

Coaching Elementary Educators' Culturally Sustaining Teaching

by

Denise LaRosa

Bachelor of Arts in Dance, Radford University, 2003

Master of Education in Elementary Education, Carlow University, 2008

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This dissertation was presented

by

Denise LaRosa

It was defended on

June 17, 2021

and approved by

Emily Rainey, PhD, Language, Literacy, and Culture

Lori Delale O'Connor, PhD, Education Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

Jill Perry, PhD, Educational Foundations, Organizations and Policy

Dissertation Director: Emily Rainey, PhD, Language, Literacy, and Culture

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Denise LaRosa, Ed.D.

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Many students of color must sacrifice their cultural identity in order to achieve academic success in US Schools (Howard, 2010). I have not seen careful attention to students' cultural diversity in my school context. My work focuses on how I can productively support my colleagues to begin to attend to students' cultural diversity. Many scholars and educators have pursued how to bring cultural awareness and relevance to classroom teaching and learning out of a general awareness that white middle class norms tend to dominate K-12 schooling, and that this disproportionately harms children of color. I sought to coach two 3rd grade teachers on culturally sustaining instruction using adapted versions of existing instructional coaching models. Through using improvement science methodology, I sought to answer two inquiry questions: When I seek to coach elementary teachers toward culturally sustaining teaching, how will their instruction change? How might my collaboration with focal teachers inform the development of a locally and contextually specific approach for instructional change? In this Dissertation in Practice, I share several key findings that emerged from my research, which include the importance of classroom talk for culturally sustaining teaching, teachers' development towards culturally sustaining teaching, implications for professional development, and my role as an instructional coach.

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1.0 Naming and Framing the Problem of Practice

1.1 Broader Problem Area

Many students of color must sacrifice their cultural identity in order to achieve academic success in US schools (Howard, 2010). For these students, the faces they see and the stories they hear in the classroom do not reflect who they are.

Although critically important in our time, I have not seen careful attention to students' cultural diversity in my school context. Many teachers instruct from a traditional curriculum that was either inherited or self-created. The majority of the teachers are white. What's more, many educators seem to believe that if they have a good rapport with students of color, then they are teaching those students well. While some educators at my school may not see the need for culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, many others sense a need for pedagogical change that connects students of color to educational experiences on a deeper, more authentic level. The latter group of educators realize the need for change, yet feel unsure in how to go about transforming their curriculum and instruction into experiences that support cultural responsiveness. My work focuses on how I can productively support my colleagues to begin to attend to students' cultural diversity. I am committed to doing my part to ensure students at my school have regular learning opportunities that honor who they are.

1.2 The System

The Ellis School is a pre-K-12 all girls' school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I have taught pre-kindergarten and second grade at Ellis, and I assumed a new role there as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in June 2020.

Recently, The Ellis School's Head of School and the Chair of the Board of Trustees launched a five-year strategic plan titled *Ellis on the Move*. Included in the five-year strategic plan is our new mission statement, which proclaims, "The Ellis School educates girls and young women to become bold, authentic, and intellectually vibrant changemakers" (www.theellisschool.org). Four pillars intend to help faculty, staff, and other members of the community to achieve this mission. The four pillars are as follows: Secure and Confident, Positive Community Members, Changemakers, and Vibrant Intellects. Each pillar serves as our guide to ensure that we are fulfilling our mission for every student at The Ellis School.

My force field analysis opened my eyes to the forces for change and forces resisting change. Our increasingly diverse student body, clearer mission and vision statements, new Ellis Faculty Expectations, and strategic plan collectively support the need for culturally responsive teaching to support our students of color. However, the forces resisting change--including white privilege, commitment to traditions that do not support cultural responsiveness, lack of prioritizing this problem of practice, and hiding behind non-performatives, such as our Statement on Equity and Inclusion--all pose challenges in moving this work forward. Our new strategic plan prioritizes cultural awareness and responsiveness in an unprecedented way in the 100+-year history of the school. Below is a list of key strategic plans (Figure 1) that relate to the need for a culturally responsive school environment:



Figure 1. Elements of The Ellis School's Strategic Plan Pertaining to Cultural Responsiveness

1.3 Stakeholders

The students of Ellis vary in their racial and ethnic backgrounds, and I have pondered how to best work toward Ellis's mission for all of our students, especially our students of color. The Ellis School's Black Student Union (BSU), originally known as The Sisterhood Club, was established in the early 2000's in response to the need to build a sense of community, address past concerns, and incorporate a social network between students at various division levels.

In February 2019, I conducted an exploratory needs assessment with the BSU (15 participants). A noteworthy finding was that 80% of student participants did not believe there were pictures, videos, or assignments in their class or school that related to their culture, ethnicity, or race. Moreover, nearly 94% of the participants reported they would like to see more pictures,

videos, or assignments in their class or school related to their culture or race. These responses suggest the need for attention to cultural competence, awareness, and inclusiveness.

See Table 1 for description of key groups of stakeholders at Ellis.

Table 1. Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Description
Students of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 38% of the student body ● Represent numerous cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds ● Expecting to receive a quality education filled with academic rigor ● Expecting to be prepared for a successful college and professional career path ● Forming their identity during these formative years
Families of students of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expecting their daughters to receive a high quality and positive educational experience ● Financially and emotionally invested in their daughter’s independent school education at various levels
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 67 faculty members ● 66% holding master’s degrees ● 94% of faculty are white ● Expected to uphold Ellis’s outstanding reputation for offering high quality instruction and learning experiences
Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responsible for sustaining a school that has a 100+ year reputation for providing girls a quality education ● Division heads oversee the instructional and logistical matters in their respective divisions (lower, middle, upper) ● Division heads support faculty, students, and families in numerous ways

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Head of School unveiled a strategic plan that includes specific aims toward cultural competence
--	---

1.4 My Role

My role at Ellis had begun to expand prior to me accepting the position of Director of DEI. First, I was invited to be a member of the newly formed Faculty Evaluation and Professional Development Task Force. As a member of this committee, I was able to use my voice to elevate the need and accountability for culturally responsive teaching, which is now reflected in our Ellis Faculty Expectations. In addition, I have presented the data derived from the exploratory needs assessment to Ellis faculty, and led a summer professional development session on how to engage in culturally sustaining teaching practices. During the session, I shared the history and evolution of resource and asset pedagogies, while offering resources and practical first steps toward establishing more culturally responsive and sustaining classroom practices. The professional development session was productive and had representation from all three divisions (over 20 faculty members in attendance), and a wide range of content area departments. Attendees were eager to learn, highly engaged, and requested more guidance in understanding and practicing cultural competence in their classrooms.

