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Navigating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: The Jumpstart Hartford Model
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Abstract

Culturally responsive pedagogy attempts to dismantle the racist structures that uphold the educational system. It acknowledges that the experiences, cultures, and traditions of marginalized communities are often missing from schooling, and tries to incorporate them by altering curriculum and day-to-day classroom practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, little research has examined whether and how teachers of color utilize culturally relevant pedagogy. Jumpstart is a national program that seeks to equalize educational opportunity in pre-kindergarten by providing language and literacy services as well as social and emotional development (Jumpstart, 2019). I, therefore, posited the following research questions: How does Jumpstart Hartford utilize culturally responsive pedagogy? How do Jumpstart members understand culturally responsive pedagogy? How do members Jumpstart Hartford believe that they embody the various aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy? In order to assess their utilization and conceptualization of the practice, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Jumpstart Hartford administrators and Corps members. Interviews focused on their positionality, their classroom practices, and their navigation of classroom spaces. Jumpstart Hartford staff emphasized the social-emotional aspects of learning and cultural synchronicity in student-teacher relationships. Staff deemphasized the importance of physical materials. These findings do not disqualify Ladson-Billings' notions of culturally responsive pedagogy, but provide a different perspective about the practice within non-traditional classroom settings. Practically, since it targets children who are often disregarded by the educational system, introducing Jumpstart as a full-day pre-kindergarten or incorporating its curriculum into preschool programs could be an important step in helping marginalized students find their voice in schooling.

Introduction

Little research has explored the experiences of teachers of color as educators. Through the research of Kohli seeks to illuminate the experiences of teachers of color and specifically women of color educators, her work demonstrates that educators of color experienced significant racism throughout their own education through racial slurs, cultural invisibility in the classroom, and the attitudes and actions of school staff (Kohli, 2009). These experiences reflected in her research, particularly in regards to the cultural invisibility in the classroom and the attitudes and actions of school staff, reflect a systematic mismatch amongst the students in the classroom, the curriculum and the teachers in front of the classroom. Through their work, teachers of color seek to address these inequalities to provide differing experiences to future students. However, little research has delved further into the intentional practices of teachers of color to dismantle the racist structures that uphold the educational system.

One attempt to address this has been through the approach of culturally responsive pedagogy. This culturally responsive practice is defined as (referred to interchangeably with culturally relevant pedagogy throughout the duration of this research), the practice of establishing “a dynamic or synergistic relationship between home and school culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This practice acknowledges that the experiences, cultures and traditions of marginalized communities are often missing from the day to day context in schooling, through the curriculum, practices, strategies, and perspectives that are encouraged and salient in the classroom. However, Ladson-Billings suggests, these practices are meant to address teachers who do not reflect their students and have different lived experiences than their students. Therefore, these practices are intended to guide White teachers in their navigation of diverse students and classroom spaces. Consequently, little literature has interrogated the classroom

practices of educators of color and the ways in which teachers of color utilize or do not utilize culturally relevant pedagogy.

Programs like Jumpstart, a national intervention program that seeks to equalize educational opportunity in the pre-kindergarten through concerted efforts towards language and literacy acquisition as well as social and emotional development, address this gap between the dominant culture and the exclusion of marginalized identities to ensure that these students, that are often forgotten and excluded, can achieve academic and social excellence (Jumpstart, 2019). In the context of Jumpstart Hartford, this program exclusively predominantly employees both administrators and Corps members of color since its inception in 2016 due to the vast population of color within the city of Hartford. Due to my positionality as a Corps member of the program and woman of color, I was well aware of the practices of the program to intentionally represent its diverse community of learners through bilingual nursery rhymes and books, collaborative lessons with the students and educators, and racial representation of students through the authority figures of the program. Therefore, the context of Jumpstart Hartford was ideal to question: How does Jumpstart Hartford utilize culturally responsive pedagogy? How do Jumpstart members understand culturally responsive pedagogy? How do members of the Jumpstart Hartford program (both administrators and Corps members) believe that they embody the various aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy?

Through this research, a new perspective about the experiences of educators of color can be gained as well as the practices that are incorporated into their teaching in order to be responsive to the diversity present in the classroom as little is known regarding these experiences and practices. Further, this research will demonstrate the ways in which a national program can be an effective mechanism to combat inequalities in the classroom and ensure that children are

well prepared to enter later academic years and have the skills for both their academic and non-academic learning. Additionally, this research can help incorporate the practices of culturally responsive pedagogy into full-time preschool programs and curriculum for various programs. Ultimately, this research will provide nuance to the ways in which society understands educators of color and their purpose as educators of children akin to their experiences as well as their teaching practices and advocate for culturally responsive techniques and practices.

