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Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy into Practice: Elementary School Teachers' Implementation of CSP in Their Classrooms



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# Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy into Practice:

# Elementary School Teachers' Implementation of CSP in Their Classrooms

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Alison Karin Munzer

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy into Practice:

Elementary School Teachers' Implementation of CSP in Their Classrooms

by

Alison Karin Munzer

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Robert Cooper, Chair

While culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) emerges from decades of theoretical and empirical research on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Banks, 1995; Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2007), the field is still in its nascent stages in terms of identifying explicit teaching practices (i.e., strategies and content) that reject white hegemony as well as honor and sustain students' home and community cultural practices and identities (Irizarry, 2017; Machado, 2017; Woodard et al., 2017). This dissertation project seeks to learn more about the practical applications of CSP in elementary school classrooms. I use a descriptive qualitative case study methodology in order to identify what pedagogical strategies and academic content teachers use in their efforts to be culturally sustaining. Additionally, I capture the challenges teachers experienced while implementing CSP in their elementary classrooms. My research seeks to generate in-depth descriptions of teaching and learning activities while examining the phenomenon of a cohort of four teachers using CSP

in the context of an elementary school (Yin, 1981). I use participant observations, individual interviews, and focus group interviews in order to respond to the research questions. The findings indicate: (1) Teachers included content that explicitly engaged issues of racism and patriarchal gender norms, as well as content that centered People of Color, in simple and direct ways with which young elementary school students could grapple. (2) Teachers used age-appropriate pedagogical strategies that supported the linguistic and cultural competencies of students through response and discussion protocols, connecting learning done at school to students' families, communities, and home languages. They also invested students with power over how they would engage with a lesson. (3) Teachers experienced challenges to implementing CSP in their classrooms because of a policy mandating the strict implementation of a new ELA curriculum and inconsistent school leadership with regard to CSP and the district-mandated curriculum.

The dissertation of Alison Karin Munzer is approved.

H. Samy Alim

Lorena Guillén

Teresa L. McCarty

Robert Cooper, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

This work is dedicated to my youngest students.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*First day jitters*. I remember getting the first day jitters as an elementary school teacher. I would probably more accurately describe them as the "first week jitters" as I got to know my new students and settle into the school year. I would wake up to pre-dawn foggy gray skies with a pit in my stomach and a sense of urgency that felt like its own natural caffeine.

I felt the ripples of first day jitters when I stepped into Ms. Lee's[1] 5th grade classroom at Angela Davis Elementary School on a Tuesday morning in 2017 for my first official classroom observation. I was careful to stay out of the way and be as unobtrusive as possible. The excitement of observing teachers committed to culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in action felt like natural caffeine.

> Ms. Lee: How did [the invention of the cotton gin] impact the world?
>
> Jessie: It made life easier.
>
> Ms. Lee: It made life easier for people picking the cotton… the laborers. How did it help the world? Not just the United States.
>
> Jessie: It says, "The U.S. was producing more cotton than anywhere else in the world."
>
> Ms. Lee: I like how he shared text evidence. How did it help the world? Remember we talked about it yesterday.
>
> Jessie: It saved time.
>
> Ms. Lee: Right, it made their work a lot easier.
>
> (Observation 1)

[1] Names for teachers, students, and schools are pseudonyms.

As Ms. Lee continued the lesson on using textual evidence to explain the problems and solutions associated with harvesting cotton in the U.S. during the 18th and 19th centuries, she shared with me a teacher's edition of the new English-Language Arts (ELA) curriculum her school had just adopted. I reviewed the reading about Eli Whitney and his invention of the cotton gin. It referred to the people who picked cotton in the 1700 and 1800s as laborers, rather than enslaved people, which obscured the settler-colonialism and pillaging of land and peoples in which the U.S. engaged in service of its burgeoning economy. The curriculum framed technology's impact on society as progress that would always make work easier and lives better. But easier for whom? And better for whom?

I looked around the room, noting the Black and Latinx students who filled the space, and felt my stomach lurch. Later that afternoon, my mind raced as I thought about Eli Whitney, the cotton gin, and its effect on slavery. While the invention certainly helped remove seeds from the cash crop, it also ignited the demand for labor of enslaved people and land for plantations because harvesting cotton became incredibly profitable. The relationship between technology and society was so much more complicated than the curriculum let on. The short article about Eli Whitney and the cotton gin assumes the ubiquity of the white gaze, as well as notions of settler-colonialism and the logic of capitalism. It was not until months later, through observations, interviews, and focus groups, that I would start to understand the tension between mandated, "mainstream" curriculum and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

## Introduction

In 2014, for the first time in U.S. history, Students of Color (SoC)[2] became the majority of the public-school student population (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2015; Strauss, 2014). Our nation's major cities tell a similar, if not more dramatic story. The 20 largest school districts in the U.S. enroll 80% SoC; Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami public schools enroll more than 90% Black and Brown youth (Emdin, 2016). Though our public schools have become increasingly diverse, the disproportionality of academic achievement between SoC and their white counterparts has persisted (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Demmert, Grissmer, & Towner, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Gutierrez, 2008; Haycock, 2001; Knight-Diop, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006; López, 2016; Lo, Chuang Wang, & Haskell, 2009; Penn, 2002). Much of this disparity has been attributed to the ways in which U.S. public schools were designed to serve middle-class white students and how they have not evolved to equitably serve their changing demographics (Gutstein, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). SoC are exposed to the dominant agenda of monoculturalism and monolingualism as soon as they begin their schooling experiences (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Given this form of systemic marginalization, it is critical that educational researchers and practitioners seek to develop and employ teaching strategies aimed at reducing the "educational debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006)—the historical, economic, and sociopolitical harm faced by students from historically and contemporarily oppressed backgrounds due to a deprivation of academic support and resources.

Alim and Paris (2017) articulate a new vision for the purpose of schooling in our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society: "CSP [culturally sustaining pedagogy]

[2] When using the term Students of Color, or SoC, I am referring to African American, Latinx, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, as well as other communities of color.

positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). They urge educators to use this moment of dramatic demographic shifts in the U.S. (and Europe) to ask, "What is the purpose of schooling *in pluralistic societies*?" (p. 1, author's emphasis). They assert that, in the past, "The purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p.1). While Alim and Paris (2017) foreground social transformation as a central purpose of public schooling, they add that a culturally sustaining approach to education will better prepare all students to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge necessary to being successfully in a diverse, multicultural, and multilingual world.

Research indicates that the educational system that privileges white, middle-class students over SoC is a source of low academic achievement for SoC, especially young students (Demmert et al., 2006; Gutstein, 2012; Penn, 2002; Sleeter, 2001), particularly because they are rooted in "white middle-class norms of knowing and being" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86). Furthermore, the teacher corps in the U.S. is predominantly white women from middle-class backgrounds who may have very little knowledge or experience with making cross-cultural connections with their students (Emdin, 2016; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). This disconnect is exacerbated by teacher education programs that do not explicitly prepare teachers to bridge the cultural divides between themselves, education institutions, and students (Gutstein, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). Geneva Gay (2010) highlights the centrality of culture to education,

suggesting that "even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn" (p. 9).

An approach to teaching and learning that attends to the cultural differences between SoC and their white peers *and* dismantles oppressive systems rooted in white supremacy is necessary if the U.S. is to build an education system that centers equity, democracy, and justice. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2014) provides a framework that guides educators, students, and other stakeholders to ensure that teachers and schools prioritize the cultural diversity of our society in their curricula and pedagogical practices. For this study, I endeavored to understand the various ways that elementary school teachers, in particular, enact CSP in their classrooms and how these efforts are often limited by educational policies that reproduce the status quo. It has been my experience, as a researcher and former elementary school educator, that teachers committed to CSP can and do resist institutional racism and oppression in their individual ways. However, as I will discuss throughout this dissertation, this work must be bolstered through teacher education programs (TEPs), critical curriculum policies, as well as programs and human resources (i.e. school leaders, instructional coaches) aimed at cultivating CSP within teachers and schools.

**Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I outline the major components of this dissertation study. I explain the problem I have identified and articulate why this issue deserves attention and further research. From there, I share the research questions that guided my data collection and analysis. I include background information to position myself as a researcher. Next, I provide some context for the issue in a brief overview of the literature and the theoretical frameworks I employed in this work. Then, I explain the logistical aspects of the study: its context (where and with whom), a

methodological overview, and the significance of this work. Finally, I conclude with defining a few key terms: culture, the white gaze, and whitestream.

**Problem Statement**

This dissertation project seeks to learn more about the practical applications of culturally sustaining pedagogy in elementary school classrooms. CSP's main goal is to advance and cultivate the linguistic and cultural practices of SoC by liberating teaching and learning from the white gaze (and other dominant gazes, like the settler-colonial gaze, the male gaze, etc.) (Paris & Alim, 2014). While CSP emerges from decades of theoretical and empirical research on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Banks, 1995; Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2007), the field is still in its nascent stages in terms of identifying explicit teaching practices (i.e. strategies and content) that reject white hegemony as well as honor and sustain students' home and community cultural practices and identities (Irizarry, 2017; Machado, 2017; Woodard et al., 2017).

While honoring and sustaining students' cultural practices and identities may seem like a path to educational equity and justice in theory, it is essential to identify the tangible things educators can do in practice to create public education spaces and learning experiences that seek to value and center the strengths, skills, and knowledge students bring with them to school while also preparing students to be successful in a diverse, multicultural, and multilingual society. Fundamentally, CSP is a stance, or an approach, that permeates all aspects of an educator's work (Paris, 2016). It rejects the "one size fits all" mentality of teaching guides or standardized lesson plans. However, by identifying what teachers who are committed to CSP do in their classrooms, we can support current and future educators in reimagining teaching and learning that rejects the

white gaze and supports their SoC. With this in mind, the following research questions guide this study:

(1) What culturally sustaining content do elementary school teachers use in their classrooms?

(2) What culturally sustaining teaching strategies do elementary school teachers employ in their classrooms?

(3) What are challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms?

**How I Came to This Work**

In September 2009, I started my career in education as a first grade teacher in Inglewood, California. I was 22 years old and had been a college senior just a few months prior to entering my first classroom as the teacher. My first year was full of various struggles but the one that bothered me most was my difficulty in teaching writing. Facilitating the writing process with my first grade students was a particularly confusing, challenging, and unsuccessful endeavor for me as an educator. I found it difficult to balance content with mechanics, often sacrificing one for the other.

Furthermore, I felt trapped by my curriculum throughout the year; it outlined a writing process that would begin and end over the span of 5 days (i.e., students were supposed to create a polished piece of writing on a weekly basis). This model was simply not feasible for me as an educator or for my students as learners. I approached my principal with my frustrations and expressed a desire for advice. She informed me that our English-Language Arts curriculum was notoriously weak in regard to teaching writing. She even went so far as to tell me not to use it; however, she did not provide professional support in creating another framework for writing instruction throughout the rest of the school year. This experience was a preview to the ways in

which I would identify curriculum as a fundamental obstacle to teaching SoC as an educator and a researcher.

After reflecting upon my challenges as a first year teacher, especially in the area of writing instruction, I came to the conclusion that my students and I struggled with writing because our writing activities and projects were not centered on topics that mattered to either party. While participating in a master's education program that encouraged extensive critical self-reflection as a means of understanding my positionality in the classroom and a way to understand why I taught in the way that I did, I realized the disconnect between me, my students, and writing was a cultural one. Instead of listening to my students and attempting to understand their realities, I fell into the pedagogical trap of believing that the knowledge and experiences of the white, middle-class are the most valuable in American society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and therefore must be imparted to all students regardless of their identity or background. I learned how to write in a rigid, methodical process (i.e., brainstorm, draft, revise, edit, publish) that centered on responding to literature so I believed that was how my students should learn how to write as well.

Fortunately, I was compelled to challenge myself and overcome this pedagogical hurdle by an action research project that I conducted in my first grade classroom as part of my master's program. I came across literature and research that spoke to the struggles I was experiencing and insisted that teachers must incorporate students' cultures in order to garner interest, cultivate engagement, and support students in critiquing the world around them (Morrell, 2004; Tan, 2009). Laurence Tan (2009) issued a call of action to me as an educator:

> To develop students that will challenge the status quo, critical educators must also go beyond reading, talking, and learning about the protests and demonstrations of the Civil

> Rights era (which falls in line with simple exposure). Students must also have the opportunity to act on what they learn by engaging in social action, which might include participating in social actions that promote peace, police accountability, immigrant rights, workers' rights, or educational justice… My students are not too young to experience injustice, poverty, violence, inequity, and hardship, yet they lack the words, tools, and experience with taking action to know how to respond to those oppressive conditions. Therefore, a major part of my pedagogy is a commitment to exposing students to ideas and methods for social action, despite their young age, so that they can contemplate more constructive ways to direct the angst which comes from their experiences growing up in South Los Angeles. (p. 488)

In response to what I was learning, I developed a writing curriculum that sought to create a more democratic writing process with my students in the hopes of being more culturally relevant as an educator, increasing student interest in writing, and developing transformational skills of pursuing social justice and self-advocacy through writing within my students. With these goals in mind, I attempted to reimagine the following aspects of my writing pedagogy: developing writing topics and prompts with students; balancing students' interests with grammar, mechanics, structure and other aspects of writing that are integral to creating meaningful texts; using writing as a tool of inquiry; facilitating writing assignments with the whole group, small groups, and individuals; creating a space for peer editing, constructive criticism, and students teaching one another; and, modifying the traditional five step writing process that better suited my students on both individual and collective levels.

The goal of my action research was to facilitate meaningful writing activities that develop ideas of social justice within my students. In order to be as effective in my pedagogy as possible,

I acknowledged that I needed to (1) establish a classroom culture of trust, inclusion, and validation of all cultures; (2) carefully develop my students' abilities to think critically, be socially aware, and express themselves through writing throughout the course of the school year; and (3) create and implement writing assignments that not only engaged my students' lived experiences, families, and communities but also encouraged social action beyond the classroom. Through my action research, I learned that I could evolve and grow through a cycle of innovation, observation, reflection, and modification.

That inquiry project provided me with the space necessary to develop professionally as an educator. Furthermore, it incited my interest in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CR/RP). That interest grew into a commitment as I continued to teach elementary school from this pedagogical stance. Furthermore, CR/RP inspired me to go back to graduate school and pursue a PhD in education so that I could continue my research in this field. Early in my program, I came across Paris and Alim's (2014) work on CSP and realized there was a new direction for me to explore as an educator and researcher committed to educational equity and justice. These personal and professional experiences have shaped who I am and why I feel compelled to learn more about CSP with elementary school teachers.

**Current Context for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

In 2012, Django Paris offered the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) as a loving critique of the field of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy given his argument that "it is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in a student's repertoire of practice, and as so, its presence in our classrooms and communities" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). His seminal work signals a shift in the field to not only leverage students' cultural practices and identities so that they can achieve academically in an

Anglocentric public education system, but also as a way to redefine the purpose of public education in the U.S., reframe academic success, and reshape what the system deems valuable.

In fact, one of the pioneers of the field, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014), agreed with Paris' claim that often culturally relevant pedagogy does not go far enough: "[teachers who claim to engage in CRP] rarely pushed students to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have direct impact on their lives and communities" (p. 78). While CSP was introduced to the field of educational research less than 10 years ago, it is steeped in a rich history of decades of research that sought to identify how educators can better support their students by centering their cultural backgrounds and practices. CR/RP, both precursors to CSP, will be discussed in more detail in the literature review of this dissertation (Chapter 2).

Given that CSP is still in its early stages as a field of research in education, there are important ways research can expand understanding of this pedagogical framework and its practical applications. My dissertation research is situated at the nexus of elementary school education and explicit pedagogical strategies (e.g. activities, assignments, literature, teaching styles, content, etc.) that seek to honor and sustain the cultures of the students present in a given classroom. As a former classroom teacher, I have often asked myself "How?" when analyzing current research on CSP. How can this be done? How can this be done with young elementary school students? How can district-mandated curriculum be adapted and supplemented to better center students' identities and cultures? How can teaching strategies honor and sustain the cultural identities and practices of students? How can elementary school teachers develop their capacity to teach in culturally sustaining ways?

## Theoretical Frameworks

My work is guided by the theoretical frameworks of asset pedagogies (Lee, 2007; Paris & Ball, 2009; Smitherman, 1977; Valdes, 1996), funds of knowledge (González et al., 1995, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012). When conceiving of and designing this dissertation study, I wanted to ensure that the cultures of SoC are being framed as assets that can be engaged to support teaching and learning; that the cultures and lived experiences of SoC are centered in pedagogical approaches, strategies, lessons, and activities; and that my research identifies the ways in which teachers reject the white gaze in their instruction. In Chapter 3, I expand on these three theoretical frameworks and articulate the ways in which they influence and guide the design of this project.

## Context of the Study

This study took place at an elementary school in Hawthorne, California during the 2017-2018 school year. This elementary school is part of a school district that elected to host a professional development (PD) program at all eleven schools in the district from 2015-2018. The PD program, designed by Center X[3] at UCLA, focused on supporting school leaders (i.e., principals, assistant principals, deans, etc.) to be more culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining in their approaches to teaching, learning, and school leadership. Two of the participating schools (one elementary school and one middle school) chose to include a cohort of teachers in this PD program so that these educators could learn practical strategies for infusing CSP into their classrooms. As part of the PD program, teachers met with researchers from Center X on a monthly basis to discuss CSP teaching practices, model lessons and activities, share

[3] Center X is part of UCLA's School of Education & Information Studies. It focuses on the intersection of educational research and practice as way to transform public schooling into a more just, equitable, democratic, and humane system.

successes and challenges in their own classrooms, and engage in cycles of observation. This study focuses on a cohort of four elementary school teachers who participated in the PD program for two school years (2016-2017, 2017-2018). I used a purposive sampling method and chose to conduct this research exclusively with the cohort of elementary school teachers because I want to contribute to improving research on practical applications of CSP with young students.

**Overview of Methods**

I use a descriptive qualitative case study methodology in order to identify what pedagogical strategies and academic content teachers use in their efforts to be culturally sustaining. The unit of analysis is the cohort of teachers enacting CSP in their classrooms. Additionally, I capture the challenges teachers experienced while implementing CSP in their elementary classrooms. A descriptive qualitative case study approach is appropriate because my research seeks to generate in-depth descriptions of teaching and learning activities while examining the phenomenon of using CSP in the context of an elementary school (Yin, 1981a). This case study is descriptive in nature as its purpose is to describe the phenomenon of teachers implementing CSP in their classrooms (Yin, 2009). I use participant observations, individual interviews, and focus group interviews in order to respond to the research questions previously articulated.

**Significance of the Study**

This study makes contributions to the field of CSP by extending the research focused on the explicit teaching strategies, academic content, and lessons that teachers can use at the elementary level to honor and sustain their students' cultural practices and identities. For example, how might elementary school teachers better engage students who come from cultures with strong oral traditions? Or, how might elementary school teachers modify a lesson so it

honors students from cooperative-oriented cultures, rather than individualistic cultures? Furthermore, this research identifies real-world challenges for implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms which is critical for researchers, educators, administrators, and other stakeholders to understand so that future scholarship can explore how to overcome those obstacles and create opportunities for teacher education and training.

**A Note on Culture**

Within the context of this study, culture is defined as the values, beliefs, ways of beings, and practices of a group of people (Nobles, 1980). Sonia Nieto (2008) elaborates: culture is "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion" (p. 128). Many scholars commenting on culture highlight its fluid and dynamic nature; it is not static nor a fixed trait (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992). It is important for educators and researchers to keep in mind the dynamic nature of culture so that they do not rely on prescriptive teaching strategies that stagnate as their students continue to change and transform.

The idea that culture is comprised of beliefs and values is reflected in the term *cultural identities*. One's identity, who one is, is deeply connected to the beliefs and values that person holds. The term *cultural practices* speaks to the fact that culture includes ways of being; people create and practice culture in the ways they act and behave. Given this understanding of culture, I will use terms like cultural practices and cultural identities to signal the beliefs, values, and ways of being students bring to the classroom that should be valued and engaged by their teachers. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that cultural practices and identities are not only

organized by race and ethnicity, they also manifest along lines of age, gender, sexuality, language, class, and ability (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Students' cultures—who they are, what they know, and what they do—are central to how they learn. Erickson (2010) asserts, "In a sense, everything in education relates to culture—to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention. Culture is in us and all around us, just as the air we breathe. In its scope and distribution it is personal, familial, communal, institutional, societal, and global" (p. 35). Given the ubiquitous nature of culture, it is essential that educators consider their students' cultures so that they can support learning and development.

## Key Terms and Definitions

In this section, I define key terms central to this study and discuss how I use them.

### *The White Gaze*

> According to Pailey (2019), the white gaze is the notion that
> assumes that whiteness is the primary referent of power, prestige, and progress across the world. It equates whiteness with wholeness and superiority. The "white gaze" measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of people of colour against a standard of whiteness and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior, or regressive. In essence, white is always right, and West is always best. (p. 733)

Many prominent Black writers like James Baldwin, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison resisted the white gaze in their work by centering Black people and their lived experiences. Morrison (1992) explained her resistance in the following way, "I am a black writer struggling with and through a language [English] that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people" (p. x-xi).

Just as the white gaze is present in American literature, it is also pervasive in our education system. It is a lens that ensures that schools and schooling are designed with a white, middle-class pupil in mind. It is an approach that frames whiteness as dominant, standard, and mainstream, as the metric to which students should assimilate and strive. The white gaze suggests that SoC are inherently deficient and must adapt to whiteness in order to be successful in school. Paris and Alim (2017) ask, "What would liberating ourselves from this White gaze and the educational expectations it forwards mean for our abilities to envision new forms of teaching and learning?" (p. 3). They extend the white gaze to implicitly encompass "patriarchal, cisheteronormative, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, [and] Judeo-Christian gazes" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 2). I use their expanded notion of the white gaze throughout this study to critique oppressive educational practices (like the lesson about the cotton gin at the beginning of this chapter) and identify liberatory teaching and learning practices that frame SoC as whole.

*Whitestream*

In my effort to de-center whiteness and not reproduce it as the standardizing and oppressive lens through which we see education and SoC, I forgo the word "mainstream" for the term "whitestream" (Urrieta, 2004, 2010). In his scholarship on Mexican Americans and bilingual education, Urrieta (2010) defines whitestreaming as,

> akin to uncritical assimilation or cultural genocide. Whitestreaming is a coercive force that imposes White history, mores, morals, language, customs, individualism, cultural capital and other forces as the norm or standard in U.S. society. It is argued by whitestreamers, in teleological fashion, that the whitestream represents the epitome of civilization, development, and democracy, as well as the superiority of English over

> Spanish. In schools, whitestreaming translates into whitestream curricula (what is taught) and whitestream pedagogy (how children are taught – or not). (p. 47)

The term whitestream reminds us that educational standards, norms, and metrics are sites of contestation. In seeking to liberate education from the white gaze and envision new forms of teaching and learning, it is essential to name existing practices that operate from and reproduce notions of white supremacy (making them whitestream) but not allow them to access the hegemonic power of being described as mainstream, which obscures the way white supremacy normalizes and standardizes education in the U.S.

**Mapping the Dissertation**

In this introduction, I lay a foundation by presenting the context, purpose, and significance of this study. I briefly explore the literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy (more on this in Chapter 2). This groundwork is important because it gives readers a concrete entry into the study by orienting readers to the issue being examined. The next chapter offers a review of the literature and streams of research that are foundational to CSP and the way it has been used in educational contexts. I describe the evolution of CSP from its roots in critical pedagogy as well as culturally relevant and responsive teaching. Finally, I identify areas where the research can be extended, focusing on the practical applications of CSP in elementary school classrooms.

Following the literature review, Chapter 3 presents the conceptual underpinnings of this study by connecting asset pedagogies, funds of knowledge, and CSP. These theories work in conjunction with each other to ensure that Students of Color are being considered in ways that frame their cultures as assets and resources (rather than deficits or differences that need to be eradicated or modified in order to achieve academic success); to center students' cultures and lived experiences as essential elements to consider when designing teaching and learning

experiences; and to highlight the ways in which educators perpetuate and foster the cultural practices and identities of SoC that might not be aligned with those of white, middle-class students. In this chapter, I provide an overview of all three theoretical frameworks and articulate how they guide my dissertation.

In Chapter 4 I detail the methodology that guided this qualitative case study research, including data collection and analysis procedures. I share background information on the participating teachers and the CSP PD program they participated in. I articulate the processes for coding classroom observation fieldnotes as well as interview and focus group transcripts. I end this chapter with my ethical stance on research.

