HEAD START INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS AND TEACHERS: CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PRACTICE, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND ABILITY TO
ADDRESS EACH

by

Mona M Assaf
A Dissertation
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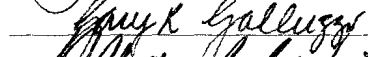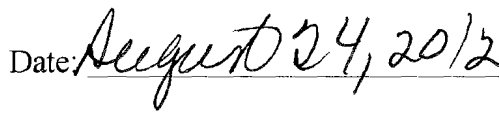Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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Children with Disabilities and Ability to Address Each

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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DEDICATION

To my family and friends, plus all of the children and families I have worked with.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

HEAD START INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS AND TEACHERS: CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PRACTICE, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND ABILITY TO
ADDRESS EACH

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George Mason University, 2012

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This qualitative study examined instructional assistants' (IAs) and teachers' perceptions

of culturally responsive and quality instructional practices for young children, especially

those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those who might have

disabilities from low socioeconomic families, in Head Start classrooms. In two focus

groups, one for instructional assistants ($n = 5$) and one for teachers ($n=6$), participants

responded to open-ended interview questions regarding their experiences and

understanding of young children, families, and personal incidents related to culturally

responsive practices and providing quality instruction for all children and families,

especially children with disabilities. Several themes emerged through a constructivist

grounded theory, critical early childhood perspective, and analytic process: children and

families, open to learning, experiences of marginalization, powerless, myth of merit, and

fear. Organizational categories— culturally responsive, children with disabilities, and

perceived ability to enact each—resulted in each group's unique definitions of each. Themes within the organizational categories varied for IAs and teachers. Suggestions for future research and practice within Head Start classrooms and other programs and policy implications in early childhood education are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

I enter a Head Start classroom. I am there to introduce myself as the new teacher's mentor. "Oh, are you here to observe the kids I am referring to special education?" "No. I'm just here to hang out, get to know you and the children, to just see what I might be able to help you with." She seems disappointed but goes on with her morning routine. Meanwhile, I am looking around the room for a schedule of what the children are supposed to be doing. Finally, I ask a child I know. I have had many children from this school in my classroom, and I visit people in the school's neighborhood, so the children know me and I am familiar with the community. As the child is explaining things to me, the teacher yells at me from across the room, "I have not had time to make a schedule!" Okay, so that is something I can help her with. The morning goes on without any out-of-the-ordinary incidences. As the children are playing, I note that there are very few toys available. I wonder to myself: Does she not have any toys or are they put away for some reason? Also, even though I have made it clear I am not there as a special education teacher, she continues to bring it up. So I ask which children she thinks need special assistance in the classroom. She says, "LaShawn, Tashania, Jermaine, Jayden, Lawrence, Leticia," pointing to each one. I cannot believe it; she just named all of the African American children. I ask her if she notices anything about the children she just pointed out to me. "They all just do not listen and are always

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causing trouble in the room." Throughout the morning, I continue pointing out typical behavior of any group of 3 to 5 year olds with no schedule and limited play resources.

After the children leave, the teacher and I sit down to chat. I suggest that a schedule might help with some of the classroom behaviors. I ask her if she needs toys. "No. I have tons of stuff in storage," she responds. We talk about why she does not have more materials out when school started more than a month earlier. She explains that the children would just break everything and then goes back to the special education issue. Again, I ask if she notices similarities among the children she told me about, but she just continues her negative stereotypical attitude toward the children. Finally I say, "Every child you listed is African American. That is extremely problematic. Not all African American children have disabilities."

After this encounter, I continued to be her mentor, although I strongly suggested to the Head Start administrator that she go and observe more often. I also made sure the special education team stopped by my classroom after they went to the teacher's classroom to do observations. I did not share my experiences with them. When they completed their evaluation they both were shocked and communicated similar observations and concerns to mine. Fortunately, the teacher resigned in November of that same year. Experiences such as this created more questions than answers for me.

My experiences, theoretical knowledge, and reflections on how I teach and what strategies are best suited for all children and families, especially those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds or who might have disabilities, are the bases for this dissertation. I wonder: What would have happened to those six young children had the

teacher been able to refer all of them? Was she communicating commonly held beliefs? Does this happen often? Can such attitudes be changed? How? Does Head Start administrations encourage such attitudes? What impact do teacher attitudes have on the children's achievement, self-confidence, and future academic success? Does it matter that she was Anglo American? Do African American teachers possess similar biases? My involvement with a neighboring Head Start community-based program (definitions provided in Chapter 2) further enhanced this dissertation. Classroom observations, group interactions, and discussions during professional development sessions[1] with this group of Head Start instructional assistants[2] (IA) and teachers helped me to further refine and focus this study. For example, in one classroom a child asks the teacher a question in Spanish during playtime. The teacher quickly responds in an angry tone, "We do NOT speak that language around here!" In another classroom, a child is physically removed from the class during circle time even though there was a speech therapist in the room for him. "I've had enough of him," states the teacher. Although the child did not appear to have actually engaged in disruptive or abusive behavior, the teacher picks him up and

[1] These classroom observations were conducted as part of a George Mason University Promoting and Sustaining Intentional Teaching (PASIT) Head Start Professional Development/Research Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This project is described in more detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[2] Instructional assistants precede teachers throughout this dissertation because their data were collected first.

walks him to a neighboring classroom. These observations highlight why culturally

responsive practices and providing quality instructional experiences for all children,

especially children with disabilities, need to be discussed and addressed.[3] In addition,

they further support the need for professional development to meet the needs of in-

service early childhood teaching staff, especially in Head Start, to tackle such

inappropriate, oppressive teaching practices. Because Head Start programs are funded

and governed by U.S. federal policies, acts, and laws, I wondered what they call for and

how children and families are discussed. Do they perpetuate and encourage such

attitudes and classroom practices?

In this chapter, I briefly discuss each element of this study. Conceptual

framework sets the stage from which research questions were developed. Further

methods utilized investigate the research questions and provide information about the site

and participants in this dissertation study. Next, collected data are categorized and

reported on. Finally, I discuss and connect the findings to current theory and research

while addressing considerations and implications of this study. I report this process in a

linear manner to be succinct and clear, yet in reality each of the elements overlap, are

interconnected, and represent a complex process of constant reflection, analysis, and

thought. Throughout this study I remain focused on the most important participants in

---

[3] Initially this dissertation planned to investigate inclusive practices, yet during data

collection neither instructional assistants nor teachers discussed inclusion. Therefore

"inclusion" was changed to "quality instructional practices for all children, especially

children with disabilities."

any early childhood education setting, specifically Head Start, children, and families. All children deserve to experience teachers and schools that welcome, nurture, and see them for the competent human beings they are, even if they do not look or act the way the teacher expects them to or do not speak English.

Conceptual Framework

This study represents the culmination of my experiences and insights gained in various Head Start programs but specifically the one in which this dissertation occurs. Culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities, advocates for practices that foster relationships with children and families that are deeply rooted in respecting and understanding how each individual experiences the world around them; through this knowledge the teacher creates classroom communities and curriculum (Gay, 2011 & 2000; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Inherent in such practices is that all members of society possess knowledge that is useful for the classroom community (Moll & Greenburg, 1990). Meanwhile such a stance firmly recognizes and encourages awareness of the social realities people live in and the role society plays in oppressing other members of the group (Freire, 2000), for example not shying away from pointing out what the teacher in the opening example of this chapter did. From the stance of cultural responsiveness and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities, such incidences serve as potential topics of professional development and instructional support (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Findings from this dissertation study push this stance further by encouraging the involvement of all members of the Head Start community, instructional assistants,

teachers and administrators, in professional development and instructional support centered on culturally responsive practices and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities, to address some of the negative, oppressive attitudes communicated.

Research Questions

The research questions work together to address the ways in which this group of Head Start IAs and teachers understand the work they do and their personal experiences with culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities.

- How does this set of Head Start IAs and teachers in a community-based program understand and utilize culturally responsive practice and provide appropriate instruction for all children, especially those with disabilities?

- How is culturally responsive practice, which was designed for Anglo American teachers, understood and used by IAs and teachers who are and are *not* Anglo American?

- How is the instruction of children with disabilities influenced by Anglo American and *non*-Anglo American IAs' and teachers' personal experience and understanding of disability?

- What power to enact each of the aforementioned practices does this set of Head Start IAs and teachers perceive themselves as having?

In Chapter 3, I discuss that the research questions for this study initially involved questions discussing inclusion-teaching practices, because neither instructional assistants

nor teachers brought up or discussed inclusion, questions were changed to reflect what they actually discussed.

Research Method

The research method, grounded theory from a critical, constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006, 2011), uses qualitative tools to systematically analyze, categorize, and connect data to form participant-created definitions of the three organizational categories (Maxwell, 2005): culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and their ability to enact each within their classrooms. Through a contiguity-based analysis (Maxwell & Miller, 2008), examples from focus group interactions create definitions that communicate each group's unique perspective. Having a critical perspective (Wink, 2005) throughout this process allowed me to take into account group dynamics, attitudes, and examples provided while remaining mindful of the social impacts language, race, gender, and immigration status have on the IAs and teachers in this study. During the analysis process, I was struck by the stark differences between the two focus group participants, from how they discuss the children and families to the ways they reflect on their own experiences of marginalization. Demographic, self-reported data in Chapter 3 provide a glimpse into who they are, while their actual interactions and discussions during their respective focus group session highlight how they understand culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and their perceived ability to enact each within their classrooms. In Chapter 4, I further connect comments and points made during the focus group to ultimately develop definitions of each of the three organizational categories for each group.

In Chapter 5, I highlight that context and site circumstances that impacted this study. As participant definitions demonstrate, each group provides clear examples and communicates very different perspectives. Although on the surface professing a deficit view of children may not appear disconcerting, research and theory argue otherwise. As with the teacher I encountered at the beginning of this chapter, such attitudes and perspectives are extremely harmful and can potentially negatively affect a young child's academic experiences. In Chapter 5, I assume research and theoretical prospective of categories and codes developed out of focus group transcripts in Chapter 4, while also providing suggestions to address issues raised from this study.

Summary

I provide a history of Head Start, personal experiences, and relevant research foundations. Then I address methods, site, participant selection and my analytic process. The main data source, focus groups, is supported by additional data (survey responses, prior focus group sessions, reflective and analytic memos) outlined in Chapter 3. Focus groups provide rich qualitative data brought together to establish definitions for the three organizational categories for IAs and teachers. Each remains centered on what this group of in-service Head Start instructional assistants and teachers understand about culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities and their perceived ability to address each. Throughout this dissertation I am reminded of the six African American children the new Head Start teacher wanted to refer to special education and wonder whether this specific set of Head Start IAs and teachers confirm or discount my experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

This study's conceptual framework includes discussion about Head Start, its history, how the needs of children with disabilities were initially outlined in the program and how they have changed, and the various types of programs that exist. As a result of my long-standing relationship with Head Start programs, I will discuss my experiences with salary discrepancy, inclusive classrooms, identification of children with disabilities, and professional development. Also, the larger professional development project (Promoting and Sustaining Intentional Teaching, or PASIT) this dissertation study is part of provides insight into the professional development experiences this set of instructional assistants (IAs) and teachers had prior to my study. Through a policy and research review a link is provided between culturally responsive practice, inclusive practices in early childhood education, and role of program and school administration. Policy and research review for this study includes the relationship between research and Head Start policy (U.S. Department of Health 2009). Policy, research, and literature work together demonstrate the need for further research in culturally responsive, inclusive practice, and professional development for in-service Head Start instructional assistants and teachers.

Head Start

History. Head Start is a social, early childhood educational program in the United States borne out of the 1964 War on Poverty. In a historical context, this

legislation   was perceived as a war that could be won (recall that in 1964 the Vietnam

War was taking a toll on the American psyche and the Johnson Administration was

looking for a success). The War on Poverty "conveyed the hope that it was possible,

once and for all, to eliminate poverty from America's cities and streets. The rhetoric of

war also suggested the sense of urgency necessary to defeat a well-entrenched enemy"

(Zigler & Muenchow, 1992, p. 2). The War on Poverty and consequently the Economic

Opportunity Act of 1964 led to the development of several social welfare initiatives: the

Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), focused completely on the War on Poverty

programs and to accomplishing the task of eliminating poverty; the Job Corps, which

provided job training and education in preparation for employment; the Community

Action Program (CAP), to encourage the poor to fight their own poverty; and Volunteer

in Service to America (VISTA), later known as AmeriCorps, a volunteer program

designed to place college students in high-poverty areas to improve social programs,

usually education-related programs. The first program to be funded from the War on

Poverty and the OEO initiatives was the CAP program. By the fall of 1964, the program

was proving to be a complete failure. As politicians scrambled to recover from such a

loss, they decided that the early childhood education element of the War on Poverty

would provide a much needed boost in public opinion (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). Sargent

Shriver was President Johnson's chief general in the War on Poverty, the director of

OEO, and instrumental in shifting focus from CAP to the early childhood education

initiative, which would later become Head Start.

Elements of the 1965 memo that established Head Start can still be seen in the

2009 Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health, 2009) adopted by

Congress to govern Head Start programs around the United States. Head Start continues

to promote family involvement; employment for communities served by the program;

and children's health, safety, development, and learning. The current mission states:

> Head Start programs promote school readiness by enhancing the social
>
> and cognitive development of children through the provision of
>
> educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled
>
> children and families. They engage parents in their children's learning
>
> and help them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and
>
> employment goals. Significant emphasis is placed on the involvement of
>
> parents in the administration of local Head Start programs (U.S.
>
> Department of Health, n.d. a.).

In amendments to the Head Start Act of 2007 (U.S. Department of Health, 2007) and

additional revisions in 2009 (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), further clarification and

definitions have worked to improve the experiences of young children and their families

from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those with disabilities. Many of the

recent changes focus on teacher professional development, educational backgrounds of

instructional assistants and teachers, improved learning opportunities for all children with

a focus on children with disabilities, and increased monitoring and accountability of

programs. All Head Start programs are required to adhere to the Head Start Act of 2007

(U.S. Department of Health, 2007) and Head Start Performance Standards 2009 (U.S.

Department of Health, 2009) in addition to all previous laws and amendments.

Disabilities. As early as 1972 Head Start implemented inclusive educational

opportunities for children with disabilities. Although Head Start center staff were

reluctant to provide such educational experiences for children with disabilities, Zigler,

author and founding researcher, notes that "after 1972, when Congress mandated that at

least 10% of the program's national enrollment consist of children with disabilities, Head

Start staff did not have much choice" (Zigler & Styfco, 2010, p. 131). In 2012, inclusion

of children with disabilities is considered the norm, but it was not always. It is important

to consider that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires

U.S. public schools to address the needs of such children, was not passed until 1975

(Education of All, 1975). As Zigler notes, Head Start developed an educational program

with "state of the art" models and research. It was ultimately a success and inspired the

1986 amendment to the Education of the Handicapped Act, Public Law 99-457 (Zigler &

Styfco, 2010, p.130), which lives on in IDEA, Public Law 108-446. The IDEA law of

2004 includes sections (Part C) specific to the educational needs of young children (birth

to age 2) and their families (Individuals with Disabilities, 2004). In addition, it is aligned

directly to Head Start Performance Standards 2009 (U.S. Department of Health, 2009) to

ensure all children and their families experience the full range of educational services

available.

Early childhood special education encourages the use of global labels for children

up to age 8 because of the significant and fast- paced mental, emotional, social and

physical development that occurs. Global labels typically utilized are developmental

delay, social-emotional delay, and/or speech delay, all of which encompass a wide

variety of characteristics and accommodations necessary to address each child's

individual educational needs. Prior to the 2007 changes to the Head Start Act, programs

typically enrolled children with high- incidence disabilities (U.S. Department of Health,

2007). High- incidence disabilities include four main categories: cognitive delay,[4] mild

cognitive delay, learning disability, and emotional disturbance (note the less involved

forms of the global labels also fall within this). Education theorists have long debated

and questioned the usefulness of the four high- incidence categories; such broad catch- all

categories have been found to contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special

education (Howard, 2008). Harry and Klingner (2006) argue that utilizing such large,

subjective categories to label and dictate students' educational future unfairly encourages

teachers and school administration to place minority students, that do not match their

personal experiences or definition of appropriate behavior, in special education.

Head Start's policy shift that encourages the enrollment of children with low-

incidence disabilities is significant. Low- incidence represents a smaller percentage of

students enrolled in special education because fewer individuals in the overall population

actually have such significant disabilities and includes six main subcategories: multiple

disabilities, hearing impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, deaf-blind, and

developmental delay. Again, there is much debate about the influences and decisions that

school administration and teachers make as to the placement of certain students in one

---

[4] "Cognitive delay" represents a modern appropriate substitution for "mental retardation."

category but not another. As Harry and Klingner (2006) found, there is wide variation within states and school districts concerning what influences the placement of students in special education. Deciding to place a child in special education should never be a simple, uncomplicated decision. As Harry and Klingner (2006) would argue, that is exactly what labels and categories do to the often very complex needs of the individual student. For Head Start programs this shift means that classrooms could potentially have children with significant disabilities that require additional supports and services than can be realistically provided in Head Start classrooms.

Although I firmly believe all children must to be allowed to benefit from a quality Head Start experience, I question if the majority of Head Start programs across the United States can properly meet the needs of children with more significant disabilities (e.g., low- incidence autism, significant physical disabilities, nonverbal, significant behavior disorders). As a Head Start teacher who is licensed in early childhood special education and has had extensive experience working with teenagers with low- incidence disabilities, I consider myself to be very capable of addressing the needs of any child with or without a disability, yet I am not so naive as to think that my skill level is matched in all Head Start programs. To be successful in truly opening up Head Start programs to all children, center administrators and teaching staff must be willing to adjust long-held beliefs about individuals with disabilities.

Types. Head Start programs consist of two types: community based and public school based. Each type acquires funding from a granting agency, which is defined as the governing body DHHS delegates as the agency to receive federal funding. This

granting agency then allocates funds to Head Start grantees, and the grantee provides educational facilities in accordance with 2009 Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health, 2009) and laws. For community-based programs funding is awarded to the granting agency, which is typically county- or city-level Departments of Health and Human Services. The city or county Department of Health and Human Services then allocates money to specific centers that supervise and monitor Head Start classrooms and staff, whereas in public school–based programs the public school system serves as the granting agency with the public schools serving as the grantee that then establishes classrooms within various schools located in areas of need. Public schools then supervise and monitor Head Start classrooms and staff.

Historically community or public schools were able to retain funding indefinitely, once awarded Head Start grants. Changes outlined in the Head Start Act of 2007 state that grants are only awarded for 5 years and "only grantees delivering quality services will be given another five-year grant non-competitively" (U.S. Department of Health, 2007). Underperforming programs must recompete, as outlined by the Department of Health and Human Services, to continue receiving funding. The act requires a minimum of 25% of all Head Start programs qualify for recompetition on the 5-year cycle. In November 2011, President Obama outlined the recompete process for 1,600 Head Start and Early Head Start programs providing early learning services to nearly 1 million low-income children (Jackson & Wolf, 2011). Recompetition for Head Start grants is seen as one way to improve quality of educational services provided to children through the program.

Within the two types, requirements for teachers vary widely. Prior to the 2007 Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (2007), teachers were only required to have a high school diploma. Head Start teachers in public schools are required to have a teaching license in early childhood education or a related teacher license. In October 2011, requirements of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (2007) for instructional assistant and teacher qualifications began in earnest. The Act (Improving Head Start, 2007) requires each Head Start program to have one teacher with an associate degree in early childhood, a bachelor's degree in a related field, a bachelor's degree in any field with experience working in early childhood settings, or acceptance into the Teach for America program with a bachelor's degree in any field. By September 2013, 50% of Head Start teachers nationwide must have a bachelor's or advanced degree in early childhood education or bachelor's/advanced degree with equivalent course work and experience working in early childhood education settings. By September 2013, instructional assistants must have a child development associate (CDA) degree, be enrolled in CDA with completion within 2 years, or have an associate or bachelor's degree or be enrolled in a program leading to a degree in any field. All of these changes to instructional assistants and teacher educational requirements reflect the federal government's efforts to improve quality in Head Start programs nationwide. Having higher teacher requirements has long been seen as one way to improve quality in early childhood education (Kelley & Camilli, 2007). Teachers with degrees in early childhood education or a related field have been found to provide children with higher quality educational experiences (Barnett, 2004).

A well-documented criticism from early childhood educators is the low salary, which brings into question how quality can improve without addressing the pay issue (Ackerman, 2006). In 2003, the Center for Law and Social Policy published *Making the case: Improving Head Start teacher qualification requires increased investment*, which points out the consequences for not funding the changes to Head Start law: "[A]n unfunded mandate will likely result in turnover and instability for the many children that rely on Head Start" (Hart & Schumacher, 2005). Salary discrepancies and teacher license requirements represent two main differences between the two Head Start programs. For example, Head Start teachers with an early childhood Virginia state license employed by the public school earn a starting annual salary of $38,000 with a typical 9-month school-year calendar and benefits of a public school teacher (insurance, sick leave, step increases, cost of living increases, educational allowance, and various other supports). In a community Head Start program, that same teacher would make $26,000 with an 11-month school year and none of the benefits of being a public school teacher. This discrepancy is because Head Start programs in public schools are part of the larger public school system; therefore they are able to make up the difference in the funding that exists. Consequently, they can pay teachers at more competitive salaries and have higher licensing requirements than a community-based program.

Given the original goal of Head Start to *defeat* poverty, it is ironic that many community-based Head Start instructional assistants and teachers in 2012 live at or slightly above the poverty line. The poverty line was defined in 2012 as a family of three having an annual income of less than $23,050 (Annual Update, 2012). How does this

affect instructional assistants' and teachers' willingness or ability to invest in professional development or their ability to meet the educational requirements of the Head Start Act of 2007 (U.S. Department of Health, 2007)? What impact does this have on instructional assistants' and teachers' interactions with children and families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, plus those that may also have disabilities? How does this reality affect their willingness to change with changing student demographics? Although I have known about the salary differences between the two, I did not realize how different the instructional assistants' and teachers' experiences were until my involvement with PASIT, the DHHS-funded Head Start research partnership between Head Start and George Mason University. I elaborate on the PASIT professional development later in this section.

Personal Experiences

All of my experiences influence my conceptualization of this study, especially my work with Head Start. Being involved with the children and families Head Start targets for the past 12 years has provided me with a unique perspective. My insights into various issues such as salary discrepancies between community- and public school–based programs, teaching in an inclusive classroom, identification of children with disabilities, and various professional development models provide the foundation and point of view I bring to this study.

Salary discrepancies. My story with Head Start began with my first internship during graduate school; it was with a community-based Early Head Start program. Upon graduating I was asked to teach there. This job would allow me to be with the children

and families I had long found joy in working with. My experiences with Alternative

Spring Break, a program offering educational experiences to young children with

HIV/AIDS in Harlem, New York; the Peace Corps in Guinea, West Africa; and

completion of my master's degree in early childhood curriculum with three Virginia State

licenses (Special Education 0–5 years, pre-K–3rd grade, and English as a Second

Language pre-K–12 grade) made me well aware of the children and families for whom

Head Start provides services. I was excited to work for that particular Head Start

program. Unfortunately, I realized that the small community-based Head Start program

could not financially measure up to what the public school offered me to teach the same

subject and population. Facing this choice began my thinking: How could the two types

of Head Start teachers be held to the same standard? Could quality be raised for all Head

Start classrooms regardless of whether it was community or public school based?

Inclusive classroom. Prior to working as a Head Start teacher I led therapeutic

recreation summer and weekend classrooms for teenagers with low incidence disabilities,

primarily verbal, social and emotional delays. Most of the teenagers in the program were

nonverbal, with some having complex personal needs and behavior management

requirements. During this time, I became a respite caregiver for one of the teens in my

recreation classrooms. This opportunity allowed me to gain a deep understanding and

appreciation for the impact a child with a disability can have on the entire family unit.

Fortunately, this family was an advocate not only for their own child but also for all

children with disabilities. I was able to experience love and wonderment about her while

being keenly aware of the fear, ignorance, and discrimination that the larger society felt toward her.

With these experiences in mind I welcomed the opportunity to start an inclusive classroom at my school. In the model, Head Start (16 children) and preschool special education (10 children) classrooms come together daily for an hour-long work time sequence.[5] My co-teacher and I have been together for 7 years. We have noticed that all of the children benefit from our co-teaching. Most often we notice Head Start children modeling and encouraging preschool special education children to engage with them, and all of the children develop productive friendships with each other. It is important to note that before we began we engaged in professional development that helped us form a respectful, supportive relationship. This required us to consider and communicate our teaching beliefs, behavior management styles, and plans and expectations for child engagement.

Identification of children with disabilities. Through my personal and professional experiences I realize it is extremely important to consider culture, language, and lived experiences before initiating the special education referral process. As a Head Start teacher, I have had children for whom special education services were necessary; therefore, a referral occurred. Unfortunately, I have experienced pressure, annoyance, and questioning of my choice not to refer other children. Most often such situations arise

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[5] Work time sequence *Plan-Do-Review* is based on the HighScope preschool curriculum (Hohmann, & Weikart, 2002).

with children for whom English is a second or even third language. Other times I have

had a child with an active individual education plan (IEP) transfer into my class and have

not been able to figure out why the child was given an IEP in the first place. Although

processes are in place to ensure children are not referred to special education because of a

perceived lack of life experiences/exposure or not understanding second language

acquisition processes, my experiences have shown this still occurs.

      Professional development. For me, memorable professional developments are

those where I am able to form a relationship with the people leading the sessions, but

these relationships must be respectful, supportive, and flexible. Also, there has to be an

understanding of my realities in the classroom and some amount of understanding about

the children I have in my classroom. One such experience was my 3-year involvement in

the MyTeachingPartner (MTP) professional development study out of the University of

Virginia (Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008b). For this study, I

implemented their literacy curriculum. I was supported through this process with

biweekly video conferencing with a project consultant based at the University of

Virginia. We only met face to face at the beginning of each school year. I would

videotape myself teaching the lessons and interacting with the children at various times

of the day, and then I would mail the tape to her. We would videoconference biweekly to

discuss activities and interactions on the videotape. We discussed elements of the

lessons/activities, my affect, student engagement, and ways I could improve in future

lessons or interactions with the children. These meetings were especially helpful because

for 2 years of the study I had children with very challenging behaviors in my classroom.

She provided support, guidance, validation of what I was doing, and helpful pointers. She never rushed our conferences; there was no feeling of judgment, annoyance, or criticism during our interactions. I felt like she saw that I was competent and capable in what I was doing, not someone who needed to conform or be spoon-fed information.

I am an avid believer that one-stop, 2-hour workshops are worthless. Hearing something from a Head Start administrative staff member who reads from PowerPoint slides, or an entire book, and shows no understanding of adult learning practice is demeaning and alienating. I can only think of one time this model has been successful for me. Juanita Copley was brought in to discuss activities and ways to introduce math to young children through her book *The Young Child and Mathematics* (2009). Although it was only a 3-hour session I walked away eager to introduce to my students her activity suggestions. She was dynamic, engaging, and encouraging throughout her presentation. Unfortunately, the two models that stand out to me are not the norm.

Promoting and sustaining intentional teaching. Through my engagement with the Promoting and Sustaining Intentional Teaching project, I further refined and grew in my understanding of the issues affecting this group of instructional assistants and teachers and ultimately engaged in the research for this study. PASIT, a DHHS-funded joint professional development and research partnership between George Mason University and a community-based urban Head Start program, represents a shift in professional development design and implementation that addresses the complex nature of effective professional development. According to Nasser, Burns, and Kidd, "The purpose of [PASIT] is to work with Head Start personnel to design, implement, and

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evaluate a continuous professional development model that develops and sustains teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are most likely to enhance Head Start children's learning and development" (2009). Instructional assistants and teachers engage in a 3-day training institute, quarterly sessions, and monthly mentor meetings as a part of this year-long professional development model.

The main focus of PASIT is to increase the instructional assistants' and teachers' instructional knowledge around early childhood teaching philosophies that are responsive to the range of children found in the Head Start classroom, while being research based and responsive to adult learning theories (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). Lead researchers involved in the PASIT project see this as an opportunity to contribute to an understanding of how teachers in early childhood environments conceptualize and then operationalize the skills learned in professional development trainings. The PASIT project focuses on building a professional development program that would be widely distributed and used throughout Head Start programs in the United States.

Policy and Research Review

As federally funded U.S. government agencies, Head Start centers are required to adhere to specific laws, as outlined in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, Head Start Performance Standards (2009). These standards outline an array of issues and services the program must take into consideration; this study focuses on culturally responsive, inclusive practices and professional development. Relevant research provides further

support for the main points of this project. In cases where appropriate research does not exist, the point was expanded to widen the search for research.

Culturally responsive practice. In the review process for culturally responsive practice with in-service minority early childhood instructional assistants and teachers, several surprising findings were noted: the very clear connection with Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health, 2007), teacher understanding of their own inadequacies related to it (Daniel & Friedman, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), a significant lack of research (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and the consequence that has on this review. Each of these elements work to form the reason this research is necessary. Remember that "cultural difference is the single most pervasive difference in US schools and until the early 1970's the most neglected" (Santamaria, 2009, p. 215). It is time, in 2012, to directly address and research ways to improve and support teachers in their acquisition of the knowledge necessary to address the needs of all children, no matter their race, class, ethnicity, language, or ability.

Culturally responsive practice is not new, yet it continues to be a key suggestion for how to better address the needs of all children and families (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Educational theorists suggest that culturally responsive practices can help bridge the divide and improve the academic success of children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Banks & McGee, 2007; Gay, 2000). Head Start programs must work to "provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture, language, ethnicity, and family composition … in ways that support the child's health and well-being" (U.S. Department of Health, 2009, p. 26). Head Start

Performance Standards provide a clear connection to culturally responsive practices, stating, "Staff should insure that behavior which may be typical of some cultures or ethnic groups, such as not making eye contact with teachers or other adults or not volunteering comments or in initiating conversations are not misinterpreted" (U.S. Department of Health, 2009, p. 79).

Through a systematic review of research articles, teacher resources, and theoretical works in culturally responsive practice (Gay, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005; Norton, Smith, Kander, & Short, 2005; Purnell et al., 2007; Souto-Manning, 2007; Santamaria, 2009) a common definition of culturally responsive practice was developed for PASIT that states, "Culturally Responsive Practice means teachers utilize, embrace, develop, and foster each child's appreciation and understanding of their cultural and ethnic background. The awareness gained from learning about and connecting to each child's cultural/ethnic background is used to form authentic, responsive learning environments where the curriculum is developed through the children's home culture, prior knowledge, and lived experiences" (Kidd, Burns, Nasser, Assaf, & Muccio, 2009). In addition, Figure 2-1 was developed to further clarify the definition and various elements of culturally responsive practice across 21 articles, books, and theoretical works (Brown, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duarte, & Reed, 2004; Gay, 2000; 2002; 2011; González et al., 2005; Kidd, Sánchez, & Thorp, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Moll, & González, 2004; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Norton et al., 2005; Park, 2011; Purnell et al., 2007;

Family involvement
Home visits
Provide authentic ways for families to engage in the learning of their children. Classroom activities, home visits, discussion groups in class or the community.

Knowledge of and reflection on personal teaching philosophy and how it affects the way students perceive, relate, or understand you and how this affects teaching.

Teacher's awareness or experience within the community the students come from.