Literature Review

Definition of the Key Term

The curator of the term *culturally relevant pedagogy*, Gloria Ladson-Billings first hypothesized that this practice would seek to “...better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Not only did this approach demonstrate that there is a difference between the cultures that are appreciated in the classroom setting, but also calls for the restructuring of the curriculum to encompass the home cultures, traditions and cultural and social capital that all students can bring to the classroom. Ladson-Billings’ acknowledges that the dominant White culture is the normative knowledge that is recognized and accredited to the important and useful information that students must learn throughout their education. The knowledge and skills that other students bear are deemed extracurricular and additive to the curriculum. In that way, these perspectives are silenced and erased from the day to day functioning of the educational system. Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy, as Ladson-Billings describes is the intentional practice to restore the values and knowledges that students that are not traditionally attended to, are given the opportunity to both be acknowledged but also respected and highly regarded. These students are

not simply a decorative piece to complement a lesson but rather are vital to the success of the classroom and the educational system holistically.

Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogy, under Ladson-Billings encompasses three crucial tenets: high expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008). In terms of high expectations, Ladson-Billings asserts that teachers must maintain high expectations of the students in their classroom by maintaining a rigorous academic curricula, alongside ensuring that students are held to high standards. Teachers must believe that their students are capable of achieving the work presented in the classroom because they have the intelligence and the skillset to achieve and excel. Additionally, the teacher must be able to utilize their students' strengths and their own prior knowledge to build their students' confidence within themselves as learners and people. Cultural competency dictates that that teachers reshape the curriculum to encompass a diverse range of students' backgrounds, cultures and traditionally unappreciated capital. This restructuring must be intentional and purposeful. Teachers also must utilize the previous knowledge that their students have acquired over time through their home lives and cultures as these forms of knowledge are also valuable to the educational setting. Teachers also must ensure that their cultural competency bridges the divide between the school and the community of the students by extending the relationship to encompass students' lives at home. This can be accomplished through the teacher's active participation in the students' communities through attendance at events and celebrations native to the students or engaging with the families of the students with invitations to the school and other events. Lastly, respective to critical consciousness, teachers must actively approach texts and other streams of information to remain critical of the portrayals of their students and the communities that their students are apart of (Morrison et al., 2008).

Though these are difficult to enact in the classroom, teachers must attempt to achieve as many of these components of culturally responsive pedagogy to insure the most accepting classroom possible.

Importance of Materials and Curriculum

However, Ladson-Billings only approaches culturally responsive pedagogy within White teachers that teach students of color but does not address the differences that may occur when teachers of color are instead, the focal point of the classroom. This research has been limited as the perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy has systematically portrayed the importance of White teachers' enactment of culturally responsive curriculum, techniques and lessons. Despite the newness of this concept, recent research has delved into the role of teachers of color within classrooms of students of color. For example, Gist (2016) found that teachers of color, particularly Latinx teachers given the scope of her study, felt the additive pressures and expectations to ensure that the students in the classroom felt represented in the classroom as much as they possibly could feel on a consistent basis. Therefore, the three Latinx teachers that Gist interviewed often tailored the curriculum to encompass their own cultures and those of the students in their respective classrooms. These teachers sought to ensure that course readings, in-class activities, and assignments were reflective of the children and their families. This meant that readings were often in English and Spanish, students engaged frequently in collaborative work to gain knowledge and exchange ideas with one another, and class lessons approached important Latinx authors to demonstrate that Latinx culture can permeate and be apart of mainstream society (Gist, 2006). In this manner, from the perspective of Gist's work, culturally responsive pedagogy often takes form through the intentional practices of the teachers within the space of the classroom. Additionally, Brown & Lee (2012) found that to enact culturally

responsive pedagogy is a lonely endeavor as these practices deviate from the norm and are not respected and supported across all school districts and schools. To be culturally responsive, one would be willing to face criticisms and critiques of one's teaching methodology and gain little to no support from teachers and administrators alike. However, teachers demonstrated, that regardless of the difficulties of their preferred orientation, their students deserve to know that their cultures and traditions were worth incorporation and integration to the classroom.

