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Teacher Perceptions and Practices of Effective Teaching in Racially Diverse Kindergarten Classrooms

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN
RACIALLY DIVERSE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

2018

Taka S. Mays defended this dissertation on March 20, 2018.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, our two kids and my mother who provided constant support, love and encouragement throughout the challenging process of earning a doctoral degree. Frequently, they reminded me that God has a greater plan for my life, but I needed to push through earning this degree so He could take me to greater heights spiritually, personally and professional.

In addition, a heartfelt dedication to my father, the Late Jerry James Graham, who helped shaped the core values of hard work and dedication that I have today. His words were always, “If you work hard, you can get whatever you want.” Well, I have worked hard and it is through the use of my Doctorate of Education Degree that I wish to continue thriving and become a stronger advocate for all children in the Pre-Kindergarten through Post-Secondary Public Education System.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began this pursuit of a doctorate in 2015 and it has been a journey filled with excitement, learning and personal and professional growth pains. However, through the journey there was and still is the God I serve, my family, friends and others who provided constant support. Without their support, this doctorate and the growth I experienced would not have been possible.

I would like to first give honor to God for the blueprint he created in my heart and soul. I know my passion to serve and help others is a result of Him and all that He has in store for my life.

I would like to thank my amazing husband, Damon Yuri Mays, for being my soul mate and best friend and for encouraging me when others tried to discourage me. Thanks to our kids, Donovan and Trinity, who knew mommy worked on this doctorate to model how they too can be trailblazers and pursue the goals God has destined for them.

I would like to thank my magnificent mom, Chappa Denise Glenn, who has been my greatest advocate and cheerleader all my life. Thank you for teaching me to be the strong, independent woman that I am today.

I would like to thank my siblings and their spouses, Taranesia, Johnathan (Shauna) and Gregory (Theresa), for the support (babysitting Donovan and Trinity) and encouragement each of you provided while I worked on my coursework for this doctorate. You are the best siblings ever!

I would like to thank all my friends and co-workers who provided constant support and uplifted me with positive words through this process. You know who you are!

I would like to thank Dr. Ayesha Khurshid and Dr. Kristal Clemons for believing in me during the times when I did not believe in myself. You both taught me how to conduct research, and write about my findings in ways that I had not previously learned. Thank you for your patience, support, encouragement and wisdom throughout this journey.

In closing and as I continue the journey that God has for me, I pray to my Heavenly Father for continuous grace, mercy and wisdom.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an overview of the accountability measures that shape kindergarten teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms. The impact of school reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has presented outcomes where teachers' instructional practices and school administrators' leadership styles have become the focal point. In addition to the scrutiny that teachers and school leaders face, racially diverse students are facing great disparities in terms of their academic performance. These disparities are also known as the "achievement gap." In Florida standardized test data from grades 3-10 show disparities in the achievement of racially diverse students. Research contends that the achievement gap is now evident as early as kindergarten. With scholarship suggesting the achievement gap starts in kindergarten, there was a need to understand the perceptions of kindergarten teachers as they implemented instructional practices in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative case study was (1) to understand the teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms in a North Florida School District; (2) understand how accountability measures shaped their definition and perceptions of effective teaching in their racially diverse classrooms. The main finding of this study was that the teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching was indeed shaped by the school's accountability paradigm. Although their definition and perceptions were shaped by the same core values outlined in the schools' accountability paradigm, they each implemented instructional strategies through high expectations differently. This final chapter of this dissertation includes how the findings interact with the conceptual framework of this study and recommendations for stakeholders and future research.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem of Practice

Discourses about educational inequality as a major policy and public challenge have been around at minimum since the War on Poverty in 1965 (Desimone & Long, 2010, p. 3025). The War on Poverty was a set of initiatives outlined by President Johnson in 1964. There were four major programs outlined in it: The Social Security Amendments of 1965 (Medicare and Medicaid), The Food Stamp Act of 1964 (food stamp program), The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasized full educational opportunity for all students by increasing resources to education and especially by ensuring that disadvantaged students had access to additional resources. NCLB included additional resources such as funding to help teachers become better teachers (teacher quality) and funding reading initiatives to ensure all students learn to read on grade level before third grade, public school choice, extra help with learning, and ways to measure student knowledge (high stakes testing). By 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorized ESEA to focus more on accountability measures to expose achievement gaps and to protect the civil rights of at-risk students (Brenchley, 2015, United States Department of Education, 2009).

The accountability measures outlined in NCLB soon became outdated and were reauthorized by Obama's Administration with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA granted flexibility to states regarding the development of respective plans to close the achievement gap, increase equity, address quality instruction and increase performance outcomes

for all students. Within these reforms, these are accountability measures regarding student outcomes on which public schools must focus. These accountability measures are meant to address the issues of equity by making quality education, highly effective teachers using effecting teaching practices and pedagogies, accessible to all students in order to fully prepare them for success in college and their careers (United States Department of Education, 2016). The first provision of ESSA advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged, generally meaning underserved or low income and high-need students. The second provision is to expand investments in increasing access to high quality preschools. Ultimately, the provisions and regulations outlined in educational reforms such as ESSA are centered on ideals that promote success for all students including historically underserved subgroups in order to continue making progress towards equity and excellence in education (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Specifically, the academic outcomes of racially diverse students are lagging behind according to the School Public Accountability Reports provided by the Florida Department of Education (2016). According to this report, racially diverse students have lagged behind their White and Asian counterparts in reading, math and science high-stakes testing by 15-20 percentage points. NCLB and ESSA both contain accountability measures such as having high quality teachers and instruction with the use of frequent data analysis that is essential to student achievement. The high stakes testing captures data on what students know at the time of testing. One might infer the results of the high stakes testing to be tied to how racially diverse students are being instructed in the classroom. On the other hand, there are factors such as ineffective teaching and less qualified teachers that are represented in high minority schools impeding students' ability to learn (Pitre, 2014 and Darling-Hammond, 2004). The issue at hand with less qualified teachers

and ineffective teaching is that school reforms expect schools and teachers to be viewed as the primary change agents who are responsible for planning and delivering quality instruction in a way that maximizes student success and minimizes the achievement gap between White students and racially diverse students, excluding Asian students. (Scott, Cooper & Hirn, 2015, p.1).

The expectation that schools and teachers are the primary change agents to maximize student success is important; however, there is no consensus of what constitutes how to be the best change agents or the meaning of teacher quality as originally outlined in NCLB (Harris and Sass, 2008). Teachers implement instructional strategies to help students experience academic success, but some strategies offer a better probability for success than do others (Hattie, 2009). Therefore, one would infer that the efficiency of teachers and their instructional practices to help all students perform well (FSA level score of 3 and above) on high-stakes testing is viewed as being integral to the effective implementation of educational reform policies targeting success for all students. In other words, this accountability paradigm is meant to help student's access a quality education through focusing on the effectiveness of the teachers' instructional practices and pedagogies that are being implemented in the classroom.

This paradigm approaches effective teaching in terms of the teachers' ability to help all students perform better on standardized testing. However, effective teaching is not clearly outlined in the accountability approaches. In this context, this qualitative case study investigates how teachers in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms perceive and implement the notion of effective teaching. The study examines what effective teaching looks like in one North Florida School's racially diverse kindergarten classrooms as the school aims to comply with and excel on Florida Standards in all grade levels and on the Florida Standards Assessment beginning in third grade. Specifically, I am interested in examining how different kindergarten teachers in the same school

approach and implement the notion of effective teaching in classrooms with a large number of racially diverse students. I have selected kindergarten for this study because there is a lack of state level accountability in pre-kindergarten through second grades and if literacy skills are not developed early, then there is a high risk of school failure (Snow & Matthews, 2016). There are fundamental literacy skills that are taught in preschool and kindergarten that students must learn before entering third grade. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how kindergarten teachers define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms.

In a context where teachers are envisioned as the main actors to implement educational policies to address the issue of achievement, the purpose of this study was to understand kindergarten teachers' perceptions about effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

The research questions to be answered are:

1. How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?
2. How do contemporary accountability measures in terms of student outcomes shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms?

While kindergarten teachers are not required to administer the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) to their students, they are required to teach the grade level standards and ensure students are mastering those standards. Therefore, if students are expected to perform at proficiency or better by the time they enter Grade 3 and take FSA, it was beneficial to examine the type of teaching practices students are receiving at the kindergarten level. Schools use benchmark

assessments to measure mastery of standards throughout the school year and other supplemental benchmarking methods, but not methods comparable to the weight of FSA.

As previously stated, the instruction and teaching practices in kindergarten classrooms are not measured each year by high stakes testing (FSA). According to the Early Learning Coalition (2014), the promotion of school readiness through Voluntary Pre-kindergarten programs is also helpful for students as they enter kindergarten and prepare them to learn the fundamental skills crucial for experiencing success on FSA beginning in third grade. This is significant in that as of the 2015 FSA results, racially diverse students are still having a challenging time demonstrating mastery of reading, math and science skills assessed on the Florida Standards Assessment (Florida Department of Education, 2016).

Research Problem

In sum, accountability measures have been in place as early as the War on Poverty, initiatives through No Child Left Behind and now Every Student Succeeds Act that was signed into law by President Obama. With the accountability measures, racially diverse students have lagged behind their White and Asian counterparts with several factors impeding their learning such as the use of quality instructional strategies and highly qualified teachers that are the impetus of teachers being change agents of today's public school classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Pitre, 2014). Since the accountability measure of high stakes testing is not evident before grade three, an analysis of the instruction of kindergarten, first, and second grade students is imperative. However, there is a limited amount of research regarding perceptions of effectively teaching racially diverse kindergarten students in a way to close or narrow the achievement gap.

Since the achievement gap has been documented earlier in elementary school it was imperative through this case study to examine how kindergarten teachers define, perceive and implement effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. In consideration of research outlining inequalities in educational outcomes and the factors impeding student learning (Desimone and Long 2010, Darling-Hammond, 2004 and Pitre, 2014), this study aimed to provide insight into kindergarten teacher's perceptions of effective teaching practices and pedagogies in an era with strong accountability measures.

Justification for Research Problem

Public schools currently face increased accountability requirements. Leaders are focusing more on preschool programs as an important strategy to promote school readiness and close achievement gaps in elementary school and beyond (Center for Public Education, 2007). Florida offers a free, half-day, legislatively mandated program designed to prepare every four year old in Florida for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. Goldstein, Peluso, and Warde (2013) found attendance in prekindergarten (preschool) positively affected students' preparedness in pre-academic areas for kindergarten. Preschool programs date back to 1965 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty when the federal government created Head Start.

The Head Start program then was a half day preschool program for low income children. At that time, the Head Start program was initiated as a summer pilot program. It later grew into a more intensive intervention with many features, including an education component, nutrition and health screenings for children, and support services for families. Sufficient funding for Head Start in the 1960's was an issue and it was challenging to enroll a majority of low-income

preschool children. Many states began to institute their own programs to target low-income children. Recognizing that by the time low income children enter kindergarten, they are already far behind their peers in skills and other measures of school readiness.

Today's vision of the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) described by the Early Learning Coalition (2014) is to prepare students in a way that they are eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten. Also according to the Early Learning Coalition the mission is to ensure that all children are intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically ready to learn in kindergarten, fully recognizing the crucial role of parents as their child's first teacher.

VPK gives each child an opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life with quality programs that include high literacy standards, accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instructional periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors. Within this educationally rich experience, constrained skills (skills that are directly teachable because the domain is finite: such as 26 letters of the alphabet) and unconstrained skills (such as vocabulary and background knowledge) that affect literacy over time should be introduced as early as VPK or by kindergarten (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Some additional examples of the literacy skills that affect students' ability to comprehend to more complex texts are phonological awareness skills (rhyming and segmenting) and the use of complex sentence structures. This study also examined how kindergarten teachers define and perceive effective teaching as it relates to these constrained and unconstrained skills that later affects students' reading comprehension in third grade (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Ultimately, the lack of educational rich experiences of racially diverse students and the lack of attendance in preschool programs leads to poor class

performance when they enter kindergarten and also may later affect their performance on Florida's Standards Assessment (FSA).