Culturally Responsive Practice
means teachers utilize, embrace, develop, and foster each child's appreciation and understanding of their cultural and ethnic background. The awareness gained from learning about and connecting to each child's cultural/ethnic background is used to form authentic, responsive learning environments where the curriculum is developed through the children's home culture, prior knowledge, and lived experiences.

The importance of using activities that help foster the development of this type of thinking and relationships in order for change in practice and thinking to occur.

Teacher shows sensitivity and understanding of difficulties that students may experience and offers support or differing learning strategies.

Importance of relationships. Relationships between teacher and students, students and each other, teacher and parents.

Figure 2.1 Culturally responsive practice

Santamaria, 2009; Sleeter, 2000; Souto-Manning, 2007; Townsend, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Ware, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Many of these are further discussed in this chapter, whereas others are presented as reinforcement for analysis and discussion in Chapter 5. Each work highlighted in graphic 2.1 discusses a specific aspect of culturally responsive practice.

Surprisingly little research has been conducted concerning culturally responsive practices (practices that theoretically match the needs of populations served through Head Start programs). A literature review conducted in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Education of professional development for early childhood educators found that existing literature "does not adequately address the issue of cultural and linguistic competence for early childhood educators. This review did not reveal any peer-reviewed articles that examined or evaluated professional development strategies to improve cultural and linguistic competence despite the growing diversity of early childhood population" (p. 87). Therefore, culturally responsive practice[6] was expanded to include culturally

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[6] Review of research in the PsycINFO database on January 18, 2010 using the key words *culturally responsive* and *early childhood education* produced only six articles, of which only two articles were applicable (Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Carter, 2007; Santamaria, 2009). The other four were eliminated because the research was conducted outside the United States (Guha, 2006), discussed larger elementary school reform (Durden, 2008), focused on parenting (Barrueco, López, & Miles, 2007), or focused on assistive technology intervention in a third grade class (Conrad, Gong, Sipp, & Wright, 2004). Consequently, the search criterion was broadened to include *culturally responsive*

responsive practices for older grades and pre-service teacher experiences, with the addition of one pertinent article published in 2011.

Articles dealing with culturally responsive practice were broken down by in-service and pre-service. Research on in-service culturally responsive classroom practices discusses the impact on: children and literacy experiences. Due to the lack of available research pre-service teacher attitudes were included. All efforts were made to acquire and include research related to in-service Head Start instructional assistants and teacher experiences related culturally responsive practices.

Children. Culturally responsive teachers embrace the philosophy that children must be provided spaces that embrace—rather than "subtract" or attempt to eliminate—the cultural, ethnic, family composition, socioeconomic, and linguistic variety that exists in a classroom, family, and community. Through relationships formed with students, families, and the school community, teachers are better able to develop curriculum and be responsive to children's behavior and learning interests in ways with which they are familiar (Gay, 2000). Children and families are seen as being capable and having knowledge worth sharing and influencing the classroom curriculum (Moll et al., 1992).

Children question the social world around them and when they bring up their experiences it is seen as a teachable moment to engage in dialogue and reflection (Gay, 2010). Souto-Manning's (2007) personal experiences as a Latina second grade teacher

and *education*, which brought up 103 articles. Of these, 31 articles provided information suitable for this project. Other terms such as *multicultural*, *culturally sensitive*, and *cultural awareness* were also used with no additional articles found.

provided her with many opportunities to reflect and experience "subtractive education".

Through this framework she is able to analyze current oppressive educational practices,

focusing on the impact on minority children, specifically Latino children (Valenzuela,

1999). She discusses the impact that renaming practices have on young children, their

cultural identity formation, and family perceptions around why this practice is necessary

and appropriate. Through home visits and in-depth interviews with one particular child

in her class, Idelbrando (Tommy), Souto-Manning addresses the student, his or her

family, and her own reflections on the common practice of renaming children once they

start school in the United States to a more "American-friendly name", such as Tommy

from Idelbrando. Observing a lost child entering her classroom late on the first day of

school, she realized that he might be the child missing from her roster. She asks, "Are

you Tommy?" The child proclaims, "No! Me llamo Idelbrando. No me llamo Tommy!"

His insistence that he was not Tommy led her to think he was in the wrong classroom.

With further investigation, Souto-Manning found that there was no Idelbrando in the

school, so she welcomed him into her class. After school she phoned Tommy's family,

and during the conversation she realized Idelbrando was Tommy. The confusion and the

initial conversation with his mother were the beginning of a relationship with the family

through which she came to see how and why families might choose to rename their

children. This also started her thinking about her own experiences as a Latina and what

the widespread use of renaming practices meant about American society and how it

affected young children. Souto-Manning discusses the fact that the practice of giving

children easier "American names" is still common practice in many early childhood

settings. She points out the numerous ways this continues the practices of education being about getting rid of the child's and families' "negative" ethnic traits so as to fully embrace their "American-ness". Finally, Souto-Manning encourages early childhood educators to see this one example as one of many that show how renaming children leads to a loss of cultural identity and contributes to a child's "subtractive educational" experience, which often contributes to academic failure (p. 402).

Culturally responsive practice relies on the teacher's attitude and ability to understand student experiences and realities that differ from his or her own (Gay, 2000). This understanding needs to strive to create safe, supportive, and heartfelt relationships where the teacher and student can connect soul to soul (Noddings, 2003). Brown's (2004) discussion of classroom management strategies and teacher interviews provides a view into how each teacher operationalizes behavior management within a culturally responsive practice. Teachers must be able to articulate authority and control over the classroom while communicating clear expectations and truly believing in the students' academic ability. Learning in a safe appropriate environment requires effort and hard work from the students and teachers. In 13 extensive interviews with urban first through twelfth grade teachers, Brown asked 34 questions, such as "How do you interact with students", and "How would you describe your management style?" Descriptive analysis was used to develop five primary themes: developing personal relationships and mutual respect through individualized attention, creating caring learning communities, establishing business-like learning environments, establishing congruent communication process, and teaching with assertiveness and clearly stated expectations (Brown, 2004).

Within each theme examples from the teacher interviews are provided. For example, most of the 13 teachers discussed the formation of respectful and engaged relationships with each student. These relationships were based on purposeful individual interactions with each student to discuss academic and nonacademic topics. As one teacher poignantly points out, "Kids feel that if you really don't care about them then they're not going to care about you" (Brown, 2004, p. 275). Another teacher states, "I try to get to know as many kids as possible on a personal level, so when I see them in the hall, I can ask about their families. I try to see them in other settings outside of school" (Brown, 2004, p. 275). The teacher statements throughout this article provide a rich description of how culturally responsive teachers communicate with, interact with, and view their students. Although the language used in some of the examples, such as "business-like", does not, at first glance, appear to be appropriate for the early childhood setting, it is actually based on frames of practice that are encouraged in early childhood. "Business-like" pertains to providing students enough structure and clear direction to support a learning environment where each member of the classroom community is engaged in learning that is appropriate, well planned, connected to their own experiences, and fun, leading in turn to better behavior. Brown points out that, although the reflections, observations, and practices described in his research are extraordinary and exemplars in the field of culturally responsive practice, it is important to note that the teachers did not arrive at culturally responsive practice easily. The majority of teachers attributed their ability to direct experiences in urban schools, with the majority having their first experience in an urban school after they had completed their teacher training.

The teachers entered the field already licensed, and Brown concludes that this fact played a major role in the teachers' practices, relationships, and confidence in their own individual teaching abilities.

Children possess a keen awareness of the world around them; although they may not fully understand, use the correct terminology, or know how to deal with such issues, it is imperative to not just sweep their concerns under the carpet. In my experience, not addressing these issues or not validating the child's emotions was never a choice. My willingness to discuss and reflect on issues of ethnic discrimination, immigration status, domestic violence, or parent incarceration is never easy, but I emerge from these discussions with a deeper understanding of the children. Children are aware that society has different expectations for people based on the color of their skin; this was first documented in the 1940s by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their Black White Baby Doll experiment was used as key evidence in *Brown v. Board of Education,* which ultimately led to desegregation of public schools. They found that the majority of children selected the white doll as good, clean, and nice, whereas the black doll was seen as bad, dirty, and mean (Clark, 1953; Clark & Clark, 1940). Although much has changed in public schools since *Brown,* Kiri Davis (2000), a high school senior in New York City, questioned how much had actually changed since the original experiment. African American children sat with two baby dolls in front of them, and Davis asked them a variety of questions: Which baby is pretty? Which baby is bad? Which baby looks like you? Why do you think that? The children's reactions and realizations of what they are

communicating about themselves are powerful and extremely telling. In 2000, "15 out of the 21 children preferred the white doll".

Children's understanding of racial and ethnic differences is complex. Caryn Park (2011) documents how children interact around such issues. Over a 3-month period, she focused her observations on child interactions during play times; collected work samples that supported her study; and, once the children were comfortable with her, conducted 20-minute interviews with pairs of children. Although the findings of the study are interesting, only one pertains to this dissertation. Children were able to extend their understanding of differences through interactions with peers. These interactions caused the children to be "stretched in new directions, highlighting the ways in which the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) affords students valuable opportunities to use experiences beyond their own to gain new insights" (Park, 2011, p. 401). Throughout her interactions she encouraged and was open to the children's reflections on texts and activities conducted with her. During an art activity, children's choice of skin color was discussed and questioned. During a discussion of one of his self-portraits, a child, who is part Native American and part Anglo American, draws himself and his mother and states, "white man". His other self-portrait, however, showed him with brown and black shades mixed together. Children attempt to create meaning about everything in their lives, and Park (2011) shows that race and ethnicity are topics even preschool age children think about.

Young children cannot achieve to their highest potential when the educational environment provided is hostile and oppressive (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Through

yearlong collaborative conversations (among teachers, students, and researchers), focus groups, artifacts, observations, and individual interviews, Norton et al. (2005) utilized a critical feminist type of narrative for analysis and developed a case study of Pam, a Dominican first grader in Mr. Williams's class. Critical literacy and culturally responsive practice grounded this study. Critical literacy is defined as attitudes Pam uses "to name, critique, and challenge how she is inequitably impacted by teachers' practices in ways that marginalize her class, age, gender, race, and ethnicity. She uses critical illiteracies to work against these positionings and to (re)position herself in more equitable, self-affirming ways" (Norton et al., 2005, p. 120). Norton et al. discusses the need for culturally responsive practice and reasons why it must be revised to include socioeconomic variation. She argues that much research does not investigate the fact that some middle- and upper class teachers "devalue and marginalize the cultures of poor and working-class children by discounting their knowledge and experiences" (Norton et al., 2005, p. 120).

One discussion focused on the fact that Pam refused to sit on the floor, and the teacher, Ms. Kai, frequently reprimanded her, stating, "Do you think you are special?" (Norton et al., 2005). In the interview with Norton et al., Pam reveals why she did not want to sit on the floor: "Don't she know I can't get my clothes dirty? [I have] two pants and two skirts. I don't have a lot of money, either. Sometimes I can't get what I want. I have to wait to get new shoes and new clothes for school. I have had these uniforms for 2 years—since kindergarten. It makes me real mad and angry. I start yelling and screaming. [Then she] lets me sit on the chair" (Norton et al., 2005, p. 121). The

teacher's reprimand does not match the reality Pam experiences. Ms. Kai sees Pam's behavior as annoying, not purposeful, as Pam explains it is. The miscommunication between Pam and Ms. Kai leads to a hostile learning environment, an environment that does not understand any aspect of Pam's life or personality and, in turn, affects her and her classmates' ability to learn because the learning environment is unresponsive to their learning and emotional needs. Norton et al. surmises from her experiences in Pam's class that it is crucial for teachers to be able to shift perspective, to view what is happening in the classroom from different angles.

In another example, Pam discusses her interactions with Ms. White, a senior mentor for Mr. Williams. "I don't want no mean teacher who yells and screams!" (Norton et al., 2005, p. 123). During an incident in which Ms. White yelled at Pam, she asserted her personal power by ignoring and refusing to do what Ms. White asked of her. The impact of such discursive practices is profound: Children lose their personal identity; it is seen as violent to the children; and it promotes a continuation of the unbalanced, disrespectful power that exists between teacher and student. Most important, the children are defenseless to react or yell back at the teacher. Children cannot learn if they feel threatened; they must feel and know they are safe. All too often the disconnect between teachers' and children's perception and understanding of teacher attitudes translates into increased referrals to special education for children and families already marginalized because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, and language (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Further, Ware (2006) illustrates how a teachers' strong sense of personal/cultural identity aids in forming a relationship based on real-life understanding and having similar personal experiences as students. The experiences of two African American teachers, even though they were very different, had an enormous impact on how and what they taught. For one teacher, an experienced (30+ years) veteran, her own life experiences in segregated schools and her experience encouraging and developing healthy identities in students and herself led her to teach and support all students in her class. "Through these experiences, she developed a positive African American cultural identity and she supported her African American students and their parents" (Ware, 2006, p. 450). For the second, much younger teacher, her experiences as an African American woman had a significant impact on her and how she taught. She experienced being the only African American student in many of her classes and having only one African American teacher. Her ability to encourage and support her students came from her understanding of herself and her lived experiences (Ware, 2006). Even with their very different experiences, the two teachers relied heavily on their experiences and felt pride in their identities as African American women. Each used different strategies and content areas to weave in African American identity and encourage students to question the world around them. Ware (2006) identifies the enormous impact their identity had on their teaching as one of the key factors in their effectiveness. "This study posits that teachers' warm demander pedagogy is positively influenced by their cultural/racial identity. Their strong identification with their African American/African heritage [was used] to encourage their

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students. These teachers also used their knowledge and comfort with their heritage to teach students in their school about their heritage" (p. 451).

Through two case studies with field notes; observations; and recorded conversations with teachers, administration, students, and parents, Santamaria (2009) highlights practices that show improvements in student achievement for culturally, linguistically diverse populations. Schools were selected because they "are reaching high levels of academic achievement and are closing achievement gaps, dispelling the myth that high levels of poverty and/or being from culturally, linguistically diverse backgrounds leads to lower student achievement" (p. 231). Through qualitative analysis she finds four practices that are present across the two schools: critical reflection on classroom topics is encouraged, teachers worked to engage all learners, a balance between teacher and student tasks is established, and assessment is used as a teaching tool to support and enhance instruction. Each of these practices demonstrated the schools' commitment to all students, in addition to their understanding of the various needs that exist for different students. Santamaria ultimately points out the importance of teachers and administrators improving their understanding of how "to distinguish between learning differences/problems and cultural/linguistic diversity [in order] to avoid confusing these issues when meeting the needs of all learners" (2009, p.241).

To ensure children are safe and respected for their culture, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, and ability, it is necessary for teachers to reflect and examine their position in society and how the children perceive her or him and to genuinely care about where and what the children have experienced and do experience

outside of school. All of these elements must occur on a daily basis, with personal

growth seen as a lifelong process both for the teacher and the child. Teachers need to

embrace the many facets of a child's prior, current, and future knowledge. To do this

they must be able to conceive of the various levels of complex human identity and

experience. Teachers can no longer look at identity as either–or, literate–illiterate, black–

white, legal–illegal, English–non-English, homosexual–heterosexual, Christian–non-

Christian, able–disabled, or poor–rich. This narrow dichotomized view of identity leads

to oppressive, culturally unresponsive educational experiences for young children (Ryan

& Lobman, 2008).

Literacy experiences. Culturally responsive practice stands to impact all areas of

instruction. Thus, literacy development will be used to expand the available research.

When a teacher embraces and utilizes the natural variation that exists within the

classroom community, all areas of instruction are affected (Gay, 2000). For children and

families to invest in the educational process and system, they must see their beliefs and

knowledge as valuable. The theme of literacy development emerged from analysis of the

articles collected under the key concepts (curriculum developed through children's home

culture, prior knowledge, and lived experiences, in addition to how teachers tap into these

areas of the child's development).

The availability of research in the field of literacy instruction for young children

relates to the larger social focus on language and literacy over two decades. During this

period, our understanding of how young children learn to talk, what affects later literacy

successes, and what types of instruction are most effective for all children has increased

significantly (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Language and literacy development in young children has been a central focus in the Clinton, Bush, and Obama Administrations. The articles presented focus not on federal programs or their effectiveness, but on how children reflect and discuss their own literacy experiences. Four articles discuss why culturally responsive practice provides a way to bridge the divide between teacher expectation and student perceptions and understanding of what is being presented, said, and acted on within the classroom. Ultimately, the teacher's view of language and literacy instruction must shift to address the needs of children from various cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and ability backgrounds.

Literacy development is complex and multifaceted, as Roger's (2003) ethnographic research demonstrates. Through her involvement with an urban African American family, she points out the different levels and purposes of the literacy skills they do have. The mother in this family described herself as illiterate, yet Rogers (2003) discusses how she manages all of the family's finances, navigates public transportation, and reacts to school requests and concerns about her children. This family possesses many more skills than they realize. Rogers argues that the illiterate label has unfairly and incorrectly been placed on this family. During the time of Roger's (2003) research with this family one of the children's schools wanted to refer her daughter to special education. Rogers (2003) highlights that although the family was actually literate, the type of literacy they possess is not highly regarded in their social world. Literacy contributes to one's social power and status, being given or convinced that one is illiterate, thereby possessing no literacy skills of value, places and keeps them oppressed

within society. Rogers (2003) argues that this family had an extraordinary perceived disadvantage that greatly limited their access within society especially in schools.

Purnell et al. (2007) utilize anecdotal vignettes from children's school experiences to demonstrate how important it is for teachers to integrate children's home culture and experiences into the classroom curriculum. Misunderstanding or a lack of awareness of children's home experiences on the child's learning and connection to the school culture is discussed. The article is theoretical in nature with three powerful reflective accounts by two women and one man. In the scenarios, they recall experiences from when they were children (an infant, kindergarten, and third grader). Each of the scenarios discusses the context, culture, and experiences they remember. Two of the scenarios are negative experiences; the authors explain what about the experience could have been different and how it would have connected the children and their lived experiences to the classroom. In the third scenario the authors discuss how differently the person recalls the experience where the teacher tried to understand some aspect of the home culture. The purpose for Purnell et al. (2007) is to provide examples of incidents in which children's culture and home experiences are not taken into consideration and then demonstrate how, with the use of carefully planned literacy and arts integration, teachers can address the needs of young children from various cultural backgrounds. Scenarios are used as educational tools to show the power of culturally responsive and multicultural theories in early childhood settings.

Through the use of purposeful critical literacy and the creative arts, teachers are able to strengthen and honor the child's experiences. For example, one child was being

raised by her grandmother because her parents had divorced. The class was discussing families, but the teacher only discussed the mother/father type of family, ignoring this one child's experience. Teachers need to "imagine how empowered [the child] might have felt if one day her teacher had included a story that focused on a little girl who lived with her wonderful grandmother" (Purnell et al., 2007, p. 420). When teachers are conscious of every element of the classroom and work to connect children to the curriculum, better learning outcomes will occur.

In Flores-Dueñas's work (2005), the teacher shared a direct connection to her students' experiences, la mæstra Miriam frequently drew on her own experience as an English Language Learner (ELL) when working with her students on literacy lessons. She shared a similar cultural/ethnic background with the students; she was a first-generation Mexican American. "I share about my life and I make time for them to share with me. I am trying to teach them how to share with others and to see their experiences are valuable" (Flores-Dueñas, 2005, p. 243). Her relationships were based on behaviors she modeled and expected the students to match. She did not ask the students to do anything that she was not willing to do herself (Flores-Dueñas, 2005). Students' work was used to support and guide classroom conversations and writing activities. La mæstra Miriam revealed several key points to being an effective culturally responsive teacher: willingness to supplement curriculum, address student motivation, abilities, recognize that students possess knowledge that they bring to the classroom, the benefits of bilingual education and the teacher's role in forming communications between school knowledge and home knowledge.

La mæstra Miriam provided extremely insightful statements about her practice, motivation, personal experience, and perceptions of her students' abilities to succeed. Her high standards and expectations clearly demonstrated how she did not prescribe to the dominant social discourse of Spanish-speaking students as less than English-speaking students. She provides a theoretically based examination into how a critically reflective pedagogue interacts and defines her classroom community. Analysis of teacher–student and student–student conversations, pieces of students' actual writing, and individual interviews with la mæstra Miriam were framed within the context of a discursive socio-political environment that exists for language minority students.

Compton-Lilly (2006) provides a powerful case study of Devon that demonstrates the negative impact culturally unresponsive, dichotomized practice has on young children. Devon's experience with literacy and data collected (field notes, running records, and interviews) is used to critique Compton-Lilly's (2006) own experience with children like Devon and scripted reading programs such as *Reading Recovery* (Clay, 1993) through a grounded theory analytic process. An important insight is that "literacy cannot be treated as separate from issues of race, class, gender, and ultimately identity" (Compton-Lilly, 2006, p. 61). This was further highlighted by Compton-Lilly's lack of success with Devon when she followed the prescribed book order outlined by *Reading Recovery*. Devon was frequently disengaged during reading, he did not see himself as a successful reader. When Compton-Lilly began asking Devon about his interests outside of school, she found that Devon was actually a very good reader when the material was interesting and engaging. This article reiterates the symbiotic complex relationship

among culturally responsive practices: literacy; identity; behavior; and past, current, and future realities and interests of children from various cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and ability backgrounds. Devon's academic struggles were highlighted by his disruptive behaviors, lack of interest in the scripted curriculum, and the teacher's unwillingness to address his needs that fell outside the scripted, state-mandated curriculum. A central theme of culturally responsive practice is that teachers develop the personal empowerment necessary to be competent and powerful enough to adapt all areas of the curriculum as needed for individual learners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gay, 2000). Luckily for Devon, Compton-Lilly had internalized personal power, was prepared in a teacher education program, and knew how to address Devon's needs.

Pre-service teacher education. I present this section on pre-service teachers and culturally responsive practice because there is a dearth of research available on in-service education and culturally responsive practice. Teachers need to view their students from different perspectives and address their prior experiences, as demonstrated by the aforementioned review. Teacher education programs must encourage and strive toward developing such understandings in future teachers so that classrooms are responsive to all aspects of children and families from various cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, family composition, linguistic, and ability backgrounds (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). A plethora of research has focused on how teacher education programs address and respond to the constant reiteration of the changing demographics in American public schools, specifically early childhood classrooms (Bowman et al., 2001; Gay, 2000; Genishi & Goodwin, 2008).

The articles in this section were found using the key concepts (encourage the development of curriculum using children's home culture, prior knowledge, and lived experiences) stated at the beginning of this section, but they also look at how teacher education programs try to instill and measure culturally responsive dispositions in pre-service teachers. I provide a synthesized review of current pre-service research as the current project is taking place within the context of in-service Head Start instructional assistants and teachers who work in community-based programs and have different educational/training needs than pre-service teachers. The research on pre-service teachers and culturally responsive practice, however, is important to review because there is some overlap in professional development opportunities identified in these studies. The findings presented focus on preschool to early elementary (pre-kindergarten to third grade) teacher preparation programs.

Sleeter's (2000) extensive review of research on pre-service teacher education programs for underserved children highlights the continued dichotomous representation of pre-service teachers: Anglo and African American. Although Sleeter's review was conducted on research reported some 15 years ago, the same issues exist in culturally responsive and multicultural practice research on pre-service and in-service teachers in 2012. Further Sleeter's research continues to be reflected in the Department of Education's 2010 literature review that shared similar gaps in available research. Research for this project has been broken down into articles that are relevant to how pre-service teachers form culturally responsive dispositions (Duarte & Reed, 2004; Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009; Kidd et al., 2008; Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007).

Pre-service teacher development in culturally responsive practice is often measured through multicultural/cultural competency surveys. Survey findings can lead to an increased understanding of individuals frequently underrepresented in research, such as African American pre-service teachers (Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002). African American pre-service undergraduate (74% female, $n = 32$; 26% male, $n = 11$) students provided evidence that culturally responsive practice must "move beyond [a] primary focus on the individual and places [with] more emphasis on the individual's actions within a collective" (Kea et al., 2002, p. 23) learning community. Purposeful learning communities provide group interactions that are responsive to the needs of pre-service African American teachers to increase their "ability to confront and resolve contradictions," (Kea et al., 2002, p. 23) such as those reported in their surveys. The pre-service teachers reported that they understood the cultural difference between African Americans (their own racial/ethnic group) to a great extent, whereas their understanding of other racial/ethnic groups (Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, Middle Easterners, and other countries) was very limited. Consequently, Kea et al., recommend the integration of a cross-cultural perspective of development to make obvious the differences and commonalities that exist between ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and ability groups. The goal of such a theoretical shift of development is needed to prepare pre-service teachers "to design differentiated instruction that will meet the needs of a broader array of students and decrease the likelihood that cultural differences will be misinterpreted as developmental delays, disabilities, or disorders" (p. 23). Kea et al., point out that "any teacher's lack of preparedness, negative perceptions, and low

expectation can contribute to school failure" (p. 24) for children from various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and ability backgrounds. A teacher's membership in a historically "minority" oppressed racial or ethnic group does not directly equate to her ability to connect, relate, and develop culturally responsive curriculum for all children (Kea et al., 2002).

Although the African American pre-service teachers in Kea et al. (2002) presented a homogenous group, their experiences, understanding, and comfort in using culturally responsive practice with all children presented unique findings. In contrast to other research on pre-service teachers Kea et al. (2002) provide important insight into how culturally responsive dispositions develop. It is important to note that the majority of research retrieved on pre-service teachers and culturally responsive practice was conducted with Anglo American pre-service graduate and undergraduate students.

Developing culturally responsive practice requires pre-service teachers to have experiences and learn reflective ways to process experiences that are often uncomfortable and unfamiliar through critical examination and discussion of long-held assumptions and stereotypes (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). One of the ways teacher education programs have worked to increase exposure in unfamiliar learning environments is through purposeful field placement. This was found to increase awareness and discussion around issues of race, ethnicity, and language (Duarte & Reed, 2004). Schools often are selected based on student demographics to provide pre-service teachers opportunities to contextualize instructional practices in real-world environments discussed in class literature (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007).

All areas of pre-service teacher preparation require purposeful planning and personal reflection on the part of instructors involved with the students (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gere et al., 2009). Instructors must provide texts, class discussions, and opportunities for the pre-service teachers to process and reflect on their own educational histories and preconceived understandings of people from various cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds (Duarte & Reed, 2004; Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gere et al., 2009). It was found that by modeling their own reflection and purposeful planning, the pre-service teachers were able to question their own assumptions and understandings. For example, Haviland (an instructor in the course), during a discussion on the disproportionate punishment of African American boys, argued, "teachers are not neutral. [This lead] Amber (a student in the course) to admit, 'I've never seen it this way before'" (Gere et al., 2009, p. 835). Perspective change toward a more culturally responsive disposition is difficult and requires a constant reflection and re-reflection of teaching practices. It is essential that teachers possess the knowledge and skill needed to question one's views and practices (Gay, 2000).

Kidd et al.'s (2008) research further supports the need for purposeful planning to help pre-service teachers in their development toward culturally responsive perspectives. Through qualitative analysis of pre-service teachers' ($n = 19$) guiding principles narratives at the end of a 2-year fulltime graduate program, they identify six key elements in their growth: readings, diverse internships, interactions with families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, critical reflection, dialogue and discussions, and interactions among all of the experiences over the 2 years. Further, Kidd et al. (2008)

emphasize the integrated, complex nature of changing long-held attitudes and biases to increase students' understanding of social injustices that affect all students but are especially significant for children and families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Finally, they highlight the fact that pre-service teachers must experience and engage in multiple types of experiences to successfully shift their perspectives.

Through carefully selected class readings, pre-service teachers were provided opportunities to critique their experiences in schools and the views they have about students from various cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds. Course readings were selected because of the texts' ability to spark discussions and facilitate the process of questioning social stereotypes about difference (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007). The text selected was especially significant for this group of pre-service teachers because the majority were Anglo American females (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gere et al., 2009). Texts such as *And Don't Call Me a Racist* (Mazel, 1998) and the video series *Starting Small* (McGovern, 1997) provided starting points for discussions around controversial issues dealing with culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and race.

In conclusion, this section on culturally responsive practice addresses several issues including teachers' lack of understanding of cultural norms, values, and beliefs that lead to a cultural disconnect between teachers and the children and families they teach; how this can affect instruction; and efforts made by pre-service programs to educate teachers to be culturally responsive. Head Start Performance Standards (2009) directly

state that programs will provide classrooms that support, encourage, and embrace the cultures of children and families represented.

Inclusive practice in early childhood education. For the past 30 years, early childhood education research has discussed, demonstrated, documented, and highlighted the numerous developmental gains achieved by children with various disabilities and children with typical development when quality inclusive early education environments are provided (Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Diamond & Carpenter, 2000; Gallagher & Lambert, 2006). Significant changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the United States federal law that governs educational services provided for all students and their families, address the legal requirements for children with disabilities' inclusion into the regular education system (Individuals with Disabilities, 2004). Clarifications to the Part B and Part C sections of IDEA that relate to education services for children 0 to 21 years of age mandate the placement of young children in inclusive education environments (Individuals with Disabilities, 2004). Inclusive education environments are considered one type of least restrictive environment (LRE) for young children with disabilities. In such environments, children with disabilities are educated alongside same-age peers with accommodations to facilitate their success. IDEA Part B and Part C require that the education of young children with disabilities be provided "to the maximum extent appropriate, [and] are provided in natural environments, including the home, and community settings in which children without disabilities participate" (Individuals with Disabilities, 2004).

Head Start is required to enroll children with disabilities; this group must represent 10% of a program's overall enrollment (U.S. Department of Health, 2007). As I discussed earlier, after 1972 providing services to children with disabilities in Head Start was a requirement. Within the Head Start law and performance standards, the 10% enrollment issue is addressed in several places. The bulk of the requirements address how to meet the needs of the 10% of children with disabilities within the general education classroom and ways that programs document and ensure recruitment of children with disabilities into their programs (U.S. Department of Health, 2007).

A large volume of data supports the positive impact of inclusive programs for children with or without disabilities (Buysse et al., 2002; Diamond, & Carpenter, 2000; Gallagher & Lambert, 2006); although these data are important, they are not central to this project because Head Start is required through the Head Start Act of 2007 (U.S. Department of Health, 2007), Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), and IDEA Part B and Part C to include children with disabilities. Even though instructional assistants[7] are a significant part of the early childhood classroom, very little research focuses on them. Therefore I have chosen to focus on research that includes instructional assistants in early childhood special education classrooms[8], Head

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[7] The term "instructional assistant" is used because in the program this study was conducted they did not identify as "paraprofessionals."

[8] Review of research in the PsycINFO database on June 3, 2012 using the key words *paraprofessional* and *early childhood education* produced only 25 articles, of which only one article was applicable (Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, & Hunt, 2012), with one

Start programs (Beauchesne, Barnes, & Patsdaughter, 2004; Lieber et al., 2000;

Gallagher, & Lambert, 2006; Bruns & Mogharreban, 2007), or issues in special education

that are pertinent to minority children (Blanchett, Klinger & Harry, 2009; Howard, 2008;

Harry, 1992; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Moore, 2002; Santamaria, 2009).

