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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND
DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR AFRICAN
AMERICAN PREKINDERGARTEN CHILDREN THROUGH INDIVIDUALIZED PRE-
SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EARLY
CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

Melita Sutton Johnson-Ferguson

February, 2018

Robert R. Barner, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Melita Sutton Johnson-Ferguson

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

“The love of a family is life’s greatest blessing.” -Eva Burrows

With a heart full of love and appreciation I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful children Chris Johnson and Crystal Ferguson-Carmier, and my son in law Rey Carmier. Thank you for your advice, enthusiasm, reassurance, and encouragement throughout this journey. To my wonderful nieces Danesha Simpkins and Veronica Alderson, thank you for your excitement and words of encouragement. To my great nieces Dane’ and Daina and nephew Dez Simpkins, this dissertation is to encourage you to pursue your education and your dreams. To my goddaughter Chelika Rice Howard and godson Roderick Howard continue to pursue your dreams.

I also dedicate my work to my father James Sutton Jr., my aunt Jean McKneely, uncle Ralph Sutton, my many generations of cousins, in-laws and friends for your prayers, words of wisdom, understanding, and compassion throughout my life. To my personal cheerleader, my cousin Tina White, and my cousins Dr. Dwight Mullen, Dr. Dolly Mullen, and Dr. Margaret Armstead; our conversations truly helped to guide my research and keep me encouraged and focused throughout this process.

Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my family who are celebrating in Heaven. My husband, Erik J. Ferguson, who encouraged me to pursue my education as an example for my children. To my mother, Elsa Fae Sutton, my brother James Sutton III, my sister Rene’ Sutton Alderson, my grandmother Theodessa Sutton, my aunts Blanche Sutton, Gladys Welsh, and Rita Gaines, and my uncle Bruce Welsh. Thank you for the prayers, words of encouragement, wisdom, and honesty that ignited the fire to my becoming an educator and that encourages others to achieve their dreams. Thank you for leaving a legacy of excellence!

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I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. –Philippians 4:13

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I would also like to thank Dr. Joan Millbuffehr and Dr. Atlas Helaire for being patient, understanding, and supportive committee members who helped shape the research and writing that led to the completion of this dissertation. Thank you for sharing your insight and wisdom with me.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and thank the many friends, Cohort 11 and Pepperdine professors who gave me words of encouragement as I worked through the life challenges during this doctoral journey.

VITA

Passionate about providing a culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate learning environment for preschool children through individualized professional development for early childhood educators; highly motivated self-starter and collaborative team builder.

Areas of Interest:

Staff Professional Development: Culturally Responsive and Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices, California Preschool Learning Foundations, PreK Guidelines, Curriculum Development and Implementation, Lesson Planning, Classroom and Playground Design, CLASS (infant, toddlers, preschool), ECERS (infants, toddlers, preschool).

Program Enhancement: Marketing, Licensing Regulations, Staff Recruitment and Retention Referrals and Resources: infant and toddlers, prekindergarten, teacher placement, school supplies

Education

Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy, 2017, Pepperdine University, West Los Angeles, CA

Master of Science in Child Development, 2004, University of La Verne, La Verne, CA

Bachelor of Arts in Child Development, 1993, California State University, Los Angeles, CA

Associate of Arts with an emphasis in Child Development, 1976, West Los Angeles Community College, Culver City, CA

Certification

Program Director Permit, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Sacramento, CA.

Professional Experience

June 2013– present SUTTON CDAP Consulting

Founder

Specializing in culturally relevant developmentally appropriate instructional professional development for early childhood administrators, teachers and assistant teachers:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R), Infant/Toddlers Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R).
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for Infant, Toddlers, and Pre-Kindergarten. Program Administration Scale (PAS).
- Kindergarten Transition

2005- June 2015 LOS ANGELES UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL LOS ANGELES, CA

Quality Support Coach

Specialized in providing individualized professional development for early childhood administrators, teachers and assistant teachers in preschool programs throughout Los Angeles county. Conducted site visits to identify and address areas for continuous quality improvement through coaching and related learning activities.

- identified strengths and areas of improvement after analyzing data from multiple sources and facilitated the implementation of a quality improvement plan, Culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, Curriculum development and implementation, Lesson planning, Classroom and Playground design.
- California Preschool Learning Foundations, PreK Guidelines, Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), Individual Education Program (IEP), Behavior Intervention Strategies, Developmental Screening and Assessment. Parent Engagement, 21st Century School Readiness Preparation. Technology in the classroom.
- Created a Research team consisting of staff from Quality and Program Operations to address how coaches can build teachers skills to promote the intentional and consistent implementation of quality instructional practices
- Supported Quality Coaches: data input, time management, relationships with providers, practices for working with children with challenging behaviors, understanding diversity, developed strategies for the delivery of quality support, timely documentation of activities and consistent feedback to the providers, writing SMART goals, action plans, writing activity logs, time management, developmentally appropriate practices, DRDP, and provider relationships
- Program Enhancement: Marketing, Licensing regulations, Team building, Staff recruitment and retention, Budgeting, Grant Writing, Funding. Parent, Community and Professional collaborations.
- Quality Assessments: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R), Infant/Toddlers Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R). Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for Infant, Toddlers, and Pre-Kindergarten. Program Administration Scale (PAS). Kindergarten Transition

2005-2006 EAST LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Adjunct Professor

Developed course curriculum and provided in-class instruction for child development students

- Course name: Child Development 1: Child Growth and Development
- Course name: Child Development 3: Creative Experiences for Children in Art, Music, Language and Literacy

2004-2005 INTENSIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION CONSULTANTS

REDONDO BEACH, CA

Case Manager

Supervised and trained behaviorists on intervention strategies.

- Created behavior intervention and treatment plans, and crisis intervention scripts for children identified to be autistic, severely emotionally disturbed, developmentally delayed, and mentally challenged.
- Provided behavior modification technique training for LAUSD principals, teachers, and support staff to be implemented in the classroom, and for parents and family members to be implemented in the home.

1995– 2004 KEDREN HEADSTART/ STATE PRESCHOOL LOS ANGELES, CA

Education Specialist, Area Specialist, Site Supervisor, Head Teacher

Supervised, trained and evaluated teachers and assistant teachers. Covered eight of 26 sites: West Los Angeles, Watts, Glendale, and Wilshire- Westlake, 76 staff members, and 600 children / families.

- Utilized the E.C.E.R.S, Desired Results Plus, Brigance Screening Tool, and the National Reporting System assessment tools to gauge the socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of children ages 3.9 to 5 years.
- Developed individualized education plans for children based on the outcome of the assessment to maximize the effectiveness of the learning environment to promote kindergarten-readiness.
- Conducted Agency-wide training session for 300 teachers and teacher's assistants on utilizing E.C.E.R.S, Head Start Performance Standards, Pre-k Guidelines Desired Results Plus, Brigance Screening Tool and the National Reporting System assessment tools, implementing the Creative Curriculum, developing lesson plans, fostering parent involvement, working with children with special needs, licensing compliance, child nutrition and safety, and effective classroom management.
- Responsible for opening new preschool sites which included budget planning, developing relationships with classroom material and playground equipment vendors, making and overseeing key expenditures, hiring and training teachers and support staff, and recruiting families.
- ***Committee and Advisory Roles:*** Head Start Management Team, Professional Growth Advisor, Heads Up! Reading Facilitator, Pre-K Guidelines Facilitator, Transition Coordinator, Lead person Self-Assessment Team (Program Design and Management, and Family and Community Partnerships), Content Expert Interview for Self-Assessment participant (Individualization and Curriculum), certified trainer, and assessor National Reporting System, and member of Education, Disabilities, Health, and Nutrition Advisory Committees.

1980- 1994 PRIVATE PRE- & ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS LOS ANGELES, CA
Assistant Director & Head Teacher Positions

1978- 1980 CHRIS' HOUSE – FAMILY CHILD CARE LOS ANGELES, CA
Founder & Director

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how instructors became aware of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) that support African American students' academic achievement. The Grounded Theory approach was used to uncover themes from the individual interviews of African American preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers of African American pre-kindergarten children in Los Angeles County. The interview questions identified the source of information for creating a culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate classroom environment and instructional practices. The literature review identified the benefits of a high-quality preschool experience for African American children. A high-quality learning environment and the consistent implementation of research-based instructional practices are created and sustained by culturally competent teachers who receive ongoing professional development and access to quality resources. The literature showed that African American teachers expressed concerns about the universal aspect of DAP for all children, leading teachers to adapt their practices to meet the cultural and developmental needs of the children. The key findings for the source of information for creating a CRT environment and instructional practices identified personal experiences, other preschool programs, multicultural workshops, multicultural resource books, and child development classes. The literature review and study findings supported the connection between the belief in DAP and the implementation of DAP in the classroom. The key findings for the source of information for creating a DAP environment and instructional practices were child development classes, trial and error, DAP workshops, and other preschool teachers. An additional finding was the challenge participants experienced when attempting to discern between creating the classroom environment and identifying instructional practices to implement the curriculum. The conclusions drawn from

the study were that preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers used personal experiences as the primary source information for creating a CRT and DAP environment and implementing CRT and DAP instructional practices. Lastly, the disconnect between the culture of the students, real-life classroom experiences and child development classes, multicultural workshops, and multicultural resources impact the quality and consistency of implementation of CRT and DAP in the classroom.

Chapter One: Problem and Purpose

Background of the Study

The purpose of education is to provide a safe, nurturing, and enriched environment that will prepare children socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically to be assets to their community and country (Kemp, Page, & Wilson, 2014; Lyon, 1998). Therefore, the ultimate objective of education reform should be to improve the public education system, ensuring academic success for all children regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (SES; Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014). Education reform laws that create universal access and enrollment in high-quality early learning programs have the potential to show a significant decrease in the achievement gap for African American children (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

In 1969, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) began tracking the academic performance of children in the United States to determine the impact of the composition of the school environment on achievement. Their performance was measured and compared using standardized test scores, grade point average and instructional strategies (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Engel, Claessens, & Finch, 2013). Samples of the children's work, assessment results, college completion, and dropout rates provided information to plan and address the academic achievement gap through education reform policies (Flynn, 2007; Germany, 2002; Noguera & Akom, 2000).

A more meaningful measurement of the progress of children, families, schools, and teachers would be to track the accessibility of equitable resources, teacher competence, and parent and community engagement (Bishop & Jackson, 2015; Zhao, 2009).

The SES of the home, school, and community impacts the level of academic achievement for all children regardless of ethnicity (Coleman et al., 1966; Hoff, 2013). However, the impact is greater for children living in poverty because they spend more time in the home and community than in the school environment (Coleman et al., 1966; Hoff, 2013). Ethnicity and SES were also found to have a greater impact on student achievement than discrepancies in funding for public schools (Coleman et al., 1966; Hoff, 2013). Poverty, unemployment, lack of resources, and low-quality childcare set the stage for poor academic performance (Lazarus & Ortega, 2007). Children living in poverty were identified as not having access to quality preschool experiences, therefore placing them at risk for failure in K-12 education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In addition to accessibility, racial and socioeconomic inequality in United States public schools have been found to be factors that contribute to the academic performance of African American children (Coleman et al., 1966; Hoff, 2013). In the United States, approximately 45.8% of African American children live in poverty (Economic Policy Institute, 2016). Minority children living in poverty are more likely to be placed in special education, be retained, or drop out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Historically, education reform in the United States reflects a move toward providing disadvantaged children equal access to quality educational opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Effective education reform has been an ongoing challenge for policymakers and the education community as far back as 1867, when the U.S. Department of Education, formerly known as the Federal Office of Education, was formed to help states create better schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The department's goal was to ensure that all children have access to a quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, African American children

were denied the same opportunities as Caucasian children in the pursuit of a quality public school education (Edelman & Jones, 2004; NAEP, 2015). The 1869 U.S. Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling of *separate but equal* railroad cars resulted in racial segregation public school laws by southern state and federal governments (McPherson, 2011). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states allowing the separation of public schools for African American and Caucasian children was considered unlawful (Dorris, 2009; McPherson, 2011). The separate but equal ruling was overturned in 1954 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* because the separate facilities were found to be unequal and in violation of the 14th amendment (Dorris, 2009). This ruling mandated that all children have access to a public school education, regardless of their ethnicity (McPherson, 2011). The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was believed to provide equal access to a quality educational experience for African American children to increase their academic performance (Edelman & Jones, 2004). The law guaranteed citizenship, equal protection under the law, due process, and the right to vote for free male slaves. This landmark decision led to the desegregation of public schools, hoping to provide an enhanced learning environment African American children (Dorris, 2009).

Equity Education Reform began with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination due to national origin, sex, color, religion, or race (Andrews & Gaby, 2015). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was formed as a result of the Civil Rights Act to ensure implementation of the law (National Archives, 2015). During that period, policymakers and educators began to recognize that the years before kindergarten were crucial in laying a foundation for higher academic achievement. The Early Childhood Education Act establishes the goal of educating and nurturing the development and growth of preschool children through a variety of comprehensive services. The various laws in the Early Childhood Education Act

provided guidelines for federally funded education programs to prepare young preschool children for K-12 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The programs were required to provide either infant and toddler care, expand early learning home visits, or offer high-quality preschool for low and middle-income families through state collaborations.

The war on poverty. In response to civil unrest, President Lyndon B. Johnson on January 2, 1964, declared war on poverty by pioneering initiatives designed to enhance the quality of life for the struggling poor in America (R. Alexander, 2010). President Johnson sought to improve the quality and accessibility of educational opportunities, health coverage, economic resources and employment opportunities to low-income families and communities (D. Matthews, 2014). Project Head Start established a culturally responsive, comprehensive child development program that would provide nutritional, psychological, health and socio-emotional support for disadvantaged children and their families (Office of Head Start, 2016; Osborn 1991). The project began with an 8-week summer program in 1965 and 1966 through the office of Economic Opportunity. Competitive federal grants were distributed to organizations to establish Head Start and Early Start programs in disadvantaged communities (Office of Head Start, 2016). Project Head Start provided opportunities for parents to participate in the program by volunteering in the classroom and decision-making in parent meetings. The teaching staff consisted of parents and other members of the community.

In 1998, under President William Clinton, the reauthorization of Head Start expanded the services to a full day and year-round program to accommodate working parents. President George W. Bush reauthorized the Head Start program in 2007 to enhance the quality of the programs and services. The 2007 reauthorization of Head Start aligned the Head Start school readiness goals with the early learning standards identified by the individual states. Included in

the reauthorization was a higher level of qualifications for administrators, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers. Head Start programs moved to 5-year grant cycles replacing the indefinite project contracts. During the 5-year plan, funding was given to the community if the program was unable to provide and maintain high-quality services. As a result of the reauthorization, many programs serving low-income children in South Los Angeles lost their opportunity to participate in the Head Start program due to the inability to maintain a high-quality program. Despite the closure of several agencies, under President Barack Obama, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided over 64,000 additional enrollment opportunities for Early Head Start and Head Start programs (Office of Head Start, 2016). President Johnson's War on Poverty included the creation of Title I schools. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was designed to provide federal funds and guidance specifically for low-income children in public schools. The funds support children from birth to kindergarten who the district has determined to be at risk for future academic failure. Schools receiving Title I funds continued to qualify for Head Start, child care subsidies, and other funding sources (H. Matthews & Ewen, 2010). Title I funds provided health and developmental screenings, community childcare, school district collaborations, and professional development for the teaching staff.

Following the establishment of the federally funded Head Start program, the federal and state government turned their attention to the unique needs and challenges of immigrant children and children with disabilities. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act established federally funded programs designed specifically for children with limited English language proficiency. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act produced a move toward English-only instruction in public schools (Baker, Myers, & Vasquez, 2014). The 1974 Equal

Educational Opportunities Act prohibited discrimination and mandated the removal of obstacles to ensure that the rights of all children were protected equally, regardless of language or disabilities (K. Thompson, 2013). During President Carter's administration, bicultural and bilingual programs were implemented in Head Start in 1977 to meet the unique cultural and language needs of immigrant children (Office of Head Start, 2016). Desegregation and the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 promoted educational opportunities in the 1980s that proved to support the move toward equality between African American and Caucasian academic achievement (Baker et al., 2014). A high-quality report in 1983 entitled *A Nation at Risk*, criticized the education system in the United States public schools. As a result of the report, local districts and states adopted initiatives designed to enhance academic performance. The federal government provided improvement grants to support the education reform efforts.

Education reform policies continued to expand the role of the parents in their child's education experience by adopting the Head Start Project approach to parent engagement to ensure academic success (Bierman, Welsh, Heinrichs, Nix, & Mathis, 2015). Acknowledging and promoting parents as their child's first teacher and advocate encourages parent and family engagement that fosters future academic success. The Even Start Program was established by the U.S. Department of Education in 1988 to improve the literacy level of parents and families (Gelber & Isen, 2013; Office of Head Start, 2016; Slavin & Madden, 2006). The goal of the program was to prepare parents to be able to support their children in developing their literacy skills. Even Start merges family literacy, early childhood, and adult education into one program.

Education reform designed to decrease the achievement gap continued with revisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In 1994, President Bill Clinton included Title 1 reforms in the reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b).

The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) increased funding for charter schools, educational technology, immigrant, and bilingual education to support children in completing their education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 update of the ESEA, enacted by President George W. Bush, replaced the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (McGuinn, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). President Bush intended to provide educational programs to ensure that elementary and secondary children reached their full academic potential. Reflecting the principles of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, NCLB was designed to provide an inclusive and equitable education system (H. Matthews & Ewen, 2010). NCLB increased accountability and federal resources to ensure academic success for all children in the United States. Due to the high level of accountability under NCLB and its subsequent reauthorizations, early childhood education has become a key factor in promoting academic achievement for K-12 through the development of learning outcomes.

High-quality preschool. Education reform began primarily for at-risk children; however, the positive results caused policymakers to see the benefits for all young children (O'Brien & Dervarics, 2007). The interest in early childhood education has increased considerably due to national anti-poverty initiatives, increased numbers of working mothers, and research on the impact of early childhood experiences on brain development (Barnett, 2003a; O'Brien & Dervarics, 2007). Young children who attended a quality preschool program were more likely to experience a higher level of success socially and academically from kindergarten through college (Burgess, 2002; California Department of Education, 2003; Gilliam & Zigler, 2001; Slaby, Loucks, & Stelwagon, 2005). The social and academic gains supported the move toward increasing access to quality preschool experiences for low income and at-risk children.

The academic achievement gap in mathematics and literacy for children from low-income communities begins before the children enter kindergarten (Starkey, Klien, & Wakeley, 2004). Marcon (1992) conducted a study of three educational models identified as academically oriented, child-initiated and middle of the road. African American children accounted for 90% of the randomly selected participants in the study. The findings showed no gains in reading and math for the children in the academic model; however, they displayed negative social behaviors during primary school. The greatest gains were in the child-initiated model, where the children mastered basic skills and demonstrated greater social skills than the participants in the academic model. Minority and low-income children who attended a quality preschool program made significant gains in literacy, print awareness, language, and math (Barnett, Lamy, & Jung, 2005; Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007). However, African American children and children from low-income families are less likely to attend a preschool program that meets quality benchmarks for the quality instructional support that promote higher-order thinking and language skills (Herzfeldt-Kamprath & Adamu, 2014). Funding challenges in low-income communities limit access to ongoing professional development and quality resources for administrators, teachers, and parents.

An achievement gap between African American and Caucasian children is still present despite the short and long-term cognitive gains documented by the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, Chicago Child-Parent Centers, the Carolina Abecedarian project. (Currie, 2001; G. Henry et al., 2014; NAEP, 2015). However, the gains have created a positive move toward universal preschool for all children. Since 1995 and with Georgia leading the way, several states have implemented universal preschool, with others providing partial funding for all children interested in attending a preschool program (Temple & Reynolds, 2007). Although children with

the greatest need are still considered the target population in many states, additional funding is being requested to serve the children of more affluent parents (Fusarelli, 2004).

A variety of service models are available for young children such as Head Start, publicly and privately owned preschools, public schools, and community agencies (Mitchell, 2001). Funding sources for early childhood education programs include state funding, federal funding, and fees paid by parents (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). The challenges of specific licensing regulations for the different models and non-competitive salaries impact the quality of the programs (Rathburn, West, & Germino-Husken, 2004). Although there is little data on the time frame that determines sustained gains, funding challenges have limited most programs to half-day sessions (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Loeb et al., 2007). As policymakers look at the positive impact of full-day kindergarten on reading skills, the prospect of full-day preschool is coming closer to reality (Denton, West, & Walston, 2003).

The 1990 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was established to provide childcare for low-income families. The funds were designed to help the increasing number of mothers that are returning to the workforce to ensure that their children are in a quality child care environment. In 2014, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act was established to revise the Child Care & Development Fund and to support child care providers with training and additional funds (Office of Child Care, 2016).

The California 2010 Kindergarten Readiness Act was designed to help young children from birth to kindergarten (Bryant et al., 2016; Núñez-Pineda, 2016). Senate Bill 837, An Act to Expand Transitional Kindergarten, was established to create and align the K-12 continuum with a preschool curriculum (Bryant et al., 2016). Initial enrollment challenges and feedback reflected the parents' lack of awareness of the purpose, availability, and concerns regarding the academic

rigor of the program (Cadigan, Quick, & Manship, 2015). In 2011, through the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, President Barack Obama introduced the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) initiative (Kolbe & Rice, 2012; McGuinn, 2012). The education reform initiative awarded \$500 million to states with comprehensive early learning plans (McGuinn, 2012). Proposed by President Obama in 2013, the Preschool for All initiative was designed to provide additional funding to the states to provide high-quality preschool experiences for all low and middle-class 4-year-old children in America (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). Also in 2013, the Early Reading First competitive grants provided states with funding to develop model preschool programs to prepare children to be ready to learn when entering kindergarten (Wilson, Dickinson, & Rowe, 2013).

Parents, policymakers, and administrators began to realize the importance of investing financially in quality early childhood programs designed to develop the skills needed for future academic success (Hoff, 2013; Workman, Griffith, & Atchison, 2014). Various funding strategies were implemented nationwide to support the development of preschool programs such as California's tax on cigarettes to fund the universal preschool program (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2006). The quality of preschool programs is significantly affected by the licensing and program standards of the individual states (Barnett et al., 2005). The challenge is allocating the limited funds to supervise and monitor classrooms in statewide preschool programs to support the development of quality preschool programs (Farran & Bilbrey, 2014; Frede & Barnett, 2011).