1.5 Fishbone

My fishbone diagram (See Figure 2) has evolved over the course of my doctoral journey. I maintained the root causes of lack of accountability, lack of faculty diversity, and lack of resources and ongoing support. While The Ellis School has made gains in these areas, the changes are new and need time to take root. For instance, the Ellisions for an Inclusive Community's (EFIC) Steering Committee, of which I am a member, recently launched a book club that was optional for faculty members to join. Our first text was *How to be an Anti-Racist*. This book served as a catalyst for meaningful discussions on race. Additionally, our newly revised Ellis Faculty Expectations and the five-year strategic plan explicitly address culturally responsive teaching, holding faculty more accountable. Both of these initiatives are new and it is unclear how both will be used to ensure that teachers engage in culturally responsive teaching practices and interactions with students of color.

Finally, we are undergoing a robust curricular review in all content areas beginning with language arts. According to the five-year strategic plan, Ellis seeks to “launch a system of regular curricular reviews within each department that consider scope and sequence, balance of breadth and depth of content, development of cultural competency, and developmentally appropriate levels of rigor” (www.theellisschool.org). The adjustments to my fishbone diagram have provided clarity while offering a more accurate view of root causes.

Denise LaRosa's Fishbone Diagram

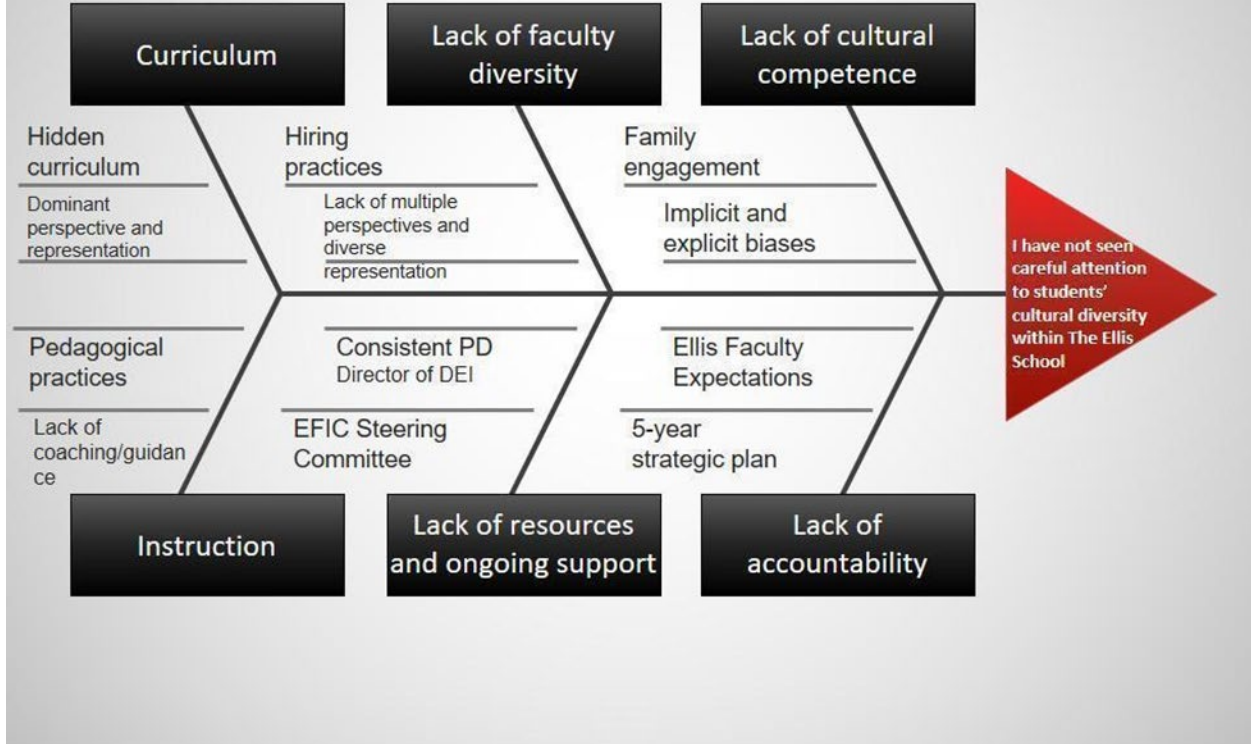


Figure 2. Fishbone Diagram

1.6 Statement of Problem of Practice

Many scholars and educators have pursued how to bring cultural awareness and relevance to classroom teaching and learning out of a general awareness that white middle class norms tend to dominate K-12 schooling, and that this disproportionately harms children of color.

Recently, Paris and Alim (2014) proposed the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy. In their work, they do not accept the commonly held purposes and outcomes of schooling, which have tended to center notions of achievement and white middle class culture as a given. Instead,

they ask, “What if...the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform white middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices?” (p. 86). Paris and Alim call for instruction that would sustain students’ “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (p. 88). In other words, culturally sustaining pedagogy acknowledges the value of cultures, while preparing and empowering all students to engage knowledgeably, critically, and effectively in our multicultural and multilingual society. This approach to instruction and learning challenges the typical methods of teaching from the perspective of the dominant culture, including a focus on “responding to” the needs, identities, and language and cultural practices of non-white students.

Based on these calls and my own noticings at Ellis, I have wondered how I can productively support my colleagues to consistently use culturally sustaining approaches in their instruction. My Dissertation in Practice focuses on this problem.

