

Summary of Research that Informed the Development of the IDEA Foundations Curriculum

Acknowledging that the majority of teachers in the United States identify as White females, Ashley Vaccaro sought to investigate ways urban teachers that identify as White and female understand and apply culturally responsive teaching to their practice through her doctoral research. These two cycles of research helped inform the development of the IDEA Foundation Curriculum. A summary of this research can be found below, while a complete read of Dr Vaccaro's doctoral research can be [found here](#).

Cycle One Approach and Findings

Participants in Cycle One included 10 urban educators identifying as White and female. All participants taught in the United States and hold a valid U.S. teaching license. Participants included 5 teachers with 0-3 years of urban teaching experience, and 5 teachers with 5-15 years of urban teaching experience. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups around cultural responsiveness and experience teaching within urban contexts.

Two major findings emerged from Cycle One. First, urban teachers identifying as White females struggle with cultural responsiveness, particularly in their early years of practice. This can be attributed to a lack of experience and training around culturally responsive practices and working with diverse student populations through preservice education and professional development opportunities. Teachers expressed their limited opportunities to explore such areas and struggled to define what culturally responsive teaching is and how it is applied in their practice.

Second, teachers would like to receive support in expanding their cultural competencies through conversation and collaboration with colleagues.

These findings led to an action step goal to provide opportunities for teachers to explore areas of diversity, equity, and culturally responsive pedagogy through a supportive and collaborative approach. This included:

- Providing support to urban educators in exploring areas of cultural competency, racism, equity, privilege, and inclusion; topics commonly absent from preservice education and professional development opportunities.
- Fostering community, collaboration, and productive conversation among urban educators to destigmatize areas related to cultural responsiveness, such as race.
- Promoting culturally responsive, anti-bias teaching practices.

Knowledge generated from this study was expected to understand the perceptions and experiences of culturally responsive teaching among White female teachers in urban contexts. Further, this research was expected to inform the types of resources required by teachers to support a culturally responsive, anti-bias practice.

Cycle Two Approach and Findings

The action step was a 10 week initiative, held weekly on with ten teachers from the same urban charter school in the United States. All participants identify as White and female. The workshop initiative consisted of three parts:

- A book club
 - All participants read and discussed assigned chapters from *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum. Questions were shared with the group for reflection and conversation prior to each weekly meeting. The purpose of the book club was to support participants in exploring issues related to race, White privilege, bias, equity, and inclusion in relation to both their personal and professional lives. Book club conversations were held over weeks 2-5 of the initiative.

- Collaborative conversation
 - These weekly conversations among teachers focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural competency in relation to practice. These conversations provided teachers a safe space to exchange ideas and information with one another in a supportive environment. Conversation topics were both semi-structured and based upon the interests or needs of participants during a given week. Participants reflected upon their students, classroom, and learning community. Teachers had the opportunity to share their experiences with teaching in an urban context as White females and offered support and ideas to one another pertaining to culturally responsiveness.
- The creation of book collections to be used within classrooms
 - Participants recognized the need for collections of culturally responsive picture books within individual classroom libraries to support their work in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusivity, noting that picture books are a helpful tool in broaching these topics with their students. Teachers curated titles that they felt would serve them well in broaching sensitive topics such as race, cultural differences, and equity within their classrooms, ensuring that titles would accurately represent their student demographics. Participants connected with colleagues outside of our group about the book collections, seeking their opinion and book recommendations. Participants reported that their colleagues were both enthusiastic and supportive of the initiative. Together, participants assembled what they titled “Anti-Racist Book Collections” along with discussion questions, separated by grade, to promote diversity and cultural responsiveness within classroom libraries school-wide. Participants presented a proposal for the collections to their school administrators, to which they were granted the requested funds.

The workshop proved to be successful in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy among participants. The following four themes emerged from Cycle 2 research:

The Power of Collaboration and Reflection

Data collected in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 highlight the importance of educators feeling supported by colleagues. While describing the most valuable part of the workshop, participants expressed appreciation for having a place to receive support in exploring areas of race and cultural responsiveness through collaboration and reflection. Participants frequently described feeling comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives through our collaborative conversations. Despite the fact that sensitive subject matters were addressed during our collaborative conversations related to race, equity, and privilege, participants were eager to engage with one another because they felt supported in doing so. Further, multiple participants expressed feeling “more connected” to their students as a result of their participation in collaborative conversations.

During weekly meetings, participants frequently referred to our workshop group as “safe”. Participants felt safe in supporting one another through sharing their experiences and asking questions. One teacher described feeling safe expressing herself, knowing the group was “learning together” and that she didn’t have to worry if something she said “was maybe coming out wrong”.

It was clear that participants valued the opportunity to form meaningful connections among colleagues by sharing experiences, perspectives, and challenges as White women teaching in an urban context. Through conversation and reflection, participants felt supported by their peers.

Receiving support and feeling connected to colleagues as a result of collaborative conversation and reflection led to participants to feel more comfortable at work. During our focus group conversation, one teacher described feeling less isolated at school knowing she and her colleagues shared similar experiences and perspectives as White women in an urban teaching context. Another participant echoed this sentiment of feeling less isolated and more connected to her peers as a result of collaboration throughout the workshop.