Early learning standards. Established in 1926, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed research-based early childhood education learning standards (NAEYC, 2005). The NAEYC has established benchmarks for class

enrollment, teacher/child ratios, and professional development for early childhood educators (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006). Early learning standards (ELS) were designed to define the content and desired outcomes to guide instructional practices to ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn (Adams, 2011). The emphasis placed on addressing socio-emotional, cognitive, physical and language skills for current and future early learning and development determines the effectiveness of the ELS (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006). Many states created specific early learning goals achieved through content standards aligned with the K-12 standards (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). Some states include instructional practices to guide the teachers in providing appropriate activities that address the specific content areas (Barnett et al., 2005). Established in 1985 by the NAEYC, the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs provides accreditation to preschool programs. The certification is voluntary and based on established education, health, and safety standards.

The 2009 National Governors Association for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers introduced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative, specifying what children in K-12 should know in mathematics and English language arts at the completion of each grade level (NAEYC, 2012). The goal was to prepare all children in the nation to graduate from high school ready to enter and graduate from college and be competitive in the world, regardless of the SES of their family and community (Kornhaber et al., 2014). The implementation of the CCSS in kindergarten has raised concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the standards used in preschool programs for young students before entering kindergarten (NAEYC, 2012). The CCSS have impacted learning expectations in preschool, requiring teachers to use the kindergarten standards as a guideline for instruction in the preschool classroom. As teachers concentrate their planning on school readiness skills, they lose focus of

planning for the current learning and developmental needs of the children to develop the cognitive skills necessary for the children to be ready to learn after entering kindergarten (Kroll, 2013).

In 2000, the California Department of Education released the Prekindergarten Learning & Development Guidelines, designed to expand high-quality learning experiences for preschool age children (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). The guidelines aligned with the California State Board of education standards for mathematics and language arts. Early childhood educators can gain information on the teacher's role in creating activities and an environment that promotes learning. In addition to the PreK guidelines, in 2008 by the California Department of Education and early childhood stakeholders released the California Preschool Learning Foundations. The Foundations provided guidelines that outlined the skills and knowledge young children can achieve when provided with a high-quality environment, quality instruction, and quality teacher/child interactions (California Department of Education, 2015a). In 2010, the California Department of Education released the California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks to accompany the California Preschool Learning Foundations. The Frameworks guided preschool educators in implementing ELS into daily activities and materials and how to individualize the curriculum based on children's interest, knowledge, and skills (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Statewide stakeholders and the public offered their input into the creation of the Foundations and Frameworks.

Assessing preschool children. A quality preschool setting is ideal for assessing young children to determine if they are at risk for low academic achievement (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The outcome of a valid assessment of skills for young children, which follows the developmental characteristics of how young children learn, guides the development of

individualized instructional activities and accommodations for children in the classroom (Lazarus & Ortega, 2007). The Desired Results Developmental Profile-R is the tool currently being used to assess the academic progress of the children in the State of California (K. Thompson, 2013). Krause (2016) explored the impact of administrative support for preschool teachers in the implementation of the DRDP-R. Findings from the study showed that teachers need time away from the children to review DRDP-R results, in addition to training and online support from WestEd. DRDP-R resources and time are crucial in the successful implementation of the DRDP-R; its successful implementation is dependent upon the ongoing administrative support. The development of portfolios with current informal observations is more appropriate than a standard test to track the progress of the acquisition of school readiness skills (Brand & Dalton, 2012).

Assessing preschool programs. The state of California uses the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-revised edition (ECERS-R) to evaluate the quality of their preschool programs (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014; La Paro, Thomason, Lower, Kinter-Duffy & Cassidy, 2012). The ECERS-R assesses the quality of a preschool environment with 43 items addressing the space, equipment, personal care, language and reasoning, teacher/child interactions, the structure of the program, parent engagement, provisions, and professional development for the staff. The 43 items are observed and rated on a scale to determine the level of quality. In 2008, Senate Bill 1629 (Steinberg), a policy for the assessment of early education programs, was created. California's Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS) implementation plan included the use of the Classroom Rating System (CLASS) as the means for assessing teacher/child interactions in the classrooms (Hong, Howes, Marcella, Zucker, & Huang, 2015). CLASS is a research-based observation tool that focuses on teacher/child

interactions in three domains—emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support providing a rating of 1-7 in each domain. The domains are scored independently as each observation cycle occurs. In classrooms with multiple adults, the observation captures the behaviors of all adults in the classroom. The scores range from Low (1, 2), to Middle (3, 4, 5) to High (6, 7; Pianta et al., 2008).

The starting point of education reform is acknowledging that every child can learn (Fullan, 2000). Effective education reform is intensive and comprehensive intervention in the early years with individualized attention to the child and the appropriate resources for the parents (Ramey et al., 2000). The lack of enhanced educational opportunities for African American children creates an achievement gap that begins in kindergarten and continues to widen throughout their academic journey (G. Duncan, Jenkins, Watts et al., 2015; Lubienski, 2002). The public schools in the United States are still separate and unequal for children living in poverty. Interventions designed to benefit children who are enduring poverty, hunger, homelessness, and violence will provide high-quality educational opportunities, ensuring a prosperous future (Edelman & Jones, 2004). The academic achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian peers remains an ongoing challenge for policymakers and educators despite the current trend of education reform (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Early intervention through a quality preschool experience has been shown to impact the performance ability of African American children and children in poverty (G. Duncan, Jenkins, Auger et al., 2015; Noguera, Darling-Hammond, & Friedlaender, 2015). Effectively decreasing and ultimately eliminating the achievement gap will require concentrated efforts on education reform that addresses culture, SES, and accessibility to quality educational resources and experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Education reform in the United States has focused on accessibility to a quality preschool for children at risk of academic failure. A high-quality preschool has trained teachers that create enriched learning experiences reflecting the culture of the children, family, and community and providing enhanced, developmentally appropriate activities that target and develop the skills required to be successful in school (Brooks, 2004; Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013; Slaby et al, 2005). African American children and children from low-income families are more likely to attend programs that have frequent staff turnover and unqualified and untrained teachers due to low salaries and poor working conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mahoney, 2015). High-quality preschools provide opportunities for administrators and teachers to have access to ongoing professional development to gain information on implementing culturally and developmentally appropriate instructional practices. Teachers in inner city schools are less likely to have the resources to consistently attend professional development activities to learn to implement culturally and developmentally appropriate instructional practices that have been shown to promote academic success for African American and low-income children (Buxbaum, Moser, Ahrendt & Molinuevo, 2014). African American and low-income children thrive in an environment where the teachers and assistant teachers consistently implement instructional practices are culturally and developmentally appropriate throughout the daily schedule. Therefore, further study is necessary to determine the best instructional practices for building the skills of the administrators, lead teachers, and assistant teachers in inner-city programs to continuously implement culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate instructional practices in the classroom to promote academic success for African American children and children from low-income families.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how instructors become aware of CRT and DAP for African American preschool children that promote consistent implementation of quality teacher/child interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

Nature of the Study

This study implemented a qualitative grounded theory approach consisting of interviews for data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that is designed to generate a theory through data that is rooted in information from the literature and the participants (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Through rigorous analysis of the data, themes emerge that will explain the problem. Grounded theory approach looks for emerging theory driven by the data. Questions have generated that drive the research, creating an ongoing process of active inquiry referencing previous notes from interviews to produce a theory. The grounded theory approach provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and strategies of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices of preschool administrators, teachers, and assistant teachers of African American children. The information from interviews was revisited multiple times to ensure different perspectives. The grounded theory approach of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data guides the researcher through coding the data to answering the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Research questions emerging from the literature review and interviews steered the direction of this qualitative grounded theory study. A rigorous ongoing analysis of reviewing interview transcripts, recordings, previous notes, and generating new questions was used to

describe perceptions and strategies of the preschool administrators, lead teachers, and assistant teachers (Richards & Morse, 2012).

Consistently comparing cross-referencing, questioning, categorizing, identifying themes, patterns, reviewing and revising of the research questions maintained validity and reliability. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and provide additional information. The grounded theory method was used to generate a theory from the literature review and interviews that may explain the challenges and barriers for teachers implementing CRT and DAP in preschool to promote academic success for African American children.

Importance of the Study

Preschool teachers and assistant teachers will gain an understanding of how a culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate learning environment enhances academic success for African American preschool children. Preschool administrators will have research that supports providing ongoing professional development for preschool teachers that focus on CRT and DAP for African American preschool children. Policymakers will have additional research to support resources and individualized professional development workshops, training, and coursework for preschool teachers. Further study will add to the research that promotes CRT and DAP for African American preschool children to decrease the academic achievement gap.

Operational Definitions

A Child Development Permit Assistant Teacher is authorized to provide instruction and care to young children in a childcare setting. The assistant teacher is under the supervision of the program director, site supervisor, master teacher, and teacher (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015).

A Child Development Permit Master Teacher is authorized to provide instruction and care to young children in a childcare setting. The master teacher supervises teachers and assistant teachers (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015).

A Child Development Permit Teacher is authorized to provide instruction and care to young children in a childcare setting. The teacher is under the supervision of the program director, site supervisor, and master teacher and is authorized to supervise assistant teachers (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015).

A Child Development Permit Site Supervisor is authorized to supervise the teaching staff in a single child care facility. The Site Supervisor coordinates curriculum and professional development in a child care program (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015).

A Child Development Permit Program Director is authorized to supervise site supervisors and teachers in multiple childcare settings. The program maintains the licensing regulations, coordinates the instruction, curriculum, parent engagement, and professional development for the teaching staff (State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015).

Culturally Relevant or Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogy grounded in teachers displaying cultural competence in skill teaching in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices or DAP are child-centered individualized instructional practices designed to meet the age and developmental needs of young children (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Head Start programs are federally funded preschools for low-income children under 5 promoting school readiness through education, mental, social, health, nutrition and other services for the whole family (Office of Head Start, 2016).

High-Quality Preschool (a) The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults; (b) The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive; (c) The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the curriculum goals; (d) The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development; (e) The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury; (f) The program employs and supports a teaching staff with the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests; (g) The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings; (h) The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals; (i) The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments; (j) The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, and fiscal, and program management, so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences. (NAEYC, 2005)

Private Preschool Centers are licensed by Community Care Licensing (CCL) providing services for young children in a commercial building. Parents are required to pay a tuition fee unless the child receives funding from a subsidy program.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. They advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children (NAEYC, 2015).

Research Question

What is the process by which preschool directors, site supervisors, teachers, and assistant teachers develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support African American students' academic achievement?

Limitations

Administrative limitations included the willingness of the programs to participate in the study and want to review the answers before submitting to the researcher. The director, supervisor, teacher, and assistant teachers had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The study will provide information for the administrators and teachers to understand how to consistently implement teaching practices that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate. The interviews will provide reliable data showing how the participants in the study acquired information for the instructional practices implemented in the classroom. The findings and conclusions of this study are limited to the directors, teachers and assistant teachers participating in the interviews.

Delimitations

The time frame for the data collection was from November-December 2016. The selected participants came from private early childhood education centers in Los Angeles County that provide services for African American children. The researcher selected privately owned early childhood education centers to study due to the programs' limited access to professional development opportunities. The challenges of funds, resources, and substitute teachers limit the professional development opportunities for teachers and assistant teachers in private facilities. Directors, site supervisors, teachers, and assistant teachers working in publicly funded programs have access to resources for ongoing professional development support.

Assumptions

The study will provide information to administrators and teachers on creating a learning environment that is culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate for African American children. Each participant has the right to participate or withdraws from the study without fear of repercussions. The responses to the interviews are confidential, allowing the participants the freedom to respond honestly, therefore providing reliable data that reflect the process of becoming an effective teacher to impact the achievement gap.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter One includes the problem statement and describes the specific problem addressed in the study, as well as design components. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature and relevant research associated with the problem discussed in this study. Chapter Three presents the methodology and procedures used for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four contains an analysis of the data

and presentation of the results. Chapter Five provides a summary and discussion of the researcher's findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature and relevant research associated with culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate instructional practices to successfully eliminate the academic achievement gap between African American and Caucasian children. The focus of American education reform has been on accessibility to a quality preschool and a universal approach to teacher/child interactions in the classroom. However, the idea of a universal set of standards for the classroom environment, curriculum implementation, and teacher/child interactions places the disadvantaged child at a higher risk of academic failure (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). It is vital to discover the deeply rooted causes of the achievement gap to plan and implement interventions that will decrease the disparities between the advantaged and the disadvantaged children in America.

School readiness. The quality of the school environment and the level of family engagement in their child's education determines school readiness (Office of Head Start, 2016). A child's school readiness is measured by the mastering of language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development skills (Cannon, Jackowitz, & Karoly, 2012; Office of Head Start, 2016). Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, and Miller-Johnson (2002) conducted the Abecedarian Project to study how a quality preschool program affects the academic achievement of high-risk children. The study tracked 104 high-risk children from infancy through 21 years of age, randomly selecting who received intervention services during preschool or primary school and who did not receive any intervention services. The findings showed the intervention group's

academic and IQ scores were higher than the non-intervention group. The intervention group experienced less pregnancy during their teenage years, and more frequently attended and completed more years of higher education than the non-intervention group. Educators need to focus on how well the child is learning and developing in the environment to consistently plan a variety of enriched learning experiences (Gao, 2014; Kroll, 2013). A teacher that focuses on school readiness standards is less aware of the specific needs of each child and therefore less likely to provide a variety of individualized activities for the children.

Early learning standards. ELS inform instructional practices needed to make progress toward educational goals (NAEYC, 2015). Teachers' beliefs regarding DAP creates accountability for integrating ELS into the curriculum a challenge (Adams, 2011). Professional development opportunities that provide CRT and DAP strategies aligned with early learning standards support the consistent implementation of the standards in the curriculum (Kang, 2011). Teacher preparation programs should continue to build upon research-based strategies to provide pre-service and in-service teachers with the experiences and skills needed to be useful in creating a favorable learning environment in a culturally diverse classroom setting.

High-quality preschool. The initial purpose of early childhood education programs was to provide equal educational opportunities to socioeconomically disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers (Hutchinson, Morrissey, & Burgess, 2014). Early childhood education programs serve young children ages 3-5 in either a federal Head Start, state-funded, non-public nursery school, family child care, or center setting before entering kindergarten (Mitchell, 2001). The programs are designed to provide learning experiences for young children that will enhance their social, cognitive, and physical skills so that they enter kindergarten ready to learn (Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009; Dickens, 2005). Several factors characterize the

elements of a quality preschool learning environment, including adult to child ratios, group size, trained and qualified teachers, support services for the teachers and children, and learning goals aligned to K-12 standards (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015).

Achieving and maintaining a high level of quality is also affected by the licensing and program standards that vary by state (Baker et al., 2014; Barnett et al., 2005). Equitable access to high-quality prekindergarten programs will provide opportunities for all children to enter kindergarten ready to learn, complete high school, and be prepared to begin a career and be an asset to society (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013; Burger, 2010). Although preschools with average quality are accessible to most preschool-age children, African American children and low-income families are more likely to attend lower quality pre schools (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013; Barnett, Carolan, Johns, 2013).

Academic advances in literacy and mathematics. A quality preschool program experience will close the achievement gap for minority and low-income at-risk children (NAEYC, 2015; Ryan, 2006). Gains in literacy, print awareness, language, and math have been found for minority and low-income children who attended a quality preschool program (Barnett et al., 2005; Loeb et al., 2007). Children who attend a high-quality prekindergarten program averaged a gain of 3-4 months of academic advancement (Frede & Barnett, 2011; O'Brien & Devarics, 2007). Well planned, interactive, and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies promote language, pre-literacy, social/emotional development, pre-numeracy, and physical development. Awareness and implementation of CRP is an important factor to address, along with academic skills (Frede & Barnett, 2011). Children who attended a high-quality preschool were found to be more sociable, task-oriented, and articulate. They entered

kindergarten ready to learn and were more likely to be college graduates as well as employed and not incarcerated (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013; G. Duncan & Magnuson, 2013).

Fitler (2000) studied the rate of retention and placement for elementary children who had or had not participated in the Title I Reading early childhood program. Title I Reading programs are federally funded to provide reading and instruction support to children at risk of failing school. The findings showed that children who participated in an early childhood program were seldom retained or placed in a Title I Reading program. Children who attend a quality early childhood education program was also found to benefit from short and long-term positive outcomes in cognitive ability (Anderson, 2008; Currie, 2001; Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010).

Preschool age children who participated in state programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma made gains in problem-solving and early literacy skills. When compared to their Caucasian peers the gains in literacy were comparable; however, the African American children's skills were substantially higher than the Caucasian children. African American children made a 21% gain as opposed to a 6% increase for Caucasian children in problem-solving and early literacy skills (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013). Young children benefit more from advanced content in math and reading regardless of SES or previous preschool experience (Claessens, Engel, & Curran, 2013). African American children who attended a high-quality preschool program showed language and academic advances scoring higher than children who participated in a lower quality preschool program (Puma et al., 2010). Young children from low-income families showed later academic improvements after attending a high-quality preschool program with an effective math curriculum (Starkey et al., 2004). There is a year of growth and a lifetime of gains for children

who attended the higher quality programs, with the most significant increases found in reading and math skills.

Fade out effect. The ability to sustain the gains achieved in preschool requires educational reform in the K-12 system that will continue to move children to the next level of academic achievement (G. Duncan, Magnuson, & Murnane, 2016). Findings from the Impact of Head Start study showed that the advances gained in preschool were not detected after the children completed the first grade of school (DeVault & Kean, 1970; Clements, Sarama, Wolfe, & Spitler, 2013; Puma et al., 2010). The cognitive gains in math and other academic skills achieved in preschool were shown to decrease by the third grade when children who did not have a preschool experience caught up to their peers who attended preschool. However, positive outcomes were maintained from adolescence to adulthood (G. Duncan, Jenkins, Watts, et al., 2015). Although preschool programs have shown to enhance cognitive ability, the specific skills required to promote long-term positive outcomes beyond the early years of school are unclear (G. Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). Aligning standards between preschool and elementary school may prove a significant factor in sustaining the benefits of a high-quality preschool experience. The quality of the elementary school is important in maintaining academic gains during preschool (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005). Although some children benefit from the review of core competencies, elementary teachers continue to teach the core skills and not the advanced academic content for which many children are ready due to their preschool experience (Bailey et al., 2016).

Dickinson (2011) examined the development of language in future reading ability and argued that early preschool interventions are ineffective due to the limited capacity of preschool teachers to support the conceptual knowledge and language of the children in the classroom. A

professional collaboration among pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers will provide an opportunity for the teachers to understand the instruction and how to support children with prior preschool experience (G. Duncan, Jenkins, Auger et al., 2015). The K-12 system has to reform to meet the needs of African American children, low-income, and other children from diverse cultures to ensure that all have a successful school experience (Williams, 2007).

Academic achievement gap. The academic achievement gap reflects the difference in the standardized test scores that are used to predict future success in higher education and life (Education Week, 2011; NAEP, 2015). There is a growing debate as to the perceived concept of an achievement gap versus the realities of the inequity of the accessibility of increased opportunities for learning that impact the outcome of the assessment tests (V. Miller, 2014; Ravitch, 2016). There are distinctions between the terms achievement gap, learning gap, and opportunity gap. The unequal or inadequate balance of academic outcomes and benefits creates an achievement gap. A performance gap shows a disparity between learning expectations and what is learned based on grade level and age. Lastly, the opportunity gap is inadequate or unequal access to opportunities and resources (“Hidden Curriculum,” 2014). Opportunity gaps that impact the standardized scores inhibit academic achievement for at-risk children (Irvine, 2010; Milner, 2013). An achievement gap exists due to deficiencies in curriculum, health, employment, income, teacher quality, funding for schools, and access to resources and quality preschools (Irvine, 2010; H. Matthews & Ewen, 2006). The inaccessibility of high-quality educational opportunities for African American children accounts for the educational debt that has contributed to an academic gap between them and their Caucasian peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The SES of the families and community has a significant impact on the quality of the

preschool programs accessible to the children in the community (Baker et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Effective education reform addresses culture, SES, and access to quality educational resources and experiences (Jones, van Belle, Johnson, & Simmons, 2014). A high-quality preschool experience for African American children and children in low-income families was shown to significantly increase the possibility of a positive school experience and a prosperous future (Fernandez, 2009). Young children from diverse cultures and low-income families who attended a quality preschool showed gains in literacy and math skills upon entering kindergarten (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). However, K-12 education reform is required to sustain the gains achieved in preschool (Best & Cohen, 2013; Frede & Barnett, 2011). When young children consistently received high-quality instruction from qualified teachers over consecutive years, they demonstrated more significant gains in achievement (C. Hill, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2015). Unfortunately, African American children from low-income families living in the inner city are more likely to attend low-quality preschools (California Department of Education, 2015b). The inner city early childhood centers and family child care homes have limited resources to make the necessary improvements to the indoor and outdoor educational environment to provide enriched learning experiences consistently (Fernandez, 2009). Recruitment and retention of a diverse and highly skilled workforce continue to be an ongoing challenge for inner city communities due to low compensation, unsatisfactory working conditions, high teacher qualifications, and limited professional growth opportunities (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998; Karoly et al., 2008). One challenge for the inner city and low-income communities is access to preschools that consistently have trained and qualified teachers prepared to provide an enriched learning experience for children from diverse cultures

(Fernandez, 2009). The achievement gap continues to widen, as minority and children from low-income communities are least likely to have teachers who meet the criteria that research indicate are important in producing positive outcomes for children (L. Henry, 2015). As a result, the achievement gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged continues to widen despite current national education reform efforts (Ladd, 2011).

Culturally relevant teaching. CRT is a pedagogy that is grounded in the ability of the teachers to display cultural competence when preparing learning experiences for children of color (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Culturally competent teachers use the children's culture and interest in developing and implementing their instructional practices (Gichuru, Riley, Robertson, & Park, 2015). The classroom environment and activities represent the culture and community of the children in a non-stereotypical manner through daily learning experiences (Farago, Sanders, & Gaias, 2015). Culturally competent teachers learn, respect, and acknowledge the cultural norms and values of individual children as an asset to the classroom environment (Gay, 2010). Creating culturally competent preschool teachers is a significant factor in decreasing the academic achievement gap for African American children, children from other diverse ethnic groups, and children from low-income families in America (Becker & Luthar, 2002). A culturally relevant learning experience fosters academic success for children from diverse cultures (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Preschool teachers must receive training to gain information on adapting the curriculum to create activities and an environment that accurately reflects the culture and values of the children, family, and community (Esposito, Davis & Swain, 2012; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013). Due to a lack of funding and available resources to provide ongoing professional development opportunities, inner-city preschool administrators and teachers are unprepared to provide enriched learning experiences that

promote academic success for African American children, children from other diverse ethnic groups, and children from low-income families (Barnett, 2003b).

