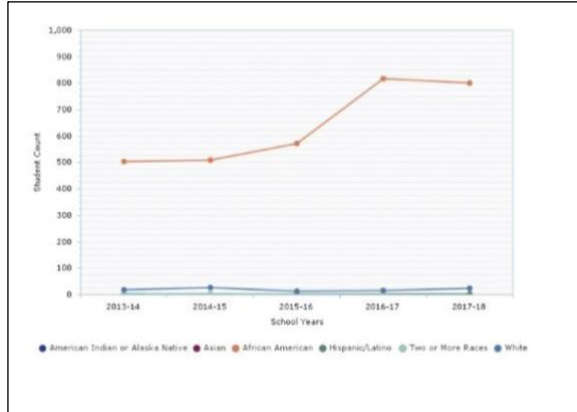
Figure 5: School 2 student demographics.[5]   *Figure 6:* School 2 teacher demographics.[6]
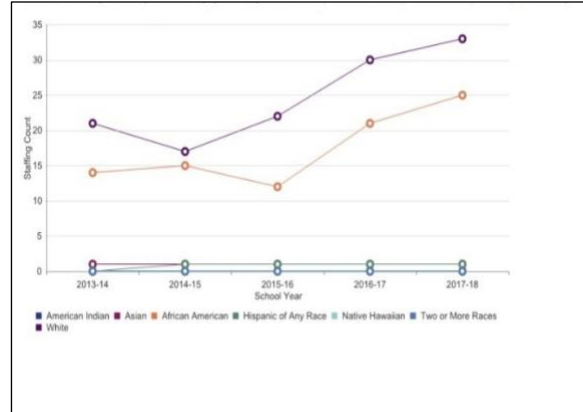
3.7 Informed Consent

All participants were informed of the benefits and risk of taking part in the study. Participants age 18 and older signed consent forms. Participants under the age of 18 signed an assent form and were given a consent form that was signed by a legal caregiver. Participants, or their caregiver, gave verbal permission for their data and information to be used in the research. Participants were informed that they may withdraw their participation at any time if they felt threatened or uncomfortable.

Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality was included in the consent forms. The researcher informed the participants verbally that they had the right to keep their names and recordings private. All audio recordings were protected through an encrypted website and were only handled by the researcher. The participants were assured that their discussions would not be disseminated to their schools or to any other institutions, and that their data was only used for research purposes. Every

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https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StaffingInformation/StaffingCount3/StaffingCount3.aspx

effort was made to guarantee privacy by keeping participant names and responses confidential. All participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms created and assigned by the researcher. Conditions were established to preserve confidentiality, preserving and eventually dispose of collected data. Precautions were used to avoid using participant names and coding responses. The data is secured in a safe and locked environment until the records are destroyed after three years.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Recruitment and data collection are the fundamental components of research studies which can determine the success of the study (Bryman, 2016). Recruiting participants requires the researcher to identify suitable demographic characteristics of the individuals to be included in the study. As the study was concerned with developing culturally competent curriculum, it was suitable to select and recruit individuals from schools with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study identified regions with schools having diversity regarding race, ethnicity and gender to determine if they have a culturally competent syllabus to address the needs of all students.

The data collected included teacher-researcher observations, teacher interviews, and student interviews. My research obligation was to investigate whether if developing a culturally relevant curriculum would enable both students and teachers to respect each other's ways of existence and to build bridges between them that would ultimately improve teacher experience and student's learning experience. The researcher used a social identity wheel for the teachers in addition to comprehensive interviews to allow the participants to describe their experiences in detail.

The interview was the leading method used to gather information from the respondents in this study. The participants were invited for an interview session which lasted for one hour

wherein open-ended questions were administered. The interviews were conducted through face to face interactions with the participants. There were separate interview questions for the teachers and students who took part in the study. Specifically, the students were asked to give their responses on the appropriate curriculum that can facilitate a culturally competent learning environment. In addition, the students were asked if the given design of curriculum was appropriate for them. On the other hand, teachers were asked of the curriculum they are using is culturally competent and their opinions regarding the best curriculum to cater for the diverse needs of the students. All the questions for the interviews were open-ended to help the respondents provide their feelings, attitudes, experiences and understanding of the topic under study. The questions for each category were similar since each was aimed at assessing specific information regarding culturally competent curriculum which can help improve the academic performance of the students in the schools.

Interviews were audio recorded. Each participant was interviewed a minimum of three times to ensure the researcher collected rich and exhaustive data from them. The researcher used open-ended questions with prompts to allow the participants to give elaborate answers rich and in detail. The prompts ensured that the researcher elicit as much information and responses as possible from the participants. Audio recordings were used to effectively collect participant responses and later transcribed and used to gauge the accuracy or truth of the participants' answers.

The audio recordings were transcribed without making any editorial changes. The researcher read and listened to the audio recordings to make grammatical changes and to hide participants' voices and faces to maintain confidentiality. After the transcription, the participants were allowed to review the data and make changes or add information they deemed to be

necessary. It is only after the participants had fully confirmed the contents of the transcriptions that the researcher moved on to the next stage of the study. This is because such recordings can show and be used to analyze a participant's posture or gestures, to determine their level of comfort during the interview. Posture and gestures cannot be used to determine if a participant is being truthful during the interview.

The researcher also used observation as an important technique to analyze the data for the study. Observation helped the researcher gain some insights on the behavior of teachers and students in the two schools. Various elements were assessed during the observation and included the curriculum used by the teachers and the interaction between the students and teacher. The relations among the students and their peers were also observed to determine how they adapt to diversity in the schools.

The data analysis was achieved through the identification of themes which emerged from the interviews of the respondents. The themes which emerged were grouped based on various topics. The focus of the themes was a culturally relevant curriculum in the schools. Sub-themes were also developed from the main topics to help identify how the schools can develop and adopt a learning environment to accommodate culturally relevant curriculum and culturally sensitive teaching in the schools.

Observation of participants which included students and teaches was mainly in their school environment and interactions in the classroom. The researcher observed the participants for approximately one hour each day for two weeks. During the observation, the researcher assesses how the students interact with each other and the teachers. In essence, the researcher wanted to know the attitude and behavior of students in schools. Observation was also done during the class lessons where the researcher was interested in knowing the actions of the students and

teachers on the used curriculum. After this initial period, the researcher took a week to reflect on collected data and returned for two to three days per week over the course of four weeks. This allowed the researcher to focus on data collection based on what was learned up to a certain point. This format further allowed enough time to give the researcher enough material on the activities and interactions between the students and their teachers. This research study used school ethnography qualitative research publications to discuss the importance of developing cultural curriculums. The researcher explored the lives, culture, and situations of the students and their communities, and observed how lack of culturally relevant curriculum affects their learning.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and integrity are upheld by preserving confidentiality with the participant. Instead of focusing on reliability and validity, qualitative researchers substitute data trustworthiness (Anderson, 2010). Trustworthiness consists of the following components: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c); dependability; and (d) conformability. Credibility contributes to a belief in the trustworthiness of data through the following attributes: (a) prolonged engagement; (b) persistent observations; (c) triangulation; (d) referential adequacy; (e) peer debriefing; and (f) member checks. Triangulation and member checks are primary and commonly used methods to address credibility. Triangulation is accomplished by asking the same research questions of different study participants and by collecting data from different sources and by using different methods to answer those research questions. Member checks occur when the researcher asked participants to review both the data collected by the interviewer and the researchers' interpretation of that interview data. Trust is an important aspect of the member check process. Knowing that the participant had a chance to verify their statements cause study participants to

willingly fill in any gaps from earlier interviews. Participants were genuinely appreciative of the member check process.