Representation Matters: Teachers as Models

Nevertheless, not all research has deemed curriculum to be the only mechanism to effectively enact culturally responsive pedagogy. Instead, other research has illustrated that the mere presence of authority figures of color such as teachers can prove to be critical to students of color. Barrero, Flores & de la Cruz (2016) posed that modeling, or the simple representation of another person who is physically similar to their students can have a large impact on the functioning of the classroom and the self-esteem, the sense of worth and the confidence that students can acquire within the classroom and their holistic world view. By simply existing as an authority figure in the classroom as a teacher, the most highly esteemed role in the classroom, students are given a positive figure to aspire to, gain comfort with and confide in, as this is often missing from most students' educational experiences. From that perspective, Barrero et al., suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy is not just the physical materials that are brought to the classroom, but also the role and importance of positive figures that mirror the students in the classroom.

Teachers Caught in a Double Bind: Academic "Success" or Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In addition to the difficulties of the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy within the classroom due to the lack of institutional support, teachers often are pressured to

“teach to the test” in order to ensure their own security within the school. Therefore, as Achinstein & Ogawa (2012) present, despite their desire to represent the diversity of their students, teachers often found themselves obligated to choose between their ideological preferences and standardized testing results. This is the double bind (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). Though culturally responsive pedagogy was the main goal of the teachers featured in the study, the constraints of standardized testing left teachers with tough choices: “Whose knowledge counts: cultural and linguistic relevance or standardization? What type of classroom climate prevails: a community of learners or teacher transmission? Who gets left behind: social justice or enhanced test scores?” (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). These questions not only lay the foundation for culturally responsive pedagogy but also illustrate the choices that teachers must make and subsequently must sacrifice in order to attain the results necessary to prove that their students have “learned” the appropriate skills for their given course level. Ultimately, teachers chose to rid many culturally responsive practices in their classroom to demonstrate that their students were academically “prepared” and to serve as role models to their students, as teachers of color themselves, that academic preparedness can serve as a launching tool for social mobility. Achinstein & Ogawa suggest that although culturally relevant practices may be important to the teachers, as it was to the teachers involved in their research, academic learning may take precedence over the values of the teachers and additionally, as all of the teachers in the study were also teachers of color, they knew the value of academics in their own lives as integral to their success. Therefore, in the best interests of the students, academic achievement is inferred to be most important to ensure that a different future is possible for their lives.

Though the literature encompasses varying perspectives regarding teachers of color and their teaching practices, little research specifically delves into culturally responsive pedagogy

within educators of color. Therefore, this research seeks to illuminate these experiences while also expanding current understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Data and Methods

To conduct my research, I desired to both observe the trainings of Jumpstart as new members are trained to be in the classroom, the expectations of the program and the information necessary to be in the classroom and to conduct interviews with various Jumpstart Corps members and administrators of the program who have different amounts of exposure to the classrooms that Jumpstart has access to within the city of Hartford.

Firstly, I met with two administrators of the Jumpstart Hartford program. I then conducted these interviews with the participants with various questions regarding their initial interest in the early childhood literacy program, their experience in the classroom and their own beliefs regarding culturally responsive pedagogy in relationship to their own experiences in the educational system in order to understand their beliefs about the role of Jumpstart and its benefits and drawbacks.

After interviewing the two Jumpstart Hartford administrators, I then contacted other various Jumpstart Hartford Corps members who had at least one year of experience in the program as to demonstrate that they had a certain level of experience within the program. I contacted these individuals via email after meeting with the administrators after I was provided with a list of the prior Corps members through the snowball technique. I then set up various meetings with these Corps members to ask about their experience while serving in the program, the skills that they utilized while in the classroom, and their relationships to the children that Jumpstart Hartford serves in relation to their own prior experiences. The interview guide is attached at the end of the paper (Appendix I).

Ultimately, I conducted a total of four qualitative interviews with 2 administrators of the program. One identified as a Latina, given the name Maria throughout the duration of this thesis and another who identified as Black, under the pseudonym Craig. I conducted 2 interviews with 2 Corps Members. One interviewee identified as a Black man, named Taylor. The second interviewee identified as a Black woman and is referred to as Ciara.

Following each interview, the interviews were transcribed utilizing the system Trint. Then, all interviews were thematically coded to find emergent themes and analyzed.

Limitations

Although I initially planned for participant observations during training sessions of new Corps members of the Jumpstart Hartford program, I was unable to access these spaces as the Jumpstart Hartford was behind schedule for the 2019-2020 school year at the time of the writing of this thesis. However, I then inquired about other Jumpstart trainings that occurred at other sites nearby, such as the New Britain site and University of Connecticut site and was informed that I would be able to observe classroom sessions at these sites, instead of Hartford sites. However, given the nature of my research, specific to the city of Hartford, I chose against this as it would not accurately portray the experiences of people of color within Jumpstart as both in the New Britain and University of Connecticut sites, the Corps members and the administrators are predominantly White. Though I could have utilized these differing experiences to compare and contrast the notions and understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy amongst White people and people of color, I determined that ultimately, it would change the scope of my research and I felt that the experiences of teachers of color is often unknown and under-researched and a perspective in need of being told and continued to be explored beyond this thesis. Therefore, I only chose to continue with the qualitative interviews.