The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 5. My analysis offers an examination of the practical applications of CSP with regard to both content and teaching strategies. Throughout this chapter I present detailed excerpts from classroom observations and interviews, along with my analytic reflections and interpretations to guide the reader through my meaning-making process. In the final section of the chapter, I offer insight into the challenges to CSP that emerged through data collection and analysis.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with my recommendations with regard to teacher education programs, mandated curriculum policy, and how to support the on-going learning of teachers committed to CSP. In doing so, I provide next steps for researchers, school leaders, and classroom teachers interested in strengthening CSP in school settings.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I examine the literature and streams of research that provide the foundation and context for this dissertation study. I begin by connecting CSP to its roots in critical pedagogy, one of the important areas of scholarship that precedes CSP. Next, I explore culturally relevant and responsive teaching, as well as educators and scholars who have interrogated the ways in which schooling marginalizes Students of Color. From there, I situate this study in current research on CSP, identifying the ways in which researchers and practitioners have used the approach in educational contexts. After orienting the reader to CSP, I examine the ways in which teacher education programs (TEPs) pursue educational equity and social justice. Finally, I highlight the relationship between CSP and TEPs, as these institutional teacher preparation programs are prime sites for expanding the work on CSP. Throughout, I highlight areas where the research can be extended and how this dissertation contributes to the development of scholarship, specifically pertaining to CSP as content and pedagogical strategies in elementary school settings.

## CSP Roots in Critical Pedagogy

CSP emerges from many academic traditions. When contextualizing this theory, homing in on its core principles can illuminate some of these academic ancestors. Wong (2019) synthesizes the five principles of CSP as follows:

(1) Decenter the White gaze (as well as other intersecting dominant gazes)

(2) Sustain, revitalize, and imagine toward socially just, pluralistic societies

(3) Recognize that culture is complex, evolving, intergenerational, and locally-situated

(4) Sustain lives and revive souls

(5) Loving critique (pp. 52-53)

Many of these principles are related to critical pedagogy, which drew inspiration from the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and includes American theorists like John Dewey, Henry Giroux, Myles Horton, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcom X as well as Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; McLaren, 2003). Critical pedagogy aims to "empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 2003, p. 186). In this way, it aligns with a few of the principles of CSP highlighted by Wong (2019): "(1) Decenter the White gaze (as well as other intersecting dominant gazes), (2) Sustain, revitalize, and imagine toward socially just, pluralistic societies, and (4) Sustain lives and revive souls" (pp. 52-53).

Freire, an essential predecessor to critical pedagogy, outlined a philosophy of education that includes praxis, critical consciousness (conscientização), and problem posing that lead to social transformation (Freire, 2010; Kincheloe et al., 2001). His philosophy of praxis suggests that "theory is formulated through action and further refined and developed in a continuous loop" (Kincheloe et al., 2001, p. 238). Praxis is essential to developing critical consciousness – conscientização "is the result of collective struggle… not individual or intellectual effort" (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011, p. 80). Praxis entails both critical reflection and action that aim to achieve social transformation and create a better world (Freire, 2010; Kessing-Styles, 2003; Kincheloe et al., 2001). Praxis and critical consciousness are made possible through dialogue and problem-posing, which create conditions for education to be engaging and relevant to learners' lives as well as empowering and liberating (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Freire, 2010; Kincheloe et al., 2001). Freire asserts that the oppressed must lead social justice efforts because the oppressor

is unable to be aware of the structures that benefit them; this aligns with CSP's efforts to decenter the White gaze and work toward pluralistic, socially just societies.

Critical pedagogy recognizes schools and schooling as deeply cultural institutions – sites that can reproduce inequality or as locations of empowerment. McLaren (2003) expands,

> In general, critical theorists maintain that schools have always functioned in ways that rationalize the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers; that reproduce inequality, racism, sexism, and homophobia; and that fragment democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness and cultural ethnocentrism. (p. 187)

Implicit in critical pedagogy is a critique of the oppressive, omnipresent White gaze that marginalizes people outside of its frame. This is precisely what CSP rejects in its reimagining of what teaching and learning can be. Furthermore, critical pedagogy takes up the issue of how educational inequality damages democracy. CSP envisions education as a prime location for building towards socially just, pluralistic societies. McLaren (2003) confirms this connection between critical pedagogy and CSP: "Critical theorists want to provide for educational theorists in general a public language that not only confirms the voices of teachers and subordinate groups in the student population, but also links the purpose of schooling to a transformative vision of the future" (p. 191). CSP is fundamentally a future-oriented theory; it is focused on sustaining people and communities that are often erased in both educational spaces and in society broadly.

Both critical pedagogy and CSP suggest that educators must understand the relationships between knowledge, power, and value in order to prepare students to be active, critical citizens that pursue a more just and equitable society. Giroux (1997) elaborates on critical pedagogy:

> Critical pedagogy… signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions

> and society, and classrooms and communities… Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, power, and authority. (p. 79)

Critical pedagogy and CSP recognize schools and schooling as sites where the dominant culture can run amok, reproducing social and economic hierarchies in a state-sanctioned manner.

Furthermore, knowledge is inevitably shaped by culture, history, and power. Given that, critical pedagogy and CSP mandate that we examine all knowledge, especially when we are critically conscious to the fact that knowledge is often shaped by the White gaze (and other intersecting dominant gazes). Indeed, common liberation can only be achieved when we "recognize the Other as truly human, knowledgeable in their diverse ontologies and epistemologies" (Kincheloe et al., 2001, p. 238). This understanding negates the "one size fits all" approach to education as inherently flawed and oppressive; curriculum must be based on the identities, cultures, languages, and interests of students (Ares, 2006; Bartolome, 1996; Degener, 2001; Giroux, Henry A., 1997; Kessing-Styles, 2003; Shor, 1992). CSP builds on critical pedagogy's approach to knowledge and power by seeking to sustain the cultural and linguistic competencies of students as a fundamental challenge to oppression and a hopeful act toward liberation (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

While CSP might infuse more love in its critiques than the Frankfurt School, both pedagogies assert that rigorous critique is a tool for educational liberation, the sustenance of pluralistic societies, and the revitalization of marginalized people. Speaking of critique, CSP offers a loving critique of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000, 2014) as a way to strengthen the movement for educational equity.

## Loving Critique: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Relation to Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies

Culturally sustaining pedagogy, a term first offered by Django Paris (2012), is connected to previous work on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) and, to a lesser extent, culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 1994). CSP makes an important departure from culturally relevant and culturally responsive approaches in that it seeks to transform the definitions and measures of traditional academic success by shifting away from monocultural and monolingual policies toward a vision of cultural pluralism where all cultures are represented and valued equitably. Wong (2019) explains the interconnectedness of educators and researchers doing this work:

> In conceptualizing CSP, Paris and Alim (2017) align themselves with a growing intergenerational movement of social justice-based scholars, teachers and community-rooted educators who argue that we can no longer let education be defined by the White gaze and the goals laid out by the White settler colonial project (Bucholtz et al., 2017; Holmes & González, 2017; Kinloch, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Lee, 2017; Lee & McCarty, 2017; Matias, 2016; Rosa, 2018; San Pedro, 2017; Yancy, 2016)… Thus, as pedagogy and practice, educational scholars identifying with CSP largely do not separate their contemporary educational organizing from a long trajectory of educators and thinkers who have sought to use pedagogy to interrogate how race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, language, migration, and other axes of difference have been utilized to limit opportunities for youth, and therefore, the societies in which we live. CSP educators and researchers position themselves as continuing a legacy of loving critique

and collaboration toward positive social transformation and revitalization through pedagogy. (pp. 55-58)

To fully understand the similarities and differences between culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy, it is prudent to examine the evolution of these teaching and learning approaches which center students' cultures when defining ideal educational experiences.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as articulated by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), proposes to do three things: "(1) produce students who can achieve academically, (2) produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and (3) develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 474). Given research that demonstrated that many successful Black students achieved academic success by relinquishing some of their cultural competencies, Ladson-Billings pursued scholarship on culturally relevant pedagogy as "a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). Finally, Ladson-Billings asserted that culturally relevant pedagogy must support students to identify and critique social inequities and their causes so that students' "community circumstances" could be validated as "official knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 477). Social critique is a fundamental part of CRP and a core tenet that connects it to CSP.

From her work with eight effective teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) identified three broad approaches to teaching that were inherent to culturally relevant educators: "(1) their conceptions of self and others, (2) the manner in which social relations are structured, and (3) their conceptions of knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 478). In terms of attitudes about self and others, culturally relevant teachers believed that they were members of the community in which they taught and that teaching was a way to contribute

positively to their community; they considered teaching a constantly evolving process. They also employed asset-based thinking when it came to students—they believed that all students were capable of academic achievement.

When it came to structuring social relations, these culturally responsive educators encouraged fluid relationships (i.e., students could act as teachers and teachers could act as students), connected with all students, established a learning community, and empowered collaboration and collectivity amongst students. As for knowledge, culturally responsive teachers maintained that knowledge is constructed by a variety of stakeholders and must be critiqued, teachers must be driven by passion and be able to scaffold content and skills to meet students at the appropriate level, and assessments should be multidimensional while addressing the various modalities in which students learn and express mastery. Ultimately, Ladson-Billings (1995) conceived of CRP as a way to critique the whitestream traditions of public education, particularly in the education of African American students, and then develop new practices that championed not only academic success but also cultural competency and social critique.

At the same time that Ladson-Billings first developed CRP, Geneva Gay (1994) made an argument for multicultural education, which she later expanded into culturally responsive teaching. She began with the premise that culture is inextricably linked to teaching and learning. However, she explained, American schools were only addressing the mainstream cultures of white, middle-class students while marginalized groups were experiencing higher rates of academic failure when compared to their white peers. Noting the increasing diversity of American society and schools, as well as the wide range of cultural backgrounds of teachers and students, Gay posited that multicultural education would be the most effective process for the greatest number of students. She defines multicultural education as "the policies, programs, and

practices employed in schools to celebrate [know, believe, accept, value, use, and promote] cultural diversity" (1994, p. 3). Similar to how Ladson-Billings constructs CRP, Gay allies multicultural education with general education by stating that they share the common goal of student achievement.

Implied in Gay's notion of multicultural education are processes by which diverse cultures are valued and promoted which connects to Ladson-Billings' assertion that CRP must produce and maintain the cultural competencies of students (rather than encouraging them to adhere to standards of middle-class whiteness in order to be academically successful). Gay's depiction of multicultural education diverges from Ladson-Billings' CRP in the arena of social critique. While teaching students how to be critical of their society is an essential purpose of Ladson-Billings' articulation of culturally relevant pedagogy, Gay does not assert that multicultural education necessarily does this. It is important to note that CSP scholars critique culturally relevant and responsive teaching as not going far enough in their theorizing of teaching and learning that sufficiently values and sustains the cultural and linguistic practices of communities marginalized by systemic oppression (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). It is challenging to value, perpetuate, and foster cultural and linguistic practices of students if one is not also critical of the systems that seek to marginalize and erase them.

Gay's scholarship on multicultural education eventually evolved into her work on culturally responsive teaching. She begins with some of the same premises: learning and teaching are inherently cultural processes and thus students' diverse cultures and backgrounds should be critical considerations when conceiving of, designing, and executing instructional practices in U.S. public schools; and, culturally responsive teaching must be committed to achieving positive academic performance results (Gay, 2000). She goes on to describe culturally

responsive teaching as being validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Again, the connections to CRP are evident in the ways that culturally responsive teaching is committed to academic achievement and validating students' cultural competencies. Furthermore, Gay's descriptor of "multidimensional" is reminiscent of Ladson-Billings' assertion that assessments must respond to the multiple ways in which students learn and demonstrate learning. Although the descriptors of "empowering," "transformative," and "emancipatory" seem like they might be connected to critiquing the existing social order, Gay does not explicitly make social critique a tenet of culturally responsive teaching.

Gay's and Ladson-Billings' original conceptualizations have since been subjected to more than two decades of misinterpretations and misappropriations that have often resulted in teachers and schools labeling their practices as "culturally relevant" or "culturally responsive" even when those practices do not adhere to the original goals and attributes described by these authors (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Sleeter, 2012). Sleeter (2012) suggests that CRP often gets reduced to cultural celebrations that are disconnected from academic learning. Furthermore, she argues that CRP can be trivialized and essentialized when educators approach CRP as a set of steps to follow when attempting to respond to fixed characteristics they believe their students embody. As a result, Sleeter (2012) asserts that CRP is used in lieu of teaching explicitly about racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. All of this stands in direct contradiction to Ladson-Billings' (1995) point that CRP fundamentally teaches students how to be critical of society. Taking this further, CSP attempts to clarify the ways in which CRP and culturally responsive teaching have become misused and misunderstood while offering an evolved approach to supporting the maintenance and development of cultural practices of historically marginalized students (Paris, 2012).

In addition to explicating, CSP lovingly critiques the ways in which CRP and culturally responsive teaching rarely "go far enough" when it comes to maintaining and developing cultural practices that are often erased by American society and schooling (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Paris rejects deficit and difference approaches to addressing multiculturalism and multilingualism in schools because of the ways in which they erase non-dominant heritage and community practices. Wong (2019) expands on the persistence of deficit and difference framings in education research:

> [T]hese dominant beliefs, and this deficit-minded gaze, continue to thrive in contemporary forms within "at-risk" and "achievement gap" language, and "no excuse" charter schools that have adopted what has been referred to as the "new paternalism" (Carter & Welner, 2013; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004; Whitman, 2008). (p. 60)

Instead, Paris (2012) suggests that resource pedagogies (also referred to as asset pedagogies) are necessary in order to "honor, explore, and extend" the linguistic and cultural practices of poor communities of color (p. 94). Furthermore, Paris frames CSP as an approach that more explicitly pursues pluralist outcomes.

Paris (2012) goes on to state that CRP and culturally responsive teaching fall within the theoretical framework of resource pedagogies that seek to reframe the cultural and linguistic practices of marginalized communities. Resource pedagogies manifested in various ways in educational research: "culturally appropriate" (Au, 1980; Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985; Vogt et al., 1987), "cultural synchronization" (Irvine, 1990), and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992). Lee (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2001) developed "Cultural Modeling" as a way to enact asset pedagogies into practice in

the classroom. Her work, in alignment with critical pedagogy, considered how teachers could engage in collective "meaning-making" and "co-constructed knowledge" as a way reimagine how power influences knowledge (Lee, 2001, p. 8).

Paris (2012) builds upon these bodies of research while also offering the following loving critique of CRP:

> Although it is clear that Ladson-Billings (1995) was laying the ground for maintenance and cultural critique, the term and stance of "relevance" or "responsiveness" does little to explicitly support this goal. It is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in a student's *repertoires of practice* (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), and so its presence in our classrooms and communities. (p. 95)

He goes on to offer the term "sustaining" because it explicitly articulates the goal of supporting cultural and linguistic practices of people outside of the whitestream. He continues, "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Paris deliberately selects a term ("sustaining") that, by definition, implies more responsibility for supporting marginalized cultures and communities. Given how much time youth spend at school and how integral education is to participation in society, it is easy to understand how SoC would find their cultural ways of being and knowing under attack when subjected to a system that was designed for the success of middle-class white students at the expense of SoC (who may also be economically marginalized). Since educational institutions have been prime locations for cultural erasure in the past, they must become prime locations for sustaining, and revitalizing as the case may be (McCarty & Lee, 2014), cultures that have been

pushed to the margins given the changing demographics of our public-school students. It is the ethical imperative of educators and schools to sustain their students and repair the past harms perpetuated by educational institutions.

While Paris and Alim (2014) consider CSP within the theoretical category of asset (i.e. resource) pedagogies, they note that it is different from other asset pedagogies (like culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching) in its approach to dominant linguistic and cultural norms. Culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching seek to honor minority students' cultures in ways that better position them to achieve academically. However, this academic achievement is couched within "accessing dominant American English (DAE) language and literacy skills and other White middle-class dominant cultural norms of acting and being that are demanded in schools" (Paris & Alim, 2014, pp. 87-88). Conversely, CSP seeks to redefine academic success along the lines of cultural pluralism (the notion that all cultures are represented and valued equally), rather than subscribing to "assimilationist and antidemocratic monolingual/monocultural educational policies" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). Paris and Alim (2014) argue that not only does adhering to dominant definitions of academic success further subjugate marginalized cultures and languages, but it also ignores the reality of our diverse, globalized society. They explain,

> Traditionally, we have taught youth of color and their teachers that DAE and White middle-class cultural practices are the sole key to power. Ironically, there is accumulating evidence that this outdated philosophy will not grant our young people access to power but rather, in our increasingly diverse society, it might reduce that access. (p. 89)

CSP keeps an eye to the future–a future that includes a significant multilingual and multicultural presence in the United States. This future became a reality when SoC became the majority of the

public-school student population in 2014, which was just a couple of years after CSP was first presented to education researchers (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2015; Strauss, 2014).

Paris and Alim (2014) go on to make two more important points about CSP. First, it does not only seek to sustain the traditional heritage practices of various cultures (i.e., the cultural practices that have been passed down from generation to generation), but it also aims to sustain the contemporary and evolving cultural practices of all groups, which serves to respect the present-oriented practices of youth cultures. Second, CSP maintains that it must be critical of all cultural practices, even when they are part of traditionally marginalized communities. It is not only whitestream culture that risks being oppressive and regressive. Rather, all cultures can have problematic practices and it is therefore necessary to teach critical consciousness across the board. Paris and Alim (2014) elaborate:

> We must work toward a CSP that sustains the many practices and traditions of communities of color that forward equity (like much of Hip Hop does). At the same time, our pedagogical stance should also help youth, teachers, and researchers expose those practices that must be revised in the project of cultural justice. We believe CSP is ideally positioned to support this work with its explicit centering on the practices of youth of color; its emphasis on critical engagement with the dynamic, shifting nature of race, ethnicity, language, and cultural practice; and its commitment to critically sustaining our plural present and future. (p. 94)

One of CSP's strengths is its commitment to being dynamic, not static. This lends itself well to culture, which is constantly shifting, and diverse communities that will inevitably need different educational experiences in order to sustain their particular cultural practices. CSP acknowledges that SoC and their families bring a multitude of assets to educational institutions,

but that the system has been set up in such a way to classify these assets as deficits. CSP urges educators, students, researchers, and all other stakeholders to reimagine schools as sites that recognize and value the unique cultural assets that students bring with them to school. From there, schools can be transformed into spaces that leverage those assets to improve teaching and learning for everyone.

**The Scholarship on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Despite being a relatively new development from CR/RP, the field of CSP has grown both conceptually and empirically over the last decade as educators and researchers "grapple with the ongoing and enduring salience of White setter colonial violence in schooling and education" (Wong, 2019, p. 54). Paris and Alim (2017) brought together much of the research being done in this field in a volume on CSP focused on the new possibilities for teaching and learning in an increasingly diverse world. The volume encompasses both theoretically driven empirical research on CSP along with theoretical research that is rooted in practice. CSP has inspired research in a range of spaces, from the domestic to the international and from early childhood to higher education. Wong (2019) notes that "CSP educators and researchers contend that they reside within historical 'lifeways' of teachers, intellectuals, and scholars who have long thought deeply about what it means to educate and move toward socially just societies that do not aspire toward social and academic success as determined by the White settler colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, capitalist, English-monolingual, ableist, and Judeo-Christian gazes" (p. 59). Just as Paris and other CSP scholars draw on Ladson-Billings' work on culturally relevant pedagogy, she drew on the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and others who were committed to education as an act of liberation (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wong, 2019). This

underscores the collective and intergenerational relationships between academic ancestors and contemporary scholars.

Educational scholars have focused on the importance of youth culture and the ways in which Hip Hop education can be used to create sustaining educational practices (Alim, 2011; Alim & Haupt, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Other researchers have focused on the linguistic aspects of CSP and how language is conceptualized and taught as a way to dismantle the racialized hierarchy of languages and dialects in the U.S. and abroad (Alim & Haupt, 2017; Behizadeh, 2017; Caldera & Babino, 2019; Laster et al., 2020; Prasad & Lory, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Scholars in the field are generating and highlighting alternative teaching and learning strategies that seek to center student voice and the unique resources they bring with them to school (Alim & Haupt, 2017; Bomer, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Lee & Walsh, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Some of these strategies include revising curriculum so that it attends to students' identities and fosters social critique as well as engaging youth participatory action research (YPAR) to cultivate academic skills as well as critically engaged citizens (Cherubini, 2020; Lee & Walsh, 2017). CSP asks teachers to consider the specific challenges and sociopolitical disadvantages their students face when it comes to academic achievement. Other strategies include employing elder and relational pedagogies in classrooms as well as valuing indigenous and traditional knowledge and including indigenous communities in traditional public education spaces (Holmes & González, 2017).

Furthermore, CSP pushes for teacher education programs to be reshaped so that they are decolonizing spaces rather than sites of reproduction of oppressive educational practices (Domínguez, 2017). Domínguez (2017) describes decolonizing teacher education pedagogy as

> one that centers itself on the humanity and possibility of students of color, and on dismantling the accepted logics and prevailing discourses of coloniality that only highlight their 'otherness' and subordinate their wisdom. [It situates] the work of preparing teachers on the terms of the colonized, rather than allowing it to continue occurring on the terms of the colonizer. (p. 232-3)

Teacher education is often conceived of the training that occurs in credential and master's programs at universities; however, teachers continue to learn and develop their practice in less formal educational spaces throughout their careers. Professional development programs, like the one developed by Center X at UCLA, are critically important teacher education spaces.

Scholars have used CSP to highlight the ways in which educational spaces are both sites of ideological struggle (Kinloch, 2017) as well as places where community goals can be achieved and broader social change can take hold (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017; Lee & McCarty, 2017). CSP research continues the work of CR/RP by centering students' multiple literacies, languages, linguistic repertoires, and personal experiences when designing learning experiences (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Bucholtz et al., 2017; Caldera & Babino, 2019; Irizarry, 2017; Kinloch, 2017; Laster et al., 2020; Lee & McCarty, 2017; Prasad & Lory, 2020). Research indicates that teachers can support students in learning new (and extending current) academic skills by validating African American Language (AAL) in the classroom, positioning students as experts of their own lives (and how they best learn), and using curriculum that validates students' cultural identities (Behizadeh, 2017; Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Irizarry, 2017; Kinloch, 2017; Laster et al., 2020; Prasad & Lory, 2020; San Pedro, 2017). Furthermore, these pedagogical strategies support students in sustaining their identities and social agency while providing them

with the skills needed to advocate for themselves and their communities (Irizarry, 2017; Kinloch, 2017; San Pedro, 2017).

San Pedro (2017) points out that when teachers use curriculum that affirms the identity of students (e.g., ethnic studies), student engagement and motivation increases in the classroom. The bulk of current research on CSP focuses on different approaches teachers can use to center, honor, and value students' cultures in their teaching, especially as a way to reframe educational spaces as sites of liberation and emancipation, rather than assimilation or oppression. While some mention is made to the ways in which honoring and sustaining students' cultures can increase student engagement and motivation (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2017; Laster et al., 2020; Lyiscott, 2017; San Pedro, 2017) as well as help students develop and extend academic skills (Kinloch, 2017; Laster et al., 2020), these connections deserve to be explored more rigorously, especially given Alim and Paris' (2017) assertion that CSP will better prepare students to develop the skills and information required to be successful in our multicultural and multilingual world.

Other education researchers have carried Paris and Alim's banner of CSP in their efforts to identify curriculum and instructional strategies that value SoC. The majority of this research is situated in literacy. Research indicates that when students read texts by authors from similar cultural backgrounds or that reflect their cultural experiences, they are more likely to view their cultures positively (Behizadeh, 2017; Bomer, 2017; Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Flores & Springer, 2021; Machado, 2017; Wargo, 2017). Language is another way that educators can work towards valuing and sustaining their students. By embracing linguistic diversity and showing students the ways in which different languages (e.g. formal, informal, slang, regional dialects, etc.) can be used to communicate in different settings and with

different audiences, teachers can support their students to cultivating the skills necessary to successfully navigate a multilingual society.

While the extant research paves a worthwhile path, more empirical research is needed to identify specific pedagogical tools that support student achievement (Bottiani, Larson, Debnam, Bischoff, & Bradshaw, 2017; Jorgensen, 2017; Machado, 2017; Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017; Samuels, Samuels, & Cook, 2017; Sleeter, 2012; Warren, 2013; Woodard et al., 2017). The current research is promising and there are opportunities for more empirical contributions to be made that can illuminate how teachers learn about CSP theoretically and translate that learning into practical applications in their classrooms. Additionally, because the bulk of the existing research on CSP is conducted with middle and high school students, further research is needed to better understand how to best implement CSP with elementary school students. This dissertation aims to make contributions in these areas by providing tangible and practical strategies for elementary school educators seeking to utilize CSP.

**Teacher Education Programs that Pursue Educational Equity and Social Justice**

The framing of this project suggests that in addition to understanding the evolution and core principles of CSP, it is also important to understand the nature of Teacher Education Programs (TEPs), that may or may not advance the goals of CSP, so that we can better attend to implications and recommendations for future work and research (which will be addressed in Chapter 6). To that end, this section will review research on TEPs that are committed to social justice, as that commitment is aligned with the tenets of CSP.

