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Building Meaningful Relationships with Students

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Abstract

Elementary school classrooms are becoming more diverse and there is a growing need for educators to be culturally responsive to students and to understand what that means. The challenge we face is to support educators in implementing strategies to acknowledge student names, welcome students into the classroom and create an environment in which students want to be a part. Studies have shown that naming practices are an important topic in diverse classrooms, as some students with Non-Eurocentric names are being "renamed", and as a result, lose a part of their identity. To best support these students, researchers recommend student-centered teaching strategies, called "Culturally Responsive Teaching" (CRT). Schools should be a safe environment for students and one that is welcoming to who they are inside and outside of the classroom. The research conducted in this study focused on three questions, which examined the perspectives of one principal, three elementary teachers, and six third-grade students. The researcher used data from the three participant groups to examine the strategies implemented by educators and the students' perceptions of said strategies. The findings of this project considered the ways in which students were affected by naming practices and the ways in which educators supported these practices. The implications for this research support the engagement of self-reflection for educators and learning with students to acknowledge naming practices.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In the fieldwork experience portion of completing my Multiple Subject teaching credential, I was placed at a school site that was diverse and had many students whose names I had never experienced in my previous fieldwork and even my own education experiences. There were students with names that had spelling patterns that were new to me. While I was still learning about how to be an educator and observing my mentor teachers, I realized that I was not as prepared for this placement as I had thought. It was daunting to me to have a class attendance sheet in which I did not know how to pronounce a student's name. This uncertainty stemmed from my fear of saying the student's name incorrectly and the potential humility both the student and I would have from this experience.

As I continued at the school site, in the beginning, I only substituted for the classes in which I had direct contact from my previous classroom observations. However, as I became more involved in the school community, I had opportunities to substitute for other classes which I did not previously know the students. The first thing I studied was the attendance sheet for the class; I was scanning for names that were unknown, and I would try to work on the pronunciation prior to the students coming into the classroom. During this time, I had not considered that some of the students went by middle names or nicknames, which added to my own fears while taking attendance.

In my experience being in a diverse school placement, and in the process of being a substitute teacher, I wanted to explore ways to support *all* students. It was through my process of understanding my role in relation to naming practices and the humility I felt, that I realized I needed to find a way to be more culturally responsive, to develop a welcoming learning environment for students.

Statement of Purpose

This research was focused around three central questions: (1) How do naming practices affect the ways in which students feel a sense of belonging at school?; (2) How do students feel a sense of belonging in the school environment that has been established by educators?; (3) How do educators (principals and teachers) create an environment that is positive and culturally responsive to their students? And, how do the students perceive this environment? Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the student perspectives in regard to naming practices, culturally responsive teaching, and the development of a sense of belonging. The research included the perspectives of a principal and classroom teachers to examine the themes that were evident in each of the participant groups.

Position in Literature Review

The review of relevant literature surrounding the topic of naming practices also contributed to the project's overall topics of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Freire, & Ramos, 2009; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and the development of a sense of belonging for students (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Edwards & Edick, 2012; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). First, the literature discusses the topic of naming practices; Researchers discuss the potential feelings that students may have when it comes to mispronunciation and renaming. These researchers note that a sense of identity is directly related to our names. The topic of naming practices relates to the topic of cultural responsivity in that naming practices are necessary strategies for including students and honoring their identities in the classroom. Building on the topic of naming practices, the literature includes discussions about culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Several researchers (Gay, 2002; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tarlau, 2014) discuss CRT through the lens of Critical Pedagogy and then trace

the development of CRT over the years. In the exploration of the implementation of CRT, researchers state the importance of incorporating students' culture into the classroom, noting that this is necessary for acknowledging the diversity in today's classrooms. Adding to this importance, this body of literature addresses the need for curriculum development to best support the diverse learning population. To support diversity in the classroom, an educator needs to have first established a sense of belonging and welcoming learning environment for students. This includes positive and continuous relationship building between teachers and students so that students feel acknowledged and supported. This also includes building relationships with families, as it opens the door to communication that assists teachers in understanding students as individuals both inside and outside the classroom. The development of a welcoming classroom environment also requires educators to critically reflect on their own identity to examine how it will affect their teaching and potential biases. Participating in this reflection process can help support an educator's ability to appreciate differing cultures and the value they bring to groups.

The existing literature presents numerous strategies for educators to implement that can support a diverse student population. From the literature reviewed for this thesis project, the gap in research comes from a lack of student input. The studies provide numerous strategies and teacher experiences, but lack discussion about how students feel affected by these strategies and elements. This gap in the literature provided the researcher with direction to explore the ways in which students perceive the strategies implemented by educators to support a welcoming and culturally responsive learning environment.

Overview of the Research Design

This research used both a constructivist and transformative worldview. The constructivist worldview was taken as it sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of the research

participants. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the researcher used a transformative worldview to better understand the experiences of all participants with the potential of facilitating change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher also used cross-sectional qualitative interview methods to explore the participants perception of the research topics through individual interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist view is appropriate for seeking to understand the students' perspectives and lived knowledge within the learning environment. In addition, the transformative worldview is appropriate for this study as it examined the ways in which all three participant groups experience and facilitate change in relation to the research topic. A cross-sectional qualitative interview method was used to understand the relationship between the three participant groups.

The research was conducted at Roosevelt Elementary School[1]. Roosevelt is a small K-5 elementary school that has less than 10 classrooms. Less than 200 students are enrolled ,with 66% of the students designated as English Language Learners. The school site has a diverse student population. Roosevelt has 0.05% African American students, 0.05% American Indian, 1.6% Asian, 0.05% two or more races, 92.9% Hispanic, and 3.8% White students (California Department of Education, 2019). A total of 10 interviews were conducted individually. In the research project, there were three participant groups: one principal, three classroom teachers, and six students. The student participants were all third-grade students from one class. The researcher had prior experience working with all participants as they completed a student teaching practicum at the school site. As such, all four teacher participants previously played a mentorship role for the researcher and their colleagues. The student participants had experience with the researcher as both a student teacher in their classroom and a substitute teacher.

[1] Pseudonym used for confidentiality of the school site.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study presented new and unexpected perspectives and insights about the research topic. There were three emerging themes: naming practices "being light and easy", creating a sense of belonging "being seen and known by the community", and lastly, the culturally responsive school environment as being an "inclusive learning community". In the examination of naming practices and the effects that these practices have on students, it was found that students would correct an adult who mispronounced their name; however, there were circumstances that would make students more hesitant to correct an adult. In addition, regarding the culturally responsive teaching strategies, students noted that family engagement and positive community establishment were the most important factors for being culturally responsive. From the literature, it was clear that to develop a sense of belonging, students must feel seen and acknowledged by their teachers. In this study, students felt the greatest connection with their teachers when the teacher provided books that were of interest to students. Students felt truly important and supported when the classroom teachers were in communication with other educators and were able to provide support to the student in their reading development. Literature was a prevalent topic throughout the conversations about a sense of belonging and about teaching that is responsive to students' experiences and cultural backgrounds.

These findings differ from those presented in the literature base in that previous studies show that literature selection is a strategy for incorporating diverse cultures and this project shows that selecting literature is a specific strategy for helping students feel connected to their teachers at school. The student participants felt teachers knew them best when there was communication between previous teachers and current ones and when those teachers shared the students' reading levels and interests. It was also found that the students appreciated the

connection they were able to establish with their teachers when they were offered a new book based on what the teacher assumed would be of interest to them.

Research Implications

To support students in a culturally responsive learning environment that is inclusive of them and their families, specific teaching strategies must be implemented. There is a need for further support for teachers to create a “light and easy character” when working with students. The development of this character can support teachers in understanding naming practices and the effect that these practices have on students. Students will be more willing to correct a new educator who mispronounces their name or renames them, if the teacher has already established a welcoming and positive environment. Focusing on building a welcoming environment also provides an opportunity to support culturally responsive learning that is inclusive of all students. Providing professional development about culturally responsive learning environments in teacher preparation programs can support this development and help educators learn about taking on the role of being a learner, in addition to being a teacher, when learning new students’ names. Additionally, integrating literature that is unique to each individual student’s interests in the classroom can create a sense of belonging by affirming a connection to the student . Establishing a supportive and welcoming environment includes educators spending time with students to learn about their interests in order to support their selection of literature. This study guides the advancement of equity and social justice in education by acknowledging the importance of naming practices as culturally responsive teaching that directly affects our students’ sense of belonging in the school environment.

Literature Review

Growing diversity in schools creates the need for teachers to implement culturally relevant and responsive teaching practices to support all their students. Students are in classrooms in which their teachers often do not share the same cultural identity with them, and, therefore, some teachers lack the knowledge of how to change this to create a sense of belonging for students. In this research project, a *sense of belonging* is defined by Edwards and Edick (2012) as the incorporation of interaction with students, encouragement of accommodation of differences, development of a sense of ownership to learn from more than just the primary teacher, and lastly, creating opportunities for students to engage in cultural reflection. The challenge is how educators can implement strategies to welcome students into the classroom and create an environment of which students want to be a part. Research has shown that naming practices have become one important topic for consideration toward creating a sense of belonging in diverse classrooms, as some students with non-Eurocentric names are being "renamed" (or having their names changed) because of a lack of educators responding by learning proper pronunciation; as a result of this mispronunciation or renaming, students lose a part of their identity (Marrun, 2018; Peterson, Gunn, Brice, & Alley, 2015). To best support all students, research shows there are responsive teaching practices that educators can implement in their teaching, which are termed under Culturally Responsive Teaching (Freire & Ramos, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In creating Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) practices, a sense of belonging needs to be established for students, so they feel motivated to come to school to learn. School should be a safe environment for students and one that is welcoming to who they are inside and outside of the classroom (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Edwards & Edick, 2012; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

This review explores culturally responsive teaching practices through naming practices, creating a sense of belonging in the classroom, and the ways principals and teachers incorporate more of who a student is, both academically and personally, to better understand them.

Naming Practices

Naming practices involve the process of seeing a written name and speaking a name, using pronunciation the speaker considers related to that name. When a child is born, they are given a name. That name often plays a large role in the identity of that child. Considering naming practices, there are many different pronunciations and spellings of similar names. It is because of these variations that it is important to explore naming practices in school environments. The following review of literature covers the process of renaming, identity, and cultural responsibility.

Renaming

Rodriguez who wrote about his intellectual development in *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez,* shared the following in an interview with Torres and Rodriguez (2003) about his experiences in school:

> I can remember intrusions into my privacy, like when the nun insisted that I pronounce my name, and she would anglicize it, rather harshly anglicize it. Road-ree-guez, she would say. It came with some intensity, but it had nothing to do with me. It wasn't the language that I really expected to have to use. That went on for some months. (Torres & Rodriguez, 2003, p. 170)

In today's classrooms, this renaming is a reality for so many students. There are many names that have different spellings and pronunciations and a lot of students often face the reality of mispronunciation of their names. Many students suffer anxiety in the morning prior to attendance

being taken and/or when a substitute is there because of the fear that their name will be mispronounced . It is easy to imagine being in a diverse classroom, coming across an attendance sheet as a substitute teacher and finding one or more names for which the pronunciation may appear unclear; this is directly tied to the cultural knowledge of the substitute. Meanwhile, Peterson and others (2015) state that the students prepare themselves for the inevitable mispronunciation, and the effects on power dynamics and feelings of inclusion related to such naming practices.

