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Parents' Perspectives Of Cultural Competence In Schools: The Initial Development Of The Culturally Competent School Community Scale

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PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SCHOOLS: THE INITIAL
DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SCHOOL COMMUNITY SCALE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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by
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Abstract

Diversity in school settings is continuously changing with an increase of minority students in the United States school systems. The present study uses a phenomenological approach to gain parents' experiences related to culturally responsive and competent practices in their child(ren)'s schools. Interviews were conducted with 10 culturally diverse parents with children in preschool and/or elementary school. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded for common themes and analyzed for the frequency and prevalence of the themes in preschool vs. elementary school settings. An analysis of the interviews revealed 6 themes related to culturally competent and responsive practices in school settings. The prevalence of the themes varied between parents with children in preschool settings and elementary school settings. Schools and parents should use the information from this study as a foundation for improving culturally competent and responsive practices in schools. Future research will continue the development of the Culturally Competent School Community Scale to further assess parents' perspectives on a larger scale in schools and address gaps in the cultural competence literature. Additional implications for the findings in school settings include the improvement of diversity training and professional development for school staff.

Introduction

In recent years, national media attention has been brought to the increasing racial/ethnic diversity in the United States; similarly, there is increasing attention being given to issues of diversity in education. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2016), the percentage of White non-Hispanic students in schools is steadily decreasing. For example, White students went from representing 62 percent of the U.S. public school population in 2000 to 51 percent in 2013. At the same time, racial/ethnic minority student enrollment is increasing with the highest influx among non-White Hispanic students. These data relate to the 4.6 million students estimated to be enrolled in English language learner (ELL) programs in public schools. The NCES (2016) states that impoverished students in school are more likely to come from a minority group status. Specifically, 28% of African-American children, 27% of Hispanic children and 14% of Asian-American children are living in impoverished conditions compared to 9% of White children.

Diversity in the schools continues to grow yet educational attainment and behavioral outcomes continue to lag when comparing racial/ethnic minority students with White students (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). This may be attributed in part to the largely unchanging demographics of the U.S. teaching force which remains predominately White, female, middle-class and English monolingual (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Gay (2002) also stated that educators may have a lack of cultural knowledge or erroneous cultural knowledge due to insufficient multicultural education in academia and/or misinformation propagated in mainstream popular culture and mass media. Therefore, educators may develop gaps in cultural understanding that hinder their ability to work most effectively with students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. To address these potential gaps, researchers

have called for increased training and coursework on the topics of diversity, social justice, and most notably cultural competence in education (Gay, 2002).

Defining Cultural Competence in Education

Several different terms are used interchangeably in reference to the construct of cultural competence. As some examples, cultural competence in education is commonly referred to as multicultural education, multicultural competence, culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (Dickson, Chun & Fernandez, 2016; Rogers & Ponterotto, 1997; Spanierman et al., 2011; Siwatu, 2007; Stanley, 1996; Ponterotto, Baluch, Grieg & Rivera, 1998). Broadly, cultural competence in education entails that all students are equally respected and are afforded equal opportunities to academic achievement, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender (Ponterotto, Lewis & Bullington, 1990). Ponterotto et. al. (1998) also refer to cultural competence in education as a willingness to meet the needs of diversity within schools. Nieto (1992) specifically discussed cultural competence in the following manner:

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeated the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, the interaction among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. It furthers the democratic principles of social justice because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change. (p. 208)

In the counseling psychology literature, Sue et al. (1982) conceptualizes cultural competence as a multidimensional construct and defines it with application of a tripartite model comprised of beliefs/attitudes, knowledge and skills. Components of the beliefs and attitudes subconstruct includes one's ability to become culturally aware, responsive and understanding of all cultures and backgrounds despite possible biases and differences in cultures. The knowledge

subconstruct requires the inquiry of specialized knowledge for each group that one is working with including their history, interactions with institutions, values and barriers of seeking mental health services. Lastly, to possess the skills needed to become culturally competent, one must understand the verbal and nonverbal responses, language and cues needed to effectively communicate with and serve people from varying backgrounds.

Although the tripartite model of cultural competence is likely the most widely recognized and used, it was not specifically developed for the school context. Most recently, cultural competence within schools has been defined based on a theory provided by Gay (2000) which focuses on the cultural competence of teachers. Specifically, this theory includes teaching that incorporates the experiences, perspectives and histories of students from diverse backgrounds. The indicators of a culturally competent teacher according to Gay (2002) broadly include the following: “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106). Gay (2000) calls for school personnel, specifically teachers, to rise above their personal biases in order to foster a connection with culturally diverse students by developing patterns of communication and learning that are culturally conscious of the student body. Taken together, cultural competence in schools can be summarized as educators’ ability to integrate their awareness and knowledge of themselves, students’ cultures, and structural inequities towards applying educational practices that effectively meet the needs of all students, regardless of background or minority status.

To date, much of the literature on the construct of cultural competence in education stems from the perspective of educators or cultural experts (e.g., research scientists). Yet, cultural

competence is comparable to social competence in that it may be best assessed by the social judgments of the targets (cf., Frisby, 2009; Gresham, 1997). Therefore, the opinions of the primary consumers of education, students and their caregivers/parents, are paramount to our understanding of the construct. It is the consumers' perspectives of cultural competence that matters most, as it is their experiences (positive or negative) that should inform what the field deems to be culturally competent school practice. Unfortunately, as outlined below, there is a lack of attention given to the perspectives of these key stakeholders.

Significance of Cultural Competence in Education

Across the past two decades, the demand for addressing issues related to cultural diversity in education training, practice, and research has steadily grown. It is now widely accepted that to be an effective school professional one must be culturally competent. Thus, governing bodies in education have made addressing issues of equity and diversity a core feature of training, as well as professional and ethical standards (cf., Frisby, 2009; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008). As the emphasis placed on cultural competence in schools has grown so has the research literature supporting its value (e.g., Gracia & Chun, 2016; Kelley, Siwatu, Tost, & Martinez, 2015; López, 2016).

Accreditation requirements. As school-based accrediting agencies continue to push for cultural competence in the field of education, there is an increased need for continued focus on the construct in research and practice. Presently, accrediting bodies require professional school staff to be well versed in the needs of a diverse student population. For instance, the National Policy Board for Education Administration: Standard 3 (2015) requires that principals and education administrators strive for equity and cultural responsiveness to promote positive outcomes and well-being for all students. Similarly, the diversity and equity standard of the

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) requires creating and implementing a curriculum that is related to cultural competence and is conducive to the diverse populations in educational settings. In the Professional Standards set by NCATE (2008), a call to action for social justice is also expressed such that teacher education programs need to ensure teachers:

(a) have the content knowledge needed to teach students, (b) have the pedagogical and professional knowledge needed to teach effectively, (c) operationalize the belief that all students can learn, (d) demonstrate fairness in educational settings by meeting the educational needs of all students in a caring, non-discriminatory, and equitable manner, (e) understand the impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability/exceptionality, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning; and (f) can apply their knowledge, skills and professional dispositions in a manner that facilitates student learning. (p. 7)

Mental health and other support specialists in schools are also held to specialized standards for culturally competent practice. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) calls for fairness and social justice in schools for all people from various backgrounds including but not limited to ethnicity, religion, immigration status, socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation. NASP standards discourage policies or practices that discriminate, encourage awareness of diverse populations, and promote safe school climates and equal opportunity for all students and families (NASP, 2010). The American School Counselor Association (2016) calls for equal treatment and nondiscriminatory practices for all students including underserved and at-risk populations. Speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, school nurses and behavioral therapists also are obligated to abide by ethical standards that include a diversity component in their core values (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2016; American Occupational Therapy Association, 2015; National Association of School Nurses, 2016; Behavior Analyst Certification Board, 2014).

Despite the requirements of school professional accrediting bodies, clear guidance on how to accurately assess cultural competence in education, towards ensuring culturally competent practice, is lacking. This may be why some experts have found insufficient teacher preparedness for working in diverse classrooms. As an example, White teachers have been found to be less prepared to work with students from racial, ethnic or linguistic minority backgrounds, while teachers from some racial/ethnic minority groups have lacked competency to work with students who have English as a second language (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). In fact, one third of Black teachers in Frankenberg and Siegel-Hawley's study reported having little or no training on effective strategies for working with students who are English language learners. The previous study reveals a lack of preparation for the growing diversity of the student population despite the efforts of school professional accrediting bodies to place a heavy emphasis on cultural competency.