In short answers provided by participants describing what they enjoyed most about book club discussions, themes that emerged were appreciation for connection, feelings of safety in sharing experiences and thoughts, and appreciation for the openness and honesty of all

group members. Data collected through weekly conversations, book club reflection, book collection survey, and focus group illuminate that connection with colleagues through collaborative conversation served as a valuable tool in allowing teachers to feel safe and supported at work.

During the focus group, teachers explained that they feel more “self-aware”, “mindful”, and “anti-racist” as a result engaging in critical self-reflection during the course of the workshop. One participant described the importance of culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching becoming a part of everyday practice, while another explained that critical self-reflection was a valuable tool to ensure the needs of all of her students were being met.

While the opportunity for collaboration enabled participants to connect with one another to better understand cultural responsiveness within their context, teachers expressed wanting more of their colleagues and administrators to have been involved in the workshop. Over the course of the 10-week initiative, participants frequently conversed about how they felt their entire faculty would benefit from having the opportunity to explore areas of cultural competency together. While participants acknowledged that participating in the workshop was an additional responsibility since we met outside of school hours each week, all teachers expressed the value in joining, calling it “meaningful”, “necessary” and “extremely valuable”. All teacher participants described administration participation as something they would have liked to have seen done differently in regards to the workshop initiative.

Pre Service Training and Professional Development Opportunities

Data collected throughout the research show dissatisfaction among participants in regard to their limited opportunities to explore areas of cultural competency. Participants expressed the need to receive cultural responsiveness training both during preservice years and continuing into practice. Teachers shared that this workshop was their first opportunity to discuss race with colleagues.

During collaborative conversation in week four, teachers reflected upon their first experiences as White women interacting with Black and Brown students. For almost all participants, this took place during a model lesson during their job interviews with their school. Participants questioned why they had not received previous training around cultural competency, or had completed any pre practicum work within urban classrooms. All teachers shared the belief that training around cultural responsiveness would have left them better prepared as White females to meet the needs of their urban students upon entering the profession.

While all participants expressed the need for support during preservice years to prepare for working in an urban context, teachers stated that ongoing professional development opportunities once in practice are critical as well. Teachers identified this as an area of weakness at their school. Teachers stated that meaningful professional development opportunities that address areas of cultural competency “need to be regular and ongoing” to appropriately support teachers and students at their school. Participants explained that the limited opportunities to engage in meaningful professional development around cultural responsiveness led them to sign up for the workshop initiative in the first place.

Data analysis of the pre and post survey displayed a shift in attitudes among participants in response to cultural responsiveness and anti-racist teaching from the beginning of the workshop to the end. This shift illuminates the impact the workshop initiative, a professional development opportunity, had upon participants. The data collected in the pre and post survey illustrates that participants grew more comfortable and confident in their understanding and application of culturally responsive teaching practices over the 10-week initiative.

Data from the presurvey showed only two participants began our workshop feeling confident in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in their practice, with the vast majority of participants acknowledging that while culturally responsive teaching was important, they were unsure of how to be culturally responsive. Post survey data showed that at the end of the initiative, all but one participant expressed confidence in exhibiting

culturally responsiveness in their practice. At the beginning of our workshop, zero participants indicated that they felt confident in describing culturally responsive teaching.

Over the course of the workshop period, attitudes shifted and confidence grew. Data collected in the post survey showed that the majority of participants ended the workshop more confident in describing culturally responsive teaching, with five identifying as “confident” and three identifying as “somewhat confident”.

Data from the pre survey showed that the vast majority of participants indicated uncertainty as to whether or not they were an actively anti-racist teacher. Data collected in the post survey show that 100% of participants identified as an actively anti-racist teacher by the end of the 10-week workshop initiative.

Additional Resources Required

Over the course of the workshop initiative, participants repeatedly articulated the need for additional resources to foster cultural competency and inclusion within their practice. In data collected from the pre and post survey, all participants selected “yes” in response to the question, Do you wish you had more resources in your classroom to support your culturally diverse students? Teachers expressed frustration around the lack of student representation in both mandated curriculum and classroom libraries.

Teachers shared how books often serve as a valuable tool to connect with students and explore sensitive topics, such as race or cultural differences. One participant explained, “Because I’m White, and I know this is going to sound bad, but like, I’m not always comfortable talking about these things with my students. Picture books and read alouds make it easier for me and are helpful”. Another participant echoed this sentiment about picture books being helpful in navigating conversations about race with her students. However, participants shared that texts such as these are not provided by the school, leaving teachers to seek out culturally responsive books to be purchased with their own money. Participants reported that they did not have the resources required to engage in

conversations about race with their students, or books that accurately represent their students in their own classroom libraries.

Participants recognized the need for collections of culturally responsive books within individual classroom libraries to support their work in fostering a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teachers decided to curate titles that they felt would serve them well in broaching sensitive topics such as race, differences, and equity with students. Additionally, participants searched for titles that would ensure accurate representation of the student demographics.

