A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS:
CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING CASE STUDIES
OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
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The purpose of this study was to investigate pedagogical practices of two early childhood teachers to determine how they embody in theory and practices the tenets of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 19); and how does ethnic and racial lived experience influence those who are culturally relevant teachers? Data was collected over a five-month period consisting of classroom observations and individual interviews. The data was presented in a case format, adopting a narrative style that revealed the teacher’s perception and experiences (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). Narrative inquiry was the lens through which the intrinsic case study was investigated. Scene setting was consistently applied to written field notes of the participant’s classroom observations to render an interpretation and analysis of the nature and context of the interactions between the participant and their students, and indirectly, interactions between students. Four themes developed as a result of classroom observations and individual interviews. They were: (1) philosophy of teaching (2) respect and appreciation for everyone’s culture (3) community of learners and (4) sociopolitical commitment. Findings indicated that regardless of teacher’s ethnicity and years of service, teachers could be
culturally relevant teachers. This study expands the lens on teachers whose foundational philosophies of teaching support the inclusion of culture as an important element of early childhood teaching and learning.
Dedicated to my best friend

Lourdes Vazquez (1963-2004)

And her daughters who have a special place in my heart,

C. Mariel Luciano and Brianna A. Luciano
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The significance of relevant teachers to education lies in their belief that schools can be vehicles for social change, community building, and access to the mainstream; and that educators can take a leading role in promoting social justice”.


Since the early 1970s, the United States has witnessed a big demographic transformation. Most immigrants to the United States have come from non-European regions. The 2000 U.S. census data indicated that 2.6 million foreign-born children were enrolled in the United States elementary and secondary schools system, (Fast 2004). This population excluded kindergarten children. Fast (2004) pointed out that in the Midwestern United States the statistics support the same immigration patterns reflected in the nation. She mentioned that the Columbus Ohio District has 1,079 ESL students who speak twenty-eight different languages.

The number of people of color in this country is growing. The U.S. Census Bureau (2000, in Ladson-Billings, 2005) estimated that people of color made up 28% of the nation’s population in 2000 and predicted that
they would make up 38% in 2025 and 50% in 2050. Forty percent of the students enrolled in the nation’s schools in 2001 were students of color. However, these disadvantaged groups now compose less than 15% of the teaching force, and less than 12% of school administration (Status of the American School Teacher, 1992 in Gay, 1993). These facts bring many challenges and the educational institutions are called upon to work with the situation. The U.S. education system needs to face its reality and challenges in order to provide the students with a pertinent, relevant, social, cultural and developmental appropriate education. In short, U.S. schools will continue to become learning spaces where an increasingly homogeneous teaching population (mostly White, female, and middle class) will come into contact with an increasingly heterogeneous student population (primarily students of color, and from low-income backgrounds).

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1995a, Gay, 2000, Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, Pang 2001) is pedagogy that responds to the reality of having more heterogeneous classrooms in schools today. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy assert the importance of centering in classrooms within student’s cultural frames of reference. These pedagogical approaches provide teachers with effective methods to teach and learn with ethnically and culturally diverse students. They advocate that when
there is cultural congruence between classroom practices students are more successful in school and classroom task.

**Definition of terms**

**Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is a philosophy concept and an educational process. It is a concept built upon the philosophical ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity contained in the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Multicultural education is a process that takes place in schools and other educational institutions, and informs all subject areas and other aspects of the curriculum. It prepares all students to work actively toward structure equality in the organizations and institutions of the United States. Multicultural education provides knowledge about the history, culture, and contributions of the diverse groups that have shaped the history, politics, and culture of the United States (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 171)

**Culture**

Culture is all that is created by people; this represents behaviors, values attitudes, customs, viewpoints, history, and many other aspects (Valle in Pang, 2001). It is always changing because people change, however culture also shapes the way you see and interpret the world. “Culture is a large holistic sense of who one is, what one is, what one
believes, and how one act. It includes meanings, values, actions and decision-making shared by and within a social group” (Pang, 2001, p. 4).

**Diversity**

Diversity refers to differences among people. Although there are many individual differences among individuals, multicultural educators are usually referring to group differences (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 93). Diversity can be described in terms of racial, ethnic, gender, economic groups, language, religion, ability, age, and sexual orientation (Scott Mio, Trimble, Arrendondo, Cheatham, Sue, 1999).

**Culturally relevant pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 62).

In her definition of *culturally relevant* teaching Pang (2001) explained that it “is an approach to instruction that responds to the socio-cultural context and seeks to integrate cultural content of the learner in shaping an effective learning environment” (p.192).

**Community of learners**

One in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to
learn together. A learning community is a group of individuals who share a similar vision of educational values and beliefs. As a result of this shared vision, a community of learners can work toward common goals. The community includes the students, teachers, parents, extended family members, staff and school leaders. The community of learners set an environment where there are reciprocal relationship between school and community and that creates a unique learning environment reflective of the culture of the student body and the community. Toward that end, teacher and school staff must involve community and family members in student learning.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate pedagogical practices of two early childhood teachers to determine how they embody in theory and practices the tenets of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 19); and how does ethnic and racial lived experience influence those who are culturally relevant teachers?

The culturally relevant teaching, draws its theoretical bases from multicultural education based upon Banks and Banks (1995, 1995a) concepts of equity in education. The multicultural education movement started in the 1970s focusing on the African-American students and today it should be education for everybody. Nieto (2000) said that the multicultural education gives the students the chance to get to know other
cultures, other languages and the world in general. Nowadays we are living in a global world and all children should have experiences that are up with this reality. This is what Nieto (2000) called education for the social justice. She explained and so does Pang (2001) that multicultural education brings the child, among other things, the opportunity to expose to the world that which would allow him to develop critical thinking and would allow him to learn history, not only his own, but worldwide, so that later on he can promote social justice. Part of this environment where we work with multicultural education is to promote the students to get to know each other, to learn about each other’s culture, and to develop the social skills necessary to keep social relationships with people that are “different.” Those opportunities in the school will allow them to apply what they learn when they integrate to heterogeneous societies, like the ones in United State of America.

Research Guiding Questions

The research study that I conducted took place in two classrooms where the teachers work with culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

The questions that guided my inquiry were:

• How do early childhood teachers embody in theory and practice the tenets of culturally relevant teaching?
How does ethnic and racial lived experiences influence those who are culturally relevant teachers?

My observations are also going to give information regarding the culture of this classroom and will hopefully be able to answer the following questions:

- Why is each person’s culture important in the classroom?
- What is the relationship between culture and education?
- In what kinds of relations do kids engage in the classroom/school?
- How do the cultures affect the learning process?
- How are the social interactions among culturally diverse children?

The literature review (Chapter 2) brings information related with the importance of the culturally relevant teaching and why we should teach under that pedagogy. It also presents examples about how students’ academic performance increases when they participate in a program that responds to and respects their cultural background. The literature also provides information about the curriculum and some considerations that we should have when we work with cultural relevant teaching.

The culturally relevant pedagogy is a way to provide social justice for the students who are part of the disadvantaged groups in this country. Those kids deserve to have an education that is meaningful for them and also respect who they are. In the study I have reviewed just one part of this pedagogy and the impact that it has in the social interactions among
students who have different cultural backgrounds, but this pedagogy also has a holistic impact in those children’s lives.

**Significance of the study**

The study that I conducted is very important for different reasons. The census 2000 data indicated that the “minorities” groups in this country are going to increase every year (Fast, 2004) and the system of education needs to work with that reality. The investigation I conducted revealed much information that is going to be helpful for teachers who are working with culturally relevant teaching and those who want to work with that pedagogy and want to provide better education to the students who are part of the disadvantaged groups. Teachers will also have more reasons for using pedagogy that respond to students’ culture and will now have more research that is supportive of their teaching strategies.

Various studies (Erickson, 1987; Cazden, Leggett, Osborne 1989; King and Wilson, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1995a; Pang 2001) are related with culturally relevant teaching and the impact of this pedagogy in the students’ school achievement. Those studies present the basic assumption that learning is culturally situated and teachers need to learn about student’s home cultures and their teaching should meet those cultures of students for them to be able to learn effectively (Banks, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001).
The schools are the places where our students are going to learn how to relate with people who are “different” than they. The schools are the places where we need to make the difference in this society’s complexion where it is common to see a lot of segregation among groups from different backgrounds or different ideologies. Klein and Chen (2001) affirmed that one reason for students to not interact with peers who are “different” is because they do not know how to do it, they do not have the information that they need to know better their peers.

In this country we need research and practice that reaffirms the need for the system of education to respond to the different ethnic, cultural and social groups in the schools because currently it is only responding to the Anglo European students. The students who are part of the disadvantaged groups need to see themselves in their education; they need to see that the education in this country cares for them. This current study will present more information related with the importance of an education that responds to every student’s cultural background in the classroom and how that affects their social development.

Limitations

As with any research methodology, there are limitations or cautions that must be addressed. Criticism may be made about the low number of participants in the study. More participants in this study probably would have increased the contrasting dimensions of this study. Such an
increase in numbers, however, may have forced me to go into less depth, which would have likely resulted in a more superficial report of more participants.

Ultimately, the limitations of this study did not prevent me from presenting high quality case study that illustrate and attends to the nature of the research questions.

Summary

This chapter introduces the study that was conducted in relation to culturally relevant pedagogy. In this first chapter I identified the need for this study as contributing to the few studies that examine the benefits of the culturally relevant pedagogy.

In the following chapters, I explore these issues in depth. Chapter Two presents details regarding the theoretical and practical bases in which I have grounded this study. In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology that used to explore my research question. Chapters four and five describe the findings in both case studies, Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides. In Chapter six you can find the cross case analysis and discussion and in the last chapter (seven) the implications of this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The United States of America is described as one geographical place with several cultural groups living together (McLaren, 1994). That reality in this country has a major impact in the education and the holistic dynamics that is to taking place in schools. Every society and community has different worldviews and values depending upon the cultural, social, political, historical and economic contexts in which these are based (Pai & Adler, 1990). In other words, education is at once a social and cultural process rooted in the historical context of a society. This information suggests that teaching is also a social and cultural process that one cannot teach effectively without acknowledging the culturally bound ways in which a society makes meaning of its world.

In the heterogeneous world that we are living many of today’s educators believe that we need a pedagogy that has and its center, formulations and practices of a democratic, ethical and equitable approach that realizes the student at the center of teaching and learning (Banks &
Banks, 1995, 1995a, 1999). The student needs to be the center in the classroom pointing to their specific cultural, social, political, economic values, philosophies and ideologies.

As I relate to the questions I raised in chapter one, and the issues related with an education that in theory and practice responds to the social, cultural and historical climate of the U.S., I am forced to look at the research literature that is situated in two camps, cultural relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy. There is no one pedagogy, that magically will address all of the issues of education today, however, these pedagogical approaches are based upon theory and practices that strive to put the students at the center of learning, in order to maximize academic achievement.

Advocates of these theories in general, and culturally relevant teaching in particular, encourage teachers to find ways to actively involve all participants in classroom practices that include each individual's personal situated ness and subjectivities in connection to and with the present social world (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1995a).

*Culturally relevant pedagogy*

In the past decades there have been numerous investigations about learning styles and part of that literature has applied those "styles" to racial, ethnic and cultural groups (Ladson-Billings in Grant, 1992). Ladson- Billings (in Grant, 1992) presented some historical facts. She
explained how in 1974 Ramirez and Castañeda used one of the learning style models at the time to explain disparities between Latino and Anglo school performance. Also, she mentions how Cohen, in 1976, explained how “minority” students demonstrated a preference for rational styles when schools in general preferred and rewarded the analytical mode. And she also explained how in the 80’s, Hale-Benson (in 1986) and Shade (in 1982) have applied the concept of learning styles to the needs of African American students. The use of the term “style” to describe the low performance of minority group students was questioned while at the same time the education reform directed the attention to the teaching styles or educator’s pedagogy. That’s how during the 1980s several terms emerged that described the pedagogical strategies used by teachers in an effort to make the school experience of minority students more compatible with their everyday lives. Ladson-Billings (in Grant, 1992) included some of those terms in her chapter and those are: cultural congruence -Mohatt and Erickson, 1981, cultural appropriateness -Au and Jordan, 1981, cultural responsiveness -Cazden and Leggett, 1981; Erickson and Mohatt, 1982, cultural compatibility- Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan and Tharp, 1987, mitigating culture discontinuity -Macias, 1987, culturally responsive teaching -Erickson, 1987, Cazden and Leggett and Osborne 1989, Gay, 2000 and culturally relevant teaching -King and Wilson, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1989.
Culturally relevant pedagogy is a broad approach to successful and democratic teaching and learning practices with students and is grounded in the ideological foundations of multicultural education (Banks and Banks 1995, 1995a) concepts of equity in education. This term is used as a broad concept of reflective, democratic, practices in teaching and learning that are more sensitive to culturally diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1995a; Pang, 2001; Leavell, Cowart & Wilhelm, 1999; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). That teaching uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students.

There are many definitions of culturally relevant teaching; however, it was Ladson-Billings (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1995a) who popularized the term. This term has been used in relation to mainly African American students and teachers who use this pedagogy for successful teaching and learning practices for African American students. Ladson Billings (1994) defined it as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). Ladson-Billings (In Grant, 1992) explained that culturally relevant teaching serves to empower students to the point where they are able to critically examine educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society. Teachers must encourage academic success and cultural competence and they also must help students to recognize, understand,
and critique current social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This pedagogy is empowering because rather than simply teach students blind acceptance of the inherent values of the dominant culture, these teachers encourage students to think critically and work actively for social justice (Nieto, 2000). The goal of fostering cultural competence “requires teachers to help raise students’ awareness of prejudices and discrimination as well as their ability to react to and constructively cope with these negative social realities” (Ladson-Billings 1998). An example of those realities is that not all students can see themselves in their education. Students of color do not see positive images of people similar to them (Ford & Dillard, 1996). They have to struggle with seeing images of White dominant culture and that damages their self esteem to the point that they believe they are never going to be as successful as their White peers (Ford & Dillard, 1996). Cultural relevancy uses the student’s cultures to help them create meaning and understand the world. Ladson-Billings (1995a) resumes her definition of culturally relevant teaching in three major criteria or propositions: “students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p.160). In this pedagogy, the educators recognized the existence of oppression in their students’ lives and sought to use their personal, professional and social power to empower their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999).
In her definition of *culturally relevant* teaching Pang (2001) explained that it “is an approach to instruction that responds to the socio-cultural context and seeks to integrate cultural content of the learner in shaping an effective learning environment” (p. 192). Cultural content includes aspects like experiences, knowledge, events, values, role models, perspectives, and issues that arise from the community. She also emphasizes the teachers’ role and states that culturally literate teachers develop an insider perspective of a cultural community. These teachers understand that cultural elements operate simultaneously and respond in congruence with their students. A persistent theme in the literature on culturally relevant teaching is the quality of the relationships that such teachers establish with their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). Culturally relevant teachers feel personally, and not simply professionally, invested in their educating practices. These teachers are aware not only of the cultural norms, values, and practices of their students, but more important, of their political realities and aspirations. As a result, their pedagogy is relevant to the political experiences of inequity and disenfranchisement of their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999).

In particular, culturally relevant educators are conscious of the presence of the racism that surrounds students with distorted and overwhelmingly negative images of the cultures, histories and possibilities of students of “minority” groups (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). As a result, “culturally relevant teachers view their classrooms as key sites of
resistance, where students can come to see themselves and their communities in affirming ways while gaining access to mainstream codes of power" (Delpit, 1988).

The culturally relevant pedagogy is empowering, transformative and emancipatory. This pedagogy enables students in multicultural classrooms to be better human beings and more successful learners and the intention is that students believe that they are capable and they can succeed. Students develop the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become more active participants in shaping their learning and became social critics who could make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective action.

Making teaching culturally relevant involves strategies such as constructing and designing relevant cultural metaphors and multicultural representations to help bridge the gap between what students already know and appreciate and what they are to be taught (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvin, Nieto, Schofield, Stephan, 2001). Culturally relevant instructional strategies transform information about the home and community into effective multicultural classroom practice. Teachers who do not work with the home and the community culture spend amounts of time on classroom control in maintaining the Anglo culture, and culturally different students spend their psycho-emotional and mental resources defending themselves (Gay, 1993). Rather than rely on generalized notions of ethnic groups that can be misleading, effective teachers use
knowledge of their student’s culture and ethnicity as a framework for inquiry. Basic principles of learning suggest that students are more likely to master new learning when they build on previous ones (Gay, 1993). They also use culturally relevant activities, resources, and strategies to organize and implement instruction (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvin, Nieto, Schofield, Stephan, 2001).

There are studies that are related with successful teaching strategies with students from minority groups. Not all of those studies were conducted in culturally relevant or responsive teaching classrooms but they give us information on how important it is to consider students’ culture in our classrooms. Ladson- Billings (In Grant, 1992) presented us the example of the First and Crichlow (1989) study. In this study, they assert that it is effective for “minority” students to be involved in educational decision making such as decisions related to the curriculum. They also comment that when comparing effective teachers of students from “minority” groups with ineffective teachers they found that ineffective teachers, while compassionate, often see their students as victims and in inescapable situations. Effective teachers, on the other hand, know those students’ state of oppression situations but insist that those students need to learn how to overcome those negative situations and present them with academically challenging tasks on a regular basis. They need challenges like any student in the classroom and most importantly they need to see the reasons for that. Some of those ineffective teachers sometimes think
that students from “minority” groups are not able to do the classroom work; they treat them as unintelligent kids just because of their cultural or ethnic background. Ladson-Billings (1995) brings information about the study that Au and Jordan (1981) conducted in Hawaii where the teachers incorporated aspects of student’s cultural backgrounds into their reading instructions. By permitting students to use “talk-story”, a language interaction style common among Native Hawaiian children, teachers were able to help students achieve higher on standardized reading tests. In another study, Moll (1988) worked with Latino students and identified effective teaching strategies in the success of that population. In his study teachers had classrooms that were highly literate and where many languages and different types of literacy could be practiced. These teachers used different strategies in their teaching of reading and those alternatives rejected the notion of teaching specific skills or a hierarchy of sub-skills. They decided to trade books rich on literacy meaning and interest of the students and they also planned the lessons using students' personal experiences and cultural backgrounds to understand the classroom content. This is a good example of teaching strategies that have their roots in respecting students’ cultures and languages. Those teachers used their students’ experiences as the basis for their curriculum in the classroom. Another example is the study that Hernandez (1995) entitled “From remedial to Gifted: Effects of culturally centered pedagogy”. Hernandez (1995) did this study in her advance Spanish class in high
school. In her program she worked with culturally centered pedagogy and it included: the use of Spanish language as the medium of instruction, affirmation and validation of ethnic identity, development of self-esteem, curricular content emphasis on the student’s cultural heritage, history and literature, and implementation of learning strategies that matched preferred learning styles (e.g., oral language, cooperative learning, peer support, and family involvement). The students that she enrolled in her advance classes were the Latino (a) students that mostly took remedial classes and at the end of the study those students demonstrated behaviors that fell within the conformity of “giftedness”. The first year five students passed the college Board Advanced Placement Spanish Language, the second year the Spanish Literature exam and over a three year period, Latino (a)s students, previously labeled “at risk” performed at a level usually expected of honor students. The Spanish program used student resources as strengths by providing Latino (a) students with a class that maintained their native language and increased language fluency by developing thinking, oral, and writing skills in Spanish. This Spanish program (Hernandez, 1995) illustrated that programs planned and executed to meet the cultural needs of the students’ success. However it requires changing traditional roles of teachers and students, building bridges between home and school, and moving from a compensatory to a challenging, academically demanding model with high expectations. The next study is related to cultural relevant teaching and
the researcher was Ladson-Billings (1994). In her investigation, Ladson-Billings worked with teachers who were successful in teaching African American students and the evidence of the study suggest that these teachers approached teaching in a similar way on these three important dimensions: *their perceptions of themselves and others, the way they structure classroom social interactions, and their perceptions of knowledge*. The teachers in her investigation see themselves as a part of the community in which they teach and see their role as giving something back to the community. In her book, *all about love*, hook (2000) talks about the importance of communities for humans. She said that “to ensure human survival everywhere in the world, females and males organize themselves into communities” (p.129). hook is trying to help us to see the importance of been part of a community, something that the teachers in Ladson-Billings research now, respect and practice in their classrooms. In order to really understand learners whose cultures are different from our own, we must develop an awareness and understanding of their cultural community. Moll and Greenberg (1990) cite a teacher who discovered that many parents in the Latino community where she taught had expertise in the field of construction. Consequently, the class developed a unit on construction, which included reading, writing, speaking, and building, all with the help of community experts, the student’s parents. The knowledge shared by the parents and other
community persons became part of the student’s work. Imagine how excited, important, useful, those students and their families felt.