Audiences/Stakeholders

The research problem, emerging themes that are identified, and overall results of this study are intended for district and school administrators, classroom teachers, and instructional coaches who are responsible for providing instruction to any North Florida kindergarten class that has racially diverse student demographics. Further research must be conducted to determine ways for schools (teachers and administrators) with a large group of racially diverse students to implement effective teaching through the lenses of social justice principles and accountability.

Significance of Research Problem

The significance of investigating my problem of practice is to understand teachers as primary change agents, and their perceptions and practices of effective teaching to develop a practical model conducive for other teachers to study and emulate within this accountability era. In order to increase achievement for all students it is imperative that an analysis of teachers' perceptions of effectively teaching in racially diverse classrooms is conducted. Taylor (2005) states that high standards, excellent teaching, and strong leadership characterize the high poverty schools which have been academically successful. Further, all educators should have high standards and focus on providing effective teaching strategies to decrease today's achievement gaps between White/Asian students and other racially diverse students, particularly beginning in kindergarten when unconstrained literacy skills are developed.

As previously stated, there is a lack in scholarship on the meaning of quality teachers and other factors related to student achievement that are still an issue in education according to Florida's standardized assessment results. The significance of this research must be understood on a local, state and global level. Beginning with the local level, the North Florida district in which this study was conducted is focusing on closing the achievement gap by increasing the performance of racially diverse students within the district. The Florida Department of Education (2016) validates that initiative as evidenced in the 2015 School Public Accountability Report (SPAR). The results outlined include the most recent FSA performance for the North Florida District and State level which reveals racially diverse students significantly lagging behind in reading, math and science. This evidence of the achievement gap has greatly impacted school grading in schools with higher percentages of racially and ethnically diverse students.

It is the increased accountability measures over the last decade which brought school grading, and teacher/administrator evaluations through school reforms such as No Child Left Behind (2001). With this type of accountability, more of an academic structure is being emphasized as early as preschool. In addition to the standardized data described, the significance of state legislators to provide emphasis on closing the achievement gap between racially diverse students and other high performing students is paramount as well. With the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), states are given more autonomy in determining ways to address and improve student achievement. With this new level of autonomy, an opportunity exists for state legislators to make decisions for Florida diverse schools that will decrease the achievement gap as schools continue to operate under accountability measures that include standardized testing. From a global perspective and according to a Pearson education firm (2014) report, the United States ranked number 14 out of a list of 40 other countries comparing school systems; South Korea ranked

number 1 and was listed as having the world's best schools. Despite the results of local and state standardized assessment data and global school rankings, the academic achievement of racially diverse students is not commensurate with White and Asian students. An equitable education which includes stakeholders having an understanding of what it takes to implement effective teaching with appropriate practices and pedagogies is needed to help increase student achievement within schools (Elmore, 2003).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Achievement Gap and Equity in Education

The purpose of this section is to explore and describe the literature surrounding the central issues of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms in this accountability era. Those central issues are accountability measures, the achievement gap in terms of equity in education and the role they play in shaping teacher's perceptions of effective teaching. Within this context, equity means to provide racially diverse classes with what they need to experience academic success. It is through the lens of equity that teacher effectiveness and effective teaching was explored in two ways: general effective teaching practices and pedagogies and teacher effectiveness in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Teachers' perceptions of effectiveness in racially diverse classrooms in this study begins with an investigation of one of the accountability measures outlined in ESSA which is high stakes standardized testing and where the achievement gap is most evident (Florida Department of Education, 2016). Racially diverse students are struggling on these high stakes standardized assessments and teachers seem to be struggling with identifying ways to close the achievement gap for these students for years. The Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) include the Florida standards in which teachers are supposed to teach daily. There seems to be a disconnection between teachers teaching the state standards, the way students learn and their performance outcomes.

One might question the extensive amount of time necessary to close the achievement gap between non-White, non-Asian students and other racially diverse students. While the timeframe

of closing the achievement is important, it may be more important to determine how to close the achievement gap through an analysis of teacher perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms in terms of the instructional practices and pedagogies they are implementing. This study took place over a period of a few months, but further research such as a longitudinal study between the end of kindergarten and the beginning of third grade will be needed to make generalizations regarding how the achievement gap is impacted by teachers during the three full early years (K-2) before the Florida Standardized Assessment is given.

Next, the achievement gap and equity in education can be explained in terms of the performance between schools with high percentages of racially diverse students (historically underserved students) and schools with low percentages of historically underserved students. However, where accountability is particularly heavy in schools with high percentages of diverse and historically underserved students, teachers have been told what and how to teach since the installation of NCLB. The focus through NCLB to close the achievement gap and create equity has taken away teacher autonomy. This notion of closing the achievement gap and establishing equity increases the pressure of schools and teachers “teaching to the test” and instead of teachers focusing on meaningful quality instruction; the classroom environment becomes one with a test-centered approach to learning. High poverty schools tend to have teachers with less teaching experience and the stress of a test-centered environment may take the focus away from creating an environment conducive for meaning and learning (Stillman, 2011). There are several other factors that could be contributing to the ability of schools and teachers to address inequities and the achievement gap when teaching in racially diverse classrooms; however, effective teaching seems to be the theme consistent with improving the achievement gap (Stillman 2011; Desimone & Long, 2010; McKown & Weinstein, 2006).

Table 1 below displays the results of high stakes standardized testing and the achievement gap within the district and state that this research study took place. The sole purpose of the table is to provide an understanding of the performance of racially diverse students and achievement gap evidenced via high stakes testing in third through fifth grades.

Table 1. 2016 District and State FSA Reading, Math and FCAT Science Results (Percent of students from each subgroup scoring at or above proficiency level in FSA Reading, FSA Math and FCAT Science. The highlighted subgroups denote the racially diverse students referred to in this study.)

| 2016 State ELA (reading) Results | 2016 District ELA (reading) Results | 2016 State Math Results | 2016 District Math Results | 2016 State Science Results | 2016 District Science Results |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| White: 65% | White: 76% | White: 64% | White: 77% | White: 69% | White: 77% |
| Black: 34% | Black: 37% | Black: 35% | Black: 39% | Black: 37% | Black: 35% |
| Hispanic/ Latino: 51% | Hispanic/ Latino: 61% | Hispanic/ Latino: 51% | Hispanic/ Latino: 59% | Hispanic/ Latino: 53% | Hispanic/ Latino: 62% |
| Asian: 77% | Asian: 87% | Asian: 79% | Asian: 91% | Asian: 80% | Asian: 88% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native: 53% | American Indian or Alaska Native: 63% | American Indian or Alaska Native: 54% | American Indian or Alaska Native: 68% | American Indian or Alaska Native: 58% | American Indian or Alaska Native: 33% |
| Two or More Races: 58% | Two or More Races: 63% | Two or More Races: 58% | Two or More Races: 64% | Two or More Races: 61% | Two or More Races: 71% |
| Economically Disadvantage d: 43% | Economically Disadvantage d: 39% | Economically Disadvantage d: 44% | Economically Disadvantage d: 41% | Economically Disadvantage d: 46% | Economically Disadvantage d: 39% |

The table listed above show Black, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaska Native students did not achieve the same proficiency levels on state standardized tests as White and Asian students. The data listed in the table supports the notion that further research regarding effective

teaching must be done as early as kindergarten in hopes of closing or impacting the achievement gap by the time they enter third grade.

In comparison, the achievement gap looks a little different in kindergarten than in third grade. Many say that today's kindergarten classes look more like first grade classes a decade ago. The accountability measures beginning in third grade have trickled down to kindergarten and the pressure is on for students to begin reading earlier than in previous years (Bassok, Latham, Rorem, 2016).

Contemporary kindergarten classrooms are literacy rich with the inclusion of test preparation skills, but there are a lack of explicit factors listed regarding whether interactive play, and social skills curriculum versus a strong emphasis on academic content is the best for these young students. In kindergarten classrooms the achievement gap may be defined as students who enter kindergarten with school readiness skills and students who do not have these skills. School readiness skills such as being able to identify letters and sounds, grade level short words associated with early reading skills, self-regulation skills and problem solving skills.

By the end of kindergarten, school readiness or pre-reading skills develops a gap between weak and strong reading achievement that becomes increasingly challenging to close by the time students reach high-stakes standards assessments in third grade (Al Otaiba, Connor, Lane, Kosanovich, Schatschneider, Dyrland, Miller & Wright (2008). In sum, the kindergarten classrooms have changed over time as a result of the accountability measures outlined in NCLB and ESSA. In addition, kindergarten teachers now feel strongly that their students should be reading before entering first grade. This research shows that it is important to focus on teaching practices and pedagogies as early as kindergarten.

Effectiveness of Teaching

Teachers are considered the change agents in the classroom and responsible for presenting instruction in a manner that yields the highest probability for student success. Effective teaching can be characterized as the degree to which students are engaged and responds to the targeted curriculum (Scott, Cooper & Hirn, 2015, pp. 1-2). The scholarship has offered ways to understand the effectiveness of teaching such as effective instruction in mathematics, literacy/reading/language arts, and science instruction. In addition, teacher effectiveness surfaced in terms of teacher's personality traits, credentials, and years of teaching experience. Therefore, effectiveness of teaching is a broad category with many subsections depending upon the set goals for the school and classrooms. For the purpose of understanding teacher perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms, teacher effectiveness and models of effective teaching were explored.

Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness speaks more to a teacher's personality traits, mindsets, teaching styles and their respective learning preferences. It was under No Child Left Behind in which the importance of every classroom having a highly qualified teacher was emphasized (United States Department of Education, 2016). From this emphasis forward, there has been much debate about the effectiveness of public school teachers and student achievement; the debate has been specifically about how the two are connected. Florida used scales or indicator assessments such as the Myers-Briggs type indicator to help measure the personality of outstanding teachers who had been nominated by their principal or district representative as being effective. These outstanding teachers had positive attitudes with innovative problem-solving skills as determined

by the Meyers-Briggs indicator (Rushton, Morgan & Richard, 2007). Although an analysis was conducted using the Meyers-Briggs Indicator, not all great or outstanding teachers will have the same personality; in fact in education today it is more about having the right mindset. In sum, teacher effectiveness is about having a mindset which means understanding that teaching is about self-evaluation and being open to accepting evidence or feedback on the instruction and practices being utilized in the classroom (Boyd, 2009).

Effective Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The scholarship on effective teaching is explained in terms of the instructional practices, strategies and curriculum provided by the teacher; not the teachers' personal traits or characteristics as explained in teacher effectiveness. The use of effective instructional practices and strategies, and delivery of curricula is intended to create the best learning opportunities for students. But, effective teaching is more than the type of instruction and the use of the curricula; it is *how* the curriculum and instruction is being delivered. More specifically, it is the teacher's use of practices that increase rates of interaction with the target curriculum and the degree to which students are engaged by the strategies (Scott, Cooper & Hirn, 2015). Effective teaching has also been described by teachers having traits such as strong classroom management skills, organizational skills, nurturing, caring, positive attitudes, ability to create an engaging environment with high expectations for students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ferguson, 2012; Gay, 2002; Benekos, 2016). It is with these descriptions of teacher effectiveness and effective teaching that are interwoven throughout various models of effective teaching for racially diverse students.

What does effective teaching look like for racially diverse students? Are there similar characteristics or traits that define effective teaching for racially diverse students? Cultural pedagogy is an important aspect for this study. Such pedagogy has been defined by two seminal authors, Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings in similar, but slightly different ways. While Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995) advocate for the use of culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and pedagogy (CRP), they do not explicitly state that CRT or CRP is effective teaching, but rather a notion that instructional practices should be shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the settings in which instruction occur and the populations for whom they are designed (Gay, 2013). It is student opportunity to learn or also known as time spent on quality instruction that matters when increasing student achievement.

