

# Culturally Responsive Teaching in an Afterschool Literacy Program: Tutor Implementation and Experiences

*Dana L. Skelley, Margie L. Stevens, and Leslee K. Bailey-Tarbett*

## Abstract

How do educators meet the needs of our growing diverse K–12 population? Many use culturally responsive strategies in meaningful ways to ensure all students' cultures are acknowledged, celebrated, and considered (Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Although a number of culturally responsive strategies are available, it is well documented that additional research is needed to understand their impact (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2012) and specific to this study, their implementation in afterschool settings (Simpkins et al., 2017). Grounded in sociocultural and critical multiculturalism theories, the purpose of this second-year case study was to examine tutors' use of culturally responsive strategies during an elementary afterschool literacy program and was guided by these questions: (a) How did tutors implement culturally responsive strategies during tutoring sessions? (b) How did tutors experience culturally responsive strategies? This study suggests three variables affected tutors' implementation and experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy: proficiency, curriculum, and environment. The discussion considers three questions stemming from the study's findings and focuses on difficulties in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, training tutors for effective use of culturally responsive pedagogy, and structuring lessons for a global perspective.

Key Words: culturally responsive pedagogy, afterschool programs, critical multiculturalism, cultural competence, writers' workshop, digital literacies

## Introduction

How do educators meet the needs of a diverse K–12 population? Nationally, this is a growing educational challenge with the U.S. Department of Education (2019) reporting 49% of public school students are children of color. The numerous assets of a diverse school population also come with some uncertainties of how to successfully teach students with a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences. The main question becomes how do we make the teaching and learning process engaging, accessible, and equitable to all students? Many argue the answer resides with educators developing cultural competence, which is defined by the National Educational Association (2020) as:

Having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom. (para. 3)

Educators who are searching for a pedagogy grounded in cultural competence often embrace culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Gay (2000), who first coined the term, explained the purpose of a culturally responsive pedagogy is to ensure all students' cultures are acknowledged and celebrated. Research, however, cites proper implementation of culturally responsive teaching techniques is difficult for preservice and in-service teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lim et al., 2019; Young, 2010). Germane to this study, little research has been conducted specific to culturally responsive pedagogy implementation in afterschool settings (Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Simpkins et al., 2017). This is concerning as afterschool programs are expanding nationally and frequently provide literacy tutoring to diverse students (Lauer et al., 2006; Ngo, 2017).

Afterschool programs have a unique opportunity to create a sense of community for learners through the relationships between children, tutors, parents, and staff. Yet, when an afterschool program seeks to involve community volunteers, there is a need for these tutors to be trained to educate students with best-practice techniques (Wasik, 1998; Woolley & Hay, 2007). Tutors need methods to best educate all children, especially students of color and especially when the tutors' and children's backgrounds are different (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2001). Therefore, tutors can be trained in culturally responsive teaching

strategies since this pedagogy is designed to honor the child and the child's background in the curriculum and instruction.

This study was developed to investigate novice tutors' implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy in an elementary afterschool literacy program. It grew from a previous year-long investigation exploring how a university literacy center moved to an afterschool setting and implemented a bookmaking program (Skelley et al., 2017). One of the findings of that study revealed that cultural differences between tutors and children at times produced both negative disruptions and positive participation within sessions (Skelley et al., 2019). As a result, the following year the university literacy center adjusted tutor training and expectations to help tutors implement culturally responsive teaching strategies during their sessions. The purpose of this second-year study was grounded in this pedagogical change, focused on implementation, and guided by these questions: (a) How did tutors implement culturally responsive strategies during tutoring sessions? (b) How did tutors experience culturally responsive strategies?

## Perspectives

This qualitative case study employed two theoretical lenses revealing different perspectives: sociocultural learning theory and critical multiculturalism.

### Sociocultural Learning Theory

Sociocultural learning theory blankets this research by providing insight and focus into how learning takes place between tutors and children. Vygotsky (1978) informs us that all learning is social and is mediated by the individual's culture. Rogoff (1990) writes, "children's cognitive development is an apprenticeship—it occurs through guided participation in social activity with companions who support and stretch children's understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture" (p. vii). She refers to this concept as apprenticeship in thinking.

At the core of cognitive apprenticeship, situated learning occurs through active and social participation in an authentic setting through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Rogoff (2003) explains, "The model provided by apprenticeship is one of active learners in a community of people who support, challenge, and guide novices as [the novices] increasingly participate in skilled, valued sociocultural activity" (p. 39). Specifically applied to the afterschool learning space, tutors and children worked together in a cognitive apprenticeship as they worked through the writing process to create their books. Their setting, though not the traditional classroom environment, was

still within the children's school and created an authentic space which quickly became a community for situated learning (Honig & McDonald, 2005). Broadly, sociocultural learning theory posits that social interaction is a necessary component of all learning, including learning that takes place during the tutoring process.