Peterson and others (2015) provide educators with strategies for acknowledging naming practices and being most responsive, including bringing in literature and creating learning activities that support the history of names and origins/traditions surrounding names. Peterson and colleagues (2015) state explain that…

> …teachers may guide these critical discussions to explore more broadly how language can be used as a tool for leveraging or sharing social power and promoting or debunking stereotypes, as well as for the positive or negative positioning of particular individuals and societal groups. (p. 42)

These researchers also provide examples of students who changed their names before entering school because they feared mispronunciation and/or bullying; they argue that "naming practices also have the power to exclude, stereotype, or disadvantage students, particularly when a student's name is unfamiliar in sound or spelling compared to others in the classroom community" (Peterson et al., 2015, p. 40).

This fear can also arise for students who have cultural norms that make it difficult for them to speak up. Marrun (2018) discusses her personal experience with name pronunciation and explains how she was raised to "respect [their] teachers and questioning or correcting a teacher is

a sign of disrespect and an indication of one's family failure to raise un hijo bien educado (a child that is well educated)" (p. 8). As she was raised to not correct adults, Marrun struggled with communicating her sense of identity through correcting educators who mispronounced her name.

Sense of identity

In Marrun's situation, she transitioned between two different names in her academic and personal life. This shift caused her to develop a sense of lack of identity. She was not allowed to correct her teachers, therefore, teachers and even school friends called her by two different names. Marrun (2018) discusses that "mispronouncing or (re)naming students with non-Eurocentric names forces students of color to give up parts of their identities to fit into the education system" (p. 15). Peterson and colleagues (2015) agree with Marrun that when educators "rename" students, students lose a sense of their identity.

For Rodriguez, this sense of identity was also a struggle. In discussing his in moving to Sacramento, California in an excerpt from his book *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez (2008) recalled, "I couldn't really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English" (p. 6). In his experience, there was a lack of a connection between Spanish and English in schools. The two languages were separated, which led to the separation of his families' connection to the outside world. However, as he proceeded through his education, he began to acknowledge English as his primary language. According to Torres and Rodriguez (2003), in a separate interview with Rodriguez, he recalls, "one language is a little tricky because there was this psychological malady that I suffered once I began to speak English. I began to feel this enormous embarrassment about Spanish in my own mind" (p. 171). Rodriguez also discussed how, upon learning English, he moved further from his ability to be bilingual and speak both his home language and English. He states, "the loss and acquisition of a new language, which entailed for

me, psychologically, the loss of the old, of the home language" (Torres & Rodriguez, 2003, p. 167).

Isael Torres, in a TEDx conference presentation, discusses his experience with schooling and the differing experiences between home and school life. TEDx (2017) recalls that his two worlds "often felt galaxies apart." Additionally, he recalled his experience with his teachers never trying to understand his home language and the disconnect that this established for him. TEDx (2017) discusses his experiences:

> [there was this] conditioned expectation that my education depended on me conforming to a transitional schooling system rather than expecting that my education conform or evolve to meet my needs or the needs of other students who may not fit the traditional definition of a successful student (2:18).

In this expectation to conform, Torres, like many others, felt a disconnect between worlds which further perpetuated the problem of a lack of identity in school settings.

Cultural responsivity

In trying to prevent this loss of identity, it is especially important that educators learn to ask students how their name is pronounced as well as what name they prefer to go by. As Marrun (2018) explains, "parents and families invest time in choosing a perfect name for their child and many parents want to give their child a unique name" (p. 18). However, "when choosing their child's name, parents of color are confronted with the long-term consequences of how their child's name will impact how they will be treated in school or perceived on job applications" (Marrun, 2018, p. 18). Marrun identifies the significance of being culturally responsive to names of students. Without careful thought about students' names, educators could possibly be putting their students at a disadvantage and promoting their unconscious biases onto their students.

Implementation strategies

Some of the strategies that could be implemented in order to better support a diverse student population could include incorporating literature. The incorporation of literature can be an effective resource in helping students feel a sense of pride in their cultural identity. Peterson and others (2015) states, “multicultural literature offers students mirrors that affirm their identities and windows through which they might view and better understand other people, places, and cultures in our global society” (p. 42). These researchers (Peterson et al., 2015) give examples of numerous literature titles that open the conversation behind naming practices and bring an appreciation towards pronouncing names correctly. Lehman (2017) also speaks about the importance of providing students with support through literature that serves as a mirror for students. He supports bringing literature representing diverse populations into the classroom to provide students with the opportunity to view the literature as a “mirror.” Students can also practice pronouncing names correctly through sharing these books featuring diverse characters. In providing students with literature that is a mirror of themselves and literature that is a window into different cultural backgrounds, teachers create the opportunity for students to view themselves in relation to others, while showing ways to honor another person’s experiences.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Gay and Kirkland (2003), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a framework for incorporating and valuing students’ culture in the classroom and school environment. The necessity of using CRT practices stems from the necessity to value the diversity that is prevalent in schools (Gay, 2002; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings; 1995). These practices are often challenging when it comes to effectively implementing the practices,

incorporating diverse cultures into the classroom, and adapting the curriculum to fit the students and their individual cultures.

Critical pedagogy

Valuing cultural knowledge and practices through culturally responsive teaching has its roots in Freire's (2000) notion of critical pedagogy, first published in the seminal 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his work, Freire offered "a critique of the way schooling, in its current form, reinforces systems of oppression, as well as a theory of how education can become a means to help people collectively fight back against the inequalities they face" (Tarlau, 2014, p. 370). As a precursor and foundation for CRT, Tarlau (2014) breaks down an understanding of critical pedagogy as offering "educators tools they can use to help students reflect on these realities" (p. 382). Monzo (2016) explores critical pedagogy as a way of understanding both school interactions and their relation to society. Monzo (2016) states that:

> Students, parents, and communities interact with the broader society in terms of the type of education and opportunities they receive, whether they learn to think critically about the status quo, and whether they learn to see themselves as capable of breaking free from the constraints that are meant to keep them at the labor side of the labor/capital dialectic. (p. 151)

Freire discusses these constraints and limitations in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018), Freire explores this concept that he calls the "banking system" of education. Freire states that, within this system, "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p. 72). By maintaining this perspective, Freire (2018) argues that the role of the teacher was to deliver the information that they knew to their students and the students take it and memorize it. In following this

system, there is not an opportunity for an educator and student to create a partnership of learning, but instead there exists a one-sided way of learning. Freire (2018) believed in changing this "banking system" perspective. He believed that, "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (Freire, 2018, p. 72). Freire (2018) discussed his perspective of both teacher and student becoming "students" as a way of pushing beyond the banking system that is within the field of education. By viewing both teachers and students as students in education, we develop a partnership in learning so that both are able to contribute to one another as a way of furthering their learning and education. Freire (2018) said that "they must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (p. 79). By changing the way knowledge is shared in education, we can offer the opportunity for students and teachers to fully understand what it is they are learning and being taught, without just learning to memorize. Freire (2018) offers the perspective of "problem-posing education" which he states, "bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 84).

This change in thinking is a driving force in Freire's work, and in the implementation of CRT. Both the interactions among teachers and students and the implementation of CRT practices work closely in attempting to bridge the disconnect between the dominant and minority groups. A critical pedagogy framework helps educators focus on ways to provide rich educational experiences for all students and CRT helps us to envision this transformation through specific ways we can acknowledge and celebrate different cultures and experiences.

History of CRT

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is defined by Gay (2010) as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for [students]" (p. 31). CRT has evolved throughout the years as a way of empowering students of diverse cultures in the field of education. In 1989, Jordan Irvine explored the "lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and African American students and the negative impact of academic achievement" (Harmon, 2012, p. 13). Irvine's eleven-year research study showed that culturally responsive teaching was a way to help repair this disconnect as "the subject matter is viewed from multiple perspectives, including the lens of oppressed and disenfranchised groups" (Harmon, 2012, p. 13). Similar to Irvine's research, Ladson-Billings, another prominent researcher in the field of CRT, presented initial research in 1994 that "introduced the idea of culturally relevant teaching as critical pedagogy aimed at empowering students of color" (Harmon, 2012, p. 13). Ladson-Billings continued to develop her theories throughout the 2000s. After Ladson-Billings' initial research in critical pedagogy, Banks (1999) shared his work through the lens of a "multicultural content model [that] moves teachers to transformative teaching and social action" (Harmon, 2012, p. 14). Banks developed this model to help provide students with a critical perspective of history and to "engage in authentic problem-solving, and address issues of social justice" (Harmon, 2012, p. 14). In exploration of effective school reforms, Boykin (2005) "developed the concept of asset-based instruction, which uses cultural assets as the foundation for instruction" (Harmon, 2012, p. 14). Using this concept of assets-based instruction, Boykin believed that teachers must accept the diversity that students bring into the classroom and acknowledge it as an asset to the learning environment. Throughout its development, CRT has evolved , to include

terminology from researchers seeking to understand what responsive teaching means. Despite the differing perspectives from researchers, there has been consensus that educators must accept and acknowledge diversity in schools and truly understand the significant role of CRT in today's classrooms.

Incorporation of student culture into the classroom

In being mindful of students' differing cultures, teachers incorporate each students' culture into the classroom climate and curriculum. Gay (2002) states that "these students have been expected to divorce themselves from their cultures and learn according to European American cultural norms" (p. 114). Additionally, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) explained that,

> By refusing to consider culture and race as relevant to student learning and also by denying the existence of White privilege, the teachers and school leaders failed to tap into the uniqueness of individual student cultures, values, and beliefs as tools for developing culturally relevant pedagogy and leadership that could benefit all students. (p. 1292)

Closely related to this concept, Freire argues that "the oppressed, having few opportunities to critically examine their social position in society, are unwittingly complicit with dominant group ideologies and practices" (Monzo, 2016, p. 149). In this statement, , we see a need for culturally responsive teaching practices, and a need to help students understand their own cultures. In teaching that the dominant groups' ideologies are most important, it furthers the gap between differing cultures. The incorporation of student culture has much more impact on the students than is often believed. Incorporation of who the students are both outside and inside the classroom should be part of every classroom's learning environment. as this practice helps to establish a place where students can learn to push past systemic inequity.

Owning personal biases to teach more objectively

In teaching objectively, "Freire's main concern is how to educate people to emancipate themselves from the culture of silence and to meet the needs of humanity and to develop a more just society" (Shih, 2018, p. 65). Shih (2018) examined the work of Freire regarding his philosophies about culture. Shih (2018) states, "Freire lived in this social context and hoped to awaken the critical consciousness of the oppressed, thus shaping his idea of critical pedagogy" (Shih, 2018, p. 65). In acknowledging this perspective, there is need to develop teaching methods that push past traditional barriers to help more students. The desire is to move away from simply narrating to students what the educator hopes for them to know. Freire and Ramos (2009) explain their definition of banking education as, "the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 164). The researchers continue to discuss the contextualization and unequal distributions of power that the banking system has students by stating that its purpose is "to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed" (Freire & Ramos, 2009, p. 165).

Further, Gay defines CRT as "using the cultures, experiences, and perspectives of African, Native, Latino, and Asian American students as filters through which to teach them academic knowledge and skills" (Gay, & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181). Acknowledging this definition of culturally responsive teaching, there is the need for educators to acknowledge their own biases that could impact their teaching practices. Freire addresses the need for changing the purpose of education to support students learning and not the need for memorization. However, in order to shift this teaching practice, educators need to acknowledge their own teaching in order to best

support the need of all students and incorporate at Gay defines culturally responsive teaching practices.