Specifically, Cultural Responsive Teaching (CRT), it is described as a teaching approach that incorporates characteristics of a students' cultural background (African American, Latino, Native American and various Asian American students) into instructional strategies to improve educational outcomes. A primary goal of Gay's (2000) CRT is for students to utilize respective cultural elements to learn new content to enhance their educational experience and academic success (Howard, 2012, p. 1). Other characteristics of CRT include:

- Acknowledgment of cultural heritages different ethnic groups that affect approaches to learning
- Meaningfulness connections between home and school experiences as well as academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities
- Use of a variety of instructional strategies connected to different learning styles
- Students understanding and praising their respective culture and other cultures

- Incorporation of multicultural information and resources in all subjects and skills often taught in schools (Howard, 2012, p. 3).

In comparison, Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is described as an approach to improve teacher education to produce teachers who would bring forth an appreciation of their students' assets to their work in urban classrooms with African American students. Through this focus, Billings (2004) found eight teachers to include in a study who were connected to their students, their families, their communities and their daily lives. Three domains emerged from the study that are considered tenets of CRP. Those three tenets are Academic Success, Cultural Competence, and Sociopolitical Consciousness. While both Gay and Ladson-Billings' frameworks are similar in terms of improving student learning and academic achievement; for the purpose of this study I used Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy due to the similarity in research interests that I have with working with teachers as Ladson-Billings.

In addition to my research interest based on Ladson-Billings, CRP also resemble other general effective teaching models in terms of how teachers should have enough care for the students' needs, concern and respect to help students embrace their cultural identity first before teaching the curriculum and standards. It is also important for racially diverse students to hold their cultural values and norms in high regards while learning at school which may be very different from the way in which they are accustomed to learning. In sum, through positive reinforcement students should be encouraged to focus on academic achievement, but in a way conducive to respecting their cultural values (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002; Desimone & Long, 2010).

Academic achievement on standardized assessments is defined as students scoring at a level 3 or higher and students must be able to demonstrate some level of higher order and critical thinking

skills to achieve success (Florida Department of Education, 2015). As change agents and in addition to encouraging students to focus on academic achievement, the most effective teaching practices must be employed to help racially diverse students understand how to apply higher order thinking skills outlined in the test item specifications for reading found under Florida Department of Education's webpage (2015). This is not to imply that all racially diverse students have issues applying these skills, but that teachers must simply know how to employ the teaching practices to help them experience at least the same level of academic success as their White and Asian counterparts. In addition to the skills, other traits of effective teaching models include strong classroom management skills, the ability to clarify or promote understanding of skills being taught, attitude of high expectations for the students, the ability to seek students' points of view and the ability to check for students' understanding for effective encoding in memory. These higher order and critical thinking skills and traits of effective teaching models may be beneficial for racially diverse students to perform well on standardized assessments embedded in this accountability era (Ferguson, 2012, Ladson-Billings 1995, Scott, Cooper and Hirn, 2015, Snow and Matthews, 2016).

It is with these examples that effective teaching models were compared with data collected regarding the kindergarten teacher's definition and perception of effective teaching of racially diverse students. These models of effective teaching present teachers as change agents who approach effectiveness in terms of more than enhanced performance on standardized testing or mastery of grade level standards. The research suggests that teachers who utilize traits of CRP may be more effective in teaching racially diverse students. Nevertheless, some of the traits are consistent with general effective teaching practices or teaching practices that may be used

without consideration of culture. Therefore, teachers may already demonstrate some of the traits associated with CRP, but have yet to make the connection of effectiveness.

Effective teaching traits and characteristics suggested by research and that seem to be used most consistently and successfully with racially diverse students are strong classroom management and effective relationships with high expectations (Saravia-Shore, 2008). The classroom management trait is one that can be described as a set of skills that teachers use that includes clear established routines and practices in which consequences for unacceptable behavior and rewards for acceptable behavior that keep students attentive and engaged in the learning process. Classroom management may include beginning the school year with a positive focus on managing the class, arranging the classroom in a way that is organized, having discussions about how rules and operating procedures are implemented in the classroom. It is with these classroom management strategies that teachers can build high quality relationships with students (Marzano, R.J. & Marzano J.S., 2003).

High quality relationships with students minimize discipline problems and rule violations according to research by Marzano (2003). In this accountability era students also need to be encouraged that they have the ability to meet the demands of learning. It is through the teachers' beliefs that every student can learn on their own cognitively levels; further research suggests that teacher's expectations seem to be related to a student's self-concept and achievement. Therefore, this research contends that the ability of a teacher to have expectations for students is critical in helping students experience academic success (Curry, 2000).

Conceptual Framework

Overall, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) argues that teachers need to be non-judgmental and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to be effective facilitators of learning in the classroom. As previously stated, tenets of CRP are academic success, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. Academic success is further defined as the manner in which the students experience intellectual growth resulting from the classroom instruction and learning experiences. The second tenet of cultural competence is described as the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their respective culture while learning and understanding a different culture. The third tenet is sociopolitical consciousness and it is about teachers having the ability to take learning beyond the classroom to solve real-world problems. These three major tenets were considered throughout the data collection and analysis of this study. Therefore, this qualitative case study rests on the notion that racially diverse students must experience academic success through effective teaching strategies and teachers must find ways to use their culture as a vehicle for learning. However, how do teachers ensure students will experience academic success and do teachers know how to use the culture of racially diverse kindergarten students to increase learning? The scholarship on effective teaching contends that teachers should have high expectations for students so they are able to perform at their highest cognitive level to experience academic success. Nevertheless, the notion that all teachers know how to teach using cultural experiences is not prevalent. Since this study examined teacher perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms, an analysis of how traits of CRP and effective teaching can be utilized is important.

As observations are conducted in the kindergarten classrooms for this study, I looked for traits of CRP and effective teaching of reading and math skills. For example, teachers should be using small group work to differentiate reading instruction, managing instruction to keep students on

task for most of the lesson, scaffolding or providing coaching, providing explicit (clear instructional targets, clear purpose for learning, and adequate modeling) interactive strategies for students to use, and teaching students to answer higher order thinking questions during reading comprehension instruction through cultural connections (Al Otaiba, Connor, Lane, Kosanovich, Schatschneider, Dyrland, Miller & Wright, 2008; Reutzel, 2007).

Another trait of effective teaching observed was classroom management. The classroom routines and procedures should be set within the first week of school with continuous reinforcement throughout the year. In terms of classroom management, kindergarten teachers of racially diverse classrooms should establish clear behavior expectations; develop positive relationships and high expectations for students. Additionally, teachers should communicate with students in culturally consistent ways by incorporating elements of students' home, personal and community lives in the classroom (Milner & Tenore, 2010).

In sum, it is important for teachers to be aware of students' cognitive, social and academic needs. Teachers must have the mindset to understand equity and power structures among students in addition to having the ability to manage their classrooms so students can make connections and participate in learning. Within this study, I observed if and how teachers use traits of CRP and effective teaching to define and implement notions of teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, the research design, recruitment of participants, description of the participants, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness of the study are discussed. This research sought to understand how teachers' define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. A qualitative case study research is a form of qualitative research that is focused on providing a detailed account of one or more cases (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative case study was used to explore perceptions that the kindergarten teachers have regarding effective teaching practices and pedagogies. Data gathered included interviews with each participating kindergarten teacher and school principal as well as a total of 21 classroom observations. Again, the research questions explored are:

1. How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?
2. How do contemporary accountability measures in terms of student outcomes shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms?

These questions were considered as teachers' perceptions of effective teaching of racially diverse students were explored.

There are many kindergarten reading, mathematics, science and social studies standards; however, for the purpose of this study the focus was on reading and mathematics only. Reading

and mathematics was the focus since the achievement gap seems to be most evident in those areas according to Florida Department of Education (2016). Within the reading and mathematics standards there are cognitive complexity levels in which teachers must be cognizant of as they are teaching. The cognitive complexity levels are based on Norman Webb's (1997) Depth of Knowledge. According to the Webb's Depth of Knowledge Guide (2009), the model is used to analyze the cognitive expectation demanded by standards, curricular activities and assessment tasks. There are four Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels:

Level 1: Recall and Reproduction

Level 2: Skills and Concepts

Level 3: Short-term Strategic Thinking

Level 4: Extended Thinking

It is a requirement for teachers to teach these standards with an understanding of the DOK complexity levels. A full understanding of the grade level standards and complexity levels are beneficial as teachers plan their instruction for the students. Since the standards are required to be taught and students are expected to master the standards, they are identified in this study as the foundation in which effective teaching was measured.

Research Design

Over the last few years, topics such as closing the achievement gap have been discussed in the school district in which this qualitative case study took place. Within this study, there was a focus on a smaller aspect of the achievement gap; which is the teacher's perceptions and implementation of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms. The overarching research question within this study is, "How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define and perceive effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?" The data on the Florida Department of Education's website clearly report by the

time students reach third grade, the achievement gap between Whites and racially diverse students (excluding Asian students) still exists. Therefore, it is imperative to understand teacher's perspective of effective teaching as early as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten to aid in yielding a positive academic impact before third grade.

This qualitative case study took place in one elementary school in a North Florida school district where at least 50% of the classes were composed of racially diverse students. This study provides insights into teacher's perceptions and implementation of effective teaching as well as into how the accountability paradigm has shaped these perceptions and practices of effective teaching. A detailed account of the teachers' perceptions were gathered to help develop an in-depth understanding of the practices and pedagogies they perceive to be effective. It is with the teachers' perceptions captured through interviews and observations that best provide stakeholders with a sense of the teacher's experiences related to effectively teaching racially diverse students in an era where closing the achievement gap is widely discussed (Patton, 2015).

Class observations and interviews were conducted to examine patterns and emerging themes from the teachers' perceptions of effective teaching. Observations were scheduled between the interviews. During the class observations, I observed how the teachers implemented characteristics and traits of good teaching within their racially diverse classrooms as described via the interviews. I also observed how the racially diverse students were responding to the teachers' good teaching practices and pedagogies. Seven class observations of approximately 30 minutes in length in three different classrooms were conducted. In addition, deductive coding techniques were utilized to sort through the data collected to ensure all themes related to the teachers' perceptions had been identified and analyzed in the event follow-up observations or

interviews were needed. The following sections outline details of each of these steps and stages of the study.

Participant Recruitment

I began recruiting during the spring of 2017, the school year preceding the 2017-18 school year during which I intended to conduct my research in two elementary schools in the North Florida area. I spoke with the principals of the two elementary schools in a mid-sized city in North Florida about my research interests, both of whom had at least 50% or more of racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. I asked both principals for consent to conduct research in their school and they both gave verbal consent. However, one of the principals was moved from elementary to a nearby middle school, which worked out best because the other elementary school was closest to my current work location. After obtaining the principals' permission, I secured district approval to conduct research in the school in June 2017 by completing the district's research application. The process for their approval took approximately one and a half months.

School Demographics

The pre-kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school in which this study took place is located in a North Florida school district with nationally recognized colleges and universities nearby. According to Participant Four (Principal Willow), the school includes a zone of low socioeconomic students, but there are approximately 150 students attending the Magnet Program who are not necessarily from a low socioeconomic background. The school is also the home zoned school for a large middle class neighborhood. As of the 2017-2018 school year, there are a total of 640 students enrolled in the school, with 50 teachers. The school is 80%

African American, 8% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, 6.5% Multi-Race and 1.5% Asian. Due to the high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch rates, this school is classified under the National School Lunch Program as an approved Community Eligibility Provision School. This classification means that all the students receive free breakfast and lunch each school day. The demographics of this school was the targeted population desired for my research; as I needed to observe and analyze kindergarten classes comprised of racially diverse students.