Confidentiality and privacy were promised to research participants as a default condition (Yu, 2008). There were once circumstance where one of the questions posed during the interview with the two participants remained unanswered because the participants had insecurities about protecting their identity. Anderson (2010) claimed qualitative research as subjective, small in scale and unreliable lacking rigor. Qualitative research, when performed properly, is valid, reliable, dependable and rigorous. This study required a means of examining to the extent to which convincing evidence validates claims. Anderson (2010) stated reliability and validity related to quantitative research. Probing data for consistency and legitimacy evaluates the fairness and trustworthiness of the study. Anderson (2010) explained validity involves the truthfulness and authenticity of research data, while preserving consistency, reproducibility and solidity. Data collection and analysis research findings must be accurate and valid.

Anderson (2010) suggested using triangulation allows for multiple ways to examine identical phenomenon. Anderson (2010) explained researchers must examine conflicting facts and provide explanation in the analysis to guarantee research bias does not hinder or change views of the data and any insight offered. According to Anderson (2010), respondent rationale allows participants to interpret and analyze the data and offer responses related to interpretations of their responses. This method offered a technique of examining inconsistencies, disputing the theory of the researcher, and offers the prospect to reexamine the data (Anderson, 2010). Constant comparison links data such as interviews with prior information allows the data to be used in whole, as opposed to breaking up the data. Continuous assessment allows for recognizing emerging or unexpected themes in the study (Anderson, 2010).

The researcher wrote data which complemented the data from the observations and interviews performed. Classroom observations through field notes and audio- recordings were systematically recorded and collected at the end of the sessions. The days and dates of classroom observation or interviews were duly noted. The researcher did not offer personal views or correct a participant's response during an interview, nor did the researcher interject any comments, use subjective language, or provide personal feedback during any interview (Creswell, 2012). Nonetheless, the interviewer did make personal notes in their private observation notes and used these during the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

Data analysis strategy refers to the technique of collecting and organizing data to help the researcher reach a conclusion regarding a given finding of the research study. The process of data analysis helps to answer the specific research questions formulated for given research studies (Taylor et al., 2015). Analysis also helps the researcher solve a problem or address a specific issue of concern. There are many methods which can be applied to analyze data for any given study depending on the nature of the study. There are two methods which can be used to analyze data collected for a research study, qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The emphasis in this study was on qualitative data analysis since the researcher used interviews and observation to collect the data and information required from the participants.

Interviews

The interview was the leading method used to gather information from the respondents in this study. The participants were invited for an interview session which lasted for one hour wherein open-ended questions were administered. During the interviews, the researcher carefully listened to the participants' descriptions and repeatedly studies the data as it was transcribed. This

will help the researcher to understand the general essence in relation to the experiences of the students. The researcher described the significant elements of the participants' experiences individually and also in the context of their relationship to one another.

There were separate interview questions for the teachers and students who took part in the study. All the questions for the interviews were open-ended to help the respondents provide their feelings, attitudes, experiences and understanding of the topic under study. The questions for each category were similar since each was aimed at assessing specific information regarding culturally competent curriculum which can help improve the academic performance of the students in the schools.

Observations

The researcher also used observation as an important technique to analyze the data for the study. The observations were conducted in the participants' classroom for one hour at a time 2 to 3 days out of the week. The researcher used a reflective journal to record the teacher's and student's educational experiences. The reflective journal included a map of the room, external factors and interpersonal interactions. The researcher used the reflective journal to document and later reflect upon the observations and responses to teacher and student exchanges. The observations helped the researcher gain some insights on the behavior of teachers and students in the two classrooms. Various elements were assessed during the observations and included the curriculum used by the teachers and the interaction between the students and teacher. The relations among the students and their peers were also observed to determine how they adapt to diversity in the schools.

The researcher codes the data and uses the codes to search for themes, subthemes, and the essence of the data collected from the transcripts and field notes. Concrete examples were

obtained to allow for the interpretations to be clearly understood by future readers of the research. Data analysis encompassed importing data from the transcripts of all individual interviews, field notes and journal entries into Nvivo 11 to identify the common themes embedded in the teacher's experiences of reaching the African American students with respect to the learning sciences using a culturally relevant curriculum. Triangulation of data from three sources allowed the researcher to explain the teachers 'experiences and to confirm repetition of an interpretation or observation.

Constant comparison did allow the researchers to develop concepts from the data by coding and analyzing it at the same time (Taylor & Bogdan 1998). This included systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling to generate a theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a language that is clear enough to allow for further testing. The researcher, during this time, compared incidents applicable to each category, integrate the categories and their properties, delimit the theory, and write the theory. An advantage of constant comparison resulted in the researcher's ability to construct with raw data, yet through a series of comparisons, a theory became known.

Summary

The data collection and analysis process were able to collect useful data which effectively informed the study. The qualitative research study used observations and interviews, literature reviews, as well as audio recordings to collect data for the study. A constant comparative methodology ensured the researcher collect data and analyzed it thoroughly to get the necessary results which were used to inform future research.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Introduction

The findings obtained from the interviews and observations from the selected sample of the study from the research is listed in the results section. In this research study, a total sample of 10 participants was interviewed. Eight respondents were Black American students in the eighth grade and the two teachers are identified as White American middle age females. The demographic characteristics of participants were explained using race and gender. All the eight students identified themselves as Black Americans while 1 teacher identified herself as Mexican American and the other teacher identified herself as Chaldean American. Again, both of the teachers were female and taught for over 10 years in their school district.

The details of the interviews were recorded to help in analyzing and interpreting the findings. This chapter includes reporting the results of the mini-pilot study, the recruiting participants and collecting and analyzing data, results of the pilot study, participants' response rate, frequency distribution, and reliability analysis. Also reported in Table 1 are the results of the main study and conduct correlation analysis of the various variables included in the study.

Results of the Pilot Study

Participants' Response Rate

Table 1*: The Response Rate of the Participants*

INDIVIDUALS INVITED FOR THE STUDY	PARTICIPANTS WHO TOOK PART IN THE STUDY	RESPONSE RATE
10	10	100%

The response rates of the participants illustrate the number of the people selected who successfully took part in the study. The study involved 8 students and 2 teachers from two

suburban schools from a middle class district in the same county. One school is located in a low-income suburban area and the other school is located in a more affluent suburban area. The study included two teachers and eight students. All participants who were invited to take part in the study responded. The response rate was 100%. The above table shows the response rate of the participants who took part in the research study.

The respondents were composed of teachers and students. The study used one teacher and four students from each of the selected schools. The composition of teachers to students is shown in the Table 2 and Figure 7.