Developmentally appropriate practices. DAP adopted by the NAEYC in 1987 and revised in 1997 as the guidelines for best practices in the care and creation of learning experiences for young children from birth to 8 years of age (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Based on research regarding how young children develop and learn (NAEYC, 2009), the DAP framework supports the growth and development of young children (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple 1997). Children thrive cognitively in an environment that promotes independence, autonomy, and opportunities to explore and experiment with a variety of materials (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Students will not gain the higher order thinking or problem-solving skills required for success in the 21st century via the standard drill of skills in isolation (Brand & Dalton, 2012). Although the DAP guidelines have been revised to include culture, critics of DAP are concerned about the validity of a universal set of DAP for African American children, children from other diverse ethnic groups, and children from low-income families (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review will encompass historical, theoretical, and empirical research on CRT and DAP. The study of CRT and DAP literature will identify important themes that emerged from the research.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Definition. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) coined the term *culturally relevant teaching* when finding that children who did not see their culture reflected in the classroom activities or who believed that they must adopt another culture were subject to academic failure. Ladson-

Billings discussed the importance of a pedagogy that was culturally relevant, asserting that African American children experienced academic success when teachers had high-performance expectations. Teachers who were culturally competent used the children's interest and diverse cultures to create enriched learning experiences on a daily basis. The philosophy of providing CRT was presented in 1993, when researcher Cornel Pewewardy found that honoring and exploring, instead of ignoring, children's culture fosters a successful school experience (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). A culturally competent early childhood education teacher intentionally plans enriched instructional activities that are reflective of the culture of the children, families, and community.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy. In response to Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theory of culturally relevant/responsive teaching Paris (2012) coined the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) to capture cultural practices, literacies, and languages to acknowledge, maintain, and value a diverse society. CSP is designed to promote literacy, linguistic, and cultural pluralism as a response to the changing diversity in schools (Paris & Alim, 2014). Providing culturally relevant learning experiences that meet the needs of the individual children requires teachers to make adjustments to the curriculum based on the children's diversity (Esposito et al., 2012).

Culturally relevant curriculums.

Anti-bias curriculum. Developed by Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) and the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force, the Anti-Bias Curriculum has four key goals. It is designed to enable children to construct a confident, knowledgeable self-identity; to develop interactions that are just, empathetic, and comfortable; and to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills

to be advocates for themselves and others when faced with social injustice. An anti-bias curriculum promotes the appreciation of diversity for young children (Gay, 2002).

Inclusive curriculum. Early childhood and early childhood special education experts believe that an inclusive early learning environment is an appropriate intervention for young children with and without identified disabilities (Soukakou, Winton, West, Sideris, & Rucker, 2014). Local education agencies (LEAs) are not mandated to meet the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act's (IDEA) least restrictive environment (LRE) requirements, therefore limiting the number of available preschools for children in need of special accommodations (U. S. Department of Education, 2015c). LEAs are required to provide options such as Head Start to eligible parents of children with special needs. Federal law mandates that 10% of Head Start children have an Individual Family Support Plan (IFSP) or an Individual Education Plan (IEP; Office of Head Start, 2016). The characteristics of an inclusive classroom depend on various factors, including some children enrolled, severity and type of disability, and the classroom personnel, all of which determine the developmental and physical accommodations made to the curriculum and classroom environment (Soukakou et al., 2014). The diversity in learning activities reflects the materials and resources used to influence the instructional practices implemented by the teachers (Rodriguez, 1998).

Benefits of culturally relevant teaching. The culture of the children in the classroom has a substantial impact on their behavior, attitudes, and values (Dray & Wisneski, 2011; Gay, 2010). Regardless of culture, young children underachieve with field-dependent, extraversion, kinesthetic, and sensing learning styles, due to fewer opportunities to use their strengths in the classroom setting (Gay, 2010). The children lose confidence in their abilities when their culture is not represented appropriately in the curriculum (Perkins & Cooter, 2013). Positive

teacher/child relationships develop when the curriculum and classroom environment reflects the cultural diversity of the children, family, and community. (Guiffrida, 2005; Meece & Wingate, 2010). CRT uses the children's cultural knowledge and background as assets to the curriculum (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Gay, 2010; Wills, 2012). Children learn to appreciate their heritage and the culture of their peers (Gay, 2002; Hughes et al., 2006). They can understand complicated terms and concepts about their own and their peers' culture through play activities created in a safe environment (Boutte, Kelly-Jackson & Johnson, 2010; Wohlwend, 2013). CRT removes the burden of children attempting to succeed academically in a culture that does not reflect their own culture (Gay, 2010). Light (2010) explored how teachers use informal interactions throughout the day in transitional and non-academic activities to see if culture played a role in the quality of the teacher/child interactions. Findings showed that the teachers used a variety of interactions, including cultural responses that are considered valid approaches.

An environment that is reflective of African American culture and provides opportunities for children to be expressive will promote academic success for African American children. Language, cultural values, heritage, and learning styles are essential in creating a culturally enriched democratic learning environment (Ramirez & Castenada, 1974). The emotional, academic, and social success of children directly connects to the representation of the values of the children's culture and the teacher's learning experiences and outcome expectations (Meece & Wingate, 2010). According to Delpit (1995), to understand their world, African American children must learn the contributions of their culture. The absence of practices reflecting the children's culture places limitations on the children understanding and learning about the world around them.

School home community collaboration. CRT creates a link between the school, home, and the community, providing opportunities for African American parents to be engaged fully in the conversations on educating their children along with African American teachers and the African American community (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002). The knowledge and information about the education of African American children have to come from parents, administrators, teachers, students, and the community in a manner that is reflective of the African American culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Williams-Jones (2012) examined the perceptions of African American parents concerning their involvement in an early learning program. The findings showed that cultural sensitivity plays a significant role in the quality of parent involvement in their child's school. Parent participation in their child's early learning experience provides teachers with valuable information to create diverse learning experiences for the children. Early education care that is culturally responsive is critical for parents (Ceglowski, 2004). Parent involvement in the education of their young child at home and school lays the foundation for future academic success (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007).

Culturally responsive/competent educators. Culturally responsive teachers adopt a strengths-based perspective, in addition to considering previous experiences, learning styles, and cultural references when educating culturally diverse children (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Gay, 2010). Acknowledging the impact of culture on how a child learns does not imply that a specific learning style is exclusive to a particular culture (Omidvar & Tan, 2012). Instead, the instructional practices are authentic and child-centered, drawing from the child's previous experiences, home life, community, and cultural resources (Bean & Dagen, 2011; Richardson, 2003; Yilmaz, 2008). CRT promotes a variety of learning experiences based on cultural information from the child, family, and community instead of relying on resources that support

negative stereotypes (Iwai, 2013; Jackson, 2015). Culturally competent educators intentionally bring together the languages of possibility and critique to the children in their care. Teachers should find ways to understand the balance between the child's culture and his/her development in the mindset of the caregivers, the interactions of the childcare setting, and the child's social and physical features of his/her home and community without leaning toward stereotypical explanations of diversity (Iwai, 2013).

A culturally competent educator uses diversity to define desirable developmental practices instead of relying on Eurocentric definitions (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Holland (2012) examined the beliefs of four Head Start teachers of low-income urban African American males regarding CRT practices. The Head Start teachers experienced successful outcomes in emergent literacy. The teachers conduct home visits and encourages parent participation in the program. Parent interviews shaped their relationships with parents and their knowledge of the challenges of being parents and children of poverty. The findings showed understanding and empathy toward the living conditions and overall challenges of living in poverty. The teachers made modifications to the curriculum to accommodate the academic and social difficulties of the parents and children.

High expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. CRT promotes high expectations, cultural competence and critical consciousness (Dickson, Chun, & Fernandez, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Young, 2010). CRT empowers children by providing opportunities to make decisions and take on responsibilities in the classroom (Young, 2010). Additionally, CRT teachers scaffold the children's learning through activities that challenge and build upon the children's strengths (Dray & Wisneski, 2011). The learning environment reflects

the diversity and promotes understanding and valuing of the children's cultures in the classroom (Dickson et al., 2016).

Teachers must be culturally competent to implement instructional practices that meet the individual needs of a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse population (Ladson-Billings, 2014). It is important for teachers to understand the children's home and community to provide content that is reflective of the people in the children's background. Using the children's and family's experiences and knowledge, the teacher creates a culturally appropriate learning environment (Young, 2010). D. Harris (2010) used the Working with Culturally Diverse Students Survey to research the perceptions of pre-kindergarten to 12th grade Kansas school district faculty. The tool examined cultural competence, self-efficacy, and teacher preparation to work with culturally diverse children. The findings showed a relationship between self-efficacy and the concept of cultural competence in teaching staff. However, the research did not find a correlation between teacher preparation and cultural competence or self-efficacy.

Behavior, attitudes, and values of educators. CRT supports a variety of instructional practices based on the children's learning styles without the use of materials and resources that promote stereotypical behaviors and appearances (Costner, Daniels, & Clark, 2010; Gay, 2002; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013). Negative stereotypes about behavior promote an unwillingness to use culturally based strategies to teach African American children (Costner et al., 2010; C. Hill et al., 2015). Teachers who can identify bias and stereotypical materials are more likely to provide an environment where all children can grow and be successful academically (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Rivera (2006) studied two early childhood teachers to discover if their culture impacted their implementation of CRT practices. The findings showed that, with the proper support, all

teachers could become culturally responsive, regardless of their length of time teaching or ethnicity.

The teachers' cultural behavior, values, and attitudes toward behavior that is considered positive or negative influences instructional practices (Gay, 2010; Jackson, 2015). Toney (2009) examined the impact of personalities and beliefs on instructional practices when teaching low income African American children. The findings showed that the academic success of the children was dependent on the experiences of the teachers, classroom strategies, practices and the ability to provide a culturally relevant classroom environment. Yannacone (2007) conducted a study to explore attitudes, resources, and professional development strategies required to close the achievement gap for high school teachers working with children from diverse cultures and lower income families. The findings showed that improved instructional practices, positive attitudes, opportunities for collaboration with other teachers, and access to resources were important factors in building the teachers confidence to close the academic achievement gap. There is a disparity between beliefs and practices of educators in schools that serve children from diverse cultures. Most information regarding CRT implementation in the classroom is self-reported by teachers, creating a challenge in determining the effectiveness of CRT practices (Debnam, Pas, Bottiani, Cash, & Bradshaw, 2015). There are higher rates of self-reported implementation of CRT compared to the observed application, showing the need for a different approach to determining the effectiveness of CRT (Conage, 2014).

Culturally relevant instructional practices.

Experiential and cooperative learning. Experiential and cooperative learning are considered appropriate CRT instructional practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Dickson et al., 2016; Young, 2010). Preschoolers benefit from intentional and frequent scaffolding to make

meaningful connections during learning activities (Adinolfi, 2012). Children who were taught using cooperative learning strategies showed positive academic gains (Hayles-Simmonds, 2012). Cooperative play creates an environment that will nurture social and creative skills in preschoolers (Cameron, Connor, & Morrison, 2005).

Mirror versus window theory. The *mirror versus window* theory provides a lens for teachers to determine the value and use of the selection of literature. Mirror literature accurately reinforces the culture of the children, whereas window literature allows the children to engage in new experiences as they learn about their peers and the world around them (Brinson, Boast, Hassel, & Kingsland, 2012; Koss, 2015).

Literacy practices. African American children assessed for reading ability scored below all other ethnic children (NAEP, 2015). It is important to acknowledge and promote the communication style of African American children through activities that support their growth and development in oral and written language (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). African American children struggle in mainstream settings with teachers who only promote Standard English and consider their variation of English invalid (Lovelace & Stewart, 2009; Wills, 2012). Teachers should create literacy experiences that are culturally relevant based on the individual interests and culture of the children, empowering them to expand their knowledge (Davis, 2016; Flowers & Flowers, 2008). CRT practices include pre-reading, read aloud, journals, group discussions, and follow up activities designed to reflect the personal, cultural, and social lives of the children, family, and community in daily activities (Hefflin, 2002). T. Miller (2003) used African American literature to examine the quality of reading responses of 28 inner-city low-income African American children. The findings showed advanced critical analytical competence that exceeded their middle-class peers and some adults, therefore

promoting the benefits of using the home culture to create culturally relevant learning experiences.

Multicultural literature. Multicultural literature was found to have a direct impact on the level of comprehension and the ability to recall events for African American children (Lovelace & Stewart, 2009). The literature promotes positive self-image and literacy development as the children learn to value themselves and their family heritage (Boston & Baxley, 2007). Multicultural literature also fosters self-awareness (Koss, 2015). Children experience a loss of identity when the writing does not reflect their interests and culture or presented in a contrary manner (Boston & Baxley, 2007; Davis, 2016). The children gain their identities and the identity of their peers from the literature's representation of diverse cultures (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Koss, 2015). Children in diverse and non-diverse classrooms benefit from the incorporation of multicultural materials and resources in daily activities (Gay, 2002; Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Carter, 2007; Soule, 2012). Adding multicultural literature into the curriculum will positively impact the literacy issues of African American children, as they benefit from a variety of literacy learning experiences (Boston & Baxley, 2007; Perkins & Cooter, 2013). Limited multicultural resources and materials are supporting best practices for implementation of CRT in the classroom (K. Harris, 2015). Teachers require intensive training to implement a multicultural curriculum (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Perkins & Cooter, 2013).

Sharing time. Sharing time provides an opportunity for children to reveal the different aspects of their culture (Koss, 2015). During sharing time, children can explore their uniqueness and the unique character of their peers as they learn academic and social skills (Paris, 2012). Young children can learn about their culture and others through the displays in the classroom, literature, toys, and materials in the interest areas in the classroom environment (Wills, 2012).

Implementation of culturally relevant instructional practices. CRT practices may be instrumental in decreasing the achievement gap in theory; however, in practice, the application is reduced to celebrations and occasional classroom activities that usually promote cultural stereotypes (Dickson et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2012). Instructional practices that do not incorporate culturally consistent skilling building and communication strategies may account for the disproportionate level of underachievement in African American children (Howard, 2001). CRT is also an effective instructional practice for addressing the excessive amount of diverse children placed in special needs classes (K. Harris, 2015). A culturally responsive teacher incorporates diversity in the daily activities even if the class population is not diverse (Bigler & Wright, 2014, Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012; Durden, Escalante, & Blich, 2015).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Definition. DAP was adopted by the NAEYC (2009) in 1987 and revised in 1997. DAP is a set of guidelines for educators to implement the best practices when educating children from infancy to the age of 8 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Early childhood research identified how young children develop, learn guided the development of the practices (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Strickland, 2013). The revised DAP guidelines state that teachers of young children need to be knowledgeable regarding the impact of cultural influence on learning (NAEYC, 2015). The instructional practices are considered age, culturally, and individually appropriate for young children (Jambunathan, 2012). To implement DAP, teachers must be open to a variety of research-based practices that support the development and growth of young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Strickland, 2013).

Criticism of DAP guidelines. Criticism for DAP focuses on issues of implementation, identifying DAP versus non-DAP and the lack of family and community in the guide. Additional

concerns include inner city versus mainstream settings for conducting the research, and appropriateness for the individual and the age of the children (C. Brown & Lan, 2015; Hatch, Brice, Kidwell, Mason, & McCarthy, 1994). The question of who decides what knowledge, values, and goals should be used to develop the guidelines for all children is a primary concern for educators (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sanders, Deihl, & Kyler, 2007).

Raines (as cited in Isbell & Raines, 2002) found that the term *developmentally appropriate* has become a commercialized universal idea, silencing opportunities for a discussion of an alternative reform for providing an enriched educational environment for minority and low-income children. DAP excludes the individual's historical and social culture, along with diminishing the unique cultural interactions that guide people to understand and transform their world (C. Brown & Lan, 2015). The guidelines defining DAP reflect cultural values that are not shared universally by diverse populations of children and parents (Sanders et al., 2007). Developmentally universal practices (DUP) was introduced as a framework to expand DAP to include inclusion, leadership, and diversity (K. Harris, 2015). DUP provides a variety of enriched learning activities designed for culturally and linguistically diverse young learners.

Bradley (2006) critiqued how African American teachers theorize, understand, and implement DAP instructional practices. Fifty-two African American teachers of low-income preschoolers participated in the mixed methods study. Findings from the teacher questionnaire, interviews, and observations showed 46% of the teachers were familiar with DAP, and 54% of the teachers were unfamiliar with DAP. Both groups of teachers approved of the DAP ideas and activities; however, they rejected the idea of some of the activities and materials described by the DAP guidelines as inappropriate. A final finding expressed concern regarding the disconnect

between the guidelines and the African American community as well as the concept of a universal mandate for instructional activities.

Benefits of a developmentally appropriate environment. Preschool teachers who implement DAP create a high-quality learning environment that supports the development of school readiness skills in young children (Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Trister-Dodge, 1995). Cognitive skills develop when children are in an environment that promotes independence and provides opportunities for the children to initiate activities and express themselves as they create and explore the environment (C. Brown & Lan, 2013; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Child-centered classrooms promote experimentation, allowing children to construct their knowledge and gain information as the children interact with the environment (Raines, as cited in Isbell & Raines, 2002). Young children build information to help them understand their world through social interactions, exploration, and experimentation.

Developmentally appropriate classrooms versus non-developmentally appropriate classrooms. The High Scope Perry Preschool study tracked 123 African American children living in poverty in Ypsilanti, Michigan until 27 years of age (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weigart, 1993). Various programs implementing the High Scope developmentally appropriate curriculum or a non-DAP program received children through random selection. High Scope Curriculum is based on the principle that children grow, develop skills, and learn concepts through hands-on interactions with materials, events, and people (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2006). The preschool teachers in the program provided individualized learning experiences and opportunities for the children to learn through exploration. Findings showed that children participating in the High Scope DAP program showed higher IQs than the non-DAP program participants by the age of 5 and experienced higher academic accomplishment through 14 years

of age. The children in the non-DAP program were placed in special education classes at three times the rate of the children who participated in the DAP program. At the age of 19, the DAP program participants achieved higher literacy rates than the non-developmentally appropriate program participants (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

Research by Burts et al. (1992) found a link between stress behaviors in African American boys and DAP in the preschool classroom. In the study, the NAEYC DAP checklist was used to determine which classes implemented developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The classes identified as non-DAP used whole group activities, workbooks, seatwork, and flashcards. In the non-developmentally appropriate environment, African American boys displayed more stress-related behaviors. According to Dunn and Kontos (1997), the current research supports the implementation of DAP for the development of children's cognitive ability. Although programs that are academic promote higher academic success, rigorous developmentally appropriate child-centered environments have been shown to foster high academic achievement with less stress (C. Brown & Mowry, 2015).

Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, Rescorla, Cone, and Martell-Bounske (1991) conducted a study comparing the academic achievement of children participating in academically based educational programs compared to programs implementing developmentally appropriate/child initiated instructional practices. The researchers analyzed academic achievement, creativity, anxiety, and divergent thinking in the two different types of programs. The findings showed that children in the classrooms where developmentally appropriate/child initiated practices were implemented achieved higher scores on divergent thinking and creativity and displayed less anxiety during test taking than the children in the academically based education programs.

Characteristics of DAP educators. Shreck (1994) studied 184 participants including 51 second-year teachers as well as the teachers, university professors, and administrators who were the second year teachers' induction committee mentors. The purpose of the study was to discover the personal characteristics and social factors needed to develop early childhood teachers who want to implement DAP in their classroom. The findings from the self-reported questionnaires indicated that the beliefs of the consultant and the pre-service teacher, class size, early learning standards, curriculum, school policy on DAP and ethics greatly influenced implementation of DAP in the classroom

The study found that there are personal characteristics and social factors that greatly affect the implementation of DAP by teachers.

Educator attitudes and beliefs versus implementation of DAP. There is a disconnect between teachers' beliefs and their implementation of DAP in the classroom (T. Duncan, 2000; Rose & Rogers, 2012). Smith (1997) conducted a study of 60 pre-service teachers to investigate their beliefs and how those beliefs influenced their classroom practices. The findings from the self-reported Likert-scale pre and post-test showed that early childhood teachers repeatedly sanctioned DAP instructional practices, unlike the elementary teachers who preferred more traditional instructional practices. The beliefs of the pre-service teachers remained the same during the process of being placed in the classroom. T. Duncan (2000) investigated the relationships and differences between the beliefs of 355 pre-service unified early childhood teacher preparation programs, pre-service early childhood special education and pre-service early childhood educator's behavioral practices and DAP. The findings showed similar beliefs espoused by the unified teachers and the special education teachers about behavior and DAP. The pre-service early childhood educators held different beliefs from the unified teachers and the

special education teachers. The findings identified the necessity for collaboration between the early childhood education and early childhood special education fields to meet the needs of all children. The teachers' understanding of how children grow and develop impacts the implementation of DAP (Swim, 2015). The teachers need information on child development and best instructional strategies, along with the tools to assist in understanding and implementing the practices required to create a DAP learning environment (T. Duncan, 2000; Swim, 2015).

D. Alexander (2014) conducted a qualitative descriptive exploration of the perception of preschool teachers' understanding and implementation of DAP. Findings showed a disconnect between teachers' knowledge and daily planning for implementation. Teachers inconsistently described the learning goals, planning, and implementation of the activities for the children. Preschool teachers were found to use DAP to develop written instruction, oral language, and phonological awareness through play activities in learning centers. Teacher-child interactions in providing language modeling and feedback are limited (Di Francesco, 2011). Mecham (2007) found that kindergarten teachers' self-reported beliefs regarding DAP were higher than the observed implementation of DAP. Reading with the children on a daily basis and helping develop social skills were the most frequently reported beliefs. The use of manipulatives, not using time-out for discipline, writing experimentation, music, and integration of subjects were the most commonly reported practices. The study surveyed the DAP beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers and their perceptions of the children entering kindergarten. The results showed the teachers with high DAP beliefs identified *lack of academic skills* less than the teachers with lower DAP beliefs. Teachers with higher DAP beliefs recognized *non-academic preschool experience* more than teachers with less DAP beliefs. Also, teachers with higher DAP

beliefs reported fewer children as going *through a difficult* entrance into kindergarten. The teachers in the study were considered to be developmentally appropriate.