Cultural competence and student outcomes. To date, empirical investigations of the relationship between culturally competent educational practice and student outcomes has been lacking. Therefore, much of what is understood about the influence of school cultural competence on student variables stems from qualitative research and theory. Central hypotheses from this literature suggest that schools that fluently implement culturally responsive practices may enhance the educational environment through improved racial attitudes, more congruent and effective instructional practices, higher quality relationships, and decreases in the disproportional use of punitive discipline with minority students (Gay, 2010; Klump & McNeir, 2005; Oakland, 2005). A few recent studies in education have provided empirical support for some of these hypothesized relationships. For example, teacher cultural competence has been shown to account

for a small to medium degree of variance in teacher's self-efficacy (Callaway, 2017; Chu & Garcia, 2014; Hamilton, 2017; JohnBull, 2012) and there is a significant body of research demonstrating the link between teacher self-efficacy and positive teaching behaviors and student outcomes (cf. Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Haase, 2001). In addition, emerging research has revealed a significant positive direct and indirect effect of culturally competent teaching on Latinx students' academic performance (Gracia & Chun, 2016; Kelley et al., 2015; López, 2016).

Beyond teacher instructional effectiveness, Hamilton (2017) found teachers' cultural competency was an important predictor of the quality of the relationships teachers had with their students. This finding is consistent with more expansive research evidence in the psychotherapy and counseling literature that has shown that higher levels of therapist cultural competency are associated with a stronger therapeutic alliance and better treatment outcomes (Orlinsky, Ronnestad, & Willutzki, 2004; Sue & Torino, 2005; Vasquez, 2007; Wampold, 2000). Taken together, this research suggests that greater teacher cultural competence will result in increased teacher effectiveness and enhanced teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

In contrast, schools that operate in culturally incompatible or bias ways undermine the quality of relationships with students, contribute to diverse students' experiences of discrimination, and further perpetuate well-documented gaps in academic achievement and discipline. For instance, diverse students, who have been found to be chronically disengaged from school, report a lack of relationships with their teachers and a perception of disrespect towards their cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). According to a study conducted by Seaton and Douglass (2014), 97% of African American, 12% of Latinx and 11% of Asian American youth reported at least one event of racial discrimination in their school settings. The perceived racial discrimination of African American

youth was linked to an increase in depressive symptoms. Racial bias by teachers is also linked to negative student outcomes with research indicating a perception of less support, fewer positive interactions and fewer instances of praise provided for African-American students in comparison to their White counterparts (Guerra, Attar & Weissberg, 1997; Tucker et al., 2002).

Although there is no single cause for the academic achievement and discipline gaps consistently found in education, students of color may underperform due to the lack of cultural competence of their teachers and discrimination experienced in schools. As one example, African-American students express concern that their teachers have lower expectations of their academic aptitude and report higher rates of scrutiny of their behavior, often resulting in a greater likelihood for being disciplined (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). These inferior expectations can contribute directly to the observed disparities in academic outcomes (Ferguson, 2003; Irizarry, 2015).

In relation, disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices is a continuous concern in the multicultural education literature. African-American students are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled compared to their White peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Minority students, specifically those who identified as Black, Latinx or multiracial, were revealed to be punished at a greater intensity compared to White students, despite the lack of evidence that minority populations commit higher rates of misbehavior (Anyon et al., 2014). In fact, African-American students are more likely to be disciplined for minor and subjective offenses and are susceptible to greater levels of punishment when committing the same offense as White students (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). This disproportional application of punitive or exclusionary discipline practices is troubling due to the negative outcomes related to these

practices, including increased susceptibility to future suspensions and expulsions, academic failure, school dropout and incarceration.

The differential treatment of minority students is often theorized to be attributed to a cultural mismatch between students, teachers, administrators and/or the school environment. Factors that may contribute to the cultural mismatch include lack of culturally responsive instructional knowledge and skills and disagreements about what constitutes appropriate child behavioral norms (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, Bridgest, 2003). An increase in school cultural competency could lead to positive changes in the awareness, attitudes and skills of school personnel, thus reducing the achievement gap and disproportional application of exclusionary discipline practices.

Current Measures of Cultural Competence and their Limitations

The field of education has drawn heavily from counseling psychology in efforts to measure the construct of cultural competence. Unfortunately, the measures presently available from the counseling psychology literature have been scrutinized for the following reasons: (a) a focus on measuring perceived behaviors instead of actual observable ones, (b) a lack of content validity, and (c) a lack of consistency in conceptualizing underlying measures of the same construct (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995; Sue, 1996). In addition to these concerns, available measures adapted for use in education have frequently lacked an appropriate scale development and validation process, resulting in the use of measures with little or no evidence of technical adequacy. Furthermore, to a large extent, existing cultural competence measures in education assess the construct through self-assessment (Dickson et. al., 2016; Rogers & Ponterotto, 1997; Spanierman et. al., 2011; Siwatu, 2007; Stanley, 1996; Ponterotto et. al., 1998). Although teacher self-report may be the most efficient or accessible way to measure the construct of cultural

competency in schools, limitations exist in the use of self-report measures. Namely, self-report measures increase the possibility for inaccurate or biased reporting due to gaps in self-awareness or a propensity to answer in a socially desirable manner.

To date, preliminary research investigating some limitations of self-report, cultural competency measures used in education has revealed problematic results. For instance, Debnam, Pas, Bottiani, Cash and Bradshaw (2015) conducted research examining the association between teachers' self-report of their culturally competent teaching practices and assessments of their actual (or observed) practices. Researchers discovered discrepancies between self-reports and observed practices, with teachers reporting higher levels of cultural competency than those observed by a third party during their teaching. As another example, social desirability has only been assessed in the initial development of a few measures, including the Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS: Ponterotto et. al., 1998) and the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS: Spanierman et. al., 2011), due to the limited technical adequacy and validation for many measures of cultural competence in education. Assessment of social desirability for the TMAS and MTCS was deemed insignificant and uncorrelated with teachers' self-reported cultural competency during the initial development and validation studies on these measures. However, it is notable that these findings occurred in research contexts in which teacher participants knew their identifying information would not be linked to their responses. Additional measures of multicultural education and counseling competence have yet to measure the possible effects of social desirability. Obviously, the measurement of social desirability is paramount for self-report measures due to the possibility of overestimating scores on desirable items and underestimating scores on undesirable items, which leads to deceptive conclusions of the construct under investigation (Constantine, 2000).

Despite the aforementioned concerns with self-report measures of cultural competency, there is only one measure of cultural competency in education that is completed by a primary stakeholder (or consumer), students. The Student Measure of Culturally Responsive Teaching (SMCRT, Dickson, Chun & Fernandez, 2016) is a student report measure of teachers' cultural competence in schools. This student measure is important for the field because it provides input from those most directly affected by teacher practices. A benefit of this measure is the ability to directly assess the experiences of students towards intervening with their teachers to improve these experiences (Dickson, Chun & Fernandez, 2016). Although a student measure is useful for assessing a unique and important perspective of the cultural competency demonstrated by teachers, assessments completed by children yield an additional limitation. Children's ability to accurately complete assessments is restricted by developmental age, especially for more abstract constructs of interest. Dickson et. al. (2016) validated the SMCRT on a middle school sample ranging from ages 11-14; therefore, limiting students' as a source of information to this age range. Thus, there currently are no options for children below this validation age range to supply information about the cultural competency of their teachers. Clearly, the numerous limitations of present measures of cultural competence in education necessitate further research and scale development.

The Current Study

Despite the push for cultural competence in education, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the conception of the construct and how to effectively evaluate its presence and promote it in schools. Thus far, research in the areas of cultural integration (i.e. cultural competence, culturally responsive practices, culturally relevant pedagogy) in the schools has largely been conceptualized based on the perspective of researchers or school personnel.