The teachers in Ladson-Billing’s study also used a nurturing style in their interactions with students, the same caring for children that Dillard (1995) talked about in her investigation. In her study Dillard (1995) worked with a school principal who talked about her students as her responsibility. The way she described her concerns about students’ achievement was deeper than just expecting them to have good grades. Natham, the principal in Dillard’s study, cared for her student’s future and she would “look out” for them in a caring way. In her interview Natham, described how she helped one of her students to get good grades so she could go to college; the girl started her senior year with a low GPA and progressed to a 4.0 average giving her the opportunity to go to The Ohio State University. The teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and the principal (Dillard, 1995) believed that African American students had cultural knowledge to bring to the classroom and they were willing to explore and utilize those special strengths in their activities. The teachers in Ladson-Billing’s study took a critical view of the knowledge and content and they demonstrated a passion about what they taught.

Those investigations’ results showed how teachers perceived culturally diverse students as being “culture rich” and not at risk. From those studies we can learn that schools should be places that excite rather than inhibit the learning of culturally diverse students (Pang & Barba in
Grant, 1995). The educational community has tended to view students from diverse cultural backgrounds as coming from a deficit model and they don’t allow children to incorporate their prior knowledge with new experiences provided in the classroom. In that situation the child gets confused, learning can be slowed and he or she can creates a disjointed view of the world (Pang & Barba in Grant, 1995; Gay, 1975, 1993). A problem that Delpit (1988) identified in the education is part of the distinction made by educators, policy makers, and the general public between white middle-class children and minority groups’ children. Delpit (1988) argued that given the persistent beliefs in the universality and superiority of white middle-class culture, many students are seen as different for being “poor”, of color, or from immigrant families. These children are excluded from the social, political, and economic opportunities to which formal education provides access.

It is important to remember that children are individuals and cannot be made to fit into any preconceived mold of how they are “supposed” to act. The question is not necessarily how to create the perfect “culturally matched” learning situation for each ethnic group, but rather how to recognize when there is a situation for a particular child and how to seek its cause in the most broadly conceived fashion (Delpit, in Strouse, 2001). As educators it is impossible for us to be experts in each cultural group’s history, values, traditions, rituals, behaviors and language but we can try to create a support environment for all our students. The challenge is for
teachers to determine what individual strengths and cultural competencies students bring to the classroom and to design learning experiences to capitalize on them (Gay, 1993).

Just as we are comfortable in the way that we were raised, our students are also comfortable with the ways their parents and communities raise them. For some students who have “different” cultural background the school is a place where they can’t be themselves and we want them to feel safe and comfortable (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Tatum (2003) mentioned in her book how her college students responded when she asked them to share the emotions that they had when they thought about their early childhood years in schools. They used such words as anger, confusion, surprise, sadness and embarrassment. They expressed how unsafe they felt with no possibility of sharing their feelings with anybody in the school. This is not how we want our students to feel in school; we want them to enjoy being in school and most importantly to feel safe.

Responding to the cultural context in a classroom is challenging, especially when there are twenty different cultures represented (Pang, 2001). It is almost impossible to create one environment that is culturally congruent to all students all the time but is possible to create an affirming environment that values the culture students bring to school. In order to have a cultural relevant and responsive teaching, we need to have instructional methods that parallel those of the community from which the
children in our classrooms have been raised (Pang & Barba Grant, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching points out the importance of making connections with the learner (Pang, 2001). The students need to understand the purpose of the learning process and how this knowledge fits in their lives. The cultural context is important in this process of understanding and teachers can make bridges between their students’ culture and this new knowledge. In her explanation of culturally relevant teaching, Pang (2001) mentioned that cultural context doesn’t just include the ways of communication that students bring to school, but also refers to the value orientation of students. For example, some students from culturally diverse communities go to school with the concern that they can’t do well because that would be considered “acting white” (Delpit, 1988). They would be giving in to an oppressive White society and accepting assimilation. Teachers can assist these students in understanding that in order to make changes in a society; they must have the skills to do so. In this cultural context students can affirm their identity and examine the way inequalities have been and continue to be fostered in the U.S. to empower themselves and address the issues of political and social justice (Delpit, 1988). The existence of democratic societies depends upon thoughtful citizens who believe in democratic ideals and are willing and able to participate in civic life (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, Stephan, 2005).
The idea of including cultural diversity training in pre-service teacher education programs started in the late 1960s and early 1970s (King, Hollins and Hayman, 1997). If we go back in history we find Wright (1965) explaining in her book what education means for diversity and how important it was for that decade. Wright (1965) mentions in her book that the curriculum at that time needed to be for every kid in the school and not just for those groups who had the power in the society. In her book Wright (1965) gives different recommendation in order to work and respond to the different student groups that teachers have in their classrooms. She said that the schools need to become relevant to all and kids need to find themselves in books and study materials. In 1975 Gay was also writing about the importance for new teachers to know how to work with ethnically different students. Delpit (1995) presented the case of a Native Alaskan teacher who told her that she only learned how to teach White kids, she learned nothing about teaching Native kids and she lived in Alaska. For me it sounds impossible that teachers there do not know how to teach their own kids, we are not even talking about kids who have a different cultural background.

In her article Gay (1975) explained that most middle class white teachers find it difficult to relate to and understand ethnically and culturally different children. One of the consequences of that is that the less one knows about another group’s life styles, the more likely he is to view members of that group negatively, and with apprehensions (Gay, 1975).
Research made at that time showed that teachers needed to have knowledge related with the different ethnic groups in the society, they needed to examine their attitudes towards ethnic, racial and cultural differences, and they needed new skills to translate their knowledge and sensitivities into their practices (King, Hollins and Hayman, 1997). Delpit (In Strouse, 2001) said that if we are to successfully educate all of our children, “we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism” (p.211). If teachers are to be successful at educating diverse children, they must not have those blinders in order to see and to know the students they must teach. Teachers need to reflect on their actions but most importantly they need to reflect on the past experiences that shaped who they are and after that they can see where they want to go in their future as teachers (Ford & Dillard, 1996).

Knowing that this topic has been posted for many years, a good question could be: why do we need to continue talking about the importance of integrating a student’s cultural background in education? Cherry A. MacGee Banks talking to Ladson-Billings (2005) mentioned how much the teacher education programs need to help students become more effective and capable in working with the full range of students in their classrooms. She said that was hard but she tried to help them to see themselves within a broader context of the world so that they would see the importance of the multicultural education. Dillard (1997) recommends
a program that is centered in the language and culture of diverse students. This framework encourages pre-service teachers to examine the moral, ethical, political, and educational issues embedded in their everyday thinking and practice as teachers.

Ladson-Billings (1998) explained that too many teachers in U.S. schools posses only a surface understanding of culture. In U.S. teachers tend to be mono-cultural, following textbooks and lessons guides that reflect middle-class, Euro-American ideology that diminish the voices and positive contributions of culturally diverse people (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Many teachers do not believe that student’s cultural background is important in their learning process and they are just looking for the academic achievement. Those teachers do not understand that the child is a holistic person who needs to see that he is important in education. He also needs to know that the classroom community will consider his culture. Nothing in our schools is going to change if the teacher does not believe that multicultural preparation is in fact important. Being prepared does not mean just having the multicultural course; it means believing that student’s culture is relevant in their school experiences. As Pang (2001) explained in her book: “cultural models in schools can make learning more meaningful because they tap into what children already know about the world and act as important scaffolding” (p. 32). Culturally relevant teachers know when to introduce relevant examples from their student’s background and experiences to make learning more meaningful (Ladson-
Ladson-Billings & Gomez (2001) conducted a study with teachers and one assumption that under-girds their work with the teachers is that one of the major causes of children's academic failure is the failure of teachers to teach them. They saw in their study how teachers compensate for their initial lack of success with poor children and children of color by literally ignoring them. By spending more of their time with the more successful students, teachers can convince themselves that those students who are failures are not really their responsibility. The failing students fail because their parents do not read to them or listen to them read or even care about their education.

It is important that kid's value diversity and valuing diversity for young children means constantly pointing out how interesting and how positive differences are (Klein & Chen, 2001). The school is a good place to learn that ethnic or racial background doesn’t determine people's relationships. Our work as teachers is to try to make the difference in the world where we live, a world where a lot of things depend on racial or ethnic background of the people. Teaching well, in this instance, means making sure that students achieve, develop a positive sense of themselves, and develop a commitment to larger social and community concerns (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Helping students become culturally competent is not an easy task; it requires that teachers themselves be aware of their own culture and its role in their lives. Teachers who are prepared to help students become culturally competent are themselves
culturally competent. They know enough about student’s cultural and
dividual life circumstances to be able to communicate well with them
(Ladson-Billings, 2001). They understand the need to study the students
because they believe there is something worth learning. They know that
“students who have the academic and cultural resources to succeed in
school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to
others; in a democracy, this commitment to the public good is paramount”
(Ladson-Billings, 2001).

We want our students to learn from other students’ cultural
backgrounds, and we also want them to use that knowledge to construct
relationships with their classmates. Those relationships among students
depend on the communication that they have in the classroom. Freeman
and Freeman (2001) gave many examples in their book about the lack of
communication that teachers observe in their multicultural classrooms.
They explain that different ethnic groups usually keep to themselves and
lack respect for one another when teachers work with assimilation instead
of working with intercultural orientation in their pedagogy. In their book
there is an example of a teacher who discovered how little her students
knew about other cultures and then how different was the social
interactions among students when they spend time talking about the
different cultures that they had in their classroom. Gay (2000) explained
in her book that the culture is one of the rules that defines the
communication because the culture is largely responsible for who we are.
After those conversations students had enough information about cultural differences and it was easier to start a relationship among them. The new knowledge that they construct gives them another perspective of the world around them and that is our position as teachers; to give students the opportunity to have the information and experiences that they are not able to have in another contexts. Our students construct their first knowledge related with races, cultural groups, and sometimes stereotypes in their houses and in their communities (Freeman & Freeman 2001). The school has the responsibility to give them other perspectives and other experiences so they can construct their own ideas about “differences” among people.

Summary

The literature that I reviewed gives the frame that is needed to understand the culturally relevant pedagogy and those theories and studies that underpin its consideration for theory and practice. A comprehensive review of the literature defines cultural relevant teaching as” a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995)

For the purposes of this study I will use the same thereoretical framework as Ladson-Billings, in her study of eight teachers (six African Americans and two European Americans) who were successful educators
of African-American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994). She identifies six tenets of culturally relevant teaching:

- "Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in classrooms" (p. 117).

- "Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way" (p. 117).

- "Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the 'official' curriculum" (p. 117).

- "Teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory" (p. 117).

- "Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo" (p. 118). Teachers do not accept the prevailing belief that their students will not do well. They have high expectations for their students and convey their belief to the students.

- "Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings" (p. 118).
These tenets can be grouped categorically as: academic achievement, cultural competence and social and political consciousness. In this study, I utilized this theoretical construct to explore a gap in the literature related to early childhood teaching. Particularly I sought to answer:

1. How do early childhood teachers embody in theory and practice the tenets of culturally relevant teaching?

2. How does an ethnic and racial lived experience influence those who are culturally relevant teachers?

In chapter three, I will outline the epistemological underpinnings and variety of methods used in data collection and promotes the attention given to validity of related data analysis in seeking to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to describe the methodology that I used to do the research. The chapter is divided in sections and sub-sections to help the reader understand the procedures that I follow to do the study and the analysis.

Locating myself in the research

In this study, I researched, analyzed and wrote from the perspective of the different voices that are part of my past experiences. Those voices represent who I am. For example, here in US I have experienced what being English as a second language student means. As a person whose first language is not English, I know how difficult it can be for a student to fit in a new environment where people speak a different language. As a researcher I know the challenges that students face is related not just to the academic achievement but also to their holistic development (Williams, 2001). Holistic in this sense refers to social, emotional, cognitive and physical development that are now going to take
place in a different “world.” The people who are with the English second
language students everyday are an important part of this new “world.”
Furthermore, students who speak another language and spend most of
their time in their schools need to feel safe and need to have support from
their teachers and their peers (Kobayashi 2003). In their book Ayers and
Ford (1996) present stories of diverse students’ experiences in the U.S.
schools. One of second language student their study stated the following.

“Okay, why don’t you sit here in the back of the class,” she said.
“Play with some blocks until we figure out how to get you more
involved.” “It took her most of that year to figure out how to work
with a child who did not speak English”, Luis Rodriguez.

Luis Rodriguez represents the reality of many second language learners in
the U.S. In my experiences in the classrooms that I visited as part of my
graduate teaching assistant position, I have seen the second language
learners sitting in the back of the classroom where no one works with
them. At the end of the year I have heard the teachers saying that those
students need to repeat the grade because they are not doing well
academically.

Puerto Rico is a territory of the United State and a country. Here, in
the contiguous U.S I am considered a person of color- Latina. In my
country, I am just a “Puertorriqueña”. As “a person of color I know how
students “who have different cultural backgrounds other than White-
European students feel every day of their lives. I know how they feel
when people treat them differently in stores, on the bus, and everywhere
they go. People just have to look at the color of the skin and that is
enough for them to treat people of color differently. Another example from Ayes and Ford (1996) is quoted here to show how students who have diverse background than White American feel.

“…People see only the outsider of me and never bother to find out what's inside…” Jermaine Savage, 9th grade.

As a researcher I can identify myself with the students of color that I worked with in both of the classrooms that were a part of my study.

Another important voice that should be added to the perspectives that I discuss as a researcher is that of the teacher’s voice. I conducted my research project in classrooms where I could interact, observe, and have dialogues with the teachers. As a teacher in Puerto Rico, I had the opportunity to work with different grade levels in the education system, and I had previous experiences with students who had different cultural backgrounds and spoke a different language than mine. Having those experiences as a teacher helped me relate with the teachers that I worked with. I know what it is to try to make a student feel comfortable in a new environment. I also know what it means to deal with a curriculum that is not open for changes, however, as a teacher, one must make some changes; otherwise, it would be meaningless for the students. As a teacher I know what it means to feel impotent and I also know what means to feel successful with the students. These experiences helped me have different lenses in my relationship with the teachers.
Research Questions

The questions that guided my inquiry were:

- How do early childhood teachers embody in theory and practice the tenets of culturally relevant teaching?
- How does an ethnic and racial lived experience influence those who are culturally relevant teachers?

My observations also give information regarding the culture of this classroom and I was able to answer the following questions:

- Why is each person’s culture important in the classroom?
- What is the relationship between culture and education?
- In what kinds of relations do kids engage in the classroom/school?
- How do the cultures affect the learning process?
- How are the social interactions among culturally diverse children?

As participant observer, in both classrooms I was able to note in naturalistic ways, the importance given to culture in classroom, the relationship between teacher’s and student’s cultures, and the social relationships of the children. These observational phenomenons as they related to the research questions will be distinguished in the data as my research field notes.
Access

Gaining entry

For this study, I filed for an exemption which was granted by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of The Ohio State University Research Foundation. Furthermore, I was required to submit a proposal that detailed the research questions and time of study from the schools’ principals. I also submitted the information letter and the consent for participation in the research (See Appendix A) signed by my advisor and me. The access was permitted and I started the study in November, 2005.

Proximity

The locations of the schools were important because I knew that I would have to negotiate my time between the university and the schools. As a result, along with accessibility, proximity was vitally important. I was looking for schools where I could drive in a short period of time, so that I could have the freedom to visit longer or stay for special activities regardless of the scheduled visitation date. Both schools met this criterion.

Site and participants

In this research project I was interested in working with culturally relevant teachers who teach a diverse group of students at the preschool and early elementary level. For this reason I did the study in two urban
schools where the student population is very diverse. The urban schools are located near a major university campus in a metropolitan area in a Mid-Western city in the United States.

**Preschool Classroom School**

The preschool classroom school ranges from pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade and accommodates 192 students. The composition of the school’s students is 85.7% African American, 10.5% White European, 0.8% Native American, 1.5% Asian Pacific Islander, 1.5% Hispanic. The percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged is 97% with a median household income of $52,000, the English language learners is 1.5% and the students with disabilities is 25.7% (http://www.columbus.k12).

The preschool group consists of 20 students (10 boys and 10 girls) from various socio-cultural backgrounds (see table 3.1 for a breakdown of ethnicities) under the age of four and five years old. Their daily routine starts at 9:00 A.M. and ended at 3:30 P.M. In the preschool classroom there is one Jewish American female teacher and two African American aides, one female and one male. The female aide works all day with the teacher and the male aide comes twice a day to help in the classroom. For the purpose of the study I am going to use pseudonyms, the teacher’s name is Mrs. Baez, the female aide Mrs. Lebron, and the male aide, Mr. Maldonado.
Table 3.1 Preschool class breakdown of ethnicities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinos/Mexican</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Grade Classroom School

The first grade classroom school where I conducted this study ranges from pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade and accommodates 286 students. The composition of the school students is 78.7% African American, 15.8% White European, 1.5% Asian Pacific Islander, 4.7% Hispanic. The percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged is 71.0% with a median household income of $51,194, the
English language learners is 7.7% and the students with disabilities is 15.3% (http://www.columbus.k12).

When I started my research in this classroom we had 26 kids. During the second semester of classes a new girl was enrolled, thus bringing the investigation total to 27 students (11 girls and 16 boys) all from various socio-cultural backgrounds (see table 3.2 for a breakdown of ethnicities). They started their day in school at 8:50 A.M. and finished at 3:30 P.M. For the purpose of this segment of the study I am going to name the teacher Mr. Aristides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>First grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinos/Mexican</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 First grade class breakdown of ethnicities
Two teachers were purposely selected for this inquiry rather than a large number. I was interested in conducting in-depth research and a larger number of teachers would have made it difficult. The teachers were selected through a process of nomination. The teachers were nominated by scholars and experts in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy who are doing research in this area. This study acknowledges its debt to Ladson-Billings’ (1994a) and Foster’s (1997) employment of a method of selection Foster called “community nomination.” This means that researchers rely on community members and community-sanctioned vehicles (for example, community newspapers and organizations) in order to judge people, places, and things within their own settings (Ladson-Billings, 1994a, p. 147). In Ladson-Billings (1994a) research the teachers with whom she worked with were nominated by African American parents who attended local Baptist churches. In essence, this means that people within the community sought nominations of effective teachers. The difference in my study was that the nomination came from scholars and experts in the area of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy who worked with the teachers that they nominated. The scholars are not part of the school community now but they worked with these teachers before and that make them part of the community at that moment. Their expertise was going to help me to find teachers who are more than good teachers, teachers who have the characteristics of culturally relevant
teachers. During the nomination process I discuss the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy with the scholars who participate in the nomination process; in that way I assure that we were talking about the same. My work as a researcher was to visit and observe the teachers that they had nominated. During my observations I used the teacher’s characteristics list that I introduced in chapter 2. After that process I chose the two teachers that I worked with in my study.

