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Are We There Yet? Examining Sociocultural Contexts of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Antibias Teachings in Early Childhood


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Durden, Tonia and Blich, Kimberly, "Are We There Yet? Examining Sociocultural Contexts of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Antibias Teachings in Early Childhood" (2012). *Faculty Publications from CYFS*. 32.

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AERA 2012

COVER PAGE

Title of Session: Are we there yet?: Examining the socio-cultural contexts of CRP and Anti-bias teachings in early childhood education

Type of Session: Roundtable Paper Discussion

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Topic descriptors: culturally responsive pedagogy; anti-bias education; teacher development; early childhood education

Literature Review

For more than 30 years, there have been a vast number of inquiries and scholarly conversations on how to improve the educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. These conversations were sparked by the increase in diverse students, the discontinuity between the experiences of the teaching force and the students they teach (Swartz, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011), and discontinuity between students' home and schooling experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 1993, 2000; Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Currently more than 30% of children under the age of five are from culturally and/or linguistically diverse background and this percentage is expected to double by 2050 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). As our society becomes not only more ethnically diverse but also continues to connect globally it is crucial to prepare our current and future workforce for a global community. Despite evidence of candidates becoming more aware of ethnic diversity in our society (Castro, 2010), teacher educators still face the challenge of preparing candidates who can provide high quality, responsive educational experiences for children who may be culturally and linguistically different from themselves (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This study takes a deeper look at teachers' developing conceptions of a culturally responsive ethos and anti-bias teachings by asking, how do they support the socio-cultural development of the young children in their care?

Measures of Quality Care

How is quality defined in early childhood programs? General consensus is quality programs provides infants and preschoolers with stimulating and responsive environments that enhances their cognitive, social, and language development and is empirically linked to improve young children's social and cognitive outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Burchinal & Cryer, 2003; Lamb,

1998; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2006; Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, & Yazejian, 2001). There are several instruments used by childcare facilities, licensure and accreditation agencies to measure the quality of early care environment and interactions. For example, the most widely used and popular measure of quality in the center classroom is the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (Harms & Clifford, and Cryer, 1998). Another measurement tool used is The Observational Record of the Childcare Environment (ORCE; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996), which measures the relationship between the caregiver and child in any setting. Extensive research has been conducted examining how such measurement tools relate to children's development and the measure of quality is linked more strongly to culturally diverse children or those from low-income backgrounds (Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, & Clifford, 2000 & Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). For example, in their longitudinal study of the socio-emotional and cognitive development of 733 children (ages 4-8), Peisner-Feinberg et. al, (2001) found childcare quality had a modest long-term impact on children's socio-emotional and cognitive development through Kindergarten and in some cases through second grade. Findings also suggested the closeness of the teacher-child relationships had the strongest effect on children's social and cognitive skills and a more positive impact for children from at-risk backgrounds. However, there is still a contested debate on whether quality measurement tools such as ECERS reflects a) White, middle class values, b) is appropriate for children from other cultures and c) supports the socio-cultural development of young children. Therefore, as national and statewide conversations develop towards improving quality in early childhood education, an important question to consider is how and whether the current measure of quality truly represent 'quality' for children of color and encourages **all** children's' socio-cultural development and awareness.

Quality Care and Ethnic Diversity

Currently the ‘quality’ debate lies within two general schools of thought concerning childcare quality and ethnic diversity. Some argue quality is defined differently based on the child’s ethnic background. For example, some scholars believe practices rooted in communal rather than individualist goals and music contribute to the success and advancement of African American children (Boykin & Bailey, 1999; Hilliard, 2006; King, 1991, 2004). Furthermore, Beasley’s (2002) research utilized national sampling data of 1,710 4-year olds to investigate what factors influenced the cognitive readiness of young children. Findings suggested children’s participation in culture-related activities was generally associated with higher levels of cognitive development whether they attended a center-based program or not. Also when activities were culturally salient, parent’s involvement was found to more likely enhance their child’s cognitive development. In another study, Wishard, Shivers, Howes, & Rictchie (2003) used the ECERS tool to examine the impact of childcare environment on children’s development and learning. Results indicated the childcare practices implemented were embedded with the cultural context of the children’s ethnic communities and identities. They reported “Practices, more than quality appear to be deeply embedded within value and belief systems that rooted in ethnicity, community and social class” (Wishard, et. al, 2003, p.5).

As briefly presented, there is a multitude of research examining the benefits of providing culturally salient experiences for young children and the long-term impacts of such experiences (Bell, 2001; Hilliard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995;1999; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Schmoker, 1999; Sizemore, 1985; Trawick-Smith, 2000; Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Such research and literature presents a strong argument that more culturally salient experiences for young children should be the standard for which quality is assessed and measured. However,

additional research is needed to conclusively suggest the quality early childhood programs featured in this study were the representative norm and not exception.

Burchinal & Cryer (2003) completed secondary analysis of data from two of the largest studies of childcare in America the *Cost Quality and Outcomes Study* and *NICHD Study of Early Child Care*. Researchers tested whether standard measures of childcare quality were less valid or reliable for Latino and African American children than White children. Results indicated all three ethnic groups benefitted from stimulating and sensitive care on child outcomes related to school success. Researchers reported however that the degree to which the caregiver provided stimulating and sensitive care related to positive social and cognitive outcomes for the children of color. While the findings from this study and others suggests that current early childhood quality measures are statistically valid for both White children and children of color, a critical element to consider is the socio-cultural component of the development. As we determine what constitutes 'quality' it is integral to also focus efforts on developing young children who are not only academically competitive nationally and globally, but who also have an affirmative social awareness and respect for other cultures and for their own. We must ask ourselves how both early childhood professionals and parents can help support the socio-cultural development of our young children. Therefore, this article examines particularly the role of the teacher in helping to support children's socio-cultural development as they engage in daily teaching activities and attempt to create a partnership and learning community with families.