Curriculum adaptations

The curriculum implemented by educators has long been adapted throughout history. In the 1950s and 1960s, Paulo Freire was highly regarded for his work on critical pedagogy, which involves adapting curriculum. Critical pedagogy aligns well with Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), in that both frameworks are based on a desire to provide education for all and create social change. In her work in the 1990s, Ladson-Billings explored ways to implement strategies that supported the success of students of color. According to Ladson-Billings, "culturally relevant pedagogy demands that students experience success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness, which empowers them to challenge the status quo" (Harmon, 2012, p. 13). As mentioned previously, Banks' work on Multicultural education provided a model for teachers to develop ways in which they could best support their students. Banks' model "is not only for students in K-12 settings, it can and must be used in teacher preparation programs so that educators know how to develop a curriculum that is multicultural" (Harmon, 2012, p. 14). Banks' goal was to help develop curriculum that involved multiple perspectives to provide a more holistic view. As presented by Harmon (2012), CRT also clearly connects literacy and critical race theory. Harmon explains that "language is the symbolic representation of culture" (p. 15). This means that literacy can also serve as a symbolic representation of culture. Harmon (2012) cites Lazar's 2011 work1, stating:

> Literacy is a set of cultural practices that can be used to create meaningful classroom instruction. Students bring funds of knowledge and experiences with them into the

> classroom and teachers assess students' funds of knowledge to motivate students and lead to student engagement. (p. 15)

To incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices into the classroom, therefore, an educator should acknowledge the factors of literacy and language and their importance within the classroom environment. Additionally, Harmon (2012) stresses that "a discussion of culturally responsive teaching is incomplete without a discussion of Critical Race Theory" (p. 16). Harmon (2012) continues by discussing critical race theory and its specific relation to culturally responsive teaching. Harmon makes the argument that both theories support each other interchangeably. Harmon (2012) discusses that critical race theory "requires us to examine the curriculum through the lens of people of color" (p. 16). Therefore, critical race theory supports culturally responsive teaching as it targets the need for curriculum adaptations to support all people. Critical race theory addresses the need for examining the curriculum for adaptation to support culture, while culturally responsive teaching practices need to include adapting curriculum to be more inclusive and especially adapting literacy curriculum.

Leading culturally responsive curriculum development

Ladson-Billings (1995) acknowledges that there are specific subjects in which all students must be literate in and that "culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs, not merely make them 'feel good'" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). In helping students achieve academic success, Ladson-Billings states that students of color have the opportunity for success, without "acting white" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). It is imperative that students of color are not forced into these roles of "acting white," and being forced to ignore their own identities and cultures in order to perform in school. Agreeing with Ladson-Billings, Gay (2002) supports this implementation of culturally responsive teaching curriculum to support

student achievement. In designing culturally relevant curriculum, Gay (2002) stresses that teachers, both pre and in service, need to be able to "do deep cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials, revise them for better representations of culturally diversity, and provide many opportunities to practice these skills under guided supervision" (p. 108).

One feature of curriculum development that often occurs behind the scenes, is the leadership in the curriculum development process. Teachers are the driving force in curriculum implementation and can adapt the curriculum to best address the needs of their students. However, school leaders play an important part in the decision-making process regarding curriculum. Khalifa and others (2016), address the need for educational leadership to "create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students" (p. 1278). In the process of helping support teachers in developing culturally responsive curriculum, Khalifa and colleagues (2016) argue that "developing effective leaders becomes a vital part of the process in recruiting and retaining the best teachers for children who have been marginalized" (p. 1273).

Sense of Belonging

In the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), a component that adds to its effectiveness is the creation of a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging can truly only be developed between educators, students, and families when there is a mutual understanding and respect for each other.

Relationship building between teachers and students

Edwards and Edick (2012) state that educators must get to know their students *both* academically and personally. Knowing students in both settings offers the opportunity to learn more about students and be able to support them in numerous ways. For example, a student

struggling in reading, who the teacher knows is interested in a specific subject outside of school, has a better chance at helping that student develop their reading abilities by offering support in connecting to their interest in specific reading materials. Lehman (2017) documented from interviews that this “means listening to their ideas, their emotions, their worries, and trying to understand how they understand school” (p. 34). Lehman (2017) also uses critical reflection as a way of getting to know students and says, “it often involves pushing yourself to listen more than speak” (p. 35). In this regard, educators must truly listen to understand and not to simply respond.

The ways in which educators have the opportunity to create these relationships is through conversation during non-academic time, as a way to truly be open to students’ perspectives and feelings in a way that is not necessarily directed at their academic ability (Edwards & Edick, 2012). Bondy and others (2007) underline the importance for teachers and educators to introduce themselves to their students to create an opportunity for a relationship and partnership in learning. The mutual conversation between both will allow students to get to know their educator in a personal way which can create more of a connection between likes and/or dislikes between the two.

Bondy and colleagues (2007) also discuss communication processes and believe that these should follow a culturally responsive format. Communicating this way, teachers can use students' cultural backgrounds in order to best address communication amongst themselves and their students. Without addressing these relationships with a sense of cultural respect, there is the potential of adverse effects that could negatively affect student and teacher relationships.

Freire and Ramos (2009) also bring attention to the teacher student relationship by adding that a teacher cannot solely assume a student will learn from them and only them. The role

should rather be, “teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (p. 169).

Building relationships between educators and families

Weinstein and others (2003) purport that the classroom environment should establish relationships amongst teachers and students, and that this environment should show respect to student’s home language as it becomes a community environment for all. These researchers stress the importance of working with families; and that while it can be difficult to work with families when there are differing cultures, there is an essential need for cross-cultural communication in building these relationships (Weinstein et al., p. 273). Importantly, an educator should be aware of cultural differences in communication as to best address how to communicate with families, for example, at parent-teacher conferences (Weinstein et al., 2003). One strategy for implementing these relationships amongst families and educators could be bringing in relatives and parents of students to help teach students. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes that students would have the opportunity to learn from others in their community, as well as to acknowledge and learn about a subject from another person rather than only from their own teacher.

Critical reflection

A need for educators is to acknowledge their cultural identities personally and realize how their own identities could affect their relationships with students. Edwards and Edick (2012) and Weinstein and colleagues (2003) both state that to understand one’s own identity, there is an obligation to acknowledge potential biases and how they could affect future students. After critical reflection of oneself, the classroom norms and rules need to set clear expectations. Again,

Edwards and Edick (2012) and Weinstein and colleagues (2003) agree that educators must also be clear in what they expect and to concede that there are cultures with differing views which could be the reasoning behind specific behaviors. Weinstein and others (2003) provide an example of how some African American cultural groups might have norms of speaking at a louder volume than other cultural groups , and therefore in a classroom, a student might be considered "disruptive" or "loud" by a different cultural standard. Consequently, the student could be the victim of more disciplinary action based on unspoken or unacknowledged cultural privilege and biases and thereby reinforcing systemic inequities of power (Weinstein et al., 2003).

Edwards and Edick (2012) warn that "not seeing a difference can be a dangerous approach to the classroom as it ignores real differences between and among people" (p. 6). It must be a priority for the educator to bring cultural differences into the classroom and to acknowledge and affirm the differing cultures. Inclusion of cultures also helps to bring in first-person perspectives. Warren (2018) states, "without a mechanism for understanding culture from first-person perspectives of diverse students and families, teachers are left to reproduce and center norms of whiteness and other hegemonic cultural ways of being reinforced during their teacher preparation" (p. 172).

A sense of ownership in the classroom

As educators work toward involving students and incorporating different cultures, they will also foster a sense of ownership for students in their classroom. Edwards and Edick (2012) argue that the need for ownership is because "when students take ownership of their learning, they have more opportunities than if they rely solely on the teacher" (p. 8). Bunner (2017) agreed with this perspective, as she acknowledged her own struggles in teaching students who did not

share in her specific cultural beliefs. To help support her students, she and her colleagues created a student panel to discuss culturally responsive teaching that create a more comprehensive learning environment (Bunner, 2017). Bunner (2017) reflects on the student responses through six factors that made the students feel a sense of ownership and security both in the classroom and with their teachers. The six factors identified were visibility, proximity, connecting to students' lives, engaging students' culture, addressing race and connecting to the larger world and students' future selves" (Bunner, 2017).

Conclusion

The existing literature provides information on how to understand the ways in which an educator can implement teaching practices to best support a diverse student population. The literature outlined the ways in which educators can provide culturally responsivity in regard to naming practices (Marrun, 2018; Peterson et al., 2015); It offers a glimpse into some of the experiences of students who have non-Eurocentric names and their feelings about the way their name is regarded in the classroom (Marrun, 2018; Peterson et al., 2015; Rodriguez, 2003). Additionally, the literature outlines the ways in which educators can use practices listed under the umbrella term of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), to best accommodate a diverse population, especially when there are differing cultures amongst teachers and students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of these components presented in the literature also speaks to the important role of educators in helping students feel a sense of belonging .

Within the literature reviewed for this project, there are minimal student perspectives presented. The research presented in the literature review does outline some student voices; However, most of the literature is presented from the perspective of educators who have been in

the field for many years. The research supports teachers who are implementing these strategies, but does not fully consider how these strategies affect the students and their mindsets.

The purpose of this research, then, is to incorporate more student voice into the topic of culturally responsive teaching by exploring student perspectives about naming practices and their feelings of a sense of belonging in the classroom and school environment. This study explores perspectives of students, teachers, and a principal to gain greater understanding about the implementation of specific culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Methods

This research came out of my phenomenological experience in working with third graders and our shared reactions to learning to voice each other's names. Additionally, this research was influenced by my experience in the school environment, and the experience of one student being called by two different names amongst the staff. This first point of contact and communion in a space of learning lays an important foundation for the qualities of relationship available for community. Therefore, this research aimed to address the ways in which this foundation can be created and maintained in a learning environment.

Research Questions

This study focused on responses from six students to a question series, presented in a one-on-one interview format, as well as responses from a principal and three elementary teachers. The interview questions were formed based on the following central questions: (1) How do naming practices affect the ways in which students feel a sense of belonging at school? (2) How do students feel a sense of belonging in the school environment that has been established by educators? (3) How do educators (principals and teachers) create an environment that is positive and culturally responsive to their students? And, how do the students perceive this environment? These central questions were used to focus on the different strategies implemented by both the principal and teachers in creating a learning environment that is responsive to the students and their lives both inside and outside of school. These central questions also targeted the students perception of the different strategies that educators implement to create that sense of belonging.

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

A constructivist and transformative worldview provided the lens for researching Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in regard to a sense of belonging (Bondy, Ross,

Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Edwards & Edick 2012). Cross-sectional qualitative interview methods were used to compare the knowledge and perspectives between students, teachers and administrators.

The goal of the research was to identify ways in which principals and educators demonstrate cultural responsivity to their students and their needs in a socially complex and culturally inequitable environment. Students are often in classrooms where they do not share the same cultural identity with their teachers and therefore some teachers lack the knowledge as to how to cultivate a space that can establish a sense of belonging for diverse groups of students. From a constructivist worldview, the researcher drew on and sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of the research participants, particularly those of and from the students', to understand their lived knowledge and insights into the subject of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that, "the researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world" (p. 8).