There were five other elementary schools in the district with similar demographics. However, I chose this school because it was in close proximity to my work location. Since my current professional role is a school principal, it would have been extremely challenging to conduct the six to seven observations and three to four interviews per participant during the normal school day. I was required to take personal leave to conduct research and I wanted to also be conservative with the use of my leave records. This school was less than four miles from my current school where I am the principal.

Per the school district's research committee, I could not conduct research until the first week of September 2017; however, I was given permission by the school district to recruit participants using my Florida State University Institutional Review Board approved Letter of Consent. The next phase of recruitment required me to obtain the contact information of all five of the kindergarten teachers from the school principal of the same school. I immediately contacted the five teachers via email introducing myself and my research interests. Initially, two out of five of the kindergarten teachers agreed to participate in the study, two declined and one was undecided. A couple of weeks later, the one undecided teacher emailed me and expressed her interest in participating. Therefore, there were a total of three out of the five teachers participating in the study.

Participants

The typical-case sampling method was used for this study. Typical case sampling is when the criteria or characteristics of participants to be studied are determined and agreed upon as average or normal. (Christensen and Johnson, 2014, p. 270) For example, the criteria for this case were: the participants had to be a current kindergarten teacher teaching current grade level standards in the school in which this study took place. As previously mentioned, the study took place in a North Florida elementary school with three out of the total of five kindergarten teachers that this school had. The participating teachers all have five or more years of teaching experience, using the same core reading curriculum and kindergarten standards with a group of racially diverse students (see Table 2). It was not my intent to only select teachers with five years of experience as the teachers' experience is not what this study is about. However, the years of experience is included to fully inform readers about the participants.

The condition that make this case a typical-case sampling is being the participants are all kindergarten teachers utilizing the same grade level standards and core reading and math curriculum. The goal of this study is to identify the teacher participants' definition/perception of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms with teacher participants utilizing teaching the same grade level, using the same core curriculum at the same school; therefore, this case qualifies as an average case. In addition, the schools' principal was also included as a participant to collect historical and current overall information about the school and the principal's perception of identifying good teachers and good teaching.

Participant One, Brittany, is an African American female with 11 years of teaching experience which includes teaching one year of second grade in Texas and the remaining years as a

kindergarten teacher in Florida. She entered the teaching profession through the non-traditional route; she first pursued an undergraduate degree in psychology with a minor in philosophy and religion with an intent to pursue educational psychology. However, in order to pursue the educational psychology route, she stated one pre-requisite was to have a minimum of three years of teaching; which was the impetus of her entering the teaching field. After 11 years, she still exudes a great amount of excitement about teaching and being in the classroom.

Participant Two, Gracelynn, is a Caucasian female with 24 years of teaching experience which includes being a speech language pathologist teacher for the first three years and experience teaching all elementary grade level (K-5) for the remaining years. She transitioned from the speech language pathologist role into the classroom after becoming certified in Elementary Education. Once in the classroom and through her speech language pathologist perspective, she stated that she immediately noticed how inherent language is in everything done and the impact it had in the classroom. Therefore, her passion to help students is still evident and strong in her current role as a kindergarten teacher. She is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in School Counseling due to the behavioral challenges and needs to further help students as they strive for academic excellence.

Participant Three, Wanda, is an African American female with 13 years in the teaching profession. She also entered the education field through a non-traditional route; Wanda began her professional career in retail and has an undergraduate degree in Retail Merchandising. She worked in the Retail profession in Atlanta, Georgia, but soon realized that she wanted a different career. She had a relative in education and volunteered often in her classroom, which also led to substitute teaching in elementary and middle schools throughout the North Florida County she currently resides and works in. After volunteering and substitute teaching opportunities, she

pursued a teaching position and has been teaching for 13 years. In the middle of the 13th year, she taught for two years in private school; however, she stated that she liked private sector but it was not a good fit for her so she returned to teaching in public school. Since being in the public school system she has taught third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade exceptional student education courses and currently excitedly teaching kindergarten for the last few years.

Participant Four, Principal Willow, is the current school principal and has 41 years in the education field. She holds Bachelor's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education, a Master's in K-12 Reading, a Specialist in Educational Leadership and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. She started her educational career in 1977 in as a classroom teacher and later transitioned into other roles as an assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and deputy chancellor. Under her ninth year leadership at the school, she has introduced a culture of respect and caring that involves a strong home to school connection and the AVID Program. The AVID Program is typically used in secondary schools. In elementary schools, the school-wide program teaches organization such as note taking skills during instruction, how to use the notes when studying and how to have a mindset towards the different subject matter they encounter that will help improve academic performance.

Data Collection

I applied for Florida State University's Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB) approval at the end of May. I received final approval from FSU IRB in July 2017 and immediately completed the IRB application for the school district in which my study was based. I obtained approval from the district's IRB in early August 2017 and was given clearance to start collecting

data the first week of September 2017. Due to a major hurricane impacting the state of Florida in early September 2017, I started the data collection process in early October 2017.

Interviews

The next phase of the data collection process was to collaborate with the kindergarten teachers and school principal to schedule structured interviews and class observations. Beginning with the interviews (See Table 2), I conducted a total of ten; three interviews were conducted for each of the three participating teachers and one interview with the school principal. The first interview with the teacher participants was to elicit information about their background in education and to gain insight into how teachers defined/perceived good teaching. I asked questions about the background experiences in education including their educational philosophy to gain insight into how they developed their definition of good teaching as well as to understand the path they took to become a teacher. For example, I wanted to know if their definition of good teaching was developed based on what they learned in their teacher preparation college program or if they developed their definition of good teaching while interning. Basically, I wanted to capture this information for later comparison since two of the three teacher participants took the non-traditional route into education. Non-traditional meaning they did not originally obtain a bachelor's in the education, but a different field and later took the Florida Teacher Certification exam and subject matter exam to become a teacher.

After gaining insight into how they defined/perceived their definition of good teaching as well as how it was originated, the second set of interviews were conducted to gain insight into how they implemented the good teaching practices/pedagogy they described in interview one. In addition the second interview was also to understand how current accountability measures shaped their

perceptions of the good teaching practices they described. For example, I needed to observe the description of good teaching before conducting interview two so I could enhance the follow-up interview questions about how they implemented it and if their implementation was shaped by the national, state, district or school level accountability measures. If had chosen to ask these questions in the first interview, I would have been able to make connections between their background experiences in education, their definition/perception of good teaching, their implementation model and the impact of accountability measures.

The third set of interviews was conducted to gain an understanding of the challenges they faced in implementing good teaching practices and pedagogy. The reason this interview was scheduled after at least four observations had been conducted was because I wanted the teacher participants to be able to describe the challenges they face implementing good teaching relative to the level accountability from the national, state, district or school levels and to ask follow-up questions about their implementation model that I observed in the classrooms. It was important to understand if the teacher participants were experiencing challenges in implementing good teaching due to the intricacies of the today's accountability model or if it was related to another factor such as a lack of professional development or specialized training to effectively teach racially diverse students.

The one interview with the school principal was to collect information about the school principal, the school environment, the school demographics, the surrounding neighborhoods zoned for the school and the expectations for students, teachers and parents. I wanted to be able to make a connection between what I observed in the teacher participants' classrooms and the principal's expectations of teacher's daily teaching practices. I also wanted to have an understanding of the overall school environment and the neighborhoods in which the students

lived. Gaining information about the students' neighborhoods was important to understand because I frequently refer to racially diverse students; it does not necessarily mean that all the racially diverse students in this school live in impoverished neighborhoods. As a reminder, this study is about the effective teaching of racially diverse students in a kindergarten classroom; it is not about poverty.

The interviews took place at the school either during the teacher's planning time or afterschool and lasted 15-30 minutes in length depending on the responses of the interviewees. Ultimately, all interviews were focused on how they defined good teaching practices and pedagogies, how they implemented good teaching and current and past challenges they have encountered in teaching racially diverse students under current accountability requirements.

Observations

The 2017-18 school year began on August 14th for the students; however and as previously explained, there was a delay in starting the classroom observations (See Table 3) due to a major hurricane impacting Florida. The positive perspective on the delay is that the teachers had a couple of weeks to reestablish classroom expectations after being out of school due to the hurricane before I started class observations. On average, the class observations occurred weekly during the reading and math blocks of instruction. While the observations occurred almost weekly, they were scheduled on different days of the week so different segments of teaching reading and math were captured. During each observation, I took detailed handwritten notes that including the time I entered the classroom, the number of students in attendance, the teacher and student interactions, the lesson being taught and the time I concluded the observation.

There were a total twenty observations: six (6) class observations were conducted in Brittany's classroom (Participant One), seven (7) class observations were conducted in Gracelynn's classroom (Participant Two) and seven (7) class observations were conducted in Wanda's classroom (Participant Three). I was scheduled to conduct seven observations in each of their classrooms, but due to scheduling reasons. I was unable to conduct the seventh observation in Brittany's classroom. I observed the participating teachers teaching reading and math to their racially diverse class of students. For example, I saw teachers teaching reading and math grade level skills in whole group and in small group with the use of scaffolding strategies and engagement strategies to help students remain focused during the lessons. I watched teacher's implement their description of effective teaching as well as how the students responded to their teaching of the reading and math curricula. For example, I saw the teachers utilizing a variety of classroom management strategies such as the use of proximity when asking students comprehension type questions as well as monitoring for understanding and providing specific feedback to students when they answered questions.

The time period in which I collected data from the three classrooms covered the end of the first grading period and all of the second grading period. A couple of differences between the observations held in the first grading period and second grading period was the manner in which the teachers shifted from constantly telling the students the class rules and procedures to the teachers asking the students to recall and/or demonstrate the class routines and procedures. Another difference was the increase of cognitive complex questioning as previously described earlier in this chapter; which is helpful in understanding how the strategies to support effective teaching may evolve over time in a classroom.

Having the interviews scheduled between observations made it easier to follow-up with the teacher participants about their definition/perception of effective teaching, the accountability requirements and to gain a deeper understanding of what I observed in their racially diverse classrooms.

Confidentiality and Timeline for Interview and Observations

For confidentiality purposes, all data was locked in a filing cabinet within my home office until the completion of my dissertation defense and graduation in the late Spring of 2018. Only respective participants in the study may request copies of all recordings and corresponding documents. Upon completion of graduation, all recordings and related documents with the exception of the dissertation will be destroyed in order to maintain a high level of confidentiality for all participants.

Table 2. Description of Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), Participant 3 (P3) and Participant 4 (P4)

| Participants | Brief Description of Participants |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Participant 1 = Brittany | Kindergarten Teacher – African American with 11 years of public school teaching experience between Florida and Texas. |
| Participant 2 = Gracelynn | Kindergarten Teacher – Caucasian with 24 years of public school teaching experience in Florida. |
| Participant 3 = Wanda | Kindergarten Teacher – African American with 13 years of combined private and public school teaching experience in Florida. |
| Participant 4 = Principal Willow | Principal of the school – 41 years of experience in the education field. There was only one interview with Principal Willow; so she is not included in Table 2. |

Table 3. Timeline for Interviews and Observations with each Teacher Participant (This table does not include the interview with the school Principal. There was only 1 interview with the school Principal.)

| 2017 Timeline for Interviews and Observations | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Participant 1 – Brittany | | Participant 2 – Gracelynn | | Participant 3 – Wanda | |
| Interviews | Observations | Interviews | Observations | Interviews | Observations |
| Interview 1 9/28/17 | Observation 1 Math 10/4/17 | Interview 1 10/03/17 | Observation 1 Math 10/10/17 | Interview 1 10/18/17 | Observation 1 Math 11/01/17 |
| Interview 2 10/19/17 | Observation 2 Reading 10/16/17 | Interview 2 10/25/17 | Observation 2 Reading 10/23/17 | Interview 2 11/06/17 | Observation 2 Reading 11/07/17 |
| Interview 3 11/30/17 | Observation 3 Reading 10/30/17 | Interview 3 11/15/17 | Observation 3 Math 10/30/17 | Interview 3 12/01/17 | Observation 3 Reading 11/13/17 |
| | Observation 4 Math 11/17/17 | | Observation 4 Reading 11/13/17 | | Observation 4 Math 11/17/17 |
| | Observation 5 Reading 11/27/17 | | Observation 5 Reading 11/27/17 | | Observation 5 Math 11/27/17 |
| | Observation 6 Math 11/29/17 | | Observation 6 Reading 11/29/17 | | Observation 6 Reading & Math Centers 12/01/17 |
| | NOT DONE Observation 7 Reading 12/05/17 | | Observation 7 Math 12/06/17 | | Observation 7 Reading & Math Centers 12/6/17 |

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis used for this study was interim analysis. Johnson and Christensen (2014) defined interim analysis as, “The cyclical process of collecting and analyzing data during a single research study” (p. 588). Therefore, each interview session and observations listed in Table 3 were analyzed throughout the course of the study. The continuous analysis was to identify emerging themes, concepts and/or patterns regarding the teacher’s perception of

effective teaching. As significant themes and concepts emerged, due to the manner in which the interviews were scheduled between the observations, I was able to ask follow-up questions as well as clarifying questions in the next interview to ensure I accurately captured traits they identified as good teaching in today's accountability era.