2.0 Review of the Supporting Knowledge

2.1 Purpose of Review

I conducted a literature review to learn more about the history and evolution of culturally sustaining pedagogy and to collect ideas about how I could bring this concept to life at Ellis. The questions guiding my literature review were: 1) How has culturally sustaining pedagogy evolved as a concept? 2) What does culturally sustaining pedagogy entail in an early childhood or elementary classroom? 3) How can coaches and other school leaders support teachers to engage in culturally sustaining approaches to teaching? What practical steps, resources, and supports could be helpful for teachers as they learn to teach in culturally sustaining ways?

To explore my questions, I specifically searched for pieces bringing together culturally sustaining pedagogy with early childhood education, as most of the work on culturally sustaining pedagogy focuses on older children and adolescents.

In what follows, I present evolutions of thought from the literature responding to how culturally sustaining pedagogy has evolved as a concept, and then I move to themes from the literature responding to what culturally sustaining pedagogy may entail in the early childhood classroom. From there, I advance to themes from the literature responding to specific ways coaches and other school leaders can support teachers to engage in culturally sustaining approaches to teaching.

2.2 How Has Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Evolved as a Concept?

Conceptualizations of culturally sustaining pedagogy have evolved from asset pedagogies and theories seeking to affirm the identities of students of color. These concepts may be traced back to multicultural education research in the 1970s-80s.

2.2.1 Multicultural Education

James Banks pioneered the concept of multicultural education, which is “an educational reform movement whose major goal is to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that students from diverse social-class, racial, and ethnic groups - as well as male and female students and LGBT students - will experience equal educational opportunities” (Banks, 2019, p.166). The origins of the multicultural education movement are a reflection of the ethnic revitalization movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the early 1970s when he began his work, Banks (1973) called for a liberation curriculum for Black students and other oppressed groups. Such a curriculum would include opportunities for marginalized students to build positive racial identity, learn about systemic racism and equip learners with the knowledge and skills to challenge those systems, all while offering Black students opportunities to take social action. Over time, Banks focused on multicultural education. Banks (1979) believed that multicultural education serves two aims: to assist students in acquiring knowledge about various cultural groups in order to competently navigate different cultural environments, and to reform schools in ways that provide underserved cultural groups equal educational opportunities. As American education experienced a shift to focus on standardized

testing in the 1980s, Banks (1982) viewed multicultural education as a channel for decreasing educational inequities experienced by students of color.

2.2.2 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings built on the work of Banks to argue for an updated framework: culturally relevant pedagogy. Her work shifted the focus from social harmony and cultural awareness, which were major goals of the multicultural education movement, to emphasizing the importance of helping students “accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). One of the questions driving her research was “How can academic success and cultural success complement each other in settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience?” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Ladson-Billings offered three characteristics as the foundation for culturally relevant pedagogy: 1) conceptions of self and others; 2) social relations; and 3) conceptions of knowledge.

At the heart of conception of self and others is the teacher’s core belief that all students are capable of academic success. Additionally, the way teachers perceive themselves and their profession are critical components of culturally relevant pedagogy. Social relations in culturally relevant pedagogy involved maintaining fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrating connectedness with all students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively while being responsible for one another. Finally, teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy have critical and passionate conceptions of knowledge. Knowledge is shared, recycled, and constructed. This path to conceptions of knowledge occurs when teachers

scaffold to facilitate learning. Assessment of learning takes on a variety of forms to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge in a way that most accurately reflects students' grasps of concepts.

Around the same time another leading scholar, Geneva Gay, also began to advocate for a turn to culturally responsive teaching, which she defined as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Gay insists that whenever educators engage in teaching practices that are rooted in the lived experiences of students of color, those students become deeply connected and genuinely interested in learning. It follows then that students of color will achieve more academic success when they are taught from their own cultural lens.

Gay (2018) provides educators with four elements of culturally responsive instruction: learning styles, cooperative learning, active engagement, and social emotional learning. Gay (2018) defines learning styles as “Processes individuals habitually use for cognitive problem solving and for showing what they know and are capable of doing” (p. 205). According to Gay (2018), “Many students of color prefer learning situations that are active, participatory, emotionally engaging, and filled with visual and physical stimulation: (p. 229). Cooperative learning opportunities affirm the values of human connectedness and collaborative problem-solving many students of color experience within their own cultures. Giving attention to the social and emotional well-being of students ensures they are welcomed, heard, known, and feel safe. The essence of these four elements is that collectively, culturally responsive teaching practices remove the “burden” that is placed on students of color to be able to master academic tasks “under cultural conditions unnatural (and often unfamiliar) to them” (p. 114). Both Ladson-Billings and Gay aim for teachers to apply the cultures of marginalized students to the classroom experience as a means for achieving academic success.

2.2.3 Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

In recent years, Paris and Alim (2014; 2017) have pushed for an updated conception of culturally relevant teaching: culturally sustaining teaching.

The turn to “sustaining” is not just a shift in language. Instead, it marks a shift from centering student academic achievement as the ultimate goal to fostering and sustaining “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). Whereas previous asset pedagogies set out to assist students of color to acquire academic skills of the dominant group, Paris and Alim encourage educators to consider power and the ways in which the goals of schooling may themselves need to be shifted to de-center white and middle class norms and values. Put differently, culturally sustaining pedagogy reimagines educational institutions as places that reflect our multicultural, multilingual society through valuing and sustaining the cultures of diverse groups.

2.2.4 In Sum

Culturally sustaining teaching (CST) is a concept that can be traced to the multicultural education movement of the 1970s. It goes beyond seeking “relevance” and promoting students’ access to white-dominant language and literacy toward rethinking the very goals of schooling. However, culturally sustaining teaching, like cultural relevance and multicultural education before it, can all be considered asset pedagogies that are striving to push against the trends of deficit teaching of students of color and seek to make schools places where students of color thrive.

2.3 What Does Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Entail in an Early Childhood Classroom?

When it comes to the topic of culturally sustaining pedagogy, most educators readily agree that engaging our youngest learners in culturally sustaining learning experiences is critical. However, exactly how do educators prepare for such instruction and what does culturally sustaining pedagogy entail in the early childhood classroom? Building on the work of Paris and Alim (2014) and those before, scholars have begun to develop frameworks and approaches that inform this question.