To measure teacher's perceptions and experiences we draw upon two theoretical frameworks; culturally responsive pedagogy and anti-bias education. Culturally responsive pedagogy is used as a lens from which to examine teacher's understandings, beliefs in and teachings related to providing culturally salient experiences for the young children in their care. The

culturally responsiveness of the teachers focused on how they were responsive to the unique culture needs of each individual student. Culture defined in context as the child's race and language. On the other hand, we were also interested in exploring how teachers helped children to recognize and speak out against unfairness and value human diversity and difference. Therefore, we also explored whether and how anti-bias education and principles were being implemented in the classroom. Anti-bias education teachings were more broadly applied across children's multiple identities (race, language, special needs, religion, family diversity, etc.). The following section describes in more detail how socio-cultural development was conceptualized and operationalized in this study.

Socio-Cultural Development

Multicultural scholars argue that immersing students in their culture, by espousing culturally affirming teaching practices develops children who see themselves as cultural workers and leaders. These practices, in turn, reverse the current trend of low performance among these groups once they enter primary school (Freire, 1973; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Multicultural scholars argue, however, that to truly improve the long-term educational outcomes and reverse trends of historically low performance of diverse student populations, schools must view learning through the lens of the child (Beasley, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Hilliard, 1997). In other words, educators should connect children's school experiences with their cultural reality. For example, as learners, whenever we attempt to make sense of our world, we construct an understanding of the event by using our prior knowledge, past experiences, and cultural references or tools.

Children's Social-Cultural Awareness

According to Lev Vygotsky's social cultural theory, thinking and learning is highly

influenced by language, social interactions, and culture (Driscoll and Nagel, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2009). Development is viewed as social and collective rather than purely individual. The development of social cognition involves a complex network of social, emotional, and cognitive development. Children proceed through a process of self-awareness, self-understanding, and understanding of others in which they notice gender, racial, and physical disabilities during their third year of life (Sparks & ABC Taskforce, 1989). In fact, infants are already aware of themselves while toddlers at age 2 can express their feelings verbally (Umek, 2000). Children two-to-three years old become aware of and begin to take in socially prevailing negative ideas, feelings and stereotypes about people and about themselves (Sparks, 1993). Kutner (1985) notes that racial prejudice in young children leads to distortion of judgment and perception of reality. Children are exposed to these ideas and perceptions through parents, peers, caregivers, media, movies, and children books. Nevertheless, a child's interactions with parents, other children, community, and caregivers can inevitably shape their perception and judgment of others different from themselves (Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This is especially critical to consider when the classroom is ethnically heterogenous. Therefore, a more comprehensive view of culturally responsiveness will be applied in this study to not only include how the early childhood programs uses the child's cultural tools but also promotes affirmative social awareness of other cultures as well.

Empathy and Cultural Awareness

Throughout childhood, children continue to elaborate on their ideas of the identity of others, feelings of human differences, and on their feelings about their own cultural identity. Empathy is closely related to the theory of the mind and the development of social cognition. It is as Umek (2000) asserts that the development and encouragement of empathy allows students

to reflect on these feelings and ideas. Empathy can be defined as the cognitive or affective awareness of a person's inner states. Children as early as three are able to empathize with others if they have experienced, indirectly or directly, similar feelings or emotional responses (Umek, 2000). For example, consider the following scenario: *Maria, 4 years old, sees a stereotypical "Indian warrior" figure in the toy store. "That toy hurts Indian people's feelings," she tells her grandmother.* In this example Maria empathizes with the feelings of Native American people. However, of greater importance is that Maria was able to determine that the toy would hurt the Native American's feelings, for this had to occur prior to her emphasizing with their feelings. Either Maria was herself an Indian (direct empathizing) or she was exposed (indirect empathizing) to a curriculum that supports sensitivity to other cultures.

In occurrences where prejudice and stereotypes have distorted a child's perception of others, Hyun's (2003b) research tells us young children have the intellectual capacity for undoing any pre-existing unfair perceptions of others as they engage in meaningful experiences. Teachers can be reassured in the power of using teachable moments and developmentally and culturally appropriate practices to address the prejudice, stereotypes, and negative perceptions young children have developed. The mission and vision of educators should thus be to provide teachable moments that develop into authentic learning moments for students. Teachers are to be equipped with immediate and appropriate reactions to children who display prejudicial, stereotypical, or racist actions towards themselves or others. As addressed, research supports the claim that all children, regardless of ethnicity, ability, or economic status, are able to empathize and be sensitive to others different from themselves if schooled and nurtured in an environment that celebrates, acknowledges, and respects diversity.

Culturally Responsive Education¹

¹ Culturally responsive education and culturally responsive pedagogy are used interchangeably in this

Social cultural theory views learning as culturally mediated. Therefore, looking through the lens of the child requires teachers to implement curriculum and instructional practices that are culturally sensitive and relative to the child's experience. As presented by Gay (2000), culturally responsive experiences uses "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective [for students]....It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29). Howard (2003) further proclaims that pedagogy that is culturally relevant is validating and affirming because it challenges teachers to

“acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, placements, and critique their own thoughts to ensure they don't reinforce prejudice behavior. Second, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the explicit connection between culture and learning and sees students' cultural capital as an asset” (p.198).

Thus, as described by Gay (2000) and Howard (2003), culturally responsive pedagogy entails connecting learning and classroom experiences to children's home discourses and experiences. To effectively do this Ladson-Billings (1994) reports that teachers and programs must first believe that all students can succeed, maintain an affirming student-teacher relationship, and believe that assessment must incorporate multiple forms of excellence. Hilliard (2000, 2006) further notes schools should abandon the typical deficit ideology portrayed in such labels as 'at risk' and disadvantaged, and instead view their roles as awakening the natural genius in students (Hilliard, 2000, 2006). Secondly, such teaching sees excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual differences into account. Teachers and programs with culturally responsive experiences help students make connections between students' community, national,

paper.

and global identities. It also encourages children to work collaboratively and expects them to teach and take responsibility for each other (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 1999). Therefore, in this study we explored how teachers created experiences for each student that drew upon their cultural tools and how interactions and teachings were culturally responsive.