Many education researchers have charted the foundations and evolutions of teacher education programs generally and those with the explicit mission of pursuing social justice specifically. This section focuses on the common theories, practices, themes, patterns, and

components found in TEPs committed to social justice (SJTEPs). Scholars agree that SJTEPs cannot be reduced to a set of courses and content knowledge; rather, they must be rooted in the belief that teaching, learning, and justice exist within social, political, and historical contexts – SJTEPs must acknowledge and respond to those contexts in every aspect of their programs (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Sleeter, 2008). In this way, connections between critical pedagogy, CSP, and TEPs committed to social justice are illuminated given the shared focus on cultural, social, political, and historical contexts that influence how power and oppression are meted out in society through state-sanctioned institutions.

Three main categories of SJTEP foundations emerge in the literature: (1) recruitment and admission, (2) professional coursework, and (3) guided fieldwork. Recruitment and admission in SJTEPs are focused on diversifying the teaching corps so that it better mirrors the diverse nature of the nation's public-school student populations. Furthermore, programs seek candidates who are committed to multicultural democracy and believe in equity advocacy (Sleeter, 2008). SJTEP coursework is guided by principles that emphasize self-reflection and critical consciousness, asset-based frameworks with regards to populations who have traditionally been marginalized in public schools, and theories of teaching and learning that are sociocultural in nature (Adams et al., 2011; Sleeter, 2008). For SJTEPs, fieldwork must be tightly aligned with coursework. Programs work in and with communities that serve culturally diverse and low-income populations; candidates learn the cultures and realities of the students and families they are serving while gaining practical insight into institutional and communal patterns of inequality (Adams et al., 2016; Maddamsetti, 2020; Sleeter, 2008).

SJTEPs consider teaching, learning, and schooling as deeply political endeavors (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Sleeter, 2008). As political projects, SJTEPs aim to analyze power, support traditionally oppressed people in leadership roles, be accountable and responsible allies, build and maintain spaces of solidarity, disrupt deficit-theorizing, and develop ways to strengthen our multicultural democracy (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010). For these programs, social justice cannot be separated ideologically from teacher education. Theories of social justice suggest that institutions, like SJTEPs, must be democratic, anti-oppressive, multi-perspectival, critical, and rooted in equity of opportunity and outcomes for all groups (Cochran-Smith, 2010). The goals of SJTEPs are aligned with those of CSP in ways that suggest these programs could be prime locations for manifesting the vision of culturally sustaining pedagogy by training the next generation of classroom teachers in the nuances of CSP. Furthermore, social justice (in teaching and teacher education) is for everyone. It is not reserved for white middle-class teacher candidates who will be teaching students of color from low-income backgrounds. It is not solely for students from urban, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. It is for the oppressed and the privileged alike (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

### *Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention*

Research indicates a few critical components when it comes to the recruitment, admission, and retention of educators to Social Justice Teacher Education Programs: diversity, value alignment, holistic admissions practices, and alternative credential pathways.

Diversity is essential to SJTEPs otherwise teacher education programs reproduce the status quo, like the fact that the public-school teaching force is over 80% white, middle-class women while the pupils are majority Students of Color (Daniel et al., 2020; Emdin, 2016). Other facets of the status quo, like the monocultural and monolingual approaches to public education

(Alim & Paris, 2017), necessarily require a culturally, racially, and economically diverse teaching force in order to disrupt a system that has by and large been designed to serve white, middle-class students at the expense of students of color from low-income backgrounds. But diversity cannot be reserved for teacher candidates, it must also extend to SJTEP faculty, teacher educators, educational researchers, and community partners in order to provide a systemic response to a systemic issue.

Diversity starts with recruitment. By actively seeking out diverse applicants, SJTEPs better ensure that teachers will more often reflect the students they teach and bring long-marginalized voices to public schools (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; McDonald, 2005; Sleeter, 2008). SJTEPs do not stop at recruitment, however, they also have admissions practices that result in diverse applicants yielding a diverse enrollment. There are a couple ways that existing SJTEPs design their admissions processes to ensure diversity. First, some use more holistic approaches that do not solely rely on academic measures (McDonald, 2005). For example, some SJTEPs use multicultural criteria in the admissions process to ensure a more diverse group of candidates (Zeichner et al., 1998). In addition to more holistic admissions policies, some SJTEPs pursue diversity by creating alternative teacher education programs that focus on teaching in high need urban and rural areas (McDonald, 2005). Furthermore, by creating articulation agreements with community and technical colleges (which serve more students of color), SJTEPs create pipelines that yield a more diverse teaching corps (McDonald, 2005).

In addition to recruitment and admission, retention is a critical issue that SJTEPs consider strategically. Research shows that candidates' beliefs, experiences, and values should be consistent with social justice goals if they are going to successfully complete a SJTEP and

pursue a career in social justice education (Cochran-Smith, 2010; McDonald, 2005; Sleeter, 2008). Additionally, diverse teacher candidates fare better when SJTEPs employ faculty of color (McDonald, 2005). From there, SJTEPs strengthen and hone candidates' commitment to multicultural democracy and equity advocacy with coursework and fieldwork that prepares students to teach diverse populations (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). A successful SJTEP embodies a system-wide commitment to social justice in the following ways: standards and assessments reflect a commitment to social justice; required courses focus on social justice and social justice issues; instructional strategies and courses support prospective teachers in self-reflection so that they better understand who they are in our social matrix and how their positionality impacts their teaching; high quality field work in diverse settings; community-based field experiences that help prospective teachers learn about funds of knowledge, structures, and social networks in the places they will teach; and, the inclusion of K-12 educators and community members in participating SJTEPs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; McDonald, 2005).

***Coursework***

As stated previously, SJTEPs cannot be reduced to a prescriptive set of courses and content knowledge. However, researchers in the field have identified common approaches to professional coursework among social justice teacher education programs. Coursework fundamentals include the following: supporting critical consciousness among teacher candidates, balancing the cognitive with the social and emotional, taking an asset-based position when relating to and teaching students, explicitly challenging how power and privilege operate in the current system, and including other stakeholders like families and community members (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Zeichner et al., 1998). Scholars contend that if *all* courses in

an SJTEP are designed with these components in mind, then teacher candidates will be prepared to create change in their classrooms.

Developing critical consciousness among teacher candidates is an essential goal for all SJTEP courses because it is necessary to understanding one's positionality in the traditionally oppressive system of public education. By helping teacher candidates acknowledge their multiple positions within systems of inequality, courses can support pre-service teachers to understand how power, privilege, and oppression operate on multiple levels (from their classrooms, to schools, to districts, to states, to national systems) (Adams et al., 2016). Complementary to cultivating a critical consciousness is the approach of including the social and cultural contexts of schooling in all coursework (Cochran-Smith, 2010). By centering social and cultural contexts, SJTEPs better examine the purposes of public education; call attention to what is often left out, implied, or veiled in school curricula; and uncover what is subtly signaled as the norm or default perspective (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

***Fieldwork***

Fieldwork must be tightly aligned with coursework. TEPs work in and with communities that serve culturally diverse and low-income populations; candidates learn the cultures and realities of the students and families they are serving while gaining practical insight into institutional and communal patterns of inequality (Adams et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2008). Sleeter (2008) suggests that fieldwork should occur in "multiple classrooms, [be] inquiry based to disrupt deficit theorizing, [and be in] communities to learn students' cultures" (p. 1948). She posits that this kind of fieldwork is how teachers cultivate their skills of culturally affirming pedagogy. Furthermore, Zeichner (2010) argues that fieldwork can challenge the hierarchical relations of power and authority often present in university-based TEPs. Instead, fieldwork can

advance the expertise of practitioners and communities; in turn, pre-service teachers will be better prepared to successfully teach marginalized students in marginalized communities (Zeichner, 2010). Fieldwork is not simply an opportunity for teachers to apply what they have learned from their coursework at their teacher education program, but it is also a critical site for teacher learning as they develop their own expertise (Zeichner et al., 1998).

Fieldwork is an important part of teacher education that can support beginning teachers in developing culturally affirming teaching practices that ultimately pursue democratic participation and advocacy for educational equity (Sleeter, 2008). Fieldwork sites that encourage teacher collaboration and positive work environments support preservice teachers to prepare future teachers to be more successful in the classroom (Ronfeldt, 2015). Maddamsetti (2020) suggests that fieldwork can strengthen teachers' CSP practices, especially if there are curricular challenges to CSP but also when considering how to further develop CSP content and strategies. Research on CSP and teacher preparation asserts that teachers must by systematically supported in TEPs in order to become culturally sustaining teachers (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gist, 2017; Gist, 2017; Jackson, 2015; Maddamsetti, 2020).

**Teacher Education Programs and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

As the field of CSP has developed over the last decade, researchers have begun to consider how TEPs might train and support teachers in doing this work (Cardozo-Gaibisso & Harman, 2019; Daniel et al., 2020; Diaz, 2021; Flores & Springer, 2021; Maddamsetti, 2020; Newcomer & Cowin, 2021). In the tradition of CSP, scholars emphasize that TEPs must eschew hierarchical approaches to knowledge; rather, students, teachers, and communities must work together in the co-construction of knowledge (Cardozo-Gaibisso & Harman, 2019; Daniel et al.,

2020). In her review of the literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy in teacher education, Diaz (2021) articulated five key components of preparing CSP teachers:

(1) Establishing a rationale for CSP

(2) Critical reflection

(3) Integration of cultural knowledge

(4) Purposeful cross-cultural field placement

(5) Tensions (p. 14)

These elements confirm much of the research on social justice-oriented TEPs. This work cannot be isolated to a single course or brief fieldwork experience; rather, this approach to teaching and learning must be embedded in all aspects of the program and clearly communicated to all stakeholders. The importance of critical reflection emerges as a consistent necessity, from critical pedagogy in classrooms to the preparation that takes place prior to entering the classroom.

We are reminded of the fact that the majority of K-12 public-school teachers are white women from middle-class backgrounds (Daniel et al., 2020; Emdin, 2016). While SJTEPs are transforming recruitment, admissions, and retention practices that increase the numbers of teachers of color (as well as teacher educators and educational researchers of color) in the field, TEPs must ensure that white teachers learn about the cultural and linguistic practices of Students of Color in order to understand the ways in which these communities have not only survived, but also thrived, despite centuries of oppression. With that understanding, teachers can then incorporate students' identities and experiences into curriculum and teaching strategies.

Unfortunately, Diaz's (2021) research indicated that most TEPs are not preparing CSP educators. Furthermore, scholars note the importance of teachers developing and designing curriculum that ensures the sustenance of students' cultural and linguistic repertoires. However,

as will become evident in the findings chapter, modifying mandated curriculum is not always a viable option for teachers. The research on CSP in TEPs suggests that more work needs to be done at the institutional level in order to support all teachers in cultivating these pedagogical skills. This dissertation aims to contribute in this area by exploring the nuanced challenges teachers experience when doing this work. Tensions that emerge in the classroom may help us think about what needs to be done differently in both teacher preparation and professional development contexts.

**Contributions to and Directions for Future Research**

This study builds on current research on CSP by identifying practical teaching and learning strategies that can be used in elementary school classrooms. Some studies have focused on explicit teaching strategies and curricula that educators can use in their effort to both value and sustain students' cultures while also supporting them to achieve academically (Behizadeh, 2017; Bomer, 2017; Lyiscott, 2017; Mirra & Pietrzak, 2017; Sciurba, 2017; Torrez et al., 2017; Wargo, 2017; Williamson & Hedges, 2017; Woodard et al., 2017). However, these studies tend to focus on middle and high school students, leaving elementary students out of the conversation. Given this fact, it is critical that CSP be extended to our youngest students so that they are not waiting until middle or high school before becoming critically conscious of the world around them and developing the tools to preserve and foster their heritage and community cultural practices and identities. Additionally, the connections between engaging students' cultures and student achievement merit further research.

While this dissertation does not explicitly focus on student achievement measures, it does lay the groundwork for identifying pedagogical strategies, curriculum, lessons, and activities that can be used in future research to better understand how culturally sustaining approaches to

teaching and learning shape student achievement. Specifically, this study demonstrates how a CSP approach helps to subvert traditional definitions of academic success in order to make room for more pluralistic interpretations that will better serve more students. Finally, this dissertation deepens CSP scholarship regarding young learners by focusing on the elementary school context. In order to expand CSP and make it a more viable teaching approach, it is crucial to illuminate the ways that teachers apply CSP across different grade levels and, specific to this study, how they tailor the approach to ensure that it is developmentally appropriate for elementary aged students.

# CHAPTER 3

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the conception and design of this study, this dissertation is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of culturally sustaining pedagogy and funds of knowledge, which fall under the umbrella of asset pedagogies. These theories work in tandem to ensure that SoC are being considered in ways that frame their cultures as assets and resources rather than deficits or differences that need to be eradicated or modified in order to achieve academic success. Additionally, these frameworks help to center students' cultures and lived experiences as essential elements to consider when designing teaching and learning experiences. Finally, CSP and funds of knowledge highlight the ways in which educators perpetuate and foster the cultural practices and identities of SoC that might not be aligned with those of white, middle-class students. In this chapter, I provide an overview of these theoretical frameworks and articulate how they guide my dissertation.

## Asset Pedagogies as the Umbrella

CSP—as well as CR/RP—falls under the umbrella of asset pedagogies (also referred to as resource pedagogies) (Paris, 2012), which emerged as a theoretical framework in education research in response to deficit and difference teaching approaches. Deficit approaches to education, which were firmly rooted prior and up to the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., considered the cultural identities of SoC as obstacles to be overcome on the path to academic success. Non-whitestream (i.e., those belonging to People of Color, immigrants, and the economically marginalized) languages and ways of knowing were not considered valuable assets to the schooling process (Lee, 2007; Paris & Ball, 2009; Smitherman, 1977; Valdes, 1996). Moreover, deficit approaches maintained that for SoC to be successful in school, they would need to

abandon their community cultural practices and embody dominant practices instead (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Urrieta, 2010; Urrieta, 2004).

Some progress was made in the 1970s and 1980s when a few scholars pushed the field to begin considering the cultural practices of SoC and white, middle-class students as equal but different (Banks, 1993). Difference approaches emerged as a theoretical framework that sought to identify the variations between cultural practices and determine how SoC might best assimilate into learning environments that were founded on dominant cultural practices (Banks, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Similar to deficit approaches, difference approaches made no attempt to maintain or sustain the cultural practices of SoC in educational spaces—those practices were seen as detractors from whitestream academic achievement (Paris, 2012). As a response to deficit and difference approaches, the theory of asset pedagogies was developed and gained momentum in the 1990s.

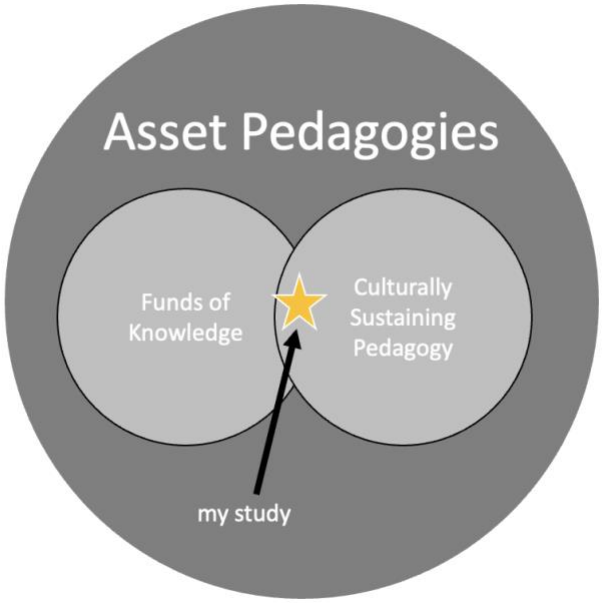
Asset pedagogies seek to reposition the cultural practices and ways of knowing of SoC as resources that can be leveraged in schools to help students develop language, literacy, and other learning skills that are needed to succeed in schools that are still entrenched in white and middle-class cultural practices (Paris, 2012). Asset pedagogies join the home and community cultures of People of Color with dominant school cultures in ways that value both. Asset pedagogies became the umbrella that house the following approaches to teaching and learning that pursue educational equity: "culturally appropriate" (Au, 1980; Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985; Vogt et al., 1987), "cultural synchronization" (Irvine, 1990), "cultural modelling" (Lee, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2001), "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 1995, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & González, 1994), "third

space" (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutierrez et al., 1999), "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995), and "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2000, 2014).

While education scholars have used different approaches and lenses when conducting research on how to better leverage the resources students bring with them to the classroom, my dissertation employs the theoretical frameworks of funds of knowledge and CSP to conceptualize the design of this study, guide data analysis, and support the findings of this project. Given that both funds of knowledge and CSP fall under the umbrella of asset pedagogies, I bring the two theories together to examine the aspects of students' home and community cultures that teachers attempt to validate and sustain. I specifically highlight the strategies and approaches that teachers employ to center their students' identities as part of their commitment to employing CSP in their elementary school classrooms.

**Figure 1.**

*Illustration of the Relationship between Asset Pedagogies, Funds of Knowledge, and CSP*



## Funds of Knowledge

*Funds of knowledge* (FoK) is a term used to refer to historically and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (González et al., 1995, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & González, 1994; Paris, 2012). González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) provide a clear definition: "The concept of *funds of knowledge* is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (p. ix-x). Their seminal volume on the theoretical framework they use to approach education is comprised of research that focuses on families and out-of-school-spaces (e.g. students' households and communities) to better understand how educators can leverage the knowledge and skills that students already possess. González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) draw a distinct connection between their *funds of knowledge* theory and asset pedagogies when they articulate the goal of their work: "[this approach intends] to alter perceptions of working-class or poor communities and to view these households primarily in terms of their strengths and resources (or funds of knowledge) as their defining pedagogical characteristic" (p. x).

Funds of knowledge builds upon asset pedagogies by specifying that the cultural practices and ways of being and knowing of SoC are developed and sustained through their lived experiences, which are just as valid and valuable as the lived experiences of people from dominant groups. In turn, educators can tailor their pedagogy to the strengths and resources that SoC bring with them to the classroom instead of trying to force students to relinquish their cultures and assimilate to white, middle-class norms as a way to achieve academically. FoK research provides evidence that teachers and students can successfully use such knowledge and skills in formal classroom learning (Moll & González, 1994; Paris, 2012). Furthermore, FoK

supports teachers in developing critical consciousness as well as rejecting the white gaze and whitestream approaches to teaching and learning, linking it fundamentally to CSP. I use FoK as a theoretical framework for my research by attending to the ways in which participating teachers use pedagogical content and strategies that focus on the lived experiences their students are bringing with them into the classroom. These experiences and identities derive from their families and communities, who are essential stakeholders in this work. Specifically, I take up how students' identities and backgrounds should be highlighted as valuable knowledge and competencies that should be nurtured and fostered, while also providing them with access to dominant cultural competencies.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the intellectual evolution of CSP, tracing its emergence from critical pedagogy to culturally relevant and responsive approaches (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and the ways in which it forges a new, unique path. In this study, CSP not only points to a robust canon of research that centers students' cultures in teaching and learning, but also provides a theoretical framework that guides the design of this dissertation project. Using CSP as a theoretical foundation inevitably entails drawing on the frameworks of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy given the ways in which these theories are deeply interconnected. In Table 1, I have identified the salient aspects of all three of these theoretical approaches to teaching and learning.

**Table 1**

*Core Tenets of CR/RP and CSP*

| Culturally Relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) | Culturally Responsive (Gay, 2000) | Culturally Sustaining (Paris, 2012) |
|---|---|---|
| Prepare students to achieve academically.<br><br>Develop cultural competencies in students.<br><br>Teach students how to understand and critique the society in which they live. | Teaching and learning are inherently cultural processes.<br><br>Students' diverse cultures and backgrounds should be critical considerations when conceiving of, designing, and executing instructional practices.<br><br>Commit to achieving positive academic performance results.<br><br>Validating<br><br>Comprehensive<br><br>Multidimensional<br><br>Empowering<br><br>Transformative<br><br>Emancipatory | "Support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities…" (p. 95)<br><br>Provide "access to dominant cultural competencies." (p. 95)<br><br>Support "multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for teachers and students." (p. 95)<br><br>"Perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling." (p. 95)<br><br>Reject the white gaze ("and the kindred patriarchal, cisheteronormative, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, Judeo-Christian gazes) (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 2) |

Given the fundamental tenets of CSP, this dissertation is focused on the ways in which elementary school teachers support their students who have linguistic and cultural competencies that are different from whitestream competencies. Through a CSP lens, this study examines what explicit teaching strategies (e.g., learning activities, content, etc.) teachers use in their attempt to sustain and cultivate the diverse and rich skills and knowledge their students bring with them to the classroom. Furthermore, this research seeks to better understand how teachers sustain

students' cultural backgrounds while also providing access to understanding and critiquing dominant cultural competencies. Data collection and analysis includes ways in which teachers rejected the white gaze (and other intersecting dominant gazes) in their classrooms. Finally, this dissertation explores how teachers engage multiple linguistic, literate, and cultural practices and perspectives such that their students are prepared to be successful in a diverse, global world.

**Social Identity and Positionality**

As I mentioned in the Introduction (Chapter 1), I am a former early elementary classroom teacher. I am also a white, cisgender, heterosexual, English-speaking, college-educated woman from an upper-/middle-class background who is pursuing a PhD. In many ways, my social identities locate me within dominant groups in society. It was not until I entered the classroom as a teacher in Inglewood, California that I was regularly a racial minority on a day-to-day basis. That shift in positionality, coupled with the challenges I experienced when teaching writing to my first graders, helped me become far more aware of how my identity was fundamentally connected to my teaching and the ways in which it was reproducing dominance in the classroom. During my master's program in urban teaching, I was able to develop that awareness into critical consciousness with the support of my professors and colleagues.

As I continued to pursue critical consciousness by reflecting on my social identities and realities, while also taking action in the classroom to pursue liberation from dominance, I used culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as methods for action. CR/RP expanded my understanding of what knowledge is important and valuable while prompting me to conceive of teaching and learning in ways that did not necessarily reflect or reproduce my K-12 experiences, which were generally aligned to my cultural identities as a white, upper-/middle-class student. Eventually, I decided that I wanted to shift the nature of the action I was taking by

transitioning from the elementary classroom to pursuing a PhD in education to learn how to conduct research that would build a more just and equitable society.

During my doctoral program, I encountered CSP which has continued to support my developing critical consciousness. The theory helped me identify the ways in which I had not gone far enough in my own elementary school teaching. Furthermore, CSP prompted me to intellectually engage with the idea of the white gaze and take action by rejecting the white gaze (and other dominant gazes) in my roles as a student, teacher, and researcher. For me, the pursuit of critical consciousness is a never-ending process. I know that my socialization into dominant groups within society has left me with critical blind spots when it comes to my research specifically and my life generally. However, I also know that I can improve my vision, especially with the support of other critical scholars and colleagues. My work has certainly benefitted from loving critiques, especially by scholars of color, that push me to think about how my own white gaze may be framing my perspective or obscuring the ways in which I need to go further and be more radical in my own reimagining of teaching and learning.

Ultimately, I believe that the relationships between oppressor and oppressed disconnect and dehumanize us. I do not want to live in a disconnected, dehumanized society. More to the point, I do not want to contribute to disconnection and dehumanization in my role as a student, teacher, or researcher. It is this desire that has resulted in a commitment to learning more about how to enact CSP in elementary school classrooms. To do this, I use funds of knowledge to ensure that I am framing the students and teachers I work with in ways that value the knowledge, experiences, and identities that they bring with them into the classroom. Consequently, I believe that my research can deepen my sense of humanity and my connection to the world I so desperately want to see become a more socially just, pluralistic society.

**Macro-sociopolitical Context**

In this section, I consider how "broad social forces" influence and situate my research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 44). As mentioned previously, Students of Color became the majority of the public-school student population in the U.S. in 2014 (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2015; Strauss, 2014). However, more than 80% of American K-12 public-school teachers are white women from middle-class backgrounds (Emdin, 2016; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). The simultaneously shifting and stagnant demographics in public schooling underscore broader demographic trends across the country as People of Color increase in population proportion, though power and privilege still operate within systems of white supremacy. These demographic shifts are not just happening in the U.S., but in Europe as well, suggesting a global context in which this work takes on heightened importance (Alim & Paris, 2017).

While there has been a plethora of research on the ways in which historically and contemporarily marginalized students are systematically deprived of academic support and resources, as well as research on how we might mitigate such systemic marginalization, educational inequity persists (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Demmert, Grissmer, & Towner, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Gutierrez, 2008; Haycock, 2001; Knight-Diop, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006; López, 2016; Lo, Chuang Wang, & Haskell, 2009; Penn, 2002). Broadly speaking, socially and historically, U.S. public schools were designed to serve middle-class white students and they have not evolved to equitably serve their changing demographics (Gutstein, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). The U.S. and the globe are becoming increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multilingual, necessitating that education systems evolve to better prepare students to be successful in these current contexts (Alim & Paris, 2017). Given this macro-sociopolitical context, culturally sustaining pedagogy is well-suited to address needed changes in

teaching and learning that attend to the cultural differences between SoC and their white peers while also dismantling oppressive systems rooted in white supremacy in order to transform our current education system into one that centers equity, democracy, and justice. The following chapter outlines the methodological process employed in this study, including the micro context for this research.