Therefore, there appears to be a lack of representation of the perspectives of students and their caregivers/parents, the primary consumers of education and key stakeholders. Given that cultural competence can be conceptualized as a social competence best judged by the target audience, it is critical to gain parents' firsthand experiences and perspectives. Parents' perspectives can provide useful information for improving culturally competent practice in schools, especially in the lower grade levels where gaining the students' perceptions directly is a challenge.

The present study provides a qualitative examination of parents' lived experiences to enhance the understanding of school-based interactions and events deemed by parents as culturally responsive or unresponsive in preschool and elementary school settings. A phenomenological research approach was deemed most appropriate for this investigation as the procedures and underlying assumptions associated with this approach fit the broad aim of the study to explore and reveal the meaning of culturally competent school practice for parents (Creswell, 1998). This research represents an initial stage in the development of a parent report measure of school cultural competence. To this end, the study examines the themes (or central experiences) of culturally competent school practice from the perspective of parents, and then compares them to the existing literature to help fine tune our conception of the construct and its empirical indicators.

This research study addressed the following broad research questions:

1. What are the essential themes or experiences of culturally competent school practice from the perspective of parents?
2. How do these themes and experiences parallel or differ from those already identified in existing conceptions, frameworks, and theoretical models of cultural competence and responsiveness in the education literature?

Method

Participants

Study sampling procedures were dictated by the qualitative research method selected, phenomenological inquiry. Consistent with previous research using this qualitative method, a total of ten participants comprised the study sample (Creswell, 1998). It is essential in phenomenological studies that all participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied; thus, included participants were parents/legal guardians of children in preschools and/or elementary schools. Parents were recruited through emails from school administrations and social media posts, including information about the study, along with referrals (i.e., snowball sampling). Parents were purposefully selected to represent a diverse sample across race/ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, highest level of education, linguistic background, marital status and current grade level of target children to ensure that the shared experiences extracted from the data captured the essence of parents' perspectives of cultural competence in the most generalizable way. Parent recruitment was complete once there was sufficient redundancy of shared themes across parents.

All of the participants identified as female ranging in age from 26 to 44 ($M = 37.2$, $SD = 5.3$) and all were the biological mothers to their children. One parent in the study identified as a foster parent and a biological parent. Many of the parents had children in various grade levels, including middle school, high school and college; however, the interview was tailored and guided based on their experiences with their children who were currently enrolled in preschool and elementary school. Table 1 presents an overview of parent demographic characteristics and grade levels of their children.

Procedures

Researchers complied with the descriptive psychological approach of the phenomenological research method (see Creswell et al., 2007; Giorgi, 2012 for details). Therefore, the phenomenological inquiry focused on the individual experience and included one-to-one interviews with the 10 parents outlined in Table 1. Prior to data collection, interviewers bracketed any knowledge or personal experience they had related to cultural competence (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003, p. 27). Bracketing is a well-established procedure used in qualitative research to bring forward ideas and judgements about a construct under study so that they can be deliberately set aside during the data collection process; thus, reducing the potential impact of researcher bias.

Individual interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, except for one interview that was conducted in Spanish by a fully bilingual graduate research assistant in school psychology. All interviews started with an informed consent process, a review of the limitations of confidentiality, and an overview of the focus and nature of the interview itself. Interviews lasted 13 to 45 minutes ($M = 23$, $SD = 11.2$) and were audio-recorded with permission from participants. Following the interviews, audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. As an incentive for participation in this study, parents received a \$10 gift card upon completion of the interview.

Interview Guide

The main purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to describe in-depth the common experiences participants have with the phenomenon of interest, in this case what parents most commonly perceive as culturally competent practice by schools. An interview guide was created to be used for each one-on-one interview conducted. The guide was comprised of two sections.

Table 1. Parent Demographics and Grade Level of Their Children

In-text Identifier	Language(s) spoken	Race/ Ethnicity	Religion	Marital Status	Level of Education	No. of Children	Grade Level of Children	Relationship to Children
M1	English*	Black, African-American	N/A	Single	High School	3	Infant, 1 st , 4 th	Biological Mother
M2	English*	Black, African-American	Christian	Married	Doctorate	3	Infant, K, 3 rd	Biological Mother
M3	English*	Black, African-American	Baptist	Married	Masters	4	K, 3 rd , 5 th , 7 th	Biological Mother
M4	English*	White	Catholic	Divorced	Bachelors	2	Preschool	Biological Mother
M5	English*, Spanish	American Indian, Nez Perce, Navajo	N/A	Married	Masters	2	Preschool	Biological Mother
M6	English*, Hebrew, Japanese	Asian, Japanese, Eastern European	Jewish	Married	Masters	1	Preschool	Biological Mother

Note. M = mother, * = primary language or language spoken most frequently.

(table cont'd.)

In-text Identifier	Language(s) spoken	Race/ Ethnicity	Religion	Marital Status	Level of Education	No. of Children	Grade Level of Children	Relationship to Children
M7	English*	Asian, Vietnamese	Catholic	Married	Bachelors	3	Preschool, 6 th , College	Biological Mother
M8	Vietnamese*, English	Asian, Vietnamese	Buddhist	Married	Masters	2	2 nd , 10 th	Biological Mother
M9	Urdu*, English*	Asian, Pakistani	Muslim	Married	Doctorate	2	5 th , College	Biological Mother
M10	English*, Spanish*	Ecuadorian	Catholic	Married	Some College	2	5 th , College	Biological/ Foster Mother

Note. M = mother, * = primary language or language spoken most frequently.

The first section of the interview focused on collecting participant background information and basic information about the children in the household, including the number of children in the household, relationship of parent/caregiver to the children, number of children currently enrolled in preschool or elementary school, current grade level of the children, and parent's age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest level of education, religious affiliation, linguistic background and marital status.

The second, and primary, section of the interview focused on determining parents' conceptions of cultural competence within the school context, including their experiences and the meaning they ascribe to them. This section included a select number of open-ended questions in an unstructured interview format and served the purpose of revealing possible new empirical indicators of the construct of cultural competence not currently reflected in the education literature. A descriptive phenomenological approach was applied such that the focus was on gathering information to describe the parents' perspectives, while remaining as unbiased as possible (Creswell et al., 2007; Giorgi, 2012). Interview questions and follow-up prompts were flexible and designed to elicit detailed information regarding parents' direct experiences and perspectives, including defining events and related cognitions and emotions (Clarke & Borders, 2014). Additionally, questions elicited cross-cultural successes or challenges experienced by parents and their recommendations on how schools can be culturally responsive in meaningful ways.

Ten sample questions and prompts were pilot tested with two parents of elementary-aged children prior to data collection for this study. As a result of this pilot testing, sample questions were then reduced, revised and refined and subsequently pilot tested with an additional parent of elementary-aged children. The finalized guide for the second section of the interview started by

prompting participants to define their personal definition of cultural competence. Then, parents were facilitated through an exploration of their lived experiences in schools; those they deemed as culturally competent and responsive and those they did not. The researcher communicated in ways that were congruent with the parents' discourses and regularly checked for understanding or asked for clarification or elaboration. The interview process was implemented similar to the format provided by Kincaid, Childs, Blasé & Wallace (2007).

1. Pose the question to parent/legal guardian.
2. Allow the parents time to formulate answers to questions.
3. The parent/legal guardian will share answers with the researcher.
4. The researcher will use active listening strategies to discuss the ideas/answers to ensure proper description/understanding.
5. To conclude the interview, a list of main topics/ideas will be provided back to the parent/legal guardian.