Anti-Bias Education

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) further purports teachers should infuse children's culture in the classroom while simultaneously develop children's awareness of how race, gender, language, and physical ability are greatly connected to power and privilege. Known as anti-bias education, Derman-Sparks (1993) argues that children should have experiences that develop anti-bias attitudes, engage them in critical pedagogy, and teach children how to speak out against injustice. Therefore in this study, we applied anti-bias education to identify ways in which the teachers helped to promote children's awareness of self and others within an anti-bias framework. Table 2 describes the basic core goals and educational principles of Anti-bias education that was used as one of the theoretical lens in this study.

Table 2. *Anti-bias educational goals and principles*

Anti-bias Education Core Goals	Anti-bias Educational Principles
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Each child will demonstrate awareness, confidence, family pride and positive social identities

Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences and deep, caring human connections.

Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

The four anti-bias education goals are for everyone, and everyone benefits

Anti-bias education activities pay attention to the realities of children's lives.

Anti bias education is developmentally appropriate.

Anti-bias education planning uses both child centered and teacher centered initiatives activities.

Anti-bias learning does not happen in one lesson or one day.

Anti-bias education calls on teachers to know themselves.

Anti-bias education avoids the pitfall of tourist curriculum

Anti-bias education rests on strong relationships among staff and between staff and families.

(Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p.4-9)

To effectively implement anti-bias educational goals and principles, scholars suggest teachers must not only implement culturally responsive practices but also infuse the goals and principles outlined in Table 2 across disciplines. It is key however to avoid engaging in a 'tourist curriculum' which often occurs in early childhood programs particularly during thematic lessons during holidays. A tourist curriculum is defined as one that patronizes and trivializes a group of people. The real life experiences and everyday realities of people from different cultures are not captured (Derman-Sparks, 2010). Derman-Sparks argues that instead teachers should celebrate the comprehensive diversity of students (i.e., family styles, gender, physical differences, culture, etc.) by employing culturally affirming relevant practices. The environment should display

pictures and posters of children, parents, and staff in the program as well as represent other racial/ethnic groups. Pictures and posters should display students with handicaps, elderly people, and men and women in various recreational and working capacities (men as nurses, women as firemen etc.). Toys and materials should reflect diversity in gender roles, racial and cultural backgrounds, special needs, occupations, and age ranges. Diversity can be most powerfully reflected in books and music selections, with dolls, and art material. The environment should also be equipped with mirrors so that children are given opportunities to check out their physical appearances.

To help further stimulate children's sensitivity towards others different from themselves Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) recommends that teachers/caregivers attend to the nonverbal and verbal expression of interest equally between boys and girls, special needs and non-handicapped, and children of color. Caregivers should offer immediate and appropriate response to students who display bias behavior. Their role is to facilitate and support children's explorations and interests of others (skin color, hair textures). Lastly, in an anti-bias classroom all children are supported in their preferred learning styles and encouraged to try new ways of interacting with people and materials (Derman-Sparks, 1993).

Teacher's Role and Development

Scholars suggest that in order for teachers to maintain a culturally responsive and anti-bias program, they must have a conscious awareness of their own multiple identities -ethnic, linguistic, cultural, gender, and socio-economic (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2005). Positively impacting the lives of children from diverse backgrounds requires a focus on teaching that is culturally responsive to children and a teacher preparation that involves reflective thinking on how to create responsive environments for children. While fostering reflectivity in teacher education programs is difficult, scaffolding reflectivity that is *critical* in nature is very

challenging and often absent from traditional teacher preparation programs (Sleeter, 2008). Even when teacher education programs introduce macro issues such as racism and discrimination, preservice teachers still struggle with these concepts and often embrace the act of colorblindness as a default for affirming diversity (Castro, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; McIntyre, 2002; Valli, 1992). An 'I-don't-see-color' view of the children, while made with good intentions by teachers, influences whether they capitalize on the cultural and linguistic tools children bring with them to the classroom (Carter, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Groulx & Silva, 2010; Hilliard, 1997, 2006; Sleeter, 2008) and limits their abilities to reflect outside their immediate realm (e.g., that lesson, that day, that class).

Thus, teachers must also be willing and able to step back and critically re-examine their own interpretations of the identities of the children they teach (Banks, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004). It is critical for teachers to reflect on how their current instructional program and social environment may or may not contribute to student discrimination and cultural disconnect. Teachers must come to understand, appreciate, and show sensitivity to cultural differences as they interact with students and parents in the classroom. In this study we examine just how teachers within an early childhood program identified within the community as 'quality' help encourage the socio-cultural development of the young children in their care. Socio-cultural development is defined as creating an early care environment that is culturally responsive and draws upon children's cultural and familial tools while also supporting and creating an anti-bias social engagement and awareness.

Methods

Research Questions

In this study we examined how teachers, parents and children within a quality, ethnically

diverse early childhood program conceptualized and experienced culturally responsive pedagogy and anti-bias education. We asked: What are teachers and parents beliefs about and experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and anti-bias education within an ethnically diverse early childhood program and How are children’s socio-cultural development and awareness encouraged in a quality early childhood program?

Case Study Methodology

As represented in Table 2, an ethnographic qualitative case study approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) was most fitting because it allowed us to capture individual and collaborative processes of understandings and development of an anti-bias and culturally responsive ethos. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research holds the view that knowledge and reality are socially mediated and constructed. A naturalistic paradigm was selected for this study because it is flexible and evolves contextually in response to the lived realities and experiences encouraged in the early childhood program (Merriam, 1998). The strength in using this type of research approach was it offered a richer, more in-depth understanding of the how the adults and children were experiencing CRP and Anti-bias education teaching practices (Borg, Gall and Gall, 1993).