While sociocultural learning theory recognizes the importance of social, cultural, and historical factors in learning, it fails to consider the critical perspectives such as whose culture and knowledge is valued in learning and/or who is empowered (Lewis et al., 2007). Therefore, we turned to a second guiding theory for this study, critical multiculturalism.

### **Critical Multiculturalism**

Critical multicultural education brings diverse experiences to the center of student discourse and empowers students to critique and challenge the social norms that continue to benefit some groups at the expense of others (Banks, 2006; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010). Gay (1995) emphasizes the primary purpose of critical multicultural education is "to empower students and transform schools and society for greater freedom, equality, and justice within the contextual realities of cultural pluralism" (pp. 180–181). One goal of critical multicultural education is to provide opportunities for all students to succeed academically. One way to create these opportunities is acknowledging all students come to school with unique funds of knowledge that are often ignored or underestimated in the classroom and, therefore, to design curriculum to best utilize these strengths (Howard, 2010; Moll, 1994). Another goal of critical multicultural education is to learn about and from diverse cultures affirmatively (Nieto, 1999). Developing cultural competence allows children to gain a working knowledge and respect for a variety of cultures. Inclusive teachers build "cultural integrity" and knowledge about other cultures by using the child's culture "as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). This stance rejects a deficit view of cultural differences and celebrates the value such differences bring to educational spaces (Paris & Ball, 2009). An additional goal of critical multicultural education is to develop critical thinking practices that question structural inequalities. Friere (1970) argues for a problem-posing education model which focuses on issues in the student's life, allowing the learner to critically reflect and act on his or her position in society, which in turn makes literacy immediately relevant and engaging. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) adds that a critical consciousness is necessary for students to "critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" which can be explored when implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy (p. 162).

In short, critical multicultural theory recognizes the need to acknowledge and include students' culture in the learning process which naturally leads to opportunities for them to affirmatively learn about other cultures. Critical multiculturalism places a priority on developing critical thinking practices that question structural inequalities, specifically how students can challenge structural inequalities to improve their own lives and the lives of others. When critical multicultural theory is put into practice, educators often find culturally responsive pedagogy as a way of application (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). The tutor training in this study was grounded in this critical theoretical stance and emphasized the acknowledgement of inequities while building on children's home cultures and community experiences.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The methods of culturally responsive teaching give educators practical guidelines on creating an equitable learning environment. Gay (2013) gives four tenets for culturally responsive teaching. First, the education of diverse students should connect "in-school learning and out-of school living" (p. 49). Next, the learning environment should "promote educational equity and excellence" while also fostering "community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 49). Finally, the educational space should "develop students' agency, efficacy, and empowerment" (p. 49).

Howard (2010) also delineates other important principles of culturally responsive teaching such as (a) the use of asset-based ideologies as opposed to deficit mentalities with culturally diverse students; (b) the recognition of interpretations of knowledge, language, culture, and historical discourse other than those that are Eurocentric or middle-class; (c) an awareness of and an ongoing commitment to challenge injustice, inequality, and oppression; (d) an authentic, holistic, and culturally informed notion of care for students; and (e) an acknowledgement of culture's complexity and a space in which students can use their personal culture in learning (p. 70). Currently, the ideas of culturally responsive teaching are being broadened and extended through the concepts of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Laman et al., 2018; Paris, 2012; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). This theory promotes the use of a sustaining pedagogy that recognizes the fluid dynamics of culture and supports a consistent critical view of pedagogical practices that are multilingualistic and multicultural in nature (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017).

### **Methodology**

This year-long qualitative case study (Yin, 2014) occurred in an afterschool program in an urban elementary school serving 1,198 children, 76% receiving

free lunch, and 95% children of color. Sixteen second grade African American children enrolled in literacy tutoring during the fall, and 12 returned in spring. With the school's goal that all students read on grade level by third grade, the principal determined second graders would be the participants for this program. All tutored children were participants in the school's afterschool program, and registration packets were offered by the principal and the school's community liaison staff member based on academic performance and child interest. Students were ultimately enrolled on a first-come-first-served basis in the order in which registration packets were returned.

Tutors were honors and education undergraduate students, enrolled in a three-hour elective course entitled *Literacy Tutoring*. During fall semester, four African American and four White students, all female between the ages of 19 to 24, tutored two children simultaneously, the same two children for all sessions. During the spring semester, a new class enrolled with four African American students, one male and three female, and eight White students, two male and six female, all between the ages of 19 and 23. They tutored one child each, the same child each week. One-to-one tutoring was used second semester due to the increased number of tutors enrolled in the course, the lack of tutoring space, and limited resources. Tutors and children were randomly assigned.