The researcher also approached this data collection from a transformative worldview. As defined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), "the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change [the] lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life" (p. 9). Considering this point from Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher used the differing participant groups to better understand how they each experience the potential for and actively facilitate change, with regards to cultural responsivity and a sense of belonging within a school environment.

In this study, the researcher conducted cross-sectional qualitative analysis as defined by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Creswell and Creswell (2018)

add that the qualitative research process "involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (p. 4). In using this criterion, the researcher compared the responses of the principal, teacher, and student participants to examine if there was a difference in the ways in which all parties create and maintain a sense of belonging and being honored in the school environment and classroom. The study used participants' viewpoints and included qualitative data in the form of open-ended interview questions with a principal, three teachers, and six students in third grade. The decision to collect principal, teacher, and student responses was made to examine the ways in which educators create a learning environment that is inviting and inclusive to the varieties of lived experiences of all students. This study also aimed to look at the ways in which students feel valued in their classroom and school environment.

Research Design

Research site and entry into the field

The research site is an elementary school in Northern California where the researcher conducted their student teaching. Consent was given by the Principal to conduct research, interview the principal, teachers, and students at the convenience of the classroom teacher. This school is on the border of an industrial/commercial area and a residential neighborhood. There are 183 students attending the school; 121 are English Language Learners and 123 students qualify for free and reduced lunch (California Department of Education, 2019).

Participants

The principal of the school site was recruited for participation in the study to gain an understanding of the leadership perspective regarding the research topic. There were three

classroom teachers from the school site that were recruited. The researcher purposefully selected (Seidman, 2013) these teachers from having prior professional experience working with them. The six student participants were also purposefully recruited for participation in this study to offer a different perspective about the interview questions being asked. Some students were purposefully selected due to their self-identification of experiences with "renaming."

Sampling procedure

The researcher used stratification (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) as a sampling procedure because the participants were purposefully selected based on "specific characteristics of [the] individuals" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). The interview premise for the principal included questions about the principal's role in school leadership and community development. The classroom teachers who were recruited to participate in the study were interviewed privately in their own classrooms. The interviews followed a format including questions based on their teaching experience at the specific research site. Questions for the teachers also addressed the creation of classroom norms and the ways in which they established these norms in their classroom. After obtaining written consent from parents, the students were asked to participate in interviews. The researcher purposefully chose students whom they had prior experience with and whom had experienced "renaming." The researcher chose students who had self-identified with "renaming," as well as students whom the researcher was aware of their "renaming" experiences. These interviews were conducted at the classroom teacher's discretion in such a way that the student would not be missing instructional time. Each interview was conducted in private either in the student's classroom or in a separate room on campus.

Methods

In conducting the research, the researcher used multiple means of data collection including one-on-one interviews with principals, teachers, and students, in addition to fieldwork notes. The interview questions presented to the principal, teachers, and students all varied in exact wording, but followed a similar regard for the initial research questions that directly related to the research topic. The questions were designed to find ways in which each of the groups interpret ways in which a sense of belonging is created and maintained in the school setting. The intention of the questions was to help facilitate an understanding that helped to support the findings for the research questions. The research data was collected in a cross-sectional (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) format, in which all "data [was] collected at one point in time" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 149).

The researcher had to be flexible in the process of when the interviews would take place as interviews were based on the scheduling of all participant groups, including teachers with busy schedules and students who were busy learning in classrooms. The researcher gave all of the interview subjects the ability to refuse any question due to any reason.

Besides the principal, all personal identifying information was kept confidential (if chosen to do so). The principal chose to grant permission to be named in the research. The principal participant in this study was asked the questions in Appendix A. These questions were framed to inquire about the current placement of this principal. The questions discussed his role as the principal, and the ways in which that role has added to the overall establishment of the school environment. The principal was asked about the ways in which relationships were established amongst staff and students. Additionally, and more specifically, there were questions

that asked about naming and how the principal went about acknowledging naming in their role as principal.

The researcher conducted one-hour interviews with three teachers at the research site. Each teacher participant granted written permission prior to interviews. In these interviews, the teacher participants were given the set of questions on Appendix B. These questions started off asking about their teaching experience at the school site. All questions were specific to the current school site where teachers worked. The teacher participants were also asked about the ways in which they establish a positive learning environment for their students, and to recall any times that naming practices were evident in their experience and the ways in which they addressed this situation.

The research included a further six student participants in third grade. Each interview was conducted in a private room at the school so that the responses remained confidential. The students were asked the questions in Appendix C, which explored their experiences at their school site, their potential experiences with mispronunciation of their names, and their personal perspectives of the ways in which they feel a sense of belonging in the school environment.

Prior to and post interviews, the researcher notified the participants that they could retract any information given throughout the interview. The researcher followed up with this by offering the transcription back to the participant to prove the information prior to incorporating it into the final research; this checking process ensures reliability (Maxwell, 2013).

Data analysis

The data analysis process for this study used a qualitative approach to analyze the one-on-one interviews with the principal, teacher, and student participants. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher also took notes during the

interviews. Additionally, the researcher wrote analytic memos directly after the interviews, regarding specific questions and the interactions the participants had with the questions.

The transcribed interviews were open coded (Maxwell, 2013) by hand. Maxwell (2013) identifies open coding as "reading the data and *developing* your coding categories, based on what data (including the participants' terms and categories) seem most important" (p. 107). The researcher identified both expected and unexpected codes in the data. The researcher started with codes that the researcher believed would come up in the research, therefore, expected codes. The researcher also used unexpected codes based on the participant responses. The researcher identified key theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2013) that emerged from the literature, including naming practices, culturally responsive teaching, ownership, relationships, belonging, and connections. Additionally, the researcher discovered the unexpected codes from the interviews including safety, respect, physical space, school culture, community, literature, and language.

Correspondingly, the researcher used categorizing analysis and concept mapping as defined by Maxwell (2013) as "a picture of what the theory says is *going on* with the phenomenon you're studying" (p. 54). The researcher used this method to target the associations between the interviews and analytical notes. The researcher used coding categories to organize the information across all interview platforms. The purpose in using this strategy was to look at common themes that emerged. It also helped to focus the information into direct categories that were then constructed into a concept map. Each group's interview responses were categorized by the themes that stood out as important or that were unexpected. Finally, the researcher integrated all the interviews and analytic notes together to create one concept map to analyze the ways in which all three educational positions compared, reinforced, or contrasted in perspective and experience.

Validity and reliability

The researcher served as a student teacher and colleague to principal and teachers at the research site. The student participants also knew the researcher as a student teacher and substitute teacher. The researcher at the time of the study had spent over a year and a half at the site with the participants.

Qualitative data was collected from the audio recordings of the interviews conducted. The researcher took additional notes throughout the interview and created analytic memos directly after interviews. The researcher used coding of transcribed interviews to examine the common themes that came up throughout the interviews, and the existing relationships with the participants prior to conducting research was both an asset in terms of rapport for data collection and a central factor for cross checking for validity. Maxwell (2013) addresses the benefits in maintaining an "intensive, long-term involvement" (p. 126) with the research participants. Maxwell (2013) points out that a long-term relationship with the participants could offer a benefit, as the participants could provide more of an understanding into the research, and even offer a greater opportunity at gaining an understanding of the unexpected.

In acknowledging the researcher's own positionality, the researcher triangulated in a cross-sectional pattern across participants and their roles in the research community (Maxwell, 2013). In this way, the researcher had to be aware of potential reactivity, as it could have increased how or why a favorable response was given (Maxwell, 2013).

The researcher also combined rich data, respondent validation, and searching for discrepant data (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher combined the data of all participants, to create a more versatile understanding of the different perspectives in regard to the knowledge gathered. Using respondent validation, the researcher was able to ensure that through the process of

transcribing, the participant's responses were accurate and of accurate depiction. This also allowed respondents to clarify and explain any discrepancies. The researcher was able to use the data from the interviews, analytic memos, and field notes to search for discrepancies.

Findings

The diversity in elementary classrooms is more evident today. Considering these diverse classrooms, there is a need for educators to examine the ways in which they implement teaching practices to best support all students. Some of these supportive teaching strategies include "naming practices," the ways teachers create a sense of belonging, and the ways we create an environment that is culturally responsive to students' needs. The findings of this research project pointed to three major themes. The first resulting theme of this research examined "being light and easy" in consideration to naming practices and the effects of the students' sense of belonging in the classroom. The second theme addressed the purposeful selection of books in how educators can support the cultivation of a sense of belonging by helping students in "being seen and known by the community." The last theme that emerged from the data analysis, was the inclusive learning community and the ways in which educators can implement a culturally responsive school environment.

Naming Practices as "Being Light and Easy"

In the first theme examined, I start with the perspective of students and consider my personal experiences within this topic and at this school site. Naming practices have been an important consideration in my own teaching practice, and I wanted to start with the perspectives of students and their feelings surrounding naming practices. After speaking with students, I interviewed one principal and three classroom teachers. Essentially, I connect students' feelings surrounding naming practices and the ways these practices were related to and actively presented by the principal and teachers.

Personal reflection into naming practices

In my second school placement during my undergraduate fieldwork experience, I was placed at a Title I school, Roosevelt Elementary School. There was and still is a lot of diversity amongst the student body. In my first experience in this school setting, there were a lot of names and specific name pronunciations that were new to me. I had also not previously experienced many of the spelling patterns. I felt that the important thing for me as a teacher was acknowledging the pronunciation of student names based on their cultural identity. Additionally, some of my students had names that were spelt in similar ways as names that were familiar to me, and yet the name was pronounced differently than I thought.

Being new to this experience, I waited to hear how other teachers and students would pronounce a student's name before attempting to pronounce it myself. The first time I knowingly mispronounced a student's name was during my first semester in my year long student teaching placement (at the same school site). I was in a Kindergarten classroom in which there was a student who was called Dylan (DEE-LAN) by his classroom teacher. However, out on the playground, other teachers were calling this student by a different pronunciation (Dill-EN). This disconnect was constantly happening between the classroom teachers, other staff members, and other students on campus. Watching this inconsistent pronunciation of a student's name occur, I realized that there were some students who would not choose to correct a teacher, even if they were pronouncing the student's name incorrectly.

As I experienced this uncertainty about name pronunciations, I found myself picking the pronunciation that I had experienced with my own peers in school, instead of asking the student how to pronounce their name. I did this as a substitute teacher during morning attendance. In taking attendance, I would start saying names, and then when I would get to a name I was unsure

about, it would take me a moment longer than other names to guess the ways in which the student might pronounce their name. In these situations, some students would laugh in response, some would quickly yell to correct me, and a few students quietly corrected me. There were other times in which students either corrected me later either one-on-one or right in that moment. Specifically, there was one student whose name I could have pronounced in different ways. The student was quick to correct my pronunciation and say, “It’s not BEN-juh-min, it’s Behn-ha-meen. I’m not white.” The moment before this student corrected me, I was fearful that I was going to make the wrong assumption for the name pronunciation. In the moment directly after the student corrected me, I realized I overlooked his cultural identity in this interaction with the student.

Student perspectives

I conducted individual interviews with six students. Four of the six students admitted that during their schooling experience, they had experienced at least one occasion in which they had a teacher or substitute pronounce their name incorrectly. In exploring their experiences, two students admitted that they have no problem telling an educator or substitute that they pronounced their name incorrectly. One student recalled one experience when a substitute mispronounced their name and the student said they felt fine about the encounter. Another student felt they would be comfortable in correcting an educator; however, they would not be comfortable correcting a “strict person.” One student goes by a nickname and felt comfortable correcting an educator or substitute. One student participant had never experienced renaming (i.e., being called by a Eurocentric version of their name) or mispronunciation.