Participation Teachers

The first teacher, Mrs. Baez, is a female Jewish American preschool teacher who has been teaching for 38 years and more specifically in this classroom for 15 years. Mrs. Baez taught in a Jewish preschool for 12 years prior and she had experiences in administering other preschool schools. Mrs. Baez is married, has two children and five grandchildren. She earned a Baccalaureate in Science degree in grades K through eighth, a pre-k certification, and took many courses in early childhood and multicultural education from during graduate school. She is a "big hearted" teacher; she is friendly, caring and a loving mother to her students. Mrs. Baez is very patient with her students and also firm in a respectful way. She enjoys her teaching; she danced, read and played with the kids as if it were ‘yesterday’ as when she first started teaching.

The second teacher, Mr. Aristides, is a male African American, who has been teaching for six years in this school but has been teaching for a total of seven years. His first experience was in middle school and the last
six years in a first grade classroom. Educationally, Mr. Aristides has earned a Bachelor in Elementary Education, a Master degree in Integrating Teaching and Learning, and he is finishing his Doctoral of Philosophy degree in Integrating Teaching and Learning. Mr. Aristides is a very special teacher; he chooses to dress in a formal manner, wearing a tie to school everyday. He stands by his reason that his students deserve it. He sees himself as a role model for the African American students in the school and he said that he has to give a good example. Mr. Aristides is very passionate when it comes to multicultural teaching and social justice topics.

My interest in working with students with different cultural backgrounds responds to the purpose of the study. In the study I observed the social interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds. The schools, the teachers, and the group of students suited my purposes.

Timeframe of the research

In October 2005 after the exemption was granted by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of The Ohio State University Research, I started to identify the participants of the study. During that month I also submitted a proposal that detailed the research questions, time of study and the information letter to the schools’ principals. These procedures gave me the access to the schools and I started the data
collection on November 2005. The data collection and simultaneous
analysis continued through April 2006. During that time I did the
interviews and I transcribed those in order to do member checking with the
participants. The in-depth analysis was done during the month of March
and April 2006.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative Design

The research design in my project was qualitative. A brief definition
for that design can be: a researcher that seeks to make sense of personal
stories and the ways in which they interact via the use of the researcher
as an instrument to engage in an inductive process of dialogical and
contextual conversation(s) (Handouts Ed P&L 800, 2004). Basically,
qualitative researchers search to preserve and analyze the situated form,
content and experience of social action, rather than subject in to
mathematical or other formal transformations (Lindlof & Tylor, 2002).
Danzin and Lincoln (2003, p.4) offered this definition: “qualitative research
is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a
set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These
practices transform the world. This means that qualitative researchers
study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense, or
interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them”.

45
**Interpretive paradigm**

The design of the study is qualitative and the paradigm is the interpretive which aims to understand the social order that exist in a society, which is reconstructed by the members of that society (Schwandt in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). According to this paradigm, reality is socially constructed through interactions (Howe, 2004). An important part of my project was to see how the interactions among students were positively affected by the pedagogy that the teacher used in the classroom. The multiple perspectives were important ingredients of this paradigm, by means of perspectives one might comprehend the reality of another society (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The nature of knowledge is to understand and analyze processes, language and culture; is to understand what is happening in a given situation and to recognize that this is standpoint dependant (Handouts Ed P&L 800, 2004). The observations, interactions and documentation in a classroom where the teacher works with culturally relevant pedagogy are going to facilitate the understanding of that pedagogy. The investigation pretends to document how teachers can utilize culturally relevant pedagogy regardless of their different cultural backgrounds. The study provided information about a pedagogy that took into consideration the student’s culture and used that information to empower students in their holistic development.
Case Study Methodology

This research encompassed two single case studies. The case study has proven to be in complete harmony with the three key words that characterize any qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993). Such a study is best able to describe and understand the case under investigation. Zonabend (1992, in Tellis, 1997) stated that “case study is done by giving special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under study. Case study is done in a way that incorporates the views of the "actors" in the case under study” (p. 3).

Schwandt (1997) posited that “…a case study strategy is preferred when the inquirer seeks answers to how and why questions” (p.13). Considering the “how” and “why” categories of this research, the case study is most appropriate for the question as posed previously. The case study draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from a single case. This method is systematic, and it stresses specific, unique, restricted methods of inquiry rather than generalities drawn from the researcher’s interpretation (Stake, 1994). Case research inquiries are concerned about what is common and what is particularistic in a study, yet the end result regularly presents something unique (Stouffer, 1941). Such uniqueness is persistent with the nature of the case, its historical background, the physical setting, and other contexts, including economic,
political, legal, and aesthetic or visual categories dimensions inherent in ethnography (Stake, 1994).

There are several examples of the use of case study methodology in the literature. Yin (1993) listed several examples along with the appropriate research design in each case: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies. In exploratory case studies, “fieldwork and data collection may be undertaken prior to definition of the research questions and hypotheses. This type of study has been considered as a prelude to some social research” Yin (1993). Explanatory cases “are suitable for doing causal studies. In very complex and multivariate cases, the analysis can make use of pattern-matching techniques” Yin (1993). Descriptive cases “require that the investigator begin with a descriptive theory, or face the possibility that problems will occur during the project. The descriptive theory must cover the depth and scope of the case under study. The selection of cases and the unit of analysis is developed in the same manner as the other types of case studies. The case studies that I conducted are descriptive.

Stake (1994) further outlined other types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study stems from the researcher’s interest in a particular topic and his or her desire to understand and interpret that phenomenon. It is not necessarily undertaken because it can be linked to other theory. In other words, this inquiry does not have to develop from other theoretical foundations.
Further, intrinsic cases are not representative of other cases, and they do not illustrate distinct traits or problems. Instead, they are cases that might represent hunches or premonitions that derive from the researcher’s personal interests, experiences, and research agendas.

Unlike the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study is concerned with a particular case and is conducted to provide insight into an issue or refinement of a theory. Moreover, the instrumental case study “plays a supportive role, facilitating understanding of something else” (Stake, 1994; p.237). Finally, the collective case study is an instrumental case extended to several cases. In other words, the collective case study focuses on several collectively investigated cases with the goal that individual cases will lead to greater knowledge about a larger collection of cases on similar topics (Stake, 1994). This research employed tenets of the instrumental case, as it was build on previous literature on culturally relevant pedagogy. It also employed tenets of the collective cases, as it investigated two different cases—a collective case dimension.

*Instrumentations*

Two types of data collection were used in this study: (a) participant observations-field notes, and (b) interviewing. The goal of observations was to develop understanding of the phenomenon one is studying. Thus the researcher must invest sufficient time to adequately develop an understanding of what is happening in the situation she/he is studying.
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The participant observations method has been defined as “observations carried out when the researcher is playing an established participant role in the scene studied” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248). Attempting to observe these teachers in a participatory manner, Glesne and Peshkin (1992 p.42) explain it as vital “to understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior” and to establish the researcher’s participation early. The term “participant” in this study referred to the researcher’s involvement in the routines of classroom life. These routines were consistent with both student and teacher activities. Because I wanted to be a participant observer in the preschool classroom I decided to be there two mornings every week. I chose the mornings because during the afternoon the children spent two hours getting ready to sleep, sleeping, getting up and having the afternoon snack. During my visits I participated and was simultaneously observed for my research. I spent most of those mornings observing and writing field notes and also talking, interacting, reading, sharing, and working with individuals and groups. For example, this participation included me helping in the cafeteria during breakfast time, playing with the children in the areas, helping during the different routines and helping students with their projects. I also participated and translated during the parent’s conferences. I shared my culture with the students through a presentation I did about Puerto Rico. In the first grade classroom my participation was different because its was a much more formal environment. I visited the
classroom two days a week in the afternoons because in this particular school, they offer the LACES (writing and reading) program and the teachers have different groups for two hours. In the first grade classroom I also participated, observed and write field notes, and sometimes became a tutor for the ESL students in the classroom. I also assisted the teacher by monitoring students during any given task, and I participated in the 100 day’s in school activity. As in the preschool classroom I did a presentation about Puerto Rico and the conversation about my culture continued throughout the semester.

In participant observation, the researcher’s awareness of self is important because it affects observational interpretation. Patton (1990) reminds us that the researcher is the main instrument for data collection in participant observation. Clearly, the researcher becomes the mechanic and the main arbiter of data collection through participant observation, an important duty of the research that must be recognized and understood.

In this study, I took the time to observe classroom life. In this sense, observation consisted of me taking field notes on issues relating to the routines of each teacher and the class’ routines, and noting occurrences that related to the research questions. When the teacher was leading the routine I sat to the side to watch and hand write field notes.

The other primary technique I used was interviewing. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explained, interviewing is one of the most common and
powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings. The interview is a very popular method of data collection, and is used extensively by qualitative researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Hence, interviewing becomes both the tool and the object, the art of socialization, an encounter in which both parties learn from the experience. Seidman (1998) asserted that the interview involves a combination of life history and informed assumptions. He also suggested that the interviewer seek answer to open-ended questions so that the participants might reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study with little interruption from the researcher.

There are two main ways to conduct an interview: structured and unstructured. In the structured interviews, “the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of pre-established questions...there is very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered” (Fontana & Frey in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 649). Also with structured interviews, all respondents get the same questions in a predetermined manner. In this type of interview, the interviewer is in complete control but at the same time has little flexibility to focus on something interesting that a respondent may said. In an unstructured interview, the goal is to understand the “complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorizations that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey in Denzin and Lincoln 2000). In the unstructured interviews, the interviewer has some general topics that he/she wants to know about, but the
interviewer does not use open-ended questions or a formal approach to interviewing. The interviewer can engage in a conversation and sometimes there is not a set plan (Fontana & Frey in Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The interviews that I conducted were a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. The reason for that is because during certain points of the interview I needed some specific information from the teacher and I needed to use closed-ended questions while at other times I preferred to have a more open conversation with the teacher guided by open-ended questions. Two formal interviews were conducted individually with each participant (I said formal because we had several informal conversations almost every time I visited the classrooms and we debriefed my observations). The information that I gathered during those informal conversations is part of the field notes that I wrote during or after the observations. The interviews were usually conducted during lunch time or at the end of the day. The first interview with both teachers was more about their background in their professional development, and the second was more related with the cultural relevant teaching (Appendix B provides the interviews protocol). Of course, other questions often developed throughout the interviews. In addition, the interviews were audio tape and transcribed.
Data analysis

Data analysis can be described as a process; one that involves an ongoing, continuing engagement that begins at the moment the first data is collected (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Embracing this process, I personally transcribed the interviews tapes to continuously immerse myself in the data. This assisted me in the formulation of new interview questions. Coding was used in this study to help analyze and interpret the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Consequently, a codebook was developed. In Richards and Richards' (1994) word coding consists of “labeling passages of the data according to what they are about or other content of interest in them (coding or index), then providing a way of collecting identically labeled passages (retrieving)” (p.446). Coding forces the research to make judgments about the meaning of contiguous blocks of texts (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

The data was presented in a descriptive comparative case format, adopting a narrative style that revealed the teacher's perception and experiences (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). These narratives not only presented the data of the participants but also provided my voice to distinguish my views from the participants.

Trustworthiness

Researchers can not escape the influence of latent a priori theories or assumptions about their investigations. As the primary data collection
and analysis instrument, what the researcher sees emerging from the data is a result of his/her own interpretive lens. Consequently, the researcher employs certain operational techniques to establish the trustworthiness of the investigation. In this investigation, trustworthiness was established through persistent observation, member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

**Persistent Observation**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), persistent observation is necessary to add depth to the scope which prolonged engagements afford. Additionally, they state that persistent observation entails, "sufficient observation to enable the evaluator to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and [to focus] on them in detail" (p.304). In order for me to become immersed in the culture of each classroom and become part of the classroom community, I dedicated approximately eight hours weekly to classroom observation during the five-month data collection period.

**Member checking**

Member checking involves placing the research respondents in the role of confirming or negates the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The case report is the investigator’s reconstruction of the informant’s experienced reality, and its accuracy must be verified by the informants. The member checking
provides the respondent an opportunity to give an assessment of the data. The researcher need “to find a way to allow for the participants to review the material” to reduce ambiguity and misleading assumptions made by the researcher (Janesick, 1994, p.216). Member checks attempt to bring the voices of the participants into the research process. I employed both formal and informal member checks in order to clarify, confirm, and disconfirm meanings from my data. In this study, participants in the collective case study reviewed the interview’s transcriptions and other relevant data. Informal member checks with the participating teachers were done during my visits.

Peer Debriefing

The Peer Debriefing “is the process where the researcher exposes himself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer’s mind” (Handouts Ed P&L 800, 2004). Peer debriefers raise questions about methodology and design; they ask for clarification of, or in some cases, challenge the interpretations being made. They ask a variety of questions which probe the biases of the investigator. Peer debriefing sessions allow the researcher the opportunity to test tentative hypotheses that emerge from the data and receive advice on methodological “next steps” in the research design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.283). One of the major purposes is to help keep researchers honest in the process of interpreting
the data. For this study, I debriefed with a fellow doctoral student in education at The Ohio State University and with a friend of mine. Over the course of the study, we continuously debriefed about the research design, data collection, and data analysis.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is meant to be a heuristic tool for the researcher and is not limited to three types of methods or perspectives in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Rather, triangulation represents the usage of multiple sources of collecting data in order to achieve and substantiate findings Denzin (1978). Analytic interpretations are cross-examined in light of all data sources, which in this study included classroom observations, interviews, audio recording, written products and collective case study.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have situated my self epistemologically as researcher in this study. I have also described the research paradigm-interpretivist, which underpins the methodological moves that I used from data collection to data analysis.

Additionally I described the site, participants and attention given to validity for the interpretation of all data sources.

Next, in chapters four and five I will present each teacher participant’s descriptive case study.
CHAPTER 4

MRS. BAEZ: A CASE STUDY

I guide them in the classroom; I am their friend;
I am their teacher and sometimes I feel like I am a Mother to them.
-Mrs. Baez

Presenting… Mrs. Baez

Mrs. Baez is a teacher with 38 years of early childhood experience. She is Jewish-American, married, has two children and five grandchildren of whom she is very proud. She loves to travel, read and care for her “little treasures” (her grandchildren) whenever asked to do so. Mrs. Baez is very special and an excellent co-worker. Her instructional aides are happy to work with her. She very proudly opened the doors to her classroom so that could conduct my observations without reservations.

Mrs. Baez has a Bachelor’s Degree in Science K-8, a Pre-K certification and many courses beyond her degree and certification in graduate Early Childhood and Multicultural Education. She attends courses offered at the University near her job.

Mrs. Baez has dedicated herself to teaching. She has been a preschool teacher for the past 15 years, in the preschool where this study took place. Previously, Mrs. Baez was a preschool teacher at a Jewish
American Center. She has also been a Preschool Center Director at the University nearby. She is described by others as loving, understanding, patient, and dedicated, always considering each child’s home experiences as foundational to children’s early learning. After many years of teaching and learning experiences, Mrs. Baez plans to retire the end of this academic year.

Mrs. Baez’s Classroom

Mrs. Baez’s classroom is very welcoming and inviting. Like most preschool classrooms, it is colorful. The room is full of supplies, posters, photographs, and displays of children’s work and a large collection of children’s literature. The room is divided into the following center areas: Reading, Computers, Science, Dramatic Play, Sand/Water, Audio Center, Blocks, Writing, Table Toys/Manipulative, and Active Play. The large carpet and the rocking chair indicate the designated circle time area. The children do activities, eat snacks, play with table toys and manipulative at the four tables located throughout the classroom. One of the tables is small and red. It is weathered and old. Mrs. Baez has designated it as the “special table.” The table was very popular with the students; everyone wanted to sit there. Every week she assigns four different children to sit at this table to resolve conflicts that would arise.

In another corner of the room is the teacher’s desk, where she hardly ever sits because she is very active throughout the classroom with
the children. Mrs. Lebron, one of the aides, is usually in the writing area where she gives each child individual time with writing assignments or any other tasks that involve coloring, identifying and other assignments. Mrs. Lebron and Mr. Maldonado (the other classroom aide) are African American. They are full time instructional aides assisting Mrs. Baez during routine activity time and to preparing the children for rest time. Both aides accompany the children to lunch and recess.

The décor in the classroom is multicultural. Mrs. Baez has many posters depicting several families of various cultures and of children of diverse cultures playing together. There is a display of the self-portraits that each child has created. The objective of this project was to give the children a sense of self and identity within the classroom environment. They used their skin tone colors for the faces, different materials to demonstrate hair texture, and crayons that complimented their eye color. I will go into further detail about this project a little later and how it helped integrate the culture of each child in this learning environment.

The classroom demographics are:

- 20 children (10 boys and 10 girls)
- 12 African American
- 3 European American
- 2 Korean
- 3 Hispanics
The schedule in the preschool is hanging in the entrance of the classroom and is as follows:

9:00-9:30  Table Games
9:30-10:00 Review chores for the week and go to the bathroom
10:00-10:30 Circle Time (community social time)
10:30-11:00 Learning centers (sign the first 15 minutes)
11:00-11:15 clean up
11:15-11:45 Small group talk or activities

Monday or Thursday-Gym/Tuesday- Library/Friday- Special activities and visitors

11:45  Recess
12:15  Lunch
12:50-1:30 Circle Time
1:30-2:30 Bathroom/nap
2:30  Bathroom/snack
3:00-3:30 Circle time

Mrs. Baez’s Philosophy of Teaching

During the structured interviews with Mrs. Baez, we spoke about her teaching philosophy and what she believes is her role as a teacher. Mrs. Baez always emphasized the growth process she’s had and continues to have as a teacher. Her experiences prior to coming to this preschool were based on one culture. She says that although there are
differences in each human being; it’s evident that working with cultures, ethnic groups and languages that are different is more challenging. She self identifies her previous teaching experiences as monocultural, with mostly European American, middle class children. She wanted a more challenging career, so she decided to enter the preschool programs within the public school system in the city where she lives.

“When they called me, I didn’t even know where the school was. This area was a very bad area at that time; I mean there were prostitutes in the streets; that is how I got here….”

Mrs. Baez told me that even though it was scary at first, she was determined to learn and never once considered leaving the school system even though she had given herself a 5-year time frame. Mrs. Baez continued in her classroom because she wanted to be there; she loves what she does and feels comfortable working with a diverse population. She devoted herself to the demographics of the public school population and immediately enrolled herself at the university to take courses on multicultural education. She credits this as enabling her to do a good job and give the children quality education.

In describing her education philosophy and role as a teacher, she says she is a teacher that seeks to learn all of the time and loves the challenge. Mrs. Baez began to teach at this school approximately 15 years ago. Prior to this experience Mrs. Baez worked in a Jewish American preschool and later worked as a director of a preschool center.
Neither of these two experiences put her in contact with diverse populations. Mrs. Baez stated,

“I had to learn everything about the African American culture, their language, the way they love to dance, their music and their history…My own school life experience was that black children had their own schools. This was before Martin Luther King, so I never…even in my college, the college was a very White middle class college. This experience was new for me and it had been a learning experience for me. In the meantime I was taking classes; multicultural classes related with the literature that I could use like themes and ideas, things to bring to kids to introduce them to different cultures, but it didn’t come naturally. That’s what I want to say, I had to take many courses, I had to read, and I had to find out what to do”.

Mrs. Baez did not start off with the knowledge that she needed to provide the best environment for her students but she concerned herself with learning.

During our structured interview, she expressed that her job at the Jewish American preschool was no longer a challenge for her. For this reason she decided to find a learning environment that was more challenging and from which she could learn.

“I was raised in an upper class school and I was looking for a challenge, something different, a change. I wanted to grow as a person because I was placed where everything was the same old routine. When I interviewed, I told them that I was looking for something for five years not for fifteen. But I learned so much through professional development classes that I grew”.