PARTICIPANTS	FREQUENCY
Teachers	2
Students	8
Total	10

Table 2*: Shows the Composition of Teachers and Students*
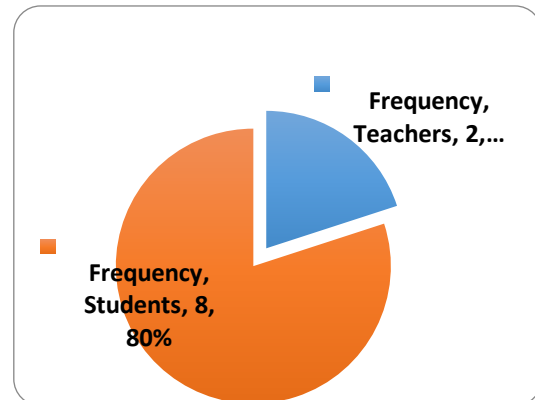
Figure 7: The composition of teacher and students.

The Composition of the Students by Race/Ethnicity

The study involved assessing the cultural competent academic curriculum in the schools. As a result, schools with a high number of Black American students were targeted. The students interviewed were all Black Americans. The inclusion of people from different races was important and allowed for the divergence of important information on cultural diversity in the learning institutions. Illustrated in Table 3, the teachers and the students came from different cultural groups.

Table 3: *The Cultural Backgrounds of the Teachers and Students*

RACE/ETHNICITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Black American Students	8	80%
Chaldean American Teacher	1	10%
Mexican American Teacher	1	10%

From the data below, it is evident the majority of the participants were Black Americans who made up 80 % of the participants. The inclusion of the majority of Black Americans was aimed at ensuring the targeted individuals were facing the challenges associated with cultural dissonance. A Chaldean American was Teacher 1 and a Mexican American was Teacher 2.
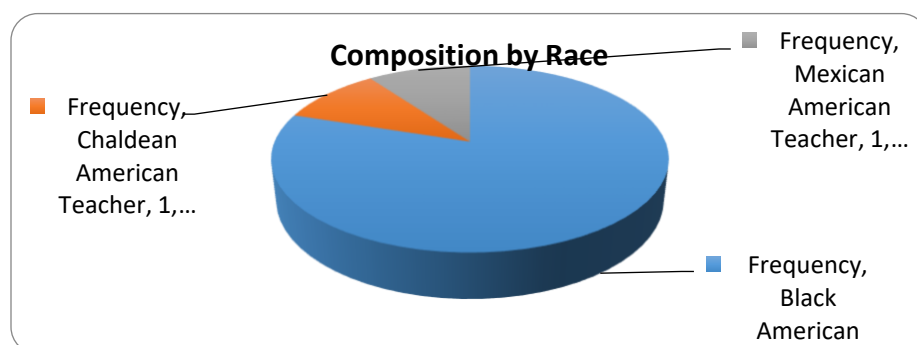
Figure 8: Composition by race.

Frequency Distribution

The frequency distribution shows the displays of the frequency associated with various outcomes of a research study. Each of the entries in a frequency distribution shows the counts or number of the occurrence of the values within a particular group. In the pilot study, the teachers and students were assessed through interview to determine whether their schools used a culturally relevant academic curriculum. The main purpose of the pilot study was to identify if the selected schools integrated cultural responsiveness in their teaching. The researcher asked the teachers to rate whether their lessons and class activities consider ethnic diversity to make an assessment. The teachers were required to give three main responses which included Yes, No, and I Don't

Know. The results are shown in the Table 4.

Table 4: *Responses of Teachers regarding the Culturally Relevant Curriculum*

CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM	FREQUENCY
Yes	0
No	2
I Don't Know	0

The result shows both teachers from the two schools indicated the curriculum they were using was not culturally relevant. The teachers thought there was a need to change the curriculum to match the diverse needs of the students in the schools. Many students found it difficult to adjust to the class lessons since the lessons failed to meet their unique needs. Many schools in the United States use the Common Core State Standards which were developed for the majority students, but it fails to meet the needs of minority students. This has severely affected the learning progress of the minority groups including Black American students.

The students were also asked to state if the two teachers selected for the study were accommodating to their needs. The eight students from the two schools gave different opinions on the culturally competent teaching methods. The students were asked to rate whether the teaching strategies met their diverse needs specifically based on their culture or race. The rating scale was 1 to 4 for strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree respectively. The results from the eight students are shown in the frequency Table 5.

Table 5: *Responses of Student Regarding Culturally Competent Curriculum*

CULTURALLY COMPETENT CURRICULUM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Disagree	6	75%
Disagree	1	13%
Agree	1	13%
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Total`	8	100%

From the frequency table, the majority of students strongly disagreed that the curriculum used was culturally competent. In fact, 75 % strongly disagreed. Thirteen per cent of the students also disagreed that the teaching methodologies used are culturally competent. This shows 87% of the students surveyed thought the syllabus was not culturally competent. Only one student, representing 13% of the respondents, agreed the curriculum was culturally competent. This implies the majority of these students were not enjoying their lessons because it was not tailored to meet their cultural needs.
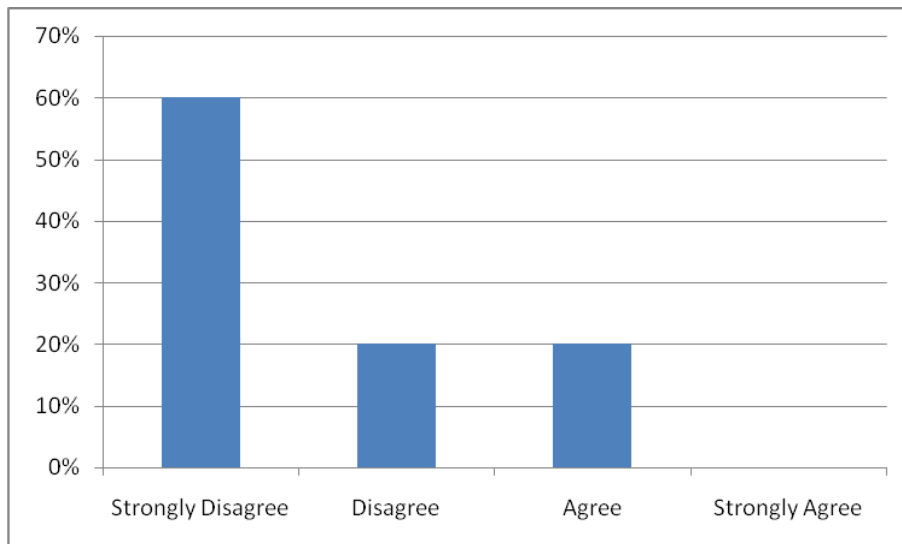
Figure 9: Graph showing the opinion of students regarding culturally competent curriculum

Trustworthiness of the Results

The trustworthiness of the pilot study was critical in determining the consistency of the findings obtained (Taylor et al., 2015). During the pilot study, the teachers were asked if they were aware the curriculum they were using was effective in addressing the diverse needs of the students. It was important to determine if the responses of the teachers were consistent. The students were assessed using open-ended questions on whether the teaching methodology was effective towards meeting their unique needs. The responses obtained were assessed to determine their reliability.