Because the Jumpstart Hartford site was behind schedule for the current year, I was only able to interview people who had been involved in the program for more than one year. No new Jumpstart Hartford members were interviewed consequently. Therefore, I was unable to gain the approach of newly hired Corps Members to ask about their motivation to join the program and the extent to which they felt that the Jumpstart training session prepared them to be in the classroom and the extent to which trainings addressed culture and diversity and practices to ensure that they were sensitive to the backgrounds of the students and utilize this knowledge to navigate the classroom setting in their actions and their relationships with students. If allowed more time, I would have conducted interviews with those who had recently been hired to Jumpstart to understand their perspectives regarding culturally responsive pedagogy.

Additionally, the limited quantity of interviews makes it difficult to extrapolate the information found within the interviews to a larger context. Therefore, the results may only be able to be utilized in order to foster a foundational understanding of the Jumpstart Hartford program, Jumpstart as an organization as a whole and the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy within the pre-kindergarten setting amongst teachers of color. Further researcher would aim to address the actual functioning of culturally responsive pedagogy in the ways that it can and does exist in the classroom through participant observations. More time for this research could attempt to gain more interviews with more efforts and resources towards recruitment as this lack of interviews served as a large barrier to the research.

Lastly, as Jumpstart as a program is an intervention program, meaning that lessons are taught twice per week, for 2 hours per session, it is difficult to assess its effectiveness as a culturally responsive tool as it only engages with students on an infrequent basis. It is difficult to measure whether or not culturally responsive techniques are only being utilized by the Jumpstart

model by Jumpstart or if there are techniques that the teachers are also enacting during regular class time. Furthermore, as it is an intervention program and does not replace regular class sessions, it does not have the additive pressures of assessment mechanisms such as standardized testing. This is important because it does not encompass equal challenges as culturally responsive pedagogy enacted within regular classrooms as it does not need to fulfill district and school requirements. Therefore, it is difficult to connect the culturally responsive tactics of this program to the utilization of such techniques in a classroom with a rigorous set of standards to meet.

Findings

Symmetry = Motivation and Desire

One of the most emergent themes in the research has been the frequent mention of how similar Jumpstart Hartford Corps members and administrators believe that they are to the students that Jumpstart serves within the program. All interviewees cited this symmetry between themselves and the students. This belief of similarity has been cited as the reason for their interest and their involvement in the program as they believe that the students in the program are mirror images of their educational experiences and of those from their home neighborhoods. Therefore, they feel a strong debt to support the students in the program. For example, one Jumpstart Hartford administrator, Maria, who previously also served as a pre-kindergarten teacher in the Hartford school district discussed the similarity of the experiences that she often witnessed as a Hartford native during her childhood to the experiences of students in the classroom:

“I see myself in all of them. I personally did not grow up worrying about socioeconomic things but I did grow up in Hartford and those were all my friends. I was very grateful to have

two parents at home, I had a house my whole life, and from a young age, I saw all the differences, and I never thought it was bad or good, I just thought it was different. As I got older, I did see how that stuff affected my friends, having one parent, not having a place to stay, not eating and things like that ...so I always knew when I was older, I was going to do something to give back and with children and to work with people who needed resources....I never saw them as less than though” (Maria, 2019).

As demonstrated by the quote above, their perceived similarity to the students of Jumpstart Hartford due to their race and class and the implications of these various identities, was influential in determining their motivations for this work. In addition, as described by Barreros, Flores & de la Cruz, Jumpstart Hartford members, both administrators and teachers, due to their common racial and socioeconomic statuses as their students, desired to serve as positive role model figures and therefore, took on this responsibility to work for this program to embody the representation that students are often not given in their educational experiences (Borreros, Flores & de la Cruz, 2016). Jumpstart Hartford members, both administrators and Corps members are driven by their own educational experiences to shift the narrative in the classroom and help their students perceive themselves as valuable in the classroom as this was cited frequently to be missing from their educational experiences. Therefore, the Jumpstart Hartford program, due to the intrinsic motivation that its employees have to represent and help students that they deem as incredibly similar to themselves, is able to have a strong impact on the students that the program serves as its employees are often reflections of their experiences.