It was not enough for her to only obtain a Bachelor’s Degree; she sought additional help to become a good teacher. Mrs. Baez admits when she doesn’t know something and when she needs to learn it to do a better job. Mrs. Baez’s is a reflective teacher. She (re) thinks her methods although
she has been teaching for many years. I observed her pondering out loud
with Mrs. Lebron about the different activities. I noted this during one of
my observations:

I noticed this today, however this is the 3rd time Mrs. Baez has
asked for my feedback about an activity that she carried out with
the children. It is incredible that a teacher with so many years in
the field would still think about how she does things and it is not
beneath her to ask for someone else’s opinion. She tells me that if
she has a PhD student in her classroom, she has to ask me
because I’m the expert. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez’s teaching strategies and her philosophies are very
closely related. Mrs. Baez and the instructional aides plan and execute
activities that have a positive impact on the development of the children.
The activities are geared toward allowing the child to explore, problem
solve, socialize, stimulate their physical development and know and
express their feelings. The representation of language in all its forms is
also evident in Mrs. Baez planning. An example of this is the consistent
use of children’s books, songs, poems and writings in various forms.

An important aspect culturally relevant teaching with a view to
academic achievement is that she individualizes her teaching and is not
blinded by stereotypes. She tries to find out the real reason behind why a
child cannot accomplish a task instead of jumping to conclusions. Once
she knows the reason she will give that child one-on-one attention.

One example of this is the case of Maria, a Mexican girl that
started out the semester and did not speak in the classroom. Mrs. Baez
knew that English is her second language and it worried her that Maria
would not even attempt to speak, not even to the other Mexican girls in the class. When I went to visit the classroom to gain access for my observations, she told me that she was going to give me “confidential” information because she needed help with one of her Mexican students and proceeded to tell me about Maria’s situation to see if I could help. The first thing I tried was to speak with Maria, but she did not respond verbally; she would only nod her head yes or no. I then asked the other two Mexican girls if she socialized with them. The girls said that although she played with them, she never spoke. I thought maybe she was experiencing “culture or language shock,” but I asked Mrs. Baez to look in the files to see if we could find something. We found that Maria was premature; her birth weight was recorded as 1 pound. Maria also had some medical concerns. At birth, she had heart surgery.

We scheduled a meeting with Maria’s parents and they informed us that she had no difficulties expressing herself in Spanish. Mrs. Baez invited me to assist with this situation. I assured that Maria’s school was a safe environment and that she would learn to speak English gradually, and they should not worry. We also gave Maria the opportunity to communicate through one of the Mexicans girls that spoke English fluently. Maria’s demeanor changed totally. She began to speak, socialize and learn English.
Today she receives one-on-one sessions to help her with the language. She is speaking more English and her social skills have developed in a positive way.

I bring this up because Mrs. Baez did a variety of things that represent her beliefs as a culturally relevant teacher. First, she gave Maria time and observed what was happening instead of using assumptions to make decisions. She then sought out the help from someone of Maria’s ethnicity, in case it was a culturally related. She consented to meet with the family and is now giving Maria individualized attention to help her reach her academic potential.

Mrs. Baez individualizes not just to help her students in their academic achievement but also in other areas of their development. For example:

Today Mrs. Baez is talking to Anthony again about appropriate behavior. He was pushing another girl in the line to go to lunch. This morning he also disrupt during circle time – he was talking and bothering other children. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez has several students going through very delicate situations at home. She knows this because of the relationship she maintains with her student's families. In Anthony's case Mrs. Baez knows older siblings (ages 15-17) are basically raising him because their mother works two jobs to support them. The older siblings aren't teaching Anthony manners or how to behave appropriately. Whenever Anthony behaves inappropriately, Mrs. Baez will speak to him instead of punishing, suspending or withholding recess from him. In this case Mrs. Baez is
helping Anthony with his behavior and with his social interactions in the school.

There is also another student in the classroom that requires special attention:

Once again, today Mrs. Baez is reading Albert a story while he is sitting on her lap. Mrs. Baez is very caring, but knowing how much Albert would rather be playing, I think that something else must be going since I noticed in my last few visits he has been sitting on her lap. (Researcher field notes)

Something was going on with Albert. He has a great need for affection and will misbehave to get attention. Mrs. Baez will prevent his negative behavior by reading to him on her lap while rocking in the chair. Albert’s grandmother is his guardian and caregiver while his mother is incarcerated. She was released not long ago and decided to take Albert to live with her, when the only mother he “knew” was his grandmother. He knew who his mother was but never lived with her, and now it is difficult for him to establish an affectionate relationship with someone he barely knows. Albert needs help with his emotional development and Mrs. Baez is helping him giving him love and affection.

Respect and appreciation for everyone’s culture

When I came to this school (urban school) I didn’t have any experience
Working with a diverse population, I had to learn
-Mrs. Baez
In this section I will expand on the value that culture has in Mrs. Baez’s classroom. I will also outline Mrs. Baez’s teaching techniques and how her desire to learn resulted in that the culture of the students became the basis of her teaching methods.

If you look around Mrs. Baez’s classroom you can perceive that she is a multicultural teacher. She commented on the multicultural literature classes that she has taken and you notice in her reading area that she has a variety of books. She showed me a bookshelf with many other books that she uses to maintain an interesting reading area for the children. When I observed the reading area I noticed there were many books of various subjects and there are books for everyone in this classroom.

The reading area is interesting and cozy. You climb the stairs you find a bookshelf and bean bag chairs where the children sit and read. There are a variety of books about different subjects and cultural matters. (Researcher field notes)

Just like the books in Mrs. Baez’s classroom, we find a variety of games and supplies that compliment different cultures. In the dramatic play area there are dress up clothes from other countries and different cultures. In the block area, there are shapes and stencils of other countries, and many of the activities that take place in the classroom are geared toward identifying the children with other cultures, languages, and ethnic groups.

As I mentioned before, Mrs. Baez did an activity with the children where they did self-portraits with different supplies. The various supplies helped the children feel more unique and experience true self-
identification. The portraits are all different yet similar in many ways. This is what Mrs. Baez mentioned in one of the interview about this project.

“I try to bring in books, pictures and things that they themselves can relate to as well as relate to their culture. One of my projects is making their faces and we talk about skin color, differences, and things that are alike”.

During the day Mrs. Baez finds time to dance and sing and it is unbelievable to see how much the children enjoy themselves. She brings different types of music to the classroom that is appealing to every ear and she always dances and sings with the children. In one of my observations, she brought in rap music, to review some of the skills that the children were learning and this is what I wrote that day:

Mrs. Baez is dancing the rap music with the children’s and I don’t know who is enjoying it more - her or the children. They are dancing, smiling and singing. The song is about the skills they have learned and they are repeating the words. The two Korean children are not participating as much. (Researcher field notes)

The day of this observation the children are incredibly happy - smiling, dancing and repeating the words that they were practicing. Even though the Korean children are somewhat distracted – they are not singing and appear to be just repeating the words. However, there are times when their culture is acknowledged in the classroom and they are more inclined to participate.

During circle time Mrs. Baez or Mrs. Lebron always read a story to the students. Today Mrs. Baez is reading a story about a Korean Family and the story took place in Korea. One of the Korean kids recognizes the structure of the buildings because she had been there. Both Korean students are making comments about the story. (Researcher field notes)
Another activity related to music and that is quite multicultural is when Mrs. Baez and Mrs. Lebron teach the children nursery rhymes. Each of them, Mrs. Baez and Mrs. Lebron, select nursery rhymes that relate to their own cultures and they teach the children how to use the songs during recess to play.

After recess the children walk in to the classroom talking about the new nursery rhymes that Mrs. Lebron taught them. They show to Mrs. Baez and me how to play a game while they sing the song. (Researcher field notes)

I had the experience of being part of cultural exchange when Mrs. Baez asked me to speak to the children about Puerto Rico. I decided to share with them laminates, photos, music, knickknacks and food. It was all a “fiesta” Puerto Rican style, and the children enjoyed the activities – they pay attention to the information, they dance with me and they ate the food that I brought. The Mexican girls looked as if they were pleased and felt important since I started sharing the similarities that exist between their culture and mine.

I am never going to forget the face of the three Mexican girls when I started my presentation. They smile and look around, like saying “she is talking about us”. When I asked “who else speak Spanish here” they all raise their hands smiling. (Researcher field notes)

In this way the students were able to compare the information I gave them to their experiences with the Mexican girls. This has not been the only presentation that the children had. Mrs. Lebron had talked about Africa and their African roots and the children learned a great deal. Other activities that I observed were: a unit on African American activists, a
presentation of musical instruments from different countries – Mrs. Baez brought instruments from the countries that were represented in the classroom demographics- and stories from different countries read during story time.

When Mrs. Baez and I spoke about multicultural activities and the different resources that the children have in the classroom to identify themselves, we spoke of all the ethnic groups that she has currently in the classroom and the ones she has had in the past.

“This year I have Latinos, Koreans, African Americans and White Europeans students, but before I had children from Somalia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other places in Africa”.

Mrs. Baez referred “sharing times” with children from different parts of the world as positive experiences for the entire learning community in her classroom. In this conversation I asked her how these experiences affected the White European children because generally the literature related to the culturally relevant pedagogy is geared toward a People of Color. Mrs. Baez said:

“If I didn’t have any culturally diverse children in my classroom, I would still be doing these types of activities because everyone is different and children need to learn about differences”.

In one of the interview when I talked to Mrs. Baez about the importance of her students’ culture, she mentioned the family as an important piece in this sense. Mrs. Baez respects the parents as the children’s primary educators and is always available to advise them when they need it without imposing herself as a power figure. When Mrs.
Lebron participated in an interview, she not only revealed the positive relationship Mrs. Baez has with the parents, but also the manner in which she speaks about family in the classroom.

“She talks about the families; different families, single families, grand-parents families, foster cares, and we talk about extended families because it is very common in some cultural groups like African American”.

Mrs. Baez had fully immersed herself in the community culture to fully know it. She has not isolated nor tried to change the children. She explained to me how she is very careful because she would never want to give the children the impression that “what they learn at home is incorrect.” on the other hand she explains to them that she is going to teach them another way of saying or doing things. Mrs. Baez’s believes that knowing the family is part of being cultural competent. She visits each student’s home before they come to her classroom. This way she gets to meet the families and see the surroundings in which they live.

“When I am teaching, I use examples from their neighborhoods, the stores, the parks, and the environments that they know and they get very excited. I want my students to know that their culture is important to me. Their community is part of who they are”.

Another example of how Mrs. Baez considers and respects her students’ culture is finding resources within the community to maintain communication with parents whose first language is not English. This year for example, Mrs. Baez asked me to assist her during parent teacher conferences for the Mexican families to act as a translator. This is something that she had been doing for years, for example Mrs. Lebron is
married with an African person and he helped Mrs. Baez before with African students from Ghana. The parents' conferences experience taught me a great deal, it was enriching and the parents felt very comfortable with the translation process because they could express themselves freely.

*Community of Learners*

We are one class, we are one group
We are friends, we are a community
-Mrs. Baez

In this section I will discuss the learning environment that every member of Mrs. Baez’s preschool class experiences. My experience in this room not only allowed me to observe, but to feel human warmth, respect, and sense of companionship that exists in this community. The first observation I made regarding the sense of community was the welcome I received in the classroom. Teacher and children alike embraced me and taught me how to be part of their community. As soon as Mrs. Baez shared the schedule with me, she explained that in her room they have more than one ‘circle time’ throughout the day. It is important to her that the children understand that a community can exist within the class just as it does in other communities in which they belong such as in the neighborhoods where they reside. My first day I could see how the schedule evolved and I was surprised to see the fellowship that exists
among the children. My observation started in the cafeteria during breakfast:

The children helped each other as they unwrapped their food package. Then they exchange food that they like or not like. While they are eating they talk about different things. After finishing eating they helped the teachers to clean the tables. Once in the classroom they resume their normal routine without any inconveniences or interruptions for it is always the same. (Researcher field notes)

Various characteristics of a community can be seen in this classroom, for example, negotiations. On Monday mornings the children assign tasks they will perform for the week such as line leader, teacher’s helper, soap carrier, etc. During this process Mrs. Baez always verifies that the children have an opportunity to perform different tasks each week and when the chores become repetitive the members of the community negotiate the exchange of tasks without any difficulty. Another instance that caused me to make note is the process in which the children clean up after playing in a specific area. This is what I noted on the first day:

As soon as the clean up bell rang, the children stopped playing and started cleaning up. When they are done in their area they look around to see if any of their peers need help and they will go and help them. They all seem to work like ants and the teachers also. (Researcher field notes)

This observation was consistent because this act never changed during the months that I was in this classroom. In her role as a teacher Mrs. Baez constantly reminded the children what their responsibilities were to maintain the community atmosphere in the classroom. In times of clean up, lining up, sharing supplies and space and when a child is in front of the
group Mrs. Baez would remind them of the privileged it is to be part of their community. When I was talking to Mrs. Baez about the classroom community Mrs. Lebron (assistant) mentioned that Mrs. Baez definition of community goes beyond the classroom community. The students' community is part of the classroom community.

“My experience with Mrs. Baez is that she doesn’t just care about the child; she cares about the whole environment where that child is, like the house. If there is something that she can do to help the parents she will do it. Mrs. Baez builds a sense of community; she wants students to be good citizens, to be part of their community. Parents are part of the community that she builds; they come here for advice even when their kids are already in other grades. She went to the baptism of Maria (a Latina girl). She was in a culture where everybody was Latino and she was immersed in a culture where everybody spoke Spanish and she was the outsider. I don’t know if there are many teachers or people who were going to go on their day off to be part of something related with their students. And I don’t know if there are going to be many parents who are going to ask the teachers unless they felt that they were part of the family”.

The desire that the parents be an integral part of the classroom community comes from Mrs. Baez’s caring nature for that community and for her students. Just as Mrs. Lebron said, Mrs. Baez cares much more for the children that what is actually expected of her. In one of the interviews Mrs. Baez told me:

“I had been in many birthdays parties, when babies are born; you know I get a little gift or something. I do home visits, we have the spaghetti diner here every year. I have the spaghetti dinner every Day and all the children performance in the stage, parents come and many of them come with their siblings that I had. I cook the spaghetti and we have a big party here”.
Another essential element of this classroom is the cultural respect that exists in this classroom. The acceptance they receive from their teacher is in turn the acceptance they give to their peers. This is what an African American girl said to me when she heard me speaking in Spanish to one of the Hispanic girls: “There are two other girls that speak Spanish; I will get them so you can talk to them too”. During one of our informal chats, Mrs. Baez commented that she allows the children to speak in their native languages and play together, but also encourages them to interact socially with all the children regardless of their ethnicity. The children value this trust and space and in this scenario, they are permitted to learn beyond society’s “norm.” For example, if there are two students playing and speaking their native language and an English-speaking child joins the game, they must switch languages. In my observations, I took the following notes:

Carmen was playing and speaking with me, when Mrs. Baez approached us and asked what we were playing. Immediately Carmen switched languages and started speaking to me in English. Later she did the same when speaking with Maria and Sarah joined in to play with them. (Researcher field notes)

Recalling a comment Mrs. Baez had made about the children relating to one another, she said the first 15 minutes of the schedule are allotted to the children playing in areas assigned by her. She makes certain that children spend time in different areas during the week and that they associate with children of different cultures, genders, language and ethnic groups. She has a list of the children’s names and assigned them
into very diverse groups according to the criteria mentioned earlier. It is interesting to say that during my visits, I never saw any of the children feel disappointed because they were assigned to a particular group. The children always look forward to see who is going to be a part of their group and immediately engage into play. Another way Mrs. Baez promotes a sense of community is through the equal opportunity/fairness that exists in this preschool. The children are free to choose where they would like to sit.

One day, when I arrived, the children could not wait to tell me about the red table. This little red table fits four children and is located in the dramatic play area, but it is also used when the children must be seated. Apparently, the week before an incident had transpired in which two children were fighting over the same chair. That day, I found that new rules had been established for sitting at the little red table. This is what the children told me:

Today the children told me about what happened with the little red table. They showed me the beautiful flowers that are on the table and explained that weekly Mrs. Lebron is going to assign four children to sit there and that you must be on good behavior to be assigned to it. Later Mrs. Lebron went into details about the incident and did clarify that all the children will be assigned but that it was a good incentive to promote good behavior. (Researcher field notes)

Likewise, there are many examples for the computer, areas, work assignments and accessibility to the teachers. I want to reiterate that this equality provides room for the individual needs the children may have in different areas. The teachers are constantly observing and documenting
in order to provide individual connection. Mrs. Lebron spends a lot of time with reading and math, individually with each child. The times dedicated to each one is based on the need of the child. Another way Mrs. Baez spends personal time with a child is when she teaches the children who speak English as a second language, new English vocabulary words. In my notes, I described how Mrs. Baez played a game with the Mexican girls and used this scenario to present new vocabulary words.

Esther was playing in the dramatic play area when her teacher joined her in play. Esther welcomed her and that day she learned the English words for some vegetables and foods. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez Socio political Commitment

It was during one of those reflective moments that we spoke on the subject of politics within the education system. We spoke about how the system confines a teacher to the point that it doesn’t leave room for growth or self-evaluation. They have to do exactly as the system dictates. Still Mrs. Baez said:

“I think that this has to come from the person. I think that the government gives guidelines, states standards and then they are just playing at standards. They are not too involved in the multicultural education; that is my opinion. It has to come from within the teacher and if the teacher is going to extend themselves to that. I recognize that the system just wants to be in control. There is a lack of support; LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) is a good example of that… they tell them exactly what they are going to say, exactly what to do, and teachers do not have any space”.
Mrs. Lebron was part of our conversation and she mention:

“I think that the system just leaves that part out, when I was in school I was very close to some teachers, with those who make the extra effort, but now there are so many restrictions, so many regulations, they have to do this and that by certain day, they (system) don’t give them a chance of doing what they must be doing in the field. The love, the creativity, you do not have time to do that”.

Mrs. Baez is very clear on her role as a teacher. She has a responsibility, and even if the system does not support her in some areas, she will find the most beneficial way for her students. “There is a lack of support in the system. I think that is why people and young teachers get very discourages”. It is because of the control” mention Mrs. Baez. Even though it is a delicate subject, she speaks of her perspective as a teacher and she told me that in her school many things have changed. An example of this is that in the past the school would celebrate Black History Month, now it does not.

“Overall, now in the new system they have eliminated practically all social studies at the elementary level and have placed a major emphasis on language and mathematics”.

Mrs. Baez socio political commitment is not an option; she feels an obligation to be a culturally competent and aware multicultural teacher. Mrs. Baez continues to take courses and learn from all her lived experiences. An example of this in her classroom; she always tried to learn a new Spanish word that would allow her to communicate more clearly with her Latina students.
During our conversations, she explained how she “had” to learn a new language and forms of communication that she had never known. She related a story, recounting the very first time a child say to her, “I have to use it”. She had no idea what that child meant. Thanks to her instructional aide, who understood that he was asking to the restroom, child did not wet his clothes and she was able to take him to the bathroom. Mrs. Baez recognized this as a something she could learn from and discussed this with her aide, who is African American.

Mrs. Baez also views her students as very competent beings. During the time I was in her classroom, Mrs. Baez shared with me the assessment process she uses and she commented on how in the end of the school year parents are very surprised at how much their child has learned. In her preschool program the teachers have forms that list the skills the children are expected to learn and develop at this level. Although the form is not the most important tool for her, it’s the document she must use to communicate to the parents about their child’s progress. On one occasion I shared with Mrs. Baez how happy I was because of one of the student’s accomplishment and she said the following:

“Today you are excited because of the analysis that Spencer did after you read the story to him, but just wait and you are going to see how some of our students read at the end of the year. Parents cannot believe that can happen because this is just a preschool, but every year we have students who read at the end.”