Specific topic domains covered during completion of the second section of the interview included (a) what constituted displays of culturally responsive and respectful school qualities, (b) the ways in which school personnel acquire information related to culture, (c) consideration/integration of culture within the school setting, (d) differences in cultural norms and values between the home and school, and (f) opinions on how to address school experiences related to culture that were experienced as negative or negligent.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis procedures outlined in Braun & Clarke (2006) were used to analyze interview data. Analysis involved the following steps: (a) review of the transcripts in their entirety, (b) highlighting of parent significant statements, (c) collapsing of parent statements into

meaningful units or themes, (d) review of transcripts to explore the identified themes more closely, and (e) a generation of detailed descriptions of the specific perspectives and experiences revealed within the shared (or common) themes. More specifically, the research team, which included the lead researcher and two graduate research assistants in school psychology, read the interview transcripts in their entirety to gain a sense of the overall information being communicated (i.e., the overall experience of the phenomenon, Creswell, 1998). This initial review was followed by an additional review which included making notes about the data and highlighting significant statements that revealed parents' perceptions and experiences of school cultural competence. To collapse statements into meaning units or themes, each interview was coded in a systematic way such that significant statements were grouped into potential themes using all the data that was relevant to each possible theme. As per standard practice (Creswell, 1998), the goal at this stage is to treat each significant statement of equal weight and work to develop a list of statements that is non-repetitive and non-overlapping. The researchers discussed the codes of significant statements and themes to determine similarities, differences and connections in each of their coding and themes. Following three consensus meetings, in which they reviewed and discussed the data, the researchers came to an agreement of the themes that portrayed the parents' descriptions of culturally competent and incompetent practices in their child/children's schools. The themes were given clear definitions, names and detailed descriptions that captured the essence of the expressed experiences. Finally, the researchers counted the frequency in which each theme was stated across all interviews (see Table 2). The accuracy of this frequency count was confirmed by full consensus.

Table 2. Frequency of Themes Mentions by Parents and Corresponding Percentages

Themes	Mentions	% Parents of Preschool Children	% Parents of Elementary Children	Total %
1. Creating an inclusive and safe educational space	63	75	100	90
2. Establishing a parent-school alliance	49	100	83	90
3. A need for cultural cognizance in the school community	41	75	83	80
4. Accommodation of religious and cultural holidays	38	75	66	70
5. Culture in the curriculum	31	75	66	70
6. Equitable access to educational opportunities	15	50	83	70

Results

Six themes emerged based on parents' perspectives of cultural competence in schools: (a) creating an inclusive and safe educational space, (b) establishing a parent-school alliance, (c) a need for cultural cognizance in the school community, (d) accommodation of religious and cultural holidays, (e) culture in the curriculum and (f) equitable access to educational opportunities.

Theme 1: Creating an Inclusive and Safe Educational Space

All but one parent expressed a desire for classrooms to create an inclusive space for their children. Overall, this was one of the most prominent themes reflected by parents. Mothers communicated the importance of (a) understanding the cultural norms and values of students, (b) displaying an appreciation and respect for students' cultures, (c) taking steps to reduce bullying on the basis of culture, and (d) building quality relationships with students regardless of background. Overwhelmingly, parents expressed that cultural competence was important as it enabled schools, including teachers and students alike, to be responsive and sensitive to students. M2 expressed it this way, "I define cultural competence as a willingness to explore and understand the different cultures within a given environment...before competence, they [school personnel] need to be understanding...They [students] come from a variety of backgrounds, so you have to be willing to reach them and teach them where they are, and honor what those experiences are, and one size doesn't fit all." Other examples of the importance of creating a welcoming and understanding environment are illustrated by the following commentaries.

Well I think that it is important for kids to know that there are other, you know, they are not the only race or religion or background...There is just a lot of differences in people and they need to be able to interact with all of them. (M4)

...teach the children to recognize each other's cultural and faith differences, understand the values behind every celebration that they choose instead of it being a, a sole point for any student...The child should not have to pick and choose between is it okay telling

everyone that I am having a lot of fun at home today and this is what is happening in my life...It's the sense of how the children take pride in their own culture and tradition and rejoice [with] each other and that's how lifelong friendships are built. When we take how, who, is different from us but we still, you know after we learn who they are, they are still our friends and that is an honest friendship and that's what I want for my children, is to have those friendships to last a lifetime, where they know who they are, they should be okay to ask a question and why is this happening? (M9)

Parents also displayed a heightened awareness for the increasing diversity in schools.

Therefore, parents recognized a need for teachers to be prepared for this increased diversity and have the capacity to create a safe learning environment for all. Several parents expressed an understanding of and respect for students' cultures may help prevent or reduce bullying among students.

My children have had a different upbringing as opposed to their student body. And of course, the students are going to realize this, but as the teacher – there wasn't as much attention drawn to that as far as there being an understanding of that. And when the kids were not understanding of that they began to bully and tease him, the teacher didn't do anything about it. And so, he would get write-ups because of his reaction from being mistreated, they wanted to put him on a disciplinary action plan and get him taken out of school, but I had to step in...Well, I think in the classrooms, there needs to be a setting where everyone may not get along—we're not trying to make everyone friends—but we need to know how to respect each other...especially in the way culture is moving now with gender identities and things of that nature. Whether we feel it's right or wrong, it's still a matter of, we need to at least be respectful. (M3)

Beyond a focus on the broader classroom climate, parents expressed the importance of a caring and responsive student-teacher relationship. Some parents relayed concerns about teachers' sensitivity in interactions with students who were culturally different from themselves.

She [referring to her daughter] will come home and she will say coach could never tell me and the other Asian girl apart. He always calls us the same name so you know, the fact that the coach has been working in the same school for over ten years, has not yet figured out that not all Asians look alike, you know and just take the time out to register the students and identify the student in your class and know them. (M9)

Other parents appreciated teachers taking the initiative to validate students' cultural differences.

As an example, "...so my son has long hair and they're [the teachers] really open to educating

other students about his long hair and there's one other student with a turban who has long hair underneath and so they are just really appreciative of having diverse kids in their school..." (M5).

Given the significance for parents of creating an inclusive and safe learning environment, several mothers articulated ways students' cultures and backgrounds could be shared and celebrated, including through show and tell activities, autobiographical or cultural stories, ice breaker games, and welcome or heritage events. As one example a Black mother (M3) stated, "...he got an opportunity to talk about his experiences...so people get to understand him more, understand him better, so people could understand where he comes from and why he doesn't act like everyone else that's there. And I think that helped a little." As another example a mother from Ecuador (M10) said, "I remember when I was in high school, here in the United States, we had a whole week where we learned about the heritage and culture of everyone, I would love to have those kinds of activities..."

Theme 2: Establishing a Parent-School Alliance

All but one parent talked about the importance of a strong parent-school alliance that included frequent communication and recognition of the family as a partner in the education process and source for relevant cultural information. As M4 put it, "I think it is very important for the teachers and parents to be on the same page, as far as discipline and how you get kids to do certain things and what works, and make sure the kid is getting a consistent...message." Parents often indicated that schools do not attempt to gather cultural or home-based information or when they do it is done in an insignificant way. Most commonly parents stated schools gather basic information, including categorical demographic information (e.g., race, ethnicity, SES), via a questionnaire at the beginning of the year. M3's statement summarizes this parent sentiment, "The only thing they get is what they need to register them. That's it, they don't take the

opportunity.” M7 said, “They haven’t really asked before.” Later in the interview M7 followed up by stating, “I mean, you can like state your ethnicity. In that questionnaire that we get every year, they ask, ‘Is there any concerns, anything we need to know about your child?’ Which, I usually don’t put anything about our race or ethnicity or culture, but I think that for some families, they feel that they need to bring that up, because of certain traditions or holidays or things that they do that the school needs to be aware of, then I think that’s where it needs to be addressed.” The problem with not gathering cultural information in a meaningful way is demonstrated by following statements by parents.

I feel like I’ve gone into this process knowing that we were going to have to do a lot of education at home. Because that’s where we are, so I’ve taken it as my responsibility rather than the institution’s responsibility. Because it wasn’t created for my child. (M2)

I think it [gathering cultural information from parents] would take into account like parents or guardians wishes or like their hopes for like what kind of educational process their child would be involved in...(M6)

When schools do not gather information from families it makes it difficult for them to learn and apply relevant cultural information in the classroom. Thus, several parents made recommendations for how schools might enhance the alliance with parents by improving upon the quality of methods used to gather this information. For instance, M9 indicated that regular open communication or dialogue was important.

If you have a good homeroom teacher, then you just discuss it with them...I had this experience with my older two, as well, and we were going to a school in Denver where my two were the only, at least that I knew of, the only Muslim kids, the only South Asian kids on campus...I could talk to the principals, I could talk to the teacher, and I could say, ‘Hey, the month of Ramadan is coming up. Do you mind if I just come in?...’ So they were very welcoming. I would be there any time something was happening...