In the student interviews, Lucia, had some shocking statements that were contradictory to my experience with this student. This student explained her feelings surrounding mispronunciation by stating:

> It made me feel sad because a lot of people say my name wrong. And I feel like people should not call me by that name. They should call me from my other name. And I feel sad when they call me another name because they're all always gonna be calling me the same name.

In my experience being a substitute in this student's class, they had not corrected me when I had said their name wrong. At the time of my mispronunciation, this student became red in the face and when I asked if I had mispronounced her name, she said "yes," but did not want to continue the discussion. Later throughout that same day, there were numerous exchanges between just the student and me, in which I attempted to pronounce her name correctly; however, she did not offer much correction during that time. Lucia furthered her explanation by discussing how she is commonly the victim of naming mispronunciation, and in her point of view, if an educator cannot pronounce the name correctly, then she would prefer to be called by her middle name, as she claims there is less of an opportunity for mispronunciation. Upon follow-up questions about whether she had asked an educator to call her by her middle name, Lucia also added that educators tend to not get her name right the first time, "but in the second time they go getting it good." The thought this student put into the choice to be called another name was surprising as, in her reflection, she said she never had to do that.

Similar to Lucia's experience, Leah (another student participant) experienced "renaming" in the classroom and school environment and stated that they would be willing to correct an educator in this situation. When asked if the student went by another name either at school or

home, the student stated, “well, sometimes and there’s a substitute like we had one yesterday and they call me like LEE-ah. They call me sometimes cuz my name is like spelled like that.” This student’s situation differs from Lucia’s as the spelling of her name has a common Eurocentric pronunciation strictly based on the spelling. Specifically, Leah pronounces her name LAY-ah; however, because of the spelling, many educators who speak English as their first language may first pronounce the name as LEE-ah. The student recalled that she often experiences unfamiliar educators who mispronounce her name, relying on their knowledge of spelling in English. She did add that when a substitute had incorrectly pronounced her name, her other classmates were very quick to jump in and support her by shouting out the proper pronunciation. In expressing her feelings surrounding the mispronunciation, Leah stated, “Oh, it’s not really- it’s nothing. It’s just normal.” In this situation, the student shrugged off any negative emotions about the situation and added that that is “normal” and not cause for any upset feelings. In response to questions about being able to correct educators, Leah responded by saying that:

> Well sometimes I do. I like I don’t wanna, when it’s like a strict person. I’m like, I can’t correct them because then I don’t want to get in trouble. Or like, it’s somewhere in public and I don’t want to, like get embarrassed.

When I asked her to expand upon who a “strict person” would be, she explained that:

> Well, I’m not meaning like strict but maybe a little strict. Like our substitute that we had yesterday was a little strict, but not that strict. So, I’m like, I don’t want to do nothing wrong. So, I just stayed with the flow.

The student seemed to feel safe in correcting known adults but not unknown adults, for fear of getting in trouble. This was an interesting perspective to me, as it gave me more of an understanding as to why the student may not correct me initially because I was seen in an

authoritative position. As with any substitute, students do not know how they will react to a variety of different situations. I asked the same student about being able to correct known adults such as the school principal as he would potentially be someone who was a "strict person". The student added that she felt comfortable in correcting the principal and other educators because if she did not, "he would have kept and called me that."

In contrast to Lucia's and Leah's experiences, Sofia Nicole felt that she could always correct an educator or substitute if they had incorrectly pronounced her name. Specifically, Sofia Nicole goes by her middle name, Nicole, and not her legal first name, Sofia. In her interview, she was very straightforward about her experiences and preferences. She stated, "I'm ok with people calling me Sofia, but I prefer Nicole." When asked about her being called by her first name, she added, "Well, I tell her what to call me- Nicole. I say it's fine but if you really... if you want to, you can call me it, but I would prefer Nicole." Nicole's experience differs from her classmates, as she goes by a middle name. In this interview, the responses were not surprising; in my experiences getting to know this student, I started with the attendance sheet that listed her first name, and she was quick to say, "I actually go by Nicole."

Similar to Nicole, Alex (or Alexandra) is another student who felt confident in her ability to correct an educator if they called her by another name. In Alex's situation, she goes by a shortened nickname of Alex instead of Alexandra. When asked if anyone at this point still calls her Alexandra (her first legal name), she replied, "not really, some people fight about what my real name is." In her experience, she has been known as Alex for so long that most of her peers did not know in her first two years of schooling that Alex is a nickname and is not listed as her first legal name. This was surprising to me as so many of her peers have been together since Kindergarten and that surely, substitutes have called Alex, Alexandra (as this is the name listed

on the roster). However, in Alex's experience, she always had substitutes that accept her preference to be called Alex. When Alex is in the situation to correct a substitute she said, "it actually depends because I just wait to see if my friends say it, and then I just say, 'I go by Alex.' Like whenever there is name tags, [my teacher] just puts Alex." Alex has experienced this situation often in her school but expressed understanding why this might happen with unknown educators.

Throughout the interviews with all six students, each student had a variety of experiences when it came to name mispronunciation. However, there was one student, Elena, who had never experienced renaming. This was interesting to me, as her name seemed like it could be pronounced in different ways. When the student was asked if she ever experienced renaming, she was quick to say "no". The only type of "renaming" that she experienced was a nickname used only at home.

Additionally, throughout the interviews, Lucia added an interesting perspective in that she would be fine with correcting an adult, but not a strict adult. This interaction provided insight that, for known adults, it is probably common for students to feel more comfortable correcting an adult. From the students' perspectives, I found that most students expressed confidence in their ability to correct an adult. It was also interesting to know that the students viewed their ability to respond to adults based on the level of strictness of the educator. This made me wonder about the interactions I had with students, and about their perceptions of my substitute teaching was.

Principal perspectives and strategies

In the interview with Principal G, his body language is best described as laid back. Throughout his interview session, he made the related conversation flow easily and was very open to discussing his strategies. He was animated with his responses, both using his hands for

gestures and changing the tone of his voice for different questions. As he recalled his experience as a principal, he said he interacted with students who went by names other than what was listed on the student rosters. He discussed the ways in which he came to discover student's preferred names by stating,

> Yeah, first day Kindergarten, first day of school, the roster reads one thing and the kid says another, and then the teacher has to like figure it out...phonetically they sound one way so the parents are trying to name them Yason because that's how you say Jason in Spanish, so they spell it Y-E-S-O-N...you find out right away...and then you make that change and off you go.

Principal G was very confident in his statement about knowing student names. The conversation continued as we discussed the confidence that his students had in being able to advocate for themselves, to correct someone using a wrong name for them. Like my experience with Lucia, it was interesting to me that he stated how his students would correct him immediately, as I had not experienced that as a substitute in that school. However, for the students, I was an unknown adult to them. As we continued to discuss the topic of naming practices, we talked about the process of learning how to pronounce a student's name. Principal G stated, "You just try and try to like ask them here and then try over and over. And the fact that you're trying genuine like, Uh-man-duh, or -Uh-mon-duh, or Am-man...you just have to work on it." The persistence that Principal G expressed about learning how to pronounce student's names correctly was evident in the three teacher interviews as well.

Teacher perspectives and strategies

In my interviews with three elementary teachers, they all discussed the specific strategies they used in order to learn their students' names. All three teachers presented happy and positive

body language. As all three teachers shared a variety of experiences, all maintained a willingness to further explore their own thoughts surrounding these questions.

In my interview with Ms. Davis, she explained her process in getting to know student names. She stated that, prior to the start of the school year, she asks the previous teacher to tell her about the class she will have. Ms. Davis states, “I always ask her if there’s any nicknames especially when I’m writing like name cards for their tables and stuff. I want to know nicknames right away.” She continued by discussing the fact that their school site is consistently getting new students throughout the school year. Acknowledging this situation, she added, “when new students come, I asked the parents like, what did they go by? What’s the name?” Ms. Davis explained further

> If there’s a new student I ask, and I try to ask sometimes if I get alerted from the office usually a day or two before I get a new student, and I’ll ask sometimes they’re like, did they fill out on the sheet how to say it? Do you know how to say it? I’ll ask around. I don’t wanna...I’ll ask the kid too...Like, the first day, [I’ll ask does] anybody go by a different name...a lot of times because they are all been together, they’ll tell me when I’m saying somebody’s name wrong.

Ms. Davis recalled that she is very aware of doing this because of an experience in her teaching in which she was calling a student one name for numerous weeks until the parents came in to tell her that their child’s name was actually something different. She stated,

> I feel horrible. Like I had no idea; she never corrected me, never said anything. The office has her first name as [one thing, however,] everything, every form they had - because once you fill out that initial form, everything gets put in that way. Like on the

> attendance form, it was wrong. And so, we had to go back and change everything, and I felt so horrible.

In her reflection of this situation with her student, she added that, “you want her to feel like comfortable and safe. And she didn’t even feel safe enough to tell me that.” In the recollection of this specific story, Ms. Davis showed a lot of emotion related to this encounter. She was able to recall the specific emotions she felt and the amount of sorrow that she felt from this situation. Ms. Davis did discuss how there was a language barrier, and she identified the fact that could have been the reason for the student not correcting their name. However, like me, this teacher thought to trust the attendance sheet, and without correction by the student, the teacher did not know how to support their student by calling them by the correct name.

Ms. Davis also discussed the ways in which she tries to help support her classroom volunteers regarding student names. She stated that, “oftentimes with my volunteers I give them...pictures of the kids and I’ll write how you spell the name and I’ll write how you say that name underneath it for them.” I have personally seen this strategy used in numerous classrooms. In a recent substitute position, I had a teacher who wrote out the phonetic way of spelling specific student names; with the spelling only, one might assume it is pronounced one way. However, these names may not be pronounced the way it is assumed. In using this strategy, I believe the classroom teacher helps to support and recognize their students by providing a substitute with the proper pronunciation to prevent mispronunciation.

Ms. Parker’s interview provided additional perspectives on studying student names. She recalled an experience with one student who was added to her class only a few days prior to the start of school. She added that she got the list and made all the name cards and labeled items in the classroom with student names. When it came to the first day, she saw what she assumed was

the student walking towards her and welcomed her immediately by addressing this student as her first legal name, Sofia. The student immediately responded. Ms. Parker explained:

> 'Oh, but I go by Nicole, Nicole is my middle name.' And she just told me herself. That that's the name that I want to be called, 'I want to be called Nicole.' And I said, Okay, great. And then I said, but I'm really sorry I put your name on everything already. And so, I'm gonna have to fix that. And she said, that's ok. She was super totally okay with it.