  Instructional assistants. Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) found that IAs (n =

52) and teachers (n = 59) discussed forming relationships, mutual respect, and shared

responsibilities. Overall they rated themselves positively and capable of fulfilling the

requirements of their job; teachers agreed that the IA added valuable skills to the teaching

team. Not surprisingly, IAs raised concerns about increased job responsibilities without

pay increases to match the changes. These insights were gleaned from instructional

assistant and teacher surveys and individual open-ended interviews with a select group of

participants. Survey data were analyzed using a Mann-Whitney test to reveal differences

between the two groups. Finally Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) state, "We should look

at current [IAs] as a possible pool from which to recruit, because they already have

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other article (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008) being found in the original search for *early*

childhood special education. Eleven were removed because they did not represent current

thinking about young children with disabilities, all were published between 1974 and

1997; two investigated specific disabilities (severe physical handicaps and autism); two

focused specifically on medical aspects of child development (nutrition and mental

health); three researched early intervention (children 0-3 years old) services; two on

specific reading interventions; one investigated the role IA and teacher education levels

had on student achievement; one dealt with early childhood services in China.

classroom experience and a knowledge base, and develop avenues for them to enhance

their credentials" (p. 171). Such a suggestion continues to build on and show that the

relationships IAs form are of value. In addition, it stands in support of the overall goal of

Head Start: to support and encourage the economic and educational abilities of the

families with children in the program.

Head Start programs. Early childhood programs, especially Head Start, continue

to be reluctant to adhere to the federal law requiring the inclusion of children with

disabilities. Providing inclusive educational settings is not a choice for Head Start

programs, but the research provides insight into ways of addressing staff concerns about

children with disabilities and issues that prove to be barriers to effective inclusive

education.   Plus research that investigates the negative impact overly placing children

with disabilities in one classroom has (Beauchesne, et al., 2004).

Lieber et al. (2000) identified six common factors across 16 early childhood

programs; three are pertinent to this study (key personnel, shared vision, and

training/external support). Changes to special education laws deemed the other three

factors irrelevant to this project. It is surprising that the factors found to facilitate or act

as barriers to successful inclusion in this 2000 article are similar to issues that continue

throughout the remainder of this literature review. Factors that facilitated or were

barriers to the program's implementation of inclusive practices were investigated in a

qualitative study of 16 early childhood programs from various program types and

communities (purposeful sampling: public school, community-based, and Head Start in

rural, suburban, and urban settings). This study was part of a larger investigation

conducted by the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion (ECRII). Using the constant comparative method of data analysis, concepts were grounded in the data collected. The data involved open-ended interviews with teachers, special education teachers, program directors, principals, and district and state coordinators of general and special education for each of the 16 early childhood programs located throughout the United States. In programs where inclusion was successfully implemented and continued to thrive, key personnel was a critical factor. For example, in one of the school districts the superintendent believed inclusion was important, and the appointment of a coordinator for the implementation of his vision of inclusion led to inclusive learning environments for all young children. Conversely, personnel also created barriers to the implementation of inclusive practices. In this example, a Head Start program forced staff to integrate without discussion; in one case a teacher returned from summer break to find her class moved and no longer a Head Start classroom. In these two examples, the need for a unified, clear, shared vision was the key factor to the success or failure of inclusion. For the first example, the division leadership had a clear and concise vision that they invested in; appointed an energetic person to implement the change; and ensured the same message was communicated to all members of the education community, families, and general education and special education teachers. The second example was forced on both the general and special education teachers. Without the necessary leadership and shared vision, the two teachers were ineffective in creating a learning environment that was successful and beneficial to all involved. Training and external supports provided the time necessary for teachers to develop as a team. In one program, one general and

one special education teacher (a teaching team) worked together to develop a mutually shared vision. The other support that was beneficial to programs was partnerships with universities and other community members with successful inclusion programs. This was especially helpful for one classroom program where the teachers were able to develop an understanding of the various types of inclusion and could see the theory in action. Lieber et al. (2000) capture the complexity involved in preschool program change and the influence each member can have on whether or not change is successful. Most disheartening is the fact that the same issues continue to hinder early childhood programs from meeting the needs of all children in 2012.

Individual Head Start programs' willingness to provide inclusive classrooms for all children depends heavily on the program's administrative director's attitude toward children with disabilities. In a 2004, article reporting on a medium-sized ($n = 55$) survey of Head Start program directors in the northeastern United States, Beauchesne et al. discuss the poignant disconnect that exists between the federal requirement and how individual Head Start programs interpret it. The researchers found that the northeastern Head Start programs were more apt to enroll children with minor speech and cognitive delays (high incidence), and none of the programs enrolled children with moderate to severe disabilities (low incidence). Head Start program administrators must address the needs of children with moderate to severe disabilities instead of enrolling children with disabilities that are seen as *easier* to handle. The findings further demonstrate the fact that Head Start programs do not have shared definitions concerning disabilities, inclusion, required services, ways to meet the 10% Head Start enrollment requirement,

and appropriate accessible staff support around inclusion of children with various types and levels of disability. Most alarming was the finding that African American boys continued to represent a large percentage of Head Start children referred to special education services. The overrepresentation of African American male referrals to special education will be further discussed in the literature review forming the link between culturally responsive practice and inclusive practices. Beauchesne et al. (2004) provide evidence that Head Start mandates are not being implemented as originally outlined; children with disabilities continue to be denied access to a program that could benefit them. Although the study was reported in 2004, the statement that Head Start program directors must "demonstrate that there is a commitment to comply with federal mandates to care for more children with complex disabilities than is currently being done" (p. 53) continues to be a central issue in 2012.

Concern over Head Start administrative support for inclusion continued to be a central observation in Gallagher and Lambert (2006). They link Head Start classroom quality and concentration of children with special needs to child outcomes. Stratified random sampling was used to select 48 classrooms from a total of 190 possible Head Start classrooms throughout the southeastern United States. The Head Start classrooms were involved in a 5-year university research partnership to measure classroom quality and help fulfill the 10% enrollment of children with special needs requirement. Quality was measured using the Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs (Abbott-Shim & Sibley, 1998). Conclusions reached by Gallagher and Lambert continue to be relevant, although Head Start is currently using different classroom quality measures. Head Start

administrative staff continued to demonstrate a need for deeper understanding of ways to integrate and support staff working with young children with disabilities. For example, in classrooms with more than 10% of children with disabilities the overall achievement of all children was lower. The success of inclusive practices in early childhood educational settings is directly related to placement of students and teacher credentials.

More than half of the classrooms evaluated in the Gallagher and Lambert (2006) Head Start study had 20% or more children with special needs, with some classrooms having 70%. There was no impact on the achievement of children with typical development in classrooms, with the 10% reflecting the maximum number of children with special needs. In addition, Head Start centers still lack focused, specific professional development and instructional support that addresses the needs of all children, especially children with disabilities. Gallagher and Lambert (2006) discuss the necessity for training that focuses on social–emotional needs to ensure the integration of all children.

Issues concerning minority children. Children's school experiences all work together to support and enhance or detract and alienate them. For children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, who may have disabilities, all too often school experiences are negative, stereotypical, and alienating. Tyrone Howard's (2008) case study research with teenage African American males poignantly discusses their realizations that their race played a significant role in how teachers and administrators discipline them. It is interesting that the young men in the study "attributed much of their academic success to their desire to challenge negative stereotypes about young Black

males" (Howard, 2008, p. 969). The research discusses the possibilities inherit in culturally responsive practice in opening teacher's eyes to the experiences and perceptions African American males have about school.

Initiating the referral process of a child to special education is complex, requiring an understanding of cultural impacts and realistic assessment of skills (Harry & Klinger, 2006). The Moore (2002) study is based on Harry and Anderson's (1994) work, which investigates teachers' decisions to refer children to special education, with a specific focus on African American teachers and children. Through qualitative interviews they investigate the influences for 11 full-time public school African American early childhood teachers, 5 pre-kindergarten and 6 kindergarten, in the Southwestern United States. Teachers all had bachelor's degrees, and three had gone on to receive a graduate degree in special education and one in early childhood education. All taught in urban schools serving low socioeconomic status populations. The findings of the study highlight teachers' requests for further training, issues of cultural disconnect within their schools, and strong community/cultural connections.

Teachers discuss the need for further training for both assessing children for referrals and addressing the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms. "Many teachers felt they really did not possess adequate knowledge needed to assess students' disabilities or to recognize one disability from another" (Moore, 2002, p. 639). Some teachers discuss the district's unwillingness to invest in professional development, pointing out that everything was based on money and that additional professional development would cost money they were unwilling to give up, yet "all teachers saw that

there was a need for extensive training" (Moore, 2002, p. 640). They viewed additional training as a way to help them make decisions to refer children, especially African American children, given the large number ending up in special education. Although teachers discuss how racial perceptions have changed for the better, they continued to echo experiences of bias toward African American children. As one teacher states:

> Being a Black American and you can tell. Even talking with some of the
> White teachers, they say, oh, he's so dumb, you know, and I have to tell
> them, don't say that about the child, [you need to] work with him. Find
> out what is making that child so "dumb" since you think that. I said,
> "Maybe it's something you are doing, something you're not teaching, your
> teaching style. You need to go back and think about it and I'll give you
> some tips on ways to work with that Black child" (Moore, 2002, p. 645).

These experiences demonstrate the need for constant vigilance to investigate racial bias in schools. Moore (2002) finds the teachers' very clear and well-rooted connections to the larger community and culture affect their referral process. Referrals tended to be based on improving the child's experiences or addressing a real need, such as extreme behavior. The connections also lead them to have positive attitudes toward the children and the school. "These excellent teachers are willing to assume personal responsibility for nurturing within students the prerequisite skills for success in school and society and to embrace the strong ties of the African American community and its culture" (Moore, 2002, p.648). Finally, Moore points out that even these teachers continued to attribute racial stereotypes to "good" and "bad" traits and use subjective interpretations of children

as reasons to refer.

Over the course of a 3-year ethnographic study Harry and Klingner (2006) discuss witnessing key school policies and attitudes that lead to a disproportionate number of minority children being referred to special education. Referrals were made based on very little evidence academic, empirical evidence. School staff often discussed children and families based on long-held social stereotypes. Harry and Klinger (2006) point out that the special education referral tended to go through because of the families' inability to combat the social stereotypes cast against them. Although individual teachers had varying numbers of referrals, the larger indicator was administrator attitude. Administrators are found to cultivate a "culture of referrals".

Culturally responsive practice encourages interactions among children, families, teachers, and school administration that can work to counter such beliefs seen by Harry and Klinger (2006). In this model, children and families are believed to possess knowledge, skills, and insight that are not only worthy of the school but also necessary for the school to function. "Culturally responsive educational systems instill ethics of care, respect, and responsibility in the professionals who serve culturally and linguistically diverse students" (Klinger et al., 2005, p.8). School staff commit to investigating their own experiences of marginalization while continuously evaluating their classroom curriculum and the messages they are communicating to children and families. Of course, it is imperative that such change is supported and encouraged by knowledgeable school leaders and that they have extensive experience and understanding

of the special education process and culturally responsive practice, their school community, and their teaching staff (Klinger et al., 2005).

As noted in the review of Santamaria (2009), the disconnect that exists between teachers and school administration concerning students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, requires constant revisiting. Teachers and administrators must understand second language acquisition and its impact on development. She points out that such "misunderstanding[s] can result in frequent special education misdiagnoses and inappropriate placement in high-incidence disability support settings, such as speech and language and/or resource specialist programs" (2009, p. 228). Although the two schools in her study provide students with a curriculum that is more welcoming and integrates their experiences, clear guidelines and implementation must be established to ensure it is successful. She cautions that integration of culturally responsive practice requires teachers move past just acknowledging difference to actually finding practical ways to bridge the divide between students; otherwise, the curriculum runs the risk of being color-blind, ultimately not validating or addressing the role race and ethnicity plays in education.

Role of program and school administration. Research points to the importance of program administration buy-in and support in co-creating a school culture that embodies culturally responsive and inclusive practices to be successful (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Bell & Thomas, 2011; Santamaria, 2009; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). A theoretical understanding of culturally responsive practice, issues facing minority children, and how culturally responsive practice addresses those issues is fundamental.

This need is illustrated by looking across programs, then noting philosophies, attitudes, and practices that lead to success in addressing the needs of minority children through culturally responsive practice (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Santamaria, 2009; Bell & Thomas, 2011). No research explicitly discusses obstacles to teachers enacting culturally responsive practice or inclusion. Lieber and colleagues (2000) state, "successful change occurred in districts that had active commitment of their leadership from the beginning" (2000, p 83). The article fell short of suggesting it was essential. With culturally responsive practice no articles were focused on early childhood programs or Head Start; therefore the search was expanded to include elementary and secondary school administration.

Over a 3-year professional development partnership with 10 inner-city Catholic schools Bell and Thomas (2011) found that in addition to teacher beliefs about students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, administration buy-in and understanding of culturally responsive practice and key issues facing minority students were just as important in instituting change to address such students' needs. Principals representing the inner-city Catholic schools reached out to university researchers to partner in a professional development that would result in change in teacher attitudes toward student populations that were increasingly coming from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They wanted a model that addressed and explored teacher beliefs, practices, and experiences in this area. Principals had experienced one-stop workshops dealing with culturally responsive practice and did not feel it had any impact on teachers. Therefore, they reached out to develop a university partnership that would

address their specific needs, while hoping to improve academic achievement of minority students. Diversity committees were formed in each school.

Research reflects on the fact that institutional buy-in, interest, and willingness to provide teachers with time, space, and open dialogue to explore issues related to teaching populations from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds were essential for success and sustainability of the program. Unfortunately, none of the schools chose to follow the researcher suggestions of inviting and involving community members and parents in the meetings, and many of the schools struggled to form short- and long-term goals for the program. Bell and Thomas (2011) note that the lack of focus of all involved, especially administrators, will not allow changes to go beyond "surface change. Transformation of teacher personal perceptions and beliefs about diversity will not happen if administrators do not understand or value their role in the change process" (p. 3). In addition, teachers must be encouraged and supported in honestly exploring their own biases through dialogue and activities that lead to further understanding of each. Through this process teachers and administrators need to clearly define culture, diversity, and race to begin the work of addressing the needs of all children (Bell & Thomas, 2011).

Interestingly Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Saki (2011) point out that though Head Start teacher educational requirements outline the need for all teachers to have bachelor's degrees by 2013, the same demand does not exist for center or program directors. Unlike K–12 education, where leaders typically have teaching credentials and extra coursework in supervision, there are no agreed-upon standards or common qualifications for leaders in programs serving children birth to 5 years (Ryan et al., 2011). An investigation into 98

Head Start and early childhood center directors illustrates topics for their future professional development needs. The majority discusses the need for additional training into program administration and management and areas related to early childhood education. In addition, a third of the directors felt they lacked knowledge of child development theory and children with special needs (Ryan et al., 2011). The issue of increasing qualifications for directors, like teachers, leads to discussion of salary disparities that exist within early childhood education. Finally, Ryan et al. (2011) point out the need for leaders that are charismatic, visionary, knowledgeable, and able to collaborate with members of the community, public schools, and other partners.

Professional development. The previous sections provided evidence of the incomplete and sometimes incorrect response to U.S. federal law IDEA Part B and Part C (Individuals with Disabilities, 2004), Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), and suggestions given by the early childhood education community. Training models have been shown to help facilitate changes for program directors and teachers. Professional development models vary widely. As the 2010 Department of Education literature review points out, professional developments need to be varied (amount of professional development needs to match the amount of content/knowledge building), should represent building of collaboration between all center staff (directors, teachers, instructional assistants), and should represent an increase in areas of concern in the early childhood education field (needs of the current population, cultural, and linguistic competencies) (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, and Shea (2009) provide further support for professional development models that vary in content and duration. Data were collected during a year-long professional development model based on four 2-hour modules focused on inclusive practices for early childhood professionals. Early childhood education services were provided through center-based, family home, and license-exempt (Native American sites) settings throughout the San Diego, California area. The topics were Introduction to Inclusion, Respectful Accommodations, Positive Behavioral Support, and Partnering with Families. Material was presented with supporting activities to be completed at the professional's worksite. Participants were encouraged to participate in all four sessions; out of 1,298 participants 353 attended three or more different modular sessions. Through a quasi-experimental design, participant response to a postsession questionnaire administered immediately following the session was analyzed for the impact of the professional development model and content on the provider's ability to integrate children with disabilities into their programs. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions about the participant's attitude and perceived competence toward inclusion with a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis revealed that "providers who attended three or more of the topic-specific training sessions displayed the most positive attitudes toward inclusion and demonstrated the greatest perceived competence regarding how to include a child with special needs into their program" (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009, p. 204). This finding further supports the need for trainings to encompass a wide range of topics over a certain period. Baker-Ericzén et al. (2009) attribute the changes in attitudes and competence to explicit instruction in strategies shown to work in inclusive settings,

such as specific strategies to manage typical types of issues behavior. This study is lacking data to demonstrate if change actually did happen because the only data collected were postsession questionnaires; there were no on-site observations of teacher practices or specific changes to program attitudes or enrollment of children with disabilities. The researchers infer a change in practice by reporting that "county-wide administrative child care referral database increased by 13%" (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009, p. 205).

Gay (2000; 2010) proposes professional development that improves teachers' culturally responsive views of the classroom, plus encourages teachers to engage in meaningful self-exploration of personal attitudes and biases that affect their practices. Culturally responsive teachers need to ensure they are also creating appropriate and sustained home–school connections (Gay, 2000; 2010). In early childhood, the home–school connection is imperative in providing environments and curricula that are meaningful, relate to prior experiences, and are respectful of home cultural beliefs and values (Bowman et al., 2001). Although many researchers have tried to capture this aspect of teaching in schools with children from various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and ability backgrounds, few have found that survey responses, interview reflections, and practice actually match the needs of the families or statements teachers give. Joshi, Eberly, and Konzal (2005) call for professional development that focuses on culturally responsive practice—more specifically, home–school connections based on the ways teachers described culture, the families of the children in their classes, ways they create spaces for home–school communication, and how to implement such strategies. As Joshi et al. point out many times, "parents and educators are each pulling in different directions

without necessarily being aware of what [agendas and stereotypes each is operating from]" (2005, p. 12). Just as families enter school with prior experiences with education and cultural definitions of teacher, schools, and parent, so do teachers. To assist each child in achieving to the best of their ability, it is necessary for all members of the child's educational team to work together in a respectful and supportive manner. Unfortunately, teachers often form relationships and prejudices based on cultural misinformation or stereotypes.

Joshi et al. (2005), through a group-developed survey with open- and close-ended questions, tried to establish patterns among teachers, specialists, and administrators in preschool to fifth grade classrooms in New Jersey. When surveyed, many of the teachers responded that they encouraged parent involvement in their classrooms through organizing special events, chaperoning field trips, and attending parent–teacher conferences. When later asked to provide reasons why families did not show interest in these activities, overwhelmingly the teacher responses focused on the parents' lack of time, language issues, and an overall lack of interest in their child's education. However, teachers did not provide additional ways of measuring parent interest or involvement. Teachers felt most comfortable with using written communication and conferences when communicating with parents. Joshi et al. (2005) further explored the fact that these two forms of communication represent an extremely one-sided power relationship between teachers and families. This point provided the foundation for Joshi et al.'s (2005) observation that what the teachers reportedly found as important and useful in the classroom did not connect to the measurements they used to determine involvement.

Little research exists that discusses the relationship between IAs and teachers. Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, and Hunt (2012) report on data collected from 167 instructional assistants and teachers throughout the Southeastern United States involved in a 2-year professional development project focused on dynamics between IAs and teachers and the use and implementation of a scripted literacy curriculum. Surveys and classroom observations before and after a targeted professional development highlighted dynamics and needs of the IA–teacher partnership. In this study IAs reported having strong relationships with children yet teachers did not; also, IAs viewed teacher feedback as helpful and positive, but teachers did not believe their feedback was well received. Finally, teachers perceived themselves as integrating IA feedback into the classroom much more often than IAs did. Researchers found that the half-day targeted professional development based on classroom observations of IA use of a scripted literacy curriculum did not yield any significant changes in the IA's delivery of the various lessons. Suggestions for future research focused on the fact that professional development must be sustained over a longer period and should focus on the needs of IAs and teachers but also address the dynamics between them. They point out that paramount to a successful partnership is that "teachers and [IAs] must view themselves as partners in the classroom" (p. 23). In addition, they found that much of the confusion was based on the fact that the roles and responsibilities of IAs were not well established or consistent. Finally, Jones et al. (2012) point out that "administrators [must] purposefully provide both teachers and [IAs] with the professional development, time, and resources to make [the partnership and relationship] work" (p. 23).

Roehrig, Dubosarsky, Mason, Carlson, and Murphy (2011) offer an example of professional development that not only looks at teaching staff but also administration of the overall program. The professional development model encouraged sustained support for culturally appropriate science education in Head Start classrooms in Native American programs. This mixed-methods study of 37 Head Start teachers at Native American reservations in the Midwestern United States investigates the impact of sustained professional development to increase teachers' use and understanding of science-based culturally responsive practices. Improvements in teacher practices were measured using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessment tool, developed to measure environment, interactions, and teacher practices in early childhood classrooms (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) After 1 year, researchers found that teachers' scores slightly increased; more important, teachers demonstrated more comfort with seeing how to integrate and see science in their communities. Further, in the second year researchers report a statistically significant change in CLASS scores and an increase in teacher integration of community-relevant science and inquiry-based interactions with children. Researchers call for continued emphasis on connecting practices and theoretical content to early childhood educational professional development models. They also point out, "meaningful instructional change takes time and one-shot workshops with limited follow-up in classrooms are ineffective in producing instructional change" (Roehrig, et al., 2011, p. 577).

Summary

Head Start history, my personal experiences, relevant research concerning culturally responsive practice, inclusive practices, role of administration, and professional development models are all woven together throughout this section. All are presented to show the interconnected nature of each of these topics and their relationship to this study. Although in-service Head Start teachers and instructional assistants are the focus of this study, it was necessary in several areas to expand the research to include elementary and secondary schools because of gaps in available research. Head Start Performance Standards (2009) outline requirements for culturally responsive practice and inclusive practices, yet very little exists that details the impact of enacting or not enacting such practices on child performance or the role administration plays in providing instructional assistants and teachers with the ability to enact such changes in their classrooms. Research does not focus on the role Head Start program administration plays in instituting change or improving quality and professional development has begun to investigate ways to address the needs of teachers already in the field. Throughout this section I have highlighted gaps in research; therefore gaps in our understanding of what is effective in shifting attitudes of in-service early childhood educators concerning culturally responsive practice and the instructional needs of all children, especially children with disabilities, or those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This literature review provides a foundation for this investigation into how Head Start IAs and teachers understand and utilize culturally responsive practice and appropriate instruction for all children, especially those with disabilities. In addition, this foundation questions

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the roll program administration and professional development models have on early

childhood practices.

CHAPTER 3

Research questions for this dissertation were developed to address three key

factors—culturally responsive practice, inclusion, and the instructional assistants' and

teachers' perceived power to enact each—which have been seen to have an impact on

instructional practices for young children, especially children in Head Start programs. I

address in this chapter the research design, qualitative with a constructivist grounded

theory approach using focus groups, plus various supporting data (reflective, analytic

memos, notes taken during the focus group sessions, survey and demographic data,

illustrations created during focus group sessions, and data from other focus groups

conducted for the PASIT[9] project). A rationale for site and participant selection is also

provided. Various sources of data collection are discussed with the primary data source

being instructional assistant and teacher focus groups. I discuss my method of data

analysis that consisted of open coding, both individually and with a co-coder. All of the

above elements work together to represent my research design which I elaborate on and

provide specific examples of in the following chapter.

The research questions developed for this study are best answered through

qualitative research methods that allow for building on and refinement of existing

practices through an iterative data collection and analysis process (Maxwell, 2005;

Patton, 2002). Each of the research questions work together to address the how this

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[9] Refer to Chapter 2 for details of PASIT project.

group of Head Start instructional assistants (IAs) and teachers[10] understand the work they do and their personal experiences with culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities.

- How does this set of Head Start IAs and teachers, in a community-based program, understand and utilize culturally responsive practice and provide appropriate instruction for all children, especially those with disabilities?

- How is culturally responsive practice, which was designed for Anglo-American teachers, understood and used by IAs and teachers who are and are *not* Anglo-American?

- How is the instruction of children with disabilities influenced by Anglo-American and *non*-Anglo-American IAs' and teachers' personal experience and understanding of disability?

- What power to address each of the above practices does this set of Head Start IAs and teachers perceive themselves as having?

Research questions for this study initially involved questions discussing inclusion-teaching practices, because neither instructional assistants nor teachers brought up or discussed inclusion; questions were changed to reflect what they actually discussed.

Research Design

In an effort to further define and refine how culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities, are understood, this dissertation probes into how this set of IAs and teachers utilizes each. Qualitative

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[10] Instructional assistants are placed before teachers throughout this paper because this was the order of data collection.

methodology provides a framework to investigate the research questions and explore the context within which the key practices of this study are understood and allows for unexpected insights through interactions with this set of Head Start IAs and teachers. Qualitative methods consider the context as a key component, both of where the participants come from and of the actual data collection activity (Patton, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). Instructional assistants' and teachers' attitudes express each person's individual experiences, plus each exists within the context of Head Start and their individual program's practices. Qualitative research design allows for multiple factors, such as the ones demonstrated in this study, to affect data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Yin, 2010). Head Start programs, staff, teachers, parents, and children do not exist in a vacuum. As Patton (2002, p. 63) discusses, qualitative research is not conducted in a laboratory, where variables are easily controlled and manipulated in a context-free world. Instead, context and the human beings, with their interactions, voice, and ways of processing the world around them, are the study.

The qualitative methods I utilize in this study are appropriate for the research questions and are theoretically guided by the literature on culturally responsive practice and definitions of quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities. Geneva Gay (2010) considers culturally responsive practices 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 them" (p. 31). Inherent in culturally responsive practice is a constructivist, critical stance toward children and families that sees them as capable and valuable members of the classroom

community. The constructivist understanding highlights that there are "multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and the interactions with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 96). A critical stance allows for conscious appreciation that these IAs' and teachers' interactions are influenced by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, politics within organizations, and their own experiences of marginalization (Patton, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

A grounded theory research design provides a process for acquiring a deeper understanding of how this group of Head Start instructional assistants and teachers understands culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define the purpose of grounded theory design to provide "a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning [and] gain understanding" (p. 1). Grounded theory allows for early analysis, where analysis is focused on participant dialogue, plus their overall interactions; this is done to ensure the voices of the participants in the study are front and center (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Through inductive data collection and analysis, this group of Head Start IAs and teachers define culturally responsive practice, quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities and their perceived ability to address each is developed while also remaining conscious of various sociocultural influences on them.

In constructivist grounded theory, codes are "given meaning and played out in the subjects' lives" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 524). Charmaz (2011) found grounded theory being used to "sharpen thematic analyses" (p. 360), through a constructivist grounded theory

process focus is shifted to theory construction with renewed emphasis on issues related to power, oppression and differences within groups, plus takes into account historical social issues and hierarchical structures within organizations (p. 362). From my perspective, "the constructivist version of grounded theory [allows me to attend] to context, positions [of individuals within a study], discourses, and meanings" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 362) instructional assistants and teachers embrace concerning the three organizational categories of this study (culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and their perceived ability to address each in their classrooms). Codes are achieved through a systematic, reflective process. This "systematic, qualitative procedure generate[s] a theory that explains a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic" (Creswell, 2005, p. 396). Each of these philosophical and research perspectives provides an appropriate research design for the research questions and goals of this study.

Site

In the following sections, I discuss site selection and characteristics. Selection was based on convenience and the availability of this specific Head Start program. Reasons for utilizing this site and the characteristics it possesses are highlighted.

Selection. Purposeful selection was utilized because it "is a strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). The ways questions are asked and methods would vary given which site or participants were selected (Glesne, 2006). Beyond providing data on a specific group of in-service Head Start IAs and teachers in an urban setting, access to this community-based program was

used for two reasons: their involvement in the PASIT project, a U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services (DHHS)-funded research grant with George Mason

University,[11] and my personal distance from the program. The program's involvement in

the PASIT project provided me with access, in that I was able to form relationships with

the teaching staff outside of the actual data collection for this study and that I had access

to the activities and reactions they had during PASIT professional development activities.

As a current Head Start teacher in a neighboring school district, it was important for me

to select a Head Start program to which I had little prior experience. The site selected

was one I had not worked with, nor attended Head Start program meetings with, prior to

the PASIT activities.

Characteristics. For this dissertation study, I was interested in urban Head Start

programs with multiethnic and multiracial teaching staff. I investigated how the teaching

staff in community-based Head Start programs view children and families who may be

different from them. The children and families involved in this Head Start program

represent a group from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in an urban setting,

living in low socioeconomic situations, and that might have disabilities.

This Head Start community-based program is located in a large metropolitan area

of the northeastern United States. Head Start classrooms in this program are scattered

throughout public schools and recreation centers. Sites have one to four classrooms per

location, depending on available space. School hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Demographics of the classrooms and the children enrolled in the program were

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[11] Refer to Chapter 2 for details on the PASIT project.

collected using *Teacher Demographics, Education and Program Professional Development Activities* (Attachment 1), a form required for PASIT Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) grant. This form was modified because not all elements of the form were necessary for this study. The data collected with the form created a composite of self-reported site and participant characteristics. Self-reported data was selected because they demonstrate how the IAs and teachers describe the children and themselves. Moreover, they create the context in which these IAs and teachers see themselves working.

The children in the classrooms were 3 to 5 years old. Instructional assistants and teachers reported having between 15 and 20 children. Children with disabilities, defined as having an active individualized education plan (IEP), were not evenly distributed throughout the classrooms. The placement of children with identified disabilities varied from one classroom having no students with IEPs to two having one child, and one classroom having five children with IEPs. This reported information supports in-class observations and focus group discussions around IA and teacher concerns that certain teachers were having a disproportionate number of children with IEPs in their classrooms without additional support. Of course, with the information requested from participants in this study, it is difficult to discern levels of need for each child's specific disability.

Instructional assistants and teachers reported that the most common languages spoken by or at the children's homes are English, Spanish, and Arabic. It is important to note that five people did not provide a list of the languages the children heard or spoke; however, they did say that the children were English language learners. The majority (8

out of 11) of participants said that the children heard three (Spanish, English, and Arabic) different languages regularly. In addition, participants varied in the number of children they considered dual language learners from 3 reporting zero to 1 estimating 18 children. The IA- and teacher-reported data provided a different picture than was noted during classroom observations I conducted for the PASIT project. During classroom observations I noted that the majority (over 80%) of children in the program had home languages other than English; children were overheard speaking to each other in Spanish or Arabic.

Participants

Below I address my participant selection process. Next I provide characteristics of the IAs and teachers in this study. For participant characteristics I provide an explanation of self-reporting survey data utilized in this study. All participant characteristics are derived from the self-reporting data.

Selection. Central to this study is that the site allowed access to IAs and teachers in an urban Head Start program, with the majority of them being members of a minority ethnic and racial group initially. As described earlier, the PASIT professional development project, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, a three year DHHS-funded Head Start research grant that involved one 3-day summer institute, quarterly seminars, in-classroom observations and coaching, and monthly group meetings within the various Head Start sites. For this dissertation I use survey data collected during a daylong evaluation of the PASIT project in May of 2010.

Over the course of the 2009-2010 school year, several members of the teaching staff in this Head Start program changed. Three female teaching staff changed their positions, two leaving Head Start (both African American, one instructional assistant and one teacher) and another moving to a supervisory role (Anglo American). Two new teachers (one male Anglo American and one female Anglo American/Alaskan Native) were hired to teach these classes. One instructional assistant (Latina) substituted in the role of the teacher for one classroom, where she co-taught with another instructional assistant who was African American. Additionally, an African female instructional assistant was placed in the classroom that was previously the Latina instructional assistant's placement. The PASIT research group and I were informed after these staff changes had been made. The three new teaching staff did not attend the PASIT project summer 3-day professional development institute in 2009, nor did they participate in the first focus group conducted to evaluate the PASIT project (data from this focus group was not analyzed for this study, it is only used to reinforce discussions in Chapter 5). These changes were allowed within the research design of the PASIT project. As the new or changing staff started in their given classrooms, they began attending the year-long professional development already in progress. Therefore, the demographics of the initial group recruited for this study changed slightly.