2.3.1 Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Community

Bennett et al. (2017) recently developed one helpful framework for culturally sensitive teaching in the early childhood classroom. Each of the components are relevant to culturally sustaining pedagogy.

1. Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom Community. The first tenet, developing a culturally responsive classroom community, requires teachers “to hold high expectations and believe all students can succeed” (p. 242). Additionally, teachers must engage in the self-reflective work of developing sociocultural consciousness. Along the same lines, the authors argue critically responsive educators “must first know themselves, understand their own culture, and have a conscious self-awareness before they can teach others” (p. 242). Cultivating a culturally responsive classroom community involves facilitating authentic, meaningful and purposeful discussions through the lens of multicultural perspectives. Such discussions typically occur in response to children’s interactions and experiences within the classroom environment.

2. Using Multicultural Literature. Bennett et al (2017) underscore that culturally responsive images in the classroom matter. Indeed, images that do not reflect the cultures and identities of students of color establish a hidden curriculum where what is not seen demonstrates who and what the teacher, school, and society value. In fact, Banks (2019) insists that the hidden curriculum is “the curriculum that no teacher explicitly teaches but that all students learn” (p. 51). Attending to images in the classroom is one of the most consistent through lines in this scholarship, beginning with Banks in a time when classrooms did not typically have materials that reflected a diverse population. For instance, Banks (2019) insists that multicultural education reform ensures that the hidden curriculum values and celebrates the ethnic, cultural, and language diversity of its students and society as a whole. Although this remains an important idea, it is critical to note that it is only one of Bennett’s tenets. Ultimately, early childhood educators must do more than post diverse images upon their classroom walls. It is imperative that those images are paired with authentic and meaningful discussions about the communities and cultures in which those images represent. What is at stake here is the assurance that cultures are authentically and accurately represented while providing young children learning with experiences that sustain these cultures. Multicultural literature is an important tool to achieve this aim.

3. Promoting Family Engagement. Family engagement is an essential component to early childhood educational programs. Bennett et al (2017) suggests that family engagement in a culturally responsive classroom involves “formal parental engagement that includes parental guidance on take home assignments” (p.243). A more culturally sustaining approach would be to reimagine what parental engagement looks like, taking into account the various family dynamics and unique cultural situations that may prevent families of color from engaging with schools in a

way that reflects the dominant social norm. It is imperative that schools not overlook the cultural capital that students and families of color bring to an educational environment.

This commitment to promoting family engagement is echoed in other scholarship. For example, Doucet (2017) challenges early childhood educators to view families of color as partners in their children's educational journey. Doucet believes a partnership between families and schools begins with teachers placing a genuine interest in students and their families. This interest is established through an "openness to reciprocal change" (p. 199). Furthermore, Doucet states teachers must address biases, share power, practice empathy, communicate, take advantage of families' cultural capital, and rethink family roles while widening their perception of family involvement. Ultimately, trust must be established in order to support this partnership. Doucet's views reflect a more culturally sustaining way for early childhood educators to collaborate with parents of color in a variety of ways that enrich the learning experiences of all students while sustaining the cultures and languages of students of color and their families.

4. Critical Literacy. The goal of critical literacy is social action, ultimately leading to social justice. There are developmentally appropriate ways to engage our youngest learners in critical literacy instruction. According to Bennett et al. (2017), teachers serve as facilitators who guide young children in critically analyzing everyday texts they are exposed to, encouraging students "to ask questions, and to collaboratively solve problems" (p. 244). It is essential that these texts represent a variety of perspectives. This notion is aligned with Paris and Alim's (2014) claim that culturally sustaining pedagogy must challenge the regressive practices of cultures and communities through raising the critical consciousness of students.

2.3.2 Dialogic Discourse

Part of developing any kind of classroom community is fostering dialogic discourse among students and the teacher. Although the previously reviewed scholarship does not highlight classroom discourse patterns as a key part of seeking equitable and just learning opportunities, other lines of scholarship based in literacy and language instruction have made this case. It is through talk that communities and deep relationships are built. And it is through talk that identities and cultural norms, and assumptions and values are communicated, reinforced, reproduced, or challenged. So, it matters not just that there is talk, but the nature of that talk is pertinent.

One issue can come when the teacher and the students have different narrative styles. Children from different ethnic and communicative backgrounds enter school with distinctive strategies for giving narrative accounts. Teachers' discourse styles and expectations can either support or adversely affect a child's school experience. Students are best supported whenever their discourse styles are in alignment with the teacher's own literate approaches and expectations. However, a student's school performance and evaluation can be negatively impacted if there is a mismatch between the narrative styles of the student and their teacher. Through an ethnographic study, Michaels (1981) revealed that the teacher's expectation of sharing was "far removed from the everyday, conversationally, embedded accounts" during 'sharing time' in a first grade classroom" (p.428). This teacher's expectation was in stark contrast to the narrative styles of the Black students in the study, resulting in the teacher asking mistimed questions. The teacher also had difficulty discerning the student discourse and frequent interruptions. This inability for the teacher and students to fully communicate was unintentional, yet Michael's claims such differential treatment may result in negatively impacting children's literacy and language development.

Another core ethnographic study of elementary literacy teaching and learning across multiple cultural groups was conducted by Shirley Brice Heath (1981). Heath conducted an ethnographic study that looked closely at three different communities and the ways in which they interact with literacy events at home and in their elementary school classroom. The predominantly Black and rural community of Trackton demonstrated strengths in the area of reason-explanations derived from the ways in which their community communicated and interacted with literacy events. However, most of these students experienced low school reading performance in the first three primary grades because the elementary classroom favored plot driven question, and answer and other forms of communication about storybooks that most aligned with the white middle class families' home reading practice. The contrast in literacy learning styles between a community and school requires a significant adjustment for those students whose home literacy events run counter to typical literacy expectations of schools. These findings are supported by others such as Ogbu (1990), who has argued that the oral culture of Black people is often disregarded due to the school expectations and perceptions of academic success entrenched in the dominant culture.