Hur, Jeon, and Buettner (2016) found that the work environment also influences teachers' beliefs regarding DAP. When teachers perceived they influence the preschool program, they also provide more enriched child-centered activities. A negative perception of the work environment produced more teacher directed activities. Directors and policies that support teachers' well-being will encourage teachers to embrace DAP instructional practices to produce positive outcomes for the children in their classrooms. Sanders et al. (2007) interviewed six African American preschool directors operating preschools in a low-income diverse area of Los Angeles to determine how they interpreted appropriate practices for children of color. The findings showed a community-based interpretation of DAP where the instructional practices are individualized and blended with traditions of community parenting and religious rituals based on African American culture. The six African American directors used diverse, experienced, culturally competent teachers and academics to teach about the community and the world in which the children live. Thomas-Fitts (2003) examined the instructional choices of African American teachers of African American children. The data showed a moderate link between the beliefs of the teachers and the selection of instruction. The findings suggested that the teachers met the needs of the children by adapting the DAP to fit the culture of the children. Phillips (2004) studied the impact of kindergarten teachers' beliefs on the consistent implementation of DAP. Findings revealed that the pressures of state requirements and parent preferences affected the consistency and application of DAP more than the teachers' beliefs. The teachers reported implementing modified DAP, centered activities. Di Francesco (2011) found a disconnect between knowledge and understanding of the elements of DAP. The teachers displayed a lack of

awareness and understanding of developmental milestones and appropriate classroom materials. However, teachers expressed a firm belief in DAP (Goelman et al., 2006; Japel, Tremblay, & Cote, 2005).

Educator beliefs and education versus implementation of DAP.

Years of teaching and implementation of DAP. The level of education and training for preschool teachers has a direct correlation to the quality of teaching strategies in the development of an enriched classroom environment that promotes individualized learning opportunities (Barnett, 2003a; Swim, 2015). However, the educational level of a preschool teacher has less impact on the implementation of quality teaching strategies than the quality of the work environment, salary, and supervision (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

BA versus AA educator beliefs. The teachers with a higher level of education believed that they implemented DAP consistently more than teachers with less education (McKenzie, 2013). McMullen and Alat (2002) administered the Teacher Belief Scale to 151 preschool teachers who were members of the NAEYC to collect information on their views regarding developmentally appropriate instructional practices. The findings showed that a higher level of education strongly aligned with believing in the strategies associated with developmentally appropriate instructional practices. The beliefs of teachers with a bachelor of art (BA) degrees their beliefs regarding assessment, literacy, and managing classroom behavior remained the same despite being influenced by DAP training.

Ackerman (2005) found professional development and level of education impacted the teachers' beliefs. The teachers' length of teaching experience had less impact on their opinions regarding the appropriate classroom environment for the children in the program.

BA and extensive training. A study by Vu, Jeon, and Howes (2008) found that although teachers with BA degrees provided a higher level of quality interactions and instructional practices, programs with higher and more rigorous qualifications and standards did not yield a significant change in the quality of classroom instructional practices. Early education teachers with a background in child development were found to provide a more enriched learning experience for the children. The study showed that teachers with experience in early childhood education prepared less inappropriate and non-creative classroom activities. The findings from the High-Scope Perry Preschool Project, Carolina Abecedarian study, and Chicago Child-Parent Centers studies have identified the importance of teachers with BA degrees and extensive training in early childhood education. Noting significant gains in the children's print awareness and vocabulary (Barnett, 2004; Barnett et al., 2005; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2004). Lee (2004) examined the beliefs and practices of junior and senior level potential BA university students to determine their understanding of DAP theory and methods. The findings showed the senior students had a deeper understanding of theory and practice compared to the junior students. More education promoted the ability to understand and implement DAP (Lee, 2004). Teachers struggle between DAP theory and the implementation of DAP that supports the growth and development of young children (Rose & Rogers, 2012).

Attitudes and beliefs of educators and parents. Bartkowiak and Goupil (1992) sought to gain information on the views of preschool and school-age parents of typically achieving children and children with disabilities regarding developmentally appropriate instructional practices in the classroom. The findings showed that all parents had beliefs aligned with the DAP guidelines; however, parents of the typically achieving children were more likely to recommend the use of DAP in the classroom for their children. Parents of children with disabilities were

more likely to support the use of non-DAP in the school. Hoot, Parmar, Hujala-Huttunen, Cao, and Chacon (1996) compared the beliefs of parents and educators in urban United States, Ecuador, Finland, and China. The participants were asked to identify either DAP or non-DAP instruction for various scenarios. The findings showed that teachers in the United States more frequently selected scenes that reflected DAP. However, United States parents preferred traditional instructional practices that incorporated textbooks and workbooks.

Hyson and DeCspikes (1993) studied 115 urban parents and caregivers to determine their attitudes towards DAP and activities the parents provided for their children. The participants were African American, 88% female, 30% non-high school graduates, and less than 7% college graduates. The teachers completed the DAP attitude Likert-scale survey, and the parents completed the Parent Involvement checklist. The researchers interviewed twenty-one participants after the children finished kindergarten. The findings showed that, regardless of educational background, the participants preferred a more adult-directed, traditional academic approach to instructing their children to ensure academic success. Many of the parents readily endorsed using dittoes and adult instruction as important as play dough and free play to their children's academic achievement.

Culture and DAP implementation. Children thrive in classrooms where teachers use culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate instructional practices (Gao, 2014). Hyun (1995) conducted a study to examine how two first-year early childhood teachers understood, tracked, and implemented developmentally and culturally appropriate practices into their lesson planning and daily routine. The teachers participated in interviews and followed their experiences and activities through journals and lesson plans. The findings revealed that limited knowledge of the cultures of the students' families had the greatest impact on the implementation

of quality learning experiences. Hyun also found that the structural format of lesson plans may lead to the challenge of creating culturally relevant activities. Planning and implementation of culturally relevant learning experiences for pre-service teachers will increase the quality and consistency of developmentally and culturally appropriate practices in the classroom. A quantitative analysis of the process of DAP and CRT awareness in 150 graduate students was conducted to develop a pre-service and in-service early childhood teacher training program. The findings showed that teachers preferred a more interactive approach to training. The teachers examined their beliefs and attitudes about children and culture frequently. They believed that the best resource for learning about a child's culture is the child and his/her family. Insufficient materials, non-supportive administration, and lack of control over situations hampered the implementation of DAP and CRT (Teitler, 2008). The two most important factors that impact implementation were found to be the teachers' instructional choice and the availability of resources in the program (Abdelfattah, 2015).

Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators

Preschool teachers require ongoing professional development opportunities to successfully implement a variety of instructional practices that produce positive outcomes for all children (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dunst, Trivette, & Raab, 2014). The NAEYC (2015) defines professional development as improving the skills, attitudes, and knowledge of educators through pre-service and in-service hands-on learning experiences. Limited funds are provided to preschools to ensure that teachers receive ongoing professional development opportunities (Farran, & Bilbrey, 2014). Effective professional development empowers teachers to ask questions, practice the strategies, and reflect on the outcomes of the activities to develop an understanding of DAP (Cerniglia, 2012).

Pre-service and in-service training. The quality of pre-service and in-service professional development have an impact on the variety of activities implemented in the classroom (Barnett, 2003a). Pre-service training opportunities that provide hands-on experiences with materials and children enable teachers to be creative and confident in preparing a variety of enriched activities in the classroom (Cunningham et al., 2009). According to Daniel and Friedman (2005), teacher preparation that provides an opportunity for first-year teachers to engage in classroom practices, such as planning and implementing an activity based on the curriculum, creates more effective teachers. Pre-service and in-service professional development that includes hands-on experiences and modeling of practices that reflect the demographics of the teacher's classroom will result in the creation and implementation of quality activities for the children (Seglem & Garcia, 2015). Effective pre-service teacher preparation programs provide many opportunities for teachers to participate in supervised, hands-on, real-life classroom experiences (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2010).

Culturally relevant professional development. The diverse population in the United States public school system has prompted a need for culturally responsive teachers. Teacher pre-service and in-service programs must prepare teachers to work with various communities (Sleeter, 2001). Some changes have been made in the content, teaching experiences, and subject matter in the pre-service and in-service courses to meet the educational needs of a diverse population (Grant, 1994; Sleeter, 2001; Young, 2010). Peer coaching was shown to promote personal development and professional growth in pre-service teachers (Kennedy & Lees, 2016). Individualized coaching was found to have more impact on the implementation of CRT instructional practices than traditional early childhood workshops and training (Kruse, 2012; Trepanier-Street, Adler, & Taylor, 2007). Coaching provides opportunities for teachers to

increase their capacity with the use of authentic materials, observations, modeling, and timely feedback to identify the knowledge gaps between theory and implementation (Adams, 2011). Pre-service teachers can benefit from CRT training and hands-on experiences with African American children by engaging in authentic learning experiences (Evans & Gunn, 2012). Preschool teachers lacked adequate training and resources to implement culturally relevant practices (Young, 2010). Pre-service teachers acknowledged the importance of multicultural literature to promote cultural awareness in young children (Iwai, 2013). However, the lack of access to multicultural resources limited implementation in the classroom. Wills (2012) conducted a study on the impact of a culturally relevant pedagogy course designed to prepare pre-service teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse children. The 78 pre-service teachers and five instructors were from a predominantly Caucasian southern college of education. The findings indicated that participation in this course positively impacted the pre-service teachers' cultural sensitivity.

Researchers Seglem and Garcia (2015) studied pre-service elementary school teachers used digital conversations to be introduced to urban youth. The teachers learned about the lives of the students virtually and reflected on the students' lives and behaviors. The finding showed that the pre-service teachers gained a better understanding of the values of the urban youths' culture. The teachers became culturally responsive as they learned the language and understood the specific needs of the individual children. Timmons (1999) conducted a case study to examine four new teachers' interactions and beliefs while working in a low-income, linguistically and ethnically diverse elementary school. The teachers completed a masters level cultural diversity teacher preparation program. The findings from the study showed an increased level of stress for new teachers as they confronted culturally based situations with which they

were not familiar. Timmons recommended that new teachers working with children who are linguistically and culturally diverse receive teacher training, as such work requires a more in-depth study of how to become a culturally competent teacher.

DAP professional development: pre-service DAP versus non-DAP. Lawler-Prince and Slate (1993) studied 158 students who were majoring in education during their junior year to discover how well the pre-service early education teachers were able to differentiate between DAP and non-DAP instructional practices in a preschool setting. Samples were collected on a *day in the life* of a preschool classroom, finding that teachers struggled to recognize DAP and non-DAP activities. Snider and Fu (1990) found that pre-service and in-service early childhood education teachers were unable to identify DAP instructional practices consistently. Math concepts taught through play during teacher professional development activities promote consistent implementation of math-related learning activities (Graue et al., 2015). Lawler-Prince and Slate (1993) conducted a study of pre-service and in-service early childhood education teachers, finding that both in-service and pre-service early childhood education teachers had difficulty identifying activities that were DAP.

Summary

Academic achievement gap. For many years, in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the United States has introduced, passed, and reauthorized numerous initiatives such as Head Start, NCLB, and the Early Learning Challenge for education reform with the intent of decreasing the academic achievement gap. Effective education reform would ensure a quality education for all children regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, SES, or geography. However, the achievement gap continues to increase for children of color and children from low-income families (V. Miller, 2014). The research presented an ongoing debate on the accuracy of using

the term *achievement gap*, in addition to outlining various causes of the achievement gap and possible ways to decrease the achievement gap, thereby ensuring that all children have a high-quality education that leads to success in higher education and future careers. The research proposed that non-rigorous curriculums, inadequate health services, unemployment, low-income, untrained teachers, the lack of funding, and access to high-quality preschools are the causes of the achievement gap (Irvine, 2010). The elimination of opportunity gaps promotes the accessibility of quality resources, health and education services for African American children and children from low-income families (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

The research uncovered the terms learning gap, achievement gap, and opportunity gap identifying the disparity between the advantaged and the disadvantaged that impact the future success of African American children and children from low-income families and communities (“Hidden Curriculum,” 2014). The achievement gap represents an imbalance of academic benefits and positive outcomes between disadvantaged children and their advantaged peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The research argues that there is an opportunity gap that increases the incidences of African American children and children from low-income families scoring below their age and grade level. Research regarding the issue of low educational performance discussed the disparities between the quality of education and availability of resources for children of color and children from low-income families and their White and advantaged peers. The quality of the education in inner city communities is significantly below the quality of education in more affluent neighborhoods, with less funding for materials and qualified well-trained teachers. An ongoing debate in the research spoke to the focus on the difference in scores or an achievement gap as an intentional or unintentional distraction from the real issues that impact the success of African American children and children from low-income families and

communities. The discussion of the achievement or learning gap identifies the children as lacking in their ability to perform instead of focusing on the assets and the skills of the children and their families.

Benefits of a high-quality preschool. In preparation for academic success, parents enroll their children in a preschool program that they believe will prepare their children for kindergarten and beyond (Ansari & Crosnoe, 2015; Marcon, 1999). Unfortunately, access to high-quality preschool programs is dependent upon location, ethnicity, and income. High-quality learning opportunities are not accessible to children and families from low-income communities. Research by Fitler (2000) showed a decrease in academic retention or placement in special education classrooms for African American children and low-income children who attended a high-quality early education program. Children were more task-oriented, articulate, and social after attending a high-quality preschool (G. Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Although the research shows that most children participate in moderate quality preschools, African American and low-income children are least likely to attend a school in their community that provides a high-quality learning environment (Herzfeldt-Kamprath & Adamu, 2014).

Academic advances. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) reported that although African American have shown improvement in mathematics and reading, a significant gap remains between African American children and Caucasian children. Researchers have observed academic advancement in language and literacy for African American children who attended a high-quality preschool program (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013; G. Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). African American children and children from low-income families are less likely to attend a preschool program that meets quality benchmarks for instructional support that promote higher-order thinking and language skills (Mahoney, 2015).

Fade out effect. Children attending a high-quality preschool program have shown cognitive academic advances (G. Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). However, by the third grade, the children who did not attend preschool were on the same academic level as the children who attended preschool (Clements et al., 2013). The gains in preschool sustained by aligning preschool and elementary school standards (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Culturally relevant teaching.

Definition. CRT is a research-based educational practice designed to promote academic success for African American children and children from diverse cultures and low-income families (Ladson-Billings, 1992). A culturally responsive learning environment acknowledges the values and strengths of the customs of the children in the classroom. Learning experiences reflect the culture of the child, family, and community aligned with the culture of the school to create learning experiences that develop the children's skills and abilities in preparation for academic success (Paris, 2012). Culturally competent teachers believe and understand the importance of using the heritage, language, and cultural values of the individual children to create an enriched learning environment (A. Hill, 2012; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974).

The research uncovered two approaches for providing a culturally relevant pedagogy for culturally diverse children. The Anti-Bias curriculum creates an environment that incorporates the awareness of diversity and abilities into the daily learning experiences in non-stereotypical activities, classroom materials, and displays. Input from parents and community is essential in creating a diverse learning environment (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). The Inclusive Curriculum implements learning activities and a classroom environment that reflects the abilities and cultures of the children in the classroom (Soukakou et al., 2014). The teacher uses research-

based approaches to develop and implement an environment that accommodates the needs and interest of all children, regardless of ability or culture (Rodriguez, 1998).

Benefits of culturally relevant teaching. The research supported the assertion that there is a connection between deliberate and consistent culturally relevant instructional practices and academic achievement for African American children and children from low-income families (Dickson et al., 2016; Wohlgend, 2013). African American children learn to operate both in their own culture and in the mainstream culture (Sleeter, 2012). African American children flourish in an environment that is energizing and encourages self-expression (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Understanding children's learning styles are important, as research shows that children who are kinesthetic and sensing learners and extroverted are discouraged from using their strengths and are less productive in school (C. Brown & Mowry, 2015). Incorporating culturally-based communication and skill development strategies may raise the level of academic achievement for African American children (K. Harris, 2015; Howard, 2001).

School, home, community collaboration. The academic success of children is determined by how closely their values and the school's values are aligned. The research showed that the values of the child's home and community influence classroom behaviors (Gay, 2010; Dray & Wisneski, 2011). A culturally competent teacher will intentionally create instructional practices that provide a balance between the school's values and the child's values in a non-stereotypical manner to ensure that the child will be successful academically (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The teacher intentionally learns the culture of the individual children and engages the parents and the community in creating culturally relevant activities that prepare the children for kindergarten and future academic success. Research has shown that children who see their home and community reflected in the school environment are more likely to have a successful school

experience (Gay, 2010; Ingram et al., 2007; Perkins & Cooter, 2013). The community and families of the children in the classroom play a role in providing culture-related information to the teacher. The classroom environment and learning activities are created based on information about the children's culture (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Culturally competent teachers. Culturally competent teachers have high expectations for students because they have an understanding and appreciation of the cultures of the children in their care. An aspect of providing culturally relevant activities is for teachers to understand and appreciate how learning styles and culture come together in the child's personality and behavior in the classroom (Guiffrida, 2005). A culturally competent teacher understands that learning styles are individual and dependent upon the setting. Learning about and understanding the individual child prevents stereotypical thinking geared toward a particular ethnic group.

Culturally relevant teaching. Creating a diverse environment on a daily basis, using multicultural toys and displays as a part of the curriculum instead of only for special events and holidays presents a challenge for teachers (Bodur, 2016; Rodriguez, 1998). Administrators and teachers require training in culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as training regarding the culture and values of the children, family, and community to acquire the tools they need to create culturally responsive activities that prepare children to pass standardized tests. The research found a disconnect between what teachers believe and the instructional practices they implement in the classroom (Yannacone, 2007). The implementation of standardized testing limits teachers' opportunities for incorporating best practices for children from different ethnic groups (Kroll, 2013). The collaboration of instructional strategies, culture, and learning promotes academic achievement for all children, regardless of ethnicity or ability (Paris & Alim, 2014). Thorough planning, research, and advanced preparation ensure that the teacher will be able to create and

sustain an environment that reflects the culture of the children in the classroom and the learning expectations to ensure that each child is prepared and ready to learn as he/she enters kindergarten (Iwai, 2013).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices.

Definition. Adopted by the NAEYC in 1987 and revised in 1997 to include cultural awareness, DAP is nationally recognized as a guideline for the implementation of best practices in the field of early childhood education. This research-based approach to providing an environment based on current knowledge about learning development for children ages 0-8 (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The research shows that young children learn through hands-on experiences in their daily lives. An early learning environment that reflects DAP is child-centered, with adults guiding and facilitating the children's play through the creation of enriched learning experiences that prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn (Strickland, 2013).

Criticism of DAP. The main criticism of a universal approach to best practices is that DAP focusing on similarities is based on the values of the dominant culture and does not take into consideration the values, strengths, assets, and beliefs of other cultures (Sanders et al., 2007). According to Raines (as cited in Isbell & Raines, 2002), the term DAP has become mainstream and therefore restricts the continued search for effective approaches to creating an environment that promotes academic success for children at risk of failing to attain their full potential. By excluding the individual history and culture from the approach, DAP reduces the acknowledgment of the value and uniqueness of the diversity that facilitates the understanding of the children's world (Bradley, 2006). In response to the cultural and diversity limitations of

DAP, the concept of DUP was designed to create a new approach to DAP that includes diversity, guidance for teachers, leadership, and inclusion (K. Harris, 2015).

DAP versus non-DAP. The research identified the differences between developmentally appropriate classrooms and classrooms that implemented inappropriate practices for young children. Developmentally appropriate learning environments provide hands-on experiences that are individualized based on the needs of the children. The classroom materials encourage exploration and critical thinking. Instructional practices that incorporate dittos, flash cards, extended seatwork, and activities including the whole group reconsidered the non-developmentally appropriate classroom. Studies showed that African American males were more inclined to negative behaviors in the non-developmentally appropriate classroom environment (Burts et al., 1992). Whole group activities, seatwork, and flash cards limit the opportunity for self-expression and meaningful one-on-one interactions. Children in non-developmentally appropriate programs scored lower in creativity and divergent thinking and displayed more stress-related behaviors than children in developmentally appropriate programs. The implementation of developmentally appropriate instructional practices in kindergarten to first grade showed early academic success in math and reading for low-income children.

Academic advances. The research on academic success showed a steady increase in IQ points for children in programs that consistently implemented DAP. Children who participated in early education programs that incorporated DAP were less likely to be placed in special education classes (Schweinhart et al., 1993). Intervention during the first years of a child's education was a factor in decreasing the need for special education intervention at a later age. DAP was found to have a positive impact on the cognitive development of young children (C. Brown & Lan, 2013). Children's cognitive skills develop when classroom environments are

child-centered and provide opportunities for discovery and exploration of the world around them. A DAP prepared teacher increases the chances of the children in the classroom growing and thriving (Cunningham et al., 2009). The process of questioning, practicing, and reflecting is an effective strategy in empowering teachers and children (Cerniglia, 2012). The instructional choices of the teacher and the resources available have a direct impact on the consistent implementation of DAP strategies in the classroom (Abdelfattah, 2015).

DAP instructional practices.

Implementation. Theories regarding how children learn and best instructional practices influenced teacher's beliefs. Teachers focused favorably on the similarities between the children and negatively on the differences (Bradley, 2006) The differences are usually cultural and impact the quality of interaction with the teacher and the preparation of the learning environment. The ability to consistently provide activities that are developmentally appropriate depends upon the teacher's awareness of the difference between developmentally appropriate and inappropriate instructional practices (D. Alexander, 2014; Lee, 2004). The knowledge of DAP proved to be inconsistent for pre-service and in-service preschool teachers. However, studies showed that pre-service teachers promoted DAP more frequently than long-term teachers.

Teacher beliefs regarding and implementation of DAP. The research showed that the consistent application of DAP is dependent upon the views of the teachers and the administrators (D. Alexander, 2014). Teachers were found to be more receptive to accepting and implementing DAP when working in a positive work environment, showing that the quality of the work environment has an impact on the quality of instructional practices in the classroom (Hur et al., 2016). Early childhood educators in the inner city showed a community-based interpretation of developmentally appropriate practices where the instruction, materials, and activities are

individualized and blended with traditions of community parenting and religious rituals based on African American culture (Sanders et al., 2007; Thomas-Fitts, 2003).