In addition, two IAs did not attend the May 2010 professional development session; one was sick and one was having a baby. Not only were these changes confusing and difficult to keep track of as a researcher, as a current Head Start teacher I

was dumbfounded by the stress, inconsistency and overall disregard for the impact such changes have on teaching staff, children and families in their program.

Characteristics. All instructional assistants and teachers provided signed consent in accordance with George Mason University, Human Subjects Review Board. Because the data collection involved video and audio tape recording, this fact was highlighted to participants. Video and audiotapes were collected only for analysis purposes. Confidentiality of discussions and materials created during data collection was upheld and discussed with IAs and teachers.

Instructional assistants and teachers completed each survey in a group setting prior to the focus group sessions in May 2010. DHHS required the administration of the Teacher Demographics, Education and Program Professional Development Activities (Appendix A) and Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) (Burts, 1991; Appendix B) for all recipients of grants. Instructional assistants and teachers also completed the Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey (TMAS) (Ponterotito, Baluch, Greig, & Rivera, 1998; Appendix C), Multicultural Efficacy Scales (MES) (Guyton & Wesche, 2005; Appendix D), and Inclusion Attitude Scales (IAS) (Rafferty & Griffin, 2005; Appendix E). Each survey has areas or questions that are not relevant to this study; therefore, each was modified as needed. Demographic data (Appendix A) and FACES (Appendix B) were preselected and required for the project by DHHS because it was grant funded project. The other three surveys were selected to provide a complex view of what this set of instructional assistants and teachers understood about multicultural and inclusive education for young children.

Demographics. Five instructional assistants and six teachers were in this study. Demographic data (Appendix A) collects race/ethnicity, gender, languages spoken fluently, years at current job, years in the early childhood education field, and years of education. Items about professional development opportunities and attitudes toward professional development were removed because those elements are not the focus of this study.

Table 3.1
Instructional Assistants and Teacher Demographics

	Instructional assistants (*n*=5)	Teachers (*n*=6)
Race/ethnicity	2 East-African 2 African-American 1 Latino	4 African-American 1 Anglo-American 1 Anglo-American/Alaska Native
Gender	5 Females	5 Females 1 Male
Languages spoken fluently	5 English With the following as second languages: 2 Spanish 2 Amharic 2 Arabic	6 English
Years in current Head Start program	9 years, 6 years, 2 years, 1 year, 6 months	31 years, 23 years, 5 years, 3 years, two with 6 months
Education level	2 High school 1 High school some college courses 2 BAs in a non-early childhood field (Sociology and Economics)	2 High school with some college courses 2 AA 1 CDA working toward BA 1 BA in Early Childhood Ed. plus one graduate course

Demographic data (Table 3.1) shows the basics of who the people in this study are, two areas stand out: languages spoken fluently and years in current Head Start program. First, languages spoken fluently stands out because of the disparity between IAs and teachers. The fact that four out of the five IAs speak English and another language could demonstrate and an interest in helping the children maintain their home languages and cultures.

Second, years in current Head Start program stand out, with two teachers having more than 20 years of experience and three teachers with fewer than 5 years of experience and two IAs having more than 5 years and three with fewer than 2 years. This reinforces the program's reliance on IAs and teachers with more experience; the two IAs with more years discuss being frequently moved around and relied on to teach without moving to a "teacher" position. Teachers with more years also discuss having more administrative responsibilities and higher numbers of children with IEPs in their classrooms, this issue is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Instructional assistants and teacher education levels illustrate typical levels reported by the National Head Start agency. In an effort to improve the quality of instructional practices in Head Start classrooms, the federal Head Start Act of 2007 requires that 50% of teachers meet the minimum standard of having a bachelor's degree by 2013 (U.S. Department of Health, 2007). This change stands to increase the quality of educational experiences provided to young children enrolled in Head Start programs around the United States. In this study, 2 instructional assistants have BA degrees in a field not related to early childhood education, whereas only 1 teacher has a BA degree.

In order for this Head Start program to meet the changes outlined in 2007, significant changes will have to occur in the teaching staff in this program. Such staff changes affect Head Start because it was a program built on and continues to emphasize family involvement to the point that, prior to the 2007 changes, many parents began their careers in early childhood education in their child's Head Start classroom (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). For example, within this group of Head Start IAs and teachers, three IAs and five teachers had their own children in a Head Start program and two instructional assistants are Head Start graduates, with the teachers who taught them still teachers in this program.

In analyzing the demographics of this group I realized that the IA group represents a group of people that are first-generation immigrants to the United States. This insight proved significant to me during my analysis and reporting of what they discussed and debated during data collection. The life experiences of this group of IAs and teachers contributed to their view of the children and families they work with. Although this was not the focus of this study, it does provide an interesting perspective of the focus issues in this study.

Family and Child Experiences Survey. The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) (Appendix B) is a teacher measure with questions concerning didactic, teacher-centered practices, constructivist and child-centered teaching practices on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). A score of 5 is considered positive and reflects practice that is child-centered and developmentally responsive and appropriate teaching (Burts, 1991). Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley and Fleege (1993) reported reliability for the original scale (originally called Teacher Beliefs

Scale) was achieved through extensive classroom observations, scale responses from 219 kindergarten teachers throughout the United States. Analysis for this study included calculating Cronbach's alpha, plus in depth comparison of each individual statement on the scale. The survey was divided up into 6 categories; activities & materials, social, individualization, integrated curriculum/beliefs, literacy, structure. A Cronbach's alpha tests were run on each category, a statistical calculation often used in survey research to investigate internal consistency of items, one score (.84) was found within the good range, three (.77, .70, .66) were considered acceptable range, with two scores (.60, .58) were considered poor and were therefore removed (Charlesworth, et. al., 1993). The scale was adopted by the Office of Head Start in 1997 began conducting large scale longitudinal (2-3 years) cohort studies, FACES is one of the evaluation tools using in these studies (U.S. Department of Health, n.d. b.).

FACES protocol requires all statements be read aloud to participants. I read all directions and statements for this survey aloud to all participants; remember, IAs and teachers completed surveys together in one large room. Examples of FACES statements are as follows:

- Children should be allowed to cut their own shapes; perform their own steps in an experiment; and plan their own creative drama, art, and writing activities.
- Head Start teachers should use treats, stickers, or stars to encourage appropriate behavior.

All other statements followed a similar format, asking questions concerning expectations

of children, learning environments provided, and styles of instruction and teacher

attitudes. Instructional assistants and teacher scores are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2
Instructional Assistant and Teacher Mean Scores on FACES

Instructional Assistants					Teachers					
IA_1	IA_2	IA_3	IA_4	IA_5	T_1	T_2	T_3	T_4	T_5	T_6
3.14	3.13	3.60	3.73	3.20	2.79	3.71	3.80	3.20	3.20	3.87

In accord with scoring explanations provided by Burts (1991), participants' in this study

fall in the average range.

   Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey. Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey

(TMAS) (Appendix C), developed by Ponterotito et al. (1998), is a teacher self-report

measure with a 5-point Likert scale in which teachers respond to items (strongly disagree

to strongly agree) that represent different aspects of culturally responsive practice.

Ponterotito, et. al (1998) report the coefficient alpha, represents internal reliability of the

survey, as .82, considered to fall within the normal range. Within the scale a score of 5

reflects a high positive attitude toward multicultural curriculum and educational

practices. Questions also relate to teachers' experiences and comfort with teaching and

integrating various cultural perspectives into their classrooms and teaching practices.

Those questions in the original TMAS related to childhood experiences and administrative attitudes were removed because they did not pertain to the purpose of this study. Following is an example of two statements on the TMAS:

- Sometimes I think that there is too much emphasis placed on multicultural awareness and training for teachers.

- Teaching students about cultural diversity will only create conflict in the classroom.

Table 3.3
Instructional Assistant and Teacher Mean Scores on TMAS

Instructional Assistants					Teachers					
IA_1	IA_2	IA_3	IA_4	IA_5	T_1	T_2	T_3	T_4	T_5	T_6
3.40	3.25	3.40	3.37	2.83	3.40	3.70	3.45	2.70	3.10	3.40

According to Ponterotito et al. (1998), mean scores of instructional assistant (3.25) and teacher (3.29) fell within the average range for the TMAS. They neither strongly agree nor strongly disagree with the integration of culturally responsive practices or multicultural education.

Multicultural Efficacy Scales. The Multicultural Efficacy Scales (MES)

(Appendix D), developed by Guyton and Wesche (2005), is a 4-point Likert scale and is

a measure in which teachers respond to items related to culturally responsive practice

indicating the following: A = I do not believe I could do this very well; B = I could

probably do this if I had to, but it would be difficult for me; C = I believe that I could do

this reasonably well if I had time to prepare; or D = I am quite confident that this would

be easy for me to do. According to Guyton and Wesche, "These findings suggest that a

score of 1 or 2 on an item is a low score, that a score of 3 is average, and that 4 is a high

score" (2005, p. 25). This scale asks questions related to culturally responsive practice

and the teachers' attitude and ability to integrate such methods of teaching into his or

her practice. Also, it investigates attitudes and understanding of the larger sociocultural

issues surrounding the integration of culturally responsive practices. Cronbach's alpha

for this survey was .83, within the good range for internal reliability (Guyton & Wesche,

2005). Following are two examples of MES statements:

- I can adapt instructional methods to meet the needs of learners from diverse

   groups.

- I can develop materials appropriate for the multicultural classroom.

Table 3.4
Instructional Assistant and Teacher Mean Scores on MES

Instructional Assistants					Teachers					
IA_1	IA_2	IA_3	IA_4	IA_5	T_1	T_2	T_3	T_4	T_5	T_6

| 3.65 | 2.60 | 3.90 | 3.25 | 3.05 | 3.30 | 2.40 | 3.30 | 3.00 | 2.65 | 2.45 |

Three instructional assistants scored average (Table 3.4), and one was considered low, in the teacher group half scored low with the other half scoring average according to scoring descriptions provided by Guyton and Wesche (2005). For the teacher group, the low scores for half of the group represent a discomfort in providing sociocultural experiences and ways to integrate culture into curriculum and teaching practices (Guyton & Wesche, 2005). MES mean scores for instructional assistants and teachers provide additional support to findings discussions in Chapter 5.

Inclusion Attitude Scale. The Inclusion Attitude Scale (IAS) (Rafferty, Boettcher, & Griffin, 2001; Rafferty & Griffin, 2005; Appendix E) is a 5-point Likert scale that was originally developed to assess parent and teacher attitudes as to the impact of inclusion of children with disabilities and their families. Questions were developed based on a variety of published scales, specifically Benefits and Draw-basks of Mainstreaming Scale (Bailey & Witon, 1987) and Parental Attitudes Toward Mainstreaming Scale (Green & Stoeman, 1989). Cronbach's alpha calculated for teacher scores suggested high internal consistency (alpha .87) for subscales within the survey. A score of 5 reflects a high positive attitude toward inclusion of children with disabilities in all aspects of the school community. Questions within the scale are divided into those

addressing the impact on children with and without disabilities and those on teachers and

classroom dynamics. Following are two examples of statements in the IAS:

- Teachers are not likely to be qualified or trained to deal with the needs of children

  with disabilities.

- Children <u>without</u> disabilities learn to develop sensitivity to others by having the

  opportunity to know children with disabilities.

Within this scale were numerous questions not applicable to this study, such as

impact on families. In addition, there were questions concerning whether or not children

with certain disabilities should be included in the Head Start programs. These were

removed for two reasons: the early childhood field discourages applying such labels so

early in a child's development and within Head Start any child with a disability can be

registered in the program so specific disability labels are irrelevant. Instructional

assistant and teacher scores are shown in the following table.

Table 3.5
Instructional Assistant and Teacher Mean Scores on IAS

Instructional Assistants					Teachers					
IA_1	IA_2	IA_3	IA_4	IA_5	T_1	T_2	T_3	T_4	T_5	T_6
3.05	4.05	3.80	3.55	2.85	4.20	3.20	3.75	3.20	4.30	3.40

In terms described by Rafferty and Griffin (2005), all participants' in this study score within the average range (Table 3.5). When instructional assistants and teachers were completing the IAS survey many of them had questions and wanted clarification. One teacher wrote on each page of the survey "It depends", she made numerous comments throughout the time that she wanted clarification of exact context and situations that inclusion would occur.

Data collection

For this study, two focus groups (one for instructional assistants and one for teachers) are the main source of data collection. Of course reflective memos created during this entire dissertation process from conceptualization to discussion of findings influence this study. Plus, my overall analytic process from individually coding video and audio transcripts to co-coding sessions with a fellow student at George Mason University all served as additional data. Data collected from another focus group session for the PASIT project, demographic and survey data reinforce points made during this study's focus group sessions. All of these elements come together as data for this study, but in this section I will focus on the two focus groups conceptualize and designed to specifically address the key topics of this study only.

Focus groups. Focus groups are able to provide answers to the research questions developed for this study through a qualitative constructivist critical stance using a grounded theory approach. Fern (2001) explains that focus groups are well-suited for studies that look to generate theory through an inductive process. Focus groups provide information that supports or further explains other qualitative or quantitative data

collected (Fern, 2001). In this study, classroom observations and survey data collected as part of the PASIT project steered this study toward the use of focus groups, providing additional insight into how this set of IAs and teachers understands culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities and their perceived ability to address each.

Krueger and Casey (2009) state that focus groups encourage dialogue among members. For this study, focus groups provided a structured outline to guide dialogue among the members of each group around issues concerning culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities in a community Head Start setting. As Morgan (1997) points out, when focus groups are used as the primary source of data collection it is necessary to closely align the goals of the project with the focus group goals. The goals of this study are as follows:

- To address assumptions by minority teachers that culturally responsive practice is solely for Anglo American teachers to learn how to work with children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, who also might have disabilities
- To investigate the understanding of culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities, for in-service IAs and teachers in an urban community-based Head Start program

These goals were well-suited to this method of data collection because of focus groups can facilitate and encourage dialogue among group members concerning key components of the study.

Focus groups have been used in early intervention program research to provide important data on the difference between parents' and teachers' vision of the future and

purpose of early intervention (Wesley, Buysse, & Tyndall, 1997). As Barbour and

Kitzinger (1999) point out, focus groups can demonstrate how a group of people

construct and express their understanding of specific topics. In addition, focus groups are

seen as providing participants with a space where they are able to be honest and candid in

their responses (Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999).

Data for this study was collected during two individual focus groups: instructional

assistants (Focus Group I) and teachers (Focus Group II). Although considered,

individual interviews could not provide the natural and social environment that is

possible with focus groups. Focus groups were conducted at a community center

frequently used by the Head Start program for professional development. Instructional

assistants and teachers were familiar with the center. On the day that focus groups were

conducted, all members of the Head Start program were engaged in various professional

developments throughout the building and the day.

The natural, comfortable environment of the focus group's location helped IAs

and teachers understand that this was not an evaluation of their teaching practices;

instead, it was a part of the professional development model, PASIT, with which they had

been involved. Throughout the day IAs and teachers were asked to help refine and

improve the PASIT professional development model in a variety of ways. As a part of

the professional development day, each group engaged in focus group sessions for my

study.

The focus group format, sitting together and responding to questions with peers

and two moderators, was one that the majority of instructional assistants (one did not)

and teachers (two did not) were familiar. Participants had engaged in a focus group that investigated elements of the PASIT project two months prior to my focus group with the same co-moderator I used. I was unaware, until after the focus group, of the fact that one IA and two teachers did not participate in this prior focus group session. Unfortunately, I assumed all members of the two groups had had that prior focus group experience.

Design. Separate focus groups for instructional assistants and teachers were deemed necessary to provide each with a space in which they felt comfortable talking. This was especially necessary for IAs; it was noted in PASIT meetings and trainings that IAs did not necessarily always agree with the teacher but did not feel comfortable expressing it in their presence. In addition, concern about the power relationships between the two further encouraged the separation of the two groups.

Guiding questions provide the general framework for the focus groups while working to "uncover factors that influence opinions, behavior, [and] motivation" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 19). Questions developed were based on literature and prior research in culturally responsive practice; quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities; and the impact program administration has on their ability to address each. Divided into two main categories—culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities—three types of questions were developed (Appendix F):

- Those related to how assistant teachers and teachers discuss and describe the Head Start program and the children and families in their classrooms.

- Statements from literature in culturally responsive practice and quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities, in relation to early childhood teachers' attitudes and use of each.

- Investigation into how they relate or have experienced marginalization based on race, socioeconomic status, or disability.

Focus group protocol (Appendix F) outlines how each group was introduced to the focus group session and the questions developed for the session. Finally instructional assistants and teachers individually drew a response to the following question:

- Take a few minutes to draw a picture of where you as an instructional assistant/teacher fit into the hierarchy in your program. How does this hierarchy affect your ability to do culturally responsive practice and inclusion?

This question was developed to investigate if they perceived themselves to have any power to address the key topics discussed in this study, culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities. Each person had an opportunity to discuss and elaborate on the picture they drew. Pictures were collected at the end of the session.

Each focus group had two moderators: Sarah (pseudonym) and me. Sarah's knowledge of focus groups and Head Start community-based programs in urban areas led to her selection as a co-moderator. In addition, the participants in this study had already participated in another focus group moderated by Sarah; she was not an unknown person to them. I participated because of my knowledge of the Head Start programs and its connections to culturally responsive practice and providing quality instruction for all children, especially children with disabilities. In addition, Stacia, a member of the

George Mason University early childhood education community and recent graduate, videotaped, audiotaped, and took notes during the two focus groups. She was not a member of the discussion circle. The 90-minute focus groups consisted of five instructional assistants in the first group and six teachers in the second group, all of whom had participated in various stages of the PASIT project. At the end of the two focus groups, the moderators and note taker briefly met to reflect on the experience.

Sarah briefly discussed the purpose and process of the session, plus she asked the first question (Appendix F). In instances in which the question was not clearly understood or the participants swayed off topic, either of us would guide the group back to the question or provide clarification. Sarah and I worked together to elicit deeper responses; this was especially true in the teacher group. Sarah and I sat in the circle with participants while the group was videotaped and audiotaped and notes were taken. Participants created their own seating arrangement within the circle. Each person at the table had a self-made nameplate.

Sarah and I modeled and followed round-robin style, with each person in the group volunteering to comment in no specific order. This was possible with the instructional assistant group. However, in the teacher group, Sarah and I had to moderate, probe, and work to ensure all members of the group were heard and respected for their comments and insights. These observations and the dialogue that followed will be further analyzed in Chapter 4.

As a result of poor sound quality on video recordings, I had to use the separate digital audio recordings to create the verbatim transcripts. I then went back and added

nonverbal communication and reviewed the transcript for accuracy. Video noting

provided clarity of interactions and body language cues among participants and clarified

who was speaking. Verbatim transcription of the two focus groups yielded 3,594 total

lines of text (instructional assistant focus group was 1,419 and teacher focus group was

2,175).

Analysis

In a qualitative constructivist grounded theory analysis process "First, we

compare data with data as we develop codes; next, we compare data with codes; after

that, we compare codes and raise significant codes to tentative categories; subsequently,

we treat our major categories as concepts, and last, we compare concepts with concept,

which includes comparing our concept with disciplinary concepts" (Charmaz, 2011, p.

361). My analysis process includes a process theory perspective of the data, which "deals

with events and the processes that connect them" (Maxwell, 2010, p. 3). As Maxwell

(2010) points out, such a perspective should also allow for variance theory that "deals

with variables and the correlations among them" (p. 3) to emerge. This requires moving

beyond tallying incidences and interactions to solely provide a numerical value.

Providing variance theory support to process theory claims further strengths claims and

definitions. I utilize this stance and perspective of the data for this study's results section,

Chapter 4.

Throughout this section, I discuss in detail each of the steps I took in this process.

First, I highlight organizational categories that emergent out of the purpose of this study.

Second, I outline the iterative coding process my co-coder, Stacia and I took to achieve

substantive categories and how this process aided in reliability of the results. Third, I

discuss categorizing and connecting strategies used to pull together and contextualize

codes developed through the iterative coding process.

Analysis centered on what participants said, how they interacted during the focus

group session, and what they were saying related to the research questions of this study.

Maxwell (2005) discusses a view of interactions from the perspective of the participant

that provides an emic interpretation of the data while also taking on the etic perspective

to address the role of the researcher's interpretations of the interactions. The use of both

allows for a more holistic view of the data and participants in the study.

Organizational categories formed my initial review of the verbatim transcripts:

culturally responsive practice, disabilities, and experiences of marginalization/perceived

power. The three organizational categories were not surprising because they were

created and guided by the research questions and the focus group protocol developed for

the study. As Maxwell (2005) points out, these organizational categories are meant as

"broad areas or issues that [are] established prior to [data collection and] that could have

been anticipated" (p. 97). The three organizational categories represent my first review

of the transcripts; during this process large chunks of data fell under each. For the IAs,

the breakdown of the organizational categories was linear and followed the protocol

closely; with the teacher group, however, this was not the case. In the teacher group,

organizational categories were spread out, mixed in with each other, and not clearly

stated.

During the organizational category review, I began to develop and see substantive

categories in the focus group transcripts. Substantive categories provide a "broad description of participants' concepts and beliefs" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). These substantive categories go on to aid in the formulation of the group's working theory about the specific topic within the larger organizational categories. Each set of transcripts was reviewed in their entirety to develop the specific substantive categories.

Stacia and I each completed this task independently. Although Stacia's codes appear to be more substantive in nature, I too had created substantive categories. Mine appeared handwritten on the actual transcripts and in reflective memos. For this reason, in our meetings, especially for the instructional assistants group, we came to agreement quickly and were surprised on several occasions that we both had written the same comment about a particular line of text. Some of the substantive categories highlighted emergent, surprising insights by the participants. For the instructional assistants, one of the most surprising emergent categories was "Fear". Instructional assistants clearly discuss feelings of fear related to not know how to work with or best address the needs of children with disabilities.

With teachers a substantive category that developed came out of the way they discussed culture, specifically what they thought culturally responsive practice meant, which lead to the formation of the code "Myth of Merit". In the results sections of Chapter 4, this code will be further investigated. It was surprising that this was a code reinforced throughout the focus group session and used when discussing both children and families. Throughout my reviews of the transcripts, video, and discussions with Stacia, I looked for ways to connect and categorize the data. This similarity and

contiguity view of the data were necessary to capture the complex picture presented by each group during their respective sessions (Maxwell & Miller, 2008).

These complex pictures of each focus group session were analyzed using both categorizing and connecting strategies, as outlined by Maxwell and Miller (2008). First I began looking for similarities and differences within each focus group, then between the two. This helped in the creation of categories; "In qualitative data analysis, similarities and differences are generally used to define categories and to group and compare data by category" (p. 462). For example, I reviewed instructional assistant transcripts looking for all comments and discussions about families, this collected pieces of dialogue that became the code Partnership with Families, later I compared the Family category from IAs to teachers which yielded distinct differences between the two. IAs saw Partnerships with Families, whereas teachers saw Giving Parents Knowledge. These similarities based relationships aided in me in seeing contiguity-based connecting relationships "[connection] identification involves seeing actual connections between things (p. 462)". Where codes about families also become connected to views of children, in that again IAs had more positive perspectives and teachers had more deficit perspectives of children and families, this in turn spoke to the general attitude toward children and families of each group.

It was important for me during the categorizing and connecting phase of analysis that the dialogue segments not be stripped of their original meaning. Therefore, coding files include entire sections of dialogue, which represent more of what was being said before and after a specific statement is made. The contextual relationships between

members of the focus group affected how and what they were saying about the topics of this study; therefore it was important to remain conscious of these relationships throughout the categorizing process. These issues required a thematic analysis of each of the groups; "the theme itself often has an internal connected structure: a relationship between two concepts or actions" (Maxwell & Miller, 2008, p. 467). As seen with the teacher group, the group's overall attitude served as a thematic category that spoke to their group dynamics and understanding of their roles as teachers.

To improve reliability during the analysis process I co-coded the first round of all transcripts with Stacia (Patton, 2002). Reliability of the codes was established based on the common codes found by Stacia and me (Appendix 7). The final set of common codes used in the results section of this paper represents my handwritten reflections in the transcripts, video notes, memos, and reflective conversations with numerous colleagues.

Analysis began with IAs because this was the first focus group conducted on the day of data collection. We each independently reviewed, categorized, and created codes from the entire set of transcripts for IAs. Lines of text were cut and pasted while retaining context of the situation being discussed. Following is an example of what each coding table (Table 3.6) looked like:

Table 3.6
Example of coding tables

Line #	Transcript Dialogue	Thoughts
491-515	#7: if they choose to. It's gonna be up to the children and their families #2: Yeah! #7: How they turn out because…I am not really the	Lack of understanding about the role society plays in those choices

	parent after they get a certain age. But in the beginning, where you are molding them to be…	
	#2: huuu	
	#7: the best they can be. That starts at home. And then with us. And then as they go out in society, itself. Then they gonna make their own choice.	
	#4: Determine, right, determine	
	#2: Yeah.	
	#4: Decide which way they want to go.	
	#7: Even with my own children and at my house. That are adults now. We gave them the right path. Rather	
	#2: Yeah	
	#7: Rather they choose	
	#4: Right…to go	
	#7: They choose. It's gonna be their choice	

Stacia and I then met to review the codes and divisions of the data we had created on our own. We met to discuss IAs first; Stacia came to the meetings with 41 codes and I had 12 codes. Over the course of 6 hours, a list of 15 agreed-upon codes was developed.

Common codes decided on for the instructional assistants group were then applied to the teacher transcripts while allowing new codes to emerge from the text. The two tables in Appendix 6 illustrate the codes Stacia and I came to the meetings with and the common codes decided on at the end of the meetings. Ten codes found from round one (analysis of instructional assistant focus group) applied but in dramatically different ways. For example, families were discussed in both, but in the instructional assistant focus group the code was "Partnership with parents", in the teacher focus group the code was "Giving parents knowledge". The second round of coding (teacher group) led to the creation of 10 new codes and the application of the 8 codes from the assistant teacher group.

For the teacher group, Stacia and I met 3 times, for a total of 13 hours. Stacia came to the meetings with 13 new codes and 11 applicable old codes (from the IA list of codes). I had 21 new codes and 14 old codes (from the IA list of codes). Finally, a list of 10 new codes and 10 codes from the IA group that were applicable was developed. All codes are located in Appendix G. All of the meetings required a line-by-line review of the transcripts and watching of video as needed.

I independently conducted a second review of IA and teacher transcripts and video in order to double-check the final set of codes and to ensure that no pertinent data were missed. This repetitive, cyclical process accentuates the commonalities and differences between the two groups (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Open coding was done until a saturation of analysis occurred (Charmaz, 2006). The final round of analysis yielded only one code applicable to both focus groups: "Powerless".

Finally, five common codes were found between the two groups; both groups basically had similar concerns and experiences, yet they each discussed those in different ways. For example, although both groups discussed children, IAs discussed them in terms of a "Strengths-based view of children" and teachers saw them from a "Deficit view of children". Even though these two codes are related to children, the attitudes each group relayed varied greatly. It also demonstrates how each works with and sees the skills children have and bring to the classroom, a point central to culturally responsive practice.

Summary

Throughout this chapter I have provided discussion of the methods used in this study. Research design for this study follows a qualitative constructivist grounded theory perspective with two focus groups (instructional assistants and teachers). Also, a detailed presentation of site and participant selection and characteristics has been provided. Data analysis involved the formation of organizational, substantive, and theoretical categories that are achieved through coding, thematic units, and discussions of each with a co-coder. In this chapter, I provided the framework of what this study involved and why. This framework will be further reinforced by the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

The following sections outline my experiences with the results from each focus group—first the instructional assistants (IAs)[12] and then the teachers. Each group brought to the session divergent attitudes and understanding of culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and their level of power to address each. Group-created definitions of both culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities demonstrate how this set of instructional assistants and teachers understand them.

Instructional Assistants

The overall atmosphere and relationships between the instructional assistants provides a backdrop to the focus group session and how the IAs relate to each other. My discussion begins with the atmosphere instructional assistants created and shared during the focus group session. Definitions of each of the three organizational categories; culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and their perceived ability to address each in their teaching, are developed through examples from the data. For example, interlaced within IAs' definition of culturally responsive practice are a variety of factors, such as their emphasis on relationships, which influence the ways they discuss children and families. Though I discuss each IA factor individually, the interconnected, seamless way they reflect on each is important to remember. To this group of IAs,

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[12] Instructional assistants appear first because this was the order of data collection.

relationships, their own personal experiences, and a willingness to learn, all work together to influence their definitions of the three organizational categories. Instructional assistants saw the purpose of culturally responsive practice and addressing the needs of all children especially children with disabilities as a way to form better connections to the children and families in their classrooms. Whenever a lack of knowledge or understanding is discussed it is seen as an issue that requires seeking out more information, training, or exposure.

Within the instructional assistant group, three IAs were paired with a teacher, the other two were not. Because of the promotion of a teacher within the program, two IAs were working together as co-teachers. One of the IAs in this situation had been with the children all year and stayed when the classroom teacher was promoted. A second IA was brought in, and they co-taught the class for the remainder of the school year. The other three IAs were placed in classrooms with a classroom teacher. One IA had been with her teacher for some time; others were new or had recently been moved. In particular, one IA was moved from a long placement with a teacher to be with one of the new Anglo American teachers in the program. None of the placement issues were directly discussed during the focus group session, except to clarify statements when the moderators did not understand the circumstances.

Atmosphere. Instructional assistants came to the focus group immediately after a group meeting with all members of the Head Start program, where they had just completed questionnaires for the PASIT project. (For a full list of questionnaires, refer to Chapter 3.) They entered the focus group room chatting with each other and with the

moderators. Right from the beginning IAs created a warm, welcoming atmosphere between themselves and the moderators; this was communicated through their interactions with each other and the ways in which they engaged with and responded to questions. The excerpt below excerpt from the instructional assistants' focus group session, highlights communication exchanges where each person is given time to respond to a question or comment, without being interrupted or distracted.

> IA$_1$: *She just moved to a new class.* [13]
>
> IA$_2$: *Hmmm. Yeah.*
>
> IA$_3$: *Now you can talk about the old class.*
>
> IA$_1$: *You can talk about what you had before.*
>
> IA$_4$: *Oh. Yeah.*

In fact in this exchange, IA$_4$ was having a hard time answering questions, and in response other IAs offered support, encouragement and clarification of why IA$_4$ might be hesitant to answer.

Participants were encouraged by others in the group to share specific examples and to see themselves as having points of view worth sharing. For example, when a participant was reluctant to discuss controversial insights, she was encouraged and supported by all members of the group. This relationship among instructional assistants allowed them to critically reflect on their experiences with the children and families in their Head Start program. In the IA group each person, was allowed time to think and complete her part of the discussion; participants rarely cut each other off or spoke over

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[13] Throughout this dissertation, individual instructional assistant and teacher comments are provided in italic text.

others. During times of disagreement they encouraged each other to provide examples or clarity. The respect, trust, and welcoming atmosphere allowed IAs to feel comfortable enough to share their own gaps in understanding and discomfort with topics the focus group questions asked.