These patterns are also supported by work that has been conducted in other school contexts and grade bands. For example, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) gathered data from 58 eighth grade English classes in 16 Midwestern schools. These schools varied in demographics, ranging from rural to urban with students representing various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nystrand and Gamoran noticed a high degree of procedural engagement across the 58 classes they observed rather than authentic or intellectually rich questions and conversation. Procedural engagement patterns often include I-R-E exchanges, in which the teacher initiates by asking a question, one student responds, and the teacher evaluates the correctness of the response. Cazden (2001) has engaged in extensive work around classroom discourse and argues that such discourse

patterns where the teacher asks questions they already know the answers to is an inauthentic way of questioning and interacting with students. This form of classroom talk is familiar to most adults because of how prevalent it is in schools. But, it is substantive classroom engagement, not procedural engagement that has a positive impact on academic achievement. Ultimately, substantive engagement requires both students and teachers to work collaboratively, and teachers are instrumental in creating a classroom environment which supports substantive engagement.

Together, these studies point to the important role that language and literacy play in working toward equity and justice in the classroom. Classroom discourse matters, and it may be an important lever toward accomplishing goals of culturally sustaining learning opportunities in schools.

2.4 How Can Coaches and Other School Leaders Support Teachers to Engage in Culturally Sustaining Approaches to Teaching? What Practical Steps, Resources, and Supports Could be Helpful for Teachers as They Learn to Teach in Culturally Sustaining Ways?

Although numerous instructional coaching frameworks exist, there are common components (Garbacz et al., 2015), which include identifying strengths and needs, creating intervention plans, application of intervention plans with the coach offering modeling and performance feedback, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention plans by the coach and teacher. Instructional coaching is most notably used to provide teachers support in areas like literacy, math, and classroom management.

During my review of the literature, I uncovered two instructional coaching models that have the potential to support teachers engaging in culturally sustaining approaches to teaching.

According to Reddy et al. (2017), the Classroom Strategies Coaching model is arranged for coaches to work with teachers, co-design and enact plans, and provide feedback as a cycle of work. This brief and collaborative approach could be applied in a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle and complement improvement science as a research methodology.

My Teaching Partner is another coaching model. This particular model is a 1 to 2 year-long approach to instructional coaching. This intensive and collaborative instructional coaching model consists of numerous 2-week cycles that incorporate the following five steps (My Teaching Partner Consultancy Manual, 2010):

1. The teacher video records instruction from their focal classroom. The coach submits a nice work clip and considers this clip.

2. The coach sends the clips back to the teacher and describes the observed teacher-student interaction and prompts the teacher to reflect on the clips.

3. The teacher reviews the clips and responds in writing to the prompts.

4. The teacher and the coach discuss the video clips, written prompts, and responses.

5. The coach sends a written summary of the conference that includes an action plan for future improvement (Gregory et al., 2017, p. 40)

Neither Classroom Strategies Coaching nor My Teaching Partner have been used to coach for culturally sustaining teaching. Nonetheless, each model presents a routine that can be useful for working toward the goal of supporting elementary teachers' culturally sustaining instruction.

2.5 Synthesis

My review process has helped me to think about my problem of practice in more nuanced ways. Whereas before I thought about the problem as being focused on affirming the identities of students of color so they could feel seen, known, and be more connected to the learning experiences taking place in their classroom, I now recognize the importance of engaging in pedagogy that reflects our pluralistic society by sustaining cultures and inspiring students to take social action against inequities.

My review has yielded several insights about what it means to engage in CST in the early childhood classroom. First, culturally sustaining pedagogy is not a static list of steps. Many educators assume and look for set methodology for implementing teaching practices within their classroom. Educators will not find a fixed method for implementing CST. Instead, CST requires educators to be flexible and adaptable, embracing the ambiguity that comes with engaging in this form of pedagogy. However, there do seem to be clear characteristics that are often associated with culturally sensitive or sustaining teaching, including attention to and celebration of cultural diversity, cooperative learning experiences, social emotional learning that creates an inclusive classroom environment, active engagement, and attention to critical literacy and power.

In the early childhood classroom, there is particular value in considering the literacy teaching approaches that educators employ, both because of how central literacy instruction is for students of that age group and because of the rich opportunities that literacy instruction can provide for advancing and sustaining cultural and linguistic pluralism. For instance, using multicultural literature as mirrors for students of marginalized groups to see themselves reflected in the text, as well as windows that behold our diverse world, allows students to affirm their identities while also celebrating and learning more about the identities of others.

There is a body of work on dialogic classroom discourse that is relevant to CST. Interestingly, many teachers do not give careful attention to classroom talk, yet it is a critical element of the school experience. In order to sustain the linguistic diversity of a classroom, students must be given opportunities to orally engage with their teachers and classmates. If these scholars are right that language process and classroom talk must reflect the diverse ways in which different cultures interact with language, as I think they are, then we need to acknowledge that this work addresses equity and is in alignment with CST. Paris does not explicitly focus on disrupting and changing classroom discourse patterns as a lever for promoting culturally sustaining teaching and learning in schools. However, this long standing work about classroom discourse is indeed an essential part of creating equity. I am inspired by this work as it relates to my problem of practice.

My review highlighted and revealed the deep importance of engaging families and communities for CST. While I did already hold this value in general, it was striking to me that forming partnerships with families has the potential to enrich the educational experiences of all students in a classroom. It is clear that learning specific approaches for engaging families and communities in CST could be very important at Ellis.

2.6 Conclusion

My review of the literature revealed two key sets of ideas. The first is the concept of culturally sustaining teaching in the elementary classroom. I am committed to ensuring that students at The Ellis School receive regular opportunities to learn in classrooms that can be characterized as culturally sustaining. In 2019, after conducting an initial review of the literature, I created a tool that is meant to describe what culturally sustaining teaching might involve at Ellis

(see Appendix A). I sought to represent culturally sustaining teaching as an instructional practice that requires intentionality, particularly in the areas of cultural capital, cooperative learning, social emotional learning, and active engagement.