Other recommendations from parents for gathering cultural information included use of focus groups, needs assessments, and affording parents’ the opportunity to share personal narratives. For example, M10 said, “I think it would be amazing to bring parents to school, have

parents talk about their culture, about their traditions.” She added, “I would like to have a questionnaire to ask the parents if we believe that there are any deficiencies and what they are—and how they [our children] are taught or what they are focusing on. It would be good then, if one as a parent can choose their options or, for example, what I think they should do.”

Theme 3: A Need for Cultural Cognizance in the School Community

Parents expressed feelings and experiences related to a lack of cultural cognizance in the school community. As an example, M2 stated, “Competence, to me, implies that you are knowledgeable about something and at least in my experience, that’s not always the case... I think that they try, I mean, as far as my culture, I think they try to think about what the Black experience might look like, but I don’t know who’s thinking about that and then coming up with things [laughing]”. Thoughts related to this theme were mentioned by 80% of parents and covered topics including the tendency of schools to ignore the existence of culture or attend to it in stereotypic ways, and the need for schools to be proactive about gaining cultural competence.

Ignoring culture. Parents expressed that elementary and preschool settings demonstrate a pattern of turning a blind eye to other cultures. M6 stated, “they don’t really acknowledge the fact that like lots of people for instance speak different languages at school and like most of the—I’d say like a good half of the kids are not White and like you know a lot of the families have mixed generations living together—they don’t really acknowledge much of that like ‘where do you come from?’ that question doesn’t really seem to be asked”. M10 stated that her overall school experience was positive but came to the realization that “there is no attempt to really try to learn more about the culture of the children in the school”. Another parent, who identified as White and Catholic (M4), mentioned that she does not expect culture to be addressed in the school community, especially if it was not reflective of the school’s normal practices. This

mother's uncertainty about how schools should acknowledge or attend to culture was shared by others. Overall, parents were in agreement that if they or their children were not assimilated or their primary cultural identities were in the minority, schools do not directly attend to or acknowledge their cultures. This point was summarized by M7.

...for other families in general I think it's just totally turned a blind eye to it. Which is kind of my general point -- is that they should be aware, but I don't, you know, for my family, I don't have any problems that they have to address, any of these customs or anything like that, because we're more Americanized than most, I guess, other traditional families.

Culture as a stereotype. When schools did attempt to attend to culture, often parents experienced the attempts as stereotypic. Specifically, several parents stated that schools made assumptions based on their students' race/ethnicity, which were not always accurate or complete. Two African American mothers stated that the school only acknowledged their racial background during specific holidays, including Black History Month and Kwanzaa. M2 articulated this point very clearly and succinctly in her interview, "I mean, I think there's—I don't mean it to sound negative, but—there are certain assumptions that folks check off the list. So, did we do something in February for Black History Month? Check. Did we ask students if they celebrate Kwanzaa? Check." Another mother (M6), who identifies as multiracial and Jewish, stated that her child's Jewish school failed to address the intersectionality of their family's race, ethnicity and religion. She expressed the stereotypic thinking about what it means to be Jewish in the following way.

I mean like I think first of all because there's a specific thing like Judaism that like Jewishness in the United States tends to assume that Jewish equals White and like my own experience obviously is like that's not true like objectively. There are lots of Jewish people who are not White and so like Jewish experience needs to incorporate in like an understanding that like Jewish representation in the United States is dominated by like Whiteness but that is not the only experience...

She continued on to state how her child's preschool could address this specific stereotype by having "pictures on the walls" of Jewish people with various racial and ethnic backgrounds and introducing children to diversity in the schools. Addressing biases and stereotypes in the school community would help ensure that children would have accurate information and may lead to positive cross-cultural interactions in the students' futures.

Need to be proactive. Parents expressed a tendency of schools to be reactive to cultural issues when they arise and indicated a proactive approach would be more beneficial. M10 summarized it this way:

I think most important of all is learning and educating themselves about my upbringing and the things I try to follow in my home because of my culture or way of being. Talking to parents, talking to children, being a lot more active to try to learn what our culture is because—for example, I have a very specific way of raising my son because of the way I was raised. I was raised in a way..in Ecuador we have to be very obedient, we have to respect our elders and our parents and I am raising my son the same. I would love them to understand and learn a little more...

M2 described what she believed proactivity would look like.

So, a sign of a school is the way in which they respond to the needs of the community. So, if something happens that shakes up the community, "how are we involved?" More than packing a backpack with food—you know, if a student has food insecurity. I think that's what competence looks like. It's going into the community and actually learning what is going on, so that you can have an understanding and finding a way to not be invasive, but to support.

This mother continued on to state that she felt like schools "are afraid they are going to offend someone, [so] they do absolutely nothing". Due to the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce, there is an increased need for training for preservice teachers to ensure direct exposure with diverse populations. A Black parent (M2) stated that "in our teacher prep programs, these students, they come from places that don't have high levels of diversity". She carried on the conversation by stating "we've all seen the movies, teacher comes and she turns all these rowdy kids around, and that's not how it works. So, some early exposure to that [during] preservice so

that we're dusting some off the preconceived notions". Schools should have staff professional development to increase the level of cultural responsiveness and competence after they have gathered adequate cultural information about their students. Doing so ensures that teachers are mindful of adjustments that need to be made to be responsive to students. As one example provided by M9, "That the teachers [are] already aware of what's happening in the calendar according to the lives of the demographic that she has in the class. Then, she can make lesson plans accordingly, so that there is not a test that they [students] are missing or assignment that they [students] are missing."

Being proactive about attending to cultures in the school community may reduce the burden placed on parents to supplement or address what goes on in the school related to culture. For instance, parents expressed concerns related to the lack of initiative and effort given to teaching cultural, racial and social issues in schools. Parents also indicated that they would like for their children to have a space within the school to learn information and address concerns related to their cultural backgrounds. Many parents indicated that they had to take on the responsibility of teaching their children culturally relevant school information at home. Parents mentioned actively seeking out books and literature; emphasizing or correcting historical information and discussing role models and positive racial influences like inventors. In addition, parents also took the initiative to teach about differences and racial issues that may be confronted in school settings and in the broader community.

Theme 4: Accommodation of Religious and Cultural Holidays

Religious and cultural holidays was a theme mentioned by over two-thirds of parents. Parents expressed both experiences and concerns related to the celebration of religious and cultural holidays at school. One parent who identifies as American Indian (M5) stated that she

prefers for her child to attend a preschool in which celebrations are removed. In fact, she expressed appreciation for this stating she was, “thankful that there’s no, like, Columbus or Thanksgiving praise happening” which is directly tied to historical trauma experiences of American Indians. M5 indicated she preferred for her child to celebrate their cultural and family holidays and practices at home or at a school on her reservation where the experiences would be positive or affirming and provide accurate information.

Other parents did not share the same sentiment and indicated that they would prefer for schools to undo the elimination of religious and cultural holidays from the classroom (e.g., Halloween, Christmas, birthday parties). As an example, M4 said, “Like they don’t let them have a Halloween parade because some people find it offensive. I think that’s ridiculous.” As another example, M2 stated, “And to me, that’s not competency, that’s, ‘Okay, we’re just gonna remove it’... We’re not gonna celebrate anybody.” In relation, M2 along with other parents expressed a desire for celebrations outside of their cultural background to be experienced by their children in the school. For instance, M2 said:

So, I would offer that we embrace their diversity a little bit more. I would like to see celebrations of different holidays. Things that I don’t celebrate. Just the fact—this [is] our community, you know? ... More and more, they’re actually taking away parties completely... they do the same religious-themed events. We don’t, we dilute Christian events and we don’t even speak of non-Christian events [laughs]... how do we make this so that we’re celebrating everyone?

M9 who is Muslim stated “we are not allowed to celebrate and at the same time, the Christian faith which is always been celebrating, now their parties are being called winter parties or spring party instead of an Easter party”. M9 continued her point by stating that she is accepting of the celebration of all holidays. She believes that doing so is beneficial for children to learn and accept other students’ backgrounds and cultural practices.