As per the responses from the teachers, it was evident both teachers agreed the curriculum used in their respective schools failed to address the needs of the minority students. The results indicated 100 % of teachers agreed the curriculum currently used failed to address the cultural diversity of the students. According to the results, the schools did not have a curriculum to address the diverse backgrounds of the students. The researcher also used observations to confirm the appropriateness of the results. This was achieved by assessing the current curriculum to determine if any aspects of diversity existed. Curriculum in both schools was found to be similar, with no aspect of diversity.

The reliability analysis of the responses of the students can be achieved by comparing the percentages of the students who agreed and those who disagreed. From the results, only one student agreed the curriculum used was culturally competent. The rest of the students disagreed that the class work, lessons, and class activities used were culturally competent. Thus, 87% of the student respondents indicated that culturally competent teaching methods were not being used.

Results of the Study

Demographic Characteristics of School One and School Two

The participant's rates of the main study provide information regarding the participants of the study such as their composition. The same two schools were also chosen to take part in the main study. Both schools were from a suburban district of a large city in the Midwest region of the United States in which the majority of teachers are predominantly white.

School One

At the time of the study, in school one, the demographic characteristics of the students was as follows:
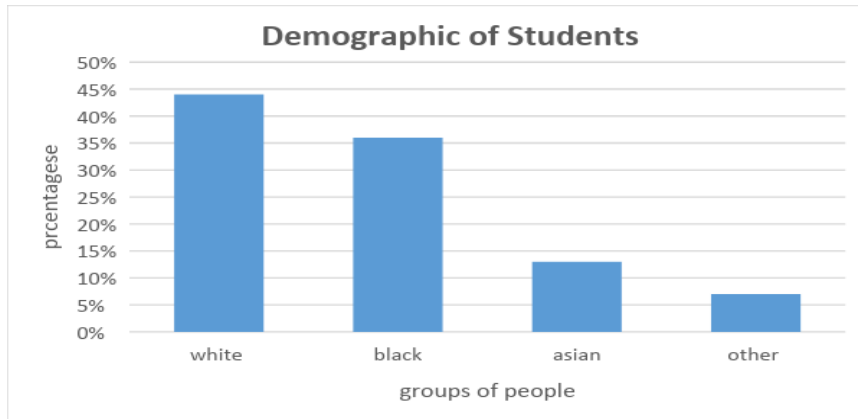
Figure 10: The demographic characteristics of the student

Number of students 638; 44 % of the students were White, 36% of the students were Black, 13% of the students were Asian, and the remaining 7 % belong to other ethnic groups. Regarding the teachers, all of the general education teachers in the school were White meaning 100% of the teachers were White.

As indicated in the frequency graph, the majority of the students in the school were White, followed by Black and Asian respectively. Distinctly, the school has students from different cultural backgrounds and this requires the teachers to use teaching strategies that accommodates all races and ethnic groups. However, the school has only White teachers irrespective of the diversity of the students. This suggests the possibility that instruction in the school might not have been culturally sensitive. The frequency distribution of teachers is shown in the graph below indicating there were no Black or Latino teachers in the school.
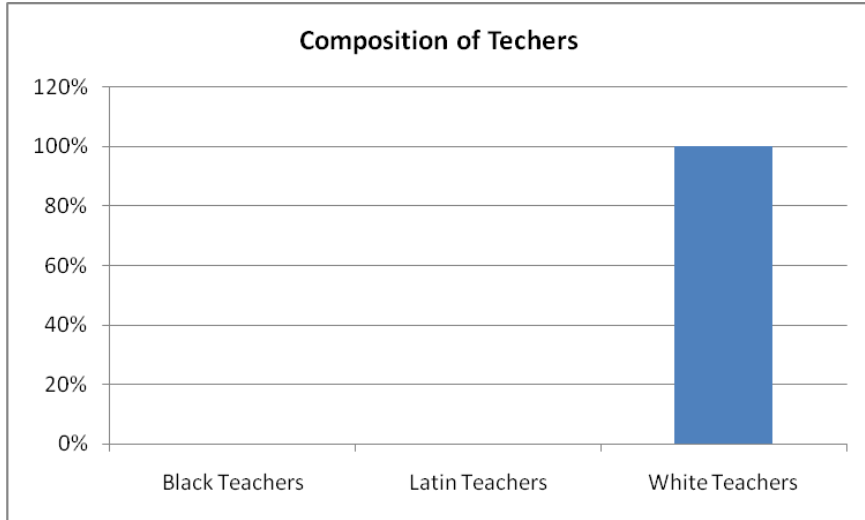
Figure 11. Graph showing the composition of teachers based on their race.

School Two

School two had the following demographic characteristics of the students and teachers. The school had 587 students. 97 % of the students were Black, 2% were White, and 1% were Asian. The school had Black and White teachers. The White teachers constituted 48 %; Black teachers were 40 % while Latina/o teachers were 12%. The demographic characteristics of the students with regards to their race are shown in the graph below.
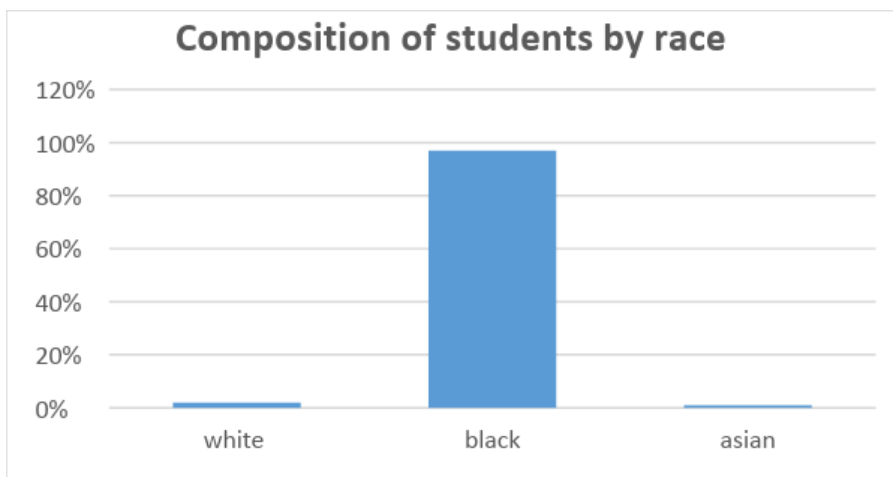
Figure 12: The composition of students based on their races