At the conclusion of each interview and each observation, I would quickly write down any additional memories of the classroom, the school and the overall environment. These additional notes helped me to remain reflective when analyzing the remainder of the field notes. In my role as a current principal, it was imperative that I captured every moment so I would not be tempted to assume what was occurring in the lessons that I observed versus what I actually observed.

As a second analysis, I chose Dedoose based on colleague and university professor recommendations. Dedoose is a data analysis tool designed to help researchers review data collected for emerging themes and patterns; I also entered all field notes including classroom pictures into Dedoose and all 10 transcribed interviews. I utilized Dedoose to search for consistent themes, concepts and patterns related to Ladson-Billings work as well as for content relative to my two research questions about effective teaching and accountability requirements.

The themes and concepts emerged based on the frequency. For example, one of themes, student engagement emerged because all three teacher participants stated in their definition that student engagement was significant as it related to good teaching. Further, the teacher participants also demonstrated strategies to keep the students engaged while they were teaching. Student engagement strategies such as relating content to real world applications students could understand was demonstrated by the teachers in every lesson. Therefore, student engagement

became one of the themes. I coded student engagement as parent code one (PC1) and the strategies the teachers utilized to demonstrate student engagement were listed as child codes (CC1). As other themes arose, I coded them sequentially such as PC2, PC3, and CC2 and CC3, etc. I continued looking for frequency and consistency of various traits they mentioned in the interviews or ones they demonstrated while teaching; if the traits were significant based on the frequency and the consistency, I renamed them as themes.

Trustworthiness

The validity of this case study is very important as public school stakeholders who have an interest in equitably educating all students, especially racially diverse students who are experiencing academic challenges in reading and/or math. The first step in establishing validity in this study was being reflective about my own positionality as a researcher and how that may have shaped the research processes. As a previous public elementary school teacher and current public school administrator, there are assumptions that I may have made about what effective teaching and learning processes may look like. However, as I observed, I tried to pay attention to different processes within the classrooms and tried to record as much as I could.

Since this was a mid-size school district, the participants knew I was an elementary school principal. Therefore, when I met with them, I assured them that I was not visiting their classroom as a principal, but as a researcher. I explained my research interests again and reassured them that I was not there to be critical of them or the manner in which they delivered instruction. I noticed after this conversation with each participant and the more time I spent in their classrooms, they became more relaxed with my visits; after the second observation, I did not attract much attention from them while they were teaching. This observation of their level of

comfort gave me the impression I gained their trust. However, due to the challenges relative to teachers trying to develop an understanding of effectively teaching racially diverse students that I have observed in my current position as principal may have caused me to pay more attention to how teachers described effective teaching and how they implemented their definition/perception of effective teaching.

A second validity used for this study was interpretive validity. Interpretive validity is a way to accurately portray the study participants' perspectives and meanings, and providing the insider's viewpoints (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). During the timeframe (October-December 2017) in which I worked with the participants, a level of trust was built between us and we began having richer conversations about their description of effective teaching practices. It was important the participants were comfortable talking with me because it allowed me to also accurately capture how they defined, perceived and implemented effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms; without the fear of judgment or criticism. The bond between the participants and I grew continuously over the course of the data collection period. The bond became so great until they laughed, joked and shared personal stories beyond the research at times when I visited them afterschool or during their planning period. The lasting impression left on my heart by these participants was their dedication and passion for educating all students. Therefore, it is imperative I fully explain their definition/perception of effectively teaching racially diverse students in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Description of Main Finding and Sub-Findings

This chapter reports and discusses findings for my research that examines the notions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms in a North Florida elementary school. The data for this study were analyzed through the lens of the following two guiding research questions:

1. How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?
2. How do contemporary accountability measures in terms of student outcomes shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms?

I conducted this study with three kindergarten teachers who worked in a North Florida elementary school. My research included interviews with three kindergarten teachers and observations of their teaching in the classroom. In addition, I also interviewed the school principal. The interviews and observations investigated how teacher participants defined and perceived characteristics of good teaching and pedagogy in an era where accountability seems to be the primary focus.

This chapter is divided into three sections; the first section and the second section outline the findings. The main finding is that the accountability paradigm implemented at the school

shaped each teacher's definition, perceptions and practices of effective teaching in their racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. The first sub finding is that the different terms that were used by the teachers to define effective teaching all reflected the central values of the accountability paradigm that was implemented at the school. The second sub finding is the teachers' teaching practices were aligned with the expectations that were outlined in the accountability paradigm even when they reflected different teaching styles and personality traits of individual teachers. With these findings in mind, this chapter ends with an explanation of how the two research questions were answered in terms of how the school's accountability paradigm shaped the teachers' definitions and perceptions of effective teaching in their racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Main Finding: The School's Accountability Paradigm

The main finding regarding how the school's accountability paradigm shaped the teachers' definitions and perceptions were demonstrated consistently by each of the three participants. The first aspect of how their definitions and perceptions were shaped by the accountability paradigm was based on Principal Willow's expectations. For example, Principal Willow's core values in terms of accountability were that the teachers had to be reflective, flexible, and maintain high expectations for student learning. Further, she expected teachers to be able to reflect on their students' data and their instructional practices, and be flexible enough to change their instructional practices in terms of differentiation techniques; all while having high expectations (the belief that all students can learn). It is these core values from the accountability paradigm that shaped each teacher's definition and perceptions of effective teaching.

The accountability paradigm at the participants' school is one that is based on three factors. One factor is student achievement through the lens of the kindergarten standards. The second factor is the constant monitoring of the teacher's instructional practices. The third factor is the teachers' evaluations. Principal Willow (Participant Four) state that student data must drive the teachers' instruction as they teach grade level standards. She monitors student progress toward achievement as well as the instructional changes made by the teachers. This monitoring was done through weekly progress monitoring meetings with each grade level's team of teachers. Principal Willow led this accountability paradigm at the school by providing specific feedback to teachers regarding student data, their instructional practices, and frequent class observations in order to monitor the ways in which teachers are responding to the feedback given in the progress monitoring meetings. The observations conducted by Principal Willow and her assistant principal are also part of the teacher's overall evaluation for the year. Principal Willow's accountability paradigm can be summarized by a comment she made in our interview. She stated that teachers must use data to determine gaps in student learning, and thereafter, teachers must provide more time and opportunities for students to become proficient in their grade level content. Further, Principal Willow said, "The same thing (instructional practices) doesn't work with every child, and teachers have to be willing to find out what works with each child and be able to keep them engaged and loving school." The core values of Principal Willow's accountability paradigm resonate strongly with teachers; however, they implement these core values in different ways and the ways in which they demonstrate these core values are described in the next section.

Principal Willow facilitated weekly progress monitoring meetings with teachers by asking questions regarding her analysis of their student data in comparison to the grade level

standards being taught. As a reminder, this research was with kindergarten teacher participants only. In Florida, kindergarten students do not take state standardized tests. Therefore, Principal Willow determined kindergarten progress as it related to Florida's kindergarten standards. As evidenced through the teachers' interviews and class observations, their perceptions of effective teaching was shaped by the school's accountability paradigm. Specifically, the teacher participants described how the weekly progress monitoring meetings motivated them to reflect on their instructional practices in order to further improve the student's academic performance. Teachers are then expected to modify their instructional practices in ways to facilitate students' academic growth. Some examples of ways in which they modified instruction based on feedback from the progress monitoring meetings included changing the type of curriculum intervention, providing small group instruction, or giving extra time for student to learn concepts. Therefore, the examples suggest that the discussions from these meetings greatly shaped how and what teachers changes in their daily instructional practices.

The teachers' evaluations were a third component of the school's accountability paradigm. This factor also shaped the teacher's perceptions of effective teaching. The teacher participants' evaluations are done through a series of observations conducted throughout the school year by Principal Willow and the assistant principal. The number of observations varies for teachers, as teachers are grouped in categories based on the number of years they have been teaching. When teachers were observed, they received immediate feedback from their administrators through the lens of a teacher evaluation framework that has elements of the best teaching practices from The Florida Educator Accomplished Practices, as well as the Robert Marzano Framework (2007). The teacher participants were familiar with this framework, as it is used districtwide. When this framework was first introduced in the district, school administrators

received training, in addition to teacher leaders. It was the responsibility of each principal to ensure that their teachers received the appropriate training on this framework. Principal Willow invited a consultant to teach and provide examples of the elements within the framework. None of the teacher participants mentioned this training; however, Principal Willow shared the professional development model with me in an interview. The teachers are supposed to use this framework to inform their daily instructional practices. For example, there are four domains in this framework: Domain 1-Collaborative Planning, Domain 2-Instruction, Domain 3-Reflection and Revision and Domain 4-Professional Responsibilities. I conclude that the teachers in this study have had several opportunities to learn about effective teaching and effective implementation as it relates to the accountability paradigm at the school level.

Sub Finding One: The Teachers' Definition and Perceptions of Effective Teaching

Within this section, I provide specific examples from each participant in regards to the core values of Principal Willow's accountability paradigm. Beginning with Brittany (Participant One), she defined good/effective teaching as being reflective while constantly monitoring the students' academic performance. An example of what she meant by being reflective was the manner in which she reflected on her teaching practices before, during and after a lesson had been taught. Specifically, Brittany stated, "Reflection is the most important part of good teaching; therefore, I look to make adjustments and how I can improve a lesson that will help the students." In addition to the reflection, she also explained the importance of flexibility in her definition of good teaching. She described flexibility as changing her instructional plans when necessary without being upset about changing them. An example of a way she demonstrated being reflective and being flexible was by noticing when students were struggling academically and/or behaviorally during a lesson, and then changing her instructional plans and delivery in the

middle of the lesson to best meet the needs of the students. Brittany had a student who struggled with regulating his behavior. However, he responds well to Brittany's redirection strategies. In an interview, I asked Brittany to explain the strategy or teaching trait in which this student responds best as she helps him to improve his behavior. Brittany stated,

He is one of my students who started kindergarten without an academic background (did not attend preschool). He is the only child and his mom was very young when she had him. I constantly focus on reminding him of the expectations. For example, I clearly explain and model the expectations for him. I also use one-on-one teaching to constantly build that relationship. As I clearly explain and model the expectations daily he has started to realize that he must do what is expected of everybody else. So I think it is important to create an environment where they feel comfortable and there is safety (personal communication, October 19, 2017).

As Brittany explained these strategies, her passion for ensuring every student experiences academic and behavior success was evident; she was able to provide specific examples of the manner in which she described effective teaching.

During weekly progress monitoring meetings, the principal asked teachers to reflect on their instructional practices and to be willing to make instructional changes in order to enhance student learning and performance. This connection between the principal's progress monitoring meeting expectations and Brittany's definition of effective teaching seemed to be the impetus of her perceptions about effective teaching.