The comment made by Mrs. Baez shows me that she has a lot of confidence and believes in her students and she challenges them. Many
students come to her classroom not knowing anything about letters, numbers, how to relate socially, where English is a second language and this may be their first experience in a school type setting because they were being cared for by a family member. Within a few months of starting, it was great to see how they followed the class routines, used vocabulary they had never used, “read”, “write” and enjoy the learning activities. For example, I observed the following:

Abby is twin with Kennedy and every time he can, he plays alone. Mrs. Baez had been working with his social interactions but she also gives him the space that he needs to feel comfortable in the classroom. But today is the second day in the week that he chooses to play with other kids. He is doing some improvements in his social interactions with his peers. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez observes her students. She is always walking throughout the classroom and will play with the children in the different areas. Sometimes her playtime is spontaneous; sometimes it’s planned. These observations allow her to work individually with the children, challenge them to their next developmental zone. An example of this is when a Korean girl discovered the concepts of patterns during the beginning of the school year. She shared with the teacher what she was doing although she did not have a name for what she was doing. Mrs. Baez approached the situation in the following way:

While the children were playing with table toys, a Korean girl called the teacher over to show her what she had done with the geometric shapes. Mrs. Baez asked her if she knew what that was called and she responded no. Mrs. Baez then took this opportunity to sit and teach her the concept of patterns. (Researcher field notes)
After that, the girl continues to show interest in skills related to mathematics. Mrs. Baez or Mrs. Lebron always provides opportunities so that the girl can explore new things that will challenge and expand her interests.

Summary

In chapter four, Mrs. Baez’s case study was presented. The study consists of a preschool classroom whose teacher- Mrs. Baez- has much experience and who will be retiring soon. Mrs. Baez is a teacher who had been working with multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy since she started teaching in this preschool classroom. Mrs. Baez noted that is was not an option to work with multicultural education. As soon as she realizes that she was going to work with a diverse population she enrolled in multicultural classes. She admitted that she didn’t have the knowledge that she need in order to have an appropriate teaching-learning community for her students, but she uses multiple resources to expand and authenticate her knowledge of the student, families and communities represented. In her classroom I observed and participated in many teaching and learning moments, this chapter is could not contain everything, and so I presented here data as a representative case.
CHAPTER 5

MR. ARISTIDES CASE STUDY

… the more and more time that I spend here
I just love it, for me it looks like a natural feat.
I can not see myself teaching other than this.
I love it because this is their first experience,
they like to be here.

Mr. Aristides

Presenting Mr. Aristides…

Mr. Aristides is teaches first grade in the other school where my
study took place. He has taught in this school for six years and prior to
that he taught for one year in a middle school in the city of his birth. Mr.
Aristides is a young African American man who is currently working on his
Doctor of Philosophy degree in Integrating Teaching and Learning with an
emphasis in Early Childhood and Multicultural Education. He has earned
a Bachelors degree in Elementary Education as well as a Masters degree
in Integrating Teaching and Learning.

Mr. Aristides is a teacher who loves his profession and discovered
that teaching first grade is his favorite area. As a male teacher in Early
Childhood, Mr. Aristides is a minority. The ranks of early childhood
educators is demographically white and female, with male educators in
middle and high school grades or administration. Being in the minority in this sense is something Mr. Aristides sees as an advantage because just as he says every time he attends educational conferences and activities concerning Early Childhood everyone wants to ask him about his experiences and this has given him the opportunity to meet and know many people and learn more through intellectual exchanges.

When I met Mr. Aristides, I quickly noticed his formal attire. He always wears a shirt and tie to school. He stated that his reason for his formal dress was that his students deserve to see him as a professional for their own benefit. Often as the only African American male teacher in the school, he is considered a role model for the students that share his race and for many who look upon him with admiration.

Mr. Aristides projects himself as a very professional teacher and a great thinker. My experience in his classroom was intellectually enriching because along with observing and participation in the class, I had the opportunity of having deep and very interesting conversations about Multicultural topics, teaching, classroom management, doctoral classes and life in general.

Mr. Aristides’ Classroom

Mr. Aristides’ first grade classroom is filled with little faces that invite you into the room. The school and his classroom are very tranquilly. The students are accustomed to the classroom routine. This is observed
from the very moment the students arrive. They automatically work in their journals while in the background instrumental music is playing softly. This is the way Mr. Aristides receives his class daily.

When I started my research in this classroom there were 26 kids. During the second semester of classes a new girl arrived bringing the class total to 27 students (11 girls and 16 boys) and it was with this group that my research was made complete. All of the students were from various socio-cultural backgrounds. The ethnicity breakdown of the class was:

- 14 African American
- 8 African
- 4 European American
- 1 Arabian

The Arabian student and one of the African girls were second language learners with whom I had the opportunity to work with directly.

The classroom is organized with student desks that form tables. Having individual desks is an advantage because it permits Mr. Aristides the resource to remove any student that might be having a difficult day at the tables. The ability to restructure the tables also allows the students to work in smaller communities where they can learn from one another. The first grade classroom has computers, an assembly area that Mr. Aristides uses frequently, a coat rack, and washroom, as well as Mr. Aristides’ desk. The classroom schedule starts at 8:30 am and ends at 3:30 pm.
Mr. Aristides gave me the classroom activity schedule in my first visit and it was as follows:

8:50   Journals
9:15   Restrooms
9:30   LACES (reading and writing program)
11:20  Ready for lunch
11:30  Lunch
12:00  Recess
12:30  Read aloud
12:40  Restrooms
12:55  Math
1:30   Gym, Library, Music
2:00   Recess
2:15   Story
       Restrooms
       Writing
3:15-3:30 Dismissal

This is the daily routine for this particular class and all day long as each activity comes to a close, Mr. Aristides announces the next activity or session. According to Mr. Aristides the announcement provides the students with a sense of security because they are being informed of what is to come.
Mr. Aristides’ Philosophy of Teaching

“Education is sort of a space
where the students are actively engaged in society”.
Mr. Aristides

Mr. Aristides’ teaching philosophy imparts his vision of the classroom as a learning community. In our conversations this was always an ever present topic, and I saw it as the basis for the dynamics given in Mr. Aristides’ classroom. Mr. Aristides teaches in a classroom of 27 students, all part of a big family where Mr. Aristides is viewed as the person that guides the children in their learning process. Mr. Aristides shared with me during interviews that the important aspects of this teaching philosophy is constructed in a community. It is not a process formed in isolation or solely under the direction of a teacher. It is a process in which all participate mentally and jointly they can see the results. The community in which Mr. Aristides and his students learn jointly was constituted at the beginning of the school year.

In our conversations, Mr. Aristides explained to me the importance of dedicating a few days at the beginning of the school year to establish the classroom atmosphere in which they will all interact and exchange ideas during the year. “In every community there are rules, negotiations to make, roles to play, and most importantly, the members need to get to know one another” said Mr. Aristides.

In one of the interviews conducted with Mr. Aristides, we spoke of the teacher’s role and of who the teacher is in the lives of the children. In
our conversation we spoke of many different roles because our students need to see us in many different ways and us as teachers want to serve as support system for our students in many diverse ways. This is what Mr. Aristides has to say about one his role in his students’ life:

“I try to be an example; I try to conduct myself in a specific way. I know that they are watching. It was like that when I was a child; I observed them, how they dressed and how they behaved. They watch me more in this place where I am the only African American male teacher. They do not have other examples. The only thing they see is perhaps a sports role model, and maybe they can think later in their lives, “I remember this teacher…”

Mr. Aristides is not only concerned for his students, but also for him, the students’ families are equally important. Mr. Aristides considers it a privilege here because he is a male African American teacher where the families of the students are primarily African American or African. The parents see Mr. Aristides as someone they can talk to and someone they can go to for advice. For example, Mr. Aristides’ relationship with a parent who does not even has students in his classroom:

In one of the interviews Mr. Aristides talked to me about a previous experience that he had with a mother who ask him for help because her son’s teacher and the school Principal was suggesting her to enroll her son in a school for students with disabilities. They suggest that because of his behavior but she knew that he does not need to be in that school. Mr. Aristides gives her information about how she was going to proceed. (Researcher field notes)

In the interview we continue talking about his role in the lives of his students and Mr. Aristides stated the following:

“Academically speaking: wherever I can help them to develop themselves, I see my role not in terms of I know these things my job is just to deposit into you, more in terms of I know these things,
but you have something else to bring to the conversation. This is how can we both can be changed as a result of our relationship; my role is more as a facilitator”.

This exchange is what is observed in Mr. Aristides’ classroom. He suggests or guides and the children decide by responding and bringing their ideas and thought to the conversation table.

In the math lesson Mr. Aristides ask students to become with a math problem together instead of him writing the problem for them to solve it. The students became with a problem related with their own experiences in the playground and then they solve it. (Researcher field notes)

The classroom curriculum is an important piece of the teaching-learning activities that are going to take place in the classroom. As part of our conversations about Mr. Aristides philosophy of teaching he expressed himself regarding the children’s culture and how important it is for him that it be present in the curriculum even though as he says, it is an emergent form.

“What happens with me is that we open that whole idea where we begin to create spaces for culture to be welcomed in, and you create this new curriculum that is emergent, it's wide open, but in a lot of ways can be affirming and that is what is really important to me; that my students find a place where who they are can be welcomed in”.

For Mr. Aristides that curriculum has to be relevant to his students’ life.

This is also what he said about his teaching curriculum:

“...sometimes I say, can I make this relevant because at the end of the day if it is not relevant. If it is not meaningful, if it doesn’t provoke any kind of action, to me its not really education, is not really learning...”
An example of a relevant activity that Mr. Aristides does in his classroom is the idea of journalism. The journal is a communication tool between him and his students. In their journal the students can write about their experiences. In the morning Mr. Aristides prepare his classroom to welcome his students and to invite them to write. The lighting in the room is dim and there is instrumental music in the background.

Today is my first day in Mr. Aristides’ classroom. The students walk in and say hi to Mr. Aristides. Immediately they get their journals and start to write. There is music playing in the background and the light is dim. (Researcher field notes)

The previous quote is also an example of the caring philosophy that Mr. Aristides has in his classroom. In the first interview, Mr. Aristides shared with me one of his fears. When he considered becoming a primary school teacher, he was afraid he could not see himself as a physically loving teacher to his students. One of his teacher colleagues and a personal friend who was a Kindergarten teacher told him one day, “You will find your own way of demonstrating your concern for your students”.

Mr. Aristides greets his students warmly in the morning and has a singing session at the end of the day. This is definitely Mr. Aristides’ way of saying to his students, “I care about you”. Another example of his caring classroom’s atmosphere is to solve all the problems before the school day end.

“Whatever happens in my room is resolved that same day. The next day is always brand new. I don’t believe in punishing a child all week long for something he or she did on Monday. I do not hold grudges against my students. We resolve every problem by talking them through and then we move on”.

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When talking to Mr. Aristides about his philosophy of teaching, I asked him if he considered himself a culturally relevant teacher. His response was very honest because he told me that the multicultural education scholars are advocating a very progressive, post education, student-centered, and active. He believes that even though we live in the 21st century we are living in conservative times. We spoke about how teachers today have their hands tied. For example, he explained to me how he loses 120 minutes daily taking the children to the restroom as a complete group when he would rather be teaching. He can’t do anything about this situation because there are other teachers who don’t mind the task and he could lose his job over it. As he had expressed to me prior to this, he needs to be creative and find ways to earn back that lost time and provoke the children to have rewarding the enriching experiences. That is the goal.

“If we start to think about education as sort of a space where the students are actively engaged in the society, they become participants in that society thus recreating it to become something different. That is when the whole notion of culturally relevant teaching becomes important to me so I start out okay. Yes, they said that I must teach this in math, but how can I do it in a way that is relevant to them because in the day for me as a teacher we are social construction beings. Humans, children are not empty vases, they are socially, culturally, economically, politically constructed, so how can my awareness about where they are coming from and their environment be used as a foundation to then scaffolding their learning to what the curriculum said that we need to do”.
Respect and appreciation for everyone’s culture

I try to create that space within my pedagogy where I can say, ok, you can pick a partner and they can pick their “cultural buddies”.

Mr. Aristides

In Mr. Aristides’ classroom one can observe and feel the respect for the different cultures and the desire the children show by sharing their culture and learning about the culture of others. In one of Mr. Aristides story telling sessions he was reading a book that had an Italian character and the students asked me if I was Italian. I explained to them that I am Puertorriquena and that lead to an invitation to present about Puerto Rico. Mr. Aristides and I agreed on a date and time in which I could give a small presentation about Puerto Rico. For me, this was a way in which I became part of their community and I shared with them giving them the opportunity to know me. In my presentation I shared pictures and told them some of Puerto Rico’s history, and how we are also partly African descendents as some of them are. We searched for Puerto Rico on the map and I answered as many questions as I could. This activity gave them a chance to know yet another culture that was not already present in their community. I observed the following:

It has been a while since I had “taught” a group of such young children and it was a pleasant experience. Today I shared with the first grade class some information about Puerto Rico and the children demonstrated great interest – they asked questions and make comments related with Puerto Rico. One can see how the children are accustomed to learning about other cultures and countries. They asked questions about the pictures, the language, the culture, the schools and even political questions because they
In Mr. Aristides classroom children’s literature plays an important role when teaching and learning about culture. Many of these books that they have in their classroom helps Mr. Aristides bring cultural and ethnic themes to the class. It has become the principal tool he has to enrich the curriculum of the educational system in which he works. The books provide illustrations that create spaces for the children to see their faces and the ethnic groups to which they belong reflected. Because of the stories, not only can the children identify themselves in cultural terms, but they can learn more about cultures.

I share with Mr. Aristides a book related with different shapes and colors that we have as part of our bodies' complexions and today he is reading that book. During the reading the students looks at each others and make comments about the similarities that they have with the children in the book. Then they all talk about differences and similarities that we all have more when it has to be with races and ethnic differences. (Researcher field notes)

On my first visit to Mr. Aristides’ first grade classroom, he read from the LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) group a book he had on Rosa Parks. During the reading, the students asked many questions and compared her with other African American activists they studied prior in class. Even though they are first graders, the level of analysis they made was quite elevated because they did not focus on the nice story but rather transcended with profound comments:

Recently Rosa Parks the activists passed away and Mr. Aristides has several books about her life in his basket of children’s literature. During and after the reading, the children have asked
many questions and have related the story with events of slavery. They demonstrated a genuine interest and asked questions as though they wanted to know everything about her. (Researcher field notes)

Just as they read that book on that day about an African American activist, they read books that reflected all cultures that represented in the classroom. Mr. Aristides shared with me that they read information on Africa, since there are many African children in the class. Also when they were studying about this ethnic group they searched the map. As part of the dynamics the children searched for the locations from which they came (the ones who knew). Mr. Aristides told me that not all of them know much information regarding their country of origin.

In addition to children’s literature there are many other instructional strategies I observed in which culture of the children and their families is made important in the classroom. For example as part of Mr. Aristides classroom routines his students participate in what he called the “sharing time”. The sharing time take place when they return from recess or from lunch. As part of Mr. Aristides’ routine, he asks the children to take turns sharing something about their lives. The student leaders call upon students and each student calls on the next child to share his or her story until Mr. Aristides announces that time is running short. During this sharing time, the children talk about their families or what activities they have planned for the weekend. They can use it as show and tell time, and some even share an experience they have had during recess. Sometimes Mr. Aristides uses sharing time to have a meeting with the students.
These meetings can deal with responses to conflicts or how to plan for future events.

“The share time gives students some time after recess and lunch to share what happened during that time. For me that is very important because as a People of Color a lot of times particularly having white teachers, I find myself in environments where anything from home, anything that was not white norm was excluded. I want to provide a space where they can talk about their home and their experiences. I want them to feel supported”.

In a later interview with Mr. Aristides he used one of my field notes as an example of another method that he uses to engage the children in the lessons. He referred to the students’ experiences and cultural background when he is teaching.

Today Mr. Aristides gave the children a mathematical exercise on the board and used the names of the children and the name of a place they go to play video games. You had to see the children’s faces, they all smiled and more so those who’s names were mentioned in the mathematical problem. (Researcher field notes)

There are many things that a good teacher must facilitate in the classroom in order for the process of learning to be enriching and cultural relevant. Mr. Aristides facilitates a relaxing atmosphere and an example of that is the different forms which he uses music in the classroom. When the children arrive in the morning, the music is playing softly. Sometimes they sing a song from a children’s literature book and in this case Mr. Aristides leads while playing his keyboard. There are other times when the music is used to remind the students of a particular skill learned, and at the end of the day Mr. Aristides uses music to dismiss the class. The children choose the song and they sing until they leave the classroom.
As I mention before those activities take place in Mr. Aristides classroom are cultural relevant to the students but a good question can be, is cultural relevant pedagogy for all the children in the classroom?

This is what Mr. Aristides stated regarding it:

“If you define it in a racialist kind of sense, it’s going to be for People of Color. But if you define culture in terms of sharing, a social kind of meaning, language, several systems, it can mean this social life that we all construct here. For example in my classroom there are three White children, but at large they are all working class White children. That means that they do have a similar culture, I mean their experiences are very similar”.

Community of Learners

I try to connect with the parents.
I want them to know that I am their ally because when the parents shut down everything is shot down.
Mr. Aristides

The school where Mr. Aristides teaches is open to the community and welcomes parents and students. The principal knows everyone including students and is visibly present at school. She uses various strategies to maintain a learning community in the school. This particular school offers a space for parents to have committees and work for the benefit of their children. They work in conjunction with the teachers that are willing and plan various activities that will be of interest and great benefit to the children. The teachers make direct contact with parents on a daily basis because they are required to walk the children from the classroom to the school exits at the end of every school day. In my visits to the school I accompanied Mr. Aristides and could sense the caring
nature of the school at that precise moment. Mr. Aristides would greet the parents of his actual students and parents of his past students.

On several occasions, Mr. Aristides and I discussed this topic of community of learners and he commented that from the beginning the game rules need to be established so that everyone wins. As mentioned before, Mr. Aristides took the time to get to know his students and their families and it is by this practice that he could prepare a community atmosphere in his classroom.

“I feel that I need to establish a relationship with the parents in order to talk with them about their kids. I always try to find some kind of entry way to connect with parents, sometimes it’s my spirituality, sometimes my race. I even used to live in the neighborhood for three years and that is a different experience because you can see what is going on”.

The formula for everything that goes on in the classroom in regards to community has its roots in the respect towards everything else. In Mr. Aristides’ classroom two leaders are chosen on a weekly basis. Mr. Aristides explained to me that the two leaders are chosen and they are the ones who will lead the various activities. For example, during the mathematics portion of the class, Mr. Aristides will explain the concept of the math problem and then the students will work with various examples on the chalkboard. The leaders will go the front of the room and call on classmates to either go to the board to work on the given math exercise or ask them to give a response that they themselves will write onto the chalkboard. Once the leaders are chosen, Mr. Aristides always reminds them that a good leader has to be an example and must carry him or
herself well both in and outside the classroom. What happens when this is not the case? The leader is discharged from his position and another is elected in his place. It was very clearly established that the leader must have certain characteristics and he/she should demonstrate them. It is a matter of being just with the community because they deserve to have a leader who will respect the classroom rules.

Mr. Aristides functions as the facilitator in the classroom, if it is necessary to clarify a doubt, he is always there to respond. However, he will always ask the students if any of them can offer a response. His role of facilitator offers confidence in the students and a sense of belonging to the class. This is not Mr. Aristides’ classroom; it is the first grade classroom community. They are the ones who run the routine of the day with Mr. Aristides’ help and this is duly noted when he forgets something related to the routine; the students are quick to remind him of the missing activity. They feel and know they have the right to be taken into consideration when changes to the routine are incorporated.