Table 2

Ethnographic Case Study Application

Case Study Characteristics	Applications to Study
Explores contemporary phenomenon in real life context (Yin 2003)	Multiple data sources (surveys, observational field notes, interview transcripts)

Case study methodology uses diverse data collection methods (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003)

Constructions of socio-cultural development and understandings

Bounded system, single unit (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998).

Early childhood program case Bounded by cultural contexts (professional, personal, and familial)

Descriptive and heuristic

Holistic and descriptive exploration of research questions

Context

This study took place within a quality, ethnically diverse early childhood program in the Midwest for one year. Quality was defined as a program that was licensed and had received some form of distinction locally or nationally (e.g. NAEYC accreditation; designated as Center of Excellence; laboratory school). The program in this study, hereafter called Kids Play, is a high quality children's program where college students (undergraduate and graduate) train to be teachers. Scholars learn more about young children through research. It is a nationally accredited program that offers full day childcare services for children eighteen months through five years. As a teacher training facility, university students assist in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities with the children, under the supervision of the Master and lead teachers in the classrooms. In this study, the duration of the internship experiences ranged from two months to the entire year, with an average of 5 months as the normative stay for pre-service teachers and graduate assistants. Furthermore, Kids Play exceeds state licensing requirements and NAEYC recommendations for the adult to child ratio in the classrooms with the goal of providing each child individualized attention.

Participants. Under the auspices of IRB, the researchers collected data from two pre-school classrooms (2-5 year olds) over the course of five semester sessions Summer 2010-Summer 2011. Participants included 28 children, nine parents, 51 teachers (master, lead, graduate students and pre-service teachers), and one program director with a total sample of 79 participants. The children and families served in the early childhood program in this study represented over ten different nationalities and spoke languages ranging from English, Spanish, Korean, Hebrew, and Chinese. The children and families also are diverse in socio-economics and religious affiliation. Similar to most university laboratory schools, a majority of the children have one or more parents who are employed by or a student of the University. Ninety eight percent of the teachers and director identified as White and middle to upper class. All teacher participants were native English Speakers. There was one male teacher participant. Eighty five percent of teachers were also born either in the state in which the study took place and/or the Midwest.

Data Collection

Data sources included 29 descriptive survey memos (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Love & Krueger, 2005); 16 individual teacher interview transcripts; seven group interview transcripts (teacher and parent); and 21 observational field notes (classroom and community). Descriptive memos for survey, observational, and interview data were written to summarize the findings, researchers' comments and initial hunches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of the surveys was to descriptively identify the teachers' attitudes towards and efficacy in implementing culturally responsive and anti-bias educational practices in the classroom and exposure and experience with diverse cultural groups. Individual semi-structured interviews (approximately an hour per teacher participant) were then conducted providing an opportunity

for each teacher to expand and clarify responses from the survey and provide insights on his or her beliefs and experiences facilitating CRP and anti-bias educational experiences. The classroom observations identified how the physical classroom environment, teacher-child interactions, and non-verbal communication represented (or not) culturally relevant and anti-bias teaching and learning. The community observations included monthly ‘family nights’ sponsored by the early childhood program and community cultural events. They provided insights on how teachers interacted and engaged with children and their families within a more informal social and cultural context. Examples of the community events included a jazz concert, cultural potluck dinners (two observed), science and nature exploration (Bird Festival), and culture quilt museum visit. Lastly, drawing upon preliminary analysis of observational field notes and teacher interview transcripts, parent group interviews were conducted (two mid year and one end of the year). These interviews allowed an opportunity for parents to share their beliefs and experiences about facilitating the socio-cultural development of their young child both within the home and in collaboration with the classroom teacher. To ensure the authentic voices of participants were captured, we engaged in follow up member checking sessions with a sample of participants during each phase of the data collection. The culmination of these data collection procedures provided a holistic portrait of teachers, parents and children’s experiences constructing socially and culturally affirming classroom environments. This article will particularly focus on presenting findings related to how teacher’s facilitated children’s socio-cultural growth and development.

Data Analysis

A two-tiered coding system was used to analyze the interviews transcripts, observational field notes and descriptive memos of survey data. Data were divided into meaningful units

consisting of phrases in interview transcripts or written records anywhere from one sentence to a page and a half. These data units were indicative of the participants' experiences and beliefs in supporting children's socio-cultural development. After units were identified, we conducted a topical analysis. The first level of analysis identified practices or beliefs (spoken and/or observed) in which participants either explicitly or implicitly referred to or engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-bias/teaching philosophies, instructional methods, personal histories, institutional/political ideologies, and/or teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The second level of analysis involved open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in which we developed patterns to describe each participant's understandings and beliefs about anti-bias education and simultaneously connecting these beliefs to experiences to ways in which children's socio-cultural development was being encouraged. The interactions, voices, and experiences of the children were coded as a proxy to the teachings and interactions of the adults in their lives. Descriptive memos were written throughout the analysis process to track emergent findings and themes and were not analyzed themselves.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Several methods were used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Data were collected over an extended period to allow for prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of multiple data sources offered supporting evidence for the findings (interview transcripts, observational field notes, descriptive memos and member-checking written records). Furthermore, to ensure that we authentically captured participants' voices, we regularly reflected on how our own beliefs and biases influenced data interpretation. Member-checking conversations occurred throughout the study with a sample of the teacher and parent sample in which tentative interpretations of the data were shared to ensure that their experiences

were authentically captured (Merriam, 1998). Finally, a peer who was trained in qualitative analysis helped to confirm coding during the within-case and cross-case analyses (Yin, 2003).