I think we were going right when we were celebrating at least the Christmas holidays and then slowly introducing, the other holidays. East coast was doing it pretty well because they had Yom Kippur, Hanukkah but at least like you were learning that. But here towards the South, I feel that they kind of took a wrong turn when they said let's not celebrate anything but I think that it is where I feel the school has really went wrong.

In addition to parents' desire to celebrate more cultural events and holidays, parents expressed that accommodating the religious and cultural practices of students and their families was very important. As an example, M8 who is Vietnamese mentioned "we have our own New Year and the kids were very excited, they are allowed to wear their dress, our traditional dress to school for those days". Other examples of accommodations that schools can provide to their students on an individualized basis include allotting a space and time for individuals to pray, sitting in a different room during fasting, permitting excused absences or alternative test days for holiday-related absences, and allowing students to participate in an alternative activity if the ongoing activity goes against their cultural or religious beliefs.

Theme 5: Culture in the Curriculum

Integration of accurate cultural information into the school curriculum was addressed in 70% of the parents' commentary and experiences. In interviews with preschool parents, ideas and experiences related to the integration of culture in the curriculum through cultural lessons during centers, play time and morning meeting. During circle time, parents indicated teachers can share cultural practices with their students, read stories about diverse people and create an open dialogue about the information. Some parents expressed apprehension about the schools' ability to successfully integrate culture in the curriculum. As one example, M4 stated, "I mean maybe with the older kids, like with the 4 and 5-year olds, you know they could say something about what they, they could have [culturally integrated] at centers or I mean morning meeting or something." As another example, M5 indicated that integration of her son's culture in the

curriculum would be great if it were done by people who she had confidence in regarding their cultural knowledge, but was hesitant about “mainstream” schools doing so accurately. She said, “Now if I had another option to where—to where there was a native school or if I was home on my reservation then I would definitely want my culture like my own specific culture much more integrated into the program because it would be place based.” Later in the interview M5 added:

I think it’s because if I say incorporate my culture into a more mainstream school I’m afraid it’s going to be completely superficial, watered down not intentional enough...I just heard so many bad experiences of again this like—things like Thanksgiving, things like Columbus Day, um [pause] I don’t know it just [pause] it just would become this whole like Indians as a general group of people and not distinct tribes or cultures that are specific and that’s what I have to deal with and we have to deal with as people every day that I don’t even want to get into that battle with my school right now I’m just exhausted.

Elementary school parents wanted schools to accurately address culture in the curriculum as well and recommended using multicultural literature and accurate historical lessons. Parents expressed that when schools attempt to address culture in the curriculum, they tend to dilute culturally important topics. One mother (M2) provided this specific example to address the lack of knowledge and cultural competence in her children’s school.

I can say that I think the way that, the way that we sometimes, we handle certain topics in classes are. For example, there was an Abraham Lincoln project that my daughter had taken on, and she wrote a report, and basically, she was asked to write this narrative about him. And, that’s great, she does the bio the whole bit, but this idea of him freeing the slaves [is] problematic, without adding other pieces.

Schools may use an assortment of explanations to avoid diving deeply into cultural topics in the school curriculum. M2 who is Black stated, “I totally understand that there’s a dilution of topics when you are this young”. The school will say “...’kids are too young to understand’, as maybe an excuse sometimes to like not address certain things”. M2 continued by saying that “slavery is slavery, oppression is oppression ... and I think my five-year-old, and my eight-year-old are capable of understanding.” Although cultural information is an uncomfortable topic for a

number of staff and educators to address, this is not a reason to ignore the obligation of teachers to accurately educate all students about their backgrounds or to include accurate and full cultural information in the curricular content.

A few parents also stated the importance of incorporating the information collected from students and families and combine this information with peer-reviewed articles to create culturally relevant curriculum. One mother (M6) stated that she “sort of trust[s] educators to like take for instance like information or like peer-reviewed science or like even just like journal articles that describe the benefits of a particular approach” and combine the peer-reviewed information “with a little of like [her] own experience” in order to develop a curriculum.

Theme 6: Equitable Access to Educational Opportunities

Many participants commented on the importance of equitable access to resources, including equitable representation, as a necessity in the school community. M3 emphasized the importance of resources for all children in the following commentary.

Well, a lot of it would be based on funding for opportunities. Cause that’s always going to be a big deal as far as funding. Let’s provide the resources and expose them to as much as we can so that way they can learn more and be exposed to different opportunities. Even if it’s competition-wise, get them out in the world and see. The biggest thing is really going to be funding and their exposure to opportunities, resources.

Specific cultural resources that parents felt were needed in schools included access to multicultural print in the school library, resources for English Language Learners, and translated information or resources for parents whose second language is English. As one example of the importance of this, a Vietnamese mother (M8) described the personal impact that school resources that represent their family culture have on her children, “I think they [the school] have more, or they have some document, some book, something related to our country so they, my children feel more familiar and feel more comfortable in classroom. Every time when they found

any book about Vietnam, they felt very excited, they run home and tell me about it.” Parents also expressed the need for resources for families of varying socioeconomic status. Parents mentioned the importance of clothing drives and ensuring food security through free and reduced lunch programs. Examples of the resources that should be applied in a school setting include equal access to higher education through school-wide and state-wide programs, sports programs and extracurricular activities. A single mother (M1) stated that she “would like to see them [her children] participate in, you know, all activities”. She continued by directly addressing the discrepancies in resources between her children’s inner-city school and wealthier schools in the suburbs.

It’s definitely a difference in educational wise. Like, um, I feel like um my kids’ school could be a little bit better like they don’t have all sports, no sports if you want to get technical, whereas the [county] schools they have sports. So, I feel like it is a racial thing because why do they, some schools have, you know, sports and all activities whereas Black schools don’t.

Parents seemed to agree that providing equitable resources within and across schools to diverse populations especially underserved and minority communities was an important factor in building a culturally competent school community.

Discussion

Although there has been increasing emphasis placed on cultural competence in education, there remains a lack of clarity regarding what defines culturally competent practice in schools. This makes it challenging for training programs and professional development workshops in education to build and promote culturally competent pedagogy in school professionals. Given that cultural competence can be conceptualized as a social competence best judged by the target audience, it is critical to gain parents' firsthand experiences and perspectives. The present study provided a qualitative examination of parents' lived experiences to enhance the understanding of school-based interactions and events deemed by parents as culturally responsive or unresponsive in preschool and elementary school settings. The findings of this qualitative study provide insight into parents' experiences and opinions about how schools can display cultural competence and responsiveness. Overall, parents from diverse backgrounds expressed common experiences related to current practices and ways to improve cultural competence in schools.

Many of the parents stated that culture is rarely acknowledged in school settings including the curriculum, school climate and environment, and interaction with diverse students and parents. There is a need for increasing the overall cultural competence in schools, by allowing students to express their cultures through active discussions and activities. Schools also need to understand the importance of creating culturally responsive classrooms by recognizing and understanding the cultural values of diverse populations, developing caring teacher relationships, and facilitating an open classroom climate (Harmon, Kasa-Hendrickson & Neal, 2009; Powell, Cantrell & Rightmyer, 2013).

Parents also addressed the role that culturally competent practice plays in fostering student-teacher relationships and bullying, which mimics current literature regarding culturally

responsive teaching and school practices. As noted by previous literature, students of diverse backgrounds who are not connected to learning and the school community reported an overall lack of student-teacher relationships and a perceived disrespect for their culture (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Although previous literature has not directly linked cultural competence to bullying, perceived discrimination and bias in schools has a demonstrated effect on students' psychological well-being and mental health (Seaton & Douglass, 2014).

Schools are moving away from the celebration and acknowledgement of holidays and cultural practices including birthdays, Christmas and other religious holidays. Parents stated that celebration of holidays leads to discussions, knowledge and awareness of various cultures and may cause students and faculty to be more open and accepting of diverse backgrounds.

Accommodating religious practices and holidays is also an imperative component of culturally competent practices according to parents. Currently, there is an overall lack of educational research and attention given to religion and cultural holidays (Haldstead, 2005). This neglect is perplexing given the large proportion of students and families for which religion and spirituality play a central role in their culture, the recent surge of interest in cultural competence in schools and the undeniable evidence that "religious background remains one of the most important variables for understanding the behavior, thinking, and attitudes of children and families as they relate to schools" (Haldstead, 2005, p. 395). This may be linked to the traditional tendency of education to view cultural competence in terms of race and ethnicity and not in terms of the beliefs, traits, and custom of groups or individuals. However, it is also likely due to the controversial and complex nature of religion.