This experience shows that the teacher felt a sense of pride in that her student was very confident in their response. This experience between Nicole and Ms. Parker confirmed that Nicole was comfortable telling adults that she preferred another name. The teacher continued to discuss previous experiences with students. She recalled numerous students who had variations of naming practices. Ms. Parker discussed that, because of the small school size and knowing students from all grades, she was able to know one of her students by their nickname immediately. However, she also discussed how she had mistakenly mispronounced a student's name at the beginning of the school year. She stated, "Yeah DN. Because it looks like DN so she will get people. And at the beginning of the year, I was calling her DN that I knew she was DN, so I don't know." In this way, Ms. Parker was recalling how, while she had the student's previous teacher give her the pronunciation, there were times that she would resort back to the way in which she thought the name was pronounced. Ms. Parker's experience is similar to situations that I have encountered. There is a part of us that knows how to pronounce the name, however, there is another part of us that will try to revert to the way we used to pronounce a name. For me, this is something that makes sense and is part of normal human experience with naming practices. As demonstrated with both Ms. Davis and Ms. Parker, educators must keep trying.

In a slightly different perspective, Ms. Brooks learns her students' names through communication with both the student and families, usually prior to the start of school. Ms. Brooks was very confident in her responses surrounding learning about her students. She was very open towards explaining the process she takes, and even addressed specific situations in which she has had both positive and challenging experiences. In the interview with Ms. Brooks, she explored her experiences in the differing names and naming practices that she has encountered in her teaching experience. Ms. Brooks recalled that, “it keeps happening where it’s like their first name is either something that their parents don’t call them usually. But it’s like on their birth certificate. But their parents will call them by their middle name.” Ms. Brooks stated that this circumstance of parents calling their student by a middle name is the only type of renaming that she has experienced. She continued to discuss her view being that their name is part of their identity and she wants and needs to know the student’s preferred name. She continued by stressing that, “I need to talk to the parents because some of the kids won’t articulate to me in the beginning of the school year.” While she has experienced both students who will correct her and students who will not, she still makes it a point to connect with families prior to the start of school about what their student prefers to be called and what the student is familiar being called.

Through my interviews with the principal and classroom teachers, I found that if an educator presented themselves as “light and easy”, students would be more willing to correct an adult whether the adult is known or unknown. However, in my role as a substitute teacher, if students perceive that I am not light and easy, it could mean that the student will not correct me. If the student is in a situation where the adult shows a light and easy personality around the students, it offers a more comforting experience for correcting mispronunciation. This is not to

say that a “light and easy” teacher does not maintain any strict expectations in the classroom. For example, at the school site, Principal G presents himself to students as light and relaxed; however, as the school leader, he is firm when needed.

Creating a Sense of Belonging: “Being Seen and Known by Community”

Getting to know students is part of creating a sense of belonging in our classrooms, which involves knowing students both personally and academically. A large piece of this is that for a student to be seen and known by their teachers, they need to know the students’ name and acknowledge the ways in which students pronounce their name. Names are a large part of a person’s identity and not knowing the proper pronunciation, makes it difficult for educators to connect with students in meaningful ways. Therefore, in the exploration of learning how educators create a sense of belonging, I first explore a principal’s perspective, and then listen to three elementary teachers share their thoughts. By starting to explore here, I looked for the ways in which the educators felt they created this environment for their students to feel supported and a sense of belonging in the overall school environment and in the classroom. Next, I discuss the student perspectives, as I look at the ways the students perceive that they are seen and acknowledged by the school community. Exploring all perspectives in this format provides an opportunity to examine how educator perspectives are internalized by students.

Principal perspective

In my interview with Principal G, he discussed the different ways in which he provides a positive learning environment for students and the school community. One of the immediate facts that he addressed was the importance of supporting the students. He stated, “everybody has to believe that our kids are capable of being successful and that they are able to be groomed into these awesome little citizens.” For students to feel that the school environment is a place of

belonging for them, educators must be supportive of students, and know them. Principal G holds pride in that, "just about every teacher knows every kid's name." In knowing the students' names, he and his staff have been able to develop meaningful relationships with not only students but their families which, in turn, provides a positive community environment at the school site. Principal G discussed the strategies he uses to establish these relationships with students by stating,

> You do everything that you're supposed to do to be nice to people. You have lunch with them. You play at recess with them. You ask them how they're doing. You have conservations with them. You build relationships, and you genuinely care about kids.

Principal G's desire to know each student was evident in his responses during the interview. In my fieldwork at this school site, I experienced this kindness firsthand. Principal G is consistently outside talking to the students and checking in with them. He actively engages with students during the morning time prior to school, during recess, and after school. During this time, he shows up for students. A statement he made clear in his interview is that "kids just need to know that you're there." By showing up for students, Principal G believes that we develop this sense of belonging for students in the school community. Without this showing up, he says that the students will not show up if they do not feel safe.

Teacher perspectives

Furthering my exploration into how educators create a sense of belonging in their classrooms, I asked Ms. Davis about her strategies for implementation. Ms. Davis first addressed the small school size and explained how this develops an opportunity for her to know all students both prior to having them in her class, and after having them in class. She also discussed how it is important to her to "teach like a feeling of respect and valuing everyone's opinion." By doing

this, Ms. Davis believes she helps her students feel a sense of safety in the classroom, both physically and emotionally. Ms. Davis also stated, “I let them know that I care about them and I value them, you know as people, so I think it creates a mutual respect and understanding.” She believes that because she implements teaching respect and values in her classroom, she experiences former students coming back into the school environment and classrooms to volunteer. In other words, the sense of belonging that was established for former students in elementary schools contributes to their desire to come back and want to be present in the community.

Closely related to Ms. Davis’ perspective, Ms. Brooks also tries to implement a feeling of respect in the classroom environment to best support her students. Ms. Brooks expressed how “just opening up to them” is an important factor in being able to create relationships with students. This language proved to be particularly insightful for me to understand the larger practices for cultivating inclusion. One of the ways in which Ms. Brooks believes she helps create a sense of belonging for students is “those times that they come late and telling them, ‘hey I’m glad you’re here today.” Simply acknowledging students’ presence in the classroom and school, she believes helps them develop the desire to want to be at school. This is one factor that is often overlooked, and I do not think all educators value this simple step. However, as Ms. Brooks stated, this teacher language truly helps students feel that sense of belonging and a sense of security in the school environment. Building on this step, she added that it is about “acknowledging the fact that they...want to know that somebody loves them and cares about them.” At any grade level, Ms. Brooks believes that this is true for students to be able to create a positive experience in the school environment. A surprising factor that Ms. Brooks added that the size of the school and knowing most of the students helps to support her ability to create a sense

of belonging for her own students. Specifically, she stated that if a student was having troubles connecting with others, “I could probably find somebody to be this kind of person because they have similar personalities, or you might want to pair somebody up with somebody who’s a different personality than that person to help them stronger.”

Similar to Ms. Davis and Ms. Brooks, Ms. Parker considered the ways in which she developed a sense of belonging in the classroom for her students. Ms. Parker started by explaining her beginning of the school year activity at Back to School night. She discussed how she gave the families who came to the event an opportunity to discuss expectations that they had for their students, themselves as parents, and their expectations of her as the classroom teacher. The day after the event, Ms. Parker invited her students to do the same activity in which they developed expectations from students and then accepted and/or discussed those expectations. She does this to bring “more student voice and parent voice into the classroom versus me just saying, these are the rules, this is what we do.”

Aside from her specific classroom routines in creating a sense of belonging for students, Ms. Parker also discussed the outside factors that she believes are what truly help students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. She explained how the students who participate in the after-school sports team develop a sense of pride, that the students “feel part of the community when they're doing something that they’re representing” their school. Ms. Parker also explored the idea that, “when they see their parents being part of the community and actively engaged with the community, I think it definitely makes them feel more part of the community...that helps kids feel more connected to the school.” Further, the school has a program that incorporates students as “junior coaches.” The students in this program are required to apply and then request a letter of recommendation from a teacher to be able to have this position. Ms. Parker believes that this

is about “having a role or responsibility at the school and feeling like I matter here because what I do is important to our community.” Ms. Parker believes each of these factors helps students feel this sense of belonging at school, which is not necessarily specific to her teaching practices, but a comment on the schoolwide community.

Overall, each of the teacher perspectives built on each other and had similar approaches to the ways in which educators create a sense of belonging for their students. Ms. Parker’s perspective of the community feel being established by students involvement in extra curriculars provided an interesting perspective into her view of the students development of a sense of belonging in the school environment. Additionally, it was surprising that the small size of the school was such a significant contributing factor to creating a sense of belonging.

Student perspectives

In exploring ways in which a sense of belonging is fostered in the classroom, I examined the strategies educators believe are of importance and then compared teacher perspectives to student perspectives. In the interviews with students, the anticipated and common response correlated to the students sense of belonging was related to the educator perspective of support and respect. In Lucia’s interview, she said, “they [teachers] are always with us helping and other things that we need.” Samuel discussed how no matter where he was on campus, there was always an adult around to help. Leah added to the conversation about this sense of support by relating it to a team, “the best part about being on a team is like they support you. It’s like a teacher supporting you in a test.” Throughout each interview, all students talked about some aspect of support and respect that was evident at the school and inside the classrooms.

The students validated many of the principal and teacher perspectives about developing a sense of belonging in schools. Lucia commented about the supportive environment by saying,

“we’re always sharing how we are at home not at school, and then the teachers start knowing us good.” Similarly, Leah added, “I feel like when I have a lot of support, I’m good. But when I don’t have a lot of support, I’m not really good.” This was a surprising statement, as she explained that when she was having off days at school, she did not feel as supported as when she was having good days. She also discussed how the days when she is supported and boosted up by her teachers, she feels very supported and good at school.

The most surprising response that emerged in the ways that a sense of belonging is established at school was in the area of reading. In my interviews with the students, four out of six of the students discussed how their reading level, or reading in general, was a contributing factor to their feeling a sense of connection in the school environment. Many of the students discussed how they felt that their reading was the way in which they had a meaningful relationship with their teachers. Nicole explained, “I also feel acknowledged by Ms. L because I really like reading and that's one thing we have in common.” In finding a connection with a teacher on campus, she feels as though she has a meaningful relationship with her and belongs at the school site. Elena was another student who stated that she felt most acknowledged by her teachers because of her reading. She said the reason was “because like in every class I’ve been into I’ve readen a lot like my teachers have told other teachers that I read a lot.” Elena continued by discussing her favorite grade because of the teacher starting the morning off by having the students read books. She said that,

> She got me by reading every day because of every time you get into the classroom, she used to have books in our seats and I always you could choose a book you wanted to read, and it was fun.

By having a teacher encourage the students to read, she felt as though she had this sense of safety within the classroom. Alex is another student who believed that her acknowledgement from teachers was about her reading. When asked, “what ways do you feel acknowledged by your teachers at school, she responded with ‘definitely my reading’.” Alex discussed how she creates this connection with teachers through reading by being able to discuss books with her teachers. She also enjoyed that her teachers are often trying to help her choose books that could be of interest to her, and even books that her teachers have read. In building this relationship with her teachers, she was able to create connections between books from the teacher’s elementary years to her own.

Throughout the interviews with the students, most said they needed support and the ability to talk openly with their teachers; most also discussed a sense of belonging as being connected to reading. This was interesting, as many of the teacher interviews discussed similar themes of being supportive of students and making them feel part of the community. At one point during the teacher interviews, the three teachers discussed how the enjoyment of reading was an important part of their students' positive experiences at school. However, it was surprising to learn that while teachers saw reading enjoyment as being tied to enjoying school, the students referred to it more as a way of connecting to teachers, which made them feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. The students also said that, as their teachers pass along information about their reading levels from one teacher to the next, it helps them to feel a sense of security in the school environment. Additionally, the students talked about the connection they feel when they can read a book or discuss a book with a teacher that the teacher has read or knows. It is through the process of reading that the students begin to feel seen and known by the community.