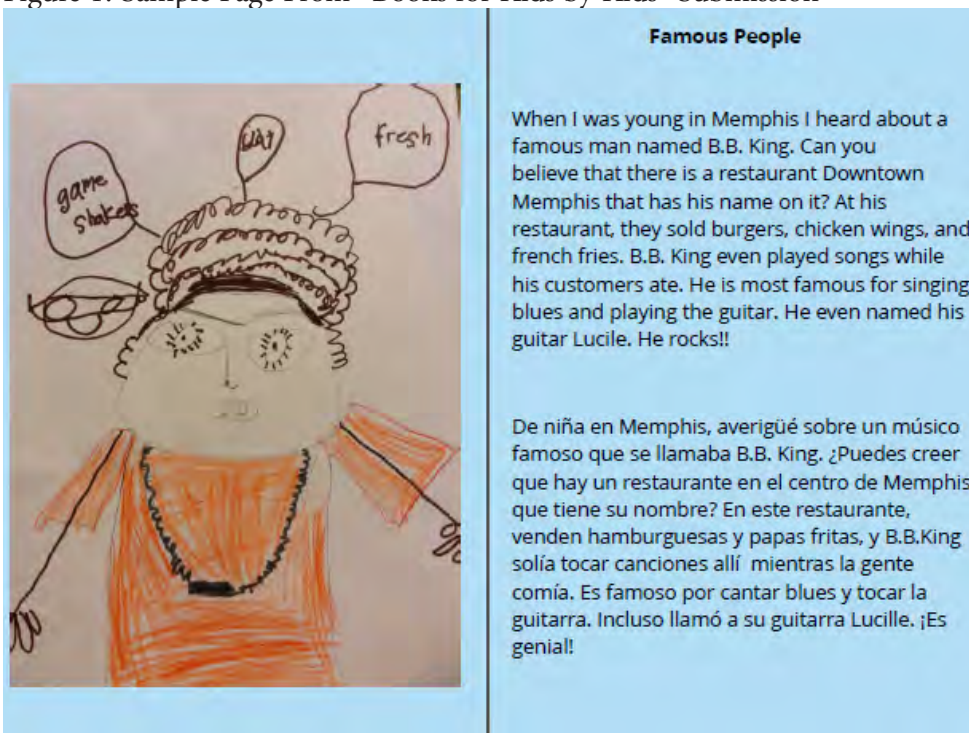
The research team consisted of one literacy professor, serving as instructor and researcher, and three doctoral students. The literacy professor and two doctoral students were participant observers during sessions, while the third doctoral student was a non-participant observer. The professor and third doctoral student also conducted end-of-semester interviews.

The university course, open only to undergraduate honors and/or education students, was created one year prior to this study as a first-time collaborative initiative between the university education, honors, and Spanish departments. One of the primary goals of the course was for each tutor and child to write and illustrate a bilingual e-book about their city with university Spanish students providing translation. Books were professionally published and donated to children at the local international cancer hospital in hopes they could visit area attractions in the future. Tutors and children also received a hard copy of their books. Funding occurred for this project through university, external, and individual support.

Tutors received training on campus the first three weeks of the semester followed by one and a half hours of weekly afterschool tutoring at the elementary school for 10 weeks. Training included a discussion on age-appropriate pedagogy for second graders through the use of a semistructured lesson plan. The lesson plans included following a process approach to writing, using culturally responsive strategies, linking children's literature to writing, using digital

tools for researching and composing, encouraging children to reflect on their learning, and blogging to parents about their children’s accomplishments (see Appendix A for lesson plan template). Training also included how to use an iPad to research topics and use the Book Creator app to write weekly content with an accompanying illustration. Each week’s writing focused on a theme, and children decided what they wanted to write within each theme (see Figure 1 for example page). Weekly topics with corresponding children’s books included (a) introduction and author’s page with *Goodnight Memphis*, *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend*, and *When I Was Young in the Mountains*; (b) downtown and *Nana in the City*; (c) zoo and *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*; (d) sports and *Salt in His Shoes*; (e) museums and *Martin’s Big Words*; (f) music and *Max Found Two Sticks*; (g) outdoor locations and *In the Woods: Who’s Been Here?*; (h) famous people and *Elvis: The Story of the Rock and Roll King*; and (i) restaurants with *Growing Up with Tamales*.

Figure 1. Sample Page From “Books for Kids by Kids” Submission



To introduce tutors to a culturally responsive pedagogy, they viewed and discussed videos of awkward or improper cultural interactions, read articles on its proper implementation, and role-played during training to cultivate a sensitivity and awareness for diversity in the tutoring environment. In addition,

they received a handout citing culturally responsive strategies and were asked to reflect weekly on how their instruction incorporated actions such as believing in their child's success, designing curriculum with their child's background in mind, honoring their child's home culture, and letting the child's input drive instruction (see Appendix B for tutor handout).