My second conclusion from my literature review is that utilizing an instructional coaching model has the potential to support teachers' engagement with and understanding of culturally sustaining instructional practices. Adapting existing coaching models to address culturally sustaining teaching would allow for a collaborative approach that offers ongoing support.

3.0 Theory of Improvement and Implementation Plan

My Dissertation in Practice focuses on my goal to support Ellis teachers' culturally sustaining teaching. My inquiry questions were: 1) When I sought to coach two focal elementary teachers toward culturally sustaining teaching, how did their instruction change? 2) How might my collaboration with the focal teachers inform the development of a locally and contextually specific coach-based approach to instructional change?

3.1 Theory of Improvement and the Change

I used an improvement science framework to guide my efforts. According to Byrk (2015), “improvement science is a methodology that disciplines inquiries to improvement practice” (p. 10). In other words, improvement research projects seek quality improvement using small tests of change stemming from identifying the problem of practice through inquiry questioning: What is the problem that I am trying to solve? What change am I trying to introduce and why? How will I know if the change is actually an improvement? (Byrk, 2015) Change ideas are tested and refined through a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle.

I set out to conduct small tests of change to influence culturally sustaining teaching at my school. Students spend the majority of their time in classrooms, so I reasoned that focusing on what students of color are experiencing in that particular space is a solid place to start a small test of change.

3.1.1 Description

My role as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at The Ellis School significantly affects my sphere of influence and ability to engage in improvement science on a broader scale within my school context.

Numerous faculty had expressed a desire and need to learn how to engage in culturally responsive and sustaining instructional practices. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the third grade class was the most racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse class in the lower school division at The Ellis School. In fact, 52% of the students in this class are students of color who deserve culturally sustaining instruction.

3.1.1.1 Participants

The participants of my study were the two 3rd grade teachers at Ellis, Catherine and Nicole (all names are pseudonyms). Both teachers identify as white. The teachers expressed their awareness of how their identities and the identities of their students had the potential to impact classroom instruction and their interactions with each other. As a result, both teachers reached out to me for support in ways to work among and across cultural differences over the summer of 2020. Catherine has been an educator for seven years. This was her second year of teaching at The Ellis School. Natalie has been an educator for 10 years. This was her eighth year teaching at Ellis where she has taught 3rd grade the entire time. This was Catherine's and Nicole's first year teaching together as a teaching team. Prior to working at Ellis, Catherine taught at both public and independent schools, working with students ranging from 20% to 50% students of color. Nicole taught at a predominantly Black high-poverty public school before becoming a teacher at Ellis.

3.2 Positionality Statement

At the time of data collection my daughter was in 3rd grade, and she was a student of both Catherine and Nicole. My daughter identifies as Black. In addition to being a classroom parent, I am in a school leadership role at Ellis. Prior to entering this role, I was a colleague to both 3rd grade teachers. I reflected on how these various hats could potentially influence collaborating with the 3rd grade teachers on this coaching experience. I was mindful of my many roles whenever approaching the focal teachers with this opportunity for collaboration. Interestingly, both teachers reached out to me for instructional support with culturally responsive teaching prior to me inviting them to work with me on this coaching cycle.

I anticipated a few challenges in the lead up to my project. First, I was concerned about being a distraction to the students when entering the classroom at various times throughout this process. My daughter and her classmates know me personally and professionally, which can pose some possibilities for disruption to their normal classroom routine. Fortunately, we were able to use Zoom to record and observe instructional practices as opposed to me entering the classroom. I was also concerned about the students being distracted by video equipment and the teachers feeling the stress of learning how to use and manage video recording equipment. One way I sought to mitigate these risks was to hold periodic check-ins with both focal teachers to gain a genuine understanding of how they felt in this process and how they thought my positionality was affecting the coaching experience.

3.3 What Was I Trying to Accomplish?

I sought to coach both teachers on culturally sustaining instruction using adapted versions of existing instructional coaching models. When I went into my work, I expected that if the focal teachers were regularly teaching in culturally responsive ways, I would observe them attending to the following four key areas of instructional practices: cultural capital, cooperative learning, social emotional learning, and active engagement (See Appendix A). I thought I would also hear social interactions among students and teachers that reflect an equitable and inclusive classroom climate. Evidence of culturally sustaining instruction would include opportunities for students to engage in critical literacy and social action. My characterization was not meant to be prescriptive but rather descriptive of the sorts of ways of thinking and interacting that are based in theories of teaching and learning that center identity, agency, and equity.

In addition to supporting the teachers' instructional approaches, a major goal I had was to support the two 3rd grade teachers as teacher leaders. Cultivating teacher leaders in CST reinforces the importance of this work through faculty buy-in. The goal would be for faculty to be featured locally as experts in CST.

A final goal centered on my own coaching practice. I wanted to learn how to best support my colleagues' instruction. This was a new professional role for me.

3.4 How Would I Know the Change Is an Improvement?

My proposed intervention came from a change idea on my driver diagram (See Figure 3).