Further, Craig also expressed that due to his own personal experiences as a student throughout the Hartford school system and then as a teacher in Hartford led to his motivation to

serve as a Jumpstart administrator as Jumpstart presented the opportunity to be an agent of change:

“So at that time I was actually a middle school teacher and I got really sick and tired. I looked to Students magazine, tired of the politics within education. Politics within education now is very corrupt. If you know education like you do, you know that there are certain people who are run in education. And these are the powers that be like the Gates family and the Wal-Mart family. They're the ones that's really dictating how education looks today and how it looks tomorrow. And so just because all the policy politics that came in, it kind of really made me want to get out of teaching in the classroom” (Craig, 2019).

This opportunity alongside his own symmetry to the students served by Jumpstart program were his primary motivations to engage within the program as an administrator:

“But yeah, when I see these two eyes, I see myself. I grew up in a half of our school system. You know, I grew up in those same communities that they're from the same place that they're from, you know? You know, when I see them, I tend to think about what they're going home to, you know, the struggles that they've gone home to, because those are some of the similar struggles that I went home to” (Craig, 2019).

As the literature suggests through the accounts of both Maria and Craig, this cultural synchronicity, defined as not only the mere racial-congruency between students and their teachers, or in the case of Maria and Craig as administrators and figureheads of the Jumpstart Hartford program, are able to have large impacts on the students served by the program due to their lived experiences that reflect the experiences of the students within the classroom (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Due to this synchronicity or symmetry amongst students with those in leadership positions such as Jumpstart Corps members and administrators, “bring to their work a

deep understanding of the cultural experiences of these learners” and therefore, bring this motivation into their work (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, this does not mean that solely racial similarity accounts for the adequate representation that students need in order to succeed. This challenges the notions proposed by Barreros, Flores & de la Cruz who assert that the simple doing of the racial representation of their students within teachers is more beneficial to students of color, whereas Villegas & Irvine argue that it is beyond race, but rather the cultural similarity to their students, which also encompasses race, that is necessary for students to be adequately supported and understood within their classrooms. Therefore, the Jumpstart Corps members and administrators are not motivated due to their physical similarities to the students served within the program, but rather by their holistic experiences both as people with similar lived experiences to their students and as people that have witnessed educational inequity in the classrooms that they have served. Ultimately, this demonstrates that in order to fully enact culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, one must go further than to physically resemble their students, but to have the motivation and desire to be an advocate for these students and holistically understand their lived experiences, often due to one’s own similar lived experiences, in order to provide these students with the understandings necessary to create a culture of acceptance, understanding, and trust within the classroom.

How Important are Materials?

Due to the literature that specifically dictates that in order to successfully implement culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum and materials must be changed in order to focus on the cultures of the students in the class, I believed that I would find evidence of this in the qualitative interviews. Though Jumpstart only utilizes books, for example, in the native languages of the students served by the program and that demonstrate people of color in positive

manners, such as being business owners or embodying their home cultures, these materials were not deemed important aspects of the program. Both the administrators and Corps members mentioned that materials could be helpful tools in the classroom, but not integral to the program functioning or even to the students. Participants in the research rather defined emotional skills the most important aspects to bring into the classroom as these skills would be most helpful for the students:

“Well, one thing I think in school is that I think a male presence is important. I know about too many, but I know the amount of numbers of male figures is very important because I realized that a lot of my kids don’t have father figures. I think honestly, I think only one of them, one [with] a father” (Tyler, 2019).

Drawing upon his previous experiences as a teacher in another teaching program and as a current Jumpstart Hartford Corps member, Tyler notes that the materials are not most significant to the students, but instead the emotional tools and skills that teachers, as authoritative figures within the classroom, bring to the classroom. This sentiment was also expressed by Ciara who also emphasized the importance of all aspects of the program, but did not particularly emphasize materials:

“Yeah, I think that every aspect of Jumpstart is important, whether it's like being an engaged leader or being excited about teaching a student or being excited about learning. Because if you're not excited about what you're bringing to the people, how do you expect the students to be excited? Like books, like really engage in books or books that teach lessons? It’s that that captivates the students to want to listen, to want to learn” (Ciara, 2019).

The quotes above question the traditional understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy. In its original conceptualization, culturally responsive pedagogy calls for an

uprooting of the traditional school curriculum which silences the narratives of students that do not pertain to the dominant groups in society as mandatory in order to emphasize the importance of every student and their respective home cultures, customs, histories and knowledge.