Participants connected with colleagues outside of our group about the book collections, seeking their opinion and book recommendations. Participants reported that their colleagues were both enthusiastic and supportive of the initiative.

Support of Administrators

Participants felt that their school leaders, all of whom identify as White, had not displayed a commitment to promoting inclusivity or cultural responsiveness among their predominantly White staff.

Administrators did not allocate professional development time each week during school hours for participants to be involved in the workshop initiative. If they had, perhaps more teachers would have felt inclined to join, as opposed being required to spend time outside of school hours to participate. Doing so would have communicated to faculty the importance of being involved.

Administrators did not express interest in learning more about the workshop, or participating themselves. This was something participants felt would have added value to the overall workshop experience.

In data collected during the focus group, all participants expressed the need for administrator involvement, agreeing it would have had a positive impact on the entire

school culture.

Participants believed that their administrators lacked appropriate knowledge around cultural responsiveness themselves. They felt administrators would benefit from engaging in similar professional development opportunities to become more comfortable and confident around areas of cultural responsiveness and anti-bias instruction. While participants were eager to learn more about cultural responsiveness to improve their practice, they felt administrators needed to invest time to do the same.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation #1: Regular Collaboration and Reflection

Collaboration among teachers is essential in promoting culturally responsive practices within school communities. Collaboration allows for teachers to engage in critical self-reflection in relation to their practice while offering support and exchanging ideas. Critical reflection and collaboration have been found to serve as valuable tools to increase teachers' knowledge and skills (Bowe & Gore, 2017), and to promote culturally responsive teaching among teachers in urban contexts (Senyshyn & Martinelli, 2021). Regular and ongoing collaboration with colleagues positively impacts instructional practices (Bowe & Gore, 2017) while promoting a professional community built on support and trust.

One aspect of the workshop initiative that participants appreciated most was the evolution of the group into a professional and trusting learning community. Teachers felt both safe and supported sharing experiences, asking questions, and growing in their understandings of what it means to be anti-bias and inclusive as White women within urban teaching contexts as a direct result of collaboration and reflection in a group setting. Efforts should be made to allow for regular and continuous collaboration among all teachers geared toward sharing experiences and reflecting upon practice from a culturally responsive lens.

Recommendation #2: Dedicated Time to Purposeful Professional Development

To foster culturally responsive teaching among faculty, professional development opportunities must be both purposeful and ongoing. Participants reported that while they were allocated time each week to engage in professional development, it was unproductive. The focus of professional development should be purposefully geared toward instructional practices that foster diversity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness. Since the majority of urban educators identifying as White females enter the profession with limited training in these areas (Darling-Hammond, 2017), it is critical that teachers receive this support through professional development opportunities. Purposeful professional development where teachers have the chance to engage in meaningful communication and collaboration has been found to produce improved teacher satisfaction and academic outcomes for students (Prenger et al., 2017).

It is crucial that purposeful professional development is frequent and ongoing. The most recent professional development opportunity around cultural competencies and diversity offered to Participants was during the 2017-2018 school year. Teacher participants expressed appreciation for this professional development, noting that while the trainers visited the school three times over the course of the year, it was insufficient to produce impactful school-wide change. Due to the infrequency in visits, the majority of teachers at the Participant's school were not invested in changing their practice or thinking from an anti-bias or culturally responsive lens.

Recommendation #3: Resources for Instruction

Successful implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy requires not only changes in attitudes and instructional approaches, but also changes to the resources available to teachers and students within learning communities. In order to promote inclusion and anti-bias within classrooms, teachers must be provided with resources that are inclusive and

reflective of the student population served. Teacher participants expressed frustration with the mandated curriculum and texts within their classroom libraries, citing a lack of diversity and relatability as serious hurdles for their students. Teachers must have access to culturally relevant curriculum to promote student engagement and achievement (Howard, 2001; Bonner et al., 2018; Picower, 2021), along with resources that support social justice, equity, and anti-bias teaching.

Recommendation #4: Administrative Involvement

Teachers require support from school leaders to take a culturally responsive approach in their instruction. While teacher participants were genuinely interested in enhancing their practice to be more culturally responsive as a way to better serve their students, they felt alone in their efforts. Participants believed that their administrators lacked the knowledge necessary to lead staff in pursuing areas related to cultural responsiveness. School leaders must show a commitment to anti-bias, culturally responsive curriculum and training for teachers to promote anti-racist educational practices within their schools (Genao & Mercedes, 2021; Kimura et. al., 2021).

Administrators have the opportunity to serve as change agents within their school contexts, empowering their staff to take an anti-bias, inclusive approach to instruction (Kimura et. al., 2021). This can be accomplished in several ways. First, administrators must show their commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy by educating themselves on what it means to be an inclusive, culturally responsive school. In this way, administrators can serve as mentors and systems of support for teachers exploring these areas. Secondly, administrators should provide opportunities for ongoing and purposeful professional development and collaboration for staff, actively participating in these learning opportunities alongside teachers. Finally, administrators must critically examine the curriculum and resources used within their school to ensure the cultures and contexts of their students are represented and celebrated.

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