Culturally Responsive School Environment: "Inclusive Learning Community"

Culturally responsive school environments, like inclusive learning environments, acknowledge and celebrate the diversity within the community. In my interviews with the participants, there were differing perspectives about the ways in which educators and students understood culturally responsive teaching practices. In my exploration of this theme, I aimed to understand the broader perspectives about the school environment. First, I wondered how the overall cultural environment is sustained by the principal. Next, I explored the ways in which the educators embody this perspective that has been communicated by the principal. Following these educator perspectives, I looked to the students to understand their interpretation of the way in which these culturally responsive practices have been implemented. This order was used to understand the broad view of the school and then continue to narrow down the perspectives to the students.

Principal perspective

Creating a culturally responsive learning environment for Principal G, involves building community. Principal G is bilingual in Spanish and English, which is beneficial at his specific school site as it provides him the opportunity to be able to speak with almost all families. This enhanced communication makes it possible for him to create connections with families and the surrounding community. Part of Principal G's role involves knowing his community. In this role, he felt that it is important that "you know your entire demographic, know all your kids, you know their families...they're part of this school." In his discussion about implementing culturally responsive practices, he addressed the building community factor as most important. He stated, "people support each other, people help each other like you create that." The community factor helps to support and bring in the cultural identities of the families and students at the school site.

While Principal G did not discuss this, his own cultural identity plays a factor in his ability to create a responsive learning environment for all. His participation and engagement in and outside of school helps to support his relationship with families in his school community.

In addition, Principal G has the view that, despite their backgrounds, "we have high expectations of our kids." One of the factors he discussed is the perspective that some take when they have a language learner. Principal G explained this by saying,

> But if I know that I'm either going to push harder for those kids to make as much progress or I'm just going to say, they're a language learner that, you know, they weren't going to get that anyway. It's that optimistic mindset versus like the no, I knew you couldn't handle it anyway.

Principal G holds this expectation that all students are capable of learning, despite their backgrounds. In maintaining this view, Principal G also values that within his school environment, the educators also believe that their students are capable of success.

Teacher perspectives

In examining their teaching approaches, the three teacher participants explored ways in which they develop a classroom environment that is culturally responsive to the diversity in their classrooms. When asked about the ways in which she implements culturally responsive teaching into the classroom, one teacher discussed how she starts every school year off with the "Ancestors Unit." Ms. Davis believes that this unit helps to initially welcome students into the classroom and to celebrate students. She explained, "especially when you have such a diverse and different than your own makeup of your classroom that you have to like have that and right off the bat." By starting the unit at the beginning of the school year, Ms. Davis believes this helps to adjust students into the classroom. In fact, she often stresses the importance to other

grade level teachers that starting with any other unit would not be as beneficial. Ms. Davis believes that it "brings in their culture and their history and values, so I think that's kind of the big icebreaker." In starting with this unit, Ms. Davis brings in the cultural identity of all students. The teaching unit provides an opportunity for both herself and her students to learn more about their own cultural identity, and that of others in the classroom.

In contrast, Ms. Parker's interview addressed different strategies that she uses to reflect cultural responsiveness in the classroom. In the beginning of the school year, "we start with self-portraits where they have to, on the self-portraits identify three things that are meaningful to them. So, right away I learned about them and their families." In doing this project, Ms. Parker identified how she can learn about what is important to her students immediately. By looking at some of the portraits, one can identify the students who value family, sports, or other aspects of their lives. Additionally, Ms. Parker implemented community circles in her classroom to know students both personally and academically. Ms. Parker stated, "So the more I know about them, the more I know about their stories, the more they're going to learn in my class because if I don't know them, it's really hard for me to make those connections." Regarding community circle and having conversations with students, Ms. Parker prioritized knowing students' personal stories. By knowing what is happening in her students' lives, she can better understand the factors behind some students' academic performance. Specifically, Ms. Parker stated, "sometimes I don't learn about things until like really late in the year and I go, oh my gosh, I totally would have reacted to everything differently had I known that piece of information." She really stressed during this time that knowing her students is an important factor affecting how she teaches her students. Knowing about them gives her more insight into understanding "what makes them tick." Ms. Parker's Spanish speaking ability is valuable for creating a culturally responsive teaching

environment. While she is not fluent, Ms. Parker says, “I speak enough Spanish that if I have a newcomer in my class that they will have their basic needs met. And they’re aware as a newcomer that like I can understand.” Ms. Parker’s ability to speak Spanish as most of the newcomer students often speak Spanish. With this ability, Ms. Parker is also responsive to her potential future students’ needs. Speaking and understanding Spanish also enhances her communication outreach with current students and families.

Ms. Brooks’ perspective differs from Ms. Davis’ and Ms. Parker’s because she is bilingual. Ms. Brooks speaks both English and Spanish fluently. Being bilingual has helped her connect with more parents in a direct format. However, she did have a student who spoke a language other than Spanish or English and Ms. Brooks was not able to connect with her directly. In this situation, Ms. Brooks stated, “Siri was my best friend.” To make sure she included this student in the learning environment, she used Siri as a way to ask the student questions and to then translate it into the student's primary language. By taking these steps, Ms. Brooks was doing anything she could in order to best support her student. Ms. Brooks also discussed how the biggest challenge for her is when she cannot communicate with families because their primary language is rooted in indigenous countries. She was grateful that the closeness of the community helps to support these situations. She stated,

> That’s where the community is so great, because like I mean, other parents somehow knew a little bit of that language. And they were able to tell them in their language... translate my Spanish into their language, which was nice.

In this sense, while not specifically her culturally responsive teaching strategies, reaching out to community resources for translation shows that this teacher knows how to utilize her community resources.

Student perspectives

The interviews conducted with students provided examples of the ways in which they perceive their teachers implementing culturally responsive teaching practices through family involvement and personal acknowledgement. Five of the student participants gave specific examples of culturally responsive teaching practices that differed from the principal and teacher responses. One theme emerging from student interviews that related to the themes from teacher perspectives was language as a connection and belonging factor. Two of the students acknowledged that the Spanish-speaking community was an important part of their lives. Nicole expressed her delight being part of a Spanish-speaking community, stating,

> Most of my family is Hispanic. And so, at [her school], there's a lot of like, people who talk Spanish for like kids who only talk Spanish and I kinda like that because they can talk in Spanish with them.

The Spanish-speaking environment at her school supports Nicole's family's engagement in the school culture and community. Elena agreed with Nicole, saying that she felt her family was truly accepted in the school culture "because there is a bunch of people here that speak Spanish and they're from a state, well country my parents are from." The language theme throughout these students' interviews showed that language is an important part of their families engaging in the school community.

An interesting factor that came up in the student interviews was the school's responsiveness to holiday celebrations. Four of the students discussed this in their interviews. Nicole explained that her teacher was responsive to her family celebrating "Day of the Dead" because she brought in literature surrounding the day, and they were able to learn more about the holiday. Lucia explained the cultural respect that the school shows surrounding Halloween.

Some of the families at the school do not celebrate Halloween for religious reasons, and therefore, most years, the school site does not celebrate the holiday. However, to support other students' cultures, the school site had a Halloween celebration this year. Students whose families did not want them to participate went to watch a movie, and the rest of the group dressed up. In this situation, Nicole felt the school did this while supporting students, so "they didn't feel sad." Leah added that her family celebrates most holidays and she felt that the school was supportive in incorporating that in the school environment. Alex added that her specific teacher is very accommodating to her and her family's religious beliefs. Alex recalled that there have been days she has had to miss due to religious purposes. She stated her teacher's response was "go have fun with your family, we'll see you when you get back." Alex was very appreciative of her teacher's support and liked that her teacher did not assign additional work when she misses school for these reasons.

From my personal experience at this school site, the students' perspectives are very accurate in naming the ways in which the different cultural practices are acknowledged and celebrated in the school community. The student perspectives, while slightly different from the teachers' views, contribute to understanding how this school creates a culturally responsive learning environment for all students. From my experience at this site, the students are celebrated for their diverse identities and experiences, and the students can truly embody their cultural identities.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the three research questions: (1) How do naming practices affect the ways in which students feel a sense of belonging at school? (2) How do students feel a sense of belonging in the school environment that has been established by educators? And (3)

How do educators (principals and teachers) create an environment that is positive and culturally responsive to their students? And, how do the students perceive this environment?

The findings from this project at Roosevelt Elementary show that, for students, mispronunciation of names is prevalent in this school environment. Most students involved in this project explained their confidence in being able to correct an educator when the educator was known and was not perceived as strict. Therefore, students expressed confidence in being able to correct an educator who was able to present themselves in a light and easy way that could also be firm when needed. It was also evident in my findings about educator perspectives that all these teachers were aware that name mispronunciation was occurring, and all were constantly trying to be respectful of their students' names through constant practice.

For educators, the development of a sense of belonging involves knowing students both academically and personally. The educators all had specific strategies they used to support a sense of belonging for their students in the classroom. “Open yourself up” and the theme that came from students was that the students felt a sense of belonging at school, based on the level of reading support they received. For the students, they felt the most acknowledged and seen by their teachers through the common connection of reading and reading interests. The more the teachers connected with the students based on their reading levels and the books they were reading, the more the students felt that their teacher understood their interests both inside and outside of school.

The educators at Roosevelt Elementary school used linguistic and cultural inclusion practices to support the culturally responsive and positive learning environment for their students. This was established through the process of knowing the school community and the including families in the classroom as volunteers and the different school events held throughout

the year. Teachers named specific strategies that are implemented in the curriculum to create a culturally responsive learning environment such as thematic units, and projects. The findings of this research target the culturally responsive learning environment in specific relation to an inclusive learning environment.

Discussion

In this research project, I interviewed three participant groups: one principal, three elementary classroom teachers, and six third-grade students. In the findings there were three themes that emerged through the topics of naming practices, sense of belonging, and the development of a culturally responsive learning environment. First, I explored the naming practices and discovered that students had experienced mispronunciation but not renaming. The students discussed their confidence in being able to correct an adult who mispronounced their name. Through the process of understanding the student interviews and in connection with the educator interviews, when an educator presents themselves as “light and easy”, students feel more willing to correct the educator. However, when an educator is perceived as strict, the students caution against correcting the adult in fear of being reprimanded. Secondly, it was found that when an educator opens themselves up to the students, they develop a stronger relationship between the student and teacher. Further, the incorporation of literature catered to the individual interests of each student provided a sense of belonging in the school environment and helped the students to feel seen and acknowledged by the community. The students stated that they felt seen by their teachers as there was communication between the teachers about reading levels, and their interest in books and book series. The teachers also provided students with suggestions and insight into books that they read, which helped the students feel a part of the classroom. The last theme centered around the creation of a culturally responsive learning environment. The emphasis centered around the incorporation of family involvement in relation to language and cultural traditions.

Implications for The Literature

Both the literature review and the research findings found that educators need to be sensitive and aware of pronunciations to be culturally responsive and acknowledging to students especially in relation to naming practices. In addition, the literature review and this project's findings expressed the need for building positive relationships amongst students, teachers, and families (Bondy et al., 2007; Lehman, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2003). This incorporation of families is key in the creation of a sense of belonging for students and for the students to feel that their families are welcome in the school environment. Further, the literature and findings support the use of literature in the classroom as it can help provide support for students (Lehman, 2017; Peterson et al., 2015). The last theme that emerged in the literature review and in my research was the necessity of the school environment to be culturally responsive to their students' needs (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While there were several overlapping findings there were important nuanced findings from the research.