Even though Mr. Aristides guides the process, the children are still the principal players. An example of that is that just now Mr. Aristides forgets their sharing time after recess and all the students remind him. Instead of continue with the math lesson he call them to the assembly area and they share. (Researcher field notes)

Mr. Aristides also facilitates the space in the room to speak when there is a conflict. Generally, these conflicts happened in other areas where Mr. Aristides is not present. For example, when the students are in music class, physical education or in the library, and when they go to recess
where other adults are watching over them. Nevertheless, Mr. Aristides opens a space of time in the daily agenda to discuss conflicts that the students have among themselves, with other children, or even with other teachers. In these conversations they review the community rules they themselves had established as necessary so that they could treat one another with respect. This is what I observed during music class:

The teacher entered the room and started handing out musical instruments to the students for a particular activity. The students are going wild, there is a lot of noise, and all are talking and playing the instruments at the same time. This does not look like Mr. Aristides’ class. It amazes me the difference a teacher can make in any given classroom. (Researcher field notes)

After taking my notes of my observation of the music class, I spoke with Mr. Aristides regarding my impression of the activity that just took place. The classroom dynamics of the music teacher are very different than Mr. Aristides’. There was no organization and no instructions were given prior to handing out the instruments. The system of working with disciplinary issues forbids the students from having an enjoyable and rewarding classroom experience. Mr. Aristides and I spoke a lot about this subject because I was shocked by the children’s behavior. It was almost as if it was a completely different group of children, but Mr. Aristides offered this explanation:

“It all has to do with the community, Janet. We decided as a community the rules of the classroom, the way to resolve conflicts, the limits and we learned how to have fun without disrespecting one another. I always give them a “heads up” before any activity so that they know what to expect and what is expected of them. I promise you I will discuss with them what you observed in the music class”.
The manner in which the classroom is organized is another demonstration of the feeling of a community. Even though the children have individual seating, they arrange them so that the students are sitting at four “tables” within the room. Even though the use of individual seats can be seen as a negative issue, I could sense how some students need to separate themselves from the table for various reasons and the individual seat provides that opportunity. An example of this would be children with poor vision and need to sit close to the chalkboard; another reason individual seating is a benefit, is for those students who are distracted easily at the tables and a parent has requested that their child sit away from the group. In addition to the children that are easily distracted there are the children that could actually cause disruption or interrupt the other students at the table and they need to be separated when disruptive behavior occurs. Now that I am mentioning the sitting arrangements of the room, I would like to share this observation I made:

Today when I arrived, I found that Isaiah was sitting next to Mr. Aristides’ desk and realized this had never happened before. I asked him what happened and he said that he was disquieted and that Mr. Aristides suggested he separate himself from the group for a short while. Along with him that day, several other students were not seated in their usual places at the tables. It was quite interesting for me to witness that Mr. Aristides took advantage of the situation to ask the other students to vote on whether or not the students away from the tables could return to their usual positions and work groups. The students voted for each of the children individually and gave their permission for them to return to the tables. Each child voted in returned to their usual seat. I had never witnessed a group of students that had been given the opportunity to give their opinion regarding discipline issues. (Researcher field notes)
That was one of those moments when one reacts with an “ah-aha!” it was interesting for me to see that the entire student community could decide for themselves if the disruptive children could return to work with them. As noted in my observation, I had never seen or witnessed a learning community that made their own decision regarding discipline in the classroom.

Continuing with the classroom organization, there is a carpeted area designed for group assembly. It is in this area that Mr. Aristides receives the LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) groups and there they begin the dynamics of that group. This LACES group is different in that the school works in levels of reading and groups are formed based on the child’s reading level. It is for this reason that the LACES groups are devised of students from different grades. It is in the carpeted area that Mr. Aristides reads stories to the children. The basket of books is located in a corner of the assembly area and the students choose the book they would like Mr. Aristides to read to them. It is also in this area where the children have their sharing moments. This is what I noted:

After recess and lunch, the children have a ‘sharing moment.’ Mr. Aristides calls on the first student; after that student shares, he or she calls on the next person. During sharing time the children can give news about their family, for example they can announce that a baby brother or sister is on the way, they can share something that happened to them during recess, future weekend plans, and/or a show-and-tell item. (Researcher field notes)
When the children are in front of the group, one sees in their little faces how good they feel having everyone’s attention. With the attention of the group, they receive the message “I am important and what I share is important to my peers”. “For me sharing is a social development piece building on that; on the cultural context is important to me because it is part of our community”, Mr. Aristides told me in the interview. In the previous section he expounded on the importance this can have on children of color. In his classroom I would say this practice opens a special window for those students whose native language is not English because it is a small space in which the community makes them feel comfortable. The children gain personal confidence when they can share things important to them in front of their peers.

Also in the assembly area, the children sing along with Mr. Aristides as he plays the keyboard and leads songs. They sing at various moments, but mostly towards the end of the school day. The leaders choose the songs they want to sing and all participate in singing. One of my notations regarding this dynamics was:

It appears much a community setting that Mr. Aristides ends the day singing with his students. Just as in the morning routine, the afternoon routine gives the students a sense of security. (Researcher field notes)

As stated previously, the assembly area provides various dynamics given in the classroom that represent the existing sense of community in this first grade class.
Mr. Aristides Sociopolitical Commitment

As a doctoral student in the area of multicultural education and as a faculty member of the school, Mr. Aristides brings a very interesting perspective that can shed light on understanding why it is so difficult for some teachers to include their students in what they do in their classroom. On many occasions, Mr. Aristides and I discussed multicultural education and touched on the subject of White American teachers. We managed to consider two perspectives regarding this subject. Mr. Aristides’ perspective included that of an African American student and as a colleague to many White teachers. Mr. Aristides said the following about advocating for his students:

“I want to be an advocate for my students and I am not sure if that is what other teachers want to do because it requires that they look at themselves. Say well, “for one time in my life whiteness is not something that is privilege in a particular kind of environment now. I have to deconstruct my whiteness, my identity. This is the first time in my life that white is not the way. In this kind of environment this is the African, African American, Latino, working class way”. I can see that here and how teachers struggle with that”.

Mr. Aristides works constantly with a co-worker that asked for his help when she arrived at the school about five years ago. He sees even today how she struggles in her classroom because she does not want to let go of her position of power.

“When the children sense that, they feel threatened, and they don’t view the classroom as a safe haven. On the other hand it is probable that the teacher confronts behavior issues because the students perceive that the teacher is not genuinely interested in them so they don’t see the need to respect the teacher. The atmosphere of the classroom is reflected on the attitude of the teacher: if the teacher is happy, the environment is relaxed, but if
the teacher is always troubled or is easily agitated, the classroom environment is tense”.

Mr. Aristides stated that being a Person of color, he can have the advantage over others because it is difficult to work with cultural groups when one is lacking the competencies necessary. However, on the other hand, we mentioned that there are teachers that don’t even try to acquire that competency. He commented that he has friends that ask him about things he has done in his classroom, and he gives them feedback, but still there are others that don’t cross those boundaries. He stated:

“...for me it is a tragedy, being color blind, that is what Sonia Nieto called it. People are so afraid that they are going to do things incorrectly that they decided they are not going to do anything”.

Another example of Mr. Aristides Sociopolitical Commitment is how he manages his reality - using the direct instruction program-LACES. In this program the teacher is handed a script and must follow it for approximately two hours. It is such a great block of time that is takes up the entire morning and the teacher does not have many liberties during that time frame. Mr. Aristides had this to say about this topic:

“I think that LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) has his limits, but I think what it makes a good teacher, if you want to use the terms Ladson-Billings uses in her book, is their ability to sort or move around. For me, what I try to look at is in terms of what I do and how I do it so that I can be more culturally relevant. In LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) structure I can still say this is an opportunity or a space to be emergent. With LACES you have to go through different parts, but for example when we do the reading, I open up for kids to talk about their experiences and the second part is when we have to read aloud. What I typically do is provide a kind of structure where
I have a basket of books, and those books for me are kind of an opportunity. I am very specific about what I place in that basket so I tell them, "you can go and pick the book" but I already know that every book in there has to be with some kind of cultural context; something that is going to reflect them”.

Summary

In chapter five, Mr. Aristides’ case study was presented. The study took place in the first grade class whose teacher- Mr. Aristides- is currently enrolled as a doctoral student in a program that focuses on multicultural education, completing his PhD. His classroom is a model classroom for culturally relevant pedagogy as he offers curriculum that is reflective of the students’ cultures, creates a community of learners and uses he knowledge from coursework and what he feels is best for his students as the foundation for socio-political work.
CHAPTER 6

CROSS CASE ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Introduction

Current trends in Early Childhood pedagogy support that teachers need to know their students and include them in the learning process. There are teachers who see themselves as the source of knowledge in the classroom and sometimes they do not take the time to know their students and see what they can bring to the learning process in the classroom. Contrary to this, during this study I had the opportunity to work with two culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1995a, 2001; Pang, 2000; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997) teachers that despite their differences, had one goal in life, and that was to provide a meaningful teaching/learning environment for the children.

I had the opportunity to work with a teacher that has 38 years experience, and although she will retire at the end of this school year, she still has the same energy and desire to provide a challenging, meaningful and culturally relevant atmosphere for the children. My other participant, Mr. Aristides, is young, full of enthusiasm and even though he’s just starting in a school system that imposes many limitations, he’s found a way to implement culturally relevant teaching. Both teachers taught me
not only to welcome the children’s culture into the classroom but also to support them so that they may enjoy and learn from their peers cultures and differences. Despite the differences in their gender, age, race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds, both Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides have common ground in their successful use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Through my observations and conversations with the teachers, I could see that everything that occurs in their classrooms is geared toward the children learning to live and enjoy a world full of differences.

Table 6.1 shows the culturally relevant characteristics that both Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides possess. Those characteristics are discussed in depth in this chapter and it will be clear that no matter how different Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides are, they both are culturally relevant teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Relevant Teacher’s Characteristics</th>
<th>Mrs. Baez</th>
<th>Mr. Aristides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have high expectations for students achievement and believe that all students can succeed</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believe that all students and themselves are members of a community and teaching is giving back to the community</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a nurturing style in their interactions with students and the relationships with them are reciprocal and equitable</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate recognition to students’ cultural competence and to their life</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are culturally competent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are enthusiastic about the learning processes and they believe that knowledge is shared and construct</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to challenge the status quo</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their teaching is participatory and interactive</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize the need to be passionate about knowledge and learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with a curriculum based on multiple perspectives, the content is used to raise critical consciousness and students are exposed to a multicultural education</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See their pedagogy as art-unpredictable and always in the process of becoming</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scaffold</em> or build bridges to facilitate learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on their daily practices</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experiences with diversity are reflected in their practices as a teacher</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that culturally relevant education is for everybody in the classroom</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides culturally relevant characteristics
Philosophy of Teaching

During my study I worked with two teachers that not only loved to teach, but also allow for a meaningful and enjoying learning process for the children. One of the procedures within the school systems today that hinder equality in the schools is the use of standardized tests (Nieto, 2000). This is the case because the tests limit the teacher’s creativity and schools must “teach to the test” rather than create a curriculum that responds to the real needs of the learners (Nieto, 2000). This process may affect the teacher’s independence to decide what is best for their students and in most cases the teacher cannot use the teaching strategies that are appropriate because the material that is being studied for these tests requires lecturing. The important activities in the classrooms are lost and are substituted with remedial curriculum when the children do not pass the tests. I am not implying that the assessments are not necessary but instead should be effective in that the teacher and school would then know how to proceed in the teaching/learning process. When I evaluate the teachers’ situations with regards to the tests, I remember what Mr. Aristides said in one of our conversations when we spoke on the subject of tests and curriculum that do not respond to the children and we spoke of how Mr. Aristides always finds a way to include culture in the children’s experiences in the classroom.

“What happens with me is that we open that whole idea where we begin to create spaces for culture to be welcomed in, and you create this new curriculum that is emergent, it’s wide open, but in a
lot of ways can be affirming and that is what is really important to me; that my students find a place where who they are can be welcomed in”.

There were many occasions when Mr. Aristides used music as a bridge to teach a difficult or insignificant subject. He also used multicultural literature to provide different experiences for his students. Mr. Aristides use these methods because he has clear goals for his student’s learning and achievement (Ladson-Bilings, 2001a). If young people are exposed in their early years to images of African Americans who have academic achievement, they won’t have to define school achievement as something for Whites only (Delpit, 1988). They will know that there is a long history of Black intellectual achievement (Tatum, 2003). As the definition states, culturally relevant teaching is a system in which the children can identify with what is being taught, where they can learn about other people of their culture who can be role models for them. Ladson-Billings (2001a) explain that teachers who work toward their students’ achievement are those who support a critical consciousness toward the curriculum and that is what Mr. Aristides do when he incorporate an emergent curriculum in his classroom. Mr. Aristides believes that the teacher is a key element in what transpires in the classroom. The teacher may find moments when using an emergent curriculum is the only way to support his student’s achievement.

There is a distinct mismatch between the curriculum of the school and the lives of many children. Textbooks are still sadly lacking in
appropriate content about differences and a critical perspective about the knowledge they do present (Nieto in Paul, Churton, Rosselli-Kostoryz, Morse, Marfo, Lavelly, Thomas, 1997). In U.S. teachers tend to be monocultural, they follow textbooks and lessons guides that reflect middle-class, Euro-American ideology that diminish the voices and positive contributions of culturally diverse people (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). When the children sense that, they feel threatened and they don’t view the classroom as a safe haven.

The curriculum can act to either enable or handicap students in their learning (Nieto, 1994). Literature is evidence that the life and experience of the children is not necessarily reflected in books and curriculums (Dillard, 1997). The teacher’s goal should be that what occurs in the classroom should be meaningful and significant to the students. Culturally relevant teachers know when to introduce relevant examples from their student’s background and experiences to make learning more meaningful (Ladson-Billings 1998). This is what I observed in Mr. Aristides classroom:

In the math lesson Mr. Aristides ask students to become with a math problem together instead of him writing the problem for them to solve it. The students became with a problem related with their own experiences in the playground and then they solve it. (Researcher field notes)

The increasing demands on teachers, require that they spend more and more time trying to get things done rather than thinking about what they have done or what they will do. Reflection is a luxury most teachers

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do not have the opportunity to indulge in (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Teachers must make thousands of decisions each day. Rarely do they have the time or inclination to think critically about their decisions. This is the reality that teachers must face daily. For example, I supervise student teachers and I always tell them that if they don’t find the time to reflect by writing that they should at least do so in their minds and during the time the process is taking place. During my observations in Mrs. Baez’s classroom, I could see how she and Mrs. Lebron (aide) would reflect while working (Table 6.1). When I was in her classroom Mrs. Baez also reflects with me and asks my opinion about the activities that she plans for her students:

I noticed this today, however this is the 3rd time Mrs. Baez has asked for my feedback about an activity that she carried out with the children. It is incredible that a teacher with so many years in the field would still think about how she does things and it is not beneath her to ask for someone else’s opinion. She tells me that if she has a PhD student in her classroom, she has to ask me because I’m the expert. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez said there were many times when she started an activity a certain way then would have to change it when she saw the children were non responsive.

Teachers are in constant learning process, and one of their goals and part of their teaching philosophy should be to take advantage of every moment to learn something new. As a reflective teacher you are aware of your actions and their consequences. Those consequences are in relation to the lives of the students that you have accepted the responsibility to
teach (Grant & Zeichner in Strouse, 2001). Although it may be difficult at times and the education system doesn’t always support the teachers with this process, a teacher should find a way to be reflective. The teacher needs to ask themselves “what can I do to make my students feel comfortable in the classroom setting and how do I get them to enjoy the learning process?” There are many activities or routines that we can use to achieve this, and one in particular that I observed in Mr. Aristides’ classroom was the use of a journal (Table 6.1).

Dillard (1996) discussed her role as a teacher educator and her position of authority in the process of learning about both her students and herself through reciprocal journal writing. Through this journalizing, open dialogs between students and teachers provide avenues for students and teacher engagement, reflection, and awareness. The students are learning, and the teacher is also learning about himself or herself and his or her pedagogical capital, the understanding the teacher has about the power of the various instructional resources available to him or her. The use of journal not only helps a teacher reflect on his/her methods but also opens a line of communication with the students (Dillard, 1996). In a classroom where a teacher is reflective and tries to promote a significant education for all the students, the children will in turn learn equality. Sharing the
journals encourages the children to learn from each other and that each child can identify with their peers.

The learning environment that I observed in the classes of Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez comes in so many ways from the previous experiences that Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez had as students. Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez each remember their experiences from two different perspectives (Table 6.1). Mrs. Baez remembers that during the time she attended, schools were segregated. White Europeans went to one school and African Americans went to another. Her way of applying this experience is assuring herself that this does not happen in her classroom.

“I had to learn everything about the African American culture, their language, the way they love to dance, their music and their history…My own school life experience was that black children had their own schools. This was before Martin Luther King, so I never…even in my college, the college was a very White middle class college”.

Mrs. Baez sees how children look to share with children of the same culture, and although she allows time for this she encourages them to share with children from different cultural backgrounds. She went on to explain how segregation caused her damage in that she knew of no other culture other than her own. Mrs. Baez wants for all of her students to learn about other cultures and to have enriching and healthy relationships.

Then there is Mr. Aristides, who suffered unfairness in school because he is African American. He shared that thanks to his parents he continued
his studies although it seemed meaningless in his life. Part of his teaching philosophy is that as an African American teacher he does not want his students to suffer as he has.

“The share time gives students some time after recess and lunch to share what happened during that time. For me that is very important because as a People of Color a lot of times particularly having white teachers, I find myself in environments where anything from home, anything that was not white norm was excluded. I want to provide a space where they can talk about their home and their experiences. I want them to feel supported”.

Like Mr. Aristides there are many others in literature that feel the same. Mrs. Aristides’ motivation is liken that to Jordan Irvine’s (in Ladson Billings, 2005) when she stated: “So my motivation for teaching and I think my research is motivated by what I see in public schools with the children who look like me. They remind me of my own child. They don’t do well in school and so I figured that the little that I could possibly do to make a difference in their lives is what I should dedicate my research and my teaching too”. In her book, Beyond the Big House, Ladson-Billings (2005) showed the history of African Americans who have distinguished themselves due to multicultural instruction. The previous quote by Irvine stated how she, like Mr. Aristides, wants to make a difference. They feel that their mission as a teacher is to ensure that everyone receives an education. Another researcher, William Tate (Ladson-Billings, 2005) expressed himself in the following manner “I see myself as an agent on behalf of kids in urban schools”. Now we can all ask ourselves, how do I want my students’ education to be in comparison to my own? How can my
experiences as a student helps me become a better teacher, or am I continuing the same appalling practices and injustices that were happening when I was a child?

The culturally relevant pedagogy has its roots in the sense of caring that the teachers must have for their students in order to do justice in the classroom and have a democratic atmosphere for everyone in the learning community (Pang, 2001). In both classrooms where I did the study you can observe that sense in different ways. As I mention before when you entered Mr. Aristides classroom, in the morning, you heard the instrumental music while he is waiting with a smile in his face for his students. Teachers don’t know how their students started their day before they get to school. What could possibly happen to a child before arriving at school in the morning? Just like adults, many things, with the exception that there is little probability that he can control any given situation. A mother yelling because they are late for school, leaving the house without breakfast, walking in extreme weather conditions whether hot, cold, perhaps storming, fights in the yard or on the street, leaving the house with thoughts of all the things that could happen upon their return home and like these there are many things that can occur to disturb the beginning of a student’s day. However, when Mr. Aristides’ students arrive they enter knowing that their school day is safe and secure, that they will enjoy their stay in the room that, they will learn, that they will share time and ideas with their peers, and that there is an adult watching and caring for them.
During her investigation with a school principal, Dillard (1995) discovered that the principal's seriousness go hand in hand with caring for the learning environment that she leads. For many teachers it is difficult to accomplish both of these elements. It is necessary that this balance exist in the classroom. Teacher's caring promotes an essential sense of belonging for students whose background differs from the mainstream (Nieto, 2003). This kindness that the teachers have for the members of their community is above the love they have for what they do (Pang, 2001). Love, then, is not simply a sentimental conferring of emotions. Rather it is a combination of trust, confidence, and faith in students and a deep admiration for their strength (Nieto, 2003).

Love is an important piece of Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides philosophy of teaching and both are culturally relevant teachers no matter they do not describe themselves like that. Mrs. Baez believe that the only way a teacher who care for her students can teach in a diverse environment is teaching under the multicultural education. As part of our first interview we talked about the meaning of the culturally relevant pedagogy and at the end she said, “I am a culturally relevant teacher and I didn’t know it”. But she knew that: her students are the protagonist of everything that happened in her classroom, she and Mrs. Lebron make their plans around the students life, her classroom has to be a representation of the students, she need to challenge her students in her teaching, she works directly with the students family and their community,
and most important that she want her students to have the experiences
and the knowledge that she didn’t had as a student because of the
segregation.