Gracelynn's (Participant Two) definition of effective teaching was about having high expectations, displaying the right attitude and building positive relationships. As an example,

Gracelynn said, “Effective teaching is about creating relationships, making students feel comfortable and showing care when I interact with them.” Further Gracelynn stated,

Building positive relationships with the children goes a long way. You have to have a relationship and they have to trust you and you have to really care about them. I am not talking about being their best friend but they have to know that I will be there for them and get them to follow the rules and do what is asked of them. I remember a specific situation where I received a student in the middle of the school year who had extreme behavioral difficulties and to the other students it looked like he was getting away with things. I had to explain to the other students that they have to trust me, but they are five years old and they just see what they see and process it in their own way. Therefore, as someone told me a few years ago that fair is not equal, fair is giving what each child needs to be successful (personal communication, November 15, 2017).

She made a connection between the importance of creating positive relationships, making students feel comfortable and showing care. With that connection Gracelynn is able to effectively differentiate instruction and strategies that would promote greater academic and behavior success for her students. Interestingly, Gracelynn described her definition of effective teaching differently, but it was still aligned to the core values outlined in Principal Willow’s accountability paradigm. Therefore, I conclude that Gracelynn’s perception of effective teaching is also shaped by the schools’ accountability paradigm.

In comparison to Brittany and Gracelynn, Wanda (Participant Three) defined good/effective teaching as a teacher who is able to hold high expectations for all students despite the academic and/or behavioral challenges they experience. An example Wanda used regarding the way she held high expectations was about building positive relationships with students,

setting academic and behavior expectations, as well as understanding and being able to meet their needs for learning to happen. Wanda also perceived good teaching as being able to imagine all the possibilities for a child and not just being able to develop one or two areas for growth, such as focusing on data without regard to the students' social and emotional needs. Specifically, she stated, "I look at academic, social, emotional and home factors to ensure the students are learning every day." Another example Wanda stated,

Look at the whole child as a teacher. Don't just look at whether the child is able to follow tasks and directions, but look deeper to determine what they are able to do and what they are not able to do. Then set specific expectations for students collectively and individually. If you don't really know what that student can do, you can't really set any type of expectation (personal communication, November 6, 2017).

Again, Wanda's focus was more about understanding the needs of students in a comprehensive way as she held them to high expectations. The aforementioned description of the teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching is also evidence that they have a strong commitment to adhering to the school's accountability paradigm. The teachers' specific implementation of effective teaching through the accountability paradigm is described in the next section.

Sub Finding Two: The Teachers' Implementation of Effective Teaching

My data shows that the teachers who participated in this study implemented their definition of effective teaching through maintaining high expectations for behavior and academics. They also implemented their definition of effective teaching through the use of engagement techniques for students. The high expectations and engagement techniques that were

used by the teachers were also aligned to the core values outlined in the school's accountability paradigm. As the teachers implemented their definition of effective teaching, I noticed there were differences in terms of the techniques they used to engage students in the learning process. These differences were because of the teacher's different personalities. Therefore, the first description in this section is about each teacher's personality, and it is meant to give readers an understanding of the different ways the teachers engaged students. Another difference was the way in which teachers were reflective and flexible in terms of the expectations in the accountability paradigm. In understanding the variance in teacher personalities, I will further explain how they implemented three core values (communication of high expectations, engaging students and reflective values). Interestingly, each teacher described their implementation of these values differently; however, despite the implementation differences between the teachers, they were still responding to the same core values of the accountability paradigm. The next sections describe the teachers' personality, their high expectations, their techniques of student engagement and their implementation of being reflective and flexible as it relates to Principal Willow's accountability paradigm.

Teacher personalities.

The teachers had different personalities but were still able to implement their vision of effective teaching by maintaining high expectations and using classroom management strategies. In comparing the three teacher participants' personalities, Brittany was energetic, and she loved interacting and teaching her students. Brittany's personality was one of kind; she displayed the belief that every student could learn! Furthermore, she was very encouraging, positive and was able to relate to the kids. I observed Brittany attentively listening to her students and helping them work through their concerns in class with a caring voice. When she worked with them, she

had this saying, “You alright now?” The students would respond with a yes and a large smile. In addition to the care she showed towards the students, she was constantly thanking the students each time they adhered to specific class directions or expectations. When students were working independently, Brittany walked around, provided feedback on their progress and drew a smiling face to the top of their assignment. The students showed a sense of pride and willingly and excitedly were ready to follow the next set of expectations.

Gracelynn demonstrated a stern, but very calm, and positive personality. Similarly to Brittany, she kept the students focused on the task at hand. She was not only calm, but extremely caring and intuitive. On my first observation, a student started crying during the assignment so Gracelynn gave him a small stuffed animal (Clifford the red dog) and calmly asked him if he wanted to sit next to the student teacher (intern) in the back of the classroom. The student replied by nodding his head for yes. After about five minutes, the student was working independently with a calm demeanor, and he seemed much more focused and engaged. While teaching, Gracelynn looked over at him consistently in a reassuring way. Her constant checking/reassuring looks seemed to make him feel very comfortable. There was another incident in observation two when Gracelynn was giving individual feedback to the students who were having a challenging time understanding the skill being taught. In the most positive way, Gracelynn says, “Take your time; you will get it.” This meant that the students would eventually understand the skill she was teaching and there was no need to rush.

Another example of Gracelynn’s personality was her ability to be sensitive and nurturing to each student. In observation five, immediately after a reading lesson, Gracelynn asked the students if they had questions. Several students wanted to share about their Thanksgiving break, but one student shared that her grandfather passed away during the break. Gracelynn stopped for

a moment, looked at the student with the utmost respect and concern in her eyes and said, “I am so sorry about that.” Gracelynn asked, “Are you ok?” The student replied, “yes.” Gracelynn paused for a little longer just to be sure the student was ready to move on with the lesson. Gracelynn’s compassion and sympathy was strongly evident as I observed her constantly monitoring the student during the rest of the lesson.

Wanda also demonstrated a caring and positive personality and kept her students focused on the task at hand, but in a more relaxed or free flowing manner. Her relaxed manner was different than the other two participants. As an example, students were allowed to talk to each other during independent work time, a time when students were given an assignment to complete independently with little to no guidance from the teacher. In contrast, the other participants did not allow their students to talk during independent work time unless the students were working in collaborative groups. Wanda’s relaxed manner was consistent with her definition of effective teaching. The definition she provided was about teaching the whole child, which meant allowing students to learn in the manner they felt most comfortable. In interview two, Wanda stated that the “whole child” was about their academic success with regards to the students’ social and emotional well-being. Wanda believed her students felt comfortable being able to talk during independent work time; therefore, she was comfortable as long as the students were learning. Overall, the teacher participants were all very positive, and they expected students to learn the grade level skills. The expectations the teachers held were high and for that reason, it is important to explain next how teachers communicated high expectations in their racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

The next sections describe how the teacher participants implemented the three core values (communication of high expectations, engaging students and reflective values) they

described in their definition of effective teaching. I started this section with the way they communicated high expectations because it was the core value in which the teachers implemented similarly; however, the variance in the teacher participant's implementation showed in the remaining two core values: engaging students and reflective values. The next sections were written this way to clearly portray the similarities and differences between the teachers' implementation of the three core values that are also aligned with the Principal Willow's accountability paradigm.

Communication of high expectations.

All three teachers held high expectations for their students. Two categories of their high expectations were demonstrated consistently by each of the participants. Those two categories were behavior expectations and academic expectations. The behavior expectations are explained in terms of how they expected the students to treat other classmates, as well as the incentive or consequence the students received for compliance or non-compliance. In contrast, the academic expectations are explained as the manner in which the students were expected to be grouped (homogeneously or heterogeneously) for differentiated instruction. In addition to these academic and behavior expectations, the teachers also implemented classroom management techniques to further engage students in the learning process. Overall, the behavior and academic expectations were demonstrated consistently by the teacher participants.

The classroom behavior expectations were posted in each classroom and discussed daily. The list of behavior expectations included the following: respect, safety, kindness, honesty, as well as raising their hands before speaking, listening while others are speaking and following directions quickly. Throughout the school day, if students were not adhering to the behavior expectations, they were given reminders with progressive discipline steps in order to regulate

their behavior. On the other hand, when students adhered to the behavior expectations, the teachers were quick to provide constant positive reinforcement for students, such as “great job” or “I like how this student is listening.”

The academic expectations were also posted and discussed daily with the students. An example of the posted academic related expectations was on charts displaying the names of students in each group as they visited academic centers around the classrooms. In these classrooms, centers were described as the grouping of students in order to practice skill related activities within small heterogeneous and at times, homogeneous groups. The grouping depended upon which students did or did not understand the grade level skills being taught. During these groups, the teachers were able to implement a technique called instructional scaffolding, a technique to help improve student comprehension of the skills taught. This process was done through small groups or one-on-one teaching, in addition to the constant monitoring of student performance relative to the grade level skills. These two categories of the teachers’ high expectations, behavior and academic, were instrumental in keeping students engaged in the learning process.

Engaging students.

All three teachers approached student engagement as the manner in which the students made eye contact with the teacher, remained seated, and raised their hands to respond to questions. As previously described, Brittany’s personality was energetic, and she always found exciting ways to engage the students in learning. Brittany’s student engagement strategies always included short video clips related to the skill being taught. She also related learning to current events and activities to help keep students engaged. As an example, the day before Halloween, Brittany had a large plastic pumpkin bucket filled with candy and smaller plastic pumpkin

buckets for each student. In order to keep the students on task the day before Halloween, they earned candy from her bucket to be placed in their bucket. They earned the candy by participating in the lesson and by following academic and behavior expectations throughout the day. I could tell the students were very excited about the upcoming opportunity to go trick or treating, but this strategy kept 100% of the students engaged, as they were learning about action words.

Gracelynn's personality was calm, but stern in a way in which the students knew she would hold them accountable for learning. Gracelynn also had a high level of student engagement. Students received explicit reminders regarding what engagement looked like in Gracelynn's classroom. For example, she constantly used these little sayings such as "eyes are watching; ears are listening." Another way in which Gracelynn kept student engagement high was by celebrating/praising students who were demonstrating engagement. The celebrations were high fives or saying great job followed by a statement from Gracelynn about what the students did well.

Wanda's personality was more relaxed than Brittany and Gracelynn. Her personality was different in that she engaged students by using clear, verbal cues. Examples of the cues were, "I need everyone listening at this time" or "turn your voices off and listen." These verbal cues were given when Wanda was delivering reading and math instruction. Wanda demanded student engagement less frequently than Brittany and Gracelynn. However, student engagement was still very important to Wanda. The importance was evidenced by the number of times within each of her observations that she demanded the students be engaged in the lessons. Other techniques related to the teacher's perception of effective teaching and accountability measures are summarized in the following section.

Reflective and flexible.

Within Principal Willow's accountability paradigm, she also expected the teachers to be reflective and flexible in terms of adjusting their instructional practices. In being reflective and flexible, Principal Willow expected teachers to reflect on their students' performance on class assignments and assessments frequently, as well as being flexible enough to change their instructional delivery or practices in ways beneficial for students to learn. As previously described, Brittany mentioned being reflective and flexible in her definition of effective teaching, which was directly aligned to the expectations in the accountability paradigm. Gracelynn demonstrated being reflective by analyzing her students' assignments and assessments as well, but I also observed her demonstrate being reflective in the midst of teaching. As an example, on several occasions when Gracelynn was teaching, when she noticed students were having a challenging time understanding a specific skill, she would make comments such as, "I can tell you all are having a challenging time understanding this skill, so let's stop and let me teach it a little differently." This example also describes her ability to be flexible enough to deviate from the lesson than she previously planned to ensure she taught the way the students would best understand the skills. Wanda demonstrated being reflective by monitoring how students were completing their assignments. For example, when she noticed students having a challenging time completing an assignment, she knew that they may not have fully understood the way she taught the skills during whole group instruction; therefore, she was flexible enough to offer one-on-one re-teaching to the students who needed it. Similarly to Brittany and Gracelynn, Wanda also analyzed her students' class assessments frequently. This explanation of how the teachers demonstrated being reflective and flexible is different based on their personalities, but yet again, it is proof that their practices are aligned to Principal Willow's accountability paradigm.