# CHAPTER 4

# METHODOLOGY

## Research Questions

(1) What culturally sustaining content do elementary school teachers use in their classrooms?

(2) What culturally sustaining teaching strategies do elementary school teachers employ in their classrooms?

(3) What are challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms?

## Methodological Approach

This research study examines the teaching practices of four elementary school teachers at Angela Davis Elementary School who are committed to teaching in culturally sustaining ways during the 2017-2018 academic year. I employed a qualitative case study research approach to study the phenomenon of elementary school teachers implementing CSP in their classrooms. The cohort of teachers enacting CSP in their classrooms is the unit of analysis (each teacher is an embedded unit within the case). The goal of this study is to identify specific pedagogical strategies, activities, and content that teachers share with their students in an attempt to be culturally sustaining (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Given the in-depth descriptions this study requires, a qualitative case study methodology is well suited for the work because it provides a framework for examining the phenomenon of teaching CSP in the context of real elementary classrooms (Yin, 1981).

Furthermore, a qualitative case study approach promotes a deeper understanding of the case at hand which can be used to clarify theories and assertions about a phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003); in this case, teachers who use CSP in elementary school classrooms. This type of investigation is essential in the field of education as CSP is an emerging

approach to teaching and learning and educators, researchers, and stakeholders would benefit from more clarity and specificity in regard to what it looks like in real public-school classrooms. A qualitative case study approach is appropriate in this type of research study as it employs multiple sources of evidence to generate a holistic view of the phenomenon being studied and will generate meaning for the researcher and participants alike (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

To contextualize my study I use Yin's (2003) definition of a case as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p. 13). Given the nature of teaching and learning, and all of the outside influences on those processes, it is difficult to articulate the boundaries between the phenomenon of teachers using CSP in elementary classrooms and its context within an elementary classroom. Though lines may be blurry when it comes to researching teaching and learning, it is still worthwhile to identify what CSP looks like in participating teachers' classrooms and how their school context creates challenges to implementing CSP. For the sake of this project, I define boundaries along the lines of time, place, people, and activities. As previously noted, this study spanned the 2017-2018 academic year at Angela Davis Elementary School in Hawthorne. The participants in this study include four elementary school teachers who participated in UCLA's Center X CSP PD program. Data collection focused on two main activities: classroom observations and interviews/focus groups with participating teachers. By constructing a case study, and creating boundaries around it, I was able to bring the phenomenon of teachers implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms into sharper focus.

For this project, I use a descriptive embedded case study approach in order to "describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred" (Baxter & Jack,

2008, p. 548; i.e., the phenomenon of a cohort of elementary teachers applying CSP in their classrooms) and because the study involved four teachers operating in the same context (i.e., they taught at the same elementary school and participated in the same CSP PD program) (Yin, 2009). Descriptive case studies seek to "describe a phenomenon (the 'case') in its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 286). I describe this study as an embedded single case study where the teachers in this study form a cohort as they all participated in the same CSP PD program and teach at the same elementary school. Each teacher is identified as an embedded unit (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By using this approach, I am able to analyze data within, between, and across sub-units (teachers and their classrooms) to provide a rich description of the phenomenon (applying CSP in elementary school classrooms) and the context in which it occurred. This design allows for data collection and analysis that provide a robust understanding of the case through classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

**Background**

The teachers in this study were part of a broader, district-wide initiative which aimed to support teachers and administrators in being culturally responsive and sustaining through a professional development program developed by Center X at UCLA. The PD program used a framework that began with (1) critical self-reflection, which led to (2) deconstruction and reconstruction, that provided for (3) agency and action, and continued with (4) support and sustenance. Initial meetings with school leadership teams and teacher cohorts focused on critical self-reflection. This was a necessary starting point because educators must first be able to understand and articulate their own identities and cultural backgrounds before they can understand and be responsive to their students' cultures. The PD included "cultural autobiographies" where teachers and leaders were asked a series of questions that prompted them

to reflect on the various components of their identities and how such demographic information had shaped their experiences, specifically in education. Cultural autobiographies were shared within the leadership and teacher cohorts as a way of building trust and common understanding among educators. Then, PD facilitators prompted teachers and administrators to think about how their cultural backgrounds influenced their school or classroom. Educators were encouraged to think about how their cultures manifested at school and how they might be different from their students' cultures.

Also early on in the PD program, facilitators worked to explicitly deconstruct and reconstruct key terms and ideas like culture, race, and equity. Teachers and leaders explored the theoretical underpinnings of concepts including equality, equity, democracy, and diversity. Through deconstruction, all participants worked through misunderstandings of these often nebulous terms and ideas. Through reconstruction, participants embarked on this work with shared knowledge of what these key concepts mean and how they influence responsive and sustaining teaching.

Once teachers engaged in critical self-reflection as well as deconstruction and reconstruction, they explored action and agency in their classrooms. PD facilitators shared practical classroom skills, such as attention signals, discussion protocols, and use of movement in class. These practical skills are meant to push teachers beyond traditional approaches to teaching and learning; they were designed to cultivate responsiveness to the students in these teachers' classrooms who were often low-income Students of Color. Teachers were encouraged to adapt these pedagogical strategies in their own, unique ways; since they knew their students better than PD facilitators, teachers were uniquely positioned to cultivate teaching strategies that best respond to their students. Teachers were supported in this work via regular classroom

observations. PD facilitators observed one lesson in each participating teacher's classroom once a month during the 2016-2017 school year. Observation notes were shared with teachers and debriefed at the following cohort meeting. This cycle of observation, reflection, and application of new skills was designed to empower teachers with the agency needed to take action in their classrooms to best support their students.

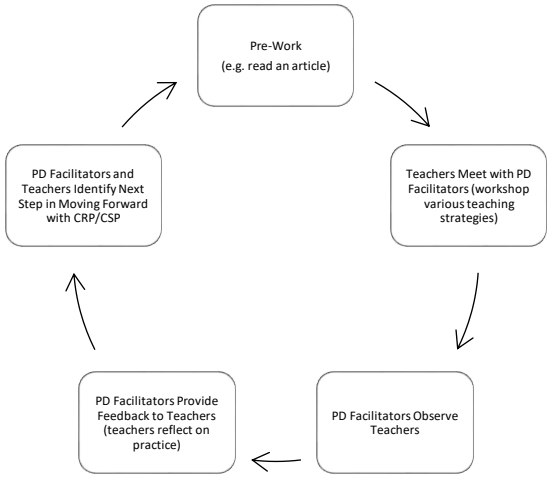
Given the longitudinal nature of the PD program, support and sustenance manifested over time. First, PD facilitators laid the foundation for school leaders to continue developing this culturally sustaining approach to teaching and learning after the PD program officially ended. Administrators learned the theory behind this pedagogical approach and apprenticed to share the approach with other faculty, beyond the initial teacher cohorts. Furthermore, school leaders learned how to use a lens of equity and diversity when addressing any educational issue experienced at the school, whether it is the same group of students being suspended or consistently low test scores among English Language Learners (ELLs). This PD program did not take a one-size-fits-all approach to problem-solving. Instead, the PD program sought to develop the leadership and critical thinking skills necessary to solve problems within schools and classrooms so that diverse learners could be served equitably. Culturally sustaining teaching was supported and sustained via teacher cohorts as these educators also apprenticed to share what they learned in the second year of the program with their colleagues. Essentially, these teachers became "experts" who can introduce concepts of equity and CSP to other faculty in future years, especially once the PD program officially ended. In this way, the PD program was designed with sustainability in mind, so that the participating schools were not dependent on Center X as they continued this work in the future.

Overall, the PD program served educators who were open to approaching teaching and learning through a culturally responsive and sustaining lens. Even if they were unfamiliar with some of the pedagogical theories and/or practical applications shared throughout the program, they did not shy away from engaging with the work and having meaningful discussions regarding how to best adapt these approaches to their students. One challenge that emerged during the PD program was the wide range of teaching experience and wide spectrum of educational philosophies across schools and within schools. Given these variations in mindset and skillset, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate PD sessions to best meet all of the needs present within one group. In the following paragraphs, I will provide more information about the teacher cohort I worked with for this dissertation study (I did not examine the entire professional development program, which included leadership teams across multiple school sites).

During the 2016-2017 school year, four teachers were part of a PD cohort and learned about the theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy as well as practical teaching and learning strategies that they were encouraged to use in their classrooms. The teacher-oriented PD program operated in the following cycle: (1) teachers read an article on their own; (2) teachers met with a PD facilitator, discussed the article, and workshopped various teaching strategies that they could integrate into their discourse; (3) PD providers observed teachers in their classrooms, specifically focusing on the new strategy the teacher was implementing; (4) PD providers shared feedback with teachers and teachers reflected on their practice; (5) teachers and PD providers would move forward and work on another culturally responsive/sustaining teaching strategy, returning to the beginning of the cycle (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Professional Development Cycle at ADES*




The PD program was designed with previous research on teacher education in mind. Overall, the entire program was designed to center culture—how it affects teaching and learning and how it can be engaged to improve teaching and learning (Gay, 2002; Samuels et al., 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The program began with significant time devoted to critical self-reflection (Howard, 2003; Samuels et al., 2017). Teachers were supported in articulating their own cultural backgrounds (values, beliefs, practices, etc.) and identifying the ways in which their own cultural identities and practices may be similar or different from those of their students. These critical self-reflection activities also served to develop culturally-caring learning communities and foster cross-cultural communication, given the diverse nature of the teacher cohort, as teachers shared their reflections with their group (Gay, 2002).

In addition to sharing the theoretical underpinnings of CSP, PD facilitators made sure to identify and model specific teaching strategies, activities, and lessons that teachers could use in their classrooms (Samuels et al., 2017). Furthermore, PD facilitators created space for

participating teachers to share the challenges and successes they were experiencing while implementing CSP in their classrooms. This strategy aimed to empower teachers, honor the work they were doing, and encourage them to keep innovating (Fowler-Amato & Warrington, 2017). It is important to note that while research suggests that some teachers face obstacles such as mentors or administrators who are resistant to culturally-based approaches to teaching (Vass, 2017), this cohort of teachers was supported by school leaders to incorporate CSP into their classrooms. School administrators at Angela Davis Elementary School sought out Center X's PD program and encouraged educators to join the teacher cohort in order to cultivate their CSP skills. That being said, the school administration also mandated the use of a new English-Language Arts (ELA) curriculum that school year, which emerged as an impediment to CSP during data analysis. In Chapters 5 and 6, I examine how school leaders can simultaneously support and constrain teachers in their efforts to be culturally sustaining.

Given that this cohort of teachers had some familiarity with and commitment to teaching in culturally responsive and sustaining ways, they were an ideal group to study in order to identify practical applications of CSP in elementary school classrooms. During the 2016-2017 school year, I developed relationships and trust with this group of elementary school teachers based on being partners in this work. As a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) with Center X, I began working on the PD project with Dr. Tonikiaa Orange in January 2016. From January 2016 through June 2016, we met with school leaders (principals, assistant principals, deans, etc.) at each of the participating schools to identify issues of equity to which they would like to respond. In July 2016, school leaders came together for a day-long PD session on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning.

Throughout August 2016, we worked with participating schools to develop a PD plan for the 2016-2017 school year. Eight of the ten schools selected a PD plan for a core group of school leaders, meeting approximately six times throughout the course of the school year. Two of the schools had both a leadership team and a cohort of teachers participate in the PD program. As a GSR, my responsibilities included calendaring, confirming, and attending meetings; planning professional development sessions; taking notes during meetings and PD sessions; creating and disseminating surveys to participating educators; organizing and sharing resources; observing teachers, documenting my observations, and providing feedback to teachers on their classroom pedagogical practices; and other various data collection activities. Given the various ways in which I supported the PD program, I believe participants saw me as both a researcher (given my role in documenting the PD program) and as a facilitator (given my role in supporting their efforts to be culturally sustaining and working with them to improve their pedagogy).

As I developed my relationships with both school leaders and teachers, I highlighted my prior experience as an elementary school teacher who taught for five years in neighborhoods with similar populations in Los Angeles. I also emphasized the difficulty I had connecting to my students at the beginning of my teaching career and how this struggle piqued my interest in culturally relevant and responsive (and now, sustaining) teaching, which was a pedagogical approach that ultimately transformed my experience as a teacher. I shared these facts about myself to hopefully put teachers at ease and gain their trust since I know what it is like to be a classroom teacher in a similar setting and what it is like to struggle with understanding students' cultures in ways that support teaching and learning. I regularly expressed to teachers that it was not my role to judge or evaluate them and that I was learning alongside them. I was able to build upon these relationships in the 2017-2018 school year as I spent significantly more time in

participating teachers' classrooms in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the practical applications of CSP in elementary school classrooms comprised of SoC.

**Research Site and Participants**

This study was conducted at a traditional public (i.e., non-charter) elementary school in Hawthorne, California. Hawthorne was founded at the beginning of the 20th century and was originally a whites-only sundown town. Through the 1930s, signs posted around the community warned Black people to leave the neighborhood by the time the sun set. Hawthorne experienced steady population growth throughout the middle of the 20th century, eventually plateauing at just less than 100,000 residents. Despite its origins as an exclusively white enclave, this neighborhood has become increasingly racially diverse over the last century. Per the 2010 census, the racial demographics of the community are as follows: 29.3% White, 39% Black/African American, 24.2% from other backgrounds (most likely includes people identifying as Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, or Chicano, etc.), 5.2% from two or more races, 7.7% Asian, 0.9% Pacific Islander, 0.8% Native American. Given that the census classifies "Hispanic or Latino" as an ethnicity, rather than a race, it is important to note that 52.9% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) (Table 2).

Interestingly, there are six different public-school districts present in Hawthorne (a city in southwestern Los Angeles approximately six square miles in size) despite its relatively small population. However, 27.5% of the community's population is under the age of 18, which may explain the presence of multiple school districts and many public-school options for residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This study focuses on one elementary school within one school district comprised of 11 schools (one high school, three middle schools and seven elementary schools) that serves approximately 10,000 students. Angela Davis Elementary School (ADES)

serves 1,223 students ranging from transitional kindergarten through fifth grade. Their student population is majority Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, which reflects the general population of the community in terms of race and socioeconomic status. The median household income is $44,649 and 19.2% of the population lives below the federal poverty line (Hawthorne School District, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

ADES is nestled in a neighborhood with a combination of single-family homes and small apartment buildings. As you drive down wide boulevards with iconic palm trees planted in the center dividers, you'll inevitably pass the massive SpaceX campus and too many autobody shops to count. The campus is comprised of two smaller campuses (TK-2nd grade and 3rd-5th grade), bisected by a small side street that is now closed to traffic. There are a collection of one and two story buildings, along with an array of bungalows, that serve as a reminder of the architectural habits of public schools in Southern California. Though the campus is enclosed by chain-linked fences and security-controlled access, if you take a closer look, you'll notice large grassy fields, multiple jungle gyms, and an expanse of basketball courts regularly filled with children playing together.

**Table 2**

*Demographic Comparison: City of Hawthorne and Angela Davis Elementary School*

| Race/Ethnicity | Hawthorne | ADES |
|---|---|---|
| *White* | 29.3% | 1.0% |
| *African American* | 39.0% | 39.6% |
| *Asian* | 7.7% | 3.4% |
| *Pacific Islander* | 0.9% | 0.4% |
| *Native American* | 0.8% | 0.2% |
| *Other* | 24.2% | N/A |
| *Two or More Races* | 5.2% | 5.2% |
| *Hispanic/Latinx* | N/A[4] | 60.3% |

[4] Census data classifies "Hispanic or Latino" as an ethnicity, rather than a race, so it is not included in racial demographic data.

The ADES demographic information is critical given one of the assumptions I make in my understanding of the U.S. public education system. Research and historical evidence demonstrate that public education in this country has been created for and tailored to the success of middle-class and affluent white students (Gutstein, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). Given what we know about the demographics of the students at ADES, they are from populations that have historically been underserved and marginalized by the public education system—they are the youth described by Ladson-Billings (2006) to whom the country owes an educational debt. Because of this, ADES was an ideal research site as its students are from non-dominant and historically marginalized cultural backgrounds who may potentially benefit from pedagogical strategies and content that seek to respond to and sustain their cultural orientations and practices.

At the beginning of the CSP PD program in Summer 2016, school leaders at ADES shared background information about Center X's PD program with their entire faculty and inquired if any teachers would be interested in participating in a cohort focused on employing CSP strategies in the classroom. Five teachers volunteered. While working as a GSR with the CSP PD program at ADES during the 2016-2017 school year, I developed a sense of which classroom teachers would be interested in participating in my dissertation research by discussing my graduate work with them and sharing my desire to conduct additional classroom observations and include interview and focus group components to the data collection plan. All of the five teachers in the cohort were interested in joining the dissertation study, but one educator ultimately had to decline because of other professional obligations.

The cohort of teachers who participated in this case study is comprised of four diverse women (Table 3). From race and ethnicity to socioeconomic background to years teaching, these teachers represent a wide swath of educators. Given that the majority of public-school teachers

are women, especially at the elementary school level, it is not surprising that there are no male teachers in the cohort.

**Table 3**

*Information About Participating Teachers*

| Name (Pseudonym) | Race/ Ethnicity | SES Background | Current SES | Grade Level (Currently Teaching) | Years of Teaching Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maggie Romari | Hispanic | Lower/ Working Class | Lower/ Middle Class | K | 4 |
| Sonia Holmes | White | Working Class | Working Class | 1st | 16 |
| Leslie Valenzuela | Hispanic, Mexican American | Working Class | Middle Class | 2nd | 3 |
| Kali Lee | Black/ Caribbean American | Lower Class | Middle Class | 5th | 18 |

***Ms. Romari (Kindergarten)***

Maggie Romari self-identified as a Hispanic woman from a lower-/working-class background who now considers herself as part of the middle-/lower-class. She is petite and bubbly, usually wearing a smile on her face and ready to share a funny story about her students. When describing her path to teaching, she shared that she knew, as a child, that she wanted to be a teacher. She started her career as a substitute teacher, usually in middle school classrooms, in the community where she grew up and for the district where she attended school when she was younger. One day, she was assigned to substitute in a kindergarten classroom at ADES. She remembered feeling a sense of dread thinking about teaching such young children, wanting to cancel the assignment. However, she honored the commitment she made which led to an informal, after-school conversation with the assistant principal at the time. Once that

administrator, now the principal at ADES, learned that Ms. Romari had a bilingual teaching credential, she offered her a permanent position as a kindergarten teacher.

Because Ms. Romari grew up in the same community as the students that she teaches, she was able to reflect on the neighborhood over time. She noted that the school served mostly African American, Hispanic, and Asian American students, just like when she was a kid. She shared that the socioeconomic status of people in the community had stayed relatively the same – most of the students at ADES received free or reduced-cost meals. For Ms. Romari, an essential aspect of her career in education is her choice to teach in the community where she grew up and where she still lives. It was evident that she could not really see herself teaching anywhere else.

She was interested in participating in the PD program because of her deep knowledge of the community and the students ADES served. She noted that some of her students would regularly be described as defiant or misbehaving, but it seemed like culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies would offer more equitable and asset-based framings for understanding and supporting her students. During interviews, Ms. Romari often discussed the linguistic practices of her students and the ways in which she wanted to support and sustain their habits of communication. She also mentioned the tension between feeling like she always had to have complete control over her classroom and students, which she described as "being able to hear a pin drop," and her desire to relinquish control and empower her students to guide their own learning (Interview 1).

Ms. Romari made frequent reference to her inexperience in the classroom, though she was in her fifth year of teaching, which is often when teachers decide to leave the classroom. Her willingness to be vulnerable, to share her fears and insecurities, allowed me to do the same. Ms. Romari's desire to improve her teaching practice and better serve her students motivated her to

participate in the teacher cohort of the PD program. She was an inquisitive participant whose warmth and love for her students radiated from her questions about how she might overcome her fear of losing control.

***Ms. Holmes (First Grade)***

Sonia Holmes self-identified as a white, working-class woman. Unlike Ms. Romari, Ms. Holmes did not always know she wanted to be a teacher. In fact, she shared that she was generally disinterested in school as a child, struggling to succeed in reading and math. Ms. Holmes described herself as a student who "slipped through the cracks" – she was quiet, polite, and often went unnoticed by her teachers (Interview 1).

After graduating from high school, Ms. Holmes took a year off before going to college and worked full time at a preschool. It was then that she realized that working with children came naturally to her and inspired her to earn a teaching credential. While completing her field work in Boston, she was part of a program that focused on preparing inner-city youth and their families to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Because she enjoyed that fieldwork experience, she knew she wanted to continue working in similar areas with similar demographics, which eventually led her to ADES and to the teacher cohort of the PD program.

Ms. Holmes brings an intensity and palpable sense of dedication to her craft. She often noted the extra time and energy necessary to serving her students equitably. If anyone wanted an extra hour added to the day, it was Ms. Holmes. From the outset, she spoke of her students and families in asset-based ways: "They care about their children. They are concerned about their well-being. And they are interested in learning new ways to help their children" (Interview 1). She was also critically conscious of the obstacles that stood in her way; while there never seemed to be enough time in the day to get everything done that she wanted to, she also pointed to the

stress brought on by testing, data, and results. From the outset, she identified a tension between the time it takes to plan and execute culturally sustaining lessons with the reality that ADES follows pacing guides that make it difficult to consistently implement CSP in her first grade classroom.

***Ms. Valenzuela (Second Grade)***

Leslie Valenzuela self-identified as a Hispanic, Mexican-American woman from a working-class background who now considers herself as part of the middle class. From the beginning, Ms. Valenzuela's role as a mother was often fore-fronted in our conversations because her daughter was a student at ADES during the time of this dissertation study. Her daughter was initially skeptical of me, peeking into her mother's classroom in not-so-subtle reconnaissance of the new visitor who was now regularly meeting with her mother. Like Ms. Romari, Ms. Valenzuela always knew she wanted to be a teacher, it just felt natural. She never considered another option, steadfast in her professional commitment since elementary school, which only deepened in middle and high school.

Ms. Valenzuela earned her teaching credential from a university in Southern California, where she completed her fieldwork in Sherman Oaks. She noticed a stark contrast in the student population (which was predominately white and middle class), as compared to the schools she attended during her childhood in Inglewood and Hawthorne. She realized she wanted to serve first-generation students, like her, that grew up in the same neighborhoods and grappled with some of the same issues endemic to low-income communities. When she started substitute teaching in Hawthorne, she felt as though these students "needed me more… someone that actually cares about them and knows where they're coming from" (Interview 1).

Ms. Valenzuela joined the PD program's teacher cohort because she has always been deeply committed to connecting with her students. She felt like she could relate to her students, and that they could sense this recognition in her. Prior to the PD program, she felt as though she was implementing some of the theories and strategies that we shared, but was not able to name, describe, or provide a rationale for them. Ms. Valenzuela felt unsupported by former administrators and coaches who did not understand the ways in which she supported her students' linguistic backgrounds and practices in the classroom, instead telling her that she needed tighter classroom management. For her, this PD program was an opportunity to strengthen the arguments for CSP she had been implicitly making since she started teaching.

***Ms. Lee (Fifth Grade)***

Kali Lee self-identified as a Black, Caribbean American woman from a lower-class background who now considers herself as part of the middle class. Her path to teaching was somewhat serendipitous. After earning her bachelor's degree, she was working at a university library. She ran into one of her friends from high school, while at work, when her friend told her about an elementary school hiring teacher's aides. She realized that the elementary school was the same one she went to as a child, so she decided to apply for the job and worked there as a kindergarten aide for a year. However, she was still thinking about becoming a librarian.

When Ms. Lee did not get the librarian position she applied to, she decided to apply to a full-time teaching position and started working on her credential. Despite working in elementary classrooms for 18 years, sometimes at the same elementary school she attended, she shared that she sometimes still feels like a first-year teacher, revealing a deep sense of curiosity and beginner's mind when it comes to honing her craft. Eventually, she decided to leave LAUSD because she wanted her daughter to attend school in a smaller district. She knew she could make

that happen by finding a teaching job at a smaller district. All of our conversations included updates about her daughter, accompanied by many videos of the young girl reading, who she hoped would get into a school within her current district that had a bilingual program. Ms. Lee wanted to join the teacher cohort of the PD program because she recognized that it was the approach to teaching and learning that she had grown up with and she was interested in learning more about how to continue the approach in her own classroom.