Teachers' educational level and implementation of DAP. The research has shown that the academic level and professional development of preschool teachers is an indicator of the ability to implement effective instructional practices that create a high-quality learning environment for all children (McKenzie, 2013). Teachers with a BA degree supported the implementation of DAP, whereas training on DAP influenced the beliefs of teachers without a BA degree regarding how children learn. Although the literature supported that preschool teachers attaining a BA degree impacted the quality of instructional practices, additional research showed that higher educational criteria did not impact the effectiveness and quality of instructional practices and quality teacher/child interactions (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Pre-service and in-service coursework and training that teach about how young children learn and what they need to know to be successful in school were found to have a greater impact on the implementation of DAP than the teacher's level of qualification.

Challenges for implementing DAP. Challenges for implementation included the preschool teacher's level of creativity, the availability and usage of resources, class size and limited indoor or outdoor space for activities, and the philosophy of the program (D. Alexander, 2014). The literature revealed a disconnect between the perceptions of preschool teachers, special education, and elementary teachers in the identification of DAP, showing a need for collaboration to ensure that children at risk are receiving quality instructional practices and services (Lawler-Prince & Slate, 1993; Shreck, 1994; Teitler, 2008). Administrative support of DAP ensures that teachers receive training and resources to implement instructional practices that create an enriched learning environment successfully.

Professional development. Teachers in inner city schools are less likely to have the resources to attend professional development activities consistently (Buxbaum et al., 2014). African American children and children from low-income families are more likely to participate in programs that have frequent staff turnover and unqualified and untrained teachers due to poor working conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2006). African American parents, teachers, and the community play an important role in providing the schools with information on how to develop appropriate and effective teaching practices for the education of their children. Providing opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to learn to teach math concepts through play enables implementation of math activities in the classroom (Graue et al., 2015). The teachers benefit from real life experiences that successfully carry over into their future work environment (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Pre-service teachers receiving weekly feedback from peer coaches showed positive professional and personal development and growth (Cunningham et al., 2009; Kennedy & Lees, 2016). The pre-service teachers learned to appreciate their abilities through hands-on and engaging professional development activities.

Parents beliefs toward DAP. Ongoing parent involvement in their children's education is an essential factor in the children's future academic success (Bierman et al., 2015). In the literature, parents showed a preference for the more traditional teaching practices when compared with developmentally appropriate teaching practices. Information distributed to preschool and school-age parents regarding DAP continued to show a preference for workbooks and textbooks (Hyson & DeCspikes, 1993). Overall, parents in the studies acknowledged the importance of DAP; however, parents of children with disabilities showed a more significant preference than parents of typically achieving children for more traditional forms of teaching for

their children (Bartkowiak & Goupil, 1992). Parent participants included adult instruction and dittos as essential tools for teaching, along with hands-on experiences for their pre-kindergarten children.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how instructors become aware of CRT and DAP that promotes consistent implementation of quality teacher/child interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

Research Question

What is the process by which preschool teachers develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support African American student's academic achievement?

Overview of Chapter Three

Chapter Three discusses the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. The research methodology and rationale section provide an overview of the research design, the setting of the study, and a rationale for the selection of the research design. The population, sample, and sampling procedures identify the participants and the selection process. The human subject considerations section offers a discussion of confidentiality and the rights of the participants. The next section outlines the data collection procedures, which leads to the instrumentation and data analysis. Coding, validity, and trustworthiness are discussed in the data analysis section. A positionality discussion follows the data analysis section. The final section of Chapter Three is an overview of Chapter Four.

Research Design and Rationale

Design overview. The research methodology for this study was a qualitative grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was used to uncover themes from the literature to provide insight into the best practices for teaching African American prekindergarten age children to

ensure that they enter kindergarten ready to learn. The setting for this study was African American owned early childhood education centers and family childcare homes in Los Angeles County that provide childcare for African American children ages 4-5. The study population was African American prekindergarten directors, teachers, and assistant teachers in Los Angeles County that provide childcare for African American children ages 4-5. The sample consisted of African American prekindergarten directors, teachers, and assistant teachers from early childhood centers and family childcare homes. The researcher used a variety of methods to contact 25 early education centers and family childcare homes. Information/fact sheets were sent via social media, email, mail, or in person delivery until the researcher obtained at least seven to 10 individual respondents from the early education centers and family childcare homes that met the study criteria. The respondents were a combination of directors, teachers, and assistant teachers from the preschool centers or the family childcare homes. The entire staff was not required to participate in the study; the respondents were the individual directors, teachers, and assistant teachers and not the collective staff. The researcher scheduled a site visit with the owner/director of the facility to review the Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter. The researcher obtained the appropriate signatures from the director, teachers, and assistant teachers. The Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research and the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities outline the purpose of the study, expectations for participating, timelines, details about the interview, their rights and protections as participants, and information about the Visa gift card given for participating in the study. The six interview questions were designed to generate new information about the teachers' culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies for African American prekindergarten children. One African

American preschool director, one African American preschool teacher, and one African American preschool assistant teacher piloted the six interview questions to verify that the interview questions would answer the research question. The selected director, teacher, and assistant teacher respondents met the study criteria. The data collection consisted of up to 1 hour of recorded individual interviews with the directors, teachers and assistant teachers. The participants had an opportunity to review the final transcripts of their interviews for clarification. A hard copy of the data stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and a soft copy secured on the researcher's computer ensures the confidentiality of the participants. The data will be destroyed within 5 years after the completion of the study. The data analysis included an ongoing process of checking and reviewing transcripts, recordings, and field notes; referencing the literature; generating new questions, and repeating the process until a theory emerged.

Setting. The setting for the study was early childhood education centers and family childcare homes that provide care for inner-city African American children in Los Angeles County. The children in the program reflected the diversity of Los Angeles County.

Rationale. Grounded theory is qualitative research designed to generate a theory through data that is rooted in the information provided by the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Through rigorous analysis of the data, themes emerge that explain the problem. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of why teachers are not consistently implementing culturally relevant and DAP when teaching African American children. The grounded theory approach allowed the researcher to collect valuable information from participants who are African American and educate African American children regarding why the teachers are inconsistent in implementing culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children.

The concept of data saturation provided an opportunity for the researcher to continue to ask questions and read the literature until there was an explanation for the problem. The researcher was also able to uncover what the research says about best practices to decrease the academic achievement gap. The study will provide information to administrators and educators about pre-service and in-service training on instructional practices that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate. According to Creswell (2013), the two main challenges for using grounded theory is not having preconceived ideas or explanations and recognizing when the researcher has collected sufficient data to answer the research question. In the qualitative approach, the researcher uses face-to-face interviews, observing behaviors, and asking open-ended questions to gain insight into the participants' beliefs and knowledge regarding the problem. The flexibility of qualitative research allowed the researcher to review the data, looking for patterns, categories, and emerging themes to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the data. The ongoing process of note taking, coding, and identification and interpretation of emerging themes promoted a deeper understanding of the information from the interviews possibly missed in a single step analysis of counting and comparing the number of responses to a survey. The flexibility of the process challenged the researcher to follow the process for analyzing the data consistently to ensure that the process concluded appropriately. The grounded theory method was used to generate a theory explaining the strategies that early childhood educators can use to implement culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate instructional practices to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children and children from low-income families consistently.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

Population. The participants in this study were African American early childhood educators of prekindergarten African American children ages 4-5 years located in Los Angeles County. The early childhood education centers provide half day or full day care for preschool-aged African American children ages 4-5 years. The African American owners of the child care centers may also serve as the directors of the programs. The director must hold a program director permit with his/her qualifications aligned with California Child Care licensing criteria. The African American owned centers staffed with teachers and assistant teachers who have either AA or BA degrees in early childhood education, in compliance with California Child Care licensing qualifications. The assistant teachers have child development assistant permits. For this study, the teachers and the assistant teachers had to have at least two years of experience working with African American prekindergarten children in Los Angeles County.

In addition to handling the business of the program, the owner may also act as the lead teacher. The owner/lead teacher is in charge of the day-to-day operations and licensing regulations of the program. Minimum director/teacher qualifications are high school graduation, 15 semester or equivalent quarter units. Three of the units must be in administration, and 12 units must be in general child development and growth, child/family and community, and human development or growth; all must be program/curriculum courses from an accredited college. The owner/lead teacher is responsible for preparing the classroom environment, lesson planning, and implementation of the curriculum and the business of the program. Depending on the size of the program the owner/lead teacher may supervise an aide. For this study, the aides have completed six semester or equivalent quarter units of early childhood or child development coursework in compliance with the minimum California licensing requirement for family childcare homes. The

aide is under the direct supervision of the director/teacher at all times when engaged with the children. Funding for private early childhood centers and family childcare homes may come from tuition payments, fundraisers, resource and referral agencies, grants, and donations.

Sample. Family child care homes and early childhood education centers received Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter through the mail, email, or hand delivery, soliciting candidates to participate in the study. Seven to 10 respondents from preschool centers or family child care homes were asked to participate in the study. The selection criterion for the facility was providing care for African American children ages 4-5 who are ready to enter kindergarten. Multiple teachers from one program had the option to participate in the study to achieve the 7-10 participants needed for the study. The selection criteria for the participants are being African American, having at least two years of experience as a preschool director, serving as a teacher or assistant teacher for African American children, and having achieved a BA or AA degree in early childhood education.

Sampling procedures. The researcher generated a list of seven to 10 preschools from the respondents to the Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter in Los Angeles County in areas with African American directors. The Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research contains the purpose of the study, selection criteria, timeline, details about the interview, rights, and protections, and information about the Visa gift card for participating in the study. African American owners/directors with African American teachers and assistants and at least 10% of their enrollment are 4-5-year-old African American children were selected to participate in the study. The initial site visit consisted of a detailed discussion of the purpose of the study,

expectations, timelines, details about the interview, their rights as participants, and information about the Visa gift card for participating in the study. The researcher met with the director to review the Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter. They discussed the appropriate permissions and guidelines for the participation of the teachers, the location of the interviews, and other information such as the time and location for accessing the facility. The owner/director wrote a Site Permission Letter granting the researcher permission to be on the program premises and conduct the interviews. The researcher scheduled individual interviews with the directors, teachers, and assistant teachers after the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities and the Site Permission Letter were signed. The researcher contacted the directors, teachers, and assistant teachers before the interview for confirmation and to answer additional questions.

If there were no respondents to the initial search, the researcher contacted the schools to see if the letters were received and to provide additional information as needed. This process of phone calls and visits continued until the researcher generated 7-10 respondents to move forward with the study. A wait list of additional respondents provided additional participants if all seven to 10 selected respondents were unable to complete the study. Non-respondents received a phone call and flexibility in the interview schedule. After three unsuccessful attempts to coordinate the scheduling of the interview, non-respondents were reminded of the opt-out option so that someone else may take their place. After two additional attempts with no communication, the respondent automatically self-terminated his/her participation in the study. All non-respondents who began the study received a letter thanking them for their involvement and concluding their future participation.

Human Subject Considerations

During the initial site visit, the researcher had a detailed discussion with the owner/director, teachers, and assistant teachers to discuss protection from possible risk as participants in the study. The first step was to meet with the person responsible for granting permission for the study to be conducted on the premises and with the teaching staff. The researcher provided in writing a detailed explanation of the participants' expectations. Each participant had the opportunity to select a name to be used to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the information from the interview. The researcher was the only person who had access to the true identity of the participants. The details of the interview were given in writing and explained to the participants at the initial site visit. The researcher informed the participants that a hard copy of the interviews would be locked in a secure cabinet in the researcher's home office and a soft copy secured on the researcher's computer. The data is destroyed within five years after the completion of the study. The researcher and participants worked out an agreement on how they would review the transcripts and provide input or additional clarification. The interviews did not occur in the classroom when children were present, and the class was in session, to avoid interruptions to the program. The Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter included complete information regarding the study. At the conclusion of the discussion, the owner/director wrote the Site Permission Letter granting the researcher permission and access to the facility and the teachers and assistant teachers. The directors, teachers, and assistant teachers signed the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities confirming their understanding and consent to participate in the study voluntarily.

Data Collection Procedures

In September 2016, the researcher contacted a total of 20 early childhood centers and family childcare homes through email, social media, phone calls, and on-site visits. The sampling process began in October 2016.

Respondents contacted, site visits conducted, and interviews scheduled and completed by the end of November. A pilot was held in November-December 2016 to ensure that the interview questions were yielding culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The researcher selected two schools from the list of seven to 10 potential schools to pilot the interview questions. The schools had African American owners/directors, African American teachers, and assistant teachers and at least 10% of the children in the program were 4-5 years of age and African American. Three respondents participated in the pilot. One director, one teacher, and one assistant teacher were selected and informed from the two schools to participate in the pilot study. The Information/Facts Sheet for Exempt Research, the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities, and the Site Permission Letter for the pilot study were discussed and signed before the interviews. The three participants participated in individual interviews that had the potential to last up to 1 hour. The participants had an opportunity to review the final transcript and received a \$20 Visa gift card for participating in the interview. At the conclusion of the pilot, the researcher examined the data and made adjustments to the questions as needed.

Questions were revised based on the outcome of the pilot study. The interviews for the selected study participants began in November. The teachers and assistant teachers were asked to participate in up to 1-hour interviews. During the initial site visit, the researcher discussed the location for the interviews to ensure that the participants would be in an environment where they

could express themselves freely. Prior to the interview, the researcher tested the audio recorder to eliminate any technical issues. The researcher asked each question, allowed time for the participants to gather their thoughts, and wrote notes before speaking. Follow up questions provided additional clarification. There was a transitional break between the CRT and DAP sections of the interview to allow the participant and researcher to write notes and gather their thoughts. Before the break, the researcher informed the participant of the topic of the next section. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants had an opportunity to add information to any of their prior interview responses. The challenge of face-to-face interviews is that the participants may not be comfortable with interviews and may be unable to adequately express and relate their knowledge or opinions about CRT and DAP. At the conclusion of the study, the participants received a \$20 Visa gift card for participating in the program.

Instrumentation

Interviews. A 1-hour time frame for the interview with additional time and follow up was available if needed for clarification. The interview consisted of two sections with a 2-minute transitional break between each section and a wrap up at the conclusion of the interview. Each section had three open-ended questions for a total of six questions. The questions were open-ended to provide opportunities for elaboration and follow up questions. The first section focused on the participants' awareness, knowledge, and implementation of CRT practices for African American children. The second section focused on the participants' awareness, knowledge, and implementation of developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children. A pilot of the interview questions was conducted to test if the questions are generating information that answers the research question and provide sufficient data on the awareness and implementation of CRT and DAP for African American children.

Data Analysis

Coding. The analysis of the data was an ongoing process of checking and reviewing transcripts, recordings, and previous notes; generating new questions; and reviewing additional literature. The emerging themes from the data were collected, sorted, categorized, and organized by the researcher. The data collection process is the collection of raw data from the interviews. The researcher transcribed and typed the field notes within 48 hours of each interview. Guided by the variables CRT and DAP the data were sorted into categories. The categories, grouped into themes narrowed as the cycle of analysis continued with each interview. A color-coded visual organizer was created for the three variables showing the emerging themes. The researcher reviewed the data and began to interpret the data to start the process of creating the theory. Triangulation occurred through member checking, ongoing coding, and sorting of the emerging themes from the interviews to ensure the validity of the data. The researcher maintained a journal to capture reflections of the process. At the end of each step, the researcher reflected on the outcome to ensure that the data were aligned with the problem, purpose, and research question. A team of educators was convened to review the questionnaire, the data, and the interpretation of the data with the researcher. These methods of review and cross-referencing ensured that the analysis of the data led to the creation of a theory that explains how teachers of African American children will consistently implement culturally relevant and DAP to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children in Los Angeles County.

Validity/trustworthiness of study design. Validity and trustworthiness were maintained by being consistent in the comparing, cross-referencing, categorizing, identifying themes, patterns, and reviewing and revision of the research questions. The participants had an opportunity through member checking to review the transcripts for accuracy and provide

additional information. The validity of the study was ensured by the triangulation of the data through member checking and the ongoing coding and sorting of the emerging themes from the interviews.

Data management. At the conclusion of each interview, the data were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. The researcher is the only person with access to the cabinet. After transcribing the information from the recording, the file received a unique code that does not identify the participants. The computer is locked and used solely by the researcher. The data will be stored securely for five years after the completion of the study. At that time, the hard copies with identifying information are shredded and the soft copy permanently deleted from the computer.

Positionality

My relationship to this research study is twofold. First of all, I am an African American parent of two African American children, a son age 39 and a daughter age 25, a son in law age 26 of African American and Mexican descent. My son attended a private school for kindergarten and later enrolled in an inner-city public school in multiple grade level classes due to his advanced ability in Math and Reading. He tested and placed in the Gifted Magnet program. He matriculated through K-12 with honors, then attended Columbia University and Harvard Business School. My daughter attended a private school from preschool until high school and later attended the University of San Francisco. My son and daughter endured many challenges through school that was a direct reflection of their culture. I received less behavior-related phone calls from my children's African American teachers from preschool to high school in comparison to frequent calls from teachers of other cultures.

As a youth choir director for over 30 years working with African American children from 2 to 18 years of age, parents have frequently expressed their frustration with negative interactions that teachers of other cultures have had with their children. Secondly, my AA, BA, and Master Degrees are in Early Childhood Education. My career spans over 40 years of training and experience in early childhood education in Los Angeles County, which includes owning and operating a family child care. In addition to serving as an assistant teacher in a LAUSD reading laboratory, assistant director and head teacher in the private preschool sector, education specialist for a Head Start program, behaviorist for LAUSD. And a quality support coach certified and trained in Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) for administrators and teachers of young children in Los Angeles County. During my years of interacting with administrators and teachers, I discovered a disconnect between the professional development and the implementation of practices in the classroom. Standard professional development for preschool teachers consisted of half to full day training on a specific topic. The training mainly involved a variety of random one size fits all activities requiring multiple materials and planning time. Follow up regarding the implementation of the activities rarely occurred. Emphasis on application and follow up regarding the alignment to the curriculum, ELS, or assessment results in some cases happened briefly at the end of the training. If the workshop was a multicultural workshop, the culture of the child became a part of the discussion. My experiences as a supervisor of teachers have led me to engage teachers in conversations about individualizing the curriculum based on the needs of each child in the classroom. I believe that making CRT and DAP a vital part of professional development for educators will have a profound impact on the

implementation of practices that promote academic success for African American children and children from low-income families.

Overview of Chapter Four

Chapter Four will present the findings from the research study. Section one will be an introduction providing the purpose of the study, the research question, and an overview of the research design. Section two will present data analysis for CRT African American children in Los Angeles County. Section three will present data analysis regarding DAP for African American children in Los Angeles County. Section four will provide a summary of the key findings from the data analysis for the CRT and DAP for African American children in Los Angeles County.

Chapter Four: Results

Overview of Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents the findings from this grounded theory qualitative research study. The first section will present the purpose of the study, the research question, an overview of the research design, and the outcome of the sampling and data collection process. The second section will present the findings for CRT practices for African American children in Los Angeles County. The third section will present the findings for DAP for African American children in Los Angeles County. The fourth section will provide a summary of the key findings from the data analysis regarding CRT and DAP for African American children in Los Angeles County. The final section of Chapter Four is an overview of Chapter Five.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how instructors became aware of CRT and DAP that promoted consistent implementation of quality teacher/child interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

Research Question

What is the process by which preschool teachers develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support African American student's academic achievement?

Overview of Research Design

The grounded theory approach was used to uncover themes from the individual interviews of African American preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers of African American prekindergarten children in Los Angeles County. Thirty preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers from a combination of family childcare homes and early childhood

education centers were invited to participate in the study. At least 10% of the preschool enrollment consisted of prekindergarten African American children. A pilot was conducted with a preschool director, teacher, and teaching assistant, resulting in follow-up questions added to the original six interview questions. Seven African American preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers from African American owned early childhood centers consented to individual interviews lasting between 20-45 minutes. Table 1 displays the CRT findings for the directors, teachers, and assistants. Table 2 displays DAP findings for the directors, teachers, and assistants.

Findings

Culturally relevant teaching.

Table 1

Culturally Relevant Teaching: Findings

Theme	Source of Information	Responses
Environment	Personal Experiences	5
	Other preschool programs	4
	Multicultural workshops	3
	Multicultural resource books	1
	Child development classes	3
Instructional Practices	Personal Experiences	3
	Other preschool programs	2
	Multicultural workshops	4

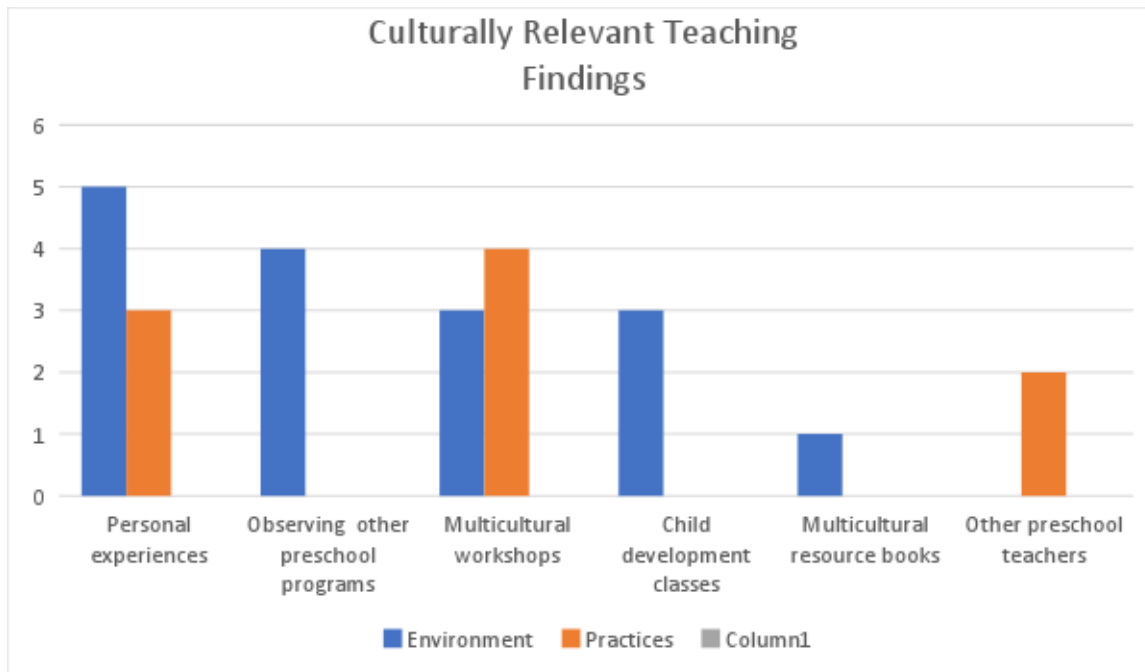


Figure 1. Culturally relevant teaching: Findings.