Conclusion

This research shows how the accountability paradigm shaped the kindergarten teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms in a North Florida elementary school. This was reflected in Principal Willow's expectations of progress monitoring, the manner in which the teacher participants changed their instructional practices based on feedback from the progress meetings, and the manner in which the teachers held high expectations for the students and their learning. In addition, each teacher participant stated how it was important for students to receive instruction that would meet their individual needs. Principal Willow also stated in an interview the importance of using student data to meet the needs of the students. Therefore, the teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching were shaped by the accountability paradigm at this school.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the teachers' definition, perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms in a North Florida School. The students in this North Florida School receive free breakfast and lunch under the National School Lunch Program as an approved Community Eligibility Provision School. This eligibility is due to the high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. As a point of reference, 70% of students in this school are considered economically disadvantaged and 90% of all students at this school are classified as racially diverse (African American, Hispanic and Multi-Racial) students. With the large percent of racially diverse students, Ladson-Billings (1995a) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) was used as a conceptual framework for this study. It was used a framework due to the research Ladson-Billings conducted in racially diverse classrooms and explained in her 1995 article called, "But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy." In addition to the CRP framework, there were two research questions guiding my study:

- (1) How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?

- (2) How do contemporary accountability measures in terms of student outcomes shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms?

This study is conducted in a context where the achievement gap at the national and Florida level is starting as early as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (Bassok, Latham & Rorem, 2016). As a result, public schools are under pressure from school reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) to address this achievement gap. Under President Obama's leadership, provisions were made to give school districts more autonomy in terms of accountability that includes standardized testing among other things. This autonomy was meant to help states create plans that would address and improve student achievement. Schools (Grades 3-10) in Florida, however, are still required to take standardized tests under ESSA. But, districts have some flexibility under the accountability model in terms of allowing school principals to determine ways in which they would monitor student progress within their respective schools.

In this context, my research examines how state, district or local accountability measures shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching at the kindergarten level. Although standardized testing is not required at this level, scholarship shows that the accountability measures that districts and schools have been subjected to shape teaching and learning even in these classrooms (Bassok, Latham and Rorem, 2016). My study investigates the teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms and if and how they have been shaped by the accountability paradigm and measures.

My research shows that the teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching were shaped by the school's accountability paradigm. The teachers each had their own style of teaching, but their styles were aligned with the core values of the accountability paradigm that Principal Willow implemented. The main message of this study is that in this accountability era,

teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching are shaped by the accountability paradigm developed at the school level.

The following sections outline the data collection process and findings followed by a discussion of recommendations for different stakeholders. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on some of the limitations of my current research and possibilities of future research focusing on implementations of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Data Collection and Methods

The interviews and observations for this qualitative case study took place late September 2017 through December 2017. Out of the five kindergarten teachers employed at this North Florida elementary school, three of the kindergarten teachers consented to participate in this study. I conducted three interviews with each of the teacher participants. The interviews took place either during the teacher's planning period (time when students are attending a different class) or after school. I utilized a list of interview questions (please see the Appendix B) that I designed to help me obtain as much information about the teachers' perceptions as possible. There were 7 classroom observations with two of the teacher participants (Gracelynn and Wanda) and 6 classroom observations with one teacher participant (Brittany); these observations took place either during the reading or math block of instruction. There was a time constraint that prohibited me from conducting the seventh class observation with the Brittany (P1). However, there was not a lack in obtaining information from Brittany. She agreed that I could conduct the seventh observation at a later date if needed to learn and understand more about her definition, perceptions and implementation of effective teaching in her racially diverse kindergarten classroom.

In addition to interviewing the teacher participants, I also interviewed Principal Willow. The goal of this interview was to gather information about the principal's expectations in terms of the definition and perceptions she held about identifying effective teaching on her campus which is comprised of a large percentage of racially diverse students. From this interview, Principal Willow's accountability paradigm was evident with connections that I later made between the teacher participants' interviews and class observations in terms of understanding their definition and perceptions of effective teaching. This accountability paradigm is explained in the next section as it relates to the main finding and sub-findings of how the teacher's defined, perceived and implemented effective teaching as well as how their perceptions were shaped.

Results

I found that the kindergarten teacher participants defined, perceived and implemented effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms with a focus on high expectations and particular classroom management strategies to keep the students engaged. For example, throughout the interviews and observations, each teacher discussed engaging students in some way; they also reminded students to remain engaged during instruction. Although this looked differently in each classroom, engagement of students was observed frequently in these teacher participants' classrooms.

The results of this study reveal that the school's accountability paradigm led by Principal Willow did indeed shape how the participating teachers defined, perceived and implemented effective teaching in their racially diverse kindergarten classrooms. However, despite being shaped by the same accountability paradigm, teachers' implementation of effective teaching in their classrooms varied reflecting different personalities, modes of communication, and

classroom management styles of the three teachers. With the differences implementation, this is where Ladson-Billings (2004) notion that theoretical propositions about pedagogy that help teachers understand, reflect on, and improve their teaching practices would be beneficial.

The school's accountability paradigm that shaped the teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching is only one example of how this North Florida School District gave autonomy to principals. Principal Willow expected all kindergarten through fifth grade teachers to use student data for reflection and to make instructional changes for greater student achievement. Specifically and as previously explained in chapter four, she expected teachers to be reflective, flexible, and hold high expectations for students' learning. A second factor of the accountability paradigm was the manner in which Principal Willow conducted classroom observations and provided feedback regarding the teachers' instructional practices. As evidenced through interviews with the teacher participants, they knew they were being held accountable for student learning based on the responses given constantly in reference to being prepared for the weekly progress monitoring meetings. In knowing this was the high expectation, teachers regularly reflected on their student data and made changes to their instructional practices in terms of differentiation techniques. Effective teaching scholarship contend that high expectations are needed for academic success(Curry, 2000).This supports the teachers and Principal Willow's notion of having high expectations through the accountability paradigm she formed.

Second, the teachers defined, perceived and implemented effective teaching in different ways. However, their definition, perceptions and implementation were aligned with Principal Willow's accountability paradigm. As one would imagine, there were differences in teacher personalities between classrooms; differences in their description and implementation of effective teaching were inevitable. An example of the notable differences were the ways in

which each teacher participant communicated high expectations through their respective class management strategies to keep students engaged. Brittany seemed to prefer rewarding students with treats or giving them high fives when they managed their behavior and was engaged during learning. Gracelyn seemed to prefer praising students with specific feedback when her students managed their behavior and remained engaged in learning. Wanda preferred restating her class expectations by beginning with the phrase, “I like” when her students managed their behavior and remained engaged during the learning process. An example of Wanda’s “I like” phrases were “I like the way John is working with his group members” Or “I like the way Sarah raised her hand to answer the question.” Again, these are some different ways in which each teacher participant communicated their high expectations, but these ways are all connected to Principal Willow’s accountability paradigm that included holding high expectations for students through classroom management techniques/strategies that kept students engaged in their learning.

These findings help us understand the central and important role of school leaders in creating institutional norms and context that shape the perceptions and practices of teaching and learning at a school. In this case, Principal Willow’s values as well as her management style seemed to be a central factor. However, this also helps us understand the significance of the role of teachers. While being part of the same institution and same reform culture; the classrooms did look different based on the teachers’ preferences and styles. It is, thus, important to examine how these reforms are translated and made sense of at different levels and in different ways. The effective implementation of such policies, thus, do not have to be linear or homogenous, but there must be understanding of such implementation coupled with continuous feedback and support similarly to the way Principal Willow implemented her accountability paradigm.

For this research, I approached effective teaching as “The extent to which students are engaged and responds to targeted curriculum” (Scott, Cooper & Hirn 2015). Understanding this scholarship in conjunction with my passion to improve student outcomes, I wanted to know the perceptions that teachers held in terms of effective teaching of racially diverse students; especially since the racially diverse students were heavily represented in the achievement gap (Florida Department of Education, 2016). Critical scholars like Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ferguson, 2012; Gay, 2002; Benekos, 2016 contend that strong classroom management skills, special attention with care, positive attitudes, and the ability to create an engaging environment with high expectations is key to effective teaching in racially diverse classrooms. Therefore, the evidence in this study regarding holding high expectations through classroom management strategies that engages students shows a positive effect in the racially diverse kindergarten classroom in which this study took place.

Furthermore, the literature review included research based instructional strategies such as small group work to differentiate instruction, student engagement, instructional scaffolding, use of explicit learning strategies, and the use of cultural connections to help students answer higher order thinking questions. All of these instructional strategies were evident throughout the twenty class observations with the exception of using cultural connections. Again, teachers were using effective teaching strategies, but did not mention this scholarship on effective teaching within the interviews as they described their definition and perceptions of effective teaching.

This qualitative case study captured data about the teacher’s perceptions of effective teaching in their racially diverse classrooms; it did not include an analysis of student outcomes in relation to their academic progress on grade level content. However, my data showed there was a positive effect in the manner in which racially diverse students responded to the teachers’

personality, high expectations and the classroom management strategies they used to increase student engagement. I simply confirm that their definition and perceptions were shaped by the school's accountability paradigm. With this in mind, it is important for readers to understand that this confirmation alone does not confirm that all kindergarten teachers' definition and perceptions of effective teaching is shaped by their respective school accountability paradigm; this confirmation can only be connected to the teacher participants in this qualitative case study.

Principal Willow implemented her accountability paradigm in way that provided guidance, feedback and support to teachers. The teachers knew and could apply the core values of the accountability paradigm in ways consistent with their teaching style and classroom management. For example, they had flexibility to teach in a way that was consistent with their teaching style because they knew Principal Willow provided them with support as they implemented the accountability paradigm. The teachers had trust in Principal Willow and were accepting of the feedback she gave them in regards to the accountability paradigm. Boyd (2009) states, "Teaching is about self-evaluation and being open to accepting feedback on the instruction and practices being utilized in the classroom." This research supports Principal Willow's notion of providing continuous guidance, feedback and support to the teachers.

Limitations

With research studies, there will be limitations. The limitation identified in this study is the amount of time spent in these kindergarten classrooms. Although, I spent two months in the kindergarten classrooms, it may be beneficial to conduct future research for a longer period of time and with subjects other than reading and math. This future research may be beneficial to further understand different and contesting examples of effective teaching. It would also be

productive to explore how teachers worked with parents to address the issues they identified, which is something that this study did not focus on.

Recommendations

As readers understand and this research of teacher definitions, perception and implementation of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms, an important reminder is that this study took place in one elementary school in a North Florida district. There are a total of 24 elementary schools in this school district, but only nine of them meet the selection criteria of having a minimum of 50% of racially diverse students in the kindergarten classrooms. While this seems like a several schools to choose from, I obtained consent from only two principals. I chose the school that was closest to the school in which I currently serve as principal. Therefore, it may be beneficial to conduct aspects of this same research for a longer period of time and with several North Florida elementary schools simultaneously.

The teachers in this study did not refer to ways to help students make cultural connections while learning grade level content. However, Ladson-Billings (1995) worked with eight teachers who demonstrated success in implementing culturally relevant strategies to enhance student learning in their racially diverse classrooms. I strongly suggest the following for district leaders, school principals and teachers:

- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Professional Development for teachers and school administrators – This type of professional development would be beneficial to help teachers and school administrators understand and determine ways to implement it in their respective schools.