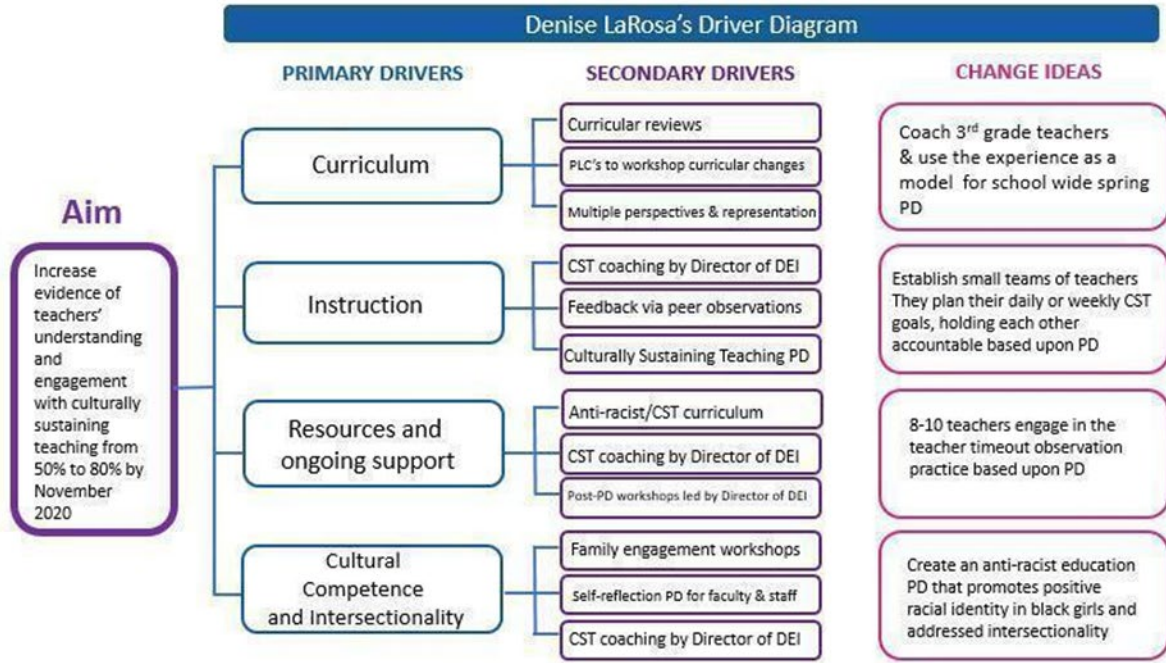


Figure 3. Driver Diagram

3.5 Methods and Measures

Table 2 for methods and measures.

Table 2. Methods, Measures, and Response to Aim

Method	Measure	Response to Aim
Launch interview/questionnaire, Loop 1, and End of Cycle interviews/questionnaire with focal teachers to assess present	Outcome Measure	How much understanding of and engagement with CST do the focal teachers have?

<p>understanding and engagement with CST (see appendices)</p> <p>Launch and Loop 1 Interviews</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify specific instructional practice that will be the focus of the coaching. 2. Coach learns more about the teacher’s current and typical teaching practices. 3. Coach describes tenets of culturally sustaining teaching using framework 4. Teacher selects one strategy/area of focus from the Cultural Capital dimension as a goal. 5. Teacher and coach co-design lesson plan based on the selected goal for use in the 2nd interview/meeting. <p>End of Cycle Interview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coach and teacher review performance feedback on effectiveness of the plan. 2. Coach and teacher co-plan subsequent lesson using reflections from coaching session 		
<p>Loop 2 interview with focal teachers to assess present understanding and engagement with CST (see appendices)</p> <p>Loop 2 Interview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coach shares performance feedback 	<p>Process Measure</p>	<p>Is the CST instructional framework working to achieve my aim?</p>

<p>from the first observation.</p> <p>2. Discuss ways to improve use or effectiveness of practices for the goals targeted in coaching session 2.</p> <p>3. Co-plan, co-design, and revise upcoming lesson plan(s).</p>		
<p>Loop 1 observations of focal teachers to view any evidence of CST. (see appendices)</p>	<p>Driver Measure</p>	<p>Knowing how much understanding and engagement with CST teachers have and are gaining to determine effectiveness of intervention</p>
<p>Loop 2 observations of focal teachers to view any increased evidence in CST since collaborating with coach and having engagement with the CST instructional framework (see appendices)</p>	<p>Process Measure</p>	<p>Did the coaching experience and CST instructional framework work to achieve my aim?</p>
<p>Reflective Journal – I use a journal to reflect upon my coaching experiences</p>	<p>Driver Measure</p> <p>Process Measure</p>	<p>Did the coaching structure work to achieve my aim?</p>
<p>Coaching Plans (see appendices)</p>	<p>Driver Measure</p> <p>Process Measure</p>	<p>Did the coaching structure work to achieve my aim?</p>

3.5.1 Description of PDSA Cycle

My aim was to increase each teacher’s frequency and quality of CST throughout the coaching cycles. I predicted that this coach-based PD model would enable me to provide teachers with the ongoing support and training, hands-on practice, modeling, and feedback necessary to foster noticeable change in teachers’ engagement and understanding of CST. Furthermore, I predicted that receiving direct feedback from stakeholders (teachers) who would be using the framework and coaching model to improve their instructional practice would strengthen the effectiveness of my instructional coaching (See Appendix B).

3.6 Data Collection

See Table 3 for a description of my data collection.

Table 3 Data Collection, Description, and Mode

Data Collected	Description	Mode
Teacher/Coach Semi-Structured Interviews	3 interviews total: -1 launch interview with both teachers (40 min.) on October 20, 2020 -1 exit interview with both teachers (30 min.) on December 17, 2020	Video recording collected by coach via Zoom
Teacher Questionnaires	2 questionnaires total: -1 launch questionnaire on October 20, 2020 -1 exit questionnaire on December 17, 2020	Google Forms
Teacher/Coach Coaching Interview Sessions	4 sessions total: -1 Loop 1 interview (30 min.) on October 27, 2020 -1 Loop 2 interview (30 min.) on November 17, 2020	Video recording collected by coach via Zoom

Observations of Teaching	30 observations total (between November 2-16, 2020 for Loop 1; and between November 30-December 11, 2020 for Loop 2): -Catherine (746 min. total) -Nicole (712 min. total)	Video recording collected by coach via Zoom
Coaching plans and materials	-Workshop outlines -Workshop slides -All accompanying materials for interviews and observations	See appendices
Coach reflective journal	-Self-reflection on coach’s experience -approximately 8-10 entries (1-3 pages each) made over the course of data collection and coaching	Notebook collected by coach

This study drew on data collected from October 2020 to December 2020. My project consisted of two loops with a launch and exit interview at the beginning and end of my data collection. Each loop included coaching sessions and observations of the focal teachers (See Appendices C – F).