Preschool directors.

CRT environment. Two preschool directors participated in individual interviews lasting 20-45 minutes. Two directors responded to “Describe a culturally relevant classroom environment for African American children” with examples of materials they would place in the classroom environment for African American preschool children. Two preschool directors identified a variety of pictures with African American families, famous people, and familiar locations. Two preschool directors identified African musical instruments. One preschool director identified cultural artifacts including authentic jewelry and clothing.

Information for CRT environment. Two preschool directors responded to the follow-up question, “where did you learn this information for a CRT environment?” Two preschool directors identified family and personal experiences as their primary source of information in creating a CRT environment. Two preschool directors identified interacting with and observing

other preschool programs as a source of information for the environment. Two preschool directors identified attending a multicultural class for creating a CRT environment.

CRT practices. In response to “Describe culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children,” two preschool directors provided examples of specific instructional practices for African American children. Two preschool directors identified storytelling that provided time for the children to talk and share their experiences. Two preschool directors identified hands-on experiences with a balance between child-directed and teacher-directed activities. One preschool director identified modeling/demonstrating the activity for the children. Two preschool directors identified providing activities that allow movement.

Information for CRT practices. Two preschool directors responded to “Where did you learn this information for CRT instructional practices?” They identified family and personal experiences as their primary source of CRT practices. One preschool director identified interacting with and observing other preschool programs as a source of information for CRT practices.

Preschool teachers.

CRT environment. Three preschool teachers participated in individual interviews lasting 15-45 minutes. The duration of the interviews varied based on the length of responses and the respondents’ ability to provide information on practices used in the classroom. Some teachers were unfamiliar with the term CRT and teaching/instructional practices. Some participants had difficulty being able to differentiate between creating an environment and implementing a strategy. The researcher observed this challenge during the pilot and added the additional questions to create more clarity. Some interviews lasted up to 45 minutes due to the participants

asking for clarification and being able to provide examples of their classroom practices. The participants asked the following questions during the shorter interviews. “What is CRT? What do you mean by teaching practices?” etc. After explaining, some of the participants were still unable to answer the interview questions and provide examples of their practices.

Three preschool teachers responded to “Describe a culturally relevant classroom environment for African American children.” Two preschool teachers identified pictures of African American families and famous people. Two preschool teachers identified dolls, and one preschool teacher identified puppets that reflect the culture of the children. One preschool teacher identified African American cultural artifacts, and three preschool teachers identified cultural and familiar music. Three preschool teachers identified dress up clothes and food in the dramatic play area.

Information for CRT environment. Three preschool teachers responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for the environment?” One preschool teacher identified gathering information from visiting other preschool programs. Two preschool teachers identified attending a multicultural class. One preschool teacher identified attending a workshop as a source of information regarding the environment. One preschool teacher identified personal experience as his/her source of information for creating a CRT environment.

CRT practices. Three preschool teachers responded to “Describe culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children.” Two preschool teachers identified hands-on experiences using materials that the children can manipulate. Two preschool teachers identified demonstrating activities for the children. Two preschool teachers

identified storytelling including time for sharing and role-play. Two preschool teachers identified engaging the children in conversations throughout the day.

Information for CRT practices. Three preschool teachers responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for CRT instructional practices and implementation?” Three preschool teachers identified personal and family experiences. Two preschool teachers identified a multicultural class as a source of information for CRT instructional practices. Three preschool teachers stated that multicultural courses in school did not provide specific strategies for African American children.

Preschool assistant teachers.

CRT environment. Two preschool assistant teachers responded to “Describe a culturally relevant classroom environment for African American children.” One preschool assistant teacher identified books about African American families and famous people. Two preschool assistant teachers identified dolls reflecting the African American children in the class. Two preschool assistant teachers identified a variety of pictures of African families, famous people, and familiar places. One assistant teacher identified everyday foods in the dramatic play area.

Information for CRT environment. Two preschool assistant teachers responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for a CRT environment?” One preschool assistant teacher identified multicultural class resources. Two preschool assistant teachers identified personal experiences as their source of CRT information. One preschool assistant teacher identified using multicultural books to create a CRT environment. One preschool assistant teacher identified observing other preschool environments as a source of information.

CRT practices. Two preschool assistant teachers responded to “Describe culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children.” Two preschool assistant teachers were unable to describe CRT practices. One preschool assistant teacher identified storytelling using African American stories. One preschool assistant teacher identified movement activities. One preschool assistant teacher identified cultural and familiar music. One preschool assistant teacher identified engaging the children in conversations throughout the day.

Source of CRT practices. One preschool assistant teacher responded to, “Where did you learn this information for CRT instructional practices and implementation?” The responding preschool assistant teacher identified gaining information from other teachers as their primary source of information for practices specifically for African American children. The second source was multicultural classes/resources for general practices for all children.

Developmentally appropriate practices.

Table 2

Developmentally Appropriate Practices: Findings

Theme	Source of Information	Responses
Environment	Personal/family experiences	4
	Child development classes	3
	Trial and error	1
Instructional Practices	Personal/family experiences	4
	Child development classes	2
	Trial and error	1
	DAP workshop	1
	Other preschool teachers	1

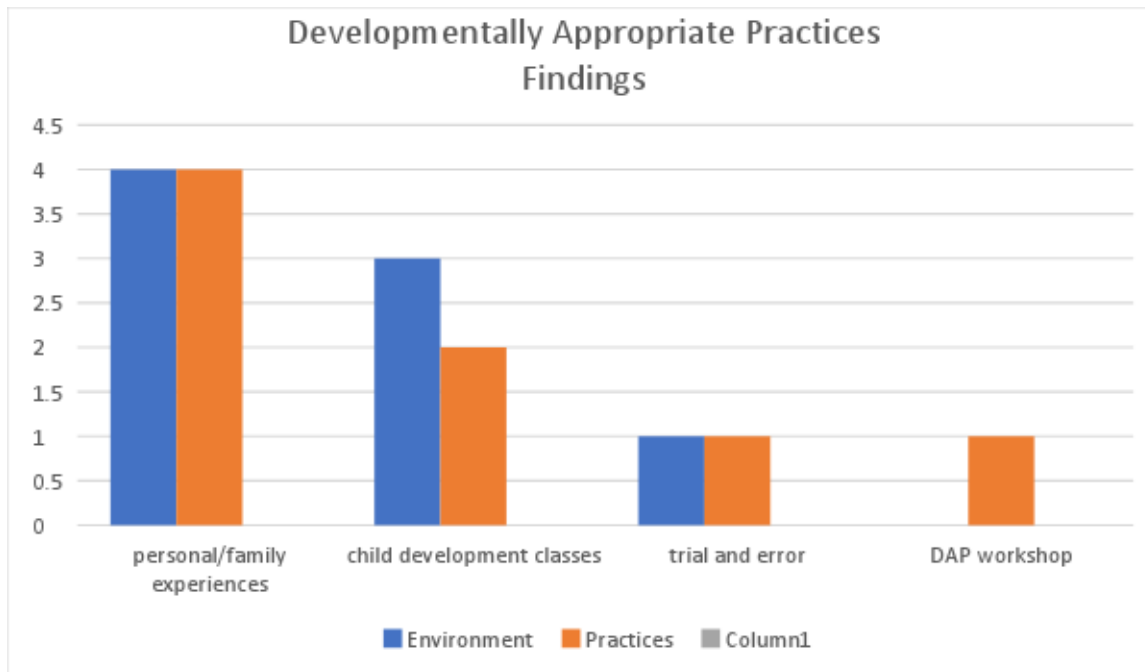


Figure 2. Developmentally appropriate practices: Findings.

Preschool directors.

DAP environment. Two preschool directors responded to “Describe a developmentally appropriate classroom environment for African American children.” One preschool director identified using toys and materials including dolls, books, and pretend food reflecting African and African American culture. One preschool director identified providing age-appropriate materials. One preschool director identified providing developmentally appropriate materials based on assessments of the children.

Information for DAP environment. Two preschool directors responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for a DAP environment?” Two preschool directors expressed that workshops and child development classes were generic and not specific to African American children. One preschool director identified child development classes as his/her source of information. Two preschool directors identified personal and family experiences.

DAP. Two preschool directors responded to “Describe developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children” with examples of DAP for prekindergarten African American children. Two preschool directors identified using hands-on learning activities. One preschool director identified structured and unstructured movement activities throughout the day. One preschool director identified storytelling and sharing time.

Information for DAP. Two preschool directors responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for developmentally appropriate instructional practices and implementation?” Two preschool directors expressed that workshops and child development classes were generic and the information adapted for African American children. Two preschool directors identified personal and family experiences.

Preschool teachers.

DAP environment. Three preschool teachers responded to “Describe a developmentally appropriate classroom environment for African American children.” One preschool teacher identified a variety of hands-on materials that are age-appropriate. One preschool teacher identified age-appropriate music that is familiar to the children. One preschool teacher identified clothing in the dramatic play area.

Information for DAP environment. Three preschool teachers responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for the environment?” One preschool teacher identified observing the children during their activities. One preschool teacher identified personal and family experiences. One preschool teacher identified multicultural classes as a source of information for creating a DAP environment.

DAP. Two preschool teachers responded to “Describe developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children.” One preschool teacher identified inviting guests to volunteer and share information with the children. One preschool teacher identified age-appropriate hands-on activities. One preschool teacher identified age-appropriate music. One preschool teacher identified small group activities allowing time for children to share their experiences.

Information for DAP. One preschool teacher responded to the question, “Where did you learn this information for developmentally appropriate instructional practices and implementation?” The responding preschool teacher identified personal experiences as his/her primary source of DAP information and a multicultural class as his/her secondary source of information.

Preschool assistant teachers.

DAP environment. Two preschool assistant teachers responded to “Describe a developmentally appropriate classroom environment for African American children.” Two preschool assistant teachers identified age and developmentally appropriate puzzles. Two preschool assistant teachers identified age and developmentally appropriate books. Two preschool assistant teachers identified providing a cozy area for relaxing and reading.

Information for DAP environment. Two preschool assistant teachers responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for the environment?” Two preschool assistant teachers identified a child development class, but no practices specific to African American children. Two preschool assistant teachers identified personal and family experiences.

Two preschool assistant teachers identified trial and error of a variety of ways to teach the children.

DAP. One preschool assistant teacher responded to “Describe developmentally appropriate practices for African American children” and “Describe how you implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children.” The responding preschool assistant teacher identified age-appropriate music and movement, a variety of indoor and outdoor games, and using visual aids during activities.

Information for DAP. One preschool assistant teacher responded to the follow-up question, “Where did you learn this information for instructional practices and implementation?” The responding preschool assistant teacher identified interacting with other preschool programs, personal and family experiences, and trial and error using a variety of methods to teach the children.

Summary of Key Findings

The key findings from the literature and the interviews identified specific CRT and DAP for African American children and preschool educators’ primary source of information related to these subjects.

Culturally relevant teaching.

Preschool directors.

CRT environment. The directors’ responses indicated that they provide a variety of cultural materials representing the African American children in the classroom environment. They identified that they fill their classroom environment with pictures of African American families, famous people, and familiar locations during their interviews. Cultural artifacts from personal collections such as jewelry, clothing, and artwork were additional essential items

identified as part of the display and decorations for the classroom environment. Furnishing the dramatic play area with pretend food, dolls, and puppets that reflected African American children were considered an essential factor in creating a culturally relevant environment for African American children. Information on creating a CRT environment came from personal experiences and family interactions. Another significant source of information came from visiting other preschool programs and interacting with preschool directors and teachers during multicultural classes/workshops.

CRT practices. The responses regarding CRT practices were similar for the preschool directors. Storytelling that included sharing time was considered the most significant form of CRT practice for African American children. The next most significant method was providing a variety of hands-on experiences throughout the day. Ensuring opportunities for the children to make choices as the teacher provided guidance and structure to maintain order and discipline was considered important in creating a productive learning environment. Creating activities that promoted movement throughout the day was also considered an important part of the learning experience for African American children.

Preschool teachers.

CRT environment. The teachers identified a variety of materials needed to create a classroom environment that reflected African American children. The most frequently identified materials were items that reflected the diversity of the children in the classroom, such as dolls and pictures of families and famous people. Cultural artifacts, including music, were identified less frequently. The most significant source of information was interactions with peers and observing classrooms in other programs. Additional sources of information for creating a CRT

classroom for African American children were multicultural classes, workshops, and personal experiences.

CRT practices. One teacher responded regarding CRT practices. Personal experiences and trial and error were considered this teacher's primary source of information for CRT practices. However, hands-on activities with the teacher demonstrating the activity for the children was considered a significant method for teaching African American children. Other practices included storytelling with opportunities for engaging in conversations and dramatic play activities. The responding teacher indicated that attending multicultural classes did not provide practices that were specific for African American children.

Preschool assistant teachers.

CRT environment. The responses from the assistant teachers indicated that materials reflecting the culture of the children in the classroom included dolls, puppets, books, and pictures of African American families, famous people, and familiar locations. Resources and information included multicultural books and visiting other classrooms and more frequently personal experiences.

CRT practices. Two teachers responded to the CRT instructional practices questions. The practices were stories about African culture and African Americans. Another response was to incorporate movement activities during learning time. Sources of information for the assistant teachers with identified practices included resources from a multicultural class and collaborating with other teachers. According to the respondents, the practices acquired from the multicultural courses were not specific to African American children.

Developmentally appropriate practices.

Preschool directors.

DAP environment. The directors consistently identified materials and toys that reflect the African American culture as the main component of creating a CRT environment. Another consideration was for the toys and materials to be age and developmentally appropriate for the African American children in the classroom. The participants found that developmentally appropriate workshops and classes provided generic information instead of specific practices for African American children. However, personal life and family experiences provided more ideas for the classroom environment.

DAP. The most frequently identified DAP were structured and unstructured hands-on experiences. Movement activities were also considered an important practice to add throughout the day. Another practice was storytelling, which included providing time for the children to reflect and share their stories. One participant included teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. The primary sources of information for the directors were child development classes, personal experiences, and life experiences. The next source of information was DAP classes, presented without specific practices for African American children.

Preschool teachers.

DAP environment. The teachers had similar responses in naming age-appropriate hands-on materials for the environment. The next highest response was age-appropriate music for the children to listen to and sing during free playtime. Personal and family experiences provided the next source of information for what would be appropriate in a DAP environment for African American children.

DAP. One participant provided examples of DAP that included classroom guests sharing their personal experiences with the children. The next practice included a variety of hands-on materials that are age-appropriate for the children in the classroom. Music activities including

singing and movement as a key practice for African American children. The responding participant identified personal experiences as the source of information for DAP for African American children. DAP classes were considered generic, without specific practices for African American children.

Preschool assistant teachers.

DAP environment. One preschool assistant teacher responded to the creating a DAP environment question. The most significant responses for creating a DAP environment were age and developmentally appropriate puzzles, books, and a cozy area providing privacy and relaxation. The source of information for the participant was child development classes with practices that pertained to all children. Personal and family experiences were significant sources of information. It is vital to note that trial and error was considered an important factor in creating a developmentally appropriate environment for African American children.

DAP. One assistant preschool teacher responded to developmentally appropriate instructional practices. The use of Visual aids during learning activities was considered developmentally appropriate. One of the practices was engaging children in age-appropriate music and movement activities at various times throughout the day. Providing a variety of games to be played indoors and outdoors was considered developmentally appropriate during free play and outdoor time. The sources of information included personal and family experiences, visiting other programs, and trial and error. Practices taught in child development classes were considered generic, without specific practices for African American children.

Overview of Chapter Five

Chapter Five will discuss the key findings for CRT and DAP and source of information for preschool educators. The chapter will present conclusions, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings

Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices for African American Children

The research question asked what is the process by which preschool directors, site supervisors, teachers, and assistant teachers develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support African American students' academic achievement? The key findings from the process by which preschool teachers create a culturally relevant learning environment and CRT instructional practices that support African American students' academic achievement were personal experiences, other preschool programs, multicultural workshops, multicultural resource books, and child development, classes. The participants who responded to the interview questions showed a limited distinction between creating a CRT environment and identifying specific CRT practices. This lack of awareness led the researcher to explore the process of creating a CRT environment and the method for implementing CRT practices separately.

Environment: Source of Information.

Personal experiences. Inner city preschools celebrate African American cultural events such as Kwanzaa, Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, and Black History month with elaborate programs including authentic clothing, music, dances, decorations, and ethnic foods. The celebrations are an opportunity for the children, teachers, family, and friends to come together and honor African American heroes, heroines, and traditions. Teachers often use personal experiences as a primary source of information for creating the environment as a result of limited ongoing professional development and access to CRT resources for preschool teachers in the inner city. The selection of materials were basic items such as pictures, clothing, jewelry, authentic artifacts, and books about commonly known African American heroes and heroines, as

well as books reflecting African American families. A multicultural display is created in one area of the classrooms, consisting of cultural artifacts such as literature, musical instruments, and clothing. Other items purchased from the school supply store such as dolls, pretend food, costumes, and posters add to the display in various areas throughout the classroom. The schools celebrated Kwanzaa, Dr. Martin L. King Jr. day, and Black History month with programs, decorations, and ethnic food. During these celebrations, personal items from travels, family heirlooms, purchases at workshops, and items from African American vendors are used to decorate the classroom.

The literature supported the use of personal experiences as a source of information for creating a culturally relevant classroom environment for African American children. Teachers who are culturally responsive were found to add their own experiences to educate children who are culturally diverse (Gay, 2010). The culturally competent teacher uses the child's previous experiences, interests, and cultural resources, as well as information from family and community to provide a learning environment and activities that represent the child's culture in a non-stereotypical manner (Dickson et al., 2015; Gay, 2010). The participants shared how their personal experiences impacted the way they created an environment that represents the culture of the children in the program. The materials were on display for the children to look at or in the library, dramatic play, and music areas for the children to engage in child-initiated activities. Participants did not share how they used the materials placed in the environment to develop lessons for the children.

Teachers require culturally relevant training and resources to efficiently create an environment that promotes ongoing learning experiences for the children and not merely focused on celebrations (Paris & Alim, 2014). The personal experiences and interest in the children or

input from the parents were mainly for the festivities in the program. The academic success of children is fostered through parent engagement in their education in the school and at home (Bierman et al., 2015; Ingram et al., 2007). Opportunities for parents and the community to provide input into the school's daily activities were limited to the special celebrations. Including parents in the school's daily planning fosters a positive relationship between the home and the school (Williams-Jones, 2012). The literature mainly focused on teaching practices as a part of the learning environment.

Other preschool programs. Child development courses provide opportunities for students to visit preschool programs to teach a lesson or observe the children in the classroom. The student teacher can gain ideas on classroom arrangements, bulletin boards, and materials in the environment. In many instances, the culture of the children in the classroom does not represent the children in the student teachers' community or the children they will teach. However, classes and workshops created opportunities to meet African American teachers and visit their programs.

Participants spoke of the benefits of visiting other preschool programs to gain information about creating a CRT environment. Although observing preschool classrooms is a common practice in child development courses, it is significant to note that the primary source of information was not the child development course but the opportunity to visit other preschool classrooms. The classroom observation intends to observe the lessons and the interactions between the children and the teachers. However, the observations provided opportunities to develop relationships and share resources to use in the classroom. Teachers who networked with colleagues brought valuable resources and information that enhanced the quality of their work environment.

The literature supported the value of pre-service and in-service teachers collaborating to share information ideas and resources. Pre-service activities such as classroom observations and student teaching provide opportunities for teachers to visit other classrooms. The participants gathered ideas for their classroom display by observing different preschool classrooms.

Yannacone (2007) found that collaborating with other teachers proved beneficial in providing additional resources for the teachers. Student observation assignments in classes that did not reflect the culture of the children where they worked was an ongoing concern. This experience proved to be less beneficial, as it did not provide unique ideas and resources to support creating activities for African American children.

Multicultural workshops. Multicultural workshops are offered to preschool educators to provide best practices and resources to create environments that represent diversity in the classroom. The workshops are designed to help educators identify materials that are nonbiased and non-stereotypical to supports the children's cognitive development. The quality of the materials and instructional practices presented at the workshops depend on the beliefs and expertise of the presenter. The standard items used for diversity such as clothing, dolls, and pretend food, items found at a school supply store, are presented to the teachers. In the creation of a CRT environment specifically for African American children, the participants did not consider multicultural workshops as a significant source of teaching strategies and resources. The workshops frequently described as generic, included standard practices to be used for all cultures.

The benefits of attending the workshops included the opportunity to collaborate with other African American preschool teachers gaining and sharing ideas, themes, and challenges in creating CRT environment that goes beyond the standard displays used for Black History month.

Multicultural workshops and classes provided resources that the more creative and experienced teachers adapted to their classroom environment. However, the less qualified participants walked away with limited knowledge or desire to learn more to create a CRT environment that was specific to African American culture. The absence of African American teachers in the workshops impacted the quality of the experience and resources gained from the workshops. Everyday experiences showed how the implementation of some of the learning activities during student teaching was not suitable for the children in their program. This issue tended to create frustration and challenges in class, thereby limiting the benefit of adapting the information to meet the needs of the children in the classroom.

The literature supported the value of multicultural materials and resources in creating a CRT environment while acknowledging the limited amount of materials and supplies available to educators (Gay, 2002; K. Harris, 2015). The participants expressed concern over the scarce materials and resources for African American children that extended beyond the famous people, careers, instruments, and pretend food found in school supply stores.

Multicultural resource books. Multicultural resource books are available to preschool educators in school supply stores, college bookstores, multicultural workshops, and training. The overall concern is the quality of the content that addresses the culture and learning style of African American children. Several of the participants did not consider multicultural resource books a valuable source of information for a CRT environment for African American children. However, the participant who cited multiple sources of information also identified multicultural books as a source of information for creating a multicultural theme.