However, like all research studies, limitations are important to consider. This case is not intended to generalize across all ethnically diverse early childhood programs, but rather to give nuance to extant theories and research about ways in which children's social and cultural development can be fully supported within early childhood education. Also, findings do not indicate strict developmental progressions in a teacher's development towards an understanding and philosophy of anti-bias education and CRP. Therefore, when examining the teacher participants' interview transcripts in particular, there is always the dilemma of whether the teachers are telling the researchers what they want to hear. Thus, we hope that by connecting the classroom and community observations, and survey results to the teacher participants' interview transcripts over the course of the year, we captured a genuine glimpse of how they were experiencing and conceptualizing how best to support children's socio-cultural development.

Results

In this study we drew upon the multiple perceptions and experiences of children, teachers, and parents. However, this article will focus on presenting the experiences and beliefs of the teacher sample as they engaged in teaching children from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Within this context of identifying how these teachers encouraged the socio-cultural development of the children in their care, the voices and experiences of parents and children will be presented. There were multiple ways in which the teachers helped to facilitate the socio-cultural growth of the young children in their care. These strategies were categorized as two primary themes: responsive curriculum and family partnerships and

communication. Furthermore, a key finding that we will also present is the mediating factors that impacted the experiences and opportunities for teachers to implement culturally responsive and anti-bias education within the classroom. We categorize this finding as the process from which teachers were developing a teacher identity inclusive of these theoretical principles and practices.

Responsive Curriculum. To fully capture the unique experiences and voices of teachers at various levels in their professional and educational careers, we collected and analyzed data in three teacher ‘sets’. These sets included pre-service teachers; graduate and in service teachers and a center director. Across this developmental spectrum, all teacher participants reflected during the interviews and member checking sessions how the emergent, child centered foci of the curriculum allowed them more flexibility to engage in children’s curiosity concerning their social and cultural differences and similarities. The curricular approach promoted in the early childhood program is the Reggio Emilia Approach. According to this philosophy of teaching and learning, children are given opportunities to engage in developing problem solving skills by participating in open dialogs and debates within the pre-school classroom (Edwards, 2003). Families and children are encouraged to participate in ‘democratic meetings’ in which they discuss and express ideas and are encouraged to become active and contributing members of the learning community within the early childhood program. From a curriculum perspective, the role of the teacher is to support children as they explore and investigate the world around them by providing intentional, child-centered interactions and instructional opportunities.

As we examined how children’s socio-cultural development was encouraged in this setting, we found that the Reggio Emilia approach was instrumental in setting the foundational framework for teachers to espouse a culturally responsive ethos and to implement anti-bias teaching. Take for example, the following reflection by the program director during an individual

interview session in which she explains how the program helps young children value the diversity of self and others:

I think it [curriculum] facilitates easily to be open to all components of diversity. We are asking the teacher to be planning experiences that are child centered and so that takes us knowing who the child is and how do we best support the child.

In another example one of the Master Teachers said the following concerning how children's culture and diversity is valued in the classroom and represented in learning experiences:

Within our curriculum... we were asking the teachers to be planning experiences that are child-centered, and so what that takes the student teacher and us knowing who the child is and how do we best support the child, so that includes how was the family impacting the child, and how it is, maybe is a disability, how do that impact the child and the environments and even just different hair colors sometimes may have impact of the experiences they are having. So for me, I am seeing as a teacher being intentional, and their approaches and strategies of what they are choosing to interact provide the experiences for the children.

As articulated in these two quotes and further expressed by multiple teacher participants throughout the study, the Reggio Emilia curricular approach espoused in the early childhood program was identified as the key mechanism for supporting children's social and cultural development. We found through observational data results that the curriculum allowed for teachers to engage in developmentally appropriate practice and child-centered educational experiences which represent two of the anti-bias educational principles (Derman-Sparks, 2010). For example, one of the primary themes children were interested in exploring was nature and weather. Teachers facilitated children's exploration of this topic by engaging children in

instructional lessons on this topic. For example, books, finger plays, and small group activities were intentionally considered to support children's learning. Even one of the family nights focused on this topic. While the teachers were very intentional concerning building upon children's interest in weather and nature, there were few documented observations of ways in which these materials, interactions and scaffolding of children's learning were culturally responsive. For example, none of the books or resources used were bilingual or represented any of the languages children spoke. Also, only local weather patterns and explorations of nature were presented but not those representing the children's native countries. Likewise, few opportunities of creating a culturally responsive and specific instructional environment therefore led to few observational opportunities to support children's socio-cultural awareness. Therefore we did not observe the intentional implementation of anti-bias educational practices as specific to multiple elements of diversity.

What we did however observe how teachers were evidence of beliefs in and practices of culturally responsive education. We found that all teachers had a respect for and were intentional in allowing spaces for children to use their native language when communicating. As one teacher reflected "groups of kids talk Chinese to each other, which is great. We love that. But it is hard for us, you know, we can't necessarily do that [speak Chinese]." There were several instances mentioned during the teacher group and individual interviews about 'allowing' opportunities for children to speak their native language during small group sessions as indicators for supporting and promoting a culturally responsive environment. One teacher mentioned how allowing children to speak in their native language provided opportunities for 'teachable moments' in creating a more culturally and responsive inclusive environment for English Language Learners while addressing any cultural misconceptions. She reflected:

We had something happen at our family block. Two kids speak Chinese and the little girl doesn't speak out in English that much because she is an English language learner, all of a sudden she and the little boy started talking in Chinese together talking about things they would like to do ohm one of the other little girls says oh you're from Chinese and that was a misconception that they had and so we just went with it and said they're from China but they live here in the United States here in [city] but they're from here, live here and just speak Chinese so it was really neat to see that.

Interestingly however, in teacher's attempts to affirm the linguistic tools of the children in their classroom, they experienced pedagogical challenges with assessment and instruction. For example, we observed clusters of children dialoging in their native language both during small group and free play activities in some cases the entire period. As a result, both the native English speaking peers and teachers were excluded primarily from the learning experience and environment; the anti-thesis of culturally responsive and anti-bias education.