Mr. Aristides case is different, when we talk about culturally
relevant pedagogy and I asked him if he considered himself as a culturally
relevant teacher he said:

“If we start to think about education as sort of a space where the
students are actively engaged in the society, they become
participants in that society thus recreating it to become something
different. That is when the whole notion of culturally relevant
teaching becomes important to me so I start out okay. Yes, they
said that I must teach this in math, but how can I do it in a way that
is relevant to them because in the day for me as a teacher we are
social construction beings. Humans, children are not empty vases,
they are socially, culturally, economically, politically constructed, so
how can my awareness about where they are coming from and
their environment be used as a foundation to then scaffolding their
learning to what the curriculum said that we need to do”.

Mr. Aristides knows the educational jargon and use the vocabulary, he
knows the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy and he knows why is
important to teach under that pedagogy. He knows the impact that
theoretical considerations related to culturally relevant teaching has on his
pedagogy and his students’ lives now and in their future.

Both teachers are different but both teachers philosophy’s of teaching has
it roots in the creating a learning environment with the influences of culture
on curriculum and classroom context. Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides
reflected on their personal experiences, from different cultural standpoints,
often drawing on their past experiences as a students affect their way of
thinking about teaching and learning.
Respect and appreciation for everyone’s culture

As a practice, teachers and schools often disregard language minority student’s native languages and cultures for what they believe to be good reasons. Students who speak a language other than English are viewed as “handicapped,” and they are urged, through both subtle and direct means, to abandon their native language (Nieto, 2000, p. 193). These children pick up the message that they speak language given lower status by some. Many teachers believe that they are doing the children a favor with this attitude because they believe that the children must embrace the English language and the United States culture in order to succeed in school. Whatever the reason, these teachers are committing an enormous mistake. Just as Nieto (2000) dictated, they are telling these children that they are not welcomed in this classroom. Teachers need to know that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995 a). To suggest that this form is “wrong” or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family (Delpit, 1995, p. 53).

Mrs. Baez explained to me how she is very careful because she would never want to give the children the impression that “what I learn at home is incorrect.”, on the other hand she explains to them that she is going to teach them another way of say or do things. Mrs. Baez’s believes
that respecting her students’ culture is part of being cultural competent (Ladson-Billings, 2001a). Rather than attempting to re-socialize students into a dominant paradigm, successful urban teachers soon learn that qualities such as reciprocity, respect, collectively, and expressive individualism are vital to being able to work with their students (Watkins, Lewis & Chou, 2001). She visits each student’s home before they come to her classroom. Those visits give her opportunity to meet the families, learn more about the students’ culture and see the surroundings in which they live to use it as examples in the lessons.

During my observation in Mrs. Baez’s classroom, I was able to distinguish how she and the Aides in the preschool classroom embrace different cultures and the different languages. This encouragement can be given in many different ways. Just by entering in this classroom you can sense a multicultural atmosphere. The décor, materials, activities that are planned and the inclusion of different styles of music are just some examples of how Mrs. Baez is culturally relevant. In this classroom the children are free to express themselves in their native language and their culture is celebrated by their peers and teachers (Table 6.1). Mrs. Baez knows how important is for her students to see their culture present in their classroom and learn from other cultures.

“I try to bring in books, pictures and things that they themselves can relate to as well as relate to their culture. One of my projects is making their faces and we talk about skin color, differences, and things that are alike”.
I capture in my field notes this instance when Mrs. Baez supports her students’ culture. For example:

Mrs. Baez is dancing the rap music with the children’s and I don’t know who is enjoying it more - her or the children. They are dancing, smiling and singing. The song is about the skills they have learned and they are repeating the words. The two Korean children are not participating as much. (Researcher field notes)

Mrs. Baez mentioned in one of the interviews how much her students enjoy every activity that she does because those are planned under the multicultural education. As Ladson-Billings (2001a) would say Mrs. Baez takes the time to learn about her students' culture and community.

Mr. Aristides also supports his students’ culture, language and ethnicity in everything that he plans in his first grade classroom. For example:

I share with Mr. Aristides a book related with different shapes and colors that we have as part of our bodies’ complexions and today he is reading that book. During the reading the students looks at each others and make comments about the similarities that they have with the children in the book. Then they all talk about differences and similarities that we all have more when it has to be with races and ethnic differences. (Researcher field notes)

Another example of this is during his math class. When he presents a problem, he uses the children’s experiences or their names. They all smile and is amazing to see how they pay attention to the lesson. That happened because the lesson is meaningful for them; they can see themselves in what is happening in the classroom. Unfortunately, the curriculum in many schools is at odds with the needs of learners. This
mismatch is evident in the irrelevance of the content to the lives and lifestyles of many students and their families (Ford & Dillard, 1996). Curriculum needs to build on rather than neglect the experiences with which students come to school in order to broaden their worlds (Gay, 1993). But instead of doing that, curriculum serves as a primary means of social control (Nieto, 2000, p. 96). Mr. Aristides agrees with Nieto, he commented that “it is an attitude of social injustice that is behind the exclusion of diverse groups in the classroom”.

When teachers welcome the children’s culture they are welcoming their families and the communities in which they live (hook, 2000). I mentioned before how Mr. Aristides thinks about families and communities. It is obvious to him that the children in his classroom are other people children just as Delpit (1995) says in her article. The education process requires participation from all the parties involved including the child. A person’s education isn’t limited to a school and it’s the teacher who decides if they want to work in unison with the families and communities or want to attempt to teach isolated from everyone.

“The share time gives students some time after recess and lunch to share what happened during that time. For me that is very important because as a People of Color a lot of times particularly having white teachers, I find myself in environments where anything from home, anything that was not white norm was excluded. I want to provide a space where they can talk about their home and their experiences. I want them to feel supported”.

This practice that Mr. Aristides has in his classroom is support in the literature (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield,
Stephan, 2001) where we find how important it is to transform information about the home and community into effective multicultural classroom practice.

In Mr. Aristides’ classroom I saw different activities and routines that respond to the students’ culture. An example is the following from one of my observations.

Recently Rosa Parks the activists passed away and Mr. Aristides has several books about her life in his basket of children’s literature. During and after the reading, the children have asked many questions and have related the story with events of slavery. They demonstrated a genuine interest and asked questions like they wanted to know everything about her. (Researcher field notes)

Learning is not as efficient when young children are expected to follow procedures in class that are outside of their previous life experiences. Teachers should connect the children’s prior knowledge to their teaching themes, demonstrating that they value their contribution to the work of the classroom (Hatch, 1995). When I talk about welcoming diversity in the classroom, I don’t mean having a few laminated posters and books where people of color are depicted. As Hatch (1995) described, it entails welcoming the child in every sense of the word. It’s bringing the child, their community, and their past experiences into the classroom. These experiences allow for a greater education about themselves and their peers. This allows them to feel safe and secure and to enjoy their education (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This environment will have a positive impact on their social relationships, because there is no
stress there or among them. I personally felt very comfortable in both classrooms where I conducted my studies. As a Spanish speaking Latina, they welcomed me. This occurred because diversity is celebrated in these classrooms. There are classrooms where there are diversities but no one can see them. If teachers pretend not to see student’s racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs (Ladson-Bilings in Strouse, 2001). Professional teachers need to envision themselves as language and cultural brokers-cultural mediators, and as advocates of more equitable policies and practices both in the classroom and in the school where they work (Osterling & Fox, 2004). Mrs. Baez told me that in the beginnings of her teaching career at this school, she felt lost because she did not understand or know the culture of her students. She opted to return to study multicultural education and she also learned from her helpers (teacher assistants) who were predominantly African Americans. Mrs. Baez could have taken the easy road and impose her own culture on her students as do so many teachers in the United States, however she decided to immersed herself in the many diverse cultures of her students. It is Mrs. Baez’s opinion that this practice not only helped her and the diverse group of students, but it also helped the White-American students. Teachers like Mrs. Baez don’t view culturally relevant pedagogy as a philosophy that can be used solely for People of Color, but sees it as a
pedagogy that embraces all members of the learning community (Table 6.1).

If I didn’t have any culturally diverse children in my classroom, I would still be doing these types of activities because everyone is different and children need to learn about differences.

It is a pedagogy that permits a learning environment to for all students and not just for some. In a learning community like those taught by Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides, the students not only develop cognitive skills, but social skills as well. The challenge is for teachers to determine what individual strengths and cultural competencies students bring to the classroom and to design learning experiences to capitalize on them (Gay, 1993). Children in this classroom setting learn from their peers’ cultures and the knowledge of such allows them to feel comfortable with the differences among them (Klein & Chen, 2001). In my observations I could see how Mr. Aristides’ and Mrs. Baez’s students spoke and learned from their differences instead of hiding them. This influence promotes positive social relationships within a learning environment.

Ladson-Billings (2001a) explained that Cultural competence occurs in classrooms where:

- The teacher understands culture and its role in education.
- The teacher takes responsibility for learning about students' culture and community.
- The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning.
• The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture.

After many observations and conversations with Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides, the data supports that both teachers are culturally competent.

While Mrs. Baez does not use the jargon and the language of the literature to describe her teacher like Mr. Aristides, both are adept at using the culture of the children, families, and communities for the best teaching and learning moments.

**Community of learners**

I chose learning communities as one of the categories in the study because I witnessed how the teachers and students alike were able to truly enjoy their education and develop healthy social relations in the learning community of the classrooms I observed. In both Mrs. Baez’s and Mr. Aristides classrooms there is a relaxing environment that is exciting at the same time. Both groups of students take pleasure from being in the classroom and sharing in the learning experience that includes the exchange of cultural knowledge.

It appears much a community setting that Mr. Aristides ends the day singing with his students. Just as in the morning routine, the afternoon routine gives the students a sense of security. (Researcher field notes)

We need to hear what others bring to us, what they can teach us about life. “We all struggle out of our little warm cocoons into a rather shocking
world when we see the perspectives of others. And if you’re lucky, you keep on going through this process all through your life” (Osterling & Fox, 2004, p.496). The more perspective you can access, the more you’re going to learn. It should be an ongoing process and teachers need to be open to that and open their students to that, too.

Successful social participation requires that children learn to be socially competent within the particular group or community (Kantor & Fernie, 2003, p. 206). It is the teacher’s responsibility to provide the space where the students will learn the necessary tools for this processes. In our conversations, Mr. Aristides explained to me the importance of dedicating a few days at the beginning of the school year to establish the classroom atmosphere in which they will all interact and exchange ideas during the year. “In every community there are rules, negotiations to make, roles to play, and most importantly, the members need to get to know one another” said Mr. Aristides. Unfortunately, it occurs all too often that teachers will start teaching a class without getting to know their students. They don’t discuss how to get along, and it becomes a struggle because five days a week for six hours a day for the approximately the following nine months, every one in that classroom must be able to get along. Then if and when a problem arises, the teacher believes that because they handed out a paper with rules on it that the children should respond accordingly. The complex stream of classroom action, socially constructed by the group of participants, becomes more understandable
when thought of in terms of its cultural elements-activities (Kantor & Fernie, 2003). The classroom is viewed as a milieu in which a classroom culture is socially constructed over time by the group as individual children and teachers become a community of learners” (Kantor & Fernie, 2003, p. 208). It is sad that many teachers believe that they should be in complete control of the classroom because it is solely in the learning community that all work together for the greater good of all. The teacher is the adult in charge, but that does not necessarily give them the total power to control everything that goes on in the classroom. The students should be permitted to participate and make decisions that are related to their learning community (Gay, 1993). An example of that is what I saw in Mr. Aristides classroom:

Even though Mr. Aristides guides the process, the children are still the principal players. An example of that is that just now Mr. Aristides forgets their sharing time after recess and all the students remind him. Instead of continue with the math lesson he call them to the assembly area and they share. (Researcher field notes)

Another example of that is when Mr. Aristides would conduct meetings when there was a disagreement or occurrence in the class. Instead of making his own executive decision as to what the punishment should be, he conducts the meeting so that together they decide the outcome for the incident at hand.

“It all has to do with the community, Janet. We decided as a community the rules of the classroom, the way to resolve conflicts, the limits and we learned how to have fun without disrespecting one another. I always give them a “heads up” before any activity so that
they know what to expect and what is expected of them. I promise you I will discuss with them what you observed in the music class”.

This was Mr. Aristides answer when I talk to him about the students’ misbehavior in the music class.

Vygotsky asserted that learning is basically a social process that takes place through the interactions between children and others who are present in their environment. Gradually, the child internalizes the skills and knowledge acquired through the social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). In classrooms and schools where there is a great diversity of children, teachers need to provide the means to teach the students how to relate with one another and overcome the fears of socializing with those that are different than themselves. In the literature Ramsey (1991) talked about how difficult is for preschool aged children to manage social relationships with children who are different from them, however in the environment that Mrs. Baez provides for them it was easier. I say easier because Mrs. Baez accepts and welcomes the child and family’s differences in her classroom. The acceptance they receive from their teacher is in turn the acceptance they give to their peers. These roles are shaped by the interactions among the members of the classroom (Dixon, Cruz, Green, Lin & Brandts, 1995).

In both classrooms I perceive that the students’ families are part of the learning community. Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez understand the importance of including the families as part of the classroom community. They know that the family and the neighborhood where the students live
are the first communities that they are part of. In Puerto Rico we have a
said about who we are in respect of the family “tu eres el reflejo de donde
vienes-you are the reflect of where you come from” and that is what Mr.
Aristides and Mrs. Baez know, who the students are, is related to who
their families are.

“I try to connect with the parents. I feel that I need to establish a
relationship with the parents in order to talk with them about their
kids. I always try to find some kind of entry way to connect with
parents, sometimes it’s my spirituality, sometimes my race. I even
used to live in the neighborhood for three years and that is a
different experience because you can see what is going on. I want
them to know that I am their ally because when the parents shut
down everything is shot down”.

In Mr. Aristides school the family and the community are important part of
the philosophy. The teachers make direct contact with parents on a daily
basis because they are required to walk the children from the classroom to
the school exits at the end of every school day. Culturally relevant
teaching points out the importance of making connections with the learner
and the family (Pang, 2001). In my visits to the school I accompanied Mr.
Aristides and could sense the caring nature of the school at that precise
moment. Mr. Aristides would greet the parents of his actual students and
parents of his past students. I felt as if I were in my own country,
because that is the dynamic in the schools of Puerto Rico. The teachers
always made themselves accessible to the parents of their students. They
don’t need to wait until parent teacher conference day or even to set up an
appointment in order to have a dialogue with the teacher regarding their
child. The parents feel they have the right to talk to their child’s teacher at the beginning or at the end of the day if they felt it was necessary. As Delpit (1995) would say, “we teach other people’s children”. But we find more and more teachers who do not even know their students’ parents names. Teachers who do not work with the home and the community culture spend amounts of time on classroom control in maintaining the Anglo culture, and culturally different students spend their psycho-emotional and mental resources defending themselves (Gay, 1993). This attitude surprises me because in my country of Puerto Rico, the relationship with the parents is constant and direct. However, after meeting the two teachers for my case studies, I believe it’s more than culture. It appears to be a situation where teachers don’t give 100%. This is what Mrs. Lebron has to say about a teacher who gives the 100%:

“My experience with Mrs. Baez is that she doesn’t just care about the child; she cares about the whole environment where that child is, like the house. If there is something that she can do to help the parents she will do it. Mrs. Baez builds a sense of community; she wants students to be good citizens, to be part of their community. Parents are part of the community that she builds; they come here for advice even when their kids are already in other grades. She went to the baptism of Maria (a Latina girl). She was in a culture where everybody was Latino and she was immersed in a culture where everybody spoke Spanish and she was the outsider. I don’t know if there are many teachers or people who were going to go on their day off to be part of something related with their students. And I don’t know if there are going to be many parents who are going to ask the teachers unless they felt that they were part of the family”.

The desire that the parents be an integral part of the classroom community comes from Mrs. Baez’s caring nature for that community and
for her students. Just as Mrs. Lebron said, Mrs. Baez cares much more for the children that what is actually expected of her. In one of the interviews Mrs. Baez told me:

“I had been in many birthdays parties, when babies are born; you know I get a little gift or something. I do home visits, we have the spaghetti diner here every year. I have the spaghetti dinner every year and all the children performance in the stage, parents come and many of them come with their siblings that I had. I cook the spaghetti and we have a big party here”.

Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides believe that having a sense of community in their classroom is the only way that they can possibly teach. I observe and experience that sense of community in their classroom and I learn what a real community of learners is.

_Sociopolitical Commitment_

Every society and community has different worldviews and values depending upon the cultural, social, political, historical and economic contexts in which these are based (Pai & Adler, 1990). In other words, education is at once a social and cultural process rooted in the historical context of a society. This information suggests that teaching is also a social and cultural process that one cannot teach effectively without acknowledging the culturally bound ways in which a society makes meaning of its world. The culturally relevant pedagogy encourage teachers to find ways to actively involve all participants in classroom practices that include each individual’s personal situatedness and subjectivities in connection to and with the present social world (Ladson-
Billings, 1995, 1995a). It is from that perspective that Mrs. Baez reflects with me about a concern that she has related with the new teachers. She expressed that the new teachers have to contend with restrictive curricula that do not allow space for creativity because they are so scripted.

“I recognize that the system just wants to be in control. There is a lack of support; LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) is a good example of that… they tell them exactly what they are going to say, exactly what to do, and teachers do not have any space”.

The new curriculum in the elementary level not even includes Social Studies and they are binding in that the teacher must follow established methods. The fact that the education system does not trust and support teachers is a constant discussion among the education circles. For that reason and because Mr. Aristides is working with the program LACES (the school districts reading and writing program) I asked him what he think about it and this is what he has to say regarding the topic of LACES.

“I think that LACES has his limits, but I think what it makes a good teacher, if you want to use the terms Ladson-Billings uses in her book, is their ability to sort or move around. For me, what I try to look at is in terms of what I do and how I do it so that I can be more culturally relevant. In LACES’ (the school districts reading and writing program) structure I can still say this is an opportunity or a space to be emergent. With LACES you have to go through different parts, but for example when we do the reading, I open up for kids to talk about their experiences and the second part is when we have to read aloud. What I typically do is provide a kind of structure where I have a basket of books, and those books for me are kind of an opportunity. I am very specific about what I place in that basket so I tell them, “you can go and pick the book” but I already know that every book in there has to be with some kind of cultural context; something that is going to reflect them.”
Mr. Aristides is doing the kind of adjustment that a culturally relevant teacher will do in order to respond to the students' needs. Tatum (2003) mentioned in her book how her college students responded when she asked them to share the emotions that they had when they thought about their early childhood years in schools. They used such words as anger, confusion, surprise, sadness, and embarrassment. They expressed how unsafe they felt with no possibility of sharing their feelings with anybody in the school. This is not how we want our students to feel in school; we want them to enjoy being in school and most importantly to feel safe. Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez are trying to develop environments where no matter the system and the curriculums do not support them their students feel safe and are able to learn. They know that their students need challenges like any student in the classroom. Some ineffective teachers sometimes think that students from diverse groups are not able to do the classroom work; they treat them as unintelligent kids just because of their cultural or ethnic background (Ladson-Billings, In Grant, 1992). Teachers must have high expectations and believe that their students can be successful. If teachers would challenge their students and believe in them, the students respond. The students in Tatum (2003) book didn’t feel that support from their teachers.

In one of my visits to Mrs. Baez classroom I was reading a story to Spencer—one of the students—and I get very excited with his analysis. Mrs. Baez said this to me:
“Today you are excited because of the analysis that Spencer did after you read the story to him, but just wait and you are going to see how some of our students read at the end of the year. Parents cannot believe that can happen because this is just a preschool, but every year we have students who read at the end.”

Mrs. Baez not just challenge her students, she also gives them individualize attention to support their learning experiences.