The lack of professional development opportunities and resources available to inner city schools accounts for the limited use of multicultural practices and materials. Participants who

were participating actively in furthering their education also sought more information from a variety of resources to meet the needs of the children in the classroom. Resource books were available; however, participants were more inclined to use personal experiences than available multicultural resource books. Participants expressed minimal interest in researching bookstores and online sources that provide information specific to the culture and learning styles of African American children. The literature supported the use of multicultural resource books to plan daily activities for the children (Gay, 2002), although there is a limited number of resource books that provide ideas for creating classroom environments that reflect the culture of the children in a non-stereotypical manner (K. Harris, 2015).

Child development classes. Potential preschool educators are required to attend a variety of child development courses designed to teach how young children grow and learn. The lessons address the social, emotional, cognitive, and gross and fine motor development of children from 2 to 8 years of age. Pre-service teachers create learning activities designed to develop the whole child. Multicultural classes provide guidance in planning non-stereotypical lessons that foster positive teacher and child interactions and prepare children for kindergarten. Child development classes although considered a source of information did not apply individually to African American children. The information was generic for all children, with nothing directly related to African American children.

As with the multicultural workshops, the use of the information depended on the participants' desire to provide a unique learning environment for African American children. The apparent motivator for using the resource books from child development classes to create a CRT environment for the children in the classroom was driven by festivals like Kwanzaa, Black History Month, Cinco de Mayo, and Chinese New Year, to name a few. The participants

attended fewer than two multicultural classes throughout their entire child development education experience, automatically limiting the quality and quantity of information gained. Several participants attended courses in environments where they were the only African American student. During those classes, they expressed spending more time refuting stereotypical comments from other students than gaining quality information that they could apply in their teaching.

The literature supports pre-service and in-service training for teachers as being interactive and reflecting the children that they will teach (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Seglem & Garcia, 2015). Child development classes are designed to prepare teachers to create a learning environment and implement learning practices that promote cognitive growth, leading to academic success for all children. Participants did not receive the training needed to implement cultural practices successfully or to create a classroom learning environment (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Perkins & Cooter, 2013). The culturally competent teacher requires resources and materials to present to the children that are non-stereotypical or biased. Participants consistently identified child development classes as a source for creating the environment, with ideas for themes and examples of materials to place in the classroom. However, the courses did not provide information on how to teach the lesson in a way that supports the culture of the children. According to the participants, the focus was on a more generic multicultural approach.

Instructional Practices: Source of Information.

Personal experiences. The participants overwhelmingly referred to individual family and school experiences when discussing their sources of CRT practices for the children. Cultural practices as seen through the eyes of time spent with grandparents, aunts, and neighbors teaching

the participants how to count using beans, marbles, buttons, and other household materials available to them. References to special teachers represented the *feel* of a cultural connection and understanding of their unique learning style. Reliance on personal experiences as a leading source of information for CRT practices for African American reflects the lack of information available and the disconnect between theory and practice.

The participants found they relied on their personal experiences from childhood to decorate the environment in ways that the children in the classroom would enjoy. However, there was a minimal discussion about implementing the same methods of using *familiar materials* to create instructional practices. Follow up questions to generate awareness of the connection between their personal experiences regarding common materials and instructional practices produced several “ah ha” moments and “I never thought of it that way” comments. The importance of the connection between the home and school was evident in the personal experiences shared by the participants; however, the interviews revealed limited parent input into developing daily activities. Identifying specific CRT practices for African American children beyond creating the classroom environment appeared to be an ongoing challenge for the participants. The practices represented personal experiences and beliefs regarding how the children learn.

The literature did not support personal experiences as the primary source for planning, creating, and implementing culturally relevant practices for African American preschool children. Culturally competent teachers generate learning activities based on the culture and the interest of the children in their classrooms (Gichuru et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris, 2012). The beliefs and personalities of the teachers played a significant role in the creation of the environment, as well as the concept of instructional practices that were specific to African

American children. The participants who embraced the importance of creating an environment that reflected African-American culture were more receptive to the idea of specific instructional practices that promoted cognitive gains.

The teacher's ability to provide a culturally relevant learning environment showed a direct connection to academic success for African American children (Toney, 2009). The initial discussion about instructional practices reflected reports in the literature of teachers who were found to be unwilling to implement culturally based strategies believing they promote negative stereotypes about behavior (Costner et al., 2010; C. Hill et al., 2015). Many of the participants wavered with acknowledging the significance of learning classroom practices for African American children. Identified practices such as *hands-on and movement activities* addressed negative behaviors in the children. The culture of the participants played a role in their willingness to implement CRT practices, as the more they thought about the benefits they were open to the concept. Rivera (2006) showed that proper support and not necessarily culture or teaching experience could create culturally competent teachers. Two of the participants continued to support *teaching all children the same way*, showing that beliefs and attitudes impact the quality of a learning environment that meets the individual needs of all children. Academic success for African American children is dependent on teachers' ability and desire to make modifications to the curriculum, creating an environment that reflects the culture of the children, family, and community (Holland, 2012).

Other preschool programs. The use of other preschool programs as a resource for practices is different from using preschool programs as a resource for the environment. The teachers developed relationships with other teachers to share information about the activities in the classroom. In this case, the visits are required assignments to complete a child development

course. The primary objective was for the participant to be observed implementing activities instead of the practices modeled for the participant. The opportunity to watch preschool teachers engaged with the children is a requirement of the child development program. Pre-service and current teachers collaborate to create theme-based activities to implement in various preschool programs. Mentor teachers assess the activities using learning objectives and goals as a guideline.

The creation of lesson plans and observing the implementation of activity are standard practice in child development courses. The application may occur in the college classroom or at another preschool other than their place of employment. Although the setting is the same classroom environment, it is significant to note the disconnect between practices occurring during required course observation and implementation in the classroom at their place of employment. Other preschool programs became another valuable source of CRT practices.

The literature supported opportunities for teachers to collaborate with other teachers to share ideas and resources to use in the classroom (Yannacone, 2007). Opportunities to work with other teachers were found to be beneficial in providing teachers with CRT strategies that promoted academic achievement.

Multicultural workshops. Multicultural workshops are intended to be a source of information to take back and implement in the classroom with their children. The participants identified multicultural workshops as the primary source of information for culturally relevant practices. The workshops provided a variety of projects for the participants to use during special cultural events. It became evident through the interviews that many of the participants had not considered CRT practices for ethnically diverse classrooms. The workshops discussed general strategies and did not provide expressly apply to African American children. The participants

attend multicultural training to gain information and resources to create a diverse classroom environment and special projects for celebrations. The information and handouts include a variety of cultural personalities, dolls, puppets, musical instruments, and pretend food to decorate the classroom. The participants talked about attending classes where the activities were created for all children and were not specific to African American children.

Multicultural workshops provided information on creating a multicultural environment through the use of dolls, clothing, instruments, literature, and posters. The participants attended multicultural workshops to develop multicultural classroom environments and special projects, not necessarily looking for specific practices to teach the lessons. Based on the responses and reactions, the participants were aware of practices that could be used to enhance the cognitive development of African American children or in some cases children in general. The literature supported extensive and ongoing training for pre-service and in-service teachers to become culturally competent teachers. Comprehensive training and access to resources on CRT are required to support the implementation of learning activities that reflect the values and culture of the children in the classroom (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Perkins & Cooter, 2013).

It is essential to understand the learning styles of children to be able to provide cognitive activities that promote academic success (C. Brown & Mowry, 2015). African American children benefit from cultural learning experiences that develop school readiness skills (K. Harris, 2015; Howard, 2001). Awareness or lack thereof did not account for the opinion that the multicultural workshops did not provide the resources required to meet the cultural needs of African American children. Participants did not name examples of practices learned in the multicultural workshops.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices for African American Children

Environment: Source of information. The key findings from the process by which preschool teachers develop a developmentally appropriate learning environment and DAP instructional practices that support African American students' academic achievement were personal/family experiences, child development classes, trial and error, DAP workshops, and other preschool teachers. DAP is designed to provide materials, supplies, and activities that are age and developmentally appropriate for each child in the classroom (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006).

Personal/family experiences. Personal experiences shared by the participants included memories of the lessons learned during family gatherings. The same individual experiences that provided ideas for creating a classroom environment reflecting the culture of the children, also influenced how the teachers presented a developmentally appropriate environment for the children. In the home environment, they were comfortable, moved around, and engaged in conversations and fun activities with parents, grandparents, other family members, and neighbors as they learned valuable lessons. The participants identified the primary materials to equip the library, dramatic play, and manipulative areas in the classroom. The participants emphasized creating a comfortable and relaxed class for the children living in stressful home environments such as a *cozy area*, music, and hands-on materials. The list of standard toys and materials included age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate materials added to the classroom environment. Some participants described what makes the items age and developmentally appropriate. The literature did not support personal experiences as a primary source for planning and creating a developmentally appropriate environment for African American children.

However, the research supported creating a developmentally appropriate environment to lower the stress level for African American boys (Burts et al., 1992).

Child development classes. DAP are instructional learning experiences based on the age and ability of the individual children in the preschool classroom. Child development classes provide numerous opportunities to learn and implement DAP with classroom demonstrations and onsite student teaching. Teachers are taught to identify materials and equipment that would be appropriate based on the age and ability of the children in the classroom. Assessing the children is vital in developing the environment and learning experiences. Teachers have opportunities to observe and present activities in preschool settings when fulfilling student teaching requirements. The completion of child development courses is required to attain certification to act as directors, teachers, and assistant teachers in a preschool setting. There is a 5-year renewal period for all certificates requiring 105 hours of professional development.

Child development courses are designed to provide information and strategies on conducting child assessments and creating developmentally appropriate learning experiences. The responses of the participants acknowledged their belief that age and developmentally appropriate materials are essential for African American children. Although participants were unable to share practices learned in class, there was a collective disagreement on what are considered DAP for African American children. The practices shared by the participants were a combination of DAP and non-DAP. Participants shared that assignments to preschools where the children are a different culture from the children where they work presented challenges. The activities offered in the child development class, and the preschool setting required modifications to meet the needs of the children in their program. The literature supported providing pre-service and in-service teachers with professional development that reflects real life classroom

experiences (Graue et al., 2015). Real life experiences created connections between the theory and practice in the classroom. Implementation in the school was found to be dependent on the beliefs of the director and the teachers in the practices that are considered developmentally appropriate (D. Alexander, 2014). The participants' understanding of DAP and their confidence that DAP will prepare the children for kindergarten significantly impacted their willingness to learn and implement DAP consistently. Pre-service and in-service teachers who were unable to distinguish between DAP and non-DAP benefited from professional development that provided hands-on interactive activities (Cunningham et al., 2009).

Trial and error. Trial and error in this context refer to participants trying different activities/projects based on their personal experiences, interests, and classroom observations. The selection of themes and projects for special events is through trial and error. The goals and objectives of the bulletin boards, materials, and equipment are to prepare the children for kindergarten. In many instances, the trial and error response appeared as a substitute when the participant was unable to answer the questions about DAP. The ability to identify DAP for African American children was a challenge for the participants. Identifying DAP for children in general presented the same problem for some participants.

Responses regarding current enrollment in child development courses and completion of courses yielded the same disparity in that what is learned or presented in class is not transferred to the workplace. To compensate for this discrepancy, many of the participants regardless of the level of education or years of experience resorted to trial and error. The participants expressed the desire to gain and retain the information from child development classes and workshops. The literature did not support trial and error as an approach to instructional practices. However, it's significant to note that the trial and error approach aligns with adapting DAP to fit the culture of

African American children. Inner-city African American preschool teachers were found to modify DAP to meet the needs of the children in the program. (Thomas-Fitts, 2003).

Instructional Practices: Source of Information.

Personal experiences/family experiences. Personal and family experiences greatly influenced how the participants interacted with the children. Childhood experiences from family gatherings with games, food, storytelling, music, dancing, and lively conversations transferred into the classroom. According to the participants, being able to touch and feel materials was significantly more enjoyable than sitting at the table or on the carpet listening to a teacher talk. Structure, discipline, and order are essential factors in the personal experiences of the participants. There was a general understanding of how children behaved in family settings. The sense of connection with family and friends for African American children was essential to the participants.

Practices implemented in the classroom drawn from their personal experiences, personality, and interests as children, and blended with the DAP learned in school. The more actively engaged the participant, the more active and engaging were the practices, which included child-centered small group activities, hands-on projects, and music and movement. Participants often spoke of being able to control the children's negative behaviors through structure and routine. The participants supported the concept of DAP. However, considered DAP as being too free and unstructured for African American children to be able to function adequately, learn, and retain their lessons. Participants expressed concerns that parents want a more academic program for their children, which included dittos so that the children can take them home to the parents.

The literature did not support personal experiences as a primary source of information for implementing DAP in the classroom. Bradley (2006) found that African American teachers in the study also disagreed with some the ideas and activities deemed inappropriate and saw DAP as disconnected with the African American community. Interviews with African American preschool directors conducted by Sanders et al. (2007) showed that DAP was adapted and combined with practices reflecting the traditions found in African American culture.

Child development classes. Pre-service and in-service teachers attend child development classes to develop the skills needed to implement best practices for teaching young children in an early learning setting. The responses of the participants showed a disparity among belief, awareness, and implementation. During the interviews, participants acknowledged learning about DAP in class; however, they were unable to explain DAP or give examples of instructional practices. The interviews also revealed various levels of understanding regarding how young children grow and learn that was not dependent on education level or years of experience. Participants gave examples of student teaching activities that were successful in the college setting environment with mainly Caucasian children and were unsuccessful in the preschool setting with African American children. The participants currently in child development classes provided fewer responses than participants who were not now in school. The current college students remembered learning about DAP in college but were unable to explain the concept or provide examples. Rephrasing the question to include all children and not specifically African American did not yield more responses. However, the participants believed their practices were developmentally appropriate for the children in the classroom.

Participants stated that they did not learn instructional practices that they would use specifically for African American and were unable to name specific DAP in general. The

literature supported pre-service and in-service professional development for DAP that is hands-on is engaging and reflects real life classrooms. Pre-service training should provide teachers with the tools required to successfully deliver an enriched learning environment for children (Cunningham et al., 2009). Responses to the interview questions showed a disconnect between beliefs and awareness of DAP concerning African American children.

Criticism of DAP centers around implementation for inner-city children showing the need to address how culture aligned with DAP (C. Brown & Lan, 2015). Teachers were found to report implementing DAP in the classroom, which was not evident during classroom observations (Mecham, 2007). Teachers self-report DAP implementation, but descriptions of the practices show more non-DAP such as whole group activities and dittos when describing activities (Di Francesco, 2011; Goelman et al., 2006; Japel et al., 2005). Teachers in pre-service and in-service training were found to prefer hands-on interactive training that provided opportunities to create activities aligned with the children they plan to teach (Seglem & Garcia, 2015; Teitler, 2008).

Trial and error. Trial and error about practices indicated taking what they know about children and how they learn DAP information, and modifying the idea for the children in the classroom. The phrase *trial and error* became the term for applying knowledge based on personal experiences and child development classes to implement practices in the school. The participants using trial and error were in the early years of teaching and completing child development courses. The responses reflect the need for ongoing student teaching experiences with feedback and follow up on learned practices.

Trial and error practices did not identify specific goals and objectives. The outcome of the product rather than the accomplishment of a skill determined the success of the activity.

Trial and error practices mainly consisted of teacher directed whole group activities including dittos, flash cards, and pre-cut projects. The literature did not support trial and error as an approach for instructional practices. However, trial and error as a means of practicing DAP so they can implement DAP in the classroom successfully are considered an acceptable strategy (Cerniglia, 2012).

DAP workshops. DAP workshops are designed to provide early childhood educators with opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of how to prepare young children for kindergarten using practices that meet the individual needs of the child. The workshops align practices with the development of social, emotional, cognitive, and fine and gross motor skills in young children. DAP workshops consist of hands-on experiences through group and individual projects with a variety of handouts for the participants. The overall objective is that the educators will take what they have learned in the workshops and apply the practices in the classroom.

Access to DAP workshops requires information about the workshop and funds to attend. The most important factor is the interest of the educator to gain more information about DAP. The participants in programs that receive outside funding attended classes and workshops; however, they did not participate in a workshop on DAP. The overall interest in understanding DAP to implement in the classroom for African American children was not evident until the further discussion of identifying their practices. Preschool teachers in private facilities have limited opportunities due to the lack of substitute teachers and time to attend outside workshops. The participants who did not identify DAP also displayed minimal interest in learning and implementing DAP in the classroom. The literature supported providing teachers opportunities to participate in workshops that enhance their understanding and ability to apply DAP daily (Rose & Rogers, 2012).

Other preschool teachers. Other preschool teachers represent the other teachers at their place of employment. Planning time for teachers is an essential factor in developing learning experiences that are guided by child assessments, parent input, and DAP and aligned with ELS. Time spent discussing how to use the environment and learning activities to implement the curriculum is crucial in ensuring an enriched academic environment for the children in the program. Sharing ideas with other teachers on behavior challenges, themes, materials, and learning activities produced positive changes in classroom behavior management. The activities are projects, bulletin board displays, and modeling ways to teach a lesson.

Director expectations for planning time in private preschool programs are mainly limited to individual teachers developing lesson plans and activities while supervising children during nap time. Opportunities to collaborate with other teachers with a higher level of education and years of experience in the program are minimal unless scheduled by the directors. Due to the structure of the schedules and classrooms, there are limited opportunities for meaningful collaborations other than outside social interactions, training, or child development classes. The literature supports collaborating with other preschool teachers as a valid and valuable resource. Relationships built by teachers with different levels of education and classroom experience provides the avenue for implementing enriched learning experiences for the children.

Conclusions

Conclusion #1: Preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers use personal experiences as the primary source to develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate environments and teaching practices African American children. The cultural competence of preschool teachers has a direct impact on the academic success of African American children (Toney, 2009). Participants reflected on their childhood and adult cultural

celebrations and used those experiences as guidelines for creating a culturally informed environment for the children in the classroom. The quality and quantity of cultural materials and artifacts were dependent upon the vision and the resources of the individual teacher and the program. Personal experiences as a primary source of information represent the limited quality of resources and professional development accessible to inner-city preschool teachers. There are many variations in the traditions and customs of African American families and communities; therefore, limiting input into the environment to personal experiences may lead to a biased and stereotypical representation of African American culture in the classroom (Dickson et al., 2015; Sleeter, 2012). However, a teacher's items and personal experiences are considered an additional source of information and enhancement to ideas learned in child development courses, workshops, and resource materials.

Preschool is the time to create parent advocates who will continue to encourage and support their children throughout their academic journey. Parents that are actively involved in their children's education foster a higher level of academic achievement from preschool to college (Gay, 2010). Family and community social celebrations are an integral part of the African-American tradition. Individual experiences with their family, friends, and community are the source of information for learning activities. Parent and family involvement in the classroom was primarily represented through planning and participating in special events and celebrations. The personal experiences of the parents and children will supply valuable information for teachers to use in assessing the children, planning the classroom environment, and implement instructional practices that reflect the culture and learning style of each child (Ingram et al., 2007; Perkins & Cooter, 2013).

Conclusion #2: Disconnect among the culture of the students, real-life classroom experiences and child development classes, multicultural workshops, and multicultural resources impacting the implementation of CRT and DAP in the classroom. Pre-service and in-service training is designed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to create CRT and DAP environments. The training offers opportunities for learning and implementing instructional practices that reflect the culture, learning styles, and developmental needs of the individual children in the classroom (Cunningham et al., 2009; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2010). Personal experiences as a leading source of information also represent a disconnect among the adult teaching practices, the culture of the teachers and the objectives of the child development courses, multicultural workshops, and resources provided to pre-service and in-service administrators, teachers, and assistant teachers. The educational level and years of experience were not a factor in the use of personal experiences to create a cultural environment. Preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers require extensive training to become culturally competent (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Perkins & Cooter, 2013).

It is important to note that the participants who identified personal experiences also identified workshops, books, and teacher collaborations as additional resources. The limited amount of resources designed to support teachers in creating an environment that reflects the culture of the children partially accounts for the primary use of materials during special events (Gay, 2002; K. Harris, 2015). Each participant expressed that the information in the classes and workshops was generic and not specific to African American children. The dependence on personal experiences reflects the training needed to gain an understanding of the culture and learning styles of children to provide an environment that supports their growth and development

(C. Brown & Mowry, 2015; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013). Attending the classes and workshops was beneficial in creating opportunities for the teachers to observe and interact with other preschool teachers (Yannacone, 2007).

A significant finding from the study was the disparity between the knowledge gained in the child development coursework and implementation in the preschool classroom. The literature supported the study findings showing that the disconnect between the teachers' beliefs and understanding of DAP and the benefits for African American children directly impacted the implementation of DAP in the classroom (D. Alexander, 2014; Swim, 2015). An understanding of how children learn and grow influenced what the teachers considered appropriate and inappropriate activities and instructional practices (Bradley, 2006; Strickland, 2013). The participants expressed the importance of creating a relaxing environment and small group interactions, which are supported in the literature, as African American boys were found to thrive in programs using DAP (C. Brown & Lan, 2015; Burts et al., 1992).

In many instances, a disconnect was present between the understanding of DAP and the implementation of DAP activities. The literature showed a disparity between distinguishing between DAP and non-DAP activities in the classroom (Mecham, 2007). The findings and the literature showed that understanding and acknowledging the benefits of DAP for African American children would promote consistent implementation of DAP in the classroom (Hur et al., 2016; Thomas-Fitts, 2003). Preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers were found to use their personal experiences as a primary resource to implement CRT and DAP for African American children. Although other resources were accessible such as child development classes, workshops, and resource books, the primary source of information was personal experiences. The findings and literature supported the importance of intensive training to develop culturally

competent and developmentally appropriate teachers with the ability to create activities that are an authentic representation of the abilities and culture of the children, family, and the community (Esposito et al., 2012; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The knowledge and skills of the director, teachers, and assistant teachers impact the academic success of the young children in the program.

Professional development for directors, teachers, and assistant teachers. The intended purpose of multicultural classes, workshops, and resources is to improve the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of preschool administrators, preschool teachers, and preschool assistant teachers through hands-on experiences designed to learn how to implement teaching practices that are culturally and developmentally appropriate for the children in the program. The work environment, education, and ongoing training of pre-service and in-service preschool educators directly impact the ability to implement teaching practices that are culturally and developmentally appropriate (Barnett, 2003b; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Professional development courses for CRT and DAP will be more effective if the ELS align with the curriculum (Swim, 2015).