The number of the black students exceeded the other races. The Asian students represented the lowest numbers in the school at about 1 % of the students. The school had more female white

teachers compared to Black or Latina/o teachers despite the majority of students being Blacks. In a culturally sensitive learning environment, the composition of teachers should ideally reflect cultural diversity. For example, where there are many Black students, there should be many Black teachers to help address their unique needs. This discrepancy between the Black teachers and students as shown in the frequency distribution of the two schools shows there is conceivably a lack of cultural competence.
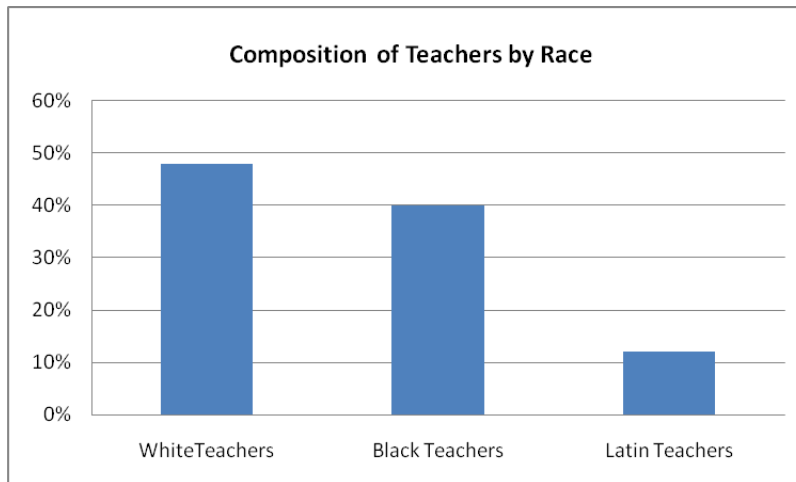
Figure 13: The composition of Teachers based on their race

Frequency Distribution

The results of the main study focused on various themes which were identified. The researcher coded the data and documented the various themes which emerged from participant interviews resulting in findings on how to improve the curriculum of the schools to become culturally competent. The themes were mainly derived from the responses from the participants which included two teachers and eight students. There were six main categories of themes which emerged including curriculum and instructional design, classroom climate, culturally relevant curriculum and materials, multicultural approaches to instruction, cultural congruence in instruction, and cultural competence.

Table 6*: The Percentages of the Responses Based on the Themes that Emerged from the Study.*

THEMES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Curriculum and Instructional Design	10	100 %
Classroom climate	8	80 %
Culturally relevant curriculum and material	8	80 %
Multicultural approaches to instruction	9	90 %
Cultural congruence in instruction	6	60 %
Cultural competence	7	70 %

Curriculum and Instructional Design

The curriculum and instructional design were evaluated to determine whether they address the needs of the black students. In the curriculum and instructional design, the researcher was interested in establishing several things hindering the effective implementation of the culturally competent teaching strategies (Gruenewald, 2014). This included assessing the ability of the teachers to develop clear standards and goals to be achieved during a specified period (Loue et al., 2015). The design of the instruction was also assessed to determine if it matched the content of the curriculum. Both teachers indicated mixed reactions regarding using curriculum and instruction materials meeting the diverse needs of the students. For instance, Teacher 1 from School 1 said, "The school is monotonous since the curriculum failed to address the diverse needs of the students. We as teachers benefit from teaching using strategies such as greeting the students at door, having a short conversation with the students regarding their day and using the Project-based Learning (PBL) instruction." The response from the teachers shows the curriculum and instructional materials used in the school are not culturally competent and a source of cultural dissonance. The teachers apparently are attempting to create a friendly teaching environment

which can make students feel accommodated regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. In some cases, it seems not to work well with many students, especially from the minority groups, since they are unable to cope with some of the majority students because of a curriculum that is not culturally competent. For instance, 80 percent of the black students indicated that they are "bored' and experience difficulties in some subjects due to the culturally incompetent curriculum. School 2, Student 3 exclaimed, "Watching CNN is a waste of time. What does it have to do with me?" []

Teacher 2 from School 2 also had the similar response to the extent to which the curriculum and instructional materials meet the needs of all students. In her response, Teacher 2 stated, "I normally attempt to make the students loved and wanted. Many of the students feel neglected and as a teacher, I must engage them to feel a sense of belonging. I ensure that I use accommodative and understandable language when talking with my students in and outside the classrooms. However, I must admit that it is difficult to give the students the assignments that are student-centered owing to the nature of the current curriculum since the curriculum is fixed in a manner that makes it impossible to differentiate instruction so that lessons are culturally relevant to the students. I normally make sure that the students have more control and this worked well for many of the students. In my lessons, I prefer to pick a topic and use the language that African Americans can relate to and understand better."

Table 7*: Responses Regarding the Curriculum and Instructional Elements*

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS		
Curriculum aligned to diverse culture	1	2
Instruction design Aligned to Culture	3	3
Aligning assessment to Culture	1	1
Structuring lessons to include Cultural Elements	3	2
Using PBL instruction	2	4

Based on the response from Teacher 2, it can be noted she is making effort to encourage and motivate students to learn. The emphasis of the teacher is to ensure all students feel loved as well as understand what she teaches in the class. The teacher can be argued to using surface adaptation to connect with her students and promote cultural competency. Although the curriculum has no specific guidelines on how to develop teaching strategies benefitting students from the Black community, the teacher is making her own efforts to ensure that the minority groups understand the lessons she is teaching. It is not well known whether other teachers also make such efforts to help the students understand what they are teaching. After evaluating the interview responses from the teachers regarding the cultural sensitivity of their curriculum and instructional design, using a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 4 indicating strongly agree, the results are shown in the frequency table above.

The students were also asked to give their responses on the appropriate curriculum that can facilitate a culturally competent learning environment. The students were asked if the given design of curriculum was appropriate for them. They were required to give one of the three answers which included Yes, No and Don't Know. The responses of the students are recorded in Table 8.

Table 8*: Response Regarding the Effective Curriculum that Can Facilitate Learning*

Curriculum and Instructional Elements	RESPONSES							
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8
Curriculum aligned to diverse culture	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instruction design	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Aligned to Culture								
Aligning assessment to Culture	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Structuring lessons to include Cultural Elements	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Using PBL instruction	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Based on the responses from the students, all students were interested in design of the curriculum to help meet their diverse cultural needs. It is clear that nearly all the students feel that a culturally competent curriculum will be appropriate for them. According to teacher data, students are not getting such curriculum. Both of the teachers who were interviewed indicated that they are not using a culturally competent curriculum. This mismatch suggests the need to implement a culturally competent curriculum (Betancourt et al., 2016). Although some students indicated "no" in certain areas such as aligning the assessment to culture, the results of such observations could have been influenced by various factors such as the background of the students and fear.

All of the students interviewed favored the PBL instruction, and this might be because of the students' familiarity with that teaching approach.

Classroom Climate

The other theme which emerged was concerned with the impact of classroom climate on the performance of students from different cultural backgrounds. The teachers were asked to identify the best classroom setting which could help meet the expectation of the students from the minority groups. The responses of the teachers were ranked based on a scale of 1 (strongly

disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The result of the responses regarding the classroom settings is shown in the Table 9.

Table 9: *Responses Regarding the Best Classroom Setting*

CLASSROOM CLIMATE		
Group-Centered Learning Approach	4	4
Collaborating Learning Approach	4	4
Encouraging Universal values and Traits	3	3
Creating Positive Relationship with Parents	4	4
Physically Inviting and Safe Classrooms	2	2

The result indicates both of the teachers thought there was a need to develop certain strategies which can support a culturally competent learning environment. Teachers had different opinions regarding the best approach to help students, especially the Black American students who were the majority of the students based on the population of the two schools involved in the study.

Regarding the classroom environment, the students were also asked to give their opinion regarding the appropriate design of their classroom. The students were required to select one of the three answers including Yes, No or Don't Know. The responses from the eight students are indicated in the Table 10.