In order to encourage parent involvement in the program, before the close of each session, tutors and children posted pictures on the program blog of the children's illustrations and writing. They also posted the children's dictated reflections on what they learned and enjoyed about the day's session. At the beginning of the semester, all parents provided their email addresses and were sent the blog website and individualized join codes. This allowed another opportunity for children to get feedback on their writing since parents could reply to their child's posts, and the blog was an easy way for parents to learn more about their child's work in the afterschool program and communicate with their child, the tutor, and program staff. Finally, when sessions were over, tutors engaged in a whole group 30-minute debriefing focused on being a culturally responsive tutor. Outside of sessions, tutors were required to write weekly reflections, answering the same questions each week about their teaching with one question related to cultural responsiveness.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected during fall and spring semesters: (a) 10 classroom observations with field notes, (b) end of semester 30-minute tutor focus group interviews, (c) weekly lesson plans and teaching artifacts, (d) weekly tutor teaching reflections, (e) anonymously written tutor debriefing responses completed after each session, (f) parent responses to weekly postings on the tutoring blog, and (g) researchers' journals.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was conducted after all data were collected. Using a critical multiculturalism lens, data sources were coded for information regarding tutors' experiences with a culturally responsive pedagogy. Tutor data from interview transcripts, weekly reflections/debriefings, and observation field notes were coded with no a priori codes through initial coding, which researchers completed individually. At this stage, Saldaña (2016) states, "All proposed codes during this cycle are tentative and provisional" (p. 115); after first cycle coding was completed, researchers separately charted these codes which "enables the analyst to scan and construct patterns from the codes, to develop initial assertions or propositions, and to explore the possible dimensions which might be found in the range of codes" (p. 229). Charting and second



cycle coding with pattern coding allowed for categories to emerge. According to Saldaña, pattern coding allows the researchers to develop the “category label that identifies similarly coded data” in order to create a meaningful organization (p. 235). At this stage, researchers came together to verify the coded data and categories. Discrepancies were discussed, and researchers came to consensus. Finally, working collaboratively, categories were refined through multiple cycles, and analysis for themes occurred as categories were collapsed into descriptions and processes.

Analysis through the lenses of both sociocultural theory (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978) and critical multiculturalism (Banks, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Friere, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995) allowed the transcripts, reflections, debriefings, and field notes to be considered in the context of their social and cultural groundings while also recognizing the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy. Using sociocultural theory allowed for coding that acknowledged the personal interactions occurring in the afterschool setting between tutors and between tutors and children. Also, by considering the tenets of critical multiculturalism throughout analysis, the instructional cultural components of the afterschool program were included. Codes emerged such as sensitive topics, misunderstandings, training, strategy-use, and bonding. Finally, to promote reliability and rigor in the study, findings and themes were triangulated by corroborating multiple data collection types. This included the analysis of field notes from classroom observations, transcripts of tutor interviews, child artifacts, tutor reflections and debriefing responses, parent blog responses, and researchers’ journals. Researchers met weekly to discuss findings and establish investigator triangulation. During this step, no inconsistencies appeared.

## Findings

The researchers identified three variables that influenced tutors’ implementation and experiences with a culturally responsive pedagogy: (a) proficiency, (b) curriculum, and (c) environment. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect anonymity.

### Culturally Responsive Proficiency

First, data revealed proficiency was a variable impacting tutors’ implementation of and experiences with a culturally responsive pedagogy. Researchers defined proficiency in this setting as the tutors’ knowledge of culturally responsive teaching strategies and their ability to know when and how to apply them. Tutors’ proficiency is discussed below through their self-reporting on strategy use, their ability to deal with culturally sensitive topics, their confidence in

implementing the pedagogy, and their participation in weekly debriefings and feedback.

### *Self-Reported Proficiency*

As tutors worked to implement a culturally responsive pedagogy, data were collected suggesting varying degrees of proficiency. Part of tutors' perceptions of their proficiency with culturally responsive teaching were collected from their weekly online reflections. Tutors were required to complete these as part of course work, and each week the assignment included the prompt, *How did you use culturally relevant strategies in your lesson? What did you learn from using it?* Data from this question revealed a consistent focus on bonding with the children and linking children's background to session content. For example, one tutor wrote about improving in this area in her third week reflection, "I could encourage my kids to write their stories around their real-life experience." Another shared about her success with bonding with her children in her final week reflection:

I learned so much about the kids' life because they wanted to put it in the book....I really became attached to them, and I think they became attached to me. It's funny, sometimes I would find myself thinking about them on the weekend. I learned a lot about their culture and them, and I think they learned about me, too.

Conversely, tutor reflections did not report on other components of culturally responsive teaching such as engaging in critical discussions or encouraging children to consider perspectives different from their own.

### *Culturally Sensitive Topics*

Other data sources revealed the lack of proficiency with culturally sensitive discussions and tutors' uncertainty in how to respond. For example, one White tutor explained, "Ian asked about slavery. It was unsettling at first, but I managed to answer and move on. I tried to be respectful of all aspects of that situation." In this instance, the tutor, not knowing how to engage meaningfully about a challenging subject, chose to pivot to a more comfortable topic. Another White tutor wrote in her weekly reflection, "Benita didn't really ask any hard questions about race so that part was not bad, but I believe her knowing about MLK helped." Here the tutor acknowledges her feeling that discussing race would be an uncomfortable topic and was glad her student did not delve deeply with questions.