Ms. Romari, Ms. Holmes, Ms. Valenzuela, and Ms. Lee are diverse across racial, economic, and teaching experience lines. But some common patterns unite them as a cohort; most of them are from the community in which they work, or from similar communities in Los Angeles, suggesting that they are more likely to be aware of the funds of knowledge their students and families bring with them into the classroom. Many of them are mothers whose children play a crucial role in their professional choices and commitments. Furthermore, all of them alluded to the fact that they recognized they were already employing CSP in their classrooms to some degree, but they wanted more information and training so that they could deepen their pedagogy and also defend it against critics.

**Data Collection and Sources**

Data collection occurred during the 2017-2018 school year (Table 4). The instruments for data collection included participant observations, individual interviews with participating teachers, and focus group interviews with the teacher cohort at ADES. Having multiple data sources (i.e., observations and interviews) allowed me to develop a rich description of the case, ensure rigor in my findings, and provide evidence for triangulation (Yin, 2003).

**Table 4**

*Project Timeline*

| | |
|---|---|
| **I. September – December 2017** | Initial classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups. Identify current pedagogical practices of teachers as well as challenges and opportunities they are experiencing. Begin on-going data analysis. |
| **II. January – March 2018** | Continuing classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups. Identify changes in pedagogical practices of teachers as well as challenges and opportunities they are experiencing. On-going data analysis and writing. |
| **III. April – June 2018** | Final rounds of classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups. Conduct member checks with participants, specifically what pedagogical content and strategies they used to be culturally sustaining and any challenges or opportunities they experienced. On-going data analysis and writing. |

### *Classroom Observations*

I observed each of the four participating teachers six times (for an entire lesson ranging from 45 to 90 minutes), yielding 24 classroom observations. Observations played a critical role in this research as they provided evidence for the context of the events (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, direct observations and their accompanying fieldnotes captured and identified elements of the lesson that participants did not notice themselves or did not discuss during interviews or focus groups (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Overall, observations are critical to generating rich, thick descriptions of a phenomenon in a case study (Stake, 1995). In addition to taking ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) during these classroom observations, I made audio recordings of the lessons, which I then transcribed. The audio recordings and their transcriptions serve as supplements to the observation data. The goal of the observations was to identify the teaching strategies, activities, and content that teachers used in order to honor and sustain their students' cultural practices and identities. Given my theoretical commitments, while taking fieldnotes, I made sure to document instances of teachers employing asset pedagogies, framing students'

cultures and lived experiences as central to the teaching and learning process, and seeking to sustain their students' cultures through their teaching.

One of the critiques of observations is that it is not possible to capture and document everything that is happening inside a classroom. The audio recordings and transcriptions supplement my field notes and respond to the aforementioned critique by allowing for additional review of what transpired during classroom observations. In turn, the observations helped guide focus group and interview questions by capturing pedagogical strategies and content that I wanted to discuss further with teachers. Reciprocally, focus group and interview data supplemented observational data by illuminating contextual elements that I may not have been aware of as an outsider in these classrooms.

### *Individual Interviews*

In addition to fieldnotes, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the cohort of four teachers. I interviewed each teacher five times throughout the course of data collection, yielding 20 total interviews. Interviews were conducted in teachers' classrooms (for privacy purposes) during lunch, recess, or their free period, which limited the duration of interviews to 20 to 40 minutes. With the individual interviews, I sought to understand "the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). Individual teacher interviews were important, in addition to focus group sessions, because they offered privacy that allowed teachers to be more honest than they might have been in front of their colleagues. Furthermore, individual interviews offered a space for teachers to be vulnerable when discussing this work, especially with regard to any challenges they might have experienced or misgivings they might have had about CSP.

I debriefed with teachers after observing them to develop a deeper understanding of what pedagogical content and strategies they used, the context in which they were teaching, and the opportunities and challenges they experienced when implementing CSP in their classrooms. In alignment with my theoretical frameworks, particularly funds of knowledge, I designed interview questions to illuminate the ways in which teachers were framing their students' cultures as assets to learning, centering students' cultures and lived experiences in their lessons, and attempting to sustain their students' cultures via their pedagogical choices. Interview data complemented fieldnotes, classroom observations, and focus group data to provide nuance and context when identifying practical applications of CSP in teachers' classrooms as well as any opportunities and challenges to this work.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

Focus groups were used to collect data on the context of the school where teachers worked. I conducted five focus groups over the course of the school year; focus groups ranged from 90 to 120 minutes and took place in the special project's teacher's classroom, who was my school liaison for this project, to ensure privacy. Descriptive case study endeavors to not only describe a phenomenon (in this case, a cohort of elementary school teachers implementing CSP in their classrooms), but also the real life context in which it occurred (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By meeting with the entire cohort of participating teachers, I gathered data about their school context from their individual and collective perspectives, which was especially helpful when identifying specific challenges to implementing CSP in a public elementary school. The focus groups also gave participating teachers time and space to share their experiences with each other and learn from each other. Developing a community of practice, as the participating teachers and

I did through the focus group sessions, is critical to ensuring that educators can maintain their own commitments to and implementations of CSP.

The research questions and research design influenced how the focus groups were conducted. Research suggests that focus groups should consist of 4 to 8 participants and last between 1-2 hours (Bernard, 1995; Krueger, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Vaughn et al., 1996). My focus group protocol was guided by my theoretical frameworks in that the questions were focused on asking participants about the assets students brought to the classroom, how teachers centered their students' cultures and lived experiences in their teaching, and which pedagogical approaches, strategies, lessons and activities they considered to be culturally sustaining.

**Data Analysis**

The unit of analysis in this study is the cohort of teachers enacting CSP in their classrooms (each teacher is an embedded unit within the case). The data collection process yielded 24 participant observations and fieldnotes, 20 teacher interviews, and 5 teacher cohort focus groups for analysis (Table 5). Classroom observation and fieldnotes were analyzed to identify culturally sustaining pedagogical content and strategies. Focus group and interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to nuance how teachers were practically applying CSP in their classrooms and illuminate any challenges they encountered in their efforts. In addition to observations and conversations with participants, I regularly wrote analytic memoranda based on my fieldnotes and interview/focus group transcripts in order to capture connections, themes, and patterns that began to emerge (Saldaña, 2013). Data collection and analysis was a simultaneous, cyclical, and on-going process so that initial data informed future data collection and analysis (Bazeley, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Fieldnotes, interview, and focus group transcriptions were coded in multiple phases. The first phase of analysis was driven by descriptive coding in which I read data, noted first impressions, and generated initial codes (Saldaña, 2013). From there, I identified emerging themes, patterns, and categories across codes as well as relevant sub-codes (Emerson et al., 2011). In the next phase, I refined the emerging themes in order to more accurately reflect the data and attend to the research questions. Based on my theoretical approach to this work, I identified themes and patterns along the lines of asset pedagogies, the centering of students' cultures and lived experiences, as well as pedagogical practices that aimed to sustain students' cultures. These themes and patterns manifested as codes and sub-codes during the coding phase of analysis.

**Table 5**

*Data Collection and Analysis Plan*

| Research Question | Data Collection | Data Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What culturally sustaining content do elementary school teachers use in their classrooms?<br>2. What culturally sustaining teaching strategies do elementary school teachers employ in their classrooms?<br>3. What are challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms? | Classroom Observations<br>Individual Interviews<br>Focus Groups | Phase 1: Descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013)<br>Phase 2: Thematic coding<br>Phase 3: Refine themes, patterns, categories, codes, and sub-codes |

## Ethics

When considering the ethical issues at hand in this research project, I utilize lessons learned from an analysis of contemporary First Nations research, specifically issues of self-determination as well as ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) (Schnarch, 2004). Despite the fact that less than 1% of ADES' student body identifies as Native American, I believe that some of the issues that impact indigenous peoples in research, as articulated by

Schnarch (2004), are relevant to conducting research with participants who identify as Black or Latinx. Broadly speaking, OCAP and a self-determination approach to research "is a political response to tenacious colonial approaches to research and information management" (Schnarch, 2004, p. 80). My approach to research is also political; it is the mechanism I use to resist and transform racist and classist elements of public education in the U.S. To this end, I must be vigilant when it comes to issues of power dynamics with the people and communities I work with, especially as a White researcher from an affluent background.

Self-determination in research and the definitions of OCAP are constantly evolving. However, for the sake of clarity, I will share my current definitions of these concepts here. Ownership implies that a given community (e.g., cohort of teachers participating in a dissertation study) owns their personal information (e.g., cultural knowledge, data, etc.). Control refers to the rights that communities have to research and information management processes which affect them. This includes, but is not limited to, "control of resources and review processes, the formulation of conceptual frameworks, data management and so on" (Schnarch, 2004, p. 81). The principle of access embodies communities' rights to manage, make decisions about, and access data about themselves no matter who collected or holds the data. Finally, possession is an element of research that attends to the possible tensions between researcher and participant where a researcher might possess data that is owned by a participant, which can result in mistrust and misuse (Schnarch, 2004). It is critical that researchers and participants come to agreements about the possession of information and data before research begins. I used OCAP as a lens with which to frame the ethical aspects of my research at ADES.

First, it was important to me to identify my assumptions about the community in which I conducted this study. Second, I engaged in reflection to consider how these assumptions might

prove to be value added, or an impediment, to my work in the community. Third, I established myself at my research site (and, more broadly, the community in which it was located) as a partner in research who sought to improve the teaching and learning experiences of all stakeholders, specifically as it related to issues of cultural identity for SoC.

To this end, I aimed to minimize boundaries and power differentials that would situate me as a gatekeeper to information and the sole creator of new knowledge. I communicated to participating teachers that they were able to review transcripts, fieldnotes, and other data sources as well as clarify anything they believed I recorded erroneously, misinterpreted, or misunderstood. In terms of ownership, the data collected during my time at ADES belongs to everyone involved in the research (me and the participating teachers) and decisions regarding what to do with it were made collectively. To that end, I articulated this approach to ownership to all of the people impacted by this project and we came to a consensus about how data will be collected and used.

Then, I worked with teachers to decide on how to best organize mutual ownership of collected data. Classroom observation fieldnotes and interview transcripts were shared with individual teachers. Focus group transcripts were shared collectively with the cohort. Furthermore, I provided analyzed data to teachers on individual and collective bases. The issue of using data brings us to the element of control; I did not make unilateral decisions as a researcher. Rather, I collaborated with teachers such that all stakeholders had collective control over the research we were conducting together. To accomplish this, I shared research questions, theoretical frameworks, data collection techniques, current data analysis, and potential directions for continued research so that all parties could agree to continuing research activities.

As far as access is concerned, teachers had access to fieldnotes, interview and focus group transcripts, documents, and any other data I collected for this project as it pertains to their classroom (i.e., teachers will only be able to read their own interview transcripts.). I was clear at the beginning of the project that all participants had access to relevant data and created systems for teachers to access data in ways that do not require them to ask me directly to provide specific data. I also shared on-going analysis of data with teachers as a way to honor their ownership and control in this research project as well as an opportunity to conduct member checks so as to ensure that I was accurately understanding the phenomenon at hand in a way that was consistent with the other people involved in the research project.

The principle of access is connected to the principle of possession in that both address who is in control of collected data. Given that I will be the primary collector and manager of data on this project, I had to be careful about not creating obstacles or boundaries when it came to our collective understanding of who possessed data. To this end, I assured teachers that all collected data belonged to the collective cohort and that it will still belong to them even at the conclusion of this research project and when I inevitably spend less (or no) time at the research site in the future.

# CHAPTER 5

# FINDINGS

## Context Revisited

As described in the previous chapter, there were four participating teachers from Angela Davis Elementary School (ADES) in Hawthorne, CA. These teachers participated in a three-year CSP PD program designed and delivered by Center X, part of UCLA's School of Education and Information Studies. Data was collected throughout the 2017-2018 school year, in the third and final year of the PD program. Teachers were part of a cohort of classroom educators who volunteered to learn more about CSP and then implement CSP in their classrooms, making them ideal participants for this study. After volunteering to participate in the PD cohort, four teachers also agreed to participate in my dissertation study, which seeks to capture the specific pedagogical content and strategies teachers used in an attempt to highlight the practical applications of CSP at the elementary school level.

Following data collection, I coded data in the following phases: (1) descriptive coding (noted first impressions and generated initial codes), (2) thematic coding (identified themes, patterns, and categories as well as relevant sub-codes), and (3) refined themes (in order to best reflect data and respond to the research questions). Given my use of asset pedagogies as a theoretical framework broadly, and the funds of knowledge and culturally sustaining pedagogy frameworks specifically, my data analysis focused on the moments when teachers framed their students' cultural identities, histories, and practices as resources and strengths. This approach aligned with the theories I employed, which reject the white gaze by framing the cultural practices and lived experiences of SoC as valuable and inextricable from the cultural processes

of teaching and learning. My focus on CSP has shaped data analysis so that it highlights evidence that:

- Perpetuates and fosters the cultural and linguistic competencies of students;
- Supports multiculturalism and multilingualism for teachers and students;
- Frames linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as the democratic project of schooling;
- Rejects the white gaze (and other oppressive hegemonic frames related to class, gender, sexuality, ability, language, settler colonialism);
- Provides access to dominant cultural competencies.

Using a descriptive qualitative case study methodology and the theoretical framework of CSP, I describe findings for the three research questions guiding my work:

(1) What culturally sustaining content do elementary teachers use in their classrooms?

(2) What culturally sustaining teaching strategies do elementary teachers employ in their classrooms?

(3) What are challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms?

This findings chapter is organized into five major sections. The first section briefly reintroduces the context of the study and the participating teachers. The second section introduces the major findings of the study followed by a summary of the findings that address each of the aforementioned research questions. Next, I present examples of the content that teachers used in their efforts to implement CSP in their elementary school classrooms. These findings are drawn from classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups sessions conducted throughout the study. The subsequent section addresses the second research question, which examined what teaching strategies teachers employed that aligned with one or multiple

fundamental aspects of CSP. The final section describes challenges to implementing CSP identified in the data.

**Major Findings**

The findings indicate that, in their efforts to enact CSP in their elementary classrooms, teachers included content that highlighted historical figures who were involved in various civil rights movements as well as content that challenged patriarchal gender norms. They shared information in simple (yet critical), straightforward ways that young students were able to understand. Furthermore, findings suggest that teachers used age-appropriate response and discussion protocols to support the linguistic and cultural practices of their students as well as other strategies that encouraged collaboration and cooperation among students. Additionally, findings reveal that challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms include being required to use a mandated curriculum and inconsistency in school leadership. Before I present the summary of the study's findings, I call attention to the major findings which are listed below:

1. Teachers included content that explicitly engaged issues of racism and patriarchal gender norms, as well as content that centered People of Color, in simple and direct ways with which young elementary school students could grapple.

2. Teachers used age-appropriate pedagogical strategies that supported the linguistic and cultural competencies of students through response and discussion protocols, connecting learning done at school to students' families, communities, and home languages. They also invested students with power over how they would engage with a lesson.

3. Teachers experienced challenges to implementing CSP in their classrooms because of a policy mandating the strict implementation of a new ELA curriculum and inconsistent school leadership with regard to CSP and the district-mandated curriculum.

In this chapter, I share data that supports the findings for research questions one, two, and three. In Chapter 6, I engage more deeply with challenges to CSP and discuss how future work and research might mitigate those challenges.

## Culturally Sustaining Content (RQ1)

Multiple classroom observations and participant interviews revealed that teachers committed to CSP used instructional content that explicitly engaged issues of racism and oppression, highlighted historical figures who participated in various civil rights struggles, critiqued patriarchal gender norms, and centered the lived experiences of People of Color. Content included information about Nelson Mandela and apartheid in South Africa; socially-constructed, binary gender norms that constrict the roles people can play in society; as well as lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez. In order to best serve their young elementary students, teachers in this study shared information in simple and straightforward ways so that students could leverage their own lived experiences to critique oppressive systems. In this section, I discuss the specific content that teachers used while demonstrating the ways in which the content aligns with CSP.

One of the fundamental aspects of CSP is that it provides "access to dominant cultural competencies" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). In this way, CSP ensures that students are prepared to succeed academically in traditional public schools. However, as I have previously noted, it does not stop there. CSP seeks to go beyond dominant cultural competencies by perpetuating and fostering the competencies of "people and communities who have been and continue to be erased and damaged through schooling" (Ferlazzo, 2017, para. 2) in school spaces. While there is some evidence that teachers participating in this project offered content (i.e., information) that was intended to "disrupt schooling as a colonial project" (Ferlazzo, 2017, para. 11), there is far more evidence that indicates teachers focused on delivering traditional content to students, especially as outlined by the various curricula they used.

Appendix A summarizes the content included in observed lessons. For the most part, teachers provided access to dominant cultural competencies (in this case, information and skills made whitestream by curriculum publishers). In this section, I highlight examples of CSP captured in classroom observations, individual interviews, and collective focus groups to demonstrate what this theory looks like when it is put into practice.

There are a few examples where teachers included content that was designed to attend to the cultural identities of their students (see bolded portions of Appendix A). Most notably, Ms. Romari, discussed apartheid in South Africa and racism in the U.S. with her kindergarteners. Other teachers addressed issues of gender in their lessons and rejected the white gaze by including content on Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and other historical figures who fought for civil rights. In this study, I examined the content of the lessons I observed teachers deliver. When I think about content, I focus on the information that is being shared with students. The content of the lessons observed were analyzed for the information shared (the what), not the process of how content was shared.

***Discussing Racism Explicitly: Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

During our third classroom observation, Ms. Romari, a kindergarten teacher, exemplified a willingness to go beyond mandated curriculum and share critical content with her students. I walked into her classroom on a Friday morning, sensing the excitement in the air with the weekend just a few hours away, a sensation I remembered well from my time as an elementary school teacher. The classroom walls were covered with high frequency words; a calendar hung prominently near the door, featuring the months of the year, the days of the week, upcoming holidays, and how many school days were left until summer vacation. Small, round tables with small chairs for small people filled the room. As her young students sat in individual squares on

a rainbow carpet, Ms. Romari introduced a story about Nelson Mandela, prompting students to ask who Nelson Mandela is. As she began the story, Ms. Romari paused over the word "apartheid" (Observation 3).

> Ms. Romari: With apartheid, people who were not white had to live in separate places, go to separate hospitals, attend separate schools… do you think that sounds fair?
>
> Multiple Students: No!
>
> *(Ms. Romari goes on to describe what people do to honor Nelson Mandela and celebrate Mandela Day.)*
>
> Ms. Romari: When I say "go," you're going to turn to a partner and tell them a few things you remember about Nelson Mandela.
>
> *(Ms. Romari models with a student. Student shares that he remembers that people are supposed to treat each other well.)*
>
> Ms. Romari: Ok, go!
>
> *(Students turn to talk to their neighbors on the carpet in pairs and trios. Students talk to each other softly, starting sentences with frames like, "I remember…". Ms. Romari circulates around the carpet, asking students what they remember and supporting them to recall certain facts from the story.)*
>
> *(Ms. Romari uses an attention signal to bring students back together.)*
>
> Ms. Romari: Who can tell me something they remember from the story?
>
> Kennie: He wanted to make all hospitals and schools good.
>
> Sky: I remember that he went to jail.
>
> Ms. Romari: Who remembers why he went to jail?
>
> Logan: Because he wanted to change the world!
>
> Ms. Romari: He did! What was wrong? What was the problem? *(Ms. Romari pauses to give students think time.)* It was called apartheid… does anyone remember what that means?
>
> *(Ms. Romari returns to the text and re-reads the passage about apartheid.)*

Ms. Romari: How would you feel? Because there's a lot of us in here who are not white… How would you feel if you couldn't go to a good school?

Multiple Students: Bad!

Ms. Romari: What was the problem? And what did Mandela want to do?

Jackie: They can't go to the same store or hospital or school.

Ms. Romari: Does anyone have any questions?

Quinn: Why did they teach them bad because of their skin color?

Ms. Romari: Remember we talked about it yesterday… it's a word that starts with R…

Quinn: They were being rude to other people.

Ms. Romari: They were rude, but there's another word…

Quinn: Because of their skin color.

Ms. Romari: Right, and that's called racism.

Riley: Just like Martin Luther King! They couldn't go to the same schools either.

Carter: Martin Luther King went to jail too!

Ellis: And then he died!

Ms. Romari: What did Martin Luther King want to change?

Cori: He wanted to change the world because white people had a good school and black people didn't. He wanted to switch black people and white people in the same schools.

Morgan: Do you know why they shot Martin Luther King? Because he was going to a restaurant and a man shot him.

Ms. Romari: Right, it was a man who didn't agree with him.

(Observation 3)

In this instance, Ms. Romari shared information—content—that was not included in her school's ELA curriculum with her students, specifically about apartheid and racism. What started as a story about Nelson Mandela evolved into a class conversation about systemic oppression

and the connections between Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Students identified these connections and drove much of the conversation, suggesting that CSP with elementary school students is effective particularly in the ways that it centers students' knowledge and lived experiences so that they are able to access information about oppressive historical and contemporary systems. Furthermore, Ms. Romari was willing to identify the fact that she and her students are not white, making this content even more important to understand and discuss. Student engagement was palpable; every student was excited to share information with their partners and many students contributed to the class-wide discussion. Students were positioned as co-creators of knowledge—a key aspect of asset-based pedagogy.

In a written reflection, Ms. Romari shared that she believes including this kind of content (information) has made her students feel more included. She wrote,

> Something that is working well for my students and I is building an environment in the classroom that feels inclusive. For example, some lessons in the language arts curriculum have prompted students to voice their observations on differences in race and culture. There have been several opportunities for my students to talk about how although there are a variety of cultures it is perfectly ok. It is my observation that students feel comfortable [in their cultures] and feel comfortable talking about it. (Written Reflection, May 16, 2018)

In this instance, Ms. Romari embedded cultural pluralism in her lesson and centered the histories of People of Color in order to have an honest conversation about racism, both in the U.S. and globally. By bringing in information (content) about apartheid in South Africa and racism, Ms. Romari was able to create culturally sustaining experiences for her students in the ways that she centered the struggle of people from marginalized backgrounds. Students' perspectives and

experiences were also centered in the ways that they were engaged by Ms. Romari. The class was provided the space to critique oppressive systems (like those opposed by Mandela and MLK Jr.), encouraged to think about their own racial and ethnic identities, and had their humanity affirmed in the process as Ms. Romari validated their responses and participation.

### *Critiquing Historical Figures: Presidents Day*

Later, in the same lesson, Ms. Romari presented information (content) about Presidents Day. For this lesson, Ms. Romari and I discussed how to provide more critical information about George Washington, who was featured in the lesson's read-aloud story. Given her commitment to CSP, she tailored the lesson to her kindergarteners:

> Ms. Romari: Why do we celebrate George Washington?
>
> Jules: He was our first… president!
>
> Ms. Romari: Why do we celebrate Abraham Lincoln?
>
> Trinity: He changed the world and made it a better place.
>
> Ms. Romari: What did he do?
>
> Trinity: He said that white people shouldn't boss brown people around and they should go to good schools too.
>
> Ms. Romari: Do you remember what law Abraham Lincoln passed?
>
> Rio: No slavery.
>
> Ms. Romari: So, we know they were important people because they have a holiday that celebrates them… but does that mean they're perfect?
>
> Multiple Students: No!
>
> Ms. Romari: Right, nobody is perfect. What is something [George Washington] did that would not be okay today?

Jai: Because he [George Washington] was white, he was treating the brown people bad.

*(Students read the same story yesterday; at that point, Ms. Romari shared with them that George Washington enslaved people.)*

Ms. Romari: We know that even though we celebrate him, people make mistakes. Nobody is perfect.

(Observation 3)

Here, it is critical to note that Ms. Romari did not "stick to the script" during her lesson about Presidents Day. She did not precisely follow the lesson outlined for her by her school's English-Language Arts curriculum, Benchmark Advanced. In order to deliver culturally sustaining content to her SoC, Ms. Romari had to go beyond the information included in the read-aloud which presented a one dimensional, whitestream version of both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Ms. Romari then framed that content in a way that was understandable to five- and six-year-olds. She used videos from BrainPOP and BrainPOP Jr.[5] to share age-appropriate information with students about slavery, apartheid, Nelson Mandela, and U.S. presidents (Interview 3). These resources presented more complete and critical information (content) that Ms. Romari used to reject the white gaze and disrupt the reproduction of whitestream histories and norms. In the following interview, she went on to tell me that the Benchmark Advanced curriculum included a handbook with many different stories she could pick from, but she intentionally selected the one about Nelson Mandela because of the cultural identities and histories of her kindergarten students (Interview 3).

[5] BrainPOP and BrainPOP Jr. are websites designed to supplement elementary school (K-5) lessons by prompting young students to ask questions and form their own ideas.

### *Including Indigenous People: The First Thanksgiving*

Though I did not observe this lesson, in another interview, Ms. Romari described a lesson she did on the first Thanksgiving with her kindergarteners. Again, she selected a text from an array of optional titles based on what kind of content she thought her students would connect to and benefit from. While the text did not present a critical account of the first Thanksgiving, Ms. Romari pushed her students by asking them if they know any Native Americans or see many in their neighborhoods and communities, thereby centering student knowledge and their lived experiences. When students responded that they did not know or see many Native Americans, she informed them that though Native Americans still live in the U.S., there used to be far more indigenous people and they used to be spread more evenly throughout the country.