Table 10: *Responses of Students Regarding the Best Classroom Settings*

Classroom climate	RESPONSES							
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8
Group-Centered Learning Approach	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Collaborating Learning Approach	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Encouraging Universal values and TRAITS	Don't Know	Don't Know	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Creating Positive Relationship with Parents	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Physically Inviting and Safe Classrooms	No	No	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

From the results, nearly all the design features of the classroom promoting cultural competency were favored by the students given that 3 responses were "Yes." This is an indication the designing of the classrooms in a manner promoting cultural competency can be ideal for the students learning and progress (Thomas, 2015). All students favored classrooms which promote a group-centered learning approach. Such a structure is appropriate, since it helps the students to learn each other's culture. This also helps to promote sharing ideas and information among the students and teachers. This will ensure a favorable learning environment to accommodate all

cultures.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials

The teachers were also asked to identify the strategies which are effective in ensuring students are taught using culturally relevant curriculum and materials. It was established that the schools are not using culturally relevant curriculum and materials, and there is a need to determine the best strategy to apply in teaching to meet the diverse needs of the students. The responses from the teachers regarding this question are shown Table 11.

Table 11: *Responses of Teachers regarding Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials*

CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS		
Selecting of the culturally relevant curriculum materials that caters to the diverse needs of students	4	4
Using the culturally relevant pictures, books and other learning materials	4	4
Recognizing all the events which are culturally relevant	4	4
Understanding and using speech/language which is familiar to all students	3	2
Using instruction materials with political, historical, social and economic events	1	2
Encouraging sharing of expressive and personal stories which are related to curriculum content	3	4

The students were also asked whether they prefer to be taught using culturally relevant learning materials. The students were required to give their answers including Yes, No or I don't Know. The results obtained were recorded as shown in Table 12. The results show the majority of the students prefer to have curriculum materials which are culturally relevant. This further

supports the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum.

Table 12: *Responses of the Students on the Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials*

Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Materials	RESPONSES							
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8
Teachers using culturally relevant curriculum materials that caters to the diverse needs of students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Using the culturally relevant pictures, books and other learning materials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Recognizing all the events that are culturally relevant	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Using speech/language that is familiar with all students	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Using instruction materials with political, historical, social and economic	No	Don't Know	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

events								
Encouraging sharing of expressive and personal stories that are related to curriculum's content	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No

Multicultural Approaches to Instruction

Multicultural approaches to instruction were also lacking in the schools selected for the study. In multicultural approaches to instruction, the teachers are required to give instruction appropriate for the students from different races. This required teachers to use different dialects, languages and style which are culturally competent. Based on the observation, the teachers were not able to provide a multicultural approach to instruction as they were accustomed to one of two cultures.

Trustworthy Analysis

The trustworthy analysis was used to examine if the result obtained from the main study was reliable. The researcher used simple approaches to test the reliability analysis of the study. One approach was to compare the responses of the teachers and the students on the effectiveness of their teaching methods. In questions where the students were asked to indicate whether the teaching strategies used were culturally competent, the majority of students indicated "No." Compared with the question which asked teachers to indicate whether they use the culturally competent instructional materials, both teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed which were ratings 1 and 2. The results of these two findings are similar as the students and teachers

agreed that the teaching approaches used in these two schools were not culturally competent. This shows the schools lacked culturally-relevant curricula leading to the cultural dissonance.

Another approach used to test the reliability of the result was the comparison of the observed statistics and the response from the interviews. From the observation, the classrooms and teacher-student interactions during the period of study give an indication of lack of cultural competency. The students were working on similar grounds and seem to adopt the majority culture when in schools. This indicates that their culture was not embraced in the schools. The presence of White teachers which exceeded the number of Black teachers in the schools where the majority of the students are Black suggests there might be no consideration of the cultural backgrounds of the students.

Summary

The result of the study implies that both schools in the study lack a culturally competent curriculum. From the two schools selected for the pilot study, it was established that the majority of teachers use the curriculum without integrating any strategies or elements which can help benefit students from diverse backgrounds. The current curriculum used in the schools lacks the elements of cultural competency. This may have adversely affected the learning progress of the Black minority students. As a result, these students might profit from revised teaching approaches that would ensure cultural responsiveness in the classrooms.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter five provides discussion of the findings obtained from the study. It discusses the various issues that emerged from the study based on the responses from the students and teachers regarding the development of culturally relevant curriculum and breaking the barriers of cognitive and culturally dissonance. Furthermore, the chapter provides implication of the study and some suggestion that can contribute the success of future studies on the subject.

Summary of the Findings

Based on the investigation about the development of culturally competent curriculum in the sample of this study, the results from the responses of the participants suggest a lack of culturally competent curricula. The students who participated in the study indicated that the curriculum being used in the two schools does not meet their diverse needs. The teachers who participated in the study also argued that there is a need for changes in the curriculum to cater for the specific needs of all the students.

Discussion

The essence of the study was to identify the barriers to culturally competent curriculum and develop appropriate strategies that can help break these barriers in schools so as to improve the performance of students as well as help the teachers to better understand their students. The two main research questions that were developed for the study included the following:

1. How can we break the barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance to implement a culturally relevant curriculum?

2. How can we increase cultural sensitivity in the schools?

The questions of the study was to determine how to break the cultural barriers of cognitive and cultural dissonance to implement a culturally relevant curriculum. The finding from the 8 students and 2 teachers selected from the two study schools indicates that there a need for the implementation of the teaching strategies that can benefit the students from different cultural groups. With regards to the research questions, six main categories of themes emerged:

- curriculum and instructional design,
- classroom climate,
- culturally relevant curriculum and materials,
- multicultural approaches to instruction,
- Cultural competency.

The curriculum and instructional design of the majority of the schools were found to be culturally incompetent. In essence, the schools did not make an appropriate design of instructional and curriculum design that caters for the need of all the students from diverse backgrounds. In order to break the cultural barriers in the schools, it is necessary that current curriculum and instructional design change. It is important to note that the instructional design and curriculum given by the relevant education authorities makes it difficult for the teachers and students to enjoy the benefits of an education that is tailored to suit the needs of each student. With the development of the new curriculum and instructional design, the teachers will be able to effectively develop the teaching practices that suit the diverse needs of the students.

The design of the classroom was another important theme that emerged from the study. The classroom environment can play a pivotal role in promoting learning among the students. The current situation in a majority of the schools shows that the classroom climate was unfavorable for some students while it favors other students. Some of the classroom settings were

in favor of the majority groups as opposed to the minority groups. This was evident with the types of pictures of the wall, the color scheme used and learning materials. Improving the classroom climate is a major requirement for many of the education stakeholders. The classroom climate should be decorated with colors, pictures, and writings that demonstrate cultural diversity. This can ensure that all the students become engaged and thus promote an equal learning environment for all the students.