- Develop Cadres/Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) – These support groups would be beneficial for teachers and school administrators to network as they implement and learn more about culturally relevant pedagogy. These support groups would also become an avenue for district leaders to participate so they can identify strengths and weaknesses of schools and offer feedback and support to sustain the efforts in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy.
- Visit Model Schools – These are schools that would be identified as effectively implementing culturally relevant pedagogy that enhanced student learning. Other school administrators and teachers would be given opportunities to observe in the classrooms of these schools who demonstrate the integration of culturally relevant pedagogy and effective teaching very well so they see it is doable.

Please understand these recommendations are specific to the findings of this qualitative case study; which sought to understand the definition and perceptions of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the two research questions below were both answered by one main finding, the teachers' definition and perceptions are shaped by the accountability paradigm of the school.

1. How do kindergarten teachers in a North Florida elementary school define, perceive and implement effective teaching pedagogy and practices in their racially diverse classrooms?

2. How do contemporary accountability measures in terms of student outcomes shape teachers' perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms?

The sub findings regarding the implementation of the strategies they used proved to be aligned with the accountability paradigm as well. With these findings, I infer that school administrators can impact the teachers' perceptions of their teaching practices. Therefore, it is important that I continue engaging in the reflection of my own leadership style. School administrators and teachers are in an accountability era where there is a great amount of pressure to be change agents and make vast improvements in students' academic performance. I have learned through this study the importance of understanding the perceptions teachers have about their instructional practices and I must ensure I am providing them with the support they need to be the effective change agent in their respective classrooms. In my role as principal, I plan to share this research with Principal Willow, other school principals and district leadership. In addition to the recommendations listed in the recommendations section of this chapter, there are final takeaways in which I plan to fully implement in my accountability plan that other principals may also view as beneficial. Those final takeaways are:

- Take time to understand the perceptions of their respective teachers.
- Create an environment with positive relationships that yield trust between the teachers and school administrative team.
- Understand the needs of the students.
- Provide support teachers to help them understand the instructional practices included in their respective accountability plans.

- Provide consistent and regular feedback to teachers about their instructional practices.

These five takeaways are a start in developing an accountability plan to meet the needs of the diverse student population. These takeaways would be beneficial as school leaders develop pedagogy that will assist teachers in understanding, reflecting on and improving their instructional practices in today's diverse public school system.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

September 2017 Interview Questions – For Participating Kindergarten Teachers

Theme: Teacher’s Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What grade levels have you previously taught?
3. Which grade level did you like working with the most?
4. How did you decide to become a teacher?
5. What do you enjoy about teaching? Can you share specific examples?
6. Describe your pre-service (internship). Can you provide examples of what you enjoyed the most about this experience?

Theme: Teacher’s Definition of Good Teaching and Accountability

1. How would you define a “good” teacher?
2. What do you think is good teaching? Please provide specific examples or strategies.
3. How do you implement these examples and strategies in your classroom and when you are teaching constrained (letter recognition and sounds) and unconstrained (vocabulary and background knowledge) reading skills?
4. How do you implement good teaching in your classroom when teaching other skills related to early reading?
5. How does your evaluation drive your teaching practices? Please provide specific examples that are directly related to your evaluation.
6. How do you use student data to drive your teaching practices? Please provide specific examples referencing the types of data you use.

7. How do students respond to your teaching practices? Please provide specific examples referencing their learning and achievement.

October/November 2017 Interview Questions – For Participating Kindergarten Teachers

Theme: Challenges Implementing Good Teaching Practices and Pedagogies

1. What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher?
2. What are some of the strategies you adopt to meet those challenges?
3. What, if any support, is available to you to meet these challenges?
4. When and where did you learn about good teaching and are the examples/strategies of good teaching challenging to implement?
5. What challenges do you encounter as you implement good teaching practices and pedagogies with racially diverse students?
6. Does your school provide professional development on good teaching practices and pedagogies? If so, please describe how this professional development help expand your good teaching practices/pedagogies.
7. Are there opportunities to receive feedback on your teaching practices and pedagogies? If so, please elaborate on how the feedback helped enhance your teaching practices of your racially diverse class.

December 2017 Interview Questions – For School Principal

Theme: The Overall School Environment as it relates to facilitating Good Teaching

Practices and Pedagogies

1. What is your education/professional background? (Degrees held, length of time in the education field and in what positions)?

2. How long have you been the principal of this school?
3. Describe your school culture.
4. What are some characteristics that you look for in a good (superstar) teacher?
5. How do you define good teaching and in what way(s) do you look for it and provide feedback to the teachers about their teaching/instructional practices? (Data chats?)
6. What types of professional development or training do you offer teachers to enhance their teaching practices?
7. How do you measure the extent to which the professional development was beneficial or not?
8. Describe some of the challenges you face as the school principal and what strategies do you use to help get through these challenges?
9. I've noticed that parents volunteer in the classroom; what are some strategies you use to get parents actively involved in their child's learning?

APPENDIX B

2017 – 2018 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Teacher’s Room #: _____

Teacher’s Name: _Ms. Sample_____

Observation Checklist

Observation #: _____

Qualitative Case Study: Teacher perceptions and practices of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms

| Teaching Traits | Comments |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Classroom Management/ Organizational Skills (Are there clear routines and procedures for students with progressive steps to address non-compliance either academically or behaviorally)</p> | <p>Sample: There were 18 students in attendance during this first observation.. I noticed Ms. Sample reminded the students of the classroom routines and procedures. During the observations, I noticed the students demonstrating self-regulation skills as they followed the routines and procedures. One student had a challenging time following the routines, but when Ms. Sample asked him, “What are our classroom expectations?” The student was able to restate the expectations regarding the class routines and procedures, then proceeded to follow them.</p> |
| <p>2. Teacher’s Personality (Do teachers exhibit nurturing, caring and/or positive personality while teaching the students)</p> | |
| <p>3. Student Engagement (Are students actively participating in the lesson)</p> | |
| <p>4. High Expectations for All Students (Do teachers provide more than 1 opportunity to learn for low performing students----Do teachers ask higher order questions of</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| low performing students as higher performing students) | |
| <p>5. Monitor the extent to which students understand skills and content</p> <p>(Do teachers ask comprehension type questions regarding the skill/content being taught)</p> | |
| <p>6. Instructional Scaffolding</p> <p>(Are supports such coaching students through skills and concepts evident--Do teachers model/demonstrate strategies to promote learning)</p> | |
| <p>7. Clear Learning Expectations</p> <p>(Do teachers have or use a strategy to convey learning expectations to the lesson being taught----Do teachers refer to learning expectation while teaching)</p> | |
| <p>8. Additional Teaching Traits Demonstrated</p> | |
| <p>9. Additional Teaching Traits Demonstrated</p> | |

APPENDIX C

FSU IRB BEHAVIORAL CONSENT FORM

FSU Behavioral Consent Form

Title: Perceptions of Teachers in Diverse Kindergarten Classrooms

You are invited to be in a research study about teacher perceptions of teaching diverse kindergarten students. You were selected as a possible participant because you will be teaching kindergarten students for during the 2017-18 school year. I ask that you read this consent letter and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Background Information:

This study is being conducted by Taka Mays, doctoral student in the department of Education Leadership and Policy at Florida State University. The purpose of this study is to explore how different kindergarten teachers in the same school approach and implement the notion of effective teaching in their racially diverse classrooms. Research questions to be answered are related to how kindergarten teachers define, perceive and implement effective teaching practices and what accountability measures shape their perceptions of effective teaching within their classrooms.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to participate in three audio taped interviews that will be scheduled based on your availability and spread between September and the beginning of November. A fourth interview may be needed in December as a follow-up to any unanswered questions related to the study. In addition to the interviews, I respectively ask to conduct a total of seven observations in your classroom. These observations will not be conducted to determine whether you are implementing correct teaching practices, but specifically to understand your perspective (challenges and or benefits) of teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Risks and benefits of being in the Study:

The information/data collected during this research study will not be reported with your identifiable information. There are no immediate benefits of participating in this study.

Compensation:

A \$25 gift card will be provided to the teachers who participate in the full length of the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent permitted by law. The records will be stored in a locked filed cabinet until the research process is complete. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to

research including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). Again, the purpose of this study is simply to explore your perception of effective teaching in racially diverse kindergarten classrooms.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University Leon County Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

Again, I will be the researcher conducting this study. You may ask any question you have now by calling me at [REDACTED] or you may contact by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Ayesha Khurshid at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than me, you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB at 2010 Levy Street, Research Building B, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742, or 850-644-8633, or by email at humansubjects@fsu.edu

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

FSU Human Subjects Committee approved on 07/24/17. Void after 07/23/18. HSC # 2017-21154

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

From: Human Subjects <humansubjects@fsu.edu>
Sent: Monday, July 24, 2017 2:11 PM
To: Taka Mays
Cc: akhurshid@fsu.edu
Subject: Use of Human Subjects in Research - Approval Memorandum

The Florida State University
Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 7/24/2017

To: Taka Mays

Address:

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

Teaching Perceptions and Practices of Effective Teaching in Racially Diverse Kindergarten Classrooms

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 7/23/2018 you must request a renewal of approval for

continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is FWA00000168/IRB number IRB00000446.

Cc: Ayesha Khurshid, Chair
HSC No. 2017.21154

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

TAKA SHENA MAYS

EDUCATION

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Doctor of Education – Educational Leadership and Policy Florida State University | May 2018 |
| Master of Science – Educational Leadership/Administration Florida State University | December 2004 |
| Bachelor of Science – Elementary Education Florida State University | December 1999 |

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Principalships

| | |
|---|------------------|
| J. Michael Conley Elementary, Tallahassee, Florida – Principal Present | July 2014 – |
| Oak Ridge Elementary, Tallahassee, Florida – Principal 2014 | July 2009 – June |
| Gilchrist Elementary, Tallahassee, Florida – Assistant Principal 2009 (2008 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award) | July 2006 – June |

Teaching Experience

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Roberts Elementary, Grade 3 Tallahassee, Florida 2006 | July 2005 – June |
| Roberts Elementary, Grade 2 Tallahassee, Florida 2005 | June 2001 – June |
| Stockbridge Elementary, Grade 2 Stockbridge, Georgia 2001 | July 2000 – June |

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Florida Association of School Administrators | 2014 – Present |
| Leon County Schools – Teacher Evaluation Review Committee (TERC) | 2013 – Present |
| Leon County Schools – District Budget Committee | 2014 – 2016 |

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATIONS

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Program Evaluation Certificate | 2017 |
| LCS School Improvement (Reform) Initiative | 2012 – Present |
| Professional Florida Education Teaching Certificate Grades 1-6 | 2016-2021 |
| Education Leadership/Administration PK-12 Certification | 2016-2021 |
| School Principal PK-12 Certification | 2016-2021 |
| District Training for Level II Principal Certification | 2009-2011 |
| ESOL (60 Credit Hours) | 2009 |
| District Wide Accreditation Training | 2008 |
| Classroom Walk-Through Training for the Evaluation of Teachers | 2006 |
| Ruby Payne Diversity Training | 2006 |

HONORS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Best and Brightest Principal Recipient <i>J. Michael Conley Elementary School at SouthWood – Principal</i> | 2018 |
| Glenn-Howell Distinguished Minority Educator of the Year <i>J. Michael Conley Elementary School at SouthWood – Principal</i> | 2016 – 2017 |
| Exemplary Service Award (Given by Oak Ridge Faculty & Staff) <i>Oak Ridge Elementary - Principal</i> | 2014 |
| Appreciation and Dedication Award (Given by Fifth Grade Classes) <i>Oak Ridge Elementary - Principal</i> | 2013 – 2014 |
| National Blue Ribbon School Recipient <i>Gilchrist Elementary – Assistant Principal</i> | 2008 |
| Glenn-Howell Distinguished Minority Educator of the Year <i>Gilchrist Elementary – Assistant Principal</i> | 2006 – 2007 |
| Glenn-Howell Distinguished Minority Educator of the Year <i>Roberts Elementary – Grade 2 Teacher</i> | 2002 – 2003 |

References available upon request.