While the children were playing with table toys, a Korean girl called the teacher over to show her what she had done with the geometric shapes. Mrs. Baez asked her if she knew what that was called and she responded no. Mrs. Baez then took this opportunity to sit and teach her the concept of patterns. (Researcher field notes)

The educational community has tended to view students from diverse cultural backgrounds as coming from a deficit model and they don’t allow children to incorporate their prior knowledge with new experiences provided in the classroom. In that situation the child gets confused, learning can be slowed and he or she can creates a disjointed view of the world (Pang & Barba in Grant, 1995; Gay, 1975, 1993). When Mr. Aristides makes a difference in this sense he feels that this is a way to advocate for his students. In her book, Big House, Ladson-Billings (2005) shows the history of African Americans who have distinguished themselves due to multicultural instruction. They feel that their mission as a teacher is to ensure that everyone receives an education and this is what Mr. Aristides wants for his students. He can advocate for his students in different ways and one of those ways is by teaching them how the world where they live is. Mr. Aristides exposes his students to different topics which information gives them the tools they need to live in
a diverse society. There is a great saying in Puerto Rico “el conocimiento nos da libertad- knowledge gives us liberty” and that is one of the ways that Mr. Aristides use to advocate for his students. In his curriculum there is no opportunity for Social Studies, but he always manages to find a way in which to expose the children to topics that are of great importance to them. In her definition, Gay (2000), explain that culturally responsive teaching is “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.29).

“I want to be an advocate for my students and I am not sure if that is what other teachers want to do because it requires that they look at themselves. Say well, “for one time in my life whiteness is not something that is privilege in a particular kind of environment now. I have to deconstruct my whiteness, my identity. This is the first time in my life that white is not the way. In this kind of environment this is the African, African American, Latino, working class way”. I can see that here and how teachers struggle with that”.

According to Mr. Aristides, many teachers don’t want to give up their “White” power and they want to impose this on the students even when the “minorities” are the majority in the schools. Mr. Aristides says “these teachers should deconstruct their whiteness, their identity and realize that that is the first time that whiteness is not a privilege.” Teachers identities are deeply implicated in their teaching, and hence in their perseverance (Nieto, 2003). Gay (1975) explained that most middle class white teachers find it difficult to relate to and understand ethnically and culturally different children. One of the consequences of that is that the less one knows about another group’s life styles, the more likely he is to view
members of that group negatively, and with apprehensions (Gay, 1975). Research made at that time showed that teachers needed to have knowledge related with the different ethnic groups in the society, they needed to examine their attitudes towards ethnic, racial and cultural differences, and they needed new skills to translate their knowledge and sensitivities into their practices (King, Hollins and Hayman, 1997). Delpit (In Strouse, 2001) said that if we are to successfully educate all of our children, “we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism” (p.211). If teachers are to be successful at educating diverse children, they must not have those blinders in order to see and to know the students they must teach. Teachers need to reflect on their actions but most importantly they need to reflect on the past experiences that shaped who they are and after that they can see where they want to go in their future as teachers (Ford & Dillard, 1996).

Ladson-Billings (2001a) discuss the importance for teachers to be sociopolitical consciousness. Like the teachers in the study many other teachers are required to teach using scripts that tell them exactly what to teach and how to teach it. In her book Ladson-Billings (2001a) define and give teachers indicators of teaching that promotes sociopolitical consciousness and I want to analyze the work that Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez are doing using some of those indicators as reference.
Sociopolitical consciousness means the teacher knows the larger sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). I had many conversations with Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez and they both know what is happening in the system of education and the consequences that the new movements have in the students. For example even though, Mrs. Baez does not work with a scripted, direct instruction program like LACES, she shared with me her concerns about the use of the program. She was concerned that a program like that will affect the teachers, the students and all the dynamics that take place in the classroom. On the other hand Mr. Aristides has to work with the program and he founded a way to work with an emergent curriculum to overcome the negative impact that it can have in the students’ life. In our conversation Mr. Aristides went deeper in his comments about the sociopolitical situation of this Nation in ways that Mrs. Baez did not. This is not to imply that Mrs. Baez is not concerned about the “politics of education”. She just did not express that in the conversations. However the data support that she was keenly aware of the impact outside forces some beyond her control are often political.

Both teachers however, in both cases, each teacher acted on behalf of children and families, often in the face of political concerns.
Another component examined in both cases was how the teachers planned and implemented academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.

Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides developed curriculums that are meaningful and responded to the students’ needs. As I discussed in the previous chapters the students’ family, community, culture and language are present in everything that happens in the classroom. They also exposed their students to different topics which information gives them the tools they need to live in a diverse society. In Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez classrooms students talk about economics, politics, social and historical topics.

Finally, the culturally relevant teacher believes that students' success has consequences for his or her own quality of life. I mentioned before few examples of how Mrs. Baez challenge her students in her classroom. The same happened in Mr. Aristides classroom and that is because they both know consequences for their students if they do not get a good foundation.

Mr. Aristides gives me examples of how students who had achieved academically in his classroom, pass on to other grades and did not continue to make academic gains.
Summary

The case studies with Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez permitted me to learn the importance of having communities where respect, trust and most of all justice is present in the classroom. It is only in this type of environment that the children accept one another and reap the benefits of that experience. This chapter presents the analysis of both case studies under the same categories that were developing in chapter four and five.

The research questions for this study were:

- How do early childhood teachers embody in theory and practice the tenets of culturally relevant teaching?
- How does an ethnic and racial lived experience influence those who are culturally relevant teachers?

Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez cases give us a good sense of what is a culturally relevant teacher. The table 6.1 summary the culturally relevant characteristics that they both have and chapter four, five and six explain those characteristics in depth. In both cases we saw how their previous experiences in their lives affect their decision to teach in a “different” way.

Mrs. Baez experienced the segregations in schools when she was a student and she reflected on those experiences with me. I remember when she said, I don’t want to have that segregation in my classroom; that is why I promote social interactions among student who have diverse cultural background. She also told me that because of that segregation she didn’t have the experience to be exposed to diversity in all senses.
She didn’t learn from other cultures, other languages and “different” people, her experience was mostly White- monocultural. In her classroom they all learn from their peers and they are also exposes to different topics that represent the diverse society where they live.

Mr. Aristides experiences are different, he is African American and he experienced as a student what that means in U.S. Mr. Aristides expresses his need to protect, advocate, and support his students because he knows what they are going to experience lately in their live. He also wants to be a role model in his students’ life so when things get harder for them in the future they can look back at him and think “I can do it”.

Each of the teachers in the study exhibited the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching (Table 6.1) in their own way; different cultural backgrounds- African American and White Jewish-, different number of years in the classroom-planning for retirement and just getting started. Both teachers are culturally relevant, working to make sure their students have academic achievement and their classrooms are a community where everybody can sense the connection with their culture. Both have a sociopolitical commitment, working inside and outside the school for change.

In chapter 7 I will discuss the implications of this research and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I present the implications of the study that was conducted in two urban schools with a preschool teacher and a first grade teacher and their use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

The findings of this study are significant and have implications in the system of education because it brings information about how teachers utilize culturally relevant pedagogy regardless of their different cultural backgrounds. The United States is a culturally pluralistic society, and this is increasingly reflected in the classrooms. Given current immigration patterns and birthrates of “minority” groups, it has been estimated that by the year 2025 people of color will make up 38% of the nation’s population. Language and religious diversity is also increasing among the nation’s student population (Ladson-Billings, 2005). These changing demographic statistics will have a significant impact on the classrooms, as more students come from culturally diverse background while teachers remain mostly White American (Delpit, 2001). Therefore, the future make up of the classrooms demands that teachers recognize and include student’s
diverse backgrounds. Schools must be reflective of the language and culture of the children, and teachers need to help their students to learn how to live in a very diverse society.

**Implications of this study**

Before I embarked upon the study presented here, I had an idea of how a classroom where culturally relevant pedagogy works, but until I saw it and lived it for myself I could never fully understand the how and why it worked. For me it was incredible to see all that can be done in a classroom solely by making the decision that all parties agree on having a real learning community. When I say ‘real’ I refer to the daily cohabitation in which all the members know each other, respect one another, and enjoy the common space shared without difficulty. This atmosphere is present if and when the teacher allows what can happen in the classrooms to be relevant. In the investigation, I observed how both an African American teacher and a White European teacher use the culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms and that allows for a healthy and enriching environment. These are the classrooms in which not only an academic achievement and cognitive learning is present, but the children exposed to this type of learning environment have been given a place to develop healthy social, emotional and physical lives. In Mrs. Baez’s and Mr. Aristides’ classrooms exists a community where the children want to belong, no one forces them, and they arrive happy to their classroom and
ready to set out for their day. The implication in terms of urban schools and culturally relevant pedagogy is that the teachers can make a difference in regards to what happens in their classroom from day to day. The pedagogy I studied was the culturally relevant but there are other pedagogies and theories that seek the well-being of the children. The teachers and school officials of urban schools can search for ways in which to identify these theories, pedagogies and/or methods that are relevant to the children that allow equality, social justice and that are systems in which the students can identify with their education. Teachers should ask themselves:

- Why do I want to be a teacher?
- What is education to me?
- What can I expect in my classroom from day to day?
- Who are my students?
- What do they mean to me?
- What do their families mean to me?
- What can I expect from the school system and should I depend on it completely?
- What can I offer the current school system/curriculum?

These and other questions can guide their teaching careers. If they take the time to answer these types of questions, and the answers are based solely on teaching subjects, follow a set curriculum, teaching students that are empty containers waiting to be filled, what will happen in these
classrooms is not relevant to the child, his development, identity and previous experiences. The implication here is that teachers need to see these “differences” that exist in their classrooms as positive for the entire learning community and as a challenge to them because they are responsible and should learn to work with diversity in the classroom. It is true perhaps what Mr. Aristides stated that it is much easier for a person of color to teach children of color but it is also true that a teacher that proposes to respond to the children will do so effectively. I worked with a teacher that is Jewish American, Mrs. Baez, and she confirmed to me that it was not an easy task when she began her work because she didn’t know the culture of the children that at that time in her career where mostly African American. She took on the task in order to grow and learn. The implication in this sense is that the culturally relevant pedagogy goes beyond race, ethnicity, culture, gender, language and religion. Any teacher can be culturally relevant as long as they have the commitment to educating the whole child and using all available means.

Today we are not referring to just African American and White American students, but we are referring to children that come from all different ethnic groups and speak different languages. All teachers are called to learn to work with these populations. Even though those of us who come from “minority groups” experiment similar things, we are not all the same and we also must learn to live a continuous learning process in order to respond to all of our children. In one of my visits to Mrs. Baez's
classroom, her assistant was absent and I function as her assistant for the day. That day I had some misunderstanding with an African American boy and I experienced that even though I am a person of color, just like the child, we had a communication gap between us because of our different cultures. With this I want to say that it is everyone’s duty to find the way in which our children receive an education that is relevant to them and respond to their experiences and needs. It should be an education that allows them to construct knowledge of the real world in which they live and the society they construct daily. If teachers do self-studies to know their own cultural identities and to develop a critical consciousness about their cultural background, then they might be more likely to teach from a culturally competent position (hooks, 1994).

In this study I wanted to observe how teachers utilize culturally relevant pedagogy regardless of their different cultural backgrounds. In the study my continuous observations, interactions with the community and constant dialogue with the teachers permitted me to identify strategies that Mr. Aristides and Mrs. Baez use within this pedagogy. The three categories; Teaching Philosophy, Respect and appreciation for everyone’s culture, Community of learners and sociopolitical commitment are used as an umbrella to explain the goings on of the classrooms studied.

As previously stated-in the classrooms where I did my investigation it is imperative to talk, explore, and construct knowledge related with other cultures, languages, ethnic groups with respect to the social and worldly
situation in which we live. The children in these classrooms ranged from four (4) to seven (7) years old and they discussed such topics as slavery in the United States, the war in Iraq, the economic situations of other countries, equality of genders, and lastly but certainly not least, about their cultures, their languages, and the different ethnic groups within their classroom. These are topics we should discuss regardless of the diverse cultures in the classroom. It is knowledge and understanding from which each child can benefit. The culturally relevant pedagogy comes from multicultural education and is not only for “minority groups”, we are talking about a pedagogy that is significant for the children and allows them the benefit from constructing an understanding of their social and worldly reality. As Freeman & Freeman (2001) said, the knowledge the students construct opens the door so that they can have better social relationships with people that are different from them.

Another important area in Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides culturally relevant pedagogy is that they give the students who have the same cultural background the space to share their cultures, speak their own languages, and work together. This lets the children see that their culture and their language is given worth in the class and is not rejected. The message they receive is one of acceptance (Nieto, 2000). The teachers are demonstrating to the group the importance of the acceptance and welcoming what is “different” instead of rejecting it. This has to have a great impact on the social relationships of these children because they no
longer see the differences as negative, but as positive (Ramsey & Dickson 1991). My experiences in both classrooms were positive in this sense. In Mrs. Baez classroom she, Mrs. Lebron and the students always asked me how to say things in Spanish. They all respect and give me the space to talk in Spanish with the three Mexican girls without complain or feel uncomfortable. In Mr. Aristides classroom students ask me all kind of questions about my country and show great interest in knowing more about my culture. An implication from this is that teachers and administrators in Early Childhood settings need to review the way that are working with diversity in their schools and classrooms. The Early Childhood settings are the places were we need to start talking to children about how diversity is this Country and the whole world. Our students can not feel threat with what is different like for example a foreign language; teachers need to find the way to give them the tools that they need in order to live in this society and learn from those who are “different”.

For pre-service teachers in teacher education programs, this information can be very useful in their preparation to work with diverse students. These cases have important information regarding teachers that proposed to do their best as teacher and have achieved that goal. The teachers in the study are a good example because they don’t work with a homogenous population, but rather with a diverse group of children. These are teacher full of love, positivism, hope, confidence, and a sense of hard work that can serve as a model to new teachers that may struggle
their first years of experience and to teachers that have the experience but need more support in the career.

The study’s findings were important because they highlighted the inclusion of parents and the student’s community in the daily routines in both classrooms. That inclusion sent the students the message that who they are is welcome in their classroom. The teachers in the study shared during interviews how powerful and important this experience is for their students. A student that feels he or she is part of the learning community is a student that will find it easy to have healthy social relationships or a student that does not need to call attention to himself in negative ways because he already has the attention he needs from his peers and teachers. In the system of education we need to question the role that the family is playing in their children education. Teachers are call to include their student’s families and communities in the day to day learning process that take place in the classroom.

Teachers can learn the respect that is due their students, their cultures, their ethnic groups, their socioeconomic situation and their language. With this study those who embark on education for a career have the opportunity to know two teachers who have decided to make a difference in the education system that does not promote education for all students; a system for White American children, English only speakers, and economically privileged.
Future Research

Demographic statistics inform us how “minority groups” are increasing in the United States. This reality warrants further investigation when it comes to educating the diversity of the children we will have in our classrooms. The demographic reality goes hand in hand with the reality of the majority of teachers that are White American and their experiences are different than the experiences of many of the children in the schools. Teacher Education programs have the responsibility of preparing future teachers in this area and continuous investigation will help this purpose.

The literature supports that the majority of the teachers are White, American-Middle class women. This study showed how Mrs. Baez, a White American middle-class woman made the decision that she wanted to respond to her students. Fifteen years ago when she started to teach in the urban school where she teaches now, she knew that she needed to learn about the history and the culture of her students. As she mentioned, it was her first encounter with a different culture and instead of trying to impose her culture she decided that she want her students to learn in a healthy, appropriate and culturally relevant environment. There are other White American middle-class teachers who are working under pedagogies that reflect their students’ diverse cultural backgrounds and we need to know about those teachers. Further research in this sense is going to help other White-American teachers to see that yes, is difficult but they
can have classrooms where they can understand their students and they all can work together.

This study and our understanding of it would be greatly informative and sharpened by future, replicate studies on these and similar matters. Future research might continue studying cases of teachers who engage in culturally relevant teaching regardless of their different cultural backgrounds. Other research can focus on pre-service teachers and how they work under the culturally relevant pedagogy. At the beginning of their career pre-service teachers need more support and it would be good for them to see how other pre-service teachers did it.

Final comments

There is still much we can do in the area of education in order to give our children the best education possible. There are many theories and pedagogies that suggest a great variety of alternatives in the sense of taking advantage of the academics of the students and in the assessment process, but there is still so much to investigate in order to offer a better education to all students. Our children spend a considerable amount of time in school each day and the impact they will have on their present and future lives depends on the experiences they have during that time.

In my investigation I had the great opportunity of sharing and learning from two teachers that decided to make a difference in their teaching. The study demonstrates two classrooms where the teachers
have achieved an atmosphere of a learning community that is enriching, challenging, secure, and stimulating for each student and for themselves. These are classrooms where a diversity of students compose the learning community, children of both genders, of different social and economic classes, of different cultures, languages and that come from different ethnic groups. In their classrooms, Mrs. Baez and Mr. Aristides work with the children as a group, as a family, and in teams. The children have an active role when it comes to decision making and they come together as a whole to make those decisions. Both teachers are an inspiration to teachers who work in the school system that are controlled. Mr. Aristides always mentioned in our conversations that in his classroom there will be an emergent curriculum that responds to the children, their needs and that will give them the opportunity to participate in the process. The regular curriculum he must follow is completed but he always looks for the open door in the routine to include what is relevant to the children.

Teachers that are starting their careers also have in this study a document that provides them with information of how the classroom is not only a place to work, academically. It is the responsibility of the teacher to investigate and work in all areas of the development of the students.

If we want to make a difference in our society where diversity of persons clearly exists, we have to start in the classrooms where our children are and teach them to socialize with one another and to enjoy
learning from the heterogeneous society, a society full of interesting, enriching and fascinating diversity.
REFERENCES


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Schools Information: http://www.columbus.k12


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH AND INFORMATION LETTER
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled: Cultural Relevant and Responsive pedagogy and Social interactions among culturally diverse students.

Dr. Cynthia Tyson, Principal Investigator, or his/her authorized representative Herminia J. Rivera has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________  Signed: ______________________________________

(Participant)

Signed:________________________________________________________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)  Signed: _______________________

Co-Investigator

Witness: __________________________


Information Letter

Dear Mrs. __________________:

My name is Herminia J. Rivera and I am a PhD candidate at Ohio State University. The reason for this letter is to invite you to participate in the research that I am going to conduct with Dr. Tyson who is the Principal investigator.

The purpose of the study we want to conduct is to explore how the cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy supports social interactions among students who have different cultural backgrounds. It is very common to see in the classrooms where we have diverse population how students make racial or ethnical social groups instead of having social interactions with peers who have different backgrounds.

In order to work with a teacher who uses the cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy we went through a nomination process by some of the members of the School of Education faculty. Your name came up in that process and we are interested in working with you in this investigation.

The methods that we are going to use in our research are interviews and field work. I will need to audio-record the interviews and I am also going to take field notes in my field work. We want to explore with you how the cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy can support the social interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds. Basically we want to explore what strategies you use to help your students to have good social interactions among themselves; no matter how their different cultural background.

The data that we obtain in this investigation is going to be confidential and we are going to use pseudonym names in the writing of the analysis of the research. We also are going to destroy the data as soon as the research is complete.

If you have any question regarding this study or if you would like to know more, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Thank you for the time that you spend on this.

Sincerely,

Herminia J. Rivera  
Co-Investigator

Dr. Cynthia Tyson  
Principal Investigator
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL
Interview #1

1. What is your name?

2. Why you decided to be a teacher? And Why early childhood education?

3. For how long you been a teacher?

4. Did you always work in urban schools? If not where did you work before and what make you change?

5. How can you describe your role as a teacher? Who are you in your student’s life?

6. How can you describe your teaching philosophy?

Interview #2

1. Review meaning and connotations of cultural relevant and responsive pedagogy.

2. How do the social interactions differ because of the diversity in this classroom?

3. How do you see this group as diverse?

4. What would be a useful conception of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy for this classroom?