Ms. Romari went on to explain that there are fewer Native Americans and they are typically concentrated in certain areas because the Pilgrims and their descendants kept coming to this country and taking their land. At this point, her students asked her, "Why?" Considering their age and cognitive development, Ms. Romari explained this instance of settler colonialism as greed, a concept that her kindergarteners were more likely to understand and could eventually lay the foundation to understanding settler-colonialism and capitalism in the future.

### *Including Indigenous People: Arctic People and Greek Mythology*

Ms. Lee is a 5$^{th}$ grade teacher who used an interesting strategy to disrupt the white gaze in the ELA curriculum used at ADES. In a lesson I observed focused on the skill of paraphrasing (which would provide students access to dominant cultural competencies), Ms. Lee gave her students a choice with regard to which text they would paraphrase for the lesson. The text suggested by the curriculum was about Greek mythology. However, Ms. Lee also found a text about Arctic People, which was the curriculum's questionable way of describing indigenous

people who existed in the northern geographic region before settler-colonialism. Students were instructed to select the text they were more interested in, read it, and then work on paraphrasing it. In this way, Ms. Lee ingeniously navigated the professional requirement to "stick to the script" by finding content (from the same curriculum) that foregrounds indigenous people instead of solely centering white western Europeans (i.e., Greeks). She empowered her students to choose what they found more interesting while also ensuring they still practiced the skill of paraphrasing, the ultimate objective of the day's lesson.

In situations where schools or districts are not invested in challenging the mainstream traditional curricula that they use (that inevitably centers the white gaze), teachers committed to CSP must often be savvy behind the scenes. While they might be restricted from bringing in outside texts or information, they can find alternate texts within the mandated curriculum to support students in developing academic skills, such as reading comprehension skills in the case of Ms. Lee. Another option that CSP educators can explore is being critical of the texts included in a curriculum. For example, if there was no other option but the Greek mythology text, Ms. Lee might consider discussing with her students how Greek mythology has been reified as a cultural standard even though non-European cultures have their own mythologies and canons.

### *Challenging Gender Norms: Kings and Queens*

Other constricting hegemonies that CSP seeks to take an anti-oppressive stand against are sexism and patriarchal norms. Discrimination, stereotyping, and/or prejudice on the basis of sex or gender is endemic to white supremacist, patriarchal systems. As such, CSP seeks to establish equity across sexes and genders. In a couple of classroom observations, I witnessed participating teachers grapple with different representations of gender and push students to consider alternatives that are rooted in equity.

Ms. Holmes' first grade classroom had massive eastern-facing windows that gave the space a sun-drenched feeling in the late morning. Her walls were decorated in systematic, orderly ways, reflecting her teaching style. One bulletin board lovingly shared student writing, another presented information on Project Lead the Way (ADES' STEM curriculum), while a third neatly displayed sight words to support student reading and writing. Small square desks were arranged into rectangular groups, but as I entered the classroom, I saw Ms. Holmes' first graders sitting in rows on the carpet at the front of the classroom.

Ms. Holmes challenged a story's depiction of a lone lion king (male) by asking students to consider the possibility of a lion queen (female).

Ms. Holmes: So, before we begin this story, can you help me to remember who were the characters in the story? You don't have to raise your hand, but you can use a whisper voice.

Multiple Students: [offer various responses in soft voices]

Ms. Holmes: What's the opposite of a king?

Multiple Students: A queen!

Ms. Holmes: Don't you think it would be cool if there were a lion queen?

Multiple Students: Yeah!

Ms. Holmes: Do you think it would be possible to have a lion queen? For a queen to be in charge?

Multiple Students: [offer mixed responses – yes, maybe, no]

Diego: Can you go online to check if there's a book that has a lion queen in it?

Ms. Holmes: That's a great idea!

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Ms. Holmes: Ok you guys, here's what we're going to do, you're going to go back to your seats and make a story map. You know what I was thinking? In this story, there was a Mother Owl. And I know sometimes moms take care of babies, but I also know that other people can make sure babies and kids feel safe. When I was a little kid, like you, my older brother would always look out for me and make me feel safe. Do you have anyone at home that makes sure you stay safe?

Multiple Students: [various responses – my mom, my dad, my brother, my sister]

Ms. Holmes: So, your challenge today, if you want to, is you can draw something other than a Mother Owl taking care of her baby, because we know it's not just mothers who take care of babies.

(Observation 3)

Through the reading comprehension strategy of character analysis, Ms. Holmes supported students to be critical of the texts they read and the latent messages of gender norms the texts send to children. Furthermore, like other teachers in this study, she rooted her critique of patriarchal gender norms in an age-appropriate way. Students understood the gendered differences between kings and queens, as well as the power discrepancies typically embodied in royal hierarchies.

In the second portion of the lesson, Ms. Holmes centered students' experiences with caregivers and gender in order to highlight the ways in which their families and communities do not necessarily subscribe to patriarchal gender norms. From there, Ms. Holmes extended her challenge to gender norms by introducing a story map activity, which is part of a reading comprehension strategy that supports students in summarizing texts. Ms. Holmes noted that in the story, the primary caregiver to the baby owl was a mother owl. She went on to discuss that

caregivers are not always mothers or women. She shared that when she was growing up, her older brother often looked after her and kept her safe. Next, she asked her students to share who takes care of them and they offered a variety of responses, including male figures like their fathers and brothers. Before she released her students to work on their story maps independently, Ms. Holmes encouraged them to consider drawing something other than a mother owl because they knew that different people can take care of children and make sure they stay safe. In this instance, Ms. Holmes worked within the confines of the mandated ELA curriculum by pushing against the patriarchal messaging that equates caregiving to women. Furthermore, she centered the lived experiences of her students and the practices of their families (with regards to caregivers) to reject the male, patriarchal gaze.

During an interview after the observation, Ms. Holmes reflected on the lesson. She noted that she wished she had done some outside research to find stories that feature female queens to supplement the text that focused on a male king. She was struck by one of her student's requests that she find other stories that do not just depict male kings. This interaction and reflection highlights two things. First, the recurring challenge of mainstream, mandated curriculum that often reproduces and reinforces patriarchal gender norms (along with other oppressive norms and practices) through texts. Second, the opportunity for teachers to see students as their guides.

In this observation, a six-year-old boy, Diego, requested stories that feature women as leaders. Here, he showed the teacher how to "support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities." (Paris, 2021, p. 95). Diego demonstrated to his teacher that he was not buying into the patriarchal notion that only men can be leaders and was eager to learn more about female leaders. At a young age, Diego was demonstrating a cultural competency of feminism and equality, one that rejected misogyny and the male gaze. In turn,

Ms. Holmes—and teachers who find themselves in a similar situation—can empower students by providing access to alternative narratives that challenge the status quo. To do this, however, she may need to go beyond the mandated curriculum to find texts that are better aligned with a culturally sustaining ideology. In the interview with Ms. Holmes, it is clear that she wanted to take this next step, but observation data do not indicate whether or not she did so in subsequent lessons.

Ms. Romari, the participating kindergarten teacher, noted a similar experience with her students when it came to kings and queens. She reflected on a discussion she had with her students about gender:

> Well, they pick up on it and they're so smart. Every day we have picture cards up in the morning and they read a sentence and one of them one day was a king and it was a white king. Let me show you. They internalize it without knowing. So, we have like a whole discussion the other day how there can be all different kinds of kings. That they don't all have to be white and we talked about it's not just kings. There are queens too. But we use [the cards] a lot of times as kind of like a prompt for them to write a sentence. So that's what we wrote about that day. We wrote, you know, all kinds of kings… that they can all look different.
>
> (Interview 2)

As noted with Ms. Holmes, Ms. Romari was able to let her students be her guide. They were aware of the depictions of white men in positions of power in the curriculum. They understood that this framing did not include them, alienating them from power and relegating them to a different part of the implicit whitestream hierarchy. Ms. Romari claimed that she supported them to critique and reject these whitestream tropes, with regards to race and gender, in their

conversations and in their writing. In the next section, I turn from the *what* of CSP to the *how*, highlighting pedagogical strategies participating teachers employed in their efforts to be culturally sustaining.

## Culturally Sustaining Teaching Strategies (RQ2)

Findings in this study suggest that teachers used age-appropriate response and discussion protocols, activities that encouraged collaboration and cooperation among students, and aligned school and home as interconnected spaces of learning, given their commitment to CSP. These pedagogical strategies supported the linguistic and cultural competencies of students by investing them with power and control over how they engaged with various lessons and activities. Three major themes emerged that illuminate the practical application of CSP strategies employed by study participants: (1) intentionally incorporating talking and moving as a teaching strategy; (2) connecting to and engaging with students' families and home cultures, especially through students' home languages; and (3) giving students choice and control over lessons and activities.

### *Intentionally Incorporating Talking and Moving*

Multiple teachers identified overlap talk and movement as CSP teaching strategies (Focus Group 2). Overlap talk is a response and discussion protocol where students do not have to wait for an individual's turn in order to speak; rather, they can "shout out" to the class or whisper to a neighbor and many people can speak simultaneously. This conversational style, when welcomed in the classroom, can be a pedagogical strategy that validates and sustains the communication styles of communities of color that are rooted in collectivism and cooperation (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Hollie, 2012; Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Schiffrin, 1994). It is a way of communicating that is not about an individual's opinion but rather about a group's consensus.

Hudley and Mallinson (2011) explain, “In standardized English, overlap may be considered a form of interruption and may be offensive to the speaker” (p. 101). But we must be clear, the “standardized English” they are describing is typically the standard of white, middle-class speakers. Their analysis not only reveals a linguistic gaze (i.e., English-monolingual), but also points to the ways in which various conversational norms can be interpreted differently based on power dynamics in classrooms and schools. If a teacher or school subscribes solely to standardized English norms, overlap talk may then be considered rude or defiant. In turn, this often frames the conversation styles and patterns of SoC, particularly Black students, as rude and/or defiant. However, when the linguistic practices of SoC are acknowledged and the differences between whitestream linguistic practices and those of communities of color are identified, CSP can be employed to encourage the multi-linguistic practices in elementary classrooms. Furthermore, multiculturalism and multilingualism for teachers and students can be better supported.

Every participating teacher I observed allowed and encouraged overlap talk throughout their lessons. In fact, I observed instances of overlap talk in nearly every classroom observation that I conducted. In this way, a linguistic practice of SoC was honored and sustained as an official response and discussion protocol in classrooms; it transcended content as it was present in lessons ranging from social studies to math to phonics. As Ms. Romari thought about the ways that her kindergarteners communicated, she explained, “It’s just a cultural thing… at their age level you need to move and talk to each other” (Interview 2). Ms. Holmes echoed this sentiment during a focus group: “I find that [students] are so sociocentric and they want to talk” (Focus Group 2). These teaching strategies of allowing—and at times, encouraging—overlap talk reveal the ways in which educators in this study use CSP to disrupt the power hierarchies of the

traditional elementary classroom. I find that CSP-oriented teachers do not always require their students to wait to be called on before offering an answer or sharing a response with a classmate, group of peers, or the entire class. Rather, there are multiple accounts during my observations and teacher interviews where I find that, guided by CSP, teachers are facilitators rather than taskmasters.

Another pedagogical strategy that was observed in every teacher's classroom was movement. Research suggests that SoC benefit from high-movement contexts, which often stand in opposition to the low-movement contexts of traditional schools and classrooms (Hollie, 2012). Data from this study indicate that teachers approached movement in a few different ways. First, movement was used as a tool to engage students in a break or a tool to facilitate a transition between lessons and activities. Second, informal movement around the classroom was a strategy that teachers used to invest power and autonomy in their students.

I observed multiple instances of informal movement (i.e., movement that was not part of an academic activity), during what I would describe as mini-dance parties. After sustained student engagement during a lesson, Ms. Valenzuela, a second grade teacher, played a video through GoNoodle[6] and students were able to move and dance around. Ms. Romari played music that increased and decreased in pace, prompting students to move their bodies along with the changing rhythms, as a way to transition from one activity to the next. In each instance, I noted the palpable joy of students. They were smiling and laughing, copying each other's dance moves, and requesting additional songs as though their teachers moonlit as DJs. During a focus group, when asked what was going well, Ms. Lee shared, "Movement is helpful. Like at the door,

[6] GoNoodle is a website designed to get children up and moving as a way to support them in becoming more mindful.

before it's their quiet time after lunch, they can move and get it out of their system. It seems like that helps" (Focus Group 2).

Movement was also integrated into lessons in ways that made it integral to an array of academic activities. Ms. Lee used a discussion protocol called "Around the World" where her fifth graders were randomly assigned numbers and then prompted to leave their desks and move to different parts of the classroom based on their number. Not only was this a way to get students up and moving, it also ensured that students worked with peers that they did not normally sit close to because of the way that the desks were grouped together. Furthermore, the "Around the World" discussion protocol de-centers the teacher and positions students as experts who can learn from and with each other, thereby aligning with asset-based pedagogy.

The "Silent Appointment" discussion protocol was another way that both Ms. Valenzuela and Ms. Holmes used movement to facilitate the validation of their students' knowledge and ideas. With this protocol, the teacher posed a question to students, gave them time to think about their response, and then prompted them to quietly make eye contact with another classmate before walking over to that peer to discuss the topic at hand. This strategy embraced movement in the classroom and students as valuable creators of knowledge. The "Silent Appointment" de-centered teachers and invested power in students to make choices for themselves about what their learning will look like. Ms. Holmes reflected on the activity during an interview as well as a focus group,

> There's so many different levels of it that I like. I like that it gives the kids the opportunity to really think about their own learning and their own needs. It gives them a choice, it's their decision. It helps them to start to develop their own skills

> of decision making. And I feel like it also gets them up, it gets them moving. And it creates a little more ownership too.
>
> (Interview 6)

> Something that's really working with me that I love is the silent appointments. I feel like I do that multiple times, I just do it all the time. But when I set them up to go find a partner, I tell them what they should be thinking about. So, for example, think about who is going to be a good writing partner for you, because we're going to do a writing activity. And then I'll say, either someone who you can help with writing or someone who can help you with writing. So, like putting them in the position of making the choice about the best partner for the activity, and the differences between a good math partner or reading partner or writing partner. So, really trying to get kids to think about their working partners, and it's so neat, because when I do that, I feel like the kids really do pick a good partner, and very few times do I have to intervene and change partners. And it gives them that opportunity to get up, and move, and then they're sitting with a different person, and it just gives them that break I think.
>
> (Focus Group 3)

In this way, Ms. Holmes did not need to validate individual student responses one by one, she trusted them to respond to her question and discuss their thinking independently and cooperatively. When Ms. Valenzuela used this strategy in her classroom, she would often play music as students moved around the room, searching for the partner they wanted to make a silent appointment with. She prompted them to skip, go in slow motion, or move at a normal pace while the music played. The varied movement prompted smiles amongst students and it appeared that they genuinely enjoyed this discussion protocol strategy, especially when the music stopped

and signaled it was time to learn from and with a classmate. Ms. Lee confirmed that movement was working well in her classroom:

> I'm saying that, the whole movement concept… I was told at least a year ago that students were supposed to stay in their groups and not physically move during independent work time. And then you guys came, and I was like, 'Oh, I'll try it.' So, the whole movement thing, it's like, okay you go from this center, okay now it's 20 minutes later, go to the next center. That was just confirmation for me that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, or should have been doing, as opposed to what somebody else thought was correct. And I would say that I do like the movement part, I do feel that even in 5th grade they need to move a little more.
>
> (Focus Group 4)

In addition to movement that was used in service of students collaborating with their peers, I also observed a general freedom of movement in each of the participating teacher's classrooms. During a reading comprehension lesson on identifying the main idea and key details of text, Ms. Valenzuela instructed students to read and discuss a text with their neighbor. Students were allowed to stand up at their desks and move closer to their partners; they did not have to stay firmly rooted to their chairs, with their feet touching the ground, which can often be a feature of whitestream classrooms and norms (Hollie, 2012). Students did not have to ask Ms. Holmes for permission to move around the classroom during a math lesson on place value. In fact, she encouraged their freedom of movement by reminding them that if they had a question about an activity, they should ask a few friends for help before coming to her. Once again, the teacher framed students as bright and capable learners who were not only able to learn independently from her, but also able to learn cooperatively with each other.

These examples of both informal and formal movement—movement that is used as a break from academic work and movement that is embedded in learning activities—highlight how power and control can be disrupted in elementary school classrooms. Traditional, whitestream norms of schooling often suggest that the teacher should exercise total control over every aspect of a classroom, from calling on individual, quietly raised hands to giving students permission for the most mundane of tasks like sharpening their pencils. Data suggest that teachers can challenge these practices by de-centering themselves, including response and discussion protocols that honor and sustain the linguistic competencies of students, and ensuring frequent opportunities for formal and informal movement. These strategies actively engage the cooperative, collaborative, and collective aspects of the cultures of SoC. Given that teaching and learning are cultural processes (Gay, 1994), these strategies disrupt and reject the white gaze of mainstream public schooling and create opportunities for cultural pluralism to thrive in the classroom.

### *Connecting to and Engaging with Families; Using Students' Home Languages*

The second finding that emerges from the second research question focuses on teachers connecting to and engaging with students' families and home cultures as well as home languages. Participating teachers explicitly connected learning done in school as relevant to students' families and home lives and vice versa. Some teachers used Spanish in their classrooms as a way to engage the linguistic competencies of their students and support their access to dominant cultural norms (like the English language).

Ms. Romari supported her kindergarteners to connect learning done at school with learning done at home by sharing what they were studying in math with someone in their family. During a math lesson, students converted information (depicted by pictures) into graphs that

helped illustrate how many they had of each item and determine what items they had more of and fewer of.

Ms. Romari: Think about your favorite color… Now, turn and tell your neighbor what your favorite color is.

*(Students excitedly share their favorite colors in partners.)*

Ms. Romari: Please stand up if your favorite color is purple.

*(Some students stand up behind their chairs.)*

Ms. Romari: Ok, let's count them!

*(Ms. Romari and students count out loud together. She repeats this process for the colors green and red. Students are visibly excited to all be able to participate.)*

*(Ms. Romari instructs her students to complete a math worksheet where they graph various information depicted by pictures. She encourages students to complete the assignment on their own, walking around the room to check their progress as they work. Students can be heard talking quietly with the other people at their tables, usually counting out loud together. Most students seem quite engaged with the task; some work with/talk to their neighbors more than others.)*

Ms. Romari: I think you did a good job, now you're going to help me do it! First thing, what should I count?

Multiple Students: Red!

*(Ms. Romari and students count aloud together.)*

Ms. Romari: How many should I color?

Multiple Students: Five!

Ms. Romari: Count with me!

*(Ms. Romari repeats this process for depicting green on the graph.)*

Ms. Romari: Do we have fewer red bowls or green bowls?

Multiple Students: Green!

Ms. Romari: So you're going to circle the green bowl and later you can show an adult the graph that you made. You can explain that there are fewer green bowls and more red bowls.

*(Students are directed to complete another page from their math workbook, this time graphing apples and bananas. Ms. Romari circulates around the room as students work on the assignment. She does not seem phased by the soft chatter and collaboration that is happening at many tables.)*

Ms. Romari: Why do people in math use graphs? Why are graphs important?

Quinn: So we can color in the boxes of things and count the stuff.

Ms. Romari: Why are graphs important? We know graphs have pictures.

Rio: We learned how to make them today.

Ms. Romari: Yes, why do we use graphs? We know they show us how much we have of something.

Ellis: So you know what your number is going to be.

Ms. Romari: Graphs show information in an easier and faster way. That way, when you go home today, you can tell an adult why graphs are important. You can tell your parents, we filled out graphs today, and graphs tell us how much we have of something.

(Observation 2)

At the end of the lesson, Ms. Romari reiterated why graphs can be useful and encouraged her students to share this information with someone in their family when they went home later that

day. By mentioning and including her students' family members in the lesson (even superficially), Ms. Romari framed education as something that was inherently connected to students' home lives. In doing this, she helped to ensure that her students did not experience school and home as siloed, unrelated, or opposing spaces.

Additionally, Ms. Romari was also pushing back on the heteronormative, middle-class version of the nuclear family. As part of her CSP approach, she reported that she purposefully used terms like "family" and "adult" instead of "mom" or "dad" (Interview 2) so as to be as inclusive as possible with regards to her students' home lives. She connected what students learned in school to what they learned in other spaces, especially in their homes. Ms. Romari built upon what her students already knew and bridged the spheres of home and school. Her strategy of connecting school and home aligns with CSP in that she was incorporating and fostering students' existing cultural competencies while simultaneously providing access to the dominant cultural competencies of representing mathematical data on a graph.

With regard to the honoring linguistic backgrounds, Ms. Valenzuela and Ms. Romari both actively engaged the linguistic competencies of their Spanish-speaking students. They casually translated English words into Spanish, thereby providing their Spanish-speaking students with more access to various lessons (Observations 3, 4, and 6). Students' native and/or home languages were not something to be forgotten or checked at the classroom door. During classroom observations, students were never asked to speak only in English. Rather, Ms. Valenzuela and Ms. Romari's use of CSP—and the ways that they incorporated Spanish into their interactions with students—made it so that their students' home language was a valuable competency that connected home and school. Spanish was a language that the students shared with their teachers, a meaningful connection between the competencies of their communities and

"access to the dominant cultural and linguistic competencies" (Paris, 2012, p. 95) that include education in the English language. Furthermore, the teachers in this study practiced multilingualism and multiculturalism, highlighting it as an asset in diverse classrooms and, broadly, in a diverse world.

The connections between learning done in school to learning done in students' homes and communities is essential to CSP. It frames formal education not as something that is in opposition to the cultural identities and practices that students bring with them to the classroom, but as an endeavor that cannot be divorced from those parts of themselves. Students do not need to create different versions of themselves to embody while they are at school. They can remain completely whole and rooted in the intersection of their identities because their teachers are attending to the strengths and assets of their communities. CSP requires symbiotic relationships between students' homes, schools, and communities in order to achieve the goal of "cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

### *Giving Students Choices and Control*

The third theme that emerged from this study as it is related to the strategies used to enact CSP was the importance of giving students choice and control in the classroom. These strategies attend to the democratic project of schooling by valuing linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism. In the previous section on culturally sustaining content, I described a lesson where Ms. Lee shared a text on indigenous people in the Arctic as a way to include information about people who are often left out of the whitestream. In that lesson, she also offered her students a choice with regards to what text they wanted to read for an activity on paraphrasing.

> Ms. Lee: For this unit, which we finish today, we were talking about paraphrasing. Who can raise their hand and tell me what paraphrasing is?

Taylor: You find a source and put it in your own words.

Nevaeh: When you rephrase a story in your own words so you're not plagiarizing.

Ms. Lee: Why do we need to paraphrase?

Charles: Because if you copy a source, that's plagiarizing.

Jaden: You have to use quotation marks if you're going to use the exact words from another source.

*(Ms. Lee projects a paraphrasing example on the whiteboard. The example contains original text and a paraphrased summary. Students read the original text aloud with Ms. Lee. Ms. Lee identifies how words changed from original to paraphrase, but the meaning stayed the same.)*

Ms. Lee: With your group, you will make a choice. I'm going to give you a paper with two articles – you can choose which article you're going to paraphrase. The first one is on Arctic People, the second one is a Greek myth. You're going to have one minute with your group to make a choice. Then, with your group, you're going to work together to paraphrase. Find your collaborative areas…

*(Students move around the room getting materials like chart paper and markers. Groups seem to be excited to work together and engaged in the activity. I overhear students start talking about which article they want to read and paraphrase. Ms. Lee is circulating around the room, giving groups advice as to how to best move forward, suggesting that they read the whole article before they start paraphrasing it.)*

(Observation 3)

Providing students with choices throughout lessons and activities supports them to have some control over their learning so that they can develop and sustain their own cultural and linguistic competencies.

One aim of CSP is to provide opportunities to challenge the power dynamics between teachers and students. In traditional, hierarchical teacher-student relationships, teachers are seen as the holders of knowledge and students as receiving vessels for that information (Freire, 2010). As such, students are expected to be quiet, listen to the teacher, and work independently in order to acquire new knowledge and skills. This traditional banking model does not take an asset-based approach to students, their families, or their communities; it ignores the profound cultural and linguistic competencies that young people bring into public schools across the U.S. on a daily basis. On the other hand, CSP frames students as fundamentally knowledgeable and skilled. From this perspective, it is the responsibility of the teacher to support and sustain the cultural identities and practices of their students, while providing access to dominant cultural competencies, so that multiculturalism and multilingualism become the validated norm in public education.