However, when asked about the materials utilized within the Jumpstart model, participants cited sociocultural awareness as the most important tool to bring into the classroom of diverse students. As defined by Villegas and Lucas (2007), this sociocultural consciousness encompasses “the awareness that a person's worldview is not universal but is profoundly influenced by life experiences, as mediated by a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and social class” (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Instead of emphasizing physical materials, Jumpstart members thought more conceptually and metaphorically about the tools necessary to be successful in the classroom and noted that materials could be useful in complementing lessons, but if their own awareness about their students was lacking, this could be detrimental. As Taylor astutely expressed, his role as a Black man and as an educator is most important for his navigation of the classroom and his awareness of the backgrounds that many students may be products of and therefore, utilizes his positionality as a tool. Similarly, Ciara defined materials as the excitement and attitudes that one can bring into the classroom, non-tangible factors that may influence the ways in which the classroom functions and the comfortability and attitudes of the students. While books, for example, can be attached to the lessons and may be important in the development of the lessons, the students will most easily discern the emotions, attitudes and feelings of the “leader” of the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary for the teachers present in the classroom to foster an environment of engagement and connection to cultivate learning within the space. This notion of sociocultural consciousness as a stronger tool for connecting with students and as integral to culturally responsive pedagogy is worth further investigation as it

may oppose or contradict the understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy that have long influenced the practice.

Small Gains, Big Successes

Finally, the last emergent theme regarding this research pertains to the definition of success provided by the interviewees in regards to the program and the students' learning and development, both in the context of Jumpstart and most generally within their traditional classroom setting. Due to Jumpstart's role as an early intervention literacy program, the participants frequently cited the importance of the development of the early language skills that are important to their academic trajectory. However, the participants did not contain their responses to solely acknowledge the academic skills that students needed to continue on to be successful in future academic years. Participants also referred to the social, emotional tools for students to have to be successful. Therefore, it is more powerful for Jumpstart members to deem that the students were making positive steps in their overall development:

“Their experiences, the way they think, the way they talk even like I want. And that's what preschool is all about. Preschool is really all about exposure to those experiences, in my personal opinion. I do think we should be teaching letters and colors and numbers and all that, but if they don't get it, it's OK. Like some kids in school, you know, preschool is more about the exposure and how to be in a group setting. How do how to interact with other people your age, how to interact with your peers, how to interact with people who are not your age” (Maria, 2019).

In this regard, the learning that is most important in this early age is the social and emotional learning, which posits that “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process whereby children are able to acknowledge and manage their emotions, recognize the emotions of

others, develop empathy, make good decisions, establish positive friendships, and handle challenges and situations effectively” (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth & Young, 2012). This form of learning is not inherently academic, yet it may have ramifications on academic learning as the perception of inappropriate behavior can lead to a milieu of negative outcomes; thus, emphasizing the importance of social and emotional development within the earliest academic years. Though kindergarten has been frequently acknowledged as “boot camp” as it is meant to socialize the young student and place expectations on behaviors, the Jumpstart Hartford model contradicts this ideology (Gracey, 1972). Rather, the Jumpstart program details that it intends to academically prepare the student while also developing the student’s social and emotional development, rather than focus on traditionally acceptable behaviors (Jumpstart, 2019). Though these elements of the Jumpstart model may unintentionally reinforce these dominant notions of the role of the student, due to the impact of its culturally responsive foundation, it instead helps students become acclimated to the academic setting while helping to reinforce the importance of the cultures and diversity present in the classroom. This notion is supported in the literature that critiques Gracey’s original ideology regarding the role of kindergarten.

Though Jumpstart is a pre-kindergarten program, it is still applicable as there are similar functions of prekindergarten and kindergarten in the development of students. In their critique of Gracey, Thompson & Thompson (2015) assert that although not all students are socialized under the culturally responsive model, these techniques are prominent in this academic year and therefore, do not create a militaristic environment. Instead, under this model, each student is considered an individual, with experiences and knowledge pertaining to their home culture that are then incorporated into the structure of the classroom:

“Whereas boot camp brutally strips new recruits of their former selves, breaks down the individual, and resocializes them with a new sense of self and identity, kindergarten reinforces each child’s former self, and builds self-esteem, all the while also socializing the child into the student role. This anticipatory socialization is done in a nurturing style as opposed to the forceful tactics of the military. There is no strong former identity to destroy, so kindergarten is really a new and important phase of early childhood socialization. Kindergarten teachers build upon a child’s former self to teach children that they have more than one identity and one of those (possibly the most important to childhood while they are in school) is that of student” (Thompson & Thompson, 2015).