### *Tutor Confidence*

Next, tutors' confidence with implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy factored into their proficiency. For example, tutors acknowledged that

although the initial training sessions were helpful, they were insecure and overwhelmed at first. At the end of the semester, one tutor explained: “I thought I was going to be a terrible tutor and not know what I was doing. However...I learned how to go about tutoring and how to use culturally appropriate approaches to lessons.” Another tutor shared, “I would not have known where to begin without the training....I never thought about how different our cultures would be,” while another tutor articulated:

At first, I was overwhelmed by everything we were taught in the training, but it really helped me be prepared to be a good tutor. The training you provided on culture made me think of situations that might occur that I had not thought up. It also made me think about how I see myself and others.

Initially tutors were apprehensive about their duties, but even though they tutored for a short amount of time, self-perception data reflects all scored themselves with highest marks on using culturally responsive strategies at the end of the semester.

#### *Participation in Debriefings and Feedback*

Finally, tutors cited the debriefing sessions immediately following tutoring and the weekly instructor and parent blog feedback as techniques that facilitated their knowledge and proficiency gains with a culturally responsive pedagogy. Debriefing sessions allowed time for tutors to conference with instructors and peers about the successes and challenges they were experiencing and then hear how other tutors’ successful activities could be adopted to improve their sessions. One tutor wrote: “The assessments (debriefs) taken after our sessions were very informative. [They] were very helpful because I was able to listen to what some of the other tutors were doing in order to be successful.”

Similarly, tutors noted their weekly online reflections with instructor feedback were valuable, along with parent feedback they received on the weekly blog. One tutor emphasized the importance of parents’ feedback: “I liked the Kidblog. I liked that the parents were able to get on the blog and see what their children were doing at tutoring. They would even leave comments for their children.” Overall, it was found that 45% of parents responded to their child’s blog, and parent feedback created a culturally responsive method of linking the child’s academic activities to home lives. Regarding tutor proficiency, interaction with parents, peers, and their instructor helped guide tutors as they worked to gain skill in using a culturally responsive pedagogy.

In sum, this finding relayed varying facets impacting tutors’ instructional proficiency and development. Some tutors had awkward interactions or avoided discussion of sensitive topics, but debriefs and feedback helped them improve

relations and instruction. Weekly reflections and end of semester surveys suggested tutors saw themselves as adept with culturally responsive strategies, but other data revealed they put little instructional emphasis on difficult points of culturally responsive teaching such as promoting critical dialogue. Finally, their confidence with implementing culturally responsive strategies improved with time as they garnered feedback from the instructor, peers, and parents.

### **Culturally Responsive Curriculum**

According to the data, the curriculum directly impacted tutors' implementation and experience with a culturally responsive pedagogy. The curriculum was designed to follow a process approach to writing, allow children to choose their writing topics within the day's theme, and offer a platform for showcasing children's writing to an authentic audience. Therefore, portions of this foundational design aligned to culturally responsive teaching before tutors created individual session lessons. Specifically, choice of writing topic was implemented to allow for child-directed learning and to create an opportunity for the children's out-of-school interests and personal culture to be integrated in the weekly writing. Also, writing for an authentic audience empowered children with the knowledge that their voice is important and others want to hear what they have to say. Within this design, research data for tutor implementation and perspectives suggest two factors assisted tutors in making curriculum relevant for the children: having an authentic purpose for writing and using iPads and children's picture books as resources.

#### *Authentic Writing Purpose*

Writing a book to share with other children about fun places to visit allowed the children an opportunity to let their voices and opinions be heard and required them to consider the reader as they developed writing content. For instance, the instructor wrote in her journal after the first tutoring session:

There was an authentic reason for the tutors and children to write about themselves today because this information goes into the author's page of the book. Children and tutors also discussed titles for their books which allowed children's voices to be valued.

Tutors also made links to how an authentic audience benefited the children:

By mentioning the books are for the kids at [hospital], it helps to remind Jyrah to write and draw things [the children at the hospital] may not have seen before. Several times, I have encouraged her to think like the reader instead of the author in order to locate and correct or improve aspects of writing.

*Resources: iPads and Children's Picture Books*

Secondly, the resources used with the culturally responsive curriculum impacted tutors' experiences, specifically the iPads and children's picture books. According to all data sources, the iPad provided an engaging research tool and was instrumental in supporting the design and implementation of culturally relevant lessons. Likewise, the use of children's books allowed the tutors to connect the day's writing to literature while highlighting the children's background or exposing them to new activities or cultures.