In order to accomplish this goal, teachers must ensure that students have power in the classroom. As revealed in this study, power can manifest in a myriad of ways: the freedom to move around the classroom without permission from an adult, the freedom to communicate and work with your peers without being constantly monitored by a teacher, or the freedom to shape how a lesson plays out. Ms. Holmes shared the following reflection about how she disrupted the traditional teacher-student power hierarchy in her first-grade classroom:

> Today the kids were working on a Project Lead the Way activity for STEM which focused on animals and camouflage. The kids were allowed to choose their own

> partner and they had to take turns during the camouflage exploration and use of materials. As I walked around the classroom kids were working independently from me and talking with one another about the topic. The voice level was at about a 3 out of 5. Students were standing up, some were walking over to other tables to investigate. All were on task. Kids were moving around, yet not wandering. Kids were talking, not whispering, and on topic. Kids were waiting their turns and cheering one another on. Expectations were being met yet kids had the freedom to dictate how their camouflage activity would unfold.
>
> (Interview 1)

In this lesson, Ms. Holmes intentionally employed collaboration and movement as culturally sustaining strategies. She fostered a learning environment where her students were free to move around, determine how they would share the materials, and discuss the topic with one another. Illuminating the promise of CSP with regard to helping students to engage deeply in their learning, Ms. Holmes points out that students remained on task and met the academic objectives.

It is important to bear in mind that cultural practices and beliefs are not confined to race or class; there are myriad identities and backgrounds that impact culture. In Ms. Holmes' vignette, it is critical to consider youth culture and what is age-appropriate for elementary school students. What 6- or 7-year-old should reasonably be expected to be quiet and sit still for 30 minutes at a time? Much less for an entire school day? By supporting the youth culture of her first graders, Ms. Holmes created a space where students could move around and talk freely while working on their STEM activity, ways of being that are part and parcel of being a young child. Ms. Holmes also validated and affirmed the cultures of her SoC by designing an activity that was fundamentally collaborative, thereby encouraging a collective approach to learning,

rather than an individual or competitive approach that is often associated with white, middle-class, neoliberal norms.

Beyond movement and peer-to-peer communication, students also had a fair amount of choice in this lesson. They were able to choose their partners, what aspect of animal camouflage they were going to explore, what materials they were going to use, and how they were going to work with each other in order to meet the expectations of the lesson. In this way, Ms. Holmes created the conditions for a democratic classroom, rather than a dictatorship. Furthermore, this lesson deeply connected the cultural practices of collectivism and cooperation to the ideal of the democratic project of schooling. Students were centered as capable, empowered learners who could rely on each other as much as, if not more than, on the adult in the room. Ms. Holmes accomplished this through the design and delivery of this STEM lesson.

It should be noted that teachers in this study expressed more difficulty applying CSP principles to math and science lessons, compared to English Language Arts or social studies lessons, typically because the content of those subjects disguises itself as acultural. However, Ms. Holmes deftly demonstrated how teachers can leverage CSP strategies across content areas to ensure that this approach to teaching and learning is not confined to the humanities or social sciences. In this way, participating teachers demonstrate that CSP is not just about culture in terms of histories and traditions, it is also about practices of communicating, ownership of knowledge, and ways of being in community. CSP is an approach to teaching and learning that transcends academic subjects and specific content areas. As elementary school teachers consider the practical implications of CSP in their classrooms, it is crucial that they identify ways in which they can divest power from themselves and invest it into students. By creating classrooms where students can make meaningful choices for themselves and exercise various freedoms,

without permission from an adult, educators can support the cultural and linguistic competencies of their students.

## Challenges to Implementing CSP in Elementary Classrooms (RQ3)

Throughout the findings provided for research questions one and two, I mention a recurring obstacle that emerged from the data: mandated curriculum. During the 2017-2018 academic year at ADES, teachers were asked to use a new English-Language Arts curriculum (Benchmark Advanced). Both the district and the school mandated that teachers use the new curriculum exactly as it was described in teacher's editions and other curricular resources. Teachers were explicitly told not to modify or supplement any parts of the new ELA curriculum, including both content and pedagogical strategies.

This curriculum policy mandate not only limited the ways in which teachers could enact CSP in their classrooms, but also created inconsistencies in school leadership. While the school district that ADES is a part of sought out Center X's professional development program on culturally sustaining teaching and school leadership and encouraged the formation of a teacher cohort at ADES, the school then also limited the scope of this work by directing teachers to strictly adhere to the new ELA curriculum. Teachers received contradictory messaging from school administrators with regards to reconciling culturally sustaining pedagogy and the new ELA curriculum. These challenges illuminate possibilities for supporting teachers to adopt CSP as a stance and develop practical applications of CSP in their classrooms, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6.

### *Mandated Curriculum*

Throughout interviews, teachers expressed their frustration with the directive to "stick to the script" when implementing the new ELA curriculum. Given that all participants had been

teaching for at least a few years, they were familiar with other ELA curricula and had experience with differentiating instruction based on their students' needs, abilities, and identities. Rather than describing supplementing curriculum as more work, teachers expressed the sentiment that that practice is at the heart of good teaching. Ms. Holmes, a first grade teacher, articulated her frustration: "My outcome is here and the book tells me to do this, but I know that [students] are probably going to get tripped up here and here" (Interview 3). This statement indicates the limiting nature of a mandated curriculum. Ms. Holmes knows her students and is able to draw on her prior teaching experience to anticipate where students may experience difficulty. Previously, she would use that information to modify and supplement lessons, as described in the teacher's edition, so that her students are better able to achieve a given outcome. During the 2017-2018 school year, however, she had to follow exactly what the curriculum instructed her to do, regardless of what is best for her students. She went on to say, "Whether you're a veteran teacher or not, knowing that cookie cutter teaching, that's not how kids learn" (Interview 3). Her frustration became even more palpable as she criticized the ELA curriculum and the school policy that it must be implemented exactly as described. She alluded to the notion that one-size-fits-all teaching is not quality teaching and might be better described as one-size-fits-most or one-size-fits-mostly-white-middle-class-students. Her students were predominantly Black and Latinx, but the new ELA curriculum is aligned with whitestream content and teaching strategies that have historically and contemporarily been designed to accommodate white, middle-class students. Furthermore, her autonomy and expertise were constrained as she was limited in her capacity to do what she knows works for her students. Ms. Valenzuela shared her frustrations during a focus group, "I think the hardest part is the lessons since we have to follow the

curriculum, we have no choice. We might be able to add call and response, but as far as changing lesson content, I don't know" (Focus Group 4).

Other teachers echoed Ms. Holmes' frustrations. Ms. Romari, a kindergarten teacher, explained:

> It's not like we're really allowed to bring in a lot of [outside resources]. They expect us to stick to [the curriculum]. [This] first year they want rigor and fidelity with the program. But I was like, "Ok, well, BrainPop Jr. might show it another way." So that's kind of what I was aiming for.
>
> (Interview 3)

She went on to say,

> I found it a bit hard to teach the unit on holidays and celebrations and be more culturally sustaining at the same time. I found this unit somewhat challenging because the expectation is to teach the curriculum as it is presented. Additionally, it is tricky to present students with a more accurate narrative of the history of our country while being careful to present the information in an age-appropriate manner.
>
> (Focus Group 4)

The terms rigor and fidelity point to power dynamics present in this situation. Rigor seems like something everyone should want embedded into public education; students should be challenged and supported to achieve at high levels. However, rigor can also be used to undermine teachers' autonomy and expertise. By describing a curriculum as rigorous, or the precise implementation of a curriculum as rigorous, school administrators are categorizing modifications of or supplements to the curriculum as antithetical to rigor. In this way, school administrators (and the district officials they answer to) are maintaining hierarchies of power that de-professionalize

teachers by stripping them of their autonomy. The term fidelity operates in the same way. By aligning the idea of fidelity with the directive that teachers stick to the script, school administrators are creating a situation where teachers who go off script are being unfaithful or inaccurate in their work. This tactic seeks to bolster obedience in teachers; it inspires fear of differentiation, modification, and supplementation. The white gaze not only affects students, but teachers as well. We can sense Ms. Romari's frustration with this mandate when she discussed her desire to use the outside resource BrainPop Jr. to supplement the ELA curriculum. She wanted to be able to explain ideas in more than one way so that her students are better supported in their learning.

Ms. Lee, a fifth grade teacher, shared her frustration when reflecting on a lesson that I observed in her classroom. She explained, "I didn't like the prompt per se, but like you heard, we can't change much of anything. I would have chosen something not so wordy. Something they would have enjoyed to read" (Interview 3). In our conversation, Ms. Lee shared her frustration with a lesson that took students an inordinate amount of time to get through. She critiqued the prompt provided by the ELA curriculum and mused that she would have selected something more relevant to her students. She demonstrated her desire to implement CSP in her classroom by selecting a reading that likely would have supported the cultural and linguistic competencies of her students. In this instance, we see how a mandated curriculum can be an impediment to implementing CSP in classrooms.

### *Inconsistent School Leadership*

In addition to challenges presented by a mandated curriculum policy, teachers identified conflicting messages from school administrators with regard to the ELA curriculum and CSP. The school district sought support from UCLA's Center X to train school leaders and teachers in

culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy. For three years, we worked with educators from 11 schools to bolster their skills in this area. At this elementary school, the professional development program was extended to a cohort of teachers who volunteered to participate. The actions of various stakeholders—district officials, school administrators, and classroom teachers—indicate that CSP is something that they value. However, when trying to also precisely implement a new ELA curriculum, the value of CSP was called into question.

At the heart of CSP is the notion that one-size-fits-all approaches to teaching and learning are not effective, especially for students from historically marginalized populations. Indeed, one-size-fits-all approaches tend to reproduce white supremacy by forwarding implicit notions of to whom education should be tailored (i.e. the white middle class) and further strengthening the white gaze. As mentioned earlier, Ms. Holmes reiterated this point by stating that kids do not learn from "cookie cutter teaching." This statement puts CSP into conflict with the ELA curriculum. The curriculum directs educators to teach in one way while CSP urges them to be multifaceted in their pedagogy. Ms. Valenzuela, a second grade teacher, explained that the principal informed teachers that they should not use outside resources with the ELA curriculum. She described communication from school administrators in the following way: "If it doesn't come from here, if it doesn't have the logo from here, you guys can't use it. It's a new curriculum, and until we've tried all these resources, then we shouldn't be using anything else" (Interview 3). This messaging from school administrators is interesting because it contradicted the work the school had been doing with CSP. CSP is not content-specific, it's an approach to teaching and learning that should permeate all subjects, grade levels, and parts of the school day. To sponsor a CSP professional development program and then direct teachers to not use what they are learning from that program in their ELA instruction created an issue of inconsistent

school leadership. Furthermore, the priority placed on the Common Core State Standards-aligned curriculum over CSP reified existing power dynamics that value whitestream methods of education over innovation and attendance to a diversifying student body that has different learning styles and needs.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the major findings of the study. Findings are organized by research question: (1) Culturally Sustaining Content, (2) Culturally Sustaining Teaching Strategies, and (3) Challenges to Implementing CSP in Elementary Classrooms. Culturally sustaining content embodies the following qualities: discuss racism explicitly, critique historical figures, include indigenous people, and challenge gender norms. Culturally sustaining teaching strategies included: intentionally incorporating talking and moving, connecting to and engaging with students' families, using students' home languages, and giving students choices and control. The primary challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms were ADES' use of mandated ELA curriculum and inconsistent school leadership. In Chapter 6, I provide recommendations for ways to push CSP forward.

# CHAPTER 6

# DISCUSSION

## Introduction

This study on culturally sustaining pedagogy with elementary school teachers aimed to identify and describe the specific pedagogical content and strategies that participating teachers used in their classrooms given their commitment to CSP. It also sought to articulate the challenges that teachers experienced when implementing CSP. Accordingly, this study was guided by the following questions:

(1) What culturally sustaining content do elementary teachers use in their classrooms?
(2) What culturally sustaining teaching strategies do elementary teachers employ in their classrooms?
(3) What are challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school classrooms?

In the previous chapter, I shared findings related to the research questions. In this chapter, I turn to a discussion of the findings as well as the implications and limitations of this study. I begin with a summary of the major findings and include a discussion of how other educators might use this evidence to be culturally sustaining in their classrooms. Next, I offer some recommendations for pushing CSP forward in public education spaces. Then, I discuss the scholarly contribution of this study to the field of education generally and the study of CSP specifically. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of limitations, implications, and future directions for researchers, teachers, leaders, and policymakers.

## Summary of Major Findings

1. Teachers demonstrated that CSP can be practically applied in elementary school classrooms. They included content that explicitly engaged issues of racism and patriarchal gender norms, as well as content that centered People of Color, in simple and direct ways that young elementary school students could grapple with.

2. Teachers used age-appropriate pedagogical strategies that supported the linguistic and cultural competencies of students through response and discussion protocols; connected learning done at school to students' families, communities, and home languages; and invested students with power over how they would engage with a lesson.

3. Teachers experienced challenges to implementing CSP in their classrooms because of a policy mandating the strict implementation of a new ELA curriculum and inconsistent school leadership with regard to CSP and district-mandated curriculum.

## Recommendations: Pushing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Forward

### *Starting with Teacher Education Programs*

Given that CSP is an all-encompassing approach to teaching and learning, it should be embedded in teacher education programs so that pre-service teachers begin their professional training with a solid foundation in this approach to education. Similar to the research on CSP that asserts that the pedagogy cannot be distilled into a comprehensive teaching guide or standardized set of lesson plans (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2016), research on TEPs committed to social justice and framing teaching and learning in their cultural contexts posits that SJTEPs cannot be reduced to a set of courses or content knowledge. Rather, they must be rooted in the belief that teaching, learning, and justice exist within cultural, social, political, and historical contexts – TEPs must acknowledge and respond to those contexts in every aspect of their programs (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Sleeter, 2008). In order to cultivate culturally sustaining educators on a broad scale, TEPs must embody five key components articulated by Diaz (2021):

(1) Establishing a rationale for CSP

(2) Critical reflection

(3) Integration of cultural knowledge

(4) Purposeful cross-cultural field placements

(5) Tensions

It is essential that TEP programs recruit and retain teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers of color; collaborate with communities; include coursework that ensures that teachers understand U.S. history in regard to race relations; offer fieldwork that helps teachers apply and practice CSP; teach educators how to develop curriculum that sustains students' cultural and linguistic resources; and emphasize incorporating students' linguistic and experiential repertoires in the co-construction of knowledge (Cardozo-Gaibisso & Harman, 2019; Daniel et al., 2020; Diaz, 2021; Flores & Springer, 2021; Maddamsetti, 2020; Newcomer & Cowin, 2021).

In addition to recruitment, retention is a critical issue that TEPs must consider strategically. Research shows that candidates' beliefs, experiences, and values should be consistent with social justice goals if they are going to successfully complete a TEP committed to social justice and pursue a career in social justice education (Cochran-Smith, 2010; McDonald, 2005; Sleeter, 2008). Additionally, diverse teacher candidates fare better when TEPs employ faculty of color (McDonald, 2005). From there, TEPs can strengthen and hone candidates' commitment to cultural pluralism, democracy, and equity advocacy with coursework and fieldwork that prepares students to teach diverse populations (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). TEPs committed to CSP must embody a system-wide commitment through their standards and assessments; required courses; instructional strategies and courses that support prospective teachers in critical self-reflection so that they better understand who they are in our

social matrix and how their positionality impacts their teaching; high quality field work in diverse settings; community-based field experiences that help prospective teachers learn about funds of knowledge, structures, and social networks in the places they will teach, and the inclusion of K-12 educators and community members in participating TEPs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; McDonald, 2005).

As stated previously, TEPs rooted in CSP cannot be reduced down to a prescriptive set of courses and content knowledge. However, researchers in the field have identified common approaches to professional coursework among teacher education programs committed to social justice and provide relevant recommendations. Coursework fundamentals include the following: supporting self-reflection and critical consciousness among teacher candidates, balancing the cognitive with the social and emotional, taking an asset-based position when relating to and teaching students, explicitly challenging how power and privilege operate in the current system, and including other stakeholders like families and community members (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Zeichner et al., 1998). By centering social and cultural contexts, TEPs can better examine the purposes of public education; call attention to what is often left out, implied, or veiled in school curricula; and uncover what is subtly signaled as the norm or default perspective (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

Fieldwork must be tightly aligned with coursework. TEPs work in and with communities that serve culturally diverse and low-income populations; candidates learn the cultures and realities of the students and families they are serving while gaining practical insight into institutional and communal patterns of inequality (Adams et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2008). Sleeter (2008) suggests that fieldwork should occur in “multiple classrooms, [be] inquiry based to

disrupt deficit theorizing, [and be in] communities to learn students' cultures" (p. 1948). She posits that this kind of fieldwork is how teachers cultivate their skills of culturally affirming pedagogy. Maddamsetti (2020) suggests that fieldwork can strengthen teachers' CSP practices, especially if there are curricular challenges to CSP but also when considering how to further develop CSP content and strategies. Research on CSP and teacher preparation asserts that teachers must be systematically supported in TEPs in order to become culturally sustaining teachers (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gist, 2017; Jackson, 2015; Maddamsetti, 2020).

TEPs must consider teaching, learning, and schooling as deeply political endeavors (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Sleeter, 2008). As political projects, TEPs committed to CSP must aim to analyze power, support marginalized people in leadership roles, be accountable and responsible allies, build and maintain spaces of solidarity, disrupt deficit-theorizing, and develop ways to strengthen our multicultural democracy (Adams et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2010). For these programs, culturally sustaining pedagogy cannot be separated ideologically from teacher education. Furthermore, social justice (in teaching and teacher education) is for everyone. It is not reserved for white middle-class teacher candidates who will be teaching students of color from low-income backgrounds. It is not solely for students from urban, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. It is for the oppressed and the privileged alike (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

### *Resisting Mandated Curriculum Policies*

Often, curricula in public schools have served to codify inequality and oppression (Paris, 2016). Paris defines the curricularization of racism as "the ways systemic racialized discrimination remains a central part of the explicit and implicit curriculum and teaching of pre-

K through University education in the United States" (Paris, 2016, p. 3). When curriculum centers the experiences of white, middle-class people it results in the erasure of and/or damage to perspectives of people and communities who are marginalized in public education spaces. Furthermore, curriculum is a site where whitestream perspectives can manifest as deficit approaches towards SoC. Information included in such curricula can position the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being attributed to SoC as "deficiencies to be overcome" and ought to be "[replaced] with what were viewed as superior practices" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). However, just as deficit approaches can perpetuate inequality, asset approaches can disrupt such practices.

Research indicates that scripted lessons and mandated curricula are connected to accountability measures associated with education policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT), and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Dover et al., 2016; Endacott et al., 2015). Furthermore, scripted curricula can undermine teachers' professional expertise by limiting their ability to tailor instruction to their students and their unique needs (Dover et al., 2016; Endacott et al., 2015). Rigid scripted curricula that do not allow teachers to differentiate their instruction to attend to who students are and what they need to learn stand in direct opposition to CSP's tenets of perpetuating and fostering the linguistic, literate, and cultural competencies students bring to the classroom. Embedded in scripted and/or mandated curriculum policy is the logic that teachers do not have the professional skills to teach independently, essentially de-professionalizing them. Furthermore, the policy creates a narrative that challenges teachers' experience and competence in the classroom.

However, data revealed the ways in which teachers resisted the school's curriculum policy as they explored the practical applications of CSP. While the mandated curriculum mitigated the power and autonomy teachers had, their resistance attempted to reclaim some independence. Ms. Valenzuela shared an example of how her grade level team resisted the directive to only use the ELA curriculum:

> At first when they said that, we were like, "Ok, yeah, sure, we'll do that." But a couple of units ago we were doing inventors. There was this foldable and there was this little story about an inventor and they were going to be writing about that inventor. And it gives them more details about this certain inventor that we already read about. So even though she said not to, we would still do it. And when they came around, they were not happy.
>
> (Interview 3)

It is evident that the outside activity Ms. Valenzuela and other second grade teachers did was designed to support and improve student learning. As a grade level team, they decided to go through with the foldable activity even though school administrators told them not to use outside resources. They were brave in their defiance as they attempted to be the most effective educators for their students.

It is not feasible for classroom teachers to constantly be observed by school administrators, so there is an opportunity for teachers to resist the restrictive nature of mandated curriculum by modifying and supplementing it when no one is watching. Certainly, they run the risk of getting caught and being chastised. However, it is not clear if there is any sort of protocol for responding to teachers who are not following the ELA curriculum with "fidelity" other than

telling them not to use outside resources. The insidious nature of this education policy is manifested in the ways in which teachers may impose the policy on themselves; they may choose to adhere exactly to the curriculum, even if they want to change or supplement it, out of fear. Teachers may stick to the script, even when no one is watching, as a self-preservation strategy. In this way, relations of power are maintained in a bottom-up capacity.

The mandated ELA curriculum policy created a narrative that undermined teachers' experiences and competencies in the classroom; they could only be trusted to deliver the instruction if it was spelled out for them. This policy became an impediment to CSP. CSP invests educators with the power to tailor their instruction to their students' cultural identities, backgrounds, and competencies. It is unfeasible for a single curriculum to be nuanced enough to support the linguistic, literate, and cultural competencies of Black and Latinx elementary school students in Hawthorne, California during the 2017-2018 school year. If teachers choose to stick to the script, they must abandon CSP.

There are various relations of power that influenced this policy. District officials are beholden to state and federal education policies that dictate funding and resource allocation. In order to ensure access to state and federal funding, the district chose to adhere to CCSS and accountability measures like standardized testing. To ensure adequate performance on these measures, they chose to adapt a CCSS-aligned ELA curriculum. In turn, this school district mandated its school leaders to implement this curriculum, who then mandated classroom teachers to carry out the curriculum with fidelity.

While my data suggest that mandated curriculum is typically an education policy that maintains power structures and reproduces the status quo, I believe there is an opportunity to

challenge and resist these processes. Levinson et al. (2018) state, "To speak, then, of democratizing education policy is to envision the ways that ordinary people across a society's structured inequalities can gain a greater measure of control over their children's education and challenge insidious forms of assimilation or social reproduction" (p. 34). They go on to suggest that educational anthropology, and its attendant method of ethnography, can provide an avenue to policy transformation by sharing knowledge that inspires people to take political action (Levinson et al., 2018). By sharing my findings with stakeholders like classroom teachers, school administrators, and district level officials, I believe I can, at the very least, open up a discussion about curriculum and best teaching practices. By centering teachers' voices and experiences, I believe this research might persuade district and school leaders to revise their ELA curriculum policy—it might inspire them to be more open to modifications and supplemental resources.

In addition to providing information that might inspire changes in policy that would invest more power and autonomy in teachers, this work also opens up a critical discussion of CSP and curriculum policy. As long as public schools in the U.S. subscribe to learning standards that are measured via standardized tests, CSP will face a significant obstacle to implementation. Curricula that are designed to demonstrate accountability to CCSS will inevitably ignore marginalized students' linguistic and cultural competencies. If CSP wants to take root in public schools, it will need to reframe or resist CCSS-aligned curricula. My research demonstrates that teachers can do this at the classroom level by bravely ignoring mandates not to modify or supplement curriculum. However, change on a broader scale might be better pursued by advocating for curriculum reform. What might curricula look like if it supported teachers to support multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students? What might curricula look like if it took an anti-oppressive stance against racism, classism, sexism,

ableism, monolingualism, and heteronormativity? Further research is needed to examine how proponents of CSP could design curricula to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

### *Providing On-Going Support to Teachers*

Though teachers are not responsible for all of the systemic inequalities in public education that often result in the education debt of Students of Color, they can play a critical role in transforming educational spaces from sites of oppression to sites of liberation (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006). While teaching in a sustaining way may come more easily to some educators, most teachers will need to learn how to teach from a CSP stance, just like they learn how to teach calculus or literary analysis. Given that the majority of U.S. public-school teachers are white, middle-class women (Emdin, 2016; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 2008), it is essential to recognize that most public-school educators are not going to reflect their students (who are majority Students of Color) when it comes to cultural identities and practices connected to ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status. While it is important to diversify the corps of public-school teachers in the U.S., this research is focused on in-service teachers who participated in CSP professional development and explored ways in which to be culturally sustaining in their classrooms.

While there is a plethora of research on teacher education and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005; Gay, 2002, 2014; Hastie et al., 2006; Howard, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), there is less research on CSP-specific teacher education, given that this pedagogical approach is still in its early stages.

Furthermore, the research on CR/RP teacher education usually focuses on pre-service teachers as participants. However, a teacher's professional development is certainly not over once they finish a credential or master's program. Just like other professions, in-service teachers continue to learn throughout their careers—and some of that learning transpires in PD programs.

Education researchers offer an array of strategies that teacher education programs can use to cultivate culturally relevant and responsive educators that can be extended to designing and delivering CSP professional development programs. The first step is providing time and space for teachers to reflect on their cultural identities (Howard, 2003; Samuels et al., 2017). Next, programs must ensure that their entire program is oriented to addressing students' cultures (Gay, 2002; Samuels et al., 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002); it is not enough for teachers to take one or two courses in culturally relevant, responsive, or sustaining pedagogy, this learning must be rooted in all aspects of their professional development. Moreover, programs should model CSP in their own pedagogical practices; these programs should validate and affirm teachers while simultaneously preparing them to do the same for their students (Gay, 2002; Higgins & Ponte, 2017).