Culturally relevant curriculum and materials was another major theme that was established during the study. Having students from diverse backgrounds requires developing familiarity with materials and curriculum that can meet the differences in the students' cultural backgrounds. Clearly, many schools in the United States have students that come from different cultures. If the results observed in this study are widespread, there is a need to design a syllabus that can meet all the unique requirements. For example, many teachers were using the culturally vocabulary when instructing mainly Black students. Moreover, the materials of learning, including books, charts, tables, drawings and other publications used by teachers and students, should be designed to address the needs of a culturally diverse student body in schools.

The multicultural approaches to instruction are another major requirement for the teachers in order to ensure cultural competency in the schools. The multicultural approaches imply that teachers should engage in teaching strategies that serve all the students from different cultural groups. It means that the teachers should understand the need of each student and whenever necessary provide the education system that can meet the expectation of all the students. It can also include combining students from different cultural groups together and allowing them share their ideas. This can foster an understanding and acceptance of each other's culture.

The other important theme that emerged was the cultural competencies. The cultural competency of the education curriculum refers to the one designed to meet the student's expectations. It is necessary to the schools to have an environment, teaching strategies and lessons that are culturally competent. Ideally, teachers in many of the schools lack adequate cultural competency and this hinders their efforts to teach in a manner that meets the expectation of each student in the schools. As the cultural competency is lacking among many teachers and students, it proves vital to come up with strategies that can help promote cultural competency. The teachers and students should accept the diversity of each other.

Increasing the Cultural Sensitivity in the Schools

The curriculum and the design of instruction were evaluated to determine whether they address the needs of the Black students. The researcher was interested in establishing what things might hinder the effective implementation of culturally competent teaching strategies (Gruenewald, 2014). In essence, the study assessed the ability of the teachers to develop clear standards and goals to be achieved during a specified period (Loue et al., 2015). The design of the instruction was also assessed to determine if it aligns with the content of the curriculum The responses from teachers and students clearly confirms that the curriculum and instructional materials used in the schools studied are not culturally competent and a source of cultural dissonance. However, it is also clear that teachers in this study are attempting to create a friendly teaching environment that can make the students feel accommodated regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. In some cases, it seems not to work well with many students, especially those from the minority groups, since they are unable to cope with some of the majority students due to a biased curriculum.

Although the curriculum has no specific guidelines on how to develop teaching strategies that benefit students from the Black community, teachers can make their own efforts to ensure that the minority groups understand the lessons being taught. However, although the study found teachers who will make such an effort, it is not well known whether other teachers also make such efforts to help the students understand the material being taught.

The results of interviews with the participants suggest a lack of cultural competence in curriculum development. Moreover, classroom observations did not reveal evidence of culturally responsive teaching strategies. While some teachers apparently are attempting to create a friendly teaching environment which can make students feel accommodated regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, it is not clear what proportion of them do.

The Implications of the Findings of the Study

The findings of the research study have various implications regarding students, teachers and learning institutions. Although the study involved two main schools, the results might apply to other schools within the county and possibly other schools in the United States. The main finding from the study indicated that the curriculum used in the schools did not meet the expectation of the diverse population of the students. The majority of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum that was being used in the schools. During the interviews with the teachers and students, it was apparent that there was a need to develop a more competent curriculum to ensure that the needs of the diverse students are meet. Specifically, the study identified several gaps in the curriculum used in both of these schools. The major issue that emerged from the study was the need for changes in curriculum in areas that include the curriculum and instructional design, classroom climate, culturally relevant curriculum and materials, multicultural approaches to instruction, cultural congruence, and cultural competency.

In an attempt to accomplish the aims and objectives of the study, the researcher assessed whether the present curriculum was able to meet the needs of the diverse students in the schools. The interest of the researcher was to establish several elements that can hinder the implementation of the teaching strategies that are culturally competent. In order to achieve this, the researcher assessed the ability of teachers to develop educational standards and goals to ensure that the needs of every student are met.

The results of the study indicated that the curriculum design failed to be responsive and thus did not meet the needs of the students. The response of the teachers gave a suggestion that a majority of the students become bored with the lessons and in some cases were sleeping in class during the teaching sessions. A teacher from one of the schools said that the school was not equitable since the curriculum they were using failed to meet and address the diverse needs of the students. Interestingly, the same teacher indicated that they were making attempts to ensure that the students were engaged throughout the learning sessions using strategies such as innovative lessons which include student-centered vocabulary and interesting contexts to increase student engagement.

The response from the students was a clear indication that the instructional methods and curriculum used in the schools lacks cultural competence and is thus a source of cultural dissonance. Although there was evidence that some teachers are making efforts to create an approachable and accommodating learning environment for all the students, it is important to modify the curriculum to ensure that it promotes cultural competency in the schools and thus reduce the cultural dissonance (Santoro, 2009). It was evident that all the students were interested in the design of a curriculum that can service their diverse cultural needs. This suggests that the majority of the students were missing the culturally competent teaching methods in the schools

(Betancourt et al., 2016). As a result, the minority students were not enjoying the same learning privileges as the majority students given the one-sidedness of the curriculum towards meeting their diverse needs.

Improving the classroom climate was another important theme that emerged from the study. The classroom climate was used to describe the learning environment of the schools with regards to the setting. It includes various elements that include the learning approaches that the teachers used in the schools. The learning strategies applied by the teachers in the schools can determine the academic performance of students (Tamim et al., 2011). Teachers are required to use learning approaches that are able to meet the needs of the students. The main issue was to develop a single learning approach that can aid in the ability to satisfy the needs of all the students in the schools. Given that many schools have students from diverse cultural backgrounds, it proves necessary to come up with a relevant curriculum that can satisfy the needs of all students. However, there exist other strategies that can improve student learning to ensure that it enhances the performance of the students and teachers.

Learning approaches can support, and classroom settings have the potential to promote, cultural competency in schools (Thomas, 2015). On approach was to implement group-centered learning strategies, as doing so enables the students to work together and learn from one another. This can help promote sharing of cultural knowledge, thus promoting cultural competence.

The other implication of the study was the need to come up with the culturally relevant learning materials and curriculum. The materials that teachers use when giving educational instructions to the students have a significant impact on academic performance. The learning materials can vary based on the needs of the students and the subject that is being taught. Teachers

should identify the needs of the students and put in place appropriate learning materials to meet those needs.

From the comments of the interviews with the students and teachers, it seems that the participants felt that the books used for instruction did not meet the needs of students from various ethnic groups such as Black Americans and Latinos. This indicates a need for the government and other educational institutions to develop curriculum and teaching strategies that incorporate culturally responsive teaching to not only meet the needs of students, but to provide teaching approaches that break teacher-student cultural barriers that impede teachers' ability to teach effectively with all of the children in mind. This implies that there is a need to align how teachers teach to with the ways their students learn. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure classroom learning materials are presented in a manner that makes information for all students at various levels of education easy to read and understand (Gurung & Prieto, 2009). Moreover, the learning materials should be enjoyable to all students to ensure that they are active throughout the class lessons and thus reduce cases of inattention.

The need for the multi-cultural approaches to instruction was also another important theme that emerged from the study. This implies that teachers should use diversified teaching strategies to ensure that all the students are engaged and enjoy the lessons. In essence, it is necessary for teachers to provide instruction that is considered appropriate to all students from diverse cultural groups. The teachers should be encouraged to use different dialects, styles and languages to promote cultural competency in schools. The findings of the study clearly show that a majority of the teachers studied failed to use multi-cultural approaches to instruction.