As demonstrated in the account of Maria, the Jumpstart Hartford program focuses on this aspect of students’ growth. Students are all believed to be capable of academic learning, and therefore, the emotional and social learning of students is emphasized as this form of learning, which is most often taught through experiential learning, is prominent to the culturally responsive pedagogy enacted in the classroom. Students are taught how to form relationships with peers and adults in a manner that allows the students to still maintain their sense of identity created in their home lives through the ability to communicate with their peers and adults in their first language, for example. In this way, the students’ cultures still play a prominent role in the classroom. Therefore, under this model, Jumpstart Hartford employs a mechanism to ensure that the students are socialized into the prekindergarten while also maintaining their cultural integrity.

In summation, the Jumpstart Hartford program does not entirely meet the standards originally implemented by Ladson-Billings’ conception of culturally responsive pedagogy, it provides nuance to the understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy through its increased

focus on its desire to provide positive figures to students as well as the young children's social-emotional development.

Discussion

In order to understand how Jumpstart Hartford utilize culturally responsive pedagogy and the extent to which these techniques are implemented or not throughout the daily function of the classroom, the understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy as the original understanding of this technique involved a narrow understanding of this practice. The Jumpstart Hartford program rather emphasizes the social-emotional aspects of learning in addition to the role of cultural synchronicity in the relationships that students have with the figures present in the classroom. Further, the Jumpstart Hartford program deemphasized the importance of physical materials within the classroom. These findings do not disqualify the notions of culturally responsive pedagogy originally set by Ladson-Billings but provide a different perspective about the practice in modernity and within non-traditional classroom settings like the settings provided by Jumpstart.

In Ladson-Billings' original iteration of culturally responsive pedagogy, the three fundamental tenets of her ideology were conceptualized as high standards, cultural competence and critical consciousness. The Jumpstart Hartford model does not inherently abide by these tenets, in the traditional sense, but given her redefined manner of understanding the culturally relevant teacher, the Jumpstart Hartford model fulfills this new perspective. In the book entitled *City Kids, City Schools: More Reports from the Front Row*, Ladson-Billings defines that to be culturally relevant to fulfill the standard critical consciousness frames the ways in which teachers think about their students. The culturally responsive teacher:

“.....envision their students as being filled with possibilities. They imagine somewhere in the classroom is the next Nobel laureate (a Toni Morrison), the next neurosurgeon (a Benjamin Carson), or the next pioneer for social justice (a Fannie Lou Hamer). This perspective moves the teacher from a perspective of sympathy (“you poor dear”) to one of informed empathy. This informed empathy requires the teacher to feel with the students rather than feel for them. Feeling with students builds a sense of solidarity between the teacher and the students but does not excuse the students from working hard in pursuit of excellence. Culturally relevant teachers recognize that their students are ‘school dependent’” (Ayre, Ladson-Billings & Mitchie, 2005).

In this perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy that has been redefined, the Jumpstart Hartford through its increased focus on cultural synchronicity and social-emotional development, fulfills the understanding cultural competence and critical consciousness as well as high expectations. In addition, the ‘school dependent’ notion regards the ideology that these traditionally marginalized students need their schools to provide them with the resources necessary to excel. The Jumpstart Hartford program, has the rigorous standard to provide their students positive role model figures and the social, emotional development learning that is not emphasized within the day to day curriculum of schooling. In this way, the navigation of culturally responsive pedagogy has expanded to encompass this nuanced perspective that the program provides for students. To provide culturally responsive pedagogy is to provide high expectations these students alongside a desire to reflect the students’ cultural and lived experiences, with a need to ensure that students are provided the non-academic skill sets to continue to be successful in their futures, both academic and non-academic.

Future Directions

However, due to the qualitative interview nature of this project, future research should aim to bridge the gap between the interviews and participant observation. Because the interviews only address the ways in which Jumpstart members believe and perceive themselves enacting culturally responsive pedagogy, and did not include participant observations to compare their interviews and the actual classroom practices, this serves as a limitation to the research as it only demonstrates the work that members believe they do in the classroom. However, future research can address this by way of participant observations. Participant observations can allow for this information to be compared across interviews and field notes. This can give a differing perspective on the ideas represented in the interviews and give a full representation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