Implications for Policy

Child development classes are culturally and developmentally appropriate for the adults in the class to promote the successful transfer of CRT and DAP in the preschool classroom. Culturally competent and developmentally appropriate teachers are created and nurtured in child development classes. Training begins in the child development classes that all directors, teachers, and assistant teachers are required to attend to meet licensing requirements. All child development classes must be designed to address the culture of the students in the class,

enabling them to transfer their knowledge to the children in their programs. A multicultural class is not needed if all courses are designed to provide teachers with the skills to incorporate the culture of the children into the learning experiences. Child development classes that offer an authentic exploration of specific cultures should take the place of the one class on diversity. It is challenging to incorporate culture and DAP in the classroom if one is not witnessing the acknowledgment and value of the uniqueness of the various cultures in the child development classes. Aligning culture with developmentally appropriate teaching practices for the adult will provide students with hands-on, real-life experience that they can provide for the children at work. Student teaching activities should reflect what is culturally and developmentally appropriate for the children in the program aligned with the ELS. The disparity among culture, DAP, ELS, and how children grow represents the disconnect between the child development classes and the preschool classrooms.

Preschool directors are required to provide ongoing professional development: CRT, DAP, lesson plans, child assessments, individualizing and implementing the curriculum. Creating a policy that holds directors accountable for the continuing professional development of their teachers and assistant teachers will ensure that the environment and practices align with best practices for the children in their program. Teachers and assistant teachers should be able to display their knowledge of how children learn and grow through the development of learning experiences based on child assessments, understanding, adaptations to the curriculum, and parent input. The director is the on-site resource to the teachers and assistant teachers and sets the standard for the quality of the program. The child development permits issued to directors, teachers, and assistant teachers should represent knowledge and skills in how young children learn and grow and best practices to ensure that all children entering kindergarten

are ready to learn. The results of the study showed that this is not the case. Although limited funding accounts for the quality of resources and access to professional development, the issuance of a permit asserts that the applicant has completed a series of required child development courses to qualify as a director, site supervisor, teacher, or assistant teacher in a licensed early childhood setting.

Permit renewals require documentation for each year leading to the renewal date: CRT, DAP, lesson plans, child assessments, and individualizing and implementing the curriculum. The State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing issues permits to qualified applicants to supervise and instruct children in preschool settings throughout California. Applicants are required to complete specific child development courses to apply for the permits. Every five years, applicants are required to participate in 105 hours of professional development to renew and or upgrade the permit. Every director, teacher, and preschool teacher working in an early childhood setting complies with this mandate to qualify for subsidy funds and retain employment. Despite mandated requirements, directors, teachers, and assistant teachers struggle to implement research-based teaching strategies that are shown to enhance academic achievement for all children. Therefore, the problem is not as simple as the lack of funding to private inner-city schools, but a call for a change in policy that issues permits without verifying the knowledge and skills of the recipients. The children in inner-city schools deserve teachers who understand how young children learn and grow and can implement practices that support the whole child developing the skills needed to be successful from preschool to college.

Permit renewals require documentation of worksite teaching observations, lesson planning, and feedback per year leading to the permit renewal date. Currently, permits are renewed every five years, meaning there are 5 years of preschool children that may or may not

receive a quality education because the teacher is not required to evaluate and enhance his/her knowledge and skills during that time frame. Under the proposed policy, directors, teachers, and assistant teachers would be required to meet with a professional growth advisor every year, presenting documentation on the progress of their ongoing professional development. The permit renewal requirements include workshops and classes aligned with the applicant's goals. The required hours of professional development would consist of a specified number of worksite hours provided by the director, as well as what the applicant gains on their own time. The literature and study findings uncovered a connection between professional development directly connected to the real-life classroom environment and the positive impact on intentional implementation and the quality of CRT and DAP instructional practices. Observations of teaching practices and samples of lesson plans submitted to the professional growth advisor tracking the progress of the applicant.

Implications for Practice

Preschool teachers and assistant teachers will gain an understanding of how a culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate learning environment enhances academic success for African American preschool children. The directors, teachers, and assistant teachers in the study became aware of how the children's culture impacted their learning experiences. After the interviews, participants expressed how they had not considered CRT or DAP specifically for African American children as a strategy for academic success. The results of the study created a desire to learn more and provide materials and activities that reflected the culture of the children, especially for the participants who were unable to answer the questions. Participants talked about gathering more information about African American culture, DAP, assessing the children, and individualizing the curriculum based on the learning

styles and culture of the children in the classroom. The study influenced teachers and assistants to rethink enhancing their knowledge about how young children learn and grow to develop the skills needed to create and implement CRT and DAP instructional practices successfully.

Preschool administrators will have research that supports providing ongoing professional development for preschool teachers that focus on CRT and DAP for African American preschool children. Preschool administrators have an incentive to provide on-site professional development for their teachers. Preschool teachers and assistant teachers requiring definitions for terms such as DAP need support and resources from their immediate supervisors. The study should influence directors and site supervisors to observe, evaluate, and provide hands-on help to ensure that the teachers and assistant teachers are implementing best practices in the classroom. Identifying directors as a significant source of information for the teachers and assistant teachers in their program empowers directors to provide planning time and ongoing professional development for the teachers.

Policymakers will have additional research to support resources and individualized professional development workshops, training, and coursework for preschool teachers. Politicians have evidence to change the child development permit process to ensure that directors, teachers, and assistant teachers are knowledgeable about the role culture plays in creating DAP based on how young children learn and grow. There is also evidence of a significant disconnect between what's taught in child development classes and implementation in preschool classrooms. In several instances, the participants with less experience and currently enrolled in child development classes were more challenged with understanding CRT/DAP and discussing how to implement CRT/DAP in the classroom than participants who were not currently in school. Many participants have permits on a 5-year renewal cycle working in

programs not impacted by funding requirements for professional development. Programs with funding and professional development requirements showed evidence of ongoing professional development although they can benefit from intensive training on CRT and DAP.

Recommendations for Further Research

An improvement on the study would be to focus on either the environment or instructional practices in separate studies. The responses to the questions also suggest that the participants are provided with a definition and examples of DAP and CRT to help connect what they learned in school with what they are implementing in the classroom. The data collection tools would be ECERS for the environment and CLASS for instructional practices, along with interview questions. The participants are aware of the CLASS and ECERS through the child development classes. The study showed that the participants struggled with identifying CRT and DAP however, they may be implementing the CRT/DAP throughout the day. Participants would be observed using the tools, and they would also rate themselves. Observations provide a broader picture to help understand the practices implemented in the classroom. The next step would be to interview the participants, asking questions about their practices. The process would be repeated a month later and then compared to determine if there was a change in the understanding and implementation of CRT and DAP. Another variation to the study would be for the participants to be from other cultures working with African American children.

Future Studies that Might Contribute to the Field of Early Childhood Education

Child development classes: CRT, DAP, ELS alignment in the curriculum for adult learners. The study showed a disconnect between what the teachers learned in child development classes and instructional practices in the classroom. The position of the participant, level of education, and years of experience did not significantly impact the quality of

implementation in the classroom. The directors, teachers, and assistant teachers depended on personal experiences and teacher collaboration as a primary resource for practices at the school. There was a minimal discussion of taking the information from the child development classes and adapting the practices for African American children. The primary challenge for the participants was identifying CRT and DAP in general and specifically for African American children. A study identifying the problems and providing recommendations would be beneficial in closing the gap between knowledge and implementation.

The process of implementing CRT into daily learning experiences. The study uncovered how teachers learned about CRT. However, it would be essential to learn how they apply the research-based practices. Participants would receive training and examples of CRT practices. The collection of data would consist of observations and interviews to determine how well the participants can implement the practices.

The process of implementing DAP into daily learning experiences. Participants would receive training and later observed and interviewed to discuss the challenges and successes in implementing DAP in the school.

How to effectively incorporate parent input into the daily curriculum. Parent input into everyday classroom activities is essential in creating a cultural and developmentally appropriate environment for the children. In preschool programs, parents are primarily involved in planning and participating in special events and celebrations. A culturally relevant classroom environment is an authentic representation of the culture, home, and community of the child. A study from the parents' perspective on how to become actively involved in the preschool program would be beneficial to the teachers in creating the environment and daily learning experiences with parent input.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how African American preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers of African American prekindergarten children in Los Angeles County became aware of CRT and DAP for African American preschool children that support academic achievement. After an extensive review of the literature, the successful implementation of CRT and DAP was found to promote positive outcomes for African American children that may decrease the academic achievement gap. The literature review and findings from the study supported the need for intensive training in CRT and DAP to create teachers who consistently implement culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate learning experiences that reflect the ability and interest of the children and the culture of the children, family, and community.

The educational level and years of teaching experience were not a significant factor in identifying specific strategies that would be considered CRT and DAP for African American children. Cultural, personal experiences provide a source of valuable information that will enable the administrators, teachers, and assistant teachers to relate to the uniqueness of diverse cultures. However, it is not the end all for creating a culturally developmentally appropriate environment with culturally and developmentally appropriate instructional practices. Extensive training in CRT and DAP produces early learning activities that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate based on the assessed individual needs and culture of each child in the classroom. It's significant to note that the concept of trial and error approach aligned with adapting DAP to fit the culture of African American children. The findings and literature review showed that inner-city African American preschool teachers were found to modify DAP to meet the needs the children in the program (Sanders et al., 2007; Thomas-Fitts, 2003).

The findings and literature showed that the first step in teaching a diverse population is becoming culturally competent. The participants had difficulties understanding how to create an enriched environment for African American children that was culturally and developmentally appropriate. Combining the study and implementation of CRT and DAP provides a collaboration that will develop enhanced activities for children of all cultures and developmental levels. However, combining CRT and DAP creates a paradigm shift that requires extensive ongoing training and resources for administrators, teachers, and assistant teachers. The argument against DAP is a concept of universal practices with culture as an added practice. The adaptation of DAP may imply that DAP is not appropriate for everyone. DAP represents what is developmentally appropriate for each child of every culture. The culture of the children supports how DAP applies to the individual children in the classroom setting. Practices should not be considered developmentally appropriate for a child if the culture does not influence the assessment and the implementation of the selected practice. The disparity between knowledge and implementation of DAP for teachers of diverse children is hampered by not assessing the children through a cultural lens. Some participants in the study asserted that the use of assessments influenced the instructional practices. The level of assessment ranged from formal to informal to no mention of assessment to discover the developmental levels of the children.

Personal Thoughts

When teachers have higher expectations of the children in their classrooms, children make higher academic gains. African American children thrive in environments where the teachers have high hopes for educational outcomes. Teachers with high expectations make efforts to assess the children, learn about their family and community, and stay current with best practices on educating young children. Inner city preschools are suffering from not only a lack

of funds and resources but also low expectations that are dampening the spirit and creativity of directors, teachers, and assistants by associating attaining high quality with the amount of funding and resources available. An enriched learning environment is not entirely dependent on funds and resources; it also depends on the creativity and resilience of the director, teacher, and assistant teachers.

The participants in the study identified personal experiences as their primary source of information for implementing CRT and DAP instructional practices for the children in the program. The lack of funding was not a part of their responses when talking about materials for the environment or learning activities. There were very few references to the financing throughout the interviews. The participants are at inner-city schools with limited funding and resources. Although funding is an issue, the ability to be creative and using their knowledge and resources outweighed the lack of funding. Questions asked about using the Internet as a support produced mixed reactions, ranging from using the Internet regularly to not using the Internet at all.

The same principle applies to directors, teachers, and assistant teachers. There should be higher expectations for preschool directors, teachers, and assistant teachers instead of using the lack of funding and resources as the ongoing explanation for untrained teachers. My policy proposal requiring directors to provide ongoing professional development reflects the African proverb “Each one teach one.” The saying is a response to the concerns around untrained teachers and assistant teachers due to funding and the lack of resources for inner-city programs. The director, teachers, and assistant teachers are living resources available to each other every day. The Internet provides volumes of free information to ensure ongoing quality professional development to the staff on a regular basis. The policy places the responsibility for the

administration to motivate and develop the skills of the teachers to create and maintain a high-quality learning environment for African American preschool children.

Closing Remarks

The ongoing academic achievement gap debate for African American children continues to point to the lack of educational opportunities and resources for inner-city children from preschool through college (V. Miller, 2014; Ravitch, 2016). The educational opportunities and resources primarily focus on the children in the program. The apparent assumption is that the teachers completing the required coursework are qualified to provide an enriched learning experience for the children in the program. Ongoing education reform has failed to combat the issue of quality preschools by not focusing on the disparity between child development courses and the consistent implementation of best practices in the preschool classroom. Teachers and assistant teachers identified as untrained and unqualified are attending child development courses in community colleges and universities to complete the required coursework to obtain permits from the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing authorizing the applicant to supervise and work with young children. The directors hold program director permits where they maintain not only licensing regulations but also are responsible for the professional development of the teachers and assistant teachers.

Teachers who consistently provide enriched CRT and DAP create an environment that enhances the cognitive development for all children (Paris & Alim, 2014). Limited funding and resources for ongoing professional development create an inner-city workforce lacking in the skills needed to implement CRT and DAP teaching strategies aligned with early learning performance standards to prepare each child for academic success (Kang, 2011). The findings from the study show a strong desire from the directors, teachers, and assistant teachers to provide

a high-quality education for the children in their care, preparing them for kindergarten. What is required is ongoing professional development provided by the directors using the information from the child development courses and other free resources with a focus on implementing the practices in the classroom. Teachers and assistant teachers in school should be required to demonstrate what they are learning in the child development classes in their workplace. It is essential to maintain a connection between the coursework and the real-life classroom. The literature and findings showed how teachers collaborate with each other in the program and other programs to share ideas and resources.

The literature showed that the first signs of an achievement gap for African American children begin before they enter kindergarten. Every school year parents enroll their preschool children in inner-city schools with the reasonable expectation that their children will enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Despite education reform that includes onsite coaching and financial incentives to complete college degrees, the literature and findings showed that African American children are more likely to attend a preschool with unqualified and untrained teachers. According to the research, academic gains for African American children will improve when the opportunities for high-quality education with high quality trained educators, adequate school funding, and access to resources are equitably accessible to all African American children living in the inner city. However, based on the findings from the study, academic achievement for African American children will improve when directors, teachers, and assistant teachers embrace the African proverb “Each one teach one.” They can share their resources and create a community of adult learners focused on implementing culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate

instructional practices to develop enriched learning experiences that promote academic success for African American children.

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APPENDIX A

Information/Facts Sheet

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY *Graduate School of Education and Psychology*

INFORMATION/FACTS SHEET FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH

Identifying Strategies of Culturally Relevant and Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices for African American Prekindergarten Children through Individualized Pre-service and In-service Professional Development for Early Childhood Administrators and Educators

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Melita Ferguson, M.S. as the principal investigator. Dr. Robert Barner, Ph.D. as the faculty advisor at Pepperdine University, because you are an African American Director/ Teacher/Assistant Teacher. You are located in a private owned early childhood education center/family childcare home in Los Angeles County. At least 10% of the children enrolled in the program are African American between the ages of 4 and 5.

Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore how instructors become aware of culturally relevant teaching and developmentally appropriate practices for African American preschool children that promote consistent implementation of quality teacher/child interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

I'm requesting your assistance as an African American prekindergarten director/teacher/assistant teacher to collect data for my doctoral dissertation on your awareness and implementation of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices for prekindergarten African American children in Los Angeles County.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

If you agree to voluntarily to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview that may take up to 1 hour. The interview consists of 3 open ended questions asking about your Culturally Relevant Teaching practices and 3 open ended questions about your Developmentally Appropriate Practices when you teach the African American children in your classroom. You may use any materials or examples to assist in answering the questions. You will have an opportunity to review the final transcript for clarification. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to; if you don't want to be taped, handwritten notes will be taken.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a \$20 visa gift card for your time. You do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive the card. The card will be given to you when you complete the interview.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio-tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and a hard copy stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigators office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Melita Ferguson, B.A., M.S. phone: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED] or faculty advisor Dr. Robert Barner, Ph.D. robert.barner@pepperdine.edu if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
ACTIVITIES**

Identifying Strategies of Culturally Relevant and Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices for African American Prekindergarten Children through Individualized Pre-service and In-service Professional Development for Early Childhood Administrators and Educators

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Melita Ferguson, M.S. as the principal investigator. Dr. Robert Barner, Ph.D. as the faculty advisor at Pepperdine University, because you are an African American Director/ Teacher/Assistant Teacher. You are located in a private owned early childhood education center/family childcare home in Los Angeles County. At least 10% of the children enrolled in the program are African American between the ages of 4 and 5.

Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore how instructors become aware of culturally relevant teaching and developmentally appropriate practices for African American preschool children that promote consistent implementation of quality teacher/child interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

I'm requesting your assistance as an African American prekindergarten director/teacher/assistant teacher to collect data for my doctoral dissertation on your awareness and implementation of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices for prekindergarten African American children in Los Angeles County.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview that may take up to 1 hour. The interview consists of 3 open ended questions asking about your Culturally Relevant Teaching practices and 3 open ended questions about your Developmentally Appropriate Practices when you teach the African American children in your classroom. You may use any materials or examples to assist in answering the questions. You will have an opportunity to review the final transcript for clarification. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to; if you don't want to be taped, handwritten notes will be taken.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The anticipated benefits to the participants and society from participating in the study is the awareness of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices and its potential impact on positive academic outcomes for African American children.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a \$20 visa gift card for your time. You do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive the card. The card will be given to you when you complete the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio-tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and a hard copy stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigators office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and

discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact investigator Melita Ferguson, B.A., M.S. phone: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED] or faculty advisor Dr. Robert Barner, Ph.D. robert.barner@pepperdine.edu if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. 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.

AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHS

- I agree to be audio recorded
- I do not want to be audio recorded

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Questionnaire

Improving Implementation of Culturally Relevant and Development Appropriate Instructional Practices for African American Prekindergarten Children through Individualized Pre-service and In-service Professional Development for Early Childhood Administrators and Educators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the process of awareness of culturally relevant teaching and understanding of developmentally appropriate practices for African American preschool children that promote consistent implementation of quality teacher/child in interactions to decrease the academic achievement gap for African American children.

Research Question

What is the process by which preschool teachers develop culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support African American student's academic achievement?

Questionnaire (closed and open ended questions)

Academic Achievement Gap

1. What do you think are the causes of the academic achievement gap for African American students?
2. What impact if any will a culturally relevant curriculum on decreasing the academic achievement gap for African American students? Explain?
3. What impact if any will developmentally appropriate instructional practices on decreasing the academic achievement gap for African American students? Explain

Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

4. Describe a culturally relevant classroom environment for African American children
5. Describe culturally relevant instructional practices for African American children
6. Describe how you implement developmentally appropriate practices for African American children

Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices

4. Describe a developmentally appropriate classroom environment for African American children
5. Describe developmentally appropriate instructional practices for African American children
6. Describe how you implement developmentally appropriate practices for African American children

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: November 28, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Melita Ferguson

Protocol #: 16-09-372

Project Title: Identifying Strategies of Culturally Relevant and Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices for African American Prekindergarten Children through Individualized Pre-service and In-service Professional Development for Early Childhood Administrators and Educators

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Melita Ferguson:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

APPENDIX E

Culturally Relevant Teaching Activities

Language Sounds

- Themes** Families, My People, Community, Heroes and Sheroes
- Objectives** Learn about role models within one's own culture
Appreciate one's own cultural heritage
Feel special and unique
- Materials** Invitations, adult-size chair
- Description** Send a note home to parents asking if any of the elders in their family might be interested in coming to school to talk with the children, tell them a story about their culture, or share some cultural artifacts with them.
Prepare children for the elder's visit. Ask the children, "So you know what an elder is? An adult who has lived a long time. Elders are wise because they have done many things in their lives and they know a lot. Elders deserve our respect."
Ask the children if they know how to respect an elder. Have them practice greeting an elder. Encourage them to model how their parent (s) have taught them to greet and address elders. When the elders visit your classroom, bring the children together for large group. Give the elder a place of honor in front of the group. Introduce the elder to the children and ask each of them to introduce themselves. At the end of their time with the elder, the children could sing a song, or recite a poem. As a follow-up, have the children draw pictures and write a class "thank you" letter to the elder.
- Variation** Invite elders from the community to visit and share with your class.

(York, 2003)

Name Game

- Themes** Families, Friends, Our Class, Communication
- Objectives** Recognize and celebrate one's own name
Identify the meaning of one's name
- Materials** Strips of poster board (6 by 24 inches), glue, felt-tip marker, glitter, sparkly or shiny collage materials; books on the meaning of names (can be checked out from the library)
- Description** Prior to this activity send a note home to parents asking them if there is a story attached to their child's name. In other words, what does it mean? Who is the child named after?
- Use the marker to write each child's name on a poster board strip. At circle time, hold the strips up, one at a time. See if the child recognizes his or her name.
- Together with the child, write the meaning of his or her name on the back of the poster board strip. Look up the child's name in baby name books to identify the meaning of the name. (Prior to the activity look up the children's names. If the majority of the names are not in the book skip this step).
- Give each child a strip of poster board and invite them to write their name in glue and cover the glue with glitter. Let the name tag dry. Once it is dry children could decorate it with a variety of sparkly and shiny collage materials.
- Variation** Invite a parent to talk with the children about how people in their culture are given their names.

(York, 2003)

APPENDIX F

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Letter Recognition

Activity **Find Your Partner A a**

Objective Letter Recognition

Materials Upper and lower case letters

Procedures Teacher chooses a few pairs of letters.

Give half of the children upper case and the other half matching lower case letters.

Play music

When music stops, they find their partner

Activity **Mommy Where Are You?**

Objective Letter Recognition

Materials Mama and baby animal cut outs

Markers

Procedures Teacher writes capital letters on the mama.

Teacher writes lower case letters on the baby.

Teacher places same color dots on the back of each pair. (This helps the child do a quick self-check.)

Give children a few pairs at a time

Tell children they must help the baby find his mama.

When music stops, they find their partner

UT Health Science Center (2008)

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Mathematics

Activity	Pom Pom Math
Vocabulary	number names, more, less, on, outside
Materials	pom poms (up to 12 per child - 2 more than the highest number you are working on) Paper plate (1 per child)
Directions	Children place 12 pom-poms on their plate Teacher calls out a number Have every child take that number of pom-poms out of their plate Then direct the children to look at the pom-poms left on their plate Everyone counts what is left. Teacher asks “Are there more pom-poms on the plate or less on the plate?” Children respond The children then place all the pom-poms back onto their plates. Continue the game for several rounds.
Extension	Add number cards Use larger number of pom-poms to work on 11-20

UT Health Science Center (2008)