Instructional assistants self-selected their seats; they created their own nameplate with markers and paper. The majority of instructional assistants were familiar with the meeting format because they had taken part in a focus group for the PASIT project prior to this session. Only one instructional assistant, who was hired in November, did not take part in the PASIT project focus group. Instructional assistants were familiar with me from prior PASIT meetings, and the co-moderator, Sarah, from prior focus groups.

Of course, the relationship between the IAs was not developed in one 90-minute focus group session. However the way they spoke to each other and examples they brought up about each other showed that they had productive relationships with each other prior to the focus group. Their involvement in the PASIT project, focusing on intentional teaching practices that are guided, established, and developed through purposeful caring relationships with children for 9 months, could have further supported their relationships.

Culturally responsive practice. For this group of IAs, the definition of culturally responsive practice relied heavily on their current relationships with each other and those they developed with the children and families in their classrooms. Culturally responsive practice gave IAs a framework to see the strengths children brought to the classroom, helped them form partnerships with families to best support the children, and

allowed them to develop deeper relationships with the children. A level of openness was required to learn new ways of working with various children and families plus an overall respect for differences that occur among people. Relationships for the IAs developed out of their teaching and life experiences.

Relationships. Relationships were central to all discussions for this group of IAs. When they talked about culturally responsive practice, disabilities and the power they had, relationships with children, families and each other were given as examples, discussed and reflected on. A central motivation for this group of IAs was the relationships they were able to form with each other, families and the children they worked with. Relationships with children and families were seen as synonymous with creating a welcoming and supportive classroom. *[I] can have a better understanding of where the family is coming from. I don't have a problem saying, 'Okay we do this in our culture.' Maybe [my suggestion] will help the child.* Such a stance and attitude highlights the central purpose of culturally responsive practice; to develop and facilitate teaching staffs' ability to connect, respect, and understand that children and families have varying life experiences and strengths than the teaching staff might have (Gay, 2010). In addition, the professional development (PD) they were involved in encourages intentional instruction through relationships as a central tenant to quality early childhood education. Relationships directly contributed to the stories they shared about the children and families in their classrooms. IAs discussed two types of relationships those they had with children and families. A large amount of time was focused on being aware of the

strengths children had and the importance of forming partnerships with families to better support the child.

Strengths-based view of children. Instructional assistants saw that children bring information and skills to the classroom that was of value to them and the child's peers. Skills children brought to school ranged from that fact that they represented various cultural and linguistic backgrounds to being able to overcome adversity. Children's ability to experience so many different cultures was celebrated; *I think all children [should] grow up [experiencing] different cultures*. Comments highlighted the fact that the children in their program come from a wide variety of cultures and languages.

I have children from different countries, different cultures, different

religions. All children are good, no matter what culture they are.

Children are seen as being extremely capable of learning, especially languages. *Kids from around the world, their minds are like [sponges]. [Children] can learn like four or five languages [at] one time.* Given the wide variety of cultures, ethnic groups, races, languages, religions and family composition that existed in the communities the IAs worked in, it was refreshing to see that IAs had positive and respectful disposition toward the children and families. This stance toward children saw them as capable and possessing useful knowledge. One IA provided an example of how one child served as *a human cable for [her] to understand what [another child was] saying.* This specific child was discussed at length; he provided a linguistic link to another child the teacher was not able to communicate with because she did not speak the child's home language. She saw the child provided her a very important service but also the child was able to

form a connection to a peer. In turn, this allowed the IA to gain a deeper understanding of both children. Through the relationships and knowledge IAs gained by getting to know the children, the IA was further able to recognize each child's strengths.

With seeing and appreciating the children's strengths also came the need to understand the children's lived experiences. Instructional assistants engaged in long discussions about the need for understanding and compassion regarding what certain children have lived through. Instructional assistants point out that in their experience, some teachers, especially white teachers, do not understand that there are differences between their own life experiences and those of children in Head Start. As IA$_4$ in the following exchange bluntly states, there is a difference, one that she equates to a lack of compassion and caring. The majority of instructional assistants (4 out of the 5) agreed with IA$_4$. In the following example children are seen as resilient, needing caring teachers. This IA$_4$'s experiences showed her that it is difficult for *white people* to understand the realities that children in her classroom face, a classroom that is typical of Head Start programs across the United States.

> IA$_4$: *A lot of them are just coming from not your everyday living situations and*
> *they just experience things that most kids probably don't experience so. I don't*
> *know. I can relate to them. I try to help them out. That's probably why they have*
> *behavior issues because the teachers you know. They just can't reach them, no*
> *offensive. Before I got over there they had two white teachers. Not that you guys,*
> *can't do anything. No you (points to Mona), you not white but not that White*
> *people can't work with Black kids but. I mean, I just think, it's the way they were*

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approaching the situation. It's just like, no love, no, it's no understanding. You just know that they're acting out and why they're not doing what [the teacher says] do. When really, they're coming from like what [the teacher] cannot even imagine. Like, I, they're coming from a lot.

IA₂: *That is true.*

IA₄: *I've got one with Sickle Cell. One with leukemia, they're giving him, two years to live.*

Everyone: *Wow*

IA₄: *Yeah, they [are] going through a lot. Your kids are. You know kids from like your urban neighborhoods, projects kids. And, that's.*

IA₃: *That's rough.*

IA₄: *Their not coming from. You know, the sunny side*

IA₃: *Sunny side*

IA₄: *of the suburbs. That's how I think [the teachers] were approaching them. That's just like takin' somebody from the suburbs to the 'hood. [The teachers are] out of [their] element, [they] don't know what to do with [the kids] and that's why I think [the teachers] had behavior issues because of that. I mean since I've been there, [the kids have] been okay. So, I don't know. I think that was just what was the problem; they just need somebody to understand them. Every body does.*

IA₃: *Understand*

IA₄: *Like you have an issue you need somebody to learn [and understand] where you comin' from.*

IA₃: *Somebody to understand where you comin' from.*

Further in this exchange, the same IA discussed how she would go visit the sick children in her class when they are in the hospital. Her main concern was that the life experiences and realities of urban minority children and their families are so significantly different from *white people's* worldview that it was almost impossible to overcome.

Children were seen as having developed the strength necessary to grow up in difficult circumstances. The children are credited with being able to continue to thrive and enjoy coming to school, despite all they experienced. This group of IAs point out that children are misunderstood because the teacher is unable to grasp the realities the children lives. Instructional assistants discussed the fact that children needed to be understood for who they are—not penalized as a result of the teacher's lack of understanding. In addition, instructional assistants point out how important it is to understand why a child might be having issues in the classroom. Children are ultimately seen as having strengths and being willing to learn, plus in need of compassion and understanding from the teacher.

Compassion was woven throughout their discussions of children. As noted earlier with the children who had serious medical conditions, knowing the children's real-life experiences, though they may be difficult to deal with, lead IAs to a better understanding of the child. A teacher or IA's ability to manage behavior was directly related to having a deeper understanding of the children. For example, in the exchange above, IA₄ equates

her ability to identify with the children and see some of their behaviors in herself.   This allowed her to form a connection through which she could manage the child's behavior. This insight further supported her belief that *white teachers* were not successful because they did not understand or connect with the children the way she could.

Instructional assistants provided further examples of compassion in their discussion about the child with leukemia. The reality that he was dying was hard for all of the IAs to discuss. This child's medical needs and family situation led to a long conversation about not *feeling sorry* for the child or family but instead feeling compassion. As one IA pointed out, *Don't feel sorry, cuz they might have a stronger mind [than you think]*. She felt that *feeling sorry* for the child does not lead to a productive working relationship. All of the IAs agreed that they were not really feeling sorry or pity for the child but that their emotion was more about compassion, caring about the children and seeing their lives for what they are, while they continued to support them in their learning. This was a heated discussion; one IA finally said that for her this was an important difference because she did not want people to feel sorry for her. *No I wouldn't feel sorry. Cuz I do not want nobody feeling sorry for me.* The group agreed that compassion and understanding are needed for all children.

Partnership with families. Families played a major role in how this group of Head Start IAs created welcoming, supportive learning environments. Instructional assistants discussed an authentic need and deep understanding of the importance of forming relationships with families in order to best educate and understand the children. *I love to ask the parents how they communicate or what do they talk about to the child.*

The parent feels they are welcome and [their] children feel they are at home, a safe home. Instilling and fostering relationships with children were important and started with getting to know the family. Relationships with families fell into two types: as a way to increase connections with the child in the classroom or as a way to increase the IA's understanding of family circumstances and/or cultural differences that existed and affected the child.

Families provided links and knowledge that they believed were impossible to gain through a relationship with only the child. Relationships existed for three main reasons for this group of instructional assistants: to provide support outside of the classroom for a child with a serious medical condition, to learning words used in the child's home language or routines used to support the child at home so that the IA could use similar languages or tactics in the classroom. *Parents have to work with you [for the teacher/IA to have] a better understanding of where [the] family is coming from.* They discuss the fact that both the teaching staff and the parents need to want to work together. Discussions highlighted that they encouraged parents to have a relationship with them so that they could best support the child.

Much of the discussion about families focused on a child, who happened to have a serious medical condition and was being cared for by his grandmother. All instructional assistants agreed that this was an extreme example, but that it was a family that needed the additional support.

IA$_1$: *[They] need support from you.*

IA₄: *His grandma the other day was crying. She took him to the doctor and she brought him back. [But he had already] missed the whole day. She came when school was over and was just crying. He'll be in DC at Children's Hospital so I said I'll come up there. And read him some stories and stuff. She doesn't have any support. [The kid's mother], she's strung out. She is actually his great-grandma, and she takes care of every thing. She was saying that there was nobody to help her. I was like I'll go! You know, just let me know what day he goes in and I'll go up there.*

IA₁: *He needs support from you.*

The story demonstrated the IAs' willingness to engage families going through difficult circumstances to build a relationship. More importantly, IAs identified that some families require more support and compassion than others. When the IA realized that no one would be able to come and help the grandmother, she jumped in to help.

Instructional assistants saw the relationship as involving dialogue and willingness to connect with the other person for the betterment of the child's experiences in school. *You invite the family. Ask the family questions. [Have] families come and read [to] the children [and share] different things they have in their cultures.* Developing this increased understanding of the families ultimately facilitated and supported the child's adjustment to school. *So the children cannot [feel] alone or lonely in the classroom. They have something that they [are] attached [to] over there. They see the parent come and engage with them [in the classroom].* Ultimately the partnership she forms with the

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family *will help the child…if they see both partners out working together*. Helping children was seen as a collaborative effort between the IA and parents.

The necessity of relationships in teaching children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and those who may have a disability, was discussed throughout the focus group session. One instructional assistant saw the use of culturally responsive practice as *easy* because *you engage with the family*. Multicultural education was made possible through the relationships they formed with the family. For them, these relationships were what made their job pleasant and possible.

Open to learning. Culturally responsive practice embraces and encourages teaching practices that are continuously revisited and refined throughout the person's career (Gay, 2011). Such an attitude required IAs to see their instruction and materials they used in their classrooms from the point of view of children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. One IA discussed how she spent time translating the Head Start program's curriculum and accompanying children's books into Arabic. *I translate [curriculum] books from English to Arabic because we have like seven kids that speak [Arabic]*. She shared how frustrating it was for her to only have English texts, especially when she knew the child could answer and respond in his or her home language. Another IA explained how thankful she was that these same materials were provided in Spanish. She admitted that if they were not she too would translate them. *[Curriculum books] are in Spanish and English. In my opinion, maybe it helps me because I do speak Spanish. But I don't know what other people, other languages do, like Arabic, Amharic.* IAs related having the children and teacher materials available in a variety of languages as

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ultimately helping them form relationships necessary to facilitate instruction. *It is important to have other languages. The kids learn from their home language. It helps them, but we don't have enough guidance. We have a small booklet about disabilities and inclusion in the classroom.* IAs voiced concern that a teacher needs to know more than just what is in the curriculum books provided by their Head Start program.

Instructional assistants admitted to a lack of knowledge concerning culturally responsive practice, or *multiculture*. *Multiculture* refers to what the instructional assistants called multicultural; this error was not corrected during the focus group session. *The culturally responsive, they don't have a lot—only like one page.* The curriculum their program follows provides too little about multicultural education, only a one-page summary. IAs understood and embraced it while trying their best to incorporate what they thought *multiculture* was. All of the IAs felt this was not adequate and that they wanted and needed further training.

In addition, IAs also voiced an interest in learning more about various cultures. For the IAs, the partnerships they formed with parents allowed them to access the knowledge they needed to support the children. One IA pointed out that she saw the relationship with parents as a way for her to learn about other cultures. *It would be a good experience for me because I don't know about a lot of different cultures. I'm willing to learn.* She honestly admitted to not knowing about *Spanish culture*; this particular IA saw the families as being able to help her learn more. Each time acquiring knowledge was discussed it always went back to doing it to help the child in the classroom.

I didn't have any idea about Spanish culture and I [asked] a parent to

help me know stuff because I am being flexible in our Head Start

classroom. People have to know who [the child] is and what cultures you

have in your classroom.

The best way to obtain knowledge about the child and their culture was to ask the

children directly or find out from the families. All instructional assistants agreed this was

how they did it or reflected what they thought was the best way to support the child and

learn about where they are coming from. Another IA pointed out: *When you work with*

somebody different, different culture, different language you learn a lot from them. You

teaching them but you learn a lot. One IA discussed how experiences with families and

children helped expand her worldview and even helped her acquire another language. *It*

is a good experience for me. I might be [able to learn] a third language. This particular

IA was already fluent in two languages. IAs discussed that there was still information

they did not know and was worth learning.

Communicating with different people you learn. I am from Africa but

there are so many parts of Africa. I don't know anything about them. I

met people here [that are] from Ghana, Sierra Leone, and they are my

neighbors but [only] now am I learning about them.

Instructional assistants saw enormous opportunity available to them through the children

and families they worked with.

If you communicate or interact with the families, you end up with a lot of

information, a lot of knowledge, about the other. Free learning! You don't

[have] to go anywhere to learn and its fun. While you [are] doing your

job and interacting with the kids you get all [this] information, more

knowledge.

Learning about cultures was a primary way for this group of IAs to expand their own

worldview while helping them build relationships with children and families.

Respect for differences. For instructional assistants, differences existed and

required discussion. Differences centered on racial, ethnic, and English language

abilities. Instructional assistants did not pretend that differences did not exist; instead

they talked about teaching the children to respect the differences that do exist among

people. The conversation started by one IA pointing out, *We are Arab. But each county*

has [their own] different things, with another chiming in, *We speak the same language.*

[But] there is a lot of difference. Again, understanding and being aware of the

differences that exist between people helped the IAs form respectful, supportive

relationships with children, families and each other.

Instructional assistants expressed surprise that people, teachers included, *don't*

know anything about outside [cultures]. All they know is here. Outside they don't know

anything. This observation sparked a long discussion among the IAs about how people

who live here don't know anything about other cultures. They went on to list the

numerous cultures in their classrooms: Arabic, Indian, Ethiopian, African, Egyptian,

Moroccan. Instructional assistants saw difference as something that needed be respected,

discussed, and shared with the children by their peers and families in the program. Their

eagerness and genuine excitement about the various cultures they worked with shined

through during the focus group. The relationships they formed with children and families were seen as opportunities to learn and expand their knowledge.

Instructional assistants' cultural and ethnic identities were shared with the children and families with pride. One IA discussed how she created a storyboard about herself and her family to share with the children. This activity opened a door to who she is. Instructional assistants agreed that they too willingly shared their ethnic and cultural background with the children in their classrooms. Others shared that it positively supported the children to know they were similar to them, such as knowing that they speak their language.

Respect for difference went beyond just acknowledging there was a difference to problem solving and examining how or if children experience the same issues they do: differences between lived experiences and realities of teachers and what children and families in the Head Start program experience, and the IAs' own experiences of marginalization in the larger society. Ultimately such understands supported how and why they formed relationships. Instructional assistants believed that the lived realities and experiences of the children and families they worked with were beyond comprehension for some teachers in the program. *They are coming from what you cannot even imagine. [The children] are not coming from your everyday living situations. They experience things that most children probably don't experience.* These experiences required compassion and understanding from the teacher and IA. Knowing the children's real-life experiences, though some were very difficult to deal with, was essential to achieving a better understanding of the child for this group of instructional

assistants. Urban minority, low socioeconomic status children were seen as being misunderstood by teachers. For IAs, a teacher's lack of knowledge contributed to children being not appreciated or applauded for what they can do and have had to overcome to get to school.

Initially this lack of awareness was focused on *white* teachers but soon merged into teachers in general possessing a rather narrow worldview. The narrow worldview was seen as not making it possible for the teacher to see what children can do and how resilient they actually are, since they were not able to see beyond their own life experiences. According to this group of IAs, teachers who do not see the drastic differences that exist between their own experiences growing up and those of the children they teach, find it difficult for such teachers to applaud the children's strengths, resiliency, and love of school.

Discussions about their own experiences of marginalization highlighted how they process such experiences. Instructional assistants shared examples and detailed stories, which in every case led to the group relating to each other with similar experiences. The IAs acknowledged that they have experienced stereotyping and racism as a result of their ethnicity, race, religious affiliation, perceived immigration status, or English language skills, which provided them with an ability to understand such issues that families communicate to them. In the instructional assistant group, three out of five were first generation immigrants to the United States. Not only did this impact how they relate to families and children but also to how they processed and understood their experiences of

marginalization. For them, the experiences they recall happened recently and happen

often. One IA discussed racial discrimination she experienced with her sister:

When we were in a store like it was years ago, me and my sister. A type of

clothing store they just followed my sister and me. Like the whole way.

When I say like they were right there almost as if they were shopping with

us. My sister just turned around and cussed them out. I remembered it. It

was many years ago. I was like wow. I was like ain't nobody gonna steal

nothin'. Like I mean cause she was just really rude. She was like we were

gonna steal something or take something from them. And it was just like

other people were in the store but she was following us. So my sister just

kind of flipped out. We left and I don't think we've ever shopped there

ever again.

Another IA's life experiences showed her that there is a difference in how people

talk and respond to her when she was in certain parts of town where there were no people

that looked like her. She reflected on the difference she felt when she went places where

there were no other Latinos. *Walking in an area where you don't have your race or you*

culture, they look at you [as if to say], "What are you doing over here?" For instance,

when she asked for directions people acted like they did not know the answer, gave

incorrect answers, or just refused to answer her. *You go ask a question and they say, "Oh*

I don't know" or "We don't have that here." Or they give you the wrong answer. The

other IAs discussed and agreed with her comments. *[I mean] they are born and raised*

here. They should know. That's a brush off of you. IAs concurred that it is difficult

because such bad attitudes were not overt but were different from how they treat other people. *It's little, but you just feel something.* Members of the group agreed and supported her insights. IA₁ tried to discount the IA telling the story, but she was met with swift questioning of her logic by other members of the group:

> IA₁: *But sometimes the people they don't know where you*
>
> *want directions to. They give you the wrong directions*
>
> *because they don't know.*
>
> IA₂: *But they were born and raised here. They should*
>
> *know. That's a brush off for ya.*
>
> IA₃: *You feel like they look at you.*
>
> IA₄: *You see how different they are when you come in.*
>
> *How they greet you. Maybe it is professional, but when*
>
> *somebody else comes in you see a big difference.*

All of the other IAs pointed out that there is a difference in how people talk and address them. The above examples demonstrate this group of IAs ability and willingness to discuss their own experiences of marginalization.

    Disabilities. Instructional assistants focused on surprising elements in their work with children with disabilities. Fear of not knowing what to do or how to teach children with disabilities was prominent in their discussions. Instructional assistants did not fear the children but were very concerned about their own practices. Their ability to be "Open to learning" provided them with experiences that sometimes were counter to prior cultural experiences or knowledge they had. Not having the exposure or experience they

felt led to their feelings of fear. Impending changes to Head Start admission policies in 2010 served as the backdrop to this conversation, changes that require Head Start programs across the United States to admit more children with disabilities and provide inclusive educational experiences for children with low- incidence disabilities[14] (U.S. Department of Health, 2009). Confusion about these pending changes was of central concern. Instructional assistants discussed the need for further training and exposure to be able to adapt and address the needs of children with disabilities. As noted in Chapter 2, Head Start has always allocated space for children with disabilities in the program, yet Head Start typically admits children with high- incidence disabilities such as behavior concerns, language delays, or mild developmental delays (Zigler & Styfco, 2010).

Fear. The majority of discussions about children with disabilities IAs focused on fear of not knowing how or what to do. Concerns and reasons that IAs felt fearful were previous life experiences with people with disabilities, not knowing what to do, and lack of experience. Initially IAs gave a sense of normalizing children with disabilities by pointing out that all of the children are all just children and all children have needs so they are all the same.

For some, the emotional aspect of working with children with disabilities was overwhelming. One IA shared that her childhood experiences and sociocultural understanding greatly limited her interactions with people with disabilities, which in turn caused to her to be emotional about children with disabilities. She discussed how

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[14] Refer to Chapter 2 for definitions.

disabilities are viewed in other cultures—that some cultures believe that having a disability is a curse and a source of shame for the family.

> *Where I come from, people with disabilities, their families put them away. You know? They don't interact in the community. So you don't deal with them and people feel ashamed of them. I grew up like that. We don't see them a lot unless it is in your family. So I come with all these feelings. Not until now have I met anyone. I don't know how I am going to react to them. I have lots of feeling about them.*

This IA recognized that her life experiences and sociocultural understanding of disability influenced her emotions toward individuals with disabilities. Others in the group agreed with these experiences and beliefs; while sharing how ridiculous they saw this attitude now, yet they noted it is not easy to overcome.

Focus was placed on instructional assistants not knowing what to do, which then created a sense of fear within them. They were conflicted with *feeling sorry* for children with disabilities, while wanting to help but not knowing how or what to do it. Another IA admitted that she just did not know what to do with children who have more severe disabilities—being in a wheelchair was something she thought would be difficult to handle. *I have no idea. I'm being honest. For a child in like a wheelchair or who can't use his hands, can't walk, can't sit up. I can't tell because I have never had it.* She went on to wonder how a wheelchair would even fit in her classroom. Another IA pointed out that their Head Start program's administrative staff had not addressed all of the issues that affect the inclusion of children with low- incidence disabilities. *If you put special*

needs in the classroom, you need to make the classroom accessible for them and you need to make the teacher have more training. This IA brought up practical concerns that contributed to the IAs' feelings of fear.

Instructional assistants discussed not knowing how to tell if a child has a disability. They pointed to the fact that they are not special education teachers. *It's my job to help the kids. Even if I'm not a professional with that disability, I don't have the training, I ask.* Each of the IAs felt capable of working within the new Head Start guidelines, yet they wondered aloud and hoped that they would receive additional training prior to the changes. For IAs the sense of fear was related to a lack of experience with various disabilities. Interestingly though they shared such concerns, they ultimately said that they were willing and eager to learn more to help themselves and the children.

Open to learning. Instructional assistants recognized the changes happening in Head Start policies toward children with disabilities while revealing their sense of fear and confusion. All of the IAs voiced a willingness to learn and do their best to help any child with or without a disability. When asked what would make them feel more competent with children with disabilities, they overwhelmingly said experience and training. *I need training but I am sure I can deal with people like that.* Another points out, *[Head Start] needs to start training the teachers on how to deal with this [change].* They wanted to learn pragmatics and real strategies to use when teaching children with disabilities. One IA suggested even taking a class at the local community college to increase her skills and understanding. At the end of the discussion, one IA asked the moderators leading the focus group to provide them with training. *Maybe you ALL can*

do a training! WE need training! This was followed by comments of agreement and

excitement at the prospect. The IAs demonstrated an overall eagerness to embrace

children with disabilities, while they acknowledged their own fears and emotions about it.

Power. Instructional assistants had power over themselves and the types of

relationships by built with children and families. Their power existed in being able to

acquire additional training, ask questions, alter program materials to meet their and the

children's needs. As noted in the previous sections on "Open to learning" in the

culturally responsive and disabilities sections, instructional assistants asked questions,

looked for answers on their own, and sought out additional training. Each IA created her

own drawing that illustrated her perceived power to address and encourage changes in the

classroom focused on culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities. The

majority of the drawings illustrated their relationships and interactions with children.

What they could influence was their own cheerful positive affect within the classroom.

Their pictures showed smiling, happy people, with most of them playing outside. Some

discussed routines and specific learning areas in the classroom, such as music and

dramatic play, where they could influence what the children learn; because they saw

themselves as having expertise and freedom in that given area.

In this group of IAs, there was one unique teaching situation. Two IAs worked

together without an official classroom teacher. They said their collaboration was

"power"—together they guided the instruction and the children. *[The other TA in the*

role of co-teacher might] have an idea. I might have an idea. We use both ideas and put

it together. It's all about the children. Collaboration, working together, and sharing

responsibilities and ideas was central to these two IAs' definition of the power they perceived themselves as having in the classroom. They provided examples that highlighted their increased ability to influence what was actually happening in their classroom, since there was no teacher with them.

Furthermore, instructional assistants' own experiences of marginalization provided them with a sense of power over certain situations that could arise. During the conversation about experiences of marginalization, IAs pointed out how the situations they discussed from their past allowed them to be conscious and prevent future situations. These experiences ultimately increased their awareness and consciousness around racist and English language bias situations. As one IA pointed out having seen her sister's reaction to racial stereotyping in a shop, she would not allow people to treat her that way in the future. Her sense of power came from knowledge and awareness of how she was treated.

Powerless. This code was created to reflect what the instructional assistants talked about concerning their ability to address culturally responsive practices and children with disabilities in their classrooms. IAs discussed the fact that the relationships they formed with the children, families, and themselves were the only thing they had any power over; otherwise they were powerless. An instructional assistant created and discussed the following picture (Figures 4.1 & 4.2). The drawing described how this particular IA felt about her abilities to share and influence what the children learn, and highlights her powerlessness over what the children experience.
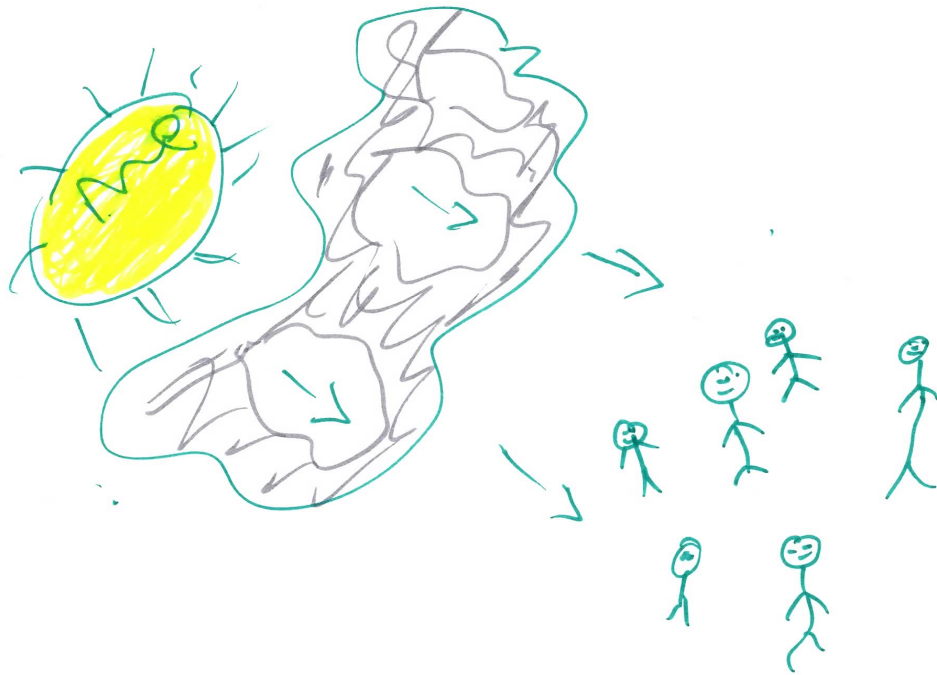
Figure 4.1. Actual drawing describing her ability to address changes in the Head Start classroom.
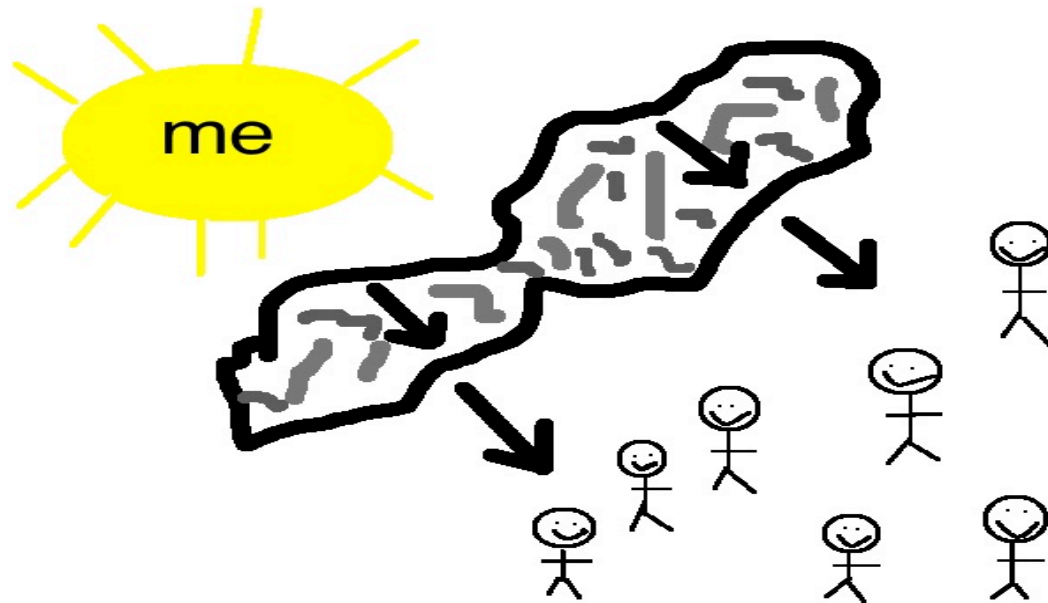
Figure 4.2. Computerized version of the instructional assistant's original drawing.

She explained that the sun represents her knowledge and experiences but all of these had to be filtered through the cloud. She was rather vague about the cloud but did hint at it being a person (the teacher she worked with) or the curriculum the program followed. Overall she felt that it did not matter how good or beneficial her ideas might be; if the *cloud* did not approve or deem them appropriate, then the children would never hear her thoughts or contributions to the class. Her clear statement and powerful visual were well received and acknowledged by the group. Another IA points out, *How much can I do? I work like an assistant. I don't have much power.* For this group their relationship with the classroom teacher were situations they tried to work with and around. The IAs recognized the difference between their situation with a classroom teacher and the two IAs that were co-teaching; the co-teaching group had more flexibility and influence over what the children learned.

Summary. Instructional assistants' conversations and debates about the three organizational categories culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities and their ability to address each within their classrooms were pulled together to create their definitions (Figure 4.3). Their definitions highlighted and celebrated their relationships with children, families, and each other. Through insightful, critically reflective dialogue they discussed ways they adjusted their teaching practices to meet all children's needs while honestly sharing their fears and areas that need improvement. Of the key attitudes and points of interest they shared, some were expected and others were surprising,

ultimately they all came together to create this group of in-service Head Start

instructional assistants' definitions of culturally responsive practice, children with

disabilities, and power they perceive they had to address each in their classrooms.