The use of iPads linked an out-of-school "toy" to in-school education by utilizing them for children's writing and learning. For each session, iPads were used to show examples of the week's theme, answer questions, research information to incorporate in drafts, and create and store the e-book writing and illustration. One tutor acknowledged how this tool motivated students: "When I reached a roadblock in Malcolm's learning, I used something he loved more than anything, technology, to keep him improving and engaged." iPads were used to activate and build on students' background knowledge during the prewriting, drafting, and revision process. Also, one classroom observation documented how an iPad was used to quickly address a child's spontaneous question after reading the book, *Martin's Big Words*:

Iriss [child] asks Anthony [tutor] why the people were put in prison if they did not do something wrong. Anthony says, "We don't put people who don't do something wrong in jail. But what happened to Rosa Parks was not right." Iriss asks, "Did she die?" Anthony replies, "She has now, maybe in 2001. I can Google if you want?" Iriss nods; Anthony Googles and says, "2005."

Likewise, one tutor shared how building background knowledge was made easier through the ability to link video directly in the digital lesson plan: "The YouTube video on strong verbs and a video I found on making tamales were effective because she learned about two things she had no knowledge about." While iPads facilitated research and writing, they also provided practical assistance enabling tutors to plan for tutoring by housing their lesson plans, personal writing examples, and topical website links.

Children's picture books were also essential to the culturally responsive curriculum. Books were used to connect the session theme with literature, with titles chosen to offer familiar contexts as well as new. For example, one tutor explained how he introduced vocabulary associated with that day's book: "Some of the vocabulary were from the book *Growing up with Tamales* which pertains to a culture outside of Lynette's." Though most child participants had not eaten tamales, much less cooked them, the children's book and subsequent instruction helped them gain new background knowledge on a culture different from

their own. Other books such as the downtown setting of *Nana in the City* and *Goodnight Memphis* provided children with a familiar context, while *When I Was Young in the Mountains* and *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* offered children a view into rural and nature-laced settings for which some had little experience.

In sum, providing an authentic purpose for writing can help tutors make a culturally responsive curriculum meaningful and purposeful. In this case, a community-based book project allowed children's opinions to be shared in order to help and inform others. Also, while composing, tutors encouraged students to see another person's perspective and write for that audience instead of for themselves. This finding also suggests curriculum resources play a vital role in implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy. Tutors facilitated and differentiated instruction by using iPads and children's picture books to build and reinforce background knowledge. In addition, using out-of-school technology for in-school learning was found to motivate students to research new information.

### **Culturally Responsive Environment**

According to all data sets, the use of a culturally responsive pedagogy helped tutors create a collaborative, safe environment that promoted positive interactions. Findings indicate tutors quickly built rapport with children by providing focused and deliberate attention. Likewise, tutors personalized and gamified instruction to connect with children's interests and also encouraged them to consistently produce their best work for the book.

#### *Building Rapport*

By using culturally responsive strategies with thoughtful attentiveness, tutors bonded and built connections with their children. For instance, one tutor stated: "I learned that if I show I am genuinely interested in my student, he will be willing to open up." Similarly, another tutor commented:

In this lesson, I asked James to tell me about going to sporting events in [city]. We talked about a few basketball games. I told him some stories of me going to the [professional basketball and baseball] games. I learned that talking about the student's interests will keep him alert and attentive.

Ultimately, all data sets reflected tutors' purposeful actions toward creating a connection with their students. These connections fostered a community learning space based on respect and understanding.

#### *Building Interest*

Along with building rapport, tutors also intentionally personalized and gamified their instruction to increase engagement and create an enjoyable and

fun experience. One tutor's first reflection discusses her initial experience with gamifying learning content:

I wanted to “gamify” some aspect of my lesson to see if the kids liked that better or if they just liked me teaching it. This week I put my vocabulary on notecards. After I asked them to explain the words and showed them the definition I had written, I mixed the words up and spread them across the table. I then had the students match up the words to the definitions. It was amazing to watch how much fun they had. That approach was more effective than I thought it would be.

As tutors learned about their children's interests and backgrounds, they worked each week to design lessons that would be engaging whether content was familiar or novel. Consequently, using this culturally responsive approach helped tutors facilitate an environment where children could be themselves.

### *Building Expectations*

Finally, tutors implemented the culturally responsive technique of communicating high expectations for and confidence in their children's performance. For instance, one tutor shared: “I have gotten to know him, and he likes telling me all about school and his school life. I believe in Jaleel. I know that he is capable of doing the work.” Field notes indicate tutors were observed encouraging children to persist with their revisions while tutors also shared in debrief sessions how excited they were with their children's progress on the books. With this finding, a positive, culturally responsive environment was fostered as tutors set high standards and voiced their belief in the children's success as they worked to complete their e-books.

In sum, this finding suggests tutors used a culturally responsive pedagogy to facilitate the creation of a safe learning environment. Tutors purposefully worked to know and acknowledge their children's backgrounds and interests, gamified instruction to make sessions fun, and shared positive beliefs in their students' abilities. Using a culturally responsive pedagogy helped create a learning community where children could feel valued and respected.