In addition, this research begs to question the Jumpstart program nationally as the program may differ depending on the location and the demographics of the program as well as its status as an intervention program. Because of the context of the Hartford location, these results may be skewed due to the large amount of people of color that are represented in the Jumpstart Hartford program, both students and members. Though this was particularly advantageous in the context of this research, further research should address the variance within the program and the likelihood of engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy. This can be helpful to distinguish the relevance of culturally responsive pedagogy within the program as well as assess the importance of this pedagogy to an intervention program as Jumpstart's status as an intervention program facilitates its existence and incorporation into the core mission and curriculum as in traditional classroom settings, the pressures of testing and key concepts to be learned at the end of each grade level drives the day to day functioning of the classroom. Additionally, because of the prekindergarten grade's status as low stakes due to the lack of testing and formalized

assessments, it is also important to assess the effect of culturally responsive pedagogy in other grade levels and whether or not it is utilized. The constraints of testing and assessments may have an impact on whether or not the curriculum has the ability and space to incorporate these techniques into the framework of the classroom.

Lastly, due to the lack of literature and research surrounding teachers of color, further research should seek to engage with teachers of color to learn about their experiences and the ways in which they navigate the classroom and educational system. Research could address how they bring their own identities into the classroom and actively incorporate their identities into the day to day function of the classroom as well as how teachers of color may still perpetuate dominant and normative rhetoric and actions and how this information may be beneficial in the current understanding of teachers of color and their role as positive figures for students of color. This research could help to prove that regardless of one's identities, one must make active efforts to represent their students and advocate for them and ultimately help to reform traditional teacher education programs that do not comprehensively address diversity, culture and marginalized identities in the classroom space. Further, this research could help to advance support systems for current teachers of color and aggregate intentional support systems for future teachers of color.

Policy Recommendation

In terms of policy recommendations, this research demonstrates that programs like Jumpstart Hartford has value to help socialize young children of color as this program emphasizes the visibility and utility of cultural synchronicity and social-emotional development. If universal pre-kindergarten is now mandated by law, the expansion of such programs akin to Jumpstart can be expanded to go beyond an early intervention program and to be fully developed

as an option for pre-kindergarten. This program emphasizes the importance between symmetry amongst members and students and allows students to involve their home cultures into the classroom while also supporting the student to gain skills that will accompany them throughout their life-long education, both formal and informal education. Further, as it meant to target children who are often an afterthought and dismissed in the educational system, this program helps to enfranchise these marginalized experiences and make intentional and systematic changes to the normative and dominant curriculum. By way of introducing Jumpstart as a full-day pre-kindergarten or extrapolating its curriculum to other preschools and other programs, the voices of the often voiceless will be restored.

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Appendix I

Interview Guide

The purpose of this research study is to understand how Jumpstart can be a better program for preschoolers in Hartford. Participants will be asked to answer questions about opinions about how the program can be improved. We estimate that this will require 20 minutes of your time.

The benefits of this study are provide information about how offer better services to the young children involved in the early development program. The study involves only minimal risk, meaning that the probability of harm or discomfort is not greater than ordinarily encountered in daily life.

To compensate you for participating in this study, you will receive a gift card to Dunkin Donuts.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I am free to stop or withdraw my participation at any time without any penalty.

I understand that all of my responses in this study are completely confidential, and will be used only for research purposes. If I have any questions about this study or want more information, I am free to contact:

Mabel Silva mabel.silva@trincoll.edu, 215-939-5841, Trinity College

Daniel Douglas, daniel.douglas@trincoll.edu, Trinity College

Or contact the Trinity College IRB administrator via email: irb@trincoll.edu

For Trainees

1. How did you find out about Jumpstart? What influenced your decision to work for the program?
2. Tell me how you felt about training. What are you excited about? What are you nervous about?
3. What kind of classroom materials did you learn about in training?
4. What kind of training did you receive in regards to collaborating with students?
5. What did you learn about the kids that are in Jumpstart?
6. How are you preparing to work with these students?
7. Do you think of these children as like you or not like you? In what ways? Why or why not?
8. How will that affect your work in the classroom?

9. What does a challenging day/lesson look like in the Jumpstart program?
10. What does a successful day/lesson look like in the Jumpstart program?

For Experienced Employees

1. How did you find out about Jumpstart?
2. Tell about why you decided to work with Jumpstart again? What went well working with Jumpstart? What are some of the challenges of working with Jumpstart?
3. What kind of materials have you used in Jumpstart classrooms?
4. Do you collaborate students within the classroom? How do you do it?
5. Tell me about the students that Jumpstart serves.
6. How have you prepared to work with the students in the past?
7. Do you think of these children as like you or not like you? In what ways? Why or why not?
8. How has that affected your work in the classroom in the past?
9. What does a challenging day/lesson look like in the Jumpstart program?
10. What does a successful day/lesson look like in the Jumpstart program?