Instructional Assistants	**Culturally responsive practice**
	Relationships with children, families and themselves were seen essential to enacting culturally responsive practices. Through relationships they were able to see, embrace and validate the knowledge, strength, and linguistic abilities the children brought to the classroom. Forming relationships with families allowed them to form partnerships based on and respectful of the cultural and linguistic needs of the children. These partnerships supported them in their instruction, social emotional connections, and to bridge the linguistic gap between the child's home language and school. Overarching each of these relationships was the instructional assistants' understanding, from personal or family experiences, compassion and a strong willingness to connect and support families as necessary. Instructional assistants embraced and recognized differences between them and within society, they saw these differences as needing to be understood and respected. Finally IAs discussed at length the need for further training and better materials to address the cultural and linguistic variation that exists in their classrooms.
	Children with disabilities
	Central to the instructional assistants feelings of fear and apprehension concerning their abilities to appropriately address the needs of children with disabilities was confusion concerning 2010 changes to Head Start enrollment practices for children with disabilities, their lack of experience or knowledge. Socio-cultural norms, values and attitudes significantly limited several instructional assistants lived experiences with individuals with disabilities. All instructional assistants voiced the need for additional experience and training.
	Perceived power to address each
	Types and intensity of relationships with children and families are what they have power to influence. Knowledge and personal, professional experiences are not valued. Ultimately they perceived their role, as instructional assistants, did not allow them to provide or influence any new practices in the classroom.

Figure 4.1 Instructional assistant definitions

Teachers

Teacher transcripts provided a tangled web of dialogue and analysis that was not clear-cut. Although the teacher group results are extremely different from the IA group, they also fell into the same organizational categories: culturally responsive, disabilities, and the power they perceived themselves as having to address each in their classrooms. In the following section, I will first discuss the atmosphere established within the teacher group during the focus group session. I provide examples and analysis of the teacher comments, discussions, and reactions to each of the organizational categories.

As described earlier, within this Head Start teacher group staff changes occurred during the school year in which this study was conducted. Two Anglo-American teachers with no Head Start experience replaced one Anglo-American and one African-American teacher.[15] The Anglo-American teacher was promoted within the Head Start program and the African-American teacher was let go. These changes occurred in November of the 2009–2010 school year.

Throughout the focus group session specific children and families were not given as examples; instead they are referred to as "those" or "them". Both the parents (teachers never mentioned other family members or caregivers of the children) and children were discussed in generalities and as being in need of knowledge that the teacher possessed. Most of the discussions were focused on the teachers being seen as experts in child development, plus communicating that no differences existed between them due to race, gender or experience. The atmosphere created by this group of teachers was at times

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[15] For a detailed discussion of staff changes, refer to Chapter 3.

hostile toward each other and researchers, while also being dismissive of the topics of this study. Definitions of each organizational category are developed and explained with examples from focus group interactions for this group of Head Start teachers.

Atmosphere. For the teacher group, the atmosphere reflected an overall combative attitude toward the topics and questions asked (Refer to chapter 5 for further discussion). Teachers entered the focus group room chatting with each other and questioning the purpose of the session. The group sarcastically discussed that they would be required to further reflect and discuss topics from the PASIT project. Even with support and guidance by the session moderators, this attitude of combative refusal to discuss topics or address questions or comments continued for the entire session.

The lack of clarity and focused dialogue was reflected in all of the teacher discussions. Statements were made with no effort to explain, even with guidance from the two moderators. Throughout the session statements made by members of the group were substantial, but in the next breath they were explained away or nullified by others in the group. For example, during a long exchange about whether or not culturally responsive practice was created for Anglo American teachers to learn how to work with minority children, the group started off talking about how there was no substantive difference between the teachers as individuals but then they went on to talk about the fact there was a difference. Such contradictions of points happened on several occasions during the session.

Throughout the focus group there was a great deal of over-talking, interruption, and side conversations, as this 40-second exchange demonstrates.

Teacher₁: *You make that change. And I think on a whole, that's what we as Head Start teachers. We are trying to get these kids, who otherwise if there wasn't Head Start, these kids would probably have nothing.*

Teacher₂: *Nothing*

Teacher₃: *Right.*

Teacher₁: *Cuz they can't afford to go to…*

Teacher₃: *Right.*

Teacher₁: *The [upper middle class schools]. They can't afford that stuff.*

Teacher₃: *And that's why…*

Teacher₁: *So that's what Head Start is there for.*

Teacher₂: *We advocate for our children.*

Teacher₃: *And that's why it's good that it's multicultural too.*

Teacher₁: *Why we are there—* (talking below Teacher₂ and Teacher₃*)*

Teacher₂: *Right.* (to Teacher₃*)*

Teacher₃: *It's good there is some diverse…*

Teacher₄: *Huuhh*

Teacher₃: *…culture. Because even…*

Teacher₂: *…even with the staff diverse…*

Teacher₃: *Right.*

Teacher₁: *I lloovvve…*

Teacher₂: *…very diverse…*

Teacher₁: *…that. I love that.*

Teacher₃: *You look at it and you imagine us working with us just one set, one race. We really…*

Teacher₂: *We DID that!*

Teacher₃: *…but we really would not learn…*

Teacher₂: *Right.*

Teacher₃: *You know what I'm saying. I am workin' with all my people. I'm working with all African Americans. We don't learn.*

Teacher₅: *Right.*

Teacher₁: *I've…*

Teacher₃: *…in a sense.*

Teacher₁: *I've…*

Teacher₅: *What you talkin' about learnin' as in…*

Teacher₃: *Learning from each other…*

Teacher₅: *…other cultures.*

Teacher₃: *That's what I'm sayin'. Yeah.*

Teacher₅: *…other races. Other people. Or feelings or other people's ways.*

Teacher₂: *…values...*

Teacher₅: *…or values or you have to be able to learn about everybody.*

Teacher₂: *Ahh.*

Teacher₅: *Even when, we... Just go back to high school. When I was in high school, they had nothing about African American in any history books*

Teacher₃: *Right.*

Teacher₅: *NOW. They're bringing a little bit of that in there. They had a little bit about Indians, white American and that's it.*

I selected this specific example of the teacher groups' dialogue style to emphasis the

dynamics and the way teachers spoke to each other. The exchange is difficult to read and

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highlights that members of the group had side conversations and interrupted each other, shown by the fact Teacher$_2$ and Teacher$_3$ appear to be having their own conversation while everyone else is focused on a different issue. Members of the group would make important points, but the point was lost during the exchange because they were cut off. Not only did this make transcription very difficult, but it also had an impact on group interactions and analysis. The dialogue style reflected in this example was representative of the entire group during the focus group session. One teacher shared very little but was nonverbally acknowledging and agreeing with what was being said.

Within the teacher group members, African American and Anglo American participants spent a considerable amount of time discussing, debating, and reinforcing their stance that no difference existed between each member of the teacher group or their life experiences. Through my analysis process, I came to see what they created as a cultural and racial utopia, a society where all members are judged, seen, and provided the same privileges and have the same experiences no matter what culture or race they are. This cultural and racial utopia reflects the overall attitude of the group that was highlighted in both their interactions with each other and what they said about the topic. It further reinforces the teacher groups' need for agreement from all of the members, for there to be no differences or conflict between them, an overall feeling of "why would the university be researching such questions?" or that they all loved each other and there was no difference between any of them. The attitude and atmosphere created by the teachers was extremely confusing and created disequilibrium for me. Maxwell (2011) in his discussion of *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research* provided me with a way to

think about the group as trying to create a solidarity stance in order to function. I wonder, were the teachers forcing the group into this "solidarity" stance by emphasizing similarities, which in turn communicated and embodied their level of privilege and unwillingness to accept natural differences between people, in order for them to function properly as a group. The stance communicated during the teacher focus group was complex, pervasive, and important to keep in mind when reading this section.

Teachers began the morning by engaging in reflection activities for the PASIT professional development project. Halfway through the morning the teachers switched with the instructional assistants. They were aware that it was a focus group session—a format they previously experienced with the PASIT project. Teachers selected their own seats and then created nameplates out of paper and markers. The two Anglo American teachers chose to sit together, and the four African American teachers sat on the other sides of the square. In retrospect the sitting arrangement possibly contributed to the dynamics of the group.

Focus group questions were followed in the same order as the instructional assistants. For the teacher group the moderator, Sarah, and I had to guide the group and ask clarifying questions frequently. On several occasions Sarah and I interjected, went back to important points made before someone else cut the person off, provided further examples to be very clear about what was being said, and redirect the group back to the original question being asked. About midway through the session, after I had provided several examples to clarify and question that there was no difference between how black and white people are treated in society, Sarah and I nonverbally acknowledged that the

group was not going to be able to be brought back to topic. After that realization we both only spoke to read the next question on the list of focus group questions or to acknowledge that a member of the group was trying to enter the conversation. In Chapter 5, I provide further discussion of factors that possibly influenced the dynamics of this group of teachers and instructional assistant, while highlighting the fact that factors in this Head Start program are not unique.

In the following, I discuss the results of my analysis process for the teacher group. I discuss culturally responsive practice, then disabilities, and finally the perceived power they had to address each in their classrooms. In conclusion, I provide the definitions of each of the organizational categories developed by the teacher group.

Culturally responsive practice. For this group of teachers, culturally responsive practice is not clearly or accurately understood. Because the codes that emerged represent the opposite of how culturally responsive is defined, what the teachers talked about was actually culturally unresponsive. Culturally responsive practice for this group of teachers would be described as color, culture, and ability blindness existing within a society where people could live up to their potential no matter what socioeconomic status, race, culture, or ability they are. The role of teacher would be focused on the distribution and dissemination of knowledge to children and parents. Children would need to be molded and given knowledge. Teachers would superficially recognize that there are differences but not something to reflect on or discuss with children because children do not see differences. Culturally responsive practice would include experiences of marginalization and discrimination for some, yet within their classrooms they would

try to create a sense of a society free of social ills. Teachers saw culturally responsive practice as a type of intrusion that forced stereotypical categories on people. One teacher defined culturally responsive practice as:

> *Just a word that people want to throw out there. We love to label*
>
> *everything. Every person has to have a label. Everything has a label.*
>
> *When I first heard culturally responsive, I was like, "I just teach."*

This definition was shared early on in the discussion. Such an attitude actually runs counter to the purpose of culturally responsive practice, thereby making their definition culturally unresponsive.

My realization of what they were actually saying came during the focus group session and continued through transcription and analysis. I found myself constantly questioning what I was reading, going back to the beginning of exchanges between teachers to ensure I understood the context and what was being said. During analysis meetings with Stacia, we spent considerable amounts of time discussing and debating what teachers were communicating. Some of the teacher statements and assertions are shocking; in these cases entire chunks were reviewed to see if others in the group supported such assertions verbally or nonverbally. I do not provide long exchanges here because they are difficult to read and would not contribute to my. In following each element that makes up this group of Head Start teachers' definition of culturally responsive practice is discussed with examples from the actual focus group session.

Myth of merit. During the analysis process Stacia and I discussed and reflected on what teachers were saying and what to call this set of dialogue. We decided that what

teachers were explaining was "Myth of merit", as defined by MacLeod (1995) in his book that researched the relationships between African American and Anglo American students. MacLeod found students' developed a perception that "[s]uccess was based on merit, and economic inequality was due to differences in ambition and ability" (p. 3). Within such a notion, acknowledgement of the existence of social inequities is removed and economic improvement or achievement of social mobility is squarely on the individual's personal motivation and ability. Further myth of merit, communicates that all members of society experience and are allowed the same privileges, such as going to quality, safe public schools, or having access to appropriate healthcare, in such a worldview race, ethnicity, linguistic skills, socio-economic status plays no role in how successful the individual becomes because everyone has the same experiences.

Though I personally recognize that such stances still exist in society in 2012, I was completely shocked and saddened by what this group of Head Start teachers communicated. Such a worldview has been repeatedly refuted and proven to not exist in modern society, yet this group of teachers was clearly articulating it throughout the focus group session. Sarah (co-moderator), Stacia (videographer and note taker), and I were surprised to hear the teachers communicate such a stance. Sarah commented after the focus group that she had to sit on her hands in order to not interrupt or question the point of view communicated by members of the teacher group. I was especially surprised because during prior interactions, in PASIT meetings and classroom observations, some of the members of the teacher group had shared points of view that did not communicate a myth of merit stance. Therefore, I left the teacher focus group session frustrated,

furious about what they communicated. I was also left with more questions than answers; what in the world happened, could the inclusion of the two Anglo American teachers influence the group that much, and what messages were the Head Start administrators communicating. Such questions fall outside the scope of this study, but do provide areas for future research (discussed at length in Chapter 5).

Teachers spent a significant amount of time describing achievement of children and families based on the myth of merit mentality, meaning that the children and families choose to succeed or fail. The myth of merit does not take into account social influences on the children or family realities such as low socioeconomic status, immigration status, and racial bias or discrimination. Although this attitude is not uncommon, it is rather alarming given the fact that this set of teachers is actually influencing and guiding children and families through their first school experience, not to mention children in Head Start programs in the United States are seen as some of the most needy children in schools.

Teachers discuss how *getting these kids on the right path* is the most important part of their job. When asked by moderators to clarify this *path,* teachers had a long exchange about how their classrooms are somehow separate from society's ills, such as racism, because the children need to experience such a social utopia so they know it is possible for them to succeed in life:

> *[The classroom] should be a safe haven. [The children] might not have*
> *money, [their] skin is darker, [they] don't speak English as [their] first*
> *language. They shouldn't feel like that gonna hinder them.*

Teachers supported this statement and went on to say, *[Social ills] make a difference in the whole of society but inside the classroom they shouldn't.* How they were able to create such classrooms was not discussed. Their role as teachers is to *create the future.* Note that during this exchange the actual child is never discussed and parents are not mentioned.

The group moved on to how such classrooms provide teachers with a space to *mold* the children. Moderators question what the teacher is *molding* the children for. *A better future, if they chose to. It's going to be up to the children and their families.* Another teacher points out, *Getting these kids on the right path. That's all that matters.* The success of the child and family is dependent solely on their future life choices. Note that no one in the group discusses other social forces that may have an impact on the child's future. This is troubling because children and families are being held up to the myth that if one works hard enough, then nothing else influences his or her success or failure in society and that education will conquer any other social realities they encounter.

   Color/culture/ability blind. Blindness in this context refers to the teachers' conversations that none of these issues mattered, meaning that they did not cloud or affect their perceptions of the children and families. Teachers saw this sense of blindness as validation to the fact that there was no difference between them. Teachers voiced disdain for having to discuss such issues:

> *I think a lot of people see the difference. You go out into the world and*
> *you see that they want to put so much emphasis on culture and so much on*
> *races and things like that.*

Another teacher bluntly stated, *Color, race, culture—it doesn't matter—they all just teach*. This point that they *just teach* was repeated several times; the statement reflected the teacher's frustration with being asked about color and culture when all they do is *just teach*. When asked to clarify what *just teaching* meant, no clear answer was provided.

In addition, their belief that children do not see color further validated their stance that color or race was not a topic that needed to be discussed. An African American teacher provided an example to prove her point:

> *[The children] really don't. [The children] say I'm white, you know? Are*
> *you white? No, that is okay, you know. I mean, I am a little light*
> *[skinned]. That is okay. [The children] really don't look at color. They*
> *don't look at disability.*

This example is met with agreement from the group. It serves as evidence that children are clueless to racial variation and that their classrooms were spaces separate from the racial inequality that existed in society.

Culture is seen as being a reality in that *[t]he children [are] diverse. They get a little bit from every culture,* but there is no further clarification and discussion of how or why this was good or bad. It is surprising that the group agrees that everyone has a different culture yet they constantly argue that they are all actually the same. Initially such statements seemed out of context or misunderstood by the moderators, but discussion of their experiences of marginalization demonstrated and reinforced this attitude. Teachers shared their family experiences and while doing so explained away any sense of awareness to society's role in the marginalization of their family members.

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Two teachers discussed their surprise when their own children or family members experienced racism and marginalization because of the their color (discussed further in "Experiences of marginalization").

Deficit view of children. Very little was said about the children in the teachers' classrooms; only 15 lines of text directly discuss children, though several of the focus group questions directly ask about them. Teachers did not discuss any specific children nor did they ever refer to a child by name, except their own biological children. Children were referred to as *those children* throughout the discussion. The teacher group saw their job as teacher to provide opportunities and knowledge to the children. The teacher is supposed to remedy deficits the children might have. *We are trying to get these kids, who otherwise, if there wasn't Head Start, these kids would probably have nothing.* Others in the group agreed and supported this statement. Within this statement and other comments made during the exchange children are seen as not possessing any form of knowledge; there is an element of the teacher "saving" the Head Start children. By this I mean the teacher is saving the children from the ignorance that exists in their families.

Teachers discuss how they give the children knowledge, which they can then use to become whatever they want. The Head Start experience is seen as a way to provide children with the information they need, but then it is up to them to make something of themselves in the future. *They are 3 and 4 and 5 years old, so [they] get a lot of stuff from us. What we're teaching them, a lot of it is going to stay with them for a while.* Teachers note that *it might go away as they get older but they had a foundation.* However, no clarification as to what this foundation included was provided.

The one potentially positive statement about children concerned their diversity.

They're all different. They all do things in different ways, say things in different ways, and act in different ways. It's very interesting. You never know what you are going to get day by day. Sadly even this statement does not clearly show strengths the children have. For the children in this classroom diversity was a reality, yet this was the only positive thing teachers could say. Teachers did not discuss what the children bring to school, or life experiences that might contribute to the classroom curriculum.

Giving parents "knowledge". According to this group of teachers, interactions with parents occurred for two reasons: to help parents understand the purpose of Head Start, and to give information and knowledge. Parents were seen as not understanding what children are gained through the Head Start program.

> *We try to get the parents to understand the [differences] between day care*
>
> *and preschool or going to a babysitter. People think that we are only*
>
> *babysitters. We try to get them to understand we do MUCH more than*
>
> *take care of your children. They are learning. They're learning through*
>
> *play.*

Another teacher recalled an exchange with a parent:

> *I had one parent. "This is a babysitter. I'm not interested in that." I said,*
>
> *"Oh no, let's sit down—we need to talk." I communicate with parents*
>
> *about the difference between a preschool, day care, and a babysitter.*

Throughout this discussion the group agreed that it was essential that the parents grasped that they did much more than other babysitters or child care could

The teacher experiences and interactions with parents supported their belief that parents did not respect or understand their abilities and knowledge as teachers. *Make sure the parents have a clear understanding of the things we do in the classroom. It is not to benefit them, the parent, but to benefit the children.* Teachers shared that helping parents understand what they as teachers did may take time but they all agreed was an important, necessary investment.

Not only did these teachers perceive that parents needed to recognize what teachers did, but also perceived that parents purposefully sought out their advice. Examples were given in which the parent was looking for various types of knowledge from the teacher.

> *The parents are seeking and searching for a lot of answers because*
>
> *they're wanting your help. They don't already have it figured out. Every*
>
> *day I have a parent come and say, "Well what can I do, to do this? Well, I*
>
> *see that when they're here with you they don't do this. How do I?"*

Further, the group of teachers discussed the lack of knowledge parents have concerning child development.

> *Some of their expectations. Just getting them to understand, the whole*
>
> *child development. They just don't know what is appropriate and what is*
>
> *not. A 3 year old, they want them to write and everything.*

Teachers voiced frustration with having to review age-appropriate activities with parents. *I have to go over it, drill about it, the age-appropriate activities.* Again this contributed to the teacher being seen as the person who possessed all necessary knowledge.

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When questioned by moderators as to how they knew what parents already knew or wanted to know, a teacher who had taught in an early childhood program that primarily served upper-middle-class families, discussed how surprised she was that Head Start parents just do not know or appear to know as much as the parents from the other program. For this teacher this was viewed as a benefit to being a Head Start teacher.

For somebody who has taught for the last several years in the high-end preschools where everybody has all this money and they all come in thinking that their children are little Einsteins. And to come into Head Start and to see the kids who really need the help. Coming from the schools I was at before. They would come in and try to tell ME how to teach. "Well I don't agree with what you are doing." But here it is the total opposite. It's like they're seeking your advice. They're wanting your advice.

This attitude of teachers goes back to the overall feeling of the focus group session that they possessed or had things that parents needed; therefore they were there to provide it to parents.

Recognition of difference. For teachers' difference is recognized, yet there was no discussion of respect for difference, unlike with the instructional assistants. A teacher brought up the fact that within their group and the IA group there was a large amount of racial and cultural diversity. Teachers discussed the different races, places each of them were from, and languages and cultural experiences they bring. One teacher questioned how they would learn anything new if they were all the same. *Can you imagine us*

working with one set race? She went on to point out that if the group was all African American, she did not know how she would learn about other cultures or people. During her comments, another older African American teacher poignantly pointed out, *We DID that!*, referring to segregation practices that she had experienced. She was cut off in the verbal exchange, but she supported and agreed with what was being said. Another teacher discussed how when she was in high school, history did not include African-Americans but now children learn about a variety of cultures.

> *When I was in high school, they had nothing about African-Americans in*
> *any high school books. They're bringing a little bit in now. They have a*
> *little bit about Indians, white Americans. The children are now able to*
> *learn about everybody's culture.*

Other teachers discussed their high school experiences and how little they learned. A teacher pointed out that her interactions with people in the Head Start program expanded her understanding of the world and the variety that existed. This particular African American teacher was paired with an IA from Africa who helped her realize that *Africa has different countries inside of it*. For this group of teachers, recognition and respect for difference were the result of lived experiences and direct interactions, but unfortunately experiences shared by the teacher group lacked discussion or reflection about the impact society had.

>   ***Experiences of marginalization***. Teachers provided examples of marginalization from family members' experiences. They discussed issues of racial inequality and size

discrimination. For one teacher her daughter's experiences in U.S. middle schools shocked her because up to that point the family had lived overseas with the military.

You know in the military circle, it's everybody's the same. You have all

kinds of friends, any color. She came back to go to high school in [the

southern United States]... the same high school that I graduated from and

the teachers. She raised her hand to ask the teacher a question. A male

teacher. He was white. The teacher told her, "Just a minute." Then a

white girl raised her hand to ask the question that my daughter was going

to ask. He answered her. My daughter immediately said, "Well, sir, I did.

I asked. I was trying to ask you a question and you didn't answer me." It

wasn't a good experience. But my husband talked to her. So she got a

better understanding of that does happen sometimes. So that wasn't good

but then after that she learned that. It happens more in the South.

Another teacher pointed out how she learned from her older siblings that as an African American she needed to advocate and push to advance in her career. Others shared similar experiences with their families. The group agreed with situations discussed and expanded on each other's examples. One teacher related the experience her brother-in-law had with racial slurs and how he dealt with discrimination as an example that helped her understand how to react to hateful remarks about her size.

It was interesting for me to be able to stand back and honestly for once not

be the one that got looked at. It was interesting to watch how he

responded. He would just look at them. When we're going home, I was

like "HOW were you able to do that?" He was like "I'm not going to let

some else's stupidity rule my life. I am just going to rise above it and I'm

going to go on." I was like "That's why you are better than I am."

Although all of the teachers shared very different experiences, they each discussed a

sense of growth and understanding from knowing someone had a similar experience to

theirs.

Teacher stories provided insight into their personal experiences with situations in

which they or their family members felt marginalized. Although the stories are

interesting and useful, there was one particular exchange that occurred toward the end of

the discussion that provided clear insight into the racial tensions that existed within this

group of teachers. All of the African American teachers shared their stories first. Once

they were finished the moderators looked around the group to see if anyone else wanted

to share. Note that this was done throughout the focus group session. The two Anglo

American teachers started laughing and whispering, *We're the only white people. Yeah!*

One of the more outspoken African American teachers stated *I LOVE it!* with conviction.

Throughout the focus group session this attitude of the Anglo American teachers seeing

themselves as being separate was communicated. Although this is the most obvious

example, it happened at other times too. For example, one Anglo American teacher

commented, *Everybody is looking at me!*, with the other saying, *Cuz we the Anglos of the*

group. Each time this happened it was pointed out that the moderators were asking the

question of everyone.

Open to learning. Teachers discussed their experiences with different people and cultures in the Head Start program. *I want to learn, not only about my culture. I know there are other people out there.* Although there was no discussion of how or why such experiences affected their teaching practice, they did share this increased knowledge and exposure with enthusiasm and excitement. Teachers who shared a this sense of excitement and intrigue concerning the variety Head Start offers were met by other members of the group's need for everyone to focus on the fact they were all actually the same. Mid-way through the discussion, the two Anglo American teachers placed a large caveat on the discussion by pointing out the questions the focus group asked were wrong, concentrated on issues that were not important, and they ultimately felt that culturally responsive practice was just a word that people used to separate people. This unfortunately ended the discussion and the group moved on.

Disabilities. Discussion about children with disabilities began when a teacher shared her experiences of marginalization. Her ability and willingness to teach children with disabilities stemmed from her own childhood experiences.

> *Mine is with my sister, back in the '50s. When my sister was born, she*
>
> *was born with cleft lip. And so they did not want her to be in the public*
>
> *school. They wanted to put her in a special education school because of*
>
> *her cleft lip. But my mother, father, they advocated for her and*
>
> *everything. She can do anything with anybody. Why would she have to go*
>
> *to a special school? Just because of her disability, they wanted to put her*
>
> *in a special school. But like I said, my mother and father, they advocated*

for her to make sure she went to the same school that the rest of the

children went to.

It was instrumental for her to see how her parents advocated and pushed the school to see

that her sister did not have a disability. She recognized then and now that her sister's

minor physical difference was not a disability even though the school wanted to label it

as such. Others in the group agreed that her parent's advocacy was what made the

difference for her sister. Since this is the same teacher that was considered to be the

special education teacher in the program, the conversation followed and highlighted her

main concerns, placement of children with disabilities. The entire group agreed that the

circumstances she was being forced into where unfair and unnecessary.

     Placement of children with disabilities. In discussing children with disabilities

and the changes to Head Start Law in 2010, it became apparent that the biggest concern

for this group of teachers was placement of children with disabilities in their Head Start

program. Head Start programs are required by law to have 10% of their enrollment

available to children with disabilities in their communities, being disabled is defined by

having an active Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The law does not dictate how

Head Start programs disperse the 10% of children. Appropriate inclusive early childhood

education practice recommends even distribution among the classrooms in a program, but

this is often not the reality (Odom, 2002). Teachers in this study voiced their willingness

to share the stress and burden on the teacher who was disproportionately given children

with IEPs. A teacher who currently and historically had all the children with IEPs in the

program discussed how she enjoyed working with such children but recognized how her

increased responsibilities impacted all of the children in her classroom. *I'm just all*

spread out! I am all over the place. Teachers agreed and supported her, and they wanted

to be given the chance to experience working with children with disabilities.

> *We don't get the opportunity! To decide, I know we have to have*
>
> *[children] with disabilities. But some of us might want more.*

Through training and exposure the group of teachers felt that they could address the

needs of children with disabilities, yet they did not believe that the Head Start

administration would allow them to. Without the support of the Head Start

administration they discussed it was not possible for them to gain the experience they

needed to be successful teaching children with disabilities. Of most concern for them

was that they were not able to offer support to their fellow teacher, who had all of the

children with disabilities.

Power. Teachers' sense of power came from their ability to seek out additional

training to best meet the needs of the children in their classrooms. *I have the power to*

ask questions and get training. Throughout the session teachers talked about support and

guidance they received from each other; the relationships between the teachers was

discussed with a sense of pride and gratitude. *I can deal with it head on because I have*

guidance from [another] teacher. Such examples were shared in response to a focus

group question that asked what they felt they brought to the classroom/program. For the

newer members of the teacher group or ones with less Head Start teaching experience,

more experienced teachers and ones with a long history with Head Start were an

invaluable resource. An experienced teacher gave advice to the less experienced

teachers, *You know, sometimes I tell [the newer teacher], you need to get down a little bit and be a little firm with the children.*

As described earlier, part of the focus group session asked each teacher to create her or his own drawing to illustrate her or his power to address changes in the classroom focused on culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities. The majority of the drawings illustrated the many obligations or commitments, most of which focused on the administrative tasks teachers had to accomplish. Most consisted of a concept map with many arms coming off with bullets of their various responsibilities as teachers and being pulled by two opposing sides (Figures 4.4 and 4.5). In Figure 4.4, the teacher discussed seeing herself (Middle), special education teacher, and parent all pointing in toward *taking care of the children's needs and parents wanting the best for their child,* while the director and cluster director were pulling in the opposite direction. Other graphics communicated a sense of the teacher at the bottom of a ladder with various forces on top of them. Children were shown in only one teacher's graphic. For this group of teachers, power focused on being powerless over the enormous amount of paperwork they were responsible for, and that they had no voice in placement of children or what they could teach in their classrooms. The teachers communicated feeling conflicted and pulled in many different directions while not receiving a clear or consistent message from their Head Start program staff and management.
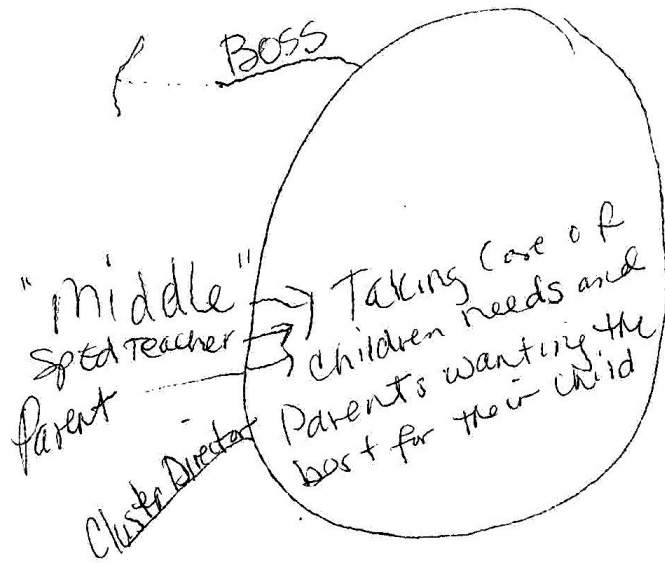
Figure 4.4. Teacher's original drawing describing the 'Power Structure'.
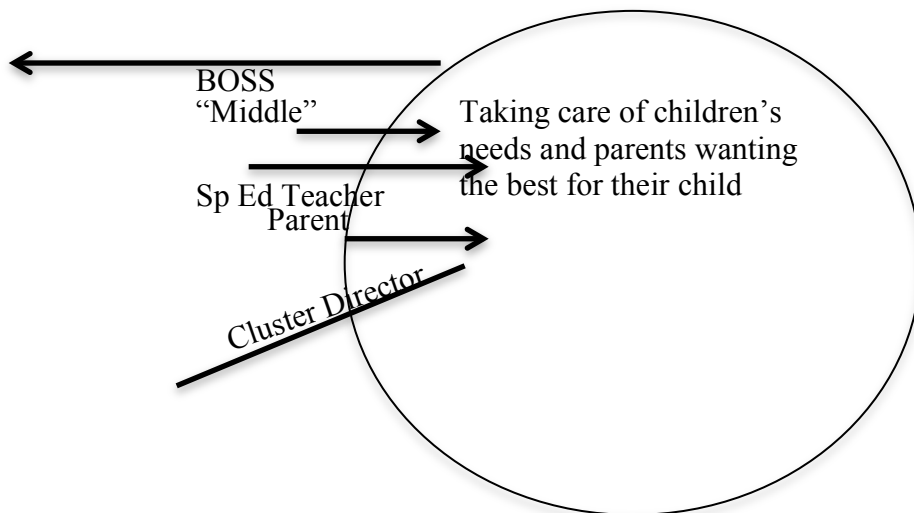
Figure 4.5. Computerized version of the teacher's original drawing.