Parents reflected on the need for more cultural information in the school curriculum using evidence-based practices. Schools often do not delve into cultural facts and histories. Their

cultural information is often misinterpreted or diluted in a way that does not accurately depict the events or histories. Parents' desire for culture in the curriculum mimics the various literature on the importance of culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy in diverse school settings (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) encourages teachers to use their knowledge of various cultures to develop diverse content in the curriculum.

Providing equitable opportunities across socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic groups and English Language Learners is deemed important in the development of cultural competence in school environments. Ways in which schools can provide equitable resources include access to sports and other extracurricular activities, higher education, nutritious foods, and translated materials for students and parents whose second language is English. Researchers and policy makers desire to work towards academic achievement and equitable access to educational resources for diverse students. The National Education Policy Center and Rice (2015) discussed the importance of balancing the wheel in schools by investing in equal opportunity in a brief addressed to policy makers. The brief touched on topics including the importance of ensuring that all schools have sufficient resources to succeed and providing “wrap around services including nutritional supports, health clinics, parental education, extended learning time, recreational programs, and other services needed to meet the social, physical, cognitive, and economic needs of both students and families” (pg. 4).

Schools also should make a conscious effort in involving parents into the school community including individualized communication with parents, collecting in-depth information about students' culture and allowing parents to share their cultural knowledge with students. Allowing parents to become integral part of the school community is “important because it acknowledges parents in the lives of their children, recognizes the diversity of values

and perspectives within the school community, provides a vehicle for building a collaborative problem-solving structure, and increases the opportunity for all students to learn in school” (Banks, 1993, p. 335). Increasing parental school involvement is linked to various student outcomes including achievement outcomes, student motivation, high school completion and enrollment in higher education (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Ross, 2016). Due to this link, it is hypothesized that cultural competence including parental engagement will help to address the achievement and discipline gaps.

When comparing the parent interviews to the culturally competent education literature, there are key differences between heavily utilized models of cultural competence and experiences of cultural competence in practice. In specific, Sue et al. (1982) model of cultural competence places a heavy emphasis on cultural self-awareness and knowledge and gives these aspects of cultural competence seemingly equal weight to demonstrated cross-cultural skills. However, parents from this study articulated school experiences of cultural competence that focused most heavily on skills or practices displayed by educators, with lesser focus given to cultural knowledge and a lack of attention paid to educators’ self-awareness, even regarding personal bias. Another prominent model of cultural competence in education, Gay’s (2002) model defines the construct as culturally responsive teaching practices; yet, parents in this study emphasized the importance of culturally competent practice that extended beyond the teacher and classroom to schoolwide practices.

Implications & Limitations

The findings reported in this study have important implications for practice and research. First, schools should utilize the information from this phenomenological inquiry and additional research as a foundation for improving diversity training and culturally competent practice in

schools. In addition to completing diversity training prior to the beginning of each school year, schools should assess faculty's cultural competence not only through the use of one of the many readily available self-report questionnaires, but also through direct inquiries with parents/legal guardians. Cultural competence training for educators needs to be recognized as a continual process not simply a one-day training, book assignment, or single course (The National Education Association, n.d.). Second, educators, administrators and support staff should make a concerted effort to provide equitable education and related services to diverse populations. For example, the National Association School Psychologists (2010) practice model outlines guidelines for "diversity in development and learning" (pg. 7) for school psychologist practicing in schools. School psychologists are required to provide direct and consultative support services to ensure that all children, including children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, are functioning effectively.

In addition, researchers should continue to gather information related to culturally competent practices on a larger scale in all schools in the United States including middle and high schools, private and alternative schools, and with other consumers including students. This will provide school systems with comprehensive information related to improving culturally competent practices. The information from this study could also be used in tandem with established literature to move toward a concise understanding of cultural competence and how to effectively incorporate the needs of culturally diverse students into the school community. Studies can also use the themes from this study and existing research to develop objective measurement tools, including questionnaires and observation tools, to increase cultural competence in teachers, administration and the school community.

Limitations should be considered when interpreting findings from the current study. Although the researchers attempted to recruit an ethnically, racially and religiously diverse sample to gain a holistic perspective, the study lacked male representation (i.e., did not include fathers or male guardians). Also, many of the participants were highly educated, therefore, are assumed to have higher socioeconomic status. The one mother who was in the lower socioeconomic status struggled to articulate and understand cultural competence as it was related to her race and ethnicity. Much of her experience was related to her socioeconomic status and inequality in the school systems regarding resources. Based on this information, it may have been beneficial to gain more information from parents in lower socioeconomic status to grasp their understanding and perspective regarding culturally competent practices and how their various social identities intersect with their social class. Despite these limitations of the sample, in a qualitative study, the main concern is not generalization to a broad population but generalization to the theory. Thus, the lack of representation of fathers and low-income parents may have resulted in missed information to extend theory, given that they might have expressed new or varied experiences that would have resulted in additional themes.

In addition, the data collection varied across the participants depending on their availability and geographical location. Some interviews were conducted by telephone and skype, while others were conducted in-person. It is possible that rapport may have been more easily established during in-person interviews, thus leading to additional information. Additionally, it is possible the mode of communication could have impacted the ease or effectiveness in which parents were able to communicate their perspectives and experiences. However, it should be noted that many of the phone or skype interviews were comparable in length or longer than the

in-person interviews, which provides some evidence that rapport was adequately established between the researcher and the parents despite the mode of communication.

Conclusion

The present study provided a qualitative examination of parents' lived experiences to enhance understanding of school-based interactions and events deemed by parents as culturally responsive (or unresponsive) in preschool and elementary school settings. While teachers' self-assessments of their cultural competence are widely utilized in schools and research, results of this study suggest that cultural competence might be better assessed by gaining parents' firsthand experiences and perspectives. Although the mothers' in the sample were diverse in the racial, linguistic and religious background, they shared similar culturally responsive and unresponsive experiences with their child(ren)'s preschool or elementary schools. Parents' lived experiences revealed six themes that can be used as further evidence for the necessity of developing cultural competence in preschool and elementary school communities and utilized in the conceptualization of culturally competent practices in the literature.

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Appendix A. IRB Approval

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



TO: Ajjah Baruti Goodwin
Psychology

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: July 25, 2017

RE: IRB# E10541

TITLE: Development and Validation of the Culturally Competent School Community Scale

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/research

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 7/24/2017

Approved Disapproved

Approval Date: 7/25/2017 Approval Expiration Date: 7/24/2020

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1; 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work In Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>

Appendix B. IRB Approval with Modifications

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/research

TO: Ajjah Baruti Goodwin
Psychology

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 30, 2017

RE: IRB# E10541

TITLE: Development and Validation of the Culturally Competent School Community Scale

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: Modification

Brief Modification Description: Phone and Skype Interviews with parents in other states

Review date: 10/30/2017

Approved Disapproved

Approval Date: 10/30/2017 **Approval Expiration Date:** 7/24/2020

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work In Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects"
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: Make sure you use bcc when emailing more than one recipient. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

Appendix C. Informed Consent

- Study Title:** Development and Validation of the Culturally Competent School Community Scale
- Performance Sites:** KIPP New Orleans, LSU Early Childhood Education Laboratory Preschool, UP Elementary Charter
- Investigators:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Aijah K. B. Goodwin, B.A.
School Psychology Doctoral Student
Department of Psychology, Louisiana State University
abarut2@lsu.edu
- Dr. Anna Long
Department of Psychology, Louisiana State University
(225) 578-7605
along@lsu.edu
- Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research project is to develop the Culturally Competent School Community scale, a parent measure for the assessment of school-wide cultural competence through use of parent interviews and a review of the relevant literature.
- Subject Inclusion:** Parents and legal guardians with children who attend public preschools to elementary schools.
- Number of Subjects:** 10
- Study Procedures:** Data will be collected using semi-structured parent interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes. All interviews include informed consent, a review of demographic information and instructions regarding the interview. Parents will be made aware that interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- Benefits:** Parents/legal guardians will have an opportunity to receive a \$10 gift card. Additionally, the study may provide information about cultural competence in schools to participating schools, future research and to guide the development of the Culturally Competent School Community scale.
- Risks:** There are no known risks.
- Right to Refuse:** Participation is voluntary. Subjects may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by investigators. Recorded and transcribed interviews will be password protected and saved on an encrypted or fingerprint secured flash drive. The information revealed during the interview will be presented and may be published but no names or identifying information will be included in the presentation or publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: Parents/legal guardians will have an opportunity to receive a \$10 gift card from major retail distributors (i.e. Target, Walmart, Amazon) following the interview.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

The parent/guardian has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the parent/guardian and explained that by completing the signature line above, the parent/legal guardian has agreed to participate.