## **Discussion**

It is widely accepted that educators should build cultural competence, but practices which foster this competence are difficult to implement (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Milner, 2011; Puzio et al., 2017). Due to this complexity and the ever-evolving conceptualization of culturally responsive pedagogy, three questions and answers generated from the study and grounded in the literature are discussed below. Some topics provide no definitive answer, but the intent is

that this discussion will be a catalyst for deeper considerations for literacy tutors and educators with their role in implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Why Are Some Components of a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy More Difficult to Implement Than Others?**

In our study, novice tutors were easily trained in culturally responsive strategies such as getting to know the students, gamifying lessons, and utilizing personal stories within instruction. Also, overall, tutors demonstrated asset-focused, caring practices that acknowledged students' unique knowledge and backgrounds (Bean-Folkes & Ellison, 2018). However, it was harder to prepare tutors to address more culturally sensitive issues and topics such as racial and economic injustices and inequalities (Lim et al., 2019).

Initially, training tutors for cultural conflicts was challenging because they were surprised and doubtful issues would even occur. When sensitive topics and awkward interactions did occur during sessions, tutors often found themselves unsure of how to deal with these situations, which is common, since they had little experience with sensitive discourse with members of other cultures (Skelley et al., 2019). For example, observations documented that while some tutors reported feeling comfortable acknowledging the man who shot Martin Luther King, Jr. was White, none of them extended the discussion into areas about race relations or social justice concerns. One goal of critical multicultural education is to encourage students to develop critical thinking practices that question structural inequalities (Friere, 1970). But this cannot occur if tutors are not engaging or encouraging critical discussions.

Educational instructional design highlighting social equity for minority communities is greatly needed (Gee, 2000; Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016; Lee, 1992). Yet, this curriculum can only occur with educators who feel confident and knowledgeable about addressing social justice issues with students, who recognize the complex, fluid nature of culture, and who realize the power dynamics inherent within cultural realities (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). In this study, developing this competence with novice tutors was a difficult, unfinished task. Throughout the year, tutors were asked to examine and reflect on their instruction, but these reflection assignments were shallow and lacked focused, personal examination. Within sessions, incremental improvements in cultural competence were observed, but more teaching time would have been required for tutors to improve their comfort level with and implementation of culturally sensitive topics and issues of social justice.



### **How Can Training Better Support Tutors to More Effectively Use Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?**

The study's finding of how tutors implement a culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that learning to teach with culturally responsive strategies is time-consuming, deliberate, and ongoing. This is especially true considering some components to a culturally responsive pedagogy are difficult to impart due to the fluid nature of the topic discussions (Paris & Alim, 2014). Similarly, there is propensity for cultural mismatches to occur when tutoring dyads involve varying cultures. Research shows there is a repetitive cycle when cultural differences exist in the teaching and learning process, leading to disruptions during teaching sessions. This is mitigated using culturally responsive pedagogy, but once the disruption is assuaged, it is normal for the cycle to begin again (Skelley et al., 2019).

Tutor training incorporated a variety of entryways (e.g., readings, role-play, videos) to introduce the implications for a culturally responsive pedagogy, and focusing on one recommendation from the handout each week provided a strategic way for tutors to become more conscious and proactive in implementing culturally responsive conversations. Ultimately, the conceptual understanding of this pedagogy is a primer to the hard work involved in the interpersonal negotiation and discomfort that implementation requires. Providing a safe space in which tutors can openly talk about race, gender, and class, as well as complex issues of social justice and systemic inequality will offer support and a foundation from which all can evolve.

### **How Do You Structure Lessons so Children Gain a Global Perspective?**

Throughout this study tutors relied on their growing knowledge of the children, iPad use, and children's literature to structure lessons to help bridge the children's experiences with new information to use for writing. Findings suggest little was accomplished toward building children's global perspective, but the weekly topics, iPad, mini-lessons, and children's literature were used to highlight or extend children's understandings about the various cultural offerings of their city.

An improvement to this program would be to incorporate more resources featuring other cultures, as educators need to remember a true culturally responsive pedagogy not only celebrates and validates the learners' cultures but also exposes them to cultures different from their own (Gay, 2010, 2013). Endeavoring to broaden students' global perspective requires educators gain cultural and pedagogical knowledge, and this is best accomplished through interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Findings from this study highlight the

importance of training, ongoing instructor and peer support, and debriefing sessions for novice tutors to advance their knowledge and competency (Skelley et al., 2017). These actions are consistent with the literature that notes the necessity for educators to interact with others, especially when learning about and trying to teach about differing cultures (Vygotsky, 1978).