Powerless. Teachers communicated frustration and a lack of control or voice of the responsibilities they were required to do as a teacher. *The support I need is from the upper management.* In a long energized discussion of these conflicted realities, all teachers echoed similar sentiments. A teacher outlined the countless people she interacted with to have a question answered, paperwork she had to complete, and her increased responsibilities as a team leader and special education contact. Moderators wondered out loud how this affected her interactions with children.

> *I don't have time for the KIDS! I'm not doing my job right! With the*
> *paperwork I have, I feel like I'm not doing my job right with the children.*
> *I'm not spending the quality time like I am supposed to be with those*
> *children.*

She shared an example of how she completed paperwork: *I am chasing my autistic child with my pencil trying to sign off [on something]. I use their backpacks [as a table].* With sadness she reflected on the fact that she would receive negative feedback if she were observed doing what she had just outlined, yet she must resort to such practices to get the paperwork completed.

Although other members of the group had different levels of responsibilities outside of classroom teacher, they all discussed having numerous people above them in the Head Start hierarchy. *There are a million people that are above us.* One of the biggest complaints teachers had was the lack of communication and clear consistent information from Head Start administration. Teachers communicated overall frustration

with the administration not grasping the fact they had responsibilities to the children, not to completing forms.

> *We are constantly going up and down the [Head Start] ladder. Then*
>
> *sometimes [information] does not get to down to us. It's like the*
>
> *telephone game and sometimes you get a busy signal.*

This group of teachers voiced a real disconnect between classroom responsibilities and program requirements.

All members of the group engaged in the conversation. Several times they pointed out that their calls to program administration go unanswered or are not dealt with, yet when administration needs something from them they expect it immediately. A teacher did point out that the program director met with a few of the teachers to discuss the paperwork issue. She shared that the director was shocked at the level of repetition and sheer volume of paperwork teachers are required to complete.

> *As lead teachers we have stacks and stacks of paperwork that we must*
>
> *have done. [The director] didn't even realize how much paperwork we*
>
> *had to do. She was like "You are doing all of this?" Her facial expression*
>
> *was priceless!*

Although other members of the group applauded this meeting, they remained cautiously optimistic.

Summary. Teachers' definitions of the three organizational categories provided interesting insights into their understanding of each. Their interactions highlighted the relationships they created between themselves. In addition, the definitions demonstrated

some of the misunderstandings and misconceptions they had concerning culturally

responsive practice. The teacher group brought up issues related to their Head Start

program's practices, choices, and style of communication with them. Definitions were

developed through their attitudes and points of interest they shared (Figure 4.6). Some

were expected and others were surprising, but ultimately all come together to create this

Teachers	**Culturally responsive practice**
	Involves teaching practices that are color, culture, and ability blind focused on perpetuation of the American Dream mentality. Children and families are seen as lacking knowledge or experiences that are of valve to the classroom. Goal is to mold children and give families the 'correct' knowledge. Unwilling to embrace practices or attitudes that contradict their personal attitudes and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences. All elements including experiences of marginalization are discussed without reflection or discussion of the socio-cultural influences on themselves, the children or families.
	Children with disabilities
	Not provided the opportunity to gain experience or knowledge due to the Head Start program's disproportionate placement of all children with disabilities in one teacher's classroom. Discuss willingness and wanting to be allowed the opportunity to grain the experience and to lessen the burden on the one teacher.
	Perceived power to address each
	Asking questions and seeking out additional training were the two areas they had the power to influence. Voiced extreme frustration concerning the lack of communication and being subjected to inconsistent, conflicting message by their program's administration. Felt that their Head Start program administration not only did not appreciate the needs of the children and families in their classrooms, but more importantly required practices that ran counter to what they were responsible for as teachers.

Figure 4.6 Teacher definitions

group of in-service Head Start teachers' definitions of culturally responsive practice,

disabilities, and power they have to address each in their classrooms.

Conclusion

Although instructional assistants and teachers work in the same program and

participated in the PASIT project, each engaged in very different discussions about focus

group topics. These differences are highlighted in the definitions created from each of

the focus groups. It is impossible not to question what caused such differences between

the two groups. This study highlights the differences between the groups but also

demonstrates areas that require further investigation into Head Start Instructional

assistants' and teachers' understanding of culturally responsive practice, disabilities, and

ways to increase their abilities to address each.

CHAPTER FIVE

In this chapter, I provide discussion of results shared in chapter four plus highlight limitations and implications of this study. Context is a significant element of qualitative research, and it is extremely important for this study. Instructional assistants (IA) and teachers were situated in a complex and at times contentious work environment, of which as a researcher I had no control over. With their work environment realities, I will demonstrate how the multiple data sources (reflective memos, audio and video transcripts, participant drawings, and working with a co-coder) of this study work together to further support and explain IA and teacher definitions of the organizational themes. Then by connecting this group of instructional assistants' and teachers' definitions with previous literature and research, I strive to infer impact on the young children and families in their Head Start program.

Central to the discussion of this dissertation study is the context and the differences between the two groups. Dramatic differences between the two groups were first demonstrated in the Demographics Survey responds (Appendix A). Three out of five instructional assistants were first generation United States immigrants, four out of five spoke English and another language, two out of five had bachelor's degrees in various fields other than early childhood education, four out of five were studying toward a child development associate (CDA), experience in the early childhood field ranged

from nine years to six months. In contrast, four out of the six teachers were African American, the other two were Anglo American; none spoke a second language; out of six one had a bachelor's degree in early childhood development, one had a CDA, two had an associate degree not in early childhood education, two had high school degrees; experience in the early childhood education field ranged from two with over 20 years experience and the remainder ranging from five years to six months. Instructional assistant and teacher mean scores on the Multicultural Efficacy Survey (Guyton & Wesche, 2005) supported attitudes shared during focus group sessions; four instructional assistants scored average, and one was considered low, while in the teacher group half 3 out of 6 scored low. For the teacher group the low scores represent a discomfort in providing sociocultural experiences and ways to integrate culture into curriculum and teaching practices (Guyton & Wesche, 2005).

In my reflective process, I questioned why if all identifiers were removed I would see the instructional assistants as representing the attitudes expected from teachers. The attitudes communicated by the teacher group were so negative that I did not want to believe that teacher's view children and families in such a way. For me if an instructional assistant held such negative views it would be understandable due to the gaps in salary, educational requirements, and the role of IA. I felt this way because of differences in salary, educational requirements and experience, plus the overall role of teacher. The reality in this group is that instructional assistants represent a group with higher education, linguistic skills, and overall understanding of cultural variation because of personal experiences.

Instructional assistants were willing to discuss, define and give examples of how they understood culturally responsive practice. Teachers were not willing to discuss or even think about culturally responsive practice. Instructional assistants conveyed a willingness to discuss cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic differences within their classrooms and their own personal experiences. Teachers demonstrated outright frustration when asked about the cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic differences that existed in their classrooms. Instructional assistants communicated positive attitudes about children and families and provided specific examples of children and family situations. Teachers did not discuss any specific children or families and communicated negative, oppressive attitudes toward them. Instructional assistants discuss in detail specific examples of their teaching practices. Teachers never discuss specific teaching practices; they only provide global attitudes. Instructional assistants focus on and place heavy emphasis on specific relationships with children, families, the teacher they work with and each other. Teachers discuss relationships between each other; never relationships they form with families, children or their instructional assistant.

A key factor influencing teacher attitudes was their Head Start program's administrative decisions; the firing of two African American teaching staff (1 teacher and 1 instructional assistant), shifting of classroom locations with short notice, reorganization of teaching teams (changing teacher's instructional assistant during the school year with short notice), pressure to conform to administration's administrative expectations (completion of paperwork), and hiring choices. This Head Start program's administrative decisions exacerbated conflict, defensiveness and negative emotions between members of

the teacher group, as outlined in Bolman and Deal's (2008) research on group dynamics and leadership.   Trust had not had time to develop between members prior to the focus group discussion of controversial issues. Group dynamics between the teachers communicated a lack of trust and unwillingness to share critical perspectives on race, ethnicity and class.

My view of the teacher group was further confused by their adoption of a 'circling the wagons' mentality, while also communicating a lack of trust in each other. When they communicated the unified attitude that race, culture and socioeconomic status did not matter, they were actually banding together in order to protect themselves from me, an outsider. I personally did not recognize or realize all of the background issues, nor did I fully understand the work environment that had been created. During my analysis process, I tried to focus on the individual 90 minute focus group session, but the fact that one of the more verbal members of the teacher group was fired because of something she did that was told to the administration by one of the new staff cannot be ignored. Teachers were suspicious and did not trust each other.

Discussion

Even so, all the issues and factors each group communicated are relevant to the field. In the following sections, I discuss factors that contributed to their definitions of culturally responsive practice, specifically children and families. For instructional assistants, relationships were the main focus. For teachers, I highlight how they discuss that their main goal was to mold the children for a better future and their belief that children do not understand or discuss racial or ethnic differences. Further, I infer the

potential impact the instructional assistants' and teachers' stances have on children and families in their program. Next, I discuss children with disabilities, for the instructional assistants' focus was on sociocultural impacts and fear of not knowing how to work with children with special needs. Both groups discussed the need for additional training and experience. For teachers, this was expanded to include reflections on their Head Start administrations placement practices of children with disabilities. Finally, I address the power each group perceived they have to address each of the organizational themes: culturally responsive practice and children with disabilities. This leads to insights about power dynamics between instructional assistants and teachers, and teachers and the administration.

Culturally responsive practice. As assessed during the focus group sessions, instructional assistants and teachers presented different definitions of culturally responsive practice. Members of the two groups exhibited varying levels of understanding and acceptance of the need to provide purposeful instruction that addressed the needs of children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Discussions in the focus group sessions were supported by their responses to the Multicultural Efficacy Scales (Guyton & Wesche, 2005), which investigates attitudes and understanding of the larger sociocultural issues surrounding the integration of culturally responsive practices. Instructional assistants overall understanding of culturally responsive practice was supported by the fact that all, except one, reported feeling they had average comfort in providing and integrating culture in to their classroom curriculum. For the teacher group, low scores for half of the group on the

Multicultural Efficacy Scales (Guyton & Wesche, 2005) represented their discomfort in providing sociocultural experiences and a lack of knowing how to integrate culture into curriculum and teaching practices.

As discussed earlier, the majority of instructional assistants and teachers participated in an evaluation of the PASIT project focus group sessions (one instructional assistant and two teachers did not participate because they were hired later in the school year). During these focus group sessions, both instructional assistants discussed confusion and the need for additional guidance in how to address the needs of children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds in their classrooms. In the focus groups conducted for the PASIT project evaluation, instructional assistants identified activities within the professional development related to culturally responsive practice, yet teachers did not mention this element of the project.

Becoming a culturally responsive teacher is a complex developmental process that requires individuals to show a willingness to reflect on personal biases, stereotypes, and social assumptions plus having an inquisitive perspective attitude towards one's teaching practices (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Kea et al., 2002; Brown, 2004). For some members of the group, the process had already begun, whereas others refused or dismissed the purpose and necessity of culturally responsive practice. Instructional assistants discussed ways in which understanding culture and overall diversity as a central, key factor to teaching for numerous reasons but most importantly because they see changes continuing to happen in the larger society. On the other hand, teachers questioned the purpose of pointing out differences between them and the children but

also amongst the group members. Teachers wondered aloud why everyone around them talks about diversity and culture, since to them cultural, linguistic, racial differences did not matter to them and were not a factor in their classrooms. Since each group existed within their own unique perspectives and experiences, the variation between how each perceived the topic is not surprising. The variation in each groups' understanding further validates the call for more research that specifically addresses the needs of children and families who are low income and from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in addition to the specific instructional needs of children with disabilities (Department of Education, 2010).

Instructional assistants and teachers defined culturally responsive practice within their focus group discussions very differently. Because the central purpose for both instructional assistants' and teachers' work is children and families, I choose this as my focus for discussions about culturally responsive practice. I selected one area from the instructional assistant group—relationships—and two from the teacher group—mold children and children's understanding of race. These areas provide unique insight and raise questions for future research. Within each there are points that support the theoretical and research base of culturally responsive practice, whereas others contradict it. I approached this section questioning what elements stood out and how such points of view could possibly affect future research in culturally responsive–centered professional development in early childhood settings, specifically Head Start.

Children and families. Culturally responsive teachers embrace the philosophy that children must be provided spaces that embrace—rather than "subtract" or attempt to

eliminate—the cultural, ethnic, family composition, socioeconomic, and linguistic variety that exists in a classroom, family, and community (Valenzuela, 1999; Gay, 2011; González et al., 2005). In addition, Head Start Performance Standards and Laws (U.S. Department of Health, 2009) outline the need for staff to demonstrate cultural acceptance and understanding and to provide a place where such differences are embraced to better support children and families. Basic cultural awareness skills, such as respecting various points of view, seeing the positive value in all members of a community, or understanding that not all children or their families have or want the same things from the classroom was not always communicated in this study.

When a teacher works with a child or family from a deficit, negative point of view, the child and family ultimately suffer. Such negative perceptions are communicated through various classroom interactions and practices. Soto-Manning (2007) documents a child and his family's decision to Americanize his name. Through in-depth interactions, discussions, and classroom observations Norton et al. (2005) communicates a child's powerful reflection and analysis of the classroom teacher's practices, which the child rebelled against. In forming this relationship, Norton et al. (2005) was able to demonstrate that young children understand and are affected by teachers' negative and oppressive attitudes toward them. Further, Brown (2004) reports on how teachers from different cultural, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic statuses from their students misunderstand and incorrectly interpret classroom behaviors because of their lack of cultural awareness and understanding of how behavior and discipline are communicated differently by different groups of people. For this group of Head Start

teachers racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences are unnecessarily focused on, in terms of the impact each has on curriculum and instruction for young children. To the teacher group, children need to experience classrooms where everyone is viewed as being the same, even if they are not. During the focus group, this point of view was questioned. Was it really possible and did the parents agree that everyone in society saw them as the same? Teachers did not provide a clear answer or explanation. Instead, they focused on the children's lack of awareness and inability to conceptualize differences between people.

The teacher group in this study stressed their belief that seeing and discussing differences that existed between them and the children was unnecessary because young children are unaware and not affected by social realities occurring around them. Park (2011) provides evidence that young children create and discuss their racial identities with their peers in complex ways. In one example, Park discusses a heated exchange between a Native American/Anglo-American boy, Bailey, and an Anglo-American girl, Emma. The children share an understanding of American history around Native Americans, and Bailey defends and argues the nature of his mixed identities. For example, Bailey in the group self-portrait draws himself with a mix of browns and peach, yet in the individual interview setting Park is surprised that he primarily used the peach color. Park (2011) further points out the complex understanding young children have and how their identities changed given the group they were with. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) researched and pointed out that children in the early childhood classrooms they worked in, understood, conceptualized, and tried to understand their own racial identities

and personal experiences. Tatum, 1997 researched the ways and reasons students segregate themselves in schools. In Davis's powerful 2006 video, inner-city African-American children communicate their awareness of stereotypes and social perceptions of what it means to be black or white in U.S. culture. At one extremely powerful point, a little girl realizes she has just identified the baby doll that looks like her as being bad, dirty, and not the one she wants to be friends with; her body language communicates her conflicting self-image. Davis's 2006 work questioned the impact of the landmark civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education*, that desegregated public schools in the United States in 1954, with a critical reflection on how much U.S. racial attitudes had progressed since the original *Black White Baby Doll* (1939) experiment conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Sadly, children's 2004 perceptions were similar to those reported by the Clark's in the 1940s.

Teachers in this study discussed providing children with knowledge and experiences they deemed necessary for success in school, yet there is never any mention, appreciation, or acknowledgement that children may possess valuable skills or knowledge prior to entering the early childhood classroom. In contrast, instructional assistants, who provided examples of specific children, see children and their families possessing useful information and knowledge for them and the other children. As Purnell et al. (2007) report, when children are not seen as possessing valuable knowledge, experiences, or skills they are more likely to disengage and not see themselves as part of the school culture. Purnell et al. (2007) point out how dangerous and detrimental such a stance is, especially for children from various cultural, linguistic, and economic

backgrounds. Although Purnell et al. (2007) provide a poignant example of the impact such a stance toward children has, many other theorists and researchers have provided work that further supports their findings. For example, González et al. (2005) conducted extensive research into the power of using students' prior and lived experiences in developing classroom curriculum and the impact this had on students' commitment and engagement in their learning; Cowhey (2006) discussed the impact using students' prior experiences had on her students' learning, engagement, and understanding of various social issues in their lives; and Valenzuela (1999) documented Latino students' schooling experiences which were predominately diminishing, discrediting, and ultimately leading them to experience subtractive and negative schooling experiences. Further, philosophical discussions by Nel Noddings (2003) outline the need for a soul-to-soul connection between students and their teacher in order for learning to occur. Geneva Gay (2010) provides a framework that supports, advocates, and encourages teachers to fully understand their students' prior experiences, where the teacher ultimately works to create curriculum that is reflective of the students in her classroom. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) urges people to see that education is not exempt from social stereotypes and is based on race. Unfortunately, children and families in this particular Head Start program continue to experience and interact with teachers who do not see them in a positive light nor see the value they do bring to the classroom.

For instructional assistants, children were discussed in relation to the relationships they had with each child and their families. Therefore, their discussions about the teachers' lack of understanding of the children's home lives were not surprising. One

instructional assistant pointed out that in her experience teachers often misunderstood or misinterpreted a child's behavior because she was unable to fully understand where the child was coming from or experiencing. In this example, the teacher's lack of cultural awareness resulted in her seeing the child from a deficit point of view. Children seen from a deficit point of view risk disinterest and disengagement in their own learning process; they are also at a higher risk of being referred to special education. This unfortunate reality has been well documented, questioned, and criticized by Beth Harry throughout her research (Harry, 2008; Harry & Klinger, 2006). For the teacher group, not only did they "give" knowledge to the children but also to the families, ultimately operating under the assumption that children and families do not already come to school having their own funds of knowledge.

Families, for the teachers, represented a group that had no clue what they were doing concerning their own children; the teachers felt they were there to provide the families with all of the knowledge and advice they needed to raise their children "right". On several occasions, teachers discussed having to educate and make families aware of what children needed and could gain from Head Start. As Joshi et al. (2005) document in their extensive mixed methods research of school administrators, teachers, and other school staff, the goals of the family are at times conflicting with or are in direct opposition of school policies and practices. While Joshi et al. (2005) advocate for focused professional development of all members of the school community on culturally responsive practices; they also note the possible impact these opposing views have on

students, and they encourage educators to work to understand where the family comes from and why.

During the teacher focus group session I directly questioned the group: Were the views and practices they communicated shared by the families? This question was met with frustration and dismissal of what the parents wanted. Sadly, in the teacher group, a deficit view of children and families existed. Teachers said very little about children and families even though focus group questions directly asked about interactions with them; they said only 15 lines of text from 2170 lines. Discussions revolved around broad, wide generalizations. No specific children or families were discussed or used as examples. Children and families are referred to as "those" and "them". Although this linguistic choice and their chosen responses to the questions on the surface appear to be benign or irrelevant, it does demonstrate the type of detachment this group felt from the children and families they worked with. This also contributed to seeing themselves as distributers of knowledge to children and families. Relationships among children, teachers, parents, and community are never discussed. As a cornerstone of culturally responsive practice, relationships are critical to addressing the needs of all children and families, especially important for the children and families in programs such as Head Start (Gay, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999; Norton et al., 2005; Noddings, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Relationships. For instructional assistants, relationships with children and partnerships with families was a cornerstone of how they measured their success in the classroom. Relationships with children and families allowed them to create classrooms that were supportive and compassionate. Classroom communities and a broader

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understanding of where children and families come from supports and fosters relationships necessary for children to be successful in their learning (McCaleb, 1994; Gay, 2011). Through relationships formed with children, families, and the school community, teachers are better able to develop curriculum and be responsive to children's behavior and learning interests in ways with which they are familiar (Gay, 2010). Instructional assistants discussed the fact that children's prior experiences, cultural knowledge, and linguistic abilities are celebrated and used to develop relationships between each child and the teacher and their classmates. Moll et al., (1992) discuss the powerful impact that forming such connections can have on students' learning and engagement in the classroom. Through their work Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005), they clearly demonstrate how allowing classroom curriculum to emerge from teachers' purposeful relationships with students and their families highlights the profound impact these relationships have for students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Inherent in all research and theoretical discussions on culturally responsive practice is that children and families, no matter their socioeconomic status, language, culture, or ethnicity, are always seen as possessing useful and valuable skills, knowledge, and experiences; that teachers must recognize and work into the classroom curriculum (McCaleb, 1994; González et al., 2005; Gay, 2011). Instructional assistants saw the children and families in this way; for them, all members of the classroom community possessed valuable knowledge and experiences worthy of being addressed in the classroom curriculum.

Strength-based, positive connections are fundamental for all children. This is especially true for children in Head Start who are living in poverty and are culturally and linguistically diverse, especially those who may also have a disability. Howes and Ritchie (2002) highlight the role positive relationships play in the early childhood classroom. Their work discusses the impact maladaptive or negative family or school relationships can have on young children's ability to learn; positive experiences and relationships are fundamental. As Howes and Ritchie (2002) point out, when children enter the classroom with negative experiences with prior adults or caregivers, teachers can have a positive impact, but they must be willing to form supportive, positive, strengths-based views of them. For instructional assistants in this study, understanding where the child and family were coming from, or the day-to-day realities of families, was an instrumental way to support and teach the child. *They just need somebody to understand them. [To recognize] they are not coming from your everyday living situations. They experience things that most kids probably don't experience.* All staff working with young children need to be willing to enter into this type of respectful, caring relationship with children and families in order to support and teach them (Noddings, 2003; Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

Mold Children. The teachers saw their main role as needing to mold the children, to show them the correct path (i.e., the path to success). Through their discussions, the path they advocated for represented a perpetuation of a social ideal, "myth of merit". This is a long-held U.S. cultural attitude that holds all members of the society to the same standard of achievement and success (McLeod, 1995; Oakes & Lipton, 2007). On the

surface, such a mentality might be okay, but it does not validate, respect, or support the

lived experiences of most families and children in Head Start. For this set of Head Start

teachers, the danger in molding the children lies in not being able to see that not all

people in society want their children molded the same way. Comments and attitudes

communicated by the teacher group, unfortunately, blinded them to fact that school does

not level the field of social mobility. For them, "the myth of merit masked that

schooling, within the broad social structure, nearly always favors children from

privileged families" (p. 52), this does not include children in Head Start. This group

never discussed or gave validation to the impact living in poverty has or the racial/ethnic

discrimination the children and families experience. Educational experiences that view

children and families as lacking or not possessing any knowledge or experiences of value

alienates them from what they are being taught (Freire, 2000). Compton-Lilly (2006) and

Rogers's (2003) research demonstrates the role negative and narrow teacher definitions

of literacy have on students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and possibly

with a disability. By developing a relationship with one of her students, she began to

understand his interests. Compton-Lilly (2006) was then able to interest him and defuse

his disruptive classroom behaviors. Similarly, Rogers's (2003) relationship with a family

demonstrated to her the various types of literacy that exist. She shows the flaws in the

school's attitude toward a student and her family, in that they were not true and that

although the school saw the mother as "illiterate", she actually did possess literacy skills.

Her research highlights the fact that a skill such as literacy exists in many different forms,

forms that may not necessarily be like those of the typical classroom teacher.

Norton et al.'s (2005) work further demonstrates the child's perception of a teacher trying to mold her. Because the child questions and refuses to conform to what the teacher wants, she is seen as being disruptive and disrespectful. Through her research and relationship with the child, Norton et al. gains a deeper understanding of why the child refuses—for instance, logical reasons such as not wanting to get her clothes dirty because it is the only uniform she has. This example highlights the disconnect that may exist between teacher and student. For the teachers, their need to "mold" the children far outweighed their connections, relationships, or understanding of the children and families they were working with.

This study's findings lead me to question if children and families in Head Start programs are experiencing educational practices best suited to address their needs. In addition, these results demonstrate the need for further research into dispositions necessary to work with children and families enrolled in Head Start and practices that best suit the educational abilities of the unique populations (urban, English Language Learners, first-generation immigrant families, low socioeconomic status). This mirrors the call, in the 2010 Department of Education report on the future of effective models of professional development in early childhood education, for further research and development of effective strategies to address the needs of all children and families, but especially those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Children and race. Teachers' focus was placed on being color, culture, and ability blind and striving to create classrooms free of conflict or validation of social perceptions of difference. *Children really don't look at [the] color [of people's skin].*

Of note, African Americans communicated this type of insight about children most vehemently in the teacher group. Unfortunately, such perceptions serve as validation of children's ignorance and naïveté of the sociocultural worlds they are part of—points of view that have long been seen as inaccurate (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). As Vygotsky points out in his discussion of child development and learning, culture and social interactions play a significant role. "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (p. 90). For Vygotsky sociocultural experiences are a key part of to learning and development.

In 2012, there is little debate that children understand and are affected by the sociocultural images and messages they experience, although they may not be able to process or completely understand them. Their lack of understanding is not a reason to ignore their observations or write them off; instead, it demonstrates their interest and concern about the topic. As Davis's 2006 video of the recreation of the Clark Black White Baby Doll experiment illustrated, children continue to receive and internalize sociocultural stereotypes. Children's skin color preferences are not limited to African American children, Kaufman and Wiese (2012) conducted a study similar to the Clark Black White Baby Doll experiment with Hispanic young children (five to seven year olds) in Arizona. They found that children overwhelming created images of figures with a skin tone one shade lighter than their own. Interestingly they also found that when the assessor had a darker skin tone than Caucasian, children tended to have a diminished preference for the lighter skin shade. Nevertheless, this group of teacher's in 2010

continued to espouse to the assumption that children do not recognize or internalize racial differences or biases. Park's 2011 research of Head Start children in Native-American reservations found that children discuss, illustrate, and reflect on sociocultural images they experience. All of the studies discussed here and teacher attitudes communicated illustrate the continued need to investigate how and what teacher's communicate to children concerning race and the society in which they live.

The attitudes communicated during this teachers' comments concerning young children and race was significant for two reasons; 1) it continues to demonstrate the misunderstanding and misconception of children's understanding of race and society, and 2) it shows the need for culturally responsive practice for all members of society, not just Anglo-American teachers. The disheartening fact still remains that in order for a society with such a negative perception of minorities, such as the United States, to move past and above that history all members of the society must recognize their role in oppressing others and perpetuating social achievement based on race, culture, and socioeconomic status. As Friere (2000) points out, the cycle of oppressor–oppressed is bound to continue if reflection, critical thinking, and consciousness are not achieved concerning one's role in the cycle.

Throughout my reflective analytic process I found myself questioning and wondering why there were such stark differences between IAs and teachers. For the IAs, did their immigration status and being first generation Americans impact how they were able to see and work with children and families, yet they make it very clear that these experiences and skills they have acquired are not valued in their program. Though I

recognize and realize this negative attitude is often communicated, I question does it have to be this way? The hierarchical structure and culture of this Head Start program would make embracing everyone's experiences and skills, IAs, teachers, children, families, community and administration difficult. I do think that professional development can foster, encourage and change attitudes and dispositions. From my own experience with Head Start, as a teacher and researcher, teaching staff are seen as needing better, more advanced knowledge. Only one professional development I have been involved in truly saw me as a professional. Providing, encouraging and supporting teaching staff with new, updated, technique and practices is invaluable. This study has made me question if that is enough to improve quality educational practices in early childhood especially Head Start. I do not think so. Teachers and IAs need to celebrate and recognize the skills children and families have, but in order for such a relationship to work they too must see themselves as viable, knowledgeable members to the program's culture, especially those with worldviews and experiences similar to what the children have.

Children with disabilities. The initial intent of this study was to investigate how this group of Head Start instructional assistants and teachers understood and utilized inclusive practice in their classrooms. During focus group data collection and analysis, it became clear that inclusion was not what instructional assistants and teachers wished to discuss. In the following section I discuss the various issues affecting instructional assistants' and teachers' interactions of children with disabilities. The teacher group raised another important issue related to children with disabilities: their Head Start program's placement policies.

Both groups realized various issues that influence their comfort and ability to teach all children, especially children with disabilities. For instructional assistants, their sociocultural experiences, confusion, and fear related to 2010 changes in Head Start enrollment policies (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), and their lack of training and experience influenced their ability and willingness to teach children with disabilities. The teacher group raised similar issues, such as a lack of training and experience. For teachers the focus was placed on the disproportionate placement of children with disabilities with one particular teacher in their Head Start program. Each group went about addressing their concerns in different ways.

Sociocultural influences. For this group of instructional assistants, their sociocultural experiences, lack of training, and no experience working with children with disabilities contributed to their fear of not knowing what to do. The importance of each issue varied among the members of the group. Instructional assistants' attitudes were complex and multidimensional. Understanding and then changing attitudes for this instructional assistant group is not easy. Brookfield (1995) points out that change in perceptions and early experiences take time, reflection, and guidance to embrace different ways of thinking. This group of instructional assistants demonstrates the impact and the variation of what affects them; for some it was sociocultural experiences, for others it was the fear of the unknown.

Within this group, sociocultural experiences and norms played a significant role in how they perceived their work with children with disabilities. As one instructional assistant explained, her childhood experiences in a different culture from the United

States influenced her attitudes toward children with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities were hidden away and seen as a curse on the family. The only exposure one had was if someone in their immediate had a disability. Such experiences contributed to her fear of not knowing what to do or how to teach children with disabilities. She further reflected on how she must consciously look past these early experiences because she knows and understands that attitudes have changed and are different in the United States.

Another instructional assistant, from a similar cultural background, shared that her lack of exposure to people with disabilities leads to her seeing all children as the same. This leads to her making statements that normalize children with disabilities. Unfortunately, when a teacher works to avoid categorizing people, she tends to not recognize or validate the real differences that exist concerning children's individual educational needs and styles of learning (Nieto, 2002; 2009). Sociocultural experiences and norms are extremely powerful and have a significant impact on how, what, and why individuals communicate various attitudes (Wink, 2005).

A large body of research has investigated the enormous impact sociocultural experiences have on teacher attitudes; unfortunately, much of the research is conducted on pre-service teachers in university programs (Kea et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2000; Duarte & Reed, 2004; Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gere et al., 2009; Kidd et al., 2008). Although this research sets the foundation for understanding how and why sociocultural experiences affect teaching and begins to suggest how such experiences can be addressed in teacher preparation programs, these practices are not necessarily applicable to in-service early childhood instructional assistants and teachers. Little research exists

concerning attitudes and ways to address sociocultural experiences and values for in-service early childhood teachers, with none addressing instructional assistants. As populations served by early childhood programs continue to represent a group of people that come from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds continues to increase, research into the teaching staff needs to match these address this reality (Department of Education, 2010). In addition, it is important to investigate in-service early childhood instructional assistants' and teachers' sociocultural experiences in order to validate them, while ultimately working to move past possible negative experiences or no exposure to children with disabilities. The U.S. population will continue to represent various cultures; therefore, professional development and instructional support programs need to recognize and address the fact that sociocultural norms concerning disability vary throughout the world.