Signature of Reader: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D. Consent Script for Remote Interviews

My name is Aijah Goodwin and I am a school psychology doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at Louisiana State University. The main purpose of this interview is to learn your perspective and specific experiences related to how your child(ren)'s school can be responsive to and respectful of your child and family's culture and background. I am interested in the interactions and events that you have with your child's (children's) school. In particular, I am interested in understanding what the school can do to work most effectively with you and your child(ren). If you agree, I will ask you to complete an interview, which will take no longer than 30 minutes. Following participation, you will receive a \$10 gift card. All interviews will begin by gaining background information and then you will be asked about your personal experiences with your children's school(s). To participate in this study, you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria which includes parents and legal guardians with children who attend preschools and/or elementary schools. Possible risks of the study include potential discomfort when discussing personal experiences with schools related to family background and culture but you may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which you might otherwise be entitled. Interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. Recorded and transcribed interviews will be assigned an ID number, password protected and saved on a secured drive. General finding of this study may be presented or published; however, no names or identifying information will be included. Your identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law or written consent is provided. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, 225-578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu. For additional questions involving this research project, contact Aijah Goodwin at abarut2@lsu.edu or Dr. Anna Long at (225) 578-7605 or along@lsu.edu. Do you agree to participate? Do you have any questions before I begin?

Appendix E. Pilot Testing Interview Guide

It is important for school personnel to know the students and the families that they are working with and be responsive to their values, needs and ways of learning. The main purpose of this interview is to learn your perspective and specific experiences related to how the school can be responsive to and respectful of your child and family's culture and background. We are interested in the interactions and events that you have with your child's (children's) school. In particular, we are interested in understanding what the school can do to work most effectively with you and your child(ren). Although I have specific questions, this interview process will be flexible and guided by you (the parent). The interview will last approximately 30 minutes but you are able to stop or discontinue the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How do you define cultural competence? (If no answer, ask question 1a. If answered, ask question 1b.)
 - Some people define it as the ability to meet the social, cultural, economic and linguistic needs in order to help improve interactions, services and outcomes of people with different backgrounds. Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not? (Continue to question 1b.)
 - Is this something that you think schools should focus on? In other words, is it important for school personnel to demonstrate cultural competence?
2. Tell me about you and your child's experience at this school. What was your (your child's) perception of the school following contact with it? What was your (your child's) perception of the teachers/administration following contact with them?
3. What types of experiences have you or your child had that made you feel welcome/comfortable/understood by the school?
4. When are times you have been surprised/happy/upset/worried about this school? What were the specific events or interactions that occurred which created those experiences?
5. What experiences have you had that showed consideration of your family background or culture? Describe specific experiences in which the school or school personnel displayed approval/disapproval/understanding/lack of understanding for your family or cultural background.
6. How has the school demonstrated knowledge of family or cultural norms and values that are important to you?
7. In what ways has your family or culture been integrated into the school, classroom, and/or curriculum? Should schools or school personnel be deliberate about doing so? If so, why?

8. In what ways have the school or school personnel gained information about your family background or culture? How have they used this information to support your child in school? Has this been helpful/unhelpful?
9. How has the school (or school personnel) addressed cultural gaps between the home/community and the school (e.g., differences in perspectives/opinions/ways of doing things)? How should the school (or school personnel) address cultural gaps between the home/community and school (e.g., differences in perspectives/opinions/ways of doing things)?
10. What things do you believe school personnel should know (or be aware of) regarding your family or culture? What are the qualities that you think are important for a school (or school personnel) to display if they are trying to be responsive and respectful to your family and cultural background?
11. How can school personnel operate in ways that are consistent with (or supportive of) the norms and values you try to instill at home?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share or you think is important to mention?

Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix F. Interview Guide

It is important for school personnel to know the students and the families that they are working with and be responsive to their values, needs and ways of learning. The main purpose of this interview is to learn your perspective and specific experiences related to how the school can be responsive to and respectful of your child and family's culture and background. We are interested in the interactions and events that you have with your child's (children's) school. In particular, we are interested in understanding what the school can do to work most effectively with you and your child(ren). Although I have specific questions, this interview process will be flexible and guided by you (the parent). The interview will last approximately 30 minutes but you are able to stop or discontinue the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. ID#: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Please indicate your gender: _____
4. What is your race/ethnicity?

<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic
<input type="checkbox"/> Black / African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American/American Indian
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiracial (please specify): _____
5. What is your religious preference? _____
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (select one)
 - High School/GED
 - Associate's
 - B.A/ B.S.
 - Masters/Specialist
 - Doctorate (e.g., PhD, JD.)
7. What language(s) do you speak most often in your home?

8. What is your current marital status? (select one)
 - Single
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
 - Would rather not say

○ Other _____

9. How many children live in your household? _____

10. How many children live in your household that are currently enrolled in preschool and/or elementary school? _____

11. What is your relationship to the children in your household?

○ Biological Mother

○ Biological Father

○ Adoptive Mother

○ Adoptive Father

○ Foster Parent

○ Other _____

12. Please select the current grade level of the children who live in your household.

Preschool

Kindergarten

1st Grade

2nd Grade

3rd Grade

4th Grade

5th Grade

6th Grade

7th Grade

8th Grade

9th Grade

10th Grade

11th Grade

12th Grade

College/Adult

1 How do you define cultural competence? (If no answer, ask question 1a. If answered, ask question 1b.)

- Cultural competence promotes “inclusive educational environments that respect and respond to differences in race, culture, ethnicity, and language.” Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not? (Continue to question 1b.)
- Is this something that you think schools should focus on? In other words, is it important for school personnel to demonstrate cultural competence? Why or why not?

Cultural Competence: _____

Why? _____

- 2 What are the qualities/actions/attitudes that you think are important for a school (or school personnel) to display if they are trying to be responsive and respectful to your family and cultural background?

- 3 In what ways have the school or school personnel gained information about your family background or culture? If any? How would you like to see the school integrate information about your family's culture, religion or background into the school, classroom, and/or curriculum?

- 4 What experiences have you had that showed consideration of your family background or culture? Describe specific experiences in which the school or school personnel displayed approval/disapproval/understanding/lack of understanding for your family or cultural background.

- 5 How can school personnel operate in ways that are consistent with (or supportive of) the norms and values you try to instill at home? Related to your culture/race/religious affiliation?

6 Your overall experience with your child(ren)'s school seems to be positive/negative, were there any times you have been surprised/happy/upset/worried about this school? What were the specific events or interactions that occurred which created those experiences? How would you like for the school to address your concerns in the future? (If positive, ask all questions in question 6. If negative, summarize the negative experience and ask the last question.)

Summarize the information provided during this interview. Does this seem accurate? Is there anything else you would like to share or you think is important to mention? Thank you so much for your time!

Vita

Aijah K. B. Goodwin was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She received her bachelor's degree in Honors Psychology with a minor in Sociology in May 2014. Thereafter, she worked as a behavior technician and a paraprofessional for children with Autism and other developmental delays. Following her two years of practical experience, she decided to attend graduate school in the Department of Psychology at Louisiana State University. While at LSU, she has gained clinical experience while working with children, families and adults with developmental disabilities in schools, community centers and outpatient clinics in Baton Rouge, Hammond and New Orleans, Louisiana. She will receive her master's degree in May 2019 and plans to continue her education and receive her Ph.D. in School Psychology by August 2021.