Strengths and Limitation of the Study

The research study was instrumental in divulging appropriate information that can promote good learning environment to the teachers and students in the United States. The success of the study can be attributed to major factors that improved its reliability and accuracy. Basically, there were three main strengths that help improve its reliability and accuracy in meeting the established aims and objectives.

One of the major strengths of the study was the use of primary sources of data to collect the information from the participants. In a research study, primary sources of data are considered as appropriate since they provide the first hand information of a given study. The researcher did not solely rely on the secondary information, and this ensured that the researcher was able to determine the current state of learning in both schools located in suburban districts in the Midwest region.

Strength of the study was associated with the ability to engage students and teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds. The researcher ensured that students from Black American groups participated. As a result, it helped to reduce the chances of bias, and thus improved its accuracy in meeting its major aims and objectives (Tamim, 2011)).

Lastly, the study used qualitative techniques to examine and interpret the findings. The use of qualitative research techniques is important as it helps improve the reliability, or trustworthiness of the research study (Gruenewald, 2014). In essence, the researcher was able to confirm the accuracy of the findings by triangulating sources of data.

Although the study was associated with various strengths, there were certain limitations. One of them was associated with selection of the participants from only two middle schools in the U.S. Midwestern state to meet certain criteria. The researcher used only these two schools as

representative of all the suburban middle schools in the Midwestern County of the U.S. The researcher only selected students from the two middle schools as a sample of convenience (Spronken‑Smith & Walker 2010).

The other limitation of the study was the limited time and resources available for the study. It was important to allocate adequate time for the study. However, the researcher was constrained by the time allocated for the study, and this made it difficult to gather all the information and data that are required to come up with the reliable results. The resources allocated for the study such as funds, assets and other facilities were also inadequate, and thus some of the important processes and procedure of the study were not accomplished. Furthermore, there were inadequate personnel such as research assistants that could help accomplish the mission of the study.

Time was another drawback. With ethnographic study, a massive investment in the researcher's time was a factor. Some ethnographic studies can proceed for many years as the researcher needs to be part of the culture during the time of study. As an ethnographic methodological approach, the researcher in this study reviewed previous professional developments data, school culture and climate data, and school improvement plan data for the past five years. The researcher interviewed parents, teachers, and students strategically as well as engaged with the schools, teachers, and students over an extended period of time to develop data which will determine student engagement relating to culturally relevant curriculum. Additionally, being part of the culture in education may cause a limitation known as the "interviewer effect." The researcher may affect the findings, as members of the group may have changed their behaviors and obfuscating the effect of the variable of interest to the researcher.

Recommendations

One recommendation of the study is to increase the sample size. This study focused primarily on Black Americana and Whites. However, the United States is composed of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This implies that the study was not a representative of the entire population in the United States. In addition, the selection of only two schools was not as fitting since there are 28 schools in the county. Future research studies should focus on more schools in the Unites States to reduce the possibility of bias in the findings.

The second recommendation is to allocate more resources and time for the study. The time allocated for the study was inadequate since it did not allow the researchers to collect all the necessary information and data required to ensure that that the result or outcome is valid. The funding for the study was not also inadequate and this implies that some processes and procedure for the study were not completed. Therefore, the future research study should allot acceptable time to ensure that the appropriate procedure and process is followed.

A third recommendation is to change the curriculum in the United States. Manifestly, the curriculum failed to meet the expectation of the students and teachers. There is a need to implement new curricula to meet the expectation of the teachers and students. These can be designed by introducing new teacher approaches for the teachers to educate students without bias in all of the schools in the United States, specifically targeting teachers who teach students that are from different ethnic backgrounds.

Although the research study came up with appropriate findings that can be used to develop an effective curriculum that can help increase cultural competencies, there is a need to come up with further studies to determine how teachers have embraced the principle of cultural competency. The future studies should focus on the effort of teachers towards developing

strategies to help improve the learning environment and ensure that the unique and varying needs of each student are met. The further studies should also consider several schools in the United States to ensure that it captures many regions and thus becomes a true representative of the whole population. Currently, the study focuses on a few schools and this makes it difficult to generalize the results for many countries in the United States.

The future studies should focus on whether the teachers make significant efforts to help the students from diverse backgrounds understand what they are teaching. This is important since this study only involved few teachers and established that the current curriculum has no specific guidelines that can be used to develop teaching strategies that can benefit the students from Black community. As a result, it is important to identify if the teachers are making any attempt to help such students understand what they are teaching.

It is recommended that cultural competence become a vital component of teacher recruitment to increase the diversity of staff. This is also one of the themes which emerged in the study. The recruitment process of teachers may not have been done in a manner which produced a culturally competent faculty. It is my recommendation that changes in the recruitment and selection processes should be carried out to ensure a more culturally sensitive faculty that might better meet the needs of all students in their respective schools.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM AND BREAKING THE BARRIERS OF COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL DISSONANCE

by

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The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore how teachers can develop a culturally relevant curriculum to break the barriers of cultural and cognitive dissonance to improve student learning experiences. Two state certified Caucasian teachers and eight middle school aged African American students took part in this qualitative study in face-to-face interviews with 20 interview questions to explore the lives, culture, and situations of their students and communities. Educational institutions have their own world views or ideologies perpetuated through the students and their teachers. Exploring and analyzing various education systems will also help to understand cultural differences and identify their connection to education. Culturally responsive teaching and learning are important because they empower students socially, emotionally, and intellectually by using cultural references to convey information, attitudes, and skills (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This qualitative research study will use classroom ethnography to discuss cultural and cognitive dissonance and how to cultivate a cultural sensitivity classroom setting. Classroom ethnography discusses everything happening to students, teachers, and the administration of the school (Gardner & Martin-Jones, 2012). Results of this study will indicate the students' abilities to understand cultural differences and identify the connection to learning.

This study will attempt to identify a correlation between developing and implementing a culturally relevant curriculum and the impact on breaking barriers of cultural and cognitive dissonance to improve student performance. This research study recommends that breaking such barriers will help develop students using cultural references to convey information, attitudes, and skills.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

My interest in this study was triggered by a stressful journey that my son and I had to encounter to ensure he received the preeminent educational experience during his fundamental years. Research has proven that education during elementary years sets the foundation for higher achievement. Unfortunately, schools that are located in poverty areas do not have the same resources as other schools and subsequently perform low on tests. I made a choice to move into a suburban area so that my son could attend a suburban school within the district to maximize his learning and provide him with the skills needed to prepare him for life after secondary education.

I have had several conversations with African American parents that have moved into White American school districts because the urban schools within my state have failed to produce high academic achievement and are considered low performing schools. We have all shared common concerns such as, "Why isn't there a higher presence, if any, of African American staff within the schools?" "Do you as a White American teacher understand my child?"

Although my son's situation ended successfully within the same school district, the path was distressing. As a parent and African American educator for over seventeen years, it is my desire to search for the solution. I want to begin the bold conversations necessary for educators around the world to effectively meet the criteria needed to develop/increase students' learning experiences without discounting their culture, race, or ethnicity.