Other approaches teacher education programs, and CSP PD programs, can use in their quest to prepare and support culturally sustaining educators include creating learning communities that are culturally caring and fostering cross-cultural communication (Gay, 2002). Furthermore, there is always the issue of translating theory into practice. Samuels, Samuels, and Cook (2017) assert that it is essential to identify specific pedagogical tools and strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms to be relevant and responsive to students' cultures. Participating teachers reinforced the need for PD programs to support teachers with concrete

practices that are aligned with CSP. When asked how Center X's PD program could be improved for the future, Ms. Holmes shared: "I think seeing [CSP] put into practice is helpful. I think being able to observe somebody doing it. Like, 'Here's what [CSP] looks like'" (Interview 5). Other teachers echoed this sentiment when they asserted that more explicit strategies, and the modeling of those strategies, would be helpful to them when continuing to apply CSP in their elementary school classrooms.

Another approach is to honor the work teachers are already doing and giving them agency to develop strategies, lessons, and activities that are responsive to their students' cultures so they can see themselves as capable agents of pedagogical innovation and social change (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017; Fowler-Amato & Warrington, 2017). Finally, programs can attempt to support teachers in the obstacles they were likely to face when attempting to teach from a CSP perspective. Vass (2017) identifies three major obstacles: teachers' mentors pushing them to use traditional, non-relevant curriculum (thereby not valuing CR/RP or CSP); teachers being encouraged to use oppressive pedagogic and assessment practices; and teachers' mentors being resistant to teachers developing and using new and different pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

There are a variety of entry points to strengthening CSP in educational settings. While TEPs are a fundamental place to start, it is important to realize that system-wide change on that level takes time. Given that, professional development programs and/or professional learning communities that make time for CSP work and offer support to teachers might be a more efficient way to jumpstart these efforts, especially for teachers who have already completed credential and/or masters programs. Relatedly, it is critical to engage school leaders and

instructional coaches who will support classroom teachers in developing their skills as CSP practitioners. As Vass (2017) noted, these administrators can often limit the scope of the work by instructing teachers to adhere to whitestream content and pedagogy.

**Significance**

The previous discussion of the major findings of this study relevant to the research questions and the theoretical framework serve as the basis for this study's significance. Within the field of CSP, this study expands the research on the practical applications of this pedagogy to elementary school contexts. As we continue to liberate ourselves from the white gaze in education and envision new forms of teaching and learning, it is critical that we identify both content and teaching strategies that are appropriate for young students and also perpetuate and foster their linguistic and cultural competencies.

Though CSP cannot be reduced to a singular teaching guide or set of lesson plans, it is necessary to provide concrete examples of CSP with elementary school students to support teachers in this work. Current and pre-service elementary school teachers who seek to implement CSP can refer to studies such as this that demonstrate how other educators talked about racism, colonialism, and patriarchal gender norms with young learners. They can use the examples of response and discussion protocols, ways to engage with students' families and home languages, and how to invest power in students as they adapt these strategies to best serve their own students. Furthermore, teacher education programs and professional development programs can use this study to help shape the ways in which they support teachers in cultivating their skills of CSP.

Finally, the study articulates challenges to implementing CSP in elementary school contexts, most notably mandated whitestream curriculum and inconsistent school leadership. These obstacles highlight the pervasiveness of the white gaze as well as whitestream norms and standards in education. If we want to see CSP succeed broadly, it is imperative that we address these issues and develop ways to resist and reject them in schooling.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include the unique moment of a new, strictly implemented ELA curriculum and that the participating cohort did not include third or fourth grade classroom teachers. These limitations situate the discussion for future research, which are explained in the implications section.

Data collection occurred during a school year where teachers were implementing a new ELA curriculum for the first time. Though participating teachers encompassed a range of teaching experience (from 4 to 18 years in the classroom), it was all of their first time using Benchmark Advanced. Thus, the data that emerged may not adequately represent the ways in which they had previously implemented CSP content and pedagogical strategies with the former, more familiar ELA curriculum. Familiarizing oneself with a new curriculum is challenging and time-consuming, two factors that may have affected how teachers attended to CSP in their classrooms during the 2017-2018 school year.

The second limitation relates to an incomplete pool of K-5 elementary school teachers. As previously stated, a third-grade teacher who had participated in Center X's PD program volunteered to participate in this study, but ultimately was not able to continue because of other

professional commitments. Additionally, the fourth-grade teacher who participated in the first two years of the PD program ended up teaching at a different school within the district during the 2017-2018 school year and therefore did not remain in the cohort. Because of this, the study cannot examine how CSP is applied across all of the grade levels that comprise the elementary school. It would be interesting to consider if CSP is practiced differently in early grades (K-2) compared to upper grades (3-5). This is important to note because of the study's commitment to extending research on CSP with our youngest students, and there may be key differences in content and strategies with younger and older elementary school students.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

The implications for future research are primarily informed by the study's significance as well as the limitations explained above. First, there is a need to increase scholarship on the practical applications of CSP in elementary school contexts, including both content and teaching strategies. Second, more research is needed to explore how teachers learn to understand CSP and implement it (whether through TEPs, PD programs, or other avenues).

The challenges to CSP articulated by this study suggest that education researchers should consider how to support school leaders in doing this work, especially since they are beholden to district measures and responsible for implementing district policies that might stand in opposition to CSP. Furthermore, the obstacles of whitestream curricula, and how to negotiate CSP into whitestream curricula, merit further study.

## Closing Remarks

This study aimed to identify the practical applications of CSP in elementary school classrooms in order to envision new forms of teaching and learning, with our youngest students, that are liberated from the white gaze and whitestream standards and practices. The study also articulated the challenges to implementing CSP so that education researchers, leaders, and practitioners can better respond to those obstacles in the future. Fundamentally, this project framed Students of Color as whole, bringing important assets, cultural practices, and ways of being into the classroom that deserve to be sustained and perpetuated throughout their education.

It is essential to constantly identify, interrogate, and disrupt the white gaze in school settings. Ms. Valenzuela provided a vision for teaching and learning if we stay true to this work:

> I think that if we liberated ourselves from this white gaze then our form of teaching would be so different, in a good way. I think we would be teaching in a more relaxed environment, the students would probably learn more too. If we were to liberate ourselves from this white gaze then we would actually be able to teach in a way that our students can relate to. More teachers would make connections with students, they wouldn't be so stressed out about teaching a specific story, a specific way, to get a specific score. I think by liberating ourselves from this white gaze it would also be easier to promote critical thinking skills, instead of having right or wrong answers, we could focus more on how [students] justify their answers. The learning gap wouldn't be so big. I feel that we are trying to get our students as close as possible to this bar that was placed by the white middle-class kids. Why were they the ones who set the bar anyway? Why do we have to get our kids of color as close as possible to *that* bar?

(Interview 5)

Elementary school students, their families, and their communities are ready to learn in culturally sustaining ways. Elementary school teachers are ready to do this work. We must support them in that effort.

**Appendix A**

*Overview of Content and Strategies Used During Classroom Observations*

| **Name**<br>**Grade Level** | **Content (RQ1)** | **Pedagogy (RQ2)** |
|---|---|---|
| **Maggie Romari**<br><br>**Kindergarten** | Observation 1<br>skip counting (2s, 5s, 10s), math test, work stations (iPads, reading, penmanship, picture sort) | Observation 1<br>skip counting (2s, 5s, 10s), math test, work stations (iPads, reading, penmanship, picture sort) |
| | Observation 2<br>counting to 100, forming numbers (e.g. "How can we make 5?"), graphs, | Observation 2<br>**call and response/attention signal, movement, partner work, school-home-family connections,** direct instruction, video instruction |
| | Observation 3<br>**Nelson Mandela and apartheid, racism, Presidents Day (George Washington and Abraham Lincoln), slavery, being critical of historical figures,** reading comprehension | Observation 3<br>**call and response/attention signal, partner work, shout out (response protocol,** read aloud |
| | Observation 4<br>compare and contrast (reading comprehension), words with multiple meanings, different kinds of weather and clothing from around the world, | Observation 4<br>**call and response/attention signal, shout out (response protocol), connecting with students and their families (lived experiences),** choral reading, work stations, small group guided reading, **student choice, partner work, Spanish language (i.e. teacher translates some words into Spanish to support student comprehension)** |
| | Observation 5<br>reading comprehension -- key details, compare and contrast, elements of a text (table of contents, captions, glossary, etc.), speaking in complete sentences, | Observation 5<br>5: guided practice, **partner talk,** graphic organizer (compare and contrast), work stations, **shout out (response protocol), movement** |
| | Observation 6<br>phonics (long /u/ sound), reading comprehension -- key details, elements of text (e.g. table of contents, glossary, captions, etc.), reading informational texts, physics (force, push, pull), | Observation 6<br>direct instruction, guided practice, **shout out (response protocol),** read aloud, partner work, **connect content to students' families/home lives** |

*Overview of Content and Strategies Used During Classroom Observations (continued)*

| Name<br>Grade Level | Content | Pedagogy |
|---|---|---|
| **Sonia Holmes**<br><br>**1st Grade** | Observation 1<br>tens and ones (digits), representing numbers as pictures (with manipulatives), math stations | Observation 1<br>**call and response/attention signal, partner work, movement**, small group instruction, manipulatives, direct instruction |
| | Observation 2<br>reading comprehension (making predictions), technology (i.e. in the workplace, in the classroom, etc.) | Observation 2<br>**call and response/attention signal, activate prior knowledge, partner work,** read aloud, **shout out (response protocol), silent appointments (discussion protocol), school-home-family connections, multiple output options (e.g. draw a picture, write a word, write a sentence)** |
| | Observation 3<br>verbs, root words, suffixes, reading comprehension (retelling), signal words, **gender** | Observation 3<br>direct instruction, **shout out (response protocol), partner work, call and response/attention signal,** story map (graphic organizer), **multiple output options (e.g. draw a picture, write a word, write a sentence; student choice)** |
| | Observation 4<br>vocabulary, context clues, elements of texts (e.g. caption boxes), Washington DC monuments, **MLK Jr. (and his fight for equality), Cesar Chavez** | Observation 4<br>**shout out (response protocol),** direct instruction, read aloud, choral reading, **partner work, connect information to students and their families** |
| | Observation 5<br>counting by 5s, signal words (e.g. first, next, at last), reading comprehension -- sequencing events, | Observation 5<br>**shout out (response protocol), call and response/attention signal, group work (collaboration), student choice (what kind of graphic organizer they want to use), movement** |
| | Observation 6<br>goods and services (unit on helping people), elements of text (e.g. captions, photographs, etc.), | Observation 6<br>**shout out (response protocol), call and response/attention signal, connect lesson to students' families/home lives, partner talk, student choice (what kind of independent practice they want to do)** |

*Overview of Content and Strategies Used During Classroom Observations (continued)*

| Name<br>Grade Level | Content | Pedagogy |
|---|---|---|
| **Leslie Valenzuela**<br><br>**2nd Grade** | Observation 1<br>double-digit subtraction | Observation 1<br>**call and response/attention signal, partner work, shout out (response protocol),** equity sticks (response protocol), **silent appointment (discussion protocol), GoNoodle video → movement/dance, direct instruction** |
| | Observation 2<br>greater than/less than, place value, numerical words, standard and expanded form | Observation 2<br>**call and response (attention signal),** thumbs up/down (response protocol), **silent appointment (discussion protocol),** direct instruction, **movement** |
| | Observation 3<br>reading comprehension (main ideas + supporting details, making predictions) | Observation 3<br>**call and response (attention signal), movement, partner work (musical partners -- discussion protocol), youth language/slang, shout out (response protocol),** read aloud, choral reading, graphic organizer (story events chart), guided practice → independent practice |
| | Observation 4<br>counting coins | Observation 4<br>**call and response (attention signal), shout out (response protocol), connect to students and families,** independent work, **group work**, manipulatives (fake coins) |
| | Observation 5<br>reading comprehension -- main idea and key details, reading a news article | Observation 5<br>**call and response (attention signal), partner talk, shout out (response protocol), musical chairs (discussion protocol), movement,** choral reading, highlighting important information |
| | Observation 6<br>origami (history and practice), reading comprehension -- important information | Observation 6<br>**call and response (attention signal), shout out (response protocol),** read aloud, **partner talk, silent appointment (discussion protocol), four corners (discussion protocol)** |

*Overview of Content and Strategies Used During Classroom Observations (continued)*

| Name<br>Grade Level | Content | Pedagogy |
|---|---|---|
| **Kali Lee**<br><br>**5th Grade** | Observation 1<br>technology + inventions (problems and solutions), Eli Whitney and the cotton gin, Industrial Revolution, reading comprehension (textual evidence), suffixes, Lowell Mill girls | Observation 1<br>**call and response (attention signal), shout out (response protocol),** mind map (graphic organizer), **around the world (discussion protocol), group work (collaboration),** work stations, choral reading |
| | Observation 2<br>fractions, mixed numbers, making improper fractions proper, | Observation 2<br>**call and response (attention signal), shout out (response protocol), school-home-family connections, group work (collaboration),** video instruction, choral reading |
| | Observation 3<br>paraphrasing (reading comprehension + writing), **Arctic Peoples text (in addition to Greek mythology text)** | Observation 3<br>**call and response (attention signal),** choral reading, **group work (collaboration), student choice (i.e. students get to decide which text they want to read)** |
| | Observation 4<br><br>N/A | Observation 4<br><br>N/A |
| | Observation 5<br>draw and classify polygons, supporting answers with evidence, | Observation 5<br>**call and response (attention signal),** guided practice, independent practice, manipulatives (popsicle sticks), **group work, gallery walk (discussion protocol), movement,** video instruction |
| | Observation 6<br>U.S. state capitals, ratio tables, expanded notation, fractions, | Observation 6<br>**call and response (attention signal),** Jeopardy game (for state capitals), state capitals song/sing-along, **group work (collaboration)**, independent practice, **shout out (response protocol),** equity sticks (response protocol) |

**Appendix B**

University of California, Los Angeles

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Apprentice Consent Form

**Munzer Dissertation Research Study**

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You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Alison Munzer, M.Ed.., Ph.D. candidate from UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS) in conjunction with Center X at UCLA. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are participating in Center X's CLR PD project. Your participation in this research is voluntary. The faculty sponsor for this project is Dr. Annamarie Francois; you can contact her at francois@gseis.ucla.edu.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study seeks to investigate culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy in elementary classrooms and its relationship to UCLA GSE&IS Center X's CLR PD project. Specifically, we are interested in understanding how teachers define and understand culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) and how they implement CSP in their elementary classrooms.

**PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Data Collection and Timeline
    - *Classroom Teaching Observations:* As part of the PD program, you will be observed teaching in your classroom about twice a month. During these approximately one hour observations, the researcher will collect data about the lesson using an observation protocol and detailed note taking.
    - *Individual Interviews:* Examples of data from individual interviews include audio recordings, transcriptions, and field notes taken during interviews. Interviews will occur approximately twice a month.
    - *Focus Groups*: Examples of data from focus groups include audio recordings, transcriptions, and field notes taken during focus groups. Focus groups will occur approximately twice a month.
    - *Artifacts from Professional Development sessions:* Examples of artifacts from PD sessions include lesson plans, reflections, discourse videos, field notes, audio recordings, and any other documentation collected during PD sessions. Artifacts will be requested on a monthly basis, approximately.

- Types of Questions in Interviews and Focus Groups
    - Questions during interviews and focus groups will focus on how participating teachers understand culturally sustaining pedagogy and how they are implementing this approach to teaching and learning in their classrooms.
- Location
    - All in-person data collection will take place at Zela Davis Elementary School.
    - Some remote data collection may take place via e-mail.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY**
You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research. However, the results of the research may contribute to improving the teacher education in your school, as well as in your state, and potentially, in the nation.

*PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION*
You will receive no payment for participation from UCLA GSE&IS.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
Your name will be replaced in our research records by a pseudonym. We will destroy all individually identifiable data after data has been coded. Only the research team will have access to the data, and they will be kept locked and secured in our facilities until the end of the study, and then destroyed. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Please note that confidentiality is limited during focus groups; participants are asked not to share what is discussed during focus groups outside of the group, but we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality given the nature of focus groups.

*PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL*
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

**IDENITIFICATION OF INVESTIGATOR**
Please contact Alison Munzer, M.Ed., if you have any further questions at (310) 498-3113 or alison.munzer@gmail.com.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
**UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

_____

Name of Investigator or Designee

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator or Designee Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Interview One: Focused Life History

*"In the first interview, the interviewer's task is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time… We ask them to reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, in their neighborhood, and at work. Because the topic of this interview study is their experience as student teachers or as mentors, we focus on the participants' past experiences in school and in any situations such as camp counseling, tutoring, or coaching they might have done before coming to the professional development school program… By asking "how?" [instead of "why?"] we hope to have them reconstruct and narrate a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, and work experience that place their participation in the professional development school program in the context of their lives." (Seidman, 2013, p. 21)*

1. What led you to teaching elementary school?
    a. What led you to being interested in teaching in a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining way? (i.e. Why did you join the CLR cohort at your school?
    b. How did you end up teaching at an urban school? Was this a deliberate choice or not?
2. Explain your school context.
    a. Tell me about the students, teachers, staff, administrators, families, neighbors, and community members you work with.
    b. What opportunities do you have at you school to teach in a culturally sustaining way?
    c. What obstacles do you face at your school to teach in a culturally sustaining way?
3. Can you give me a recent example of a lesson or unit that engaged in culturally sustaining teaching? (It can even be something from my observation today.)
    a. Why is this an example of culturally sustaining teaching?

Interview 1.5: Classroom Observation Debrief

1. Was your lesson culturally relevant? In what ways? (Ladson-Billings)
    a. Prepare students to achieve academically.
    b. Develop cultural competencies in students.
    c. Teach students how to understand and critique the society in which they live.
2. Was your lesson culturally responsive? In what ways? (Gay)
    a. Validating
    b. Comprehensive
    c. Multidimensional
    d. Empowering
    e. Transformative
    f. Emancipatory

3. Was your lesson culturally sustaining? In what ways? (Paris & Alim)
    a. Support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities.
    b. Provide access to dominant cultural competencies.
    c. Support multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for teachers and students.
    d. Perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.
    e. Take an anti-oppressive stance against: racism, classism, misogyny, sexism, ableism, monolingualism, heteronormativity, etc.
4. How can I continue to support you on your journey of practicing culturally sustaining pedagogy?

Interview Two: The Details of Experience

*"The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experiences in the topic area of the study… We do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built… In order to put their experience within the context of the social setting, we ask the student teachers, for example, to talk about their relationships with their students, their mentors, the other faculty in the school, the administrators, the parents, and the wider community… We ask for stories about their experience in school as a way of eliciting details." (Seidman, 2013, p. 21-2)*

1. Would you consider today's lesson and teaching as a representation of a typical day? Or did you significantly change your teaching for today?
2. Can you tell me about the planning that went into today's lesson?
    a. Why did you choose to teach this lesson?
    b. What resources did you draw from to develop this lesson?
3. In what ways, if any, was the lesson an example of culturally sustaining pedagogy?
    a. Sustain cultural and linguistic competencies of young people of color (make sure they continue to exist)
    b. Provide access to dominant cultural competencies
    c. Support multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for teachers and students (and as part of the democratic project of schooling)
    d. Promote an anti-racist, classist, ableist, patriarchal, misogynist, etc. stance
4. Any last comments about your teaching today?

Interview 2.5: Classroom Observation Debrief

1. Was your lesson culturally relevant? In what ways? (Ladson-Billings)
    a. Prepare students to achieve academically.
    b. Develop cultural competencies in students.
    c. Teach students how to understand and critique the society in which they live.
2. Was your lesson culturally responsive? In what ways? (Gay)
    a. Validating
    b. Comprehensive

    c. Multidimensional
    d. Empowering
    e. Transformative
    f. Emancipatory
3. Was your lesson culturally sustaining? In what ways? (Paris & Alim)
    a. Support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities.
    b. Provide access to dominant cultural competencies.
    c. Support multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for teachers and students.
    d. Perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.
    e. Take an anti-oppressive stance against: racism, classism, misogyny, sexism, ableism, monolingualism, heteronormativity, etc.
4. How can I continue to support you on your journey of practicing culturally sustaining pedagogy?

Interview Three: The Reflection on Meaning

*"In the third interview, we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience… it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life. Making sense or making meaning that requires the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs… through all three interviews participants are making meaning. The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process (Vygotsky, 1987)." (Seidman, 2013, p. 22)*

1. Can you tell me about your experience in the CLR PD teacher cohort this year?
    a. In what ways, if any, did your participation in the cohort support your teaching?
    b. In what ways, if any, have you been supported by the CLR PD group this year?
2. Can you take me back to the beginning of the CLR PD program… How did you feel?
    a. In what ways, if any, was this CLR PD program helpful?
    b. Did you gain any insightful feedback?
3. Has your teaching been altered or enhanced as a result of your participation in the CLR PD program?
    a. What strategies or skills have you gained in the cohort?
    b. Has the group assisted in your ability to teach within the context of culturally sustaining pedagogy?
4. How different would this school year have been if you did not participate in the CLR PD group?
5. In what ways, if any, would you want to change or improve the CLR PD group to support other educators (who may or may not be committed to teaching in a culturally sustaining way)?

Interview 3.5: Classroom Observation Debrief

1. Was your lesson culturally relevant? In what ways? (Ladson-Billings)
    a. Prepare students to achieve academically.
    b. Develop cultural competencies in students.
    c. Teach students how to understand and critique the society in which they live.
2. Was your lesson culturally responsive? In what ways? (Gay)
    a. Validating
    b. Comprehensive
    c. Multidimensional
    d. Empowering
    e. Transformative'
    f. Emancipatory
3. Was your lesson culturally sustaining? In what ways? (Paris & Alim)
    a. Support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities.
    b. Provide access to dominant cultural competencies.
    c. Support multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for teachers and students.
    d. Perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.
    e. Take an anti-oppressive stance against: racism, classism, misogyny, sexism, ableism, monolingualism, heteronormativity, etc.
4. How can I continue to support you on your journey of practicing culturally sustaining pedagogy?

**Appendix D**

## Focus Group Protocol

Check In

- What's working well for you and your students?
- What's challenging you and your students?
- Any explicit strategies or information you'd like to share with your colleagues?
- Any advice or suggestions you'd like from your colleagues?
- How can I continue to support you?

Key Aspects of CSP

- Changing nature/demographics of our global society – becoming increasingly racially/ethnically diverse and multilingual
- Shift from issues of "access" and "equity"
    - For too long, research in this area focuses on how to get working-class students of color to write and speak like middle-class White students
    - Given our evolving demographics that are becoming more diverse and multilingual, this approach seems inherently flawed
    - Multiculturalism and multilingualism and the flexibility the accompanies them will be increasingly linked to access and power in U.S. and global contexts (in addition to valuing historically marginalized communities)
- Heritage Practices = past-oriented dimensions (traditional) AND Community Practices = present-oriented dimensions (evolving)
- Democratic project of schooling (what does this really mean?)

Three Critiques

- Asset pedagogies are too focused on preparing working-class students of color to embody White middle-class academic success
- Unidirectional correspondence between race, ethnicity, language, and cultural ways of being (i.e. we think African American Language will only be responsive to black students, etc.)
- Don't avoid problematic practices within marginalized cultures (they can also be homophobic, misogynistic, and racist); it's important to critique regressive practices and be transparent about them rather than trying to hide them

How can we attend to youth culture?

- How might assignments be designed with youth cultures (and strengths) in mind?
    - Memes, gifs, tweets (i.e. 140-240 characters), short videos (10-15 seconds like Instagram or Snapchat)
- Which aspects of your students cultures might easiest/hardest to attend to in your teaching?
    - Youth
    - Race
    - Ethnicity
    - Gender

    - Sexuality
    - Others?
- How can we challenge the problematic things our students do that seem to be connected to a cultural practice or identity?
    - Example) Students who don't think queens are on par with kings

Reflection Questions

- What would our pedagogies look like if this gaze weren't the dominant one?
- What would liberating ourselves from this [White] gaze and the educational expectations it forwards mean for our abilities to envision new forms of teaching and learning?
- What if, indeed, the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices?

Heavy Questions (drawn from a presentation by H. Samy Alim in June 2017)

- What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their practices and investments?
- What can educators of color and those in solidarity with us learn from attempts to de-center whiteness, to envision a world where we owed no explanations to White people about the value of our children's culture, language, and learning potential?
- As we think about teaching, what would our pedagogies look like if this [white] gaze (and the kindred patriarchal, cisheteronormative, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, Judeo-Christian gazes) weren't the dominant ones?
- What would liberating ourselves from this gaze and the educational expectations it forwards mean for our abilities to envision new and recover community-rooted forms of teaching and learning?

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