While there seemed to be this challenge in balancing tenants of culturally responsive education with creating inclusive instructional opportunities for all students attempts were made to draw upon the cultural tools within the local community. For example, a partnership was formed with the local Confucius Institute to have a Chinese teacher come one day a week to teach children Chinese language and culture for twenty minutes. This was an intentional opportunity by teachers to introduce children to a language and culture represented in the center. Also it represented the ongoing challenge many of the teachers in the study expressed of how to introduce to young children the concepts of culture and language in a developmentally

appropriate manner as expressed by a teacher below:

We have a Chinese student that comes in every week and she has been teaching the students ohm her language from China, it's been really hard for her to get it down to the preschool level but we could say not to do it but it's been good to have that exposure and she's been so good with talking about her culture and have immersed them in it this is where I'm from, you do this I do that, and not the differences but the similarities of how we do things, but come at it in different ways

Environmental Supports. A key element of being culturally responsive and implementing anti-bias educational goals is to have resources and a physical environment that promotes positive representation of children's home language, culture, and family diversity. We found multiple resources that support culturally responsive and anti-bias education. For example, over 50 books in the classroom libraries and resource center focused explicitly on multiple elements of diversity such as language, gender diversity, and children with special needs. The classroom library also included books children brought from home. One teacher reflected:

I think the center does a great job showing diverse backgrounds. We're constantly rotating our books and I notice that our children chose books that show like different ethnicities or represent their own ethnicity. One child brought a book home from her home language and was really excited to share with us even though we can't read it. Also, pictures of children and their families were displayed in the classroom and around the building. Particularly in each classroom there were photos of the families and a message written by the family. Some of these messages were in both English and the family's native language. There were also puzzles, toys, dolls and dramatic play items representing age, racial and gender diversity.

However based on observational and interview data very little interaction with these environmental tools were observed throughout the study by a majority of the teachers. Take below the reflection of one of the teachers when asked during an individual interview on ways in which the classroom environment included images of diverse people and also how teaching were intentional about discouraging stereotypes she reflected:

I don't feel that we do an adequate enough job in our environment that representing those specifically qualities [cultural diversity]. However we do know that we do have materials such as puzzles that might have a woman doctor, or might have a Chinese family, not in the Chinese setting, so there are in a park, or something like that. We know we have materials that are available, but they are not always accessible in the classroom.

Survey and interview data suggest that intentional and consistent use of these resources were not due to a lack of interest or priority for the teachers but rather a question of the level of efficacy in actually using these resources appropriately and effectively with children to meet anti-bias educational goals.

Family Partnership and Communication

While there were few examples of teachers engaging in environmental tools and anti-bias teaching, we did find an intentional implementation and focus on building an authentic learning community and relationship with families. Drawing upon the cultural tools and knowledge of parents is not only a critical framework in culturally responsive education but “anti-bias education rests on strong relationships among staff and between staff and families” (Derman-Sparks, 2010, p. 9). Across all teacher interviews, communicating with families and drawing upon their cultural tools and knowledge was deemed especially critical to their work and the child's socio-cultural development. As stated by the program director, teachers were constantly

reflecting on appropriate and most effective strategies in balancing developmentally appropriate practice while respecting parent's cultural beliefs and values:

We have to actually get to know the family. Get to know the dreams for their child. Uh, the concerns that the family has, what their goals are, and what the family has identified. Then how we can then be responsive to those goals. Even if it's an inappropriate goal, even if they're saying they want their three-year-old to learn, you know, to read and write.

Teachers were intentional in providing opportunities to draw upon the cultural knowledge and tools of the families in their classroom. For example, each month teachers planned a 'family night' in which families were invited to the facility or another community venue. Again within the constructs of the Reggio Emilia approach, the intended purpose of these family nights were to help develop a learning community and partnership with families. They also served as an opportunity for families and staff to interact informally and socially. Parents agreed that the concept of the family nights helped to bridge home-school connections and partnerships. However, parents shared how more intentional efforts in connecting families were needed as well as introducing families to teachers from other classrooms. For example, during one of the group interviews, one parent reflected the following about the family nights

I think that goes all the way back to what I said earlier with the parent cuz you do those [family] nights. You know, we had that great (Bird Festival) this year! Every teacher was there. That would have been the perfect opportunity to introduce all the parents, maybe just the kids at least.

And another parent commented, "They have these [family] nights and you get together and do something but no one ever says, "Welcome! What's everyone's name?" You know, "who is your

child?”. We found from observing the family nights that there were particular themes and topics planned, however as reflected by the parents, few opportunities to evoke and promote engagement between families and teachers.

Another interesting caveat we found however was during a majority of the events, the parents engagement was similar to the child peer groups we observed in the classroom. For example, families either engaged cordially, not at all or within groups based on ethnicity. We proceed with caution on this finding because we contend that engagement of families and children based on ethnicity in the classroom and during family nights were the result of the proximity in which these families lived and also the existing friendships developed out of school.

When we asked parents to reflect on how the program supported their child’s social and cultural development, there was a consensus that the teachers attempted to draw upon the family’s culture and tools. Parents felt that teachers were intentional and consistent in their efforts to communicate with them about their child’s learning and growth specifically as it related to cultural considerations. For example, parents had a shared belief that there was an ‘open door policy’ for them to share their culture and language in their classroom. However, they felt that more support was needed to consistently integrate their home culture and language throughout the curriculum, interactions and activities. For example, one parent reflected during a group interview:

Um one of the things Kids’ Play has always been really great at is letting me come in and share our family tradition um every year now. It’s true, I volunteer, you know I’ll remind them, “Hey, it’s that time of year, let me come in and do this!” But they, in fact, have no problem with it. They enjoy it.

The kids are aware of the fact that my son doesn’t celebrate Christmas, that he’s

not a Christmas person. Um, on the other hand, uh, you know, sometimes it's funny because they'll have projects where all the kids are making ornaments... And, of course we don't have a Christmas tree. So they have something else for him to do but it's clear he's not doing what everybody else is doing.