In conclusion, one goal in implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies is to build the cultural competence of educators while making learning meaningful to diverse populations of students (Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Through focused and explicit training, tutors in this study were able to implement practical strategies modified from Gay's (2002) framework and establish a community of learners (Rogoff, 1994). Tutors, especially those with little experience with diverse students, can benefit from these examples and strategies and from mindful interactions with peers, children, and parents as they seek to improve their cultural competence and foster a sense of community, one respectful of all its members. Striving for this mindset ultimately helps create environments where all learners experience positive academic and social outcomes.

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Dana L. Skelley is an assistant professor of literacy education at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Her current research interests include afterschool programs and digital literacies and their impact on writing identities. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Dana L. Skelley, 308 Roberts Hall, 301 Sparkman Dr., Huntsville, AL 35899, or email [dana.skelley@uah.edu](mailto:dana.skelley@uah.edu)

Margie L. Stevens is an assistant professor at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine–Greenville. Her current research involves training medical professionals in addiction education.

Leslee K. Bailey-Tarbett is an assistant professor at Western Kentucky University. Her research interests include poststructural theory along with literacy coaches and their role and impact in school systems.

#### Appendix A. Lesson Overview

Time	Information/Activities
4:00-4:20	<b>Introduction/Mini-Lesson/Revisions</b> (Welcome, overview/objectives of lesson, connect to last week’s lesson, read email comments, conduct mini-lesson, revise last week’s writing using mini-lesson focus)
4:20-4:40	<b>Prewriting for this week’s writing</b> (Introduce topic/activate prior knowledge, review online links related to topic, generate/review vocabulary, have children talk about what they plan to write, complete graphic organizer/other prewriting activities)
4:40-5:00	<b>Writing rough drafts and illustrating this week’s writing</b> (One child types or dictates while the other child illustrates. Reverse tasks.)
5:00-5:15	<b>Connecting literature to writing</b> (Complete before, during and after reading activities with this week’s book. Make connections to mini-lessons, drafts, etc. that can help children consider revisions to their writing.)
5:15-5:30	<b>Closure</b> (Reflect on learning, select artifact to photograph, send reflection email to instructors and parents.)

#### Mini-Lesson Format

1. Introduce mini-lesson topic: explain the topic and why it is important.
2. Show an example from the session book or with something you have written.
3. Actively engage the child: use a hands-on activity (sentence strips, comparing two books for differences, demonstrating with your personal writing).
4. Apply lesson to child’s writing.

#### Appendix B. Tutor Handout

Promoting Cultural Relevance: Tutor Strategies

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Develop a caring relationship.

- Get to know your children, and let them get to know you.
- Show concern and interest in their well-being by asking about their day, weekend, etc. Let them share their feelings with you.
- Acknowledge children's specific, kind behavior.
- Reflect how you are modeling kind and caring behaviors.
- Be aware of children's nonverbal cues, and follow up on them. When a child is upset, consider his feelings or the rationale for this behavior before redirecting the behavior.

Set high expectations.

- Place challenging writing errors in your personal writing example for children to find and help revise.
- Teach mini-lessons and expect children to revise their writing based on them.
- Assist your child in producing an aesthetically pleasing book with accurate information on our city for the children at [hospital].

Believe in every child's success.

- Don't give up on children who aren't engaged. Search for ways to draw them in. (behavioral)
- Adjust lesson plans in ways that enable success.

Build and connect instruction and curriculum to children's backgrounds.

- Find out where in [city] your children have been, and let them tell you about that experience for the day's topic.
- Administer an interest inventory to help connect lessons to what the children value.

Honor children's home culture by affirming their home customs.

- Invite examples of how the topic connects to children's home activities.
- Acknowledge and affirm stories children share.

Incorporate culturally relevant activities.

- Use iPad to bridge the gap between school and home.
- Use multicultural books.
- Design games to grab children's attention.
- Bring in personal writing.
- Make learning social.

Create a safe environment.

- Make affirming comments toward the children's work so they feel a sense of safety in taking risks with their writing.
- Think about how certain words and actions can be hurtful, and discuss acceptable guidelines for conduct and language in tutoring sessions.

Empower children by allowing their input to drive instruction.

- Have students lead on weekly topics to research.
- Have children guide the writing focus.

Engage in critical discussions and learn to assume other's perspectives.

- Discuss a perspective different from their own when children ask questions or make comments about sensitive cultural topics. (Play charades, role-play, question "what would you do?")
- Empower children to be agents of change by reflecting on what it means to be a caring member of society.
- Help children manage feelings and overcome barriers to caring for others.
- Bring in articles and books to help children become aware of their biases and discuss.

Connect to parents by celebrating success and strengths.

- Email children's writing and reflection to parents.
- Review parent and instructor email replies.
- Discuss and celebrate your book at the parent celebration.

Develop personal skills in culturally responsive teaching.

- Reflect on your teaching through the weekly course assignment.
- Participate in weekly debriefing sessions after tutoring.

*Strategies partially developed from:*

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/14/09/how-teachers-can-make-caring-more-common>

<http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/culturally-responsive-teaching-strategies/>

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654315582066>