Implications for naming practices

While Marrun (2018) had noted that students would not feel comfortable correcting an adult the interviews with the student participants in this research found that this wasn't necessarily the situation. The student participants acknowledged that when an educator presented themselves as "light and easy," they felt confident in being able to correct an adult who had mispronounced their name. This confidence also was with adults who were known such as the classroom teacher and/or other supporting school staff. The only factor that would affect this confidence for one student was the "strictness" of an educator. If there was an unknown adult such as a substitute, the students that perceived this person as strict, would hesitate to correct, in fear of reprimand.

The students' feelings surrounding this situation related to Freire's statement that, "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (Freire, 2018, p. 72). In this way, if the educators step away from maintaining the 'need to be the authority' there is the potential of not creating the disconnect between student and teacher.

In addition to the student feelings, the educators' strategies in learning students' names was evident in my findings that were not as prominent in the literature review. The literature review and specifically Peterson et al. (2015) suggested that names should be honored, and therefore teachers can use literature as a way of incorporating the cultural importance of names. However, in my findings, the educators discussed the importance of learning the proper pronunciation of student names, rather than the historical significance. All four of the educator participants expressed the need to keep trying to get to know students' names. It was surprising for me, that they all expressed that there is not an assumption that is made that they would stick with. Rather, they had numerous strategies they used each time to get to know their students and the pronunciation. Specifically, these factors included asking prior teachers for nicknames and pronunciations, asking parents and the students themselves, repetition in pronouncing the name, and looking at the student's files for any notes of pronunciations.

Implications for a sense of belonging

In exploring the strategies used to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom, all the educator participants attributed to the sense of family and community that has been created in the school environment. In the literature review, specifically Weinstein and others (2003) support the establishment of the teacher student relationships, stating how vital a role these relationships play in creating a welcoming learning environment. However, the educator participants in this

research study stressed that it often means going above knowing simply the students in one class. Learning about more students at the school site can offer more of a community and family feel to the school that can include more students. The educator participants took pride in knowing that they built relationships with most students at the school site and attested that the family feel was a large reason as to why their previous students would come back and visit the campus.

One element that students believed established a sense of belonging was literature. The literature review included discussions about using books as a way of getting to know students and to bring students' culture into the classroom; in one article, Peterson and colleagues (2015) suggested using literature for students to use as a "mirror" of themselves and their lives. However, in the findings of this research project, the use of literature went beyond a cultural mirror for students and served as a way in which students felt seen and appreciated by their teachers. The students felt this through the process of their teachers sharing information about their reading levels and responding to the students' reading interests. The students felt that the communication that happened from one teacher to the next helped students to feel welcome. The previous teacher would inform the next teacher of the growth that was occurring, and share the interests that specific students had, which helped students to feel more included and connected to their teacher. The student participants saw the incorporation of literature not as a mirror for their own identity, but rather as a way of connecting with their teacher and developing a relationship. The students also attested that it helped their teachers get to know their likes and dislikes which further supported the sense of belonging they felt in the classroom and school environment.

Implications for a culturally responsive learning environment

Exploring the strategies that help to create a culturally responsive learning environment helps us think about how to create a sense of belonging in the classroom. The students

acknowledged that their teachers helped to incorporate their home cultures into the classroom such as including literature surrounding the holiday of "Day of the Dead." Specifically, the literature review included discussions about incorporating holidays into the classroom, and more general days that could serve as cultural awareness days. However, the findings here found that students identified specific holidays that were incorporated into the classroom to make them feel more involved. The students acknowledged that the school and classroom teachers incorporated the holidays that their families celebrated which made them feel more connected to the classroom.

Another strategy that helped to provide a more inclusive learning environment, was the incorporation of the student's family history. Through the process of discussion, community circles, and thematic units, the teachers were able to learn more about their students and their family's cultural backgrounds. In the literature review, many authors discuss the importance of culturally responsive teaching to best support the inclusion of diverse learners in the classroom. Many researchers, such as Gay (2002), discuss the importance of revising the curriculum to best include students' culture; however, there is little discussion about how critical it is to include each students' family culture into the school environment.

Implications For Practice and Policy

From this project, we learn that there is the opportunity for teachers to consider implementing some of these culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices to support their students. The findings of this project help to support the need for an educator to look more into their own teaching practices to examine the areas that could be improved to better support students. This self-examination can prove to be beneficial in helping students feel more of a belonging in the classroom and school environment. From the findings, it is evident that names

are a large part of who we are. For students, an educator being able to pronounce their name correctly, can be the factor of a student feeling connected or not with the teacher. For a student to feel comfortable in sharing the proper pronunciation of their name, a teacher presenting as light and easy can help students to feel more comfortable. This does not mean that an educator should not be strict when needed, but rather that teachers have the ability to connect with students in a way that the students feel safe in correcting the educator. This also involves the practice of simply trying to learn names and the different pronunciations. An educator needs to be aware and acknowledge that we must step outside of what we think we know and become the student when learning about our students.

An educator can also consider the use of literature as a way of building a sense of belonging and relationships with their students. Teachers can ask themselves, in what ways is literature being used in the classroom and are students able to connect with the literature on a personal and academic level? These findings present literature as being a way of connection to student interests. As educators try to support student reading levels and reading interests, they have the opportunity for an educator to get to know their students on a personal level as well. This also provides students with the opportunity to get to know their teacher and their interests. Educators can use this knowledge of knowing student interests to match them with a book or book series that can be of interest to the student while also supporting their academic needs. Educators can also use their own experience and knowledge of books and book series to boost student reading interests and levels.

Policy implementation

The findings from this research contribute to the need for additional policy changes that can help educators in supporting their students. First, in teaching credential programs, there is the

need for understanding naming practices and the important role these practices play in creating inclusive learning environments. These preparation programs should also incorporate curriculums that help preservice educators understand the cultural diversity that is prevalent in classrooms; it is difficult to find explicit teachings practices about how to understand and acknowledge student names. Adapting curriculum to help preservice teachers develop strategies when faced with an unknown pronunciation can help to prevent the potential humility that students may feel. Additionally, supporting more curriculum surrounding the cultural honoring of naming practices can help educators to appreciate the importance of learning a student's name and the proper pronunciation.

Limitations of The Study

The limitations to this study were in part, a lack of time, limited perspectives, and researcher bias and positionality. Study limitations related to the lack of time are attributed to the fact that the research project unfolded over the span of only two months. More time could serve the expansion and integration of student perspectives from Kindergarten through fifth grade. And it could incorporate more teacher participants. The research could be furthered throughout the grade levels across each of the district's schools to examine the emerging themes in a larger community.

Connected to this, another limitation that emerged was the limited and biased perspectives of the participants. All the student participants were third grade students. Each of these students came from one classroom that the researcher had completed their student teaching within the semester prior. For the student participants, they had experienced the researcher as an authority figure through the process of student teaching and being their substitute, so there was already a bias of familiarity in place. Another limitation of the study included the prior

professional relationship that had been established between the educator participants and the researcher.

Further, the findings for this research are limited because of the specific research site. The student population is 66% English Language Learners, with a diverse population of students. And, the research site is a small school that has less than 200 students, and less than 10 classes.

The researcher's own bias and positionality is another limitation of this research. Because the researcher had established relationships with these students prior to their participation in the research. The researcher knew the students academically and personally. In addition, the researcher also had prior relationships with the educator participants. The researcher had done their student teaching at the school site and had experienced the teachers in a prior mentorship role.

Future research

From the research findings, there are new gaps in the literature that could be explored. Specifically, mispronunciation of names for the student participants appeared to not have a strong link between a loss of identity or the separation of the cultural background, as was evident in the literature review. Rather, the students focused more on the perception of the teacher, and if the teacher was "light and easy," the student wasn't affected by this situation, as they felt comfortable in correcting the mispronunciation. Therefore, there is the opportunity to explore the strategies and implementation of this persona of an educator to best support a student's ability to feel safe to correct an adult. Additionally, the way that students perceive a sense of belonging in schools is not necessarily related to every action teachers take, but rather it is developed through the common interest in reading and the support that is shown to students during this time. This finding points to the need to look further into the common interests of students, and to

understand who the student is as an individual to better support their learning and sense of belonging. This study also explored culturally responsive teaching as the incorporation of families and being seen and known in the community. The research could be furthered as it could examine the ways in which being seen and known in the community is established and maintained in schools. Lastly, including more school educators such as instructional coaches, special education teachers, and school counselors could lead to the exploration of additional perspectives and potentially further the development of the ways in which educators can best support their students. Overall, there are different approaches that can be used to further this research.

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Appendix A: Principal Interview Questions

Questions for Principal Interviews

1. What has been the best part of being the principal at Roosevelt Elementary school?
2. In what ways do you establish a safe school environment each year?
3. What do you believe is your most important role at Roosevelt?
4. How does your role at Roosevelt affect the overall Roosevelt community?
5. Have there been times when you have found that you needed to make a change for the school environment based on the students who were at the school during that year?
6. Have you experienced students who go by another name? If so, how did you come to find this out?
7. How do you create meaningful and reciprocal relationships with the students at Roosevelt?
8. Have you ever met a student that you did not know how to pronounce their name? If so, how did you go about this conversation?
9. In what ways do you feel that the students at Roosevelt feel a sense of belonging in the school environment?
10. What overall do you believe your students find as being the best part of school?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

Questions for Teacher Interviews

1. What has been the best part of being a teacher at Roosevelt Elementary school?
2. In what ways do you establish classroom norms at the beginning of the school year?
3. How do you implement these norms throughout the year?
4. Has there been times when you have rethought the norms you have created in your classroom based on your students? If so, why and for what reason?
5. Have you ever had a student who goes by another name? If so, how did you come to find this out?
6. If yes to the previous question, how did the situation occur? What was the outcome?
7. How do you create meaningful and reciprocal relationships with your students?
8. Have you ever stumbled upon an attendance sheet that you did not know how to pronounce a name? If so, how did you approach that situation?
9. Have you had a student in which there was a language, or other barriers that made it difficult for you to create a relationship with a student? If so, how did you overcome it?
10. In what ways do you feel that your students feel a sense of belonging in the school environment?
11. What overall do you believe your students find as being the best part of school?

Appendix C: Student Interview Questions

Questions for Individual Student Interviews

1. What would you tell someone is the best thing about Roosevelt?
2. What ways do you feel acknowledged by your teachers at school?
3. If you could tell your teacher and/or school one thing they don't know about you, what would it be?
4. Do you have any other names you go by? Either at home or at school? If so, how has that been affected at school?
5. What is something that you appreciate that your teacher or past teachers have done?
6. How does the school/classroom incorporate your family's values and culture into the learning environment?
7. If you do have another name, how do you feel when there is a substitute, or other adult, and they say your name?
8. Have you ever had to tell someone how to pronounce your name? How did that make you feel?
9. In what ways do you feel your teachers know who you are as a student (academically) and personally (likes and dislikes)
10. What would you want to improve about your experience at Roosevelt?

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA

November 26, 2019

Amanda Brown
50 Acacia Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Amanda,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal entitled *Building Meaningful Relationships with Students* (IRBPHP application #10818) has been approved.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Carlos Molina, Ed.D.,LMFT
Chair, IRBPHP