Here we see how the parent has taken an initiative to share her cultural and family traditions in the classroom but felt as though further support was needed by the teachers in providing a more culturally responsive and inclusive classroom environment for children.

Family Communication. An essential element in culturally responsiveness and anti-bias education is understanding how to effectively and authentically communicate with parents. More specifically, when communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse families, teachers must account for the cultural and linguistic differences that could serve as barriers and opportunities. In this study, we found that teachers utilized multiple forms of communication with families. The Master and Lead teachers in the classroom communicated daily and primarily during morning and afternoon pickup with each parent in their respective classrooms. Formal communication concerning the child's growth occurred during quarterly parent-teacher meetings. When pre-service teachers began their internship experience in the classroom, they are assigned a 'family group' and were required to maintain ongoing communication with the parent and also to learn more about the unique needs of the child and family. This was done through explicit activities such as home visits and morning/afternoon family greetings.

Another approach implemented and expressed by both teachers and parents as a key way to build awareness of diversity and build home-school connections was the use of two-way folders. In the two-way folders teachers provided a summary of the learning experiences of the

child throughout the week and the parent had an opportunity to respond and write back to the teacher. This communication strategy was found to be especially helpful for both teachers concerned about communicating effectively with parents whose native language was not English and also to the parents' themselves. In other words, a majority of the parents whose first language was not English found it beneficial to be able to dialog with teachers using this written form of communication and teachers noted that the bilingual parents participated more consistently and extensively than native English parents in the two-way folders. Parents also suggested how these two-way folders could have been used more explicitly to address the cultural experiences that occurred in the classroom. For example, one parent shared the following:

I think it [two way folders] would help address if there were diversity issues or culture issues or if there were something special coming up multiculturally for somebody. Or, if there was an issue your kid brought home, I mean in the car yeah, but if somebody asked me about it then I could say, "Yeah they did ask me why.." There's also a child on the Autism spectrum, with severe Autism, in their group and one of [my child's] questions was, "How come he can't say Big X?"

Here we see how the parent has observed that this communication strategy could be easily modified to support children's socio-cultural awareness of other children in the classroom (anti-bias education). This is an essential because all parents shared experiences and 'parentable' moments in which anti-bias opportunities presented itself in the home that were often connected to the child's experiences, observations and interactions within the early childhood program. For example, parents noted that their children would ask them questions concerning issues of

diversity in the classroom or within their home and questioned how to appropriately respond to their young child:

My daughter notices what matches and what doesn't match. She's like, "Mommy, your hair and my hair match. But my dad, my skin matches daddy's skin"...sometimes we'll see someone who looks different and instead of going, "Sssh... you can't say that.." we go, "Oh yeah, they do look different... their hair is different isn't it? It doesn't match." I don't know if that really directly answers the question, but it should be talked about.

As we reflected upon such instances when analyzing the data, we asked whether and how teachers' were equipped with infusing anti-bias principles in the classroom. We observed and had documented evidence of a belief and value in creating culturally responsive environments for the children and families in the program, but little evidence of actual anti-bias teachings and educational experiences for children. In other words, what pedagogical skills are needed for teachers to assist parents in promoting anti-bias principles in the home? While this question is beyond the scope of this research, we were able to capture the process from which teachers' were beginning to develop a culturally responsive ethos in order to begin to implement anti-bias education.

Teacher Development. As we explored teachers' perceptions and experiences with culturally responsive and anti-bias education, we found that by engaging in this research study, a heightened awareness of the role of children's culture and language to their professional development and emerging teacher identities occurred. This is key because over the course of the year we were therefore able to document and observe a transformative process between many of the participants in the program.

The teachers identified as being more culturally responsive and promoting anti-bias

sentiments in the classroom had two shared characteristics. Teachers with previous interactions with diverse populations reflected more critically during interview sessions about their role in supporting the social and cultural development of the children in their care. These teachers also intentionally connected with families to infuse children's language, culture and home norms into the classroom. Also, teachers committed to an anti-bias education and cultural responsive environment were eager and expected to learn from children and their families. They were often named specifically by parents from the study as intentionally seeking resources and information about the family's culture and home life. These teachers also exclaimed the importance of becoming a cultural learner of children.

Whether a teacher was conscious of the importance in reciprocal learning with children or not, our findings suggested that the diverse context of the early childhood program inevitably impacted teacher's personal and professional growth. For example, 90% of the teacher sample were White, middle class females whereas 70% of their student and family populations were ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse. For many of the teacher participants, this was their first experience as the 'minority'; culturally and linguistically. Therefore, they were experiencing simultaneously two processes in their teacher development "how I see myself-culturally" "how I see my students culturally". As teacher's consciously and sub-consciously reflected on the cultural mismatch and differences, they then had to examine how best to negotiate differing familial and cultural norms with programmatic best practices. Therefore, as a dissonance between their perceptions of classroom norms and 'best practices' begin to clash with children's home culture and norms, teachers began a journey in exploring not only the culture of the children in their care but also a heightened awareness of their own culture as represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Processes of constructing of culturally responsive and anti-bias understandings*



We found that teachers who were more culturally responsive in their belief and approach to supporting children's socio-cultural development responded differently when engaging in this teacher identity development process. For example, these teachers were conscious of their multiple identities, espoused more culturally responsive and anti-bias sentiments; engaged in critical reflectivity, had a mastery of intentional teaching and pedagogical experience and had previous exposure growing up and/or working with diverse children and families. On the other hand, teachers who were just beginning to reflect on their own cultural identity and how to engage in culturally responsive and anti-bias education struggled to see themselves as culturally responsive and anti-bias pedagogues and in turn became de-sensitized by the diversity represented in the classrooms. While we found that teachers responded differently to the emerging consciousness and awareness of how best to support children's socio-cultural

development, there were professional development opportunities available both prior to and as a result of participating in this study. For example, each week teachers engaged in critical reflection sessions concerning classroom practices and experiences. Halfway into the study, we found that the lead teachers were more intentional about discussing culturally specific experiences and approaches. Furthermore, the program director invited author one to engage the teachers in professional development training focused specifically on infusing culturally responsive and anti-bias education in the early childhood program. Pre-service teachers had taken an entry level course focusing on topics of cultural diversity however during the group interview, these teachers noted how this course made few practical applications to early childhood education.