Lack of experience and training. A theme that emerged for both groups concerning children with disabilities was a lack of experience and training, which contributed to them discussing feelings of not knowing what to do and apprehension as to how to teach children with disabilities. For the instructional assistant group, these feelings were directly related to misunderstandings of how the 2010 changes to Head Start enrollment practices would impact them. Changes to Head Start enrollment practices in 2010 encourage programs to provide more spaces to children with low-incidence disabilities (U.S. Department of Health, 2009). Historically, Head Start programs disproportionately enroll children with high-incidence disabilities[16]. One

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[16] Refer to Chapter 2 for detailed definitions.

instructional assistant pointed out she did not know how to work with or support a child who might be non-verbal, or unable to move around. For this instructional assistant, the lack of experience led her to be anxious. She raised important issues to consider, reflected on the classroom environment, and wondered out loud if the classroom environment could be adapted to address the needs of the child. Given the group discussion around this topic, instructional assistants obviously had questions and concerns regarding the changes. All of them recognized this as a requirement of their jobs and would adapt as needed to ensure that all children have a positive school experience.

Placement of children with disabilities. The need for experience teaching children with disabilities was echoed with teachers. For teachers, the focus was on not being allowed, by the program administration, to have children with disabilities placed in their classrooms. One teacher discussed the fact that she was not *allowed* to have children with disabilities in her classroom. All members of the teacher group agreed that they wanted to have the opportunity to support and learn to work with children with disabilities. One particular teacher raised an important question: If she is not allowed to have children with disabilities, how will she ever learn how to teach them?

In discussing children with disabilities and the changes to Head Start Law in 2010 (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), it became apparent that the biggest concern for this group of teachers was placement of children with disabilities in their Head Start program. Recall Head Start requires programs make 10% of their overall enrollment available to children with disabilities; they do not outline specifically where or how the children

should be placed (Zigler & Styfco, 2010; U.S. Department of Health, 2009). In my experience both as a teacher and doctoral student, the placement of the 10% varies widely. In some Head Start centers, there may be one child with a disability in a few classrooms. Other Head Start centers some classrooms may have no children with disabilities, and others where more than half of the children have a disability, leaving that particular teacher with a disproportionate ratio of children with disabilities to typically developing children. Within this Head Start program placement was decided by the administration. It became clear during teachers' discussions that children with disabilities are placed disproportionately with one particular teacher. She described a situation where she actually signs paperwork on students' backs, finally stating she does not have time for the children.

Demographic data collected for this study further supports the teachers' observations that children with disabilities were being placed disproportionately with one teacher; one classroom team (instructional assistant and teacher) reported having five children with identified disabilities (defined as having an active IEP), and two teams reported having 3 children with identified disabilities. Some of the teaching teams (instructional assistant and teacher) were not consistent in their reporting; the IA reported having zero children with identified disabilities, yet the teacher reported having two. These data demonstrate possible confusion between the instructional assistant and teacher concerning what children in the classroom are receiving special education support or are in need of additional instructional support. In the classroom with five children with identified disabilities, both the IA and teacher reported the same number. For this

classroom, children with disabilities accounted for one-third of the group. This ratio brings into question whether children in this program are being provided with the least restrictive educational environment possible.

The amount of paperwork and additional duties affected this teacher's interactions and teaching of the children, what she recognized as her actual job. Teachers' reflections in this study mirror the findings and suggestions produced by the 2010 Hawkins and Barnett report and policy suggestions. *Investing in Young Children: New directions in federal preschool and early childhood policy* notes that Head Start programs need to focus on child performance—not on a compliance-based paper trail.

In addition, research has documented the decline in quality of instruction as the percentage of children with disabilities increases in early childhood classrooms. Gallagher and Lambert (2006) found that in Head Start classrooms with high percentages of children with disabilities, instruction was of a lower quality than in classrooms with lower percentages of children with disabilities. This appears to be the case as reported by this group of Head Start teachers. Although this study focuses on this set of Head Start teachers, my own experiences as a Head Start teacher are similar. For me, being successful and willing to take any child has at times meant a large percentage of my class contained children with disabilities. Of course, this has an impact on the entire class.

Whereas some children are placed with one particular teacher, others voiced interest in having children with disabilities in their classrooms. Teachers discussed wanting to ease some of the stress from the teacher who has all of the children with

disabilities. Also, the teachers saw having children disabilities in their classrooms as a way to increase their experience and knowledge of working with such children.

It is important to realize children in Head Start must be afforded the same rights as other children, as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Federal law that governs special education in the United States and "express[es] a strong preference, not a mandate, for educating children with disabilities in regular classes alongside their peers without disabilities. [Plus] to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled" (Congressional Law, 2007). Also, within Head Start Performance Standards it clearly states that children must be provided educational experiences that are the same as their typically developing peers (U.S. Department of Health, 2009). Inclusive early childhood educational experiences have long been documented to improve social and emotional development of all children, especially children with disabilities (Odom, 2002). This study leads to numerous questions and areas of concern related to how programs are actualizing the 10% within Head Start programs, while ensuring children experience least restrictive learning environments as outlined by IDEA. Most important, this realization points to the lack of current research into how early childhood programs, especially Head Start, are enacting inclusive practices in the real world. Although we philosophically and socially recognize the benefits of inclusive practice, little research demonstrates how it is actually being played out in early childhood education and why.

Impact of Head Start administration. At the end of the each focus group session participants were asked to draw a picture representing where they stood in relation to their program's hierarchy. This question was originally developed to investigate if instructional assistants or teachers saw themselves as having any power in what or how they taught. In the analysis, I found that their drawings and responses better communicated their perceived ability to address culturally responsive practices and address the needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms. Although instructional assistants and teachers answer to different people within their Head Start program, they both discussed similar issues and attitudes that impeded their ability to address culturally responsive practice or address the needs of all children, especially children with disabilities. Instructional assistants and teachers can be trained, given professional development, instructional support, and encouraged to provide quality educational experiences, but their insights beg the question of whether long-term change is possible when the Head Start program administration does not embrace similar philosophical stances.

Interestingly during the PASIT project evaluation focus groups instructional assistants and teachers discuss enjoying the sense of community and open lines of communication created by the project. Instructional assistants highlight and appreciate the communication loop created by the project's instructional coach, plus they discussed utilizing on-line resources provided. Teachers discuss resentment for not being able to attend their site-specific professional development sessions. Plus, the miscommunication created with Head Start administration by their lack of attendance because they were

engaging in the PASIT project. In addition, they felt that they were better able to learn

from peers than from the PASIT instructional coach.

Within this Head Start program each group reflected on the administrative

influence right above them but never the people below them or the larger hierarchical

structure of their program (Figure 6.1). For example, teachers never discussed

Head Start Administration
Program Director, Cluster Director, Support Teacher

Teacher

Instructional
Assistants
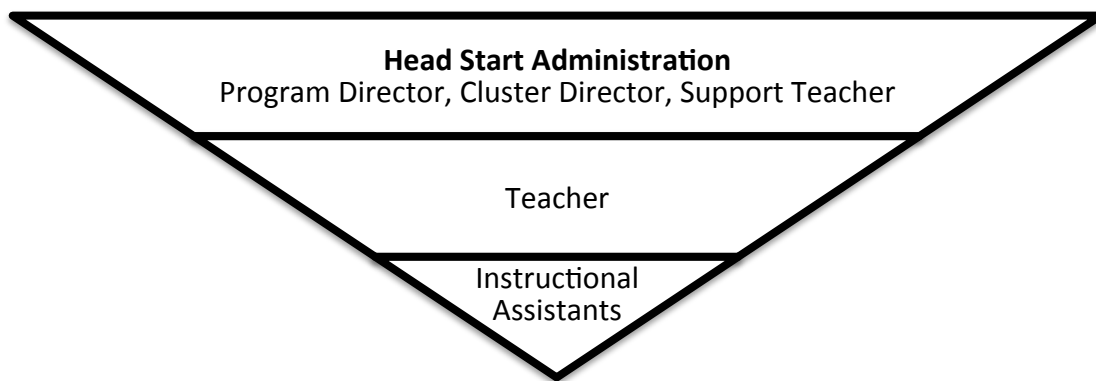
Figure 6.1 Represents instructional assistants and teachers discussion of power structure

their IAs or the impact the decisions they make have on them and IAs did not discuss the

Head Start administration or that some of the attitudes and practices teachers were

promoting actually might be those of the Head Start administration. As Paulo Freire

(2000) discusses, members of a strict hierarchical system are not always conscious of the

multiple layers of the system or the impact each has on influencing or restricting other

members of the group. Research into the implementation of inclusive practices in early

childhood educational settings found that program administration plays a significant role

in the success, failure, or inappropriate implementation of it (Lieber et al., 2000;

Beauchesne et al., 2004; Gallagher & Lambert, 2006).

Elementary school research cites administrative support and encouragement as

one of the biggest elements necessary for successful change to occur (Fullan, 2001).

When educational program administration implements uncoordinated and multiple

changes to teaching practices, these changes are ineffective (Fullan, 2001).

Unfortunately, little research exists that directly investigates the impact Head Start

program administration has on classroom practices and attitudes toward children and

families. Nor is there research that documents Head Start programs' success in

implementing practices that have been found to be effective in addressing the needs of all

children, especially children from various class groups, cultural and linguistic, or

backgrounds or those who happen to have disabilities.

As the Department of Education's 2010 report points out on several occasions,

though the cultural and linguistic variation that exists in American public school's has

continued to grow and is predicted to continue growing, no research exists that identifies

quality professional development models geared specifically toward the needs of such

children. In addition, the report states, "Professional development that includes

administrators helps to assure that early educators do not receive contradictory messages

about what practices to implement or emphasize" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010,

p. 85) Congressional or Presidential mandates do not necessarily equate to improvements

in educational practices for children served in Head Start programs. For example, many

of the attitudes communicated by teachers in this study continue to perpetuate racial

stereotypes and unrealistic social values, which have been shown to further alienate students, especially those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those who might have a disability (Valenzuela, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Harry & Klinger, 2006). The Head Start agency made significant changes to Head Start Performance Standards in 2009 (U.S. Department of Health, 2009), many of which provided further clarification and inclusion of issues specific to children and families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those with disabilities. Clearly work needs to be done because no research exists that provides evidence of the impact these changes have had on Head Start programs attitudes and practices toward such children and their families.

Considerations and Implementations

From my perspective after analyzing, reflecting, and living this study over the past two years, I see areas that are important to keep in mind when reading it and future research. As I conclude this study, my mind wonders what would be important for a different group, existing in another context concerning culturally responsive practice, children with disabilities, and the participants' perceived ability to address each. Although the exact relationships, dynamics, social influences, and understandings are very unlikely to exist within another group of Head Start instructional assistants and teachers, it is interesting to consider issues that affected this study. Four issues stand out: lack of previous research, unique policy and administrative issues within Head Start programs, changes that occurred within this Head Start program, and my own experience and involvement in Head Start. Each of these issues will be supported by existing research and theory.

Although available research regarding culturally responsive practice and addressing the needs of children with disabilities has increased since I began this study in 2010, a significant gap continues for in-service early childhood teachers, especially Head Start teachers. Two articles have been added that were found pertinent to this study (Santamaria, 2009; Park, 2011). It is interesting that research continues to lack clear connections to practices such as culturally responsive practice and the impact it has on family and child interest and involvement in programs. Practices that have been found to support and improve academic success for students, especially those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, continues to be absent in early childhood education research. There continues to be research on pre-service teachers. Although this demographic provides needed information concerning ways to implement and improve teacher preparation programs, it does little to address the realities existing in real early childhood classrooms. Research on pre-service teachers focuses on hypothetical attitudes and perceptions they have of children and families from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds in theory or as a result of interactions during short durations of time (Kea et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2000; Duarte & Reed, 2004; Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gere et al., 2009; Kidd et al., 2008). As the Department of Education 2010 review of current research in early childhood education points out, "This review did not reveal any peer-reviewed articles that examined or evaluated professional development strategies to improve cultural and linguistic competence despite the growing diversity of the early childhood population" (p. 87). In-service teachers are having direct contact with children and families coming from more varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds and with more

children that might have disabilities, yet we know very little about how or why they use specific practices to support this population.

In addition, research available as to the impact early childhood program administration has on practices in their program classrooms' is limited. The fact that for this study I expanded the search for research to include elementary school principals is problematic. Influences, policies, and state and federal regulations and supports are not the same for Head Start programs, day care centers, and other early childhood education environments, nor are they the same as policies and regulations that govern elementary schools and their administrations. These differences are even more pronounced when looking specifically at Head Start programs. As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, wide variation exists between Head Start programs, with some being managed through local health and human services agencies, whereas others are run through the public school system. This study demonstrated that program administration has a significant impact on attitudes communicated in the classroom; therefore, I wonder whether it is realistic to encourage change only at the classroom level. Fullan (2001) postulates that real change only occurs when all members of the group are engaged in the process, but more important that there exist a culture of change that is being led by leaders that agree and support change; without all of these elements change is difficult, if not impossible. In addition, the Department of Education 2010 review further supports the need for research into the impact they have on the implementation and effectiveness of professional development in early childhood education settings. Therefore, even though the attitudes communicated especially by teachers in this study are disconcerting, I question where

they arrived at these negative misconceptions of the children and families they are hired to work with.

As a federally funded program, Head Start continues to experience constant scrutiny concerning its effectiveness, while little research exists that demonstrates the ways in which it successfully supports children and families. Research must work to address the impact policy changes of 2007 have on Head Start programs (U.S. Department of Health, 2009). Although it is philosophically excellent to require teaching staff to have higher levels of education in order to improve quality of instruction and to change enrollment practices to include children with low incidence disabilities, research will need to document and evaluate the impact these changes have on Head Start programs.

In 2004, a report by the Office of the Inspector General at the Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of Health, 2004) outlined one of the main reasons increases in teacher qualifications (i.e., education levels) are difficult to maintain is the salary disparity between community-based Head Start programs and public school–based programs. Community-based programs are spending some of their resources on helping their teaching staff obtain bachelor's degrees, while as a result of their inability to increase teacher salaries, teachers leave the programs for better pay in the public school system. These community-based Head Start programs are questioning how they can remain competitive with public schools when they do not have the financial ability to match them. For Head Start to continue to be a stellar example of social programs in the

United States, it is necessary to invest in quality research and support a program that is fully funded.

Ultimately, I question if the changes in this program are typical of other Head Start programs. Because I work as a Head Start teacher in a public school, I was able to notice that another Head Start classroom in my school has had two different teachers in the past 2 years, with four different instructional assistants. With this firsthand experience I further question the impact all of these changes have on the quality of instruction and connections to children and families. I know that as the senior Head Start teacher at my school instituting higher educational requirements for teaching staff and encouraging inclusive practices is stressful and difficult for all members of the team (Head Start staff and preschool special education team).

My own experience as a Head Start teacher, as an intern in a neighboring community-based program, and as a doctoral student inevitably played a role in this study. Although the participants' awareness that I am a Head Start teacher in a neighboring public school allowed me access to their experiences, it also stood as a barrier. I did my best to communicate that although I work for a public school, thereby earn more, and am required to have state teaching licenses, I could understand some of their frustrations. This complex relationship I have with Head Start and the community is an important factor to keep in mind.

Implications

Throughout this chapter I have pointed out areas of need and future directions for research focused on in-service Head Start teaching staff's and

administration's understanding and use of culturally responsive practice and questioned the impact this has on children and families, especially those enrolled in Head Start programs. Highlighted are the gaps and lack of research on people, instructional assistants, teachers, and administrators who work with young children and their families. These gaps and lack of research further occurred concerning the impact the practices these individuals use have on young children's performance, especially when addressing the unique instructional needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children who may also have a disability.

Although culturally responsive practice has shown promise in pre-service early childhood teachers, little has shown its role in early childhood teacher classroom practices. It is difficult to advocate for the use of a practice that is not researched, shown to work, or not work in the real-world context for which it is intended. In addition, although professional development models have been discussed and a need has been documented, no research exists in early childhood education research.

The fact that significant changes to the Head Start Act were made in 2007 (U.S. Department of Health 2009) and are expected to be fully implemented by 2013, it does not necessarily mean that long-held practices and attitudes will change in individual programs. All members of the Head Start community need to be involved in and have a stake in improving the experiences children and families have in their programs. Without the buy-in of all members of the Head Start community, instructional assistants, teachers, administrators, and support staff, change will not come and the program will continue to be criticized and threatened with the loss of federal funding.

For Head Start to continue being a viable early childhood program and to receive funding, the Office of Head Start, DHHS and individual programs must institute significant changes. As the 2010 changes proposed by the Obama Administration come into practice (to be fully implemented by 2013), research into how and why certain policies are or are not successful is invaluable. Researchers in early childhood, specifically Head Start, must continue to publish and make public findings on in-service teaching staff and the role their practices and attitudes have on the young children and families they work with. Focus needs to shift to providing quality early childhood experiences based on current thinking and research for all children, especially children from low-income and various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and who might have a disability. Children and families in Head Start programs are multifaceted, with complex situations having a variety of social influences; research should begin to show this.

Finally, to improve Head Start teacher and program quality, we must first know who these people are, fully understand what they need, and design training and provide instructional supports that are responsive to each individual teacher and instructional assistant. Trainings and instructional supports must address needs related to culturally responsive practice, appropriate instruction for all children, especially children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or might have disabilities. It is necessary to include Head Start program administration in order to ensure that such teaching philosophies are shared throughout programs. Although it would be wonderful if one professional development model could address the needs of all Head Start teaching staff in the United States, I am not sure that is possible given the variation that exists; not all

Head Start programs are the same nor do they all employ the same type of teacher with the same qualification requirements, nor do they all support the same types of communities. A rural community does not need the same type of support as an urban community. These issues are key factors that should influence future professional development models. Head Start instructional assistants and teachers have the potential to have a significant impact on the children and families with which they work.

APPENDIX A

Teacher Demographics, and Education
Modified 08/2011 for this study

To complete, please circle the word or number or check the response that applies to you.

	Languages spoken fluently:

Gender: Male Female
Age:_____years
Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?
    Yes (please answer question below) 1
    No..0
    Don't know ....d
 	
What is your race? You may name more than one if you like.
 	
....
....
    White..1
    Black, African-American,
    or Negro 2
    American Indian or Alaska
    Native (SPECIFY) 3
 	
    Asian-Indian...4
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____

Years teaching in current job:_____
If you have been at your current job less than 5 years, please list the previous jobs have you have held that fall within those previous 5years.

_____

_____
Total years teaching:_____

Number of children currently in your class(es) total:

_____
Number of children with identified disabilities (IEPs) in your classes
total:_____
Number of dual language learner children in your classes total: _____

Total number of languages in your classes:_____

List the languages:

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

Please check highest level of education achieved:

1. Years of education (please check one)

a. Less than high school?		
b. High school		
c. Some college courses		How many? _____
d. AA degree		
e. BA degree		
f. Some graduate-level courses		How many? _____
g. Master's		
h. PhD		

What was your major when you achieved your highest degree? (If applicable). Please check all that apply:

Not applicable

Early Childhood Education

Elementary Education

Special Education

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Child Development

Other:_____

APPENDIX B

Teacher Beliefs Scale Items Used in FACES 2000

I'm going to read some statements that some teachers have made about how children in Head Start should be taught and managed. Please tell me whether each statement agrees or disagrees with your personal beliefs about good teaching practice in Head Start. Circle response.

(READ ITEM) Do you *strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree*, or *strongly agree* with that statement?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
a. Head Start classroom activities should be responsive to individual differences in development.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Each curriculum area should be taught as a separate subject at separate times.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Children should be allowed to select many of their own activities from a variety of learning areas that the teacher has prepared (writing, science center, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
d. Children should be allowed to cut their own shapes, perform their own steps in an experiment, and plan their own creative drama, art, and writing activities	1	2	3	4	5
e. Students should work silently and alone on seatwork...	1	2	3	4	5
f. Children in Head Start classrooms should learn through active explorations.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Head Start teachers should use treats, stickers, or stars to encourage appropriate behavior	1	2	3	4	5

h. Head Start teachers should use punishments or reprimands to encourage appropriate behavior ...	1	2	3	4	5
i. Children should be involved in establishing rules for the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
j. Children should be instructed in recognizing the single letters of the alphabet, isolated from words.	1	2	3	4	5
k. Children should learn to color within predefined lines.	1	2	3	4	5
l. Children in Head Start classrooms should learn to form letters correctly on a printed page	1	2	3	4	5
m. Children should dictate stories to the teacher......	1	2	3	4	5
n. Children should know their letter sounds before they learn to read.	1	2	3	4	5
o. Children should form letters correctly before they are allowed to create a story.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey
Modified 08/2011 for this study

Directions: Please circle the number that corresponds to your opinion for each statement listed. Please respond to all items in the survey.

1. I find teaching a culturally diverse student group rewarding.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

2. Teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student group.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

3. Sometimes I think that there is too much emphasis placed on multicultural awareness and training for teachers.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

4. Teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

5. I frequently invite extended family members (e.g., cousins, grandparents, godparents)
   to attend parent teacher conferences.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

6. It is not the teacher's responsibility to encourage pride in one's culture.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

7. As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly challenging.

  Strongly Disagree   Strongly
       1   2   3   4   5

8. I believe that the teacher's role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

9. When dealing with bilingual children, communication styles often are interpreted as behavioral problems.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

10. As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes increasingly rewarding.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

11. I can learn a great deal from students with culturally different backgrounds.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

12. Multicultural training for teachers is not necessary.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

13. To be an effective teacher, one needs to be aware of cultural differences present in the classroom.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

14. Multicultural awareness training can help me to work more effectively with a diverse student population.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

15. Students should learn to communicate in English only.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

16. Today's curriculum gives undue importance to multiculturalism and diversity.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

17. I am aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds in my classroom.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
1   2   3   4   5

18. Regardless of the makeup of my class, it is important for students to be aware of multicultural diversity.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
      1   2   3   4   5

19. Being multiculturally aware is not relevant for the subject I teach.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
      1   2   3   4   5

20. Teaching students about cultural diversity will only create conflict in the classroom.

Strongly Disagree   Strongly
      1   2   3   4   5

MULTICULTURAL EFFICACY SCALE
Modified 08/2011 for this study

<u>Directions</u>: To the best of your knowledge, self-assess your own ability to do the various items listed below. Many of the items refer to you as a teacher. Please indicate this reference point below.

Key: **A = I do not believe I could do this very well.**
          B = I could probably do this if I had to, but it would be difficult for me.
          C = I believe that I could do this reasonably well if I had time to prepare.
          D = I am quite confident that this would be easy for me to do.

1)   I can provide instructional activities to help students to develop strategies for dealing with racial confrontations. _____
2)   I can adapt instructional methods to meet the needs of learners from diverse groups. _____
3)   I can develop materials appropriate for the multicultural classroom. _____
4)   I can develop instructional methods that dispel myths about diverse groups. _____
5)   I can analyze instructional materials for potential stereotypical and/or prejudicial content. _____
6)   I can help students to examine their own prejudices. _____
7)   I can present diverse groups in our society in a manner that will build mutual respect. _____
8)   I can develop activities that increase the self-confidence of diverse students. _____
9)   I can provide instruction showing how prejudice affects individuals. _____
10)   I can plan instructional activities to reduce prejudice toward diverse groups. _____
11)   I can identify cultural biases in commercial materials used in teaching. _____
12)   I can help students work through problem situations caused by stereotypical and/or prejudicial attitudes. _____
13)   I can get students from diverse groups to work together. _____
14)   I can identify school practices that may harm diverse students. _____
15)   I can identify solutions to problems that may arise as the result of diversity. _____

16) I can identify the societal forces that influence opportunities for diverse people. _____

17) I can identify ways in which various groups contribute to our pluralistic society. _____

18) I can help students take on the perspective of ethnic and cultural groups different from their own._____

19) I can help students view history and current events from diverse perspectives. _____

20) I can involve students in making decisions and clarifying their values regarding multicultural issues. ___

Inclusion Attitude Scales (IAS)
Modified 08/2011 for this study

Children with disabilities in inclusion settings… Interactions with typical peers	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
It is important that preschool children with special needs participate in an inclusion/integrated program.					
Are more likely to develop independence in self-help skills, such as dressing, eating, and toileting.					
Learn more because they have a chance to see same-age peers and learn from them.					
Are more likely to be rejected or left out by teachers.					

In inclusion classrooms… Inclusion	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree/Nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Children with disabilities are less likely to receive enough special help and individualized instruction from their teachers.					
Children with disabilities are less likely to receive enough special services, such as physical and speech therapy.					
Children with disabilities are more likely to be rejected or left out by other children.					
Teachers are not likely to be qualified or trained to deal with the needs of children with disabilities.					

In inclusion classrooms… **Typical peers**	**Strongly Disagree** **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree** **3**	**Agree** **4**	**Strongly Agree** **5**
Children <u>without</u> disabilities would better understand and accept differences in people as a result of his/her participation in an inclusion program.					
Children <u>without</u> disabilities benefit when children with special needs are integrated.					
Children <u>without</u> disabilities learn to develop sensitivity to others by having the opportunity to know children with disabilities.					
In inclusion programs, children <u>without</u> disabilities become more aware and accepting of their own strengths and weaknesses.					
Children with disabilities may do things that injure other children.					

Children <u>without</u> disabilities might be frightened by the strange behavior of som children with disabilities.					
Children <u>without</u> disabilities would continue to receive adequate teacher instruction in an integrated program.					
In inclusion classrooms, children <u>without</u> disabilities may copy children with disabilities and learn negative behaviors from them.					
Children with disabilities hold back other children and slow down their learning.					

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Impact on teacher	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree Nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Children with disabilities are demanding.					
A child with disabilities would present a number of behavior problems when integrated with children without disabilities.					
It is difficult to maintain order in a preschool classroom that contains a child with disabilities.					

Focus Group Protocol
(5/20/2010)

Opening comments: Welcome. For the next 90 minutes we will ask questions about your Head Start program, the children and families in your classrooms. All comments made, video and audio-recorded will remain confidential. No information will be shared with your program. Our discussions of the topics will be used for Mona's dissertation study. She will not identify any one in her writings. We would like to have open discussion of all of the topics. Feel free to ask questions. We will keep track of time so that we are finished in time. All right, ready?

Introductions—Each person introduces themselves. Sharing something they plan to do over the upcoming summer break.

Section 1—40 minutes max
If you had 1 minute to describe the children and families in your class to someone unfamiliar with the program, what would you say?

Some researchers have said, "Culturally responsive practice is created for Anglo-American teachers to learn how to work with children and families from backgrounds different from the Anglo-American experience."

I am already a minority so culturally responsive practice does not apply to me,

Because we are minorities we know how to work with all children.
Some researchers have stated that minorities do not need culturally responsive training because they know the minority experience.

  How are they the same?
  How are they different?
  Does it make a difference if you do/don't have money?

All minorities are the same.

What skills do you have as an instructional assistant/teacher that are unique to you being a minority?

Discuss a time when a family member or friend was treated wrongly because of his/her race/ethnicity.

How would you describe the ability/developmental levels of the children in your class?

When thinking about times that you have had children with disabilities in your class, what do remember the most about these children?

Most of you have touched on not "knowing" what to do with the kids.

Okay, you pointed out that "their needs are too many." How do the needs of this child differ from the needs of other children in the class? Are they not all "needy"/ "at risk"?

Often it is said in research that early childhood teachers and assistants "do not feel capable of addressing the needs of children with special needs." Do you feel "capable" of addressing the needs of children with special needs?
Why or why not? (Create List)

Discuss a time when a family member or friend was treated wrongly or wrongly placed in special education.

Have we missed anything about culturally responsive practice and teaching children with disabilities?
Section 2—45 minutes
Now we are going to talk about power in your program.

Take a few minutes to draw a picture of where you as a teacher/instructional assistant and how you fit into the hierarchy of power in your program.

Discuss images created.

How does the hierarchy in your program affect your ability to do culturally responsive practice and inclusion?

Wrap up—5 minutes
Have we missed anything about culturally responsive practice, inclusion, or power?

Instructional Assistants' Focus Groups Codes

Mona's codes ($n = 12$)	Stacia's codes ($n = 41$)
Family	Recognition of culture/diversity
Children	Strengths-based
Race/minority	Collegial support
Culturally responsive practice	Respect for differences
Interacting/communication	Value heritage language
Discrimination	Parent responsibility to teach English
Disability	Hegemony
Teacher	Partnership with parents
Fear	Open to learning/need for learning
Training	Students as resources
Power	Support/care/love
Curriculum/instruction	(White) Teacher ignorance
	Necessary for white teachers
	Reaching out to families
	Overwhelmed with amount of knowledge needed
	Culturally responsive for everyone
	Money doesn't matter in maintaining culture
	Importance of maintaining culture
	Share language
	Sharing of self
	Connection with students
	Experience of marginalization
	Being dismissed
	Not qualified to label disability
	"Normalizing"
	Lack of training
	Emotional
	Lack of experiences with disabilities
	Feel capable
	Need for training
	Inclusion balanced with 1-on-1
	Aware of needs

	Impact
	Petty
	Assumptions
	Power 'over' children
	Power through collaboration
	Supportive curriculum
	Curriculum not enough
	Responsibility on the teacher
	Power through collaboration
	Supportive curriculum
	Curriculum not enough
	Responsibility on the teacher
Common Codes from Instructional Assistant Focus Group (*n* = 15)	
Training	Partnership with parents
Language-promoting English	Open to learning
(White) Teacher ignorance	Strengths-based view of children
Experience of marginalization	Curriculum
Normalizing disability	Recognition of culture
Power	Respect for differences
Compassion	Importance of maintaining culture
	Fear

Teacher Focus Group Codes

Mona's codes (*n* = 35)	Stacia's codes (*n*= 24; New=13; From Focus group I=11)
New (*n*=21)	New (*n*=13)
Ability of white person to understand others	Educate the parents
Avoiding/discounting/normalizing race	Deficit view of children
	Power
Children as not aware	Others' learning
Children doing well in the future	Color/culture blind
Control	Culturally Responsive/Difference as a label (rejecting idea of labels)
Giving parents knowledge	Separation of classroom from world
Hinder	American dream—Myth of Merit—
Income	responsibility on the individual (strength of
Lack of communication	character)
Lack of support	Stereotyping
NOT normalizing disability	Feel capable
Peer collaboration	Lack of support/communication from
Personal experience influencing practice	management
	Paperwork
PowerLESS	Disseminating information: focus on learning

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Racial awareness between teachers	(and learning separate from culture—
Respect	opposite of Culturally Responsive)
Role of teacher	Old (*n*=11)
Setting the stage	Recognition of culture
Stereotypes	Strengths-based view of the child
Utopia	Partnership with parents
Working with children with	Open to learning
disabilities	Fear: need to feel
Old (*n*=13)	appreciated/valued/respected
Compassion	Respect for differences
Curriculum	Importance of maintaining culture (teacher's
Experiences of marginalization	own culture—nothing about students)
Fear	Language: promoting English
Importance of maintaining culture	Experience of marginalization
Language promoting English	Compassion
Normalizing disability	Training
Open to learning	
Partnership with parents	
Power	
Recognition of culture	
Strengths based	
Training	

Common Codes	
New Codes from Teacher Focus Group (*n* = 10)	Codes from Instructional Assistant Focus Group that Applied (*n*= 8)
Giving parents' knowledge	Strengths-based view of children
Color/culture/ability blind	Training
Myth of Merit	Open to learning
White teachers separating self's	Experience of marginalization
from others	Language-promoting English
Lack of support communication	Recognition of differences (was Recognition
from management	of "culture" but was changed to
Disseminating information "stuff"	"differences")
Feel capable + personal experience	Fear (more a fear that lead to the need to feel
influencing practice	appreciated/valued/
Deficit view of children	respected)
Stereotyping—gender	Compassion (with peers—NO mention of
PowerLESS + hinder	children/families)

Common code between the two	
PowerLESS+hinder	

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