Discussion

In this study we asked how teachers encouraged children's socio-cultural development and awareness within a quality, ethnically diverse early childhood program. In doing so, we explored their beliefs and experiences with culturally responsive and anti-bias education. We found there were multiple ways in which the teachers promoted children's socio-cultural development. For example, all teachers expressed the importance of engaging in culturally responsive education with the children in their care. Implementing a curriculum such as Reggio Emilia provided the foundational latitude to truly connect with children's interest and cultural tools and knowledge. We found evidence of teachers 'allowing' children to speak their native language in the classroom. However, culturally responsive education includes more than 'allowing' children to speak their native language when they take the initiative, it also includes intentionally encouraging and promoting children's culture and language within the classroom. Although implemented as a separate learning opportunity, teachers did connect with a local

community agency to teach children Chinese language and culture. Recommended next steps would include directly collaborating with the Confucius Institute instructor on ways to extend and infuse the lessons and information within the actual early childhood classrooms daily and throughout the year.

Furthermore, there were environmental resources such as puzzles, books, music, family pictures, children's artwork that communicated a value in cultural diversity of self and others. We conclude however that a more intentional and conscious effort be made to implement and fully integrate culturally responsive and anti-bias education in the early childhood program. To do this however requires a more facilitated approach to first engaging teachers in critical reflection on their own cultural beliefs and values then experiences learning about culturally responsive and anti-bias philosophies and teaching. The curricular approach and philosophy espoused by the program allows for such exploration and implementation with the understanding of the importance of reflecting on how my perception of what I perceive to be of cultural importance and interest of the children in my care can positively and/or negatively influence their socio-cultural development.

Teachers can learn from parents on where to begin with understanding how cultural responsiveness and anti-bias education can be conceptualized in this early childhood program. For example, in keeping with the Reggio Emilia approach, teachers can engage parents in a democratic dialog and learning community event focusing on ways to integrate families' culture and language in the classroom and help develop children's socio-cultural awareness of self and others. We found that teachers attempted to forge authentic relationships and communication with families by implementing monthly family nights and engaging in multiple and diverse forms of communication. Parents reflected on the value of these attempts towards developing a

authentic learning community but expressed a need for more explicit opportunities to have intentional activities that highlight their family's differences and similarities within and outside the classroom.

Lastly, while such exposure to diverse children and their families provided optimal opportunities to develop and grow as a culturally responsive and anti-bias teachers, we found in some cases, the diverse child population actually desensitized some of the teachers. Instead of being an opportunity for professional growth, children's cultural tools and identities were perceived as a barrier to delivering instruction, assessment and to their own development as a teacher. Therefore unlike the current rhetoric in multicultural education concerning how a majority of White pre-service and in-service teachers adopt a color-blind stance in the classroom (Sleeter, 2008; Ullucci & Battey, 2011), because of the diverse range of ethnicities represented among children and families, these teachers were very much conscious of color and culture. However, for some teachers, this consciousness coupled with teaching and learning to teach became too much of a complex cognitive and socially constructive process. For example, as some teachers were able to demonstrate, to effectively integrate anti-bias education within an ethnically diverse classroom requires belief in and understanding its principles; efforts in learning about the multiple cultures represented and your own culture; critical reflectivity of personal bias and beliefs; modification of 'best practices' to meet the diverse needs of the children you are teaching; and skills to genuinely draw upon and seek the cultural tools of parents. Arguably for teachers who are new to the field or pre-service teachers, this is an exhaustive task and requires ongoing coaching, support and mentorship. A critical question then becomes, what responsibility do we have in teacher education to be intentional in the professional supports to provide teachers at all levels concerning anti-bias education teachings?

Based on our findings, there were several questions in which future research can explore. We used qualitative methods to examine the research questions. Therefore, future research can use a mixed methods approach to explore both the predictive factors associated with the development of culturally responsive and anti-bias pedagogues and how teacher educators can facilitate construction of culturally responsive identities across diverse levels of cultural competency. Such research can also explore the influence of the early childhood curriculum and instructional approaches adopted in the program on implementing culturally responsive and anti-bias practices. Also in teachers' attempt to be culturally responsive we found how this approach disengaged and excluded other members of the learning community. Therefore, researchers could further explore the challenges and opportunities for providing culturally responsive spaces for young children in classrooms representing multiple languages. Future research can explore how and when teachers become de-sensitized of the relevance of culture and language when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Lastly, the voices and experiences of the children and family in this study gave further insights on how these two groups 'take initiative' in expressing the importance of their culture and language in the early childhood classroom. Therefore, future research can example, what pedagogical skills and professional supports are needed for teachers to partner with parents and children in creating culturally responsive and anti-bias environments within and outside the home. Also research can examine programs available for parents to support their ability to create an anti-bias home environment for their child(ren).

In closing we ask what is our role in teacher education and development in preparing a workforce that has the professional competencies and skills to provide quality experiences for the culturally and linguistically diverse children in their care? We argue, it is imperative to draw

upon the cultural and linguistic tools of children and families. An educational program that is culturally responsive to the child and encourages their socio-cultural awareness and anti-bias beliefs towards others is critical in our emerging global society and essential to maximizing children's learning experiences and future success. Culture still matters. Culture sensitivity, consciousness and awareness are all still integral components of teacher education conversation in early childhood education.

DRAFT

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