3.6.1 Launch Interview

To launch our work together, I conducted an interview with Catherine and Nicole, the two 3rd grade focal teachers. Each teacher and I collaboratively identified the instructional practice that would be the focus of the PDSA cycle. The focal teachers and I utilized one dimension of the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework I had developed as a tool for identifying specific instructional goals. Elements of the Ellis Faculty Expectations and The Ellis School’s five-year strategic plan were also integrated into the framework. For the purposes of this PDSA cycle, the focal teachers and I addressed an instructional practice from the Cultural Capital dimension. This

initial interview concluded with me giving the teachers time to individually reflect on the framework in preparation for our first coaching session.

3.6.2 Loop 1

In my first coaching session, I asked the teachers to bring their lesson plans and materials for an upcoming lesson. Each teacher selected an area of focus from the Cultural Capital dimension of the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework for use in the remainder of the PDSA/coaching cycle. We examined the lessons together and looked for moments to incorporate aspects of culturally sustaining teaching specific to their areas of focus. These moments could involve curricular changes, such as switching out one text for another, or smaller pedagogical changes, such as practicing a few key ways of phrasing ideas that would position students in affirming ways. They could also include larger shifts, such as how to facilitate and engage in conversations about race.

I followed up the interview by observing video-recorded instruction from each classroom. Each teacher planned to video record instruction in her classroom for about one week. Which part of the day, including content area and instruction, was determined based upon the needs and goals expressed by the teacher during the initial coaching interview.

3.6.3 Loop 2

In loop 2 I met with the focal teachers and shared feedback from the video-recorded instruction. We discussed ways to improve use or effectiveness of practices, co-designing a plan. I was particularly mindful of the need to help the teachers identify moments of progress and

opportunities for deepening their practices. We examined upcoming lessons and looked for new ways of incorporating culturally sustaining approaches. I collected video recorded lessons from each teacher for about one week following our meeting.

3.6.4 Reflection Interview

To conclude our work together, I conducted a final interview. In this interview, I found out how their understanding and engagement with CST had changed from their points of view. I especially wanted to know what feedback the teachers had for me about the coaching experience, their perceptions of their professional growth, and what they thought they would like to work on next in their practice.

3.7 Analysis of Data

I engaged in qualitative methods of research, gathering the following types of data (See Table 4).

Table 4. Types of Qualitative Data and Coding Method

Types of Qualitative Data
Interviews
Coaching sessions
Coach's Reflective Journal
Coaching Plans/Materials
Observations of Video recorded instruction

In phase one of data analysis, I focused my efforts on answering the question, “How can I bring about change in two elementary teachers’ approaches to culturally sustaining instruction?” The goals that were established by the focal teachers led to answering those questions; it was just a matter of establishing specific “look-fors” for the coding process.

In phase two of data analysis, I sought to answer the question, “How does my collaboration with the focal teachers inform the development of a locally and contextually specific coach-based approach to instructional change?” I carefully reviewed and analyzed my coaching journal, coaching materials, and all interviews with the focal teachers. The interviews were a combination of meetings via Zoom and questionnaires via google forms due to time constraints for meeting. I looked for and noted obstacles, moments of growth for the teachers and myself as a coach in my coaching journal using initial codes such as, “frustrations,” “new strategies,” and “strengths.” The coaching material revealed the process and path for the coaching experience, and the interviews with the focal teachers affirmed demonstrated growth in the focal teachers’ understanding of CST.

In phase three of data analysis, I looked for discourse patterns to answer my first question. To answer my second question, I carefully reviewed teachers’ responses to interview questions as well as the challenges and successes they verbalized throughout the interviews. To analyze my coaching journey, I carefully listened to and noted the advice I was offering the teachers throughout the interviews and the experiences I expressed in my coaching journal to see how the two sets of data interacted with each other. Ultimately, I looked for patterns across the initial codes. This crosswalk analysis of the two sets of data – focal teacher data and coaching data (See Figure 4) assisted me in understanding the consistency in the effectiveness of the coaching model from both the coach’s and teachers’ perspectives. A crosswalk analysis is a method of analyzing data that looks at the possible relationships between two or more sets of data (Kavanagh & Rainey, 2017;

Kavanagh & Danielson, 2019). I looked for and documented recurring language and interactions between my coaching data and the data of the focal teachers to see if there were relationships between the two sets of data.

Figure 4. Crosswalk Analysis



4.0 PDSA Results

I began this work with a problem of practice: I needed to find ways to begin to support my colleagues' culturally sustaining teaching in our school. As a new instructional coach, I knew that it was necessary to develop my own approaches to coaching. My inquiry questions were:

1) When I seek to coach elementary teachers toward culturally sustaining teaching, how will their instruction change?

2) How might my collaboration with focal teachers inform the development of a locally and contextually specific approach for instructional coaching?

In what follows, I describe my two coaching cycles chronologically.

4.1 Loop 1

4.1.1 Launch of Coaching Cycle

Catherine, Nicole, and I had a launch meeting to establish our collaboration, gain a shared understanding of what the process would look like, and how I could best support their efforts in CST. I communicated the primary objective, which was to support the teachers to identify and plan for growth along one dimension of culturally sustaining teaching. For this particular meeting, I shared three additional goals, which were:

- Connect culturally responsive & sustaining teaching to Ellis's mission, vision & statement on DEI

- Introduce culturally sustaining teaching instructional framework
- Clarify terminology for culturally responsive and culturally sustaining teaching

I also asked for some general background information from both focal teachers, including how long they have been teaching (overall and at Ellis), details about the populations/demographics of the students they have taught in the past, what they consider to be their individual strengths, and for them to share what comes to mind whenever they hear culturally relevant or sustaining teaching. I offered scholarly definitions of both culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining teaching. We collectively reviewed and discussed the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework. I gave the teachers one week to reflect upon our objectives, definitions, and framework.

In the meantime, I reflected on my role as instructional coach in my journal:

I am so pleased that our initial meeting went so well. It was a productive and informative conversation. I find myself feeling vulnerable in my requests for the focal teachers' time. They are being stretched so thin and have very little time to spare. I am fortunate in that both teachers are committed to their students and have a desire to engage in CST.

4.1.2 My Coaching

The focal teachers and I met the following week. Both teachers selected their goals, which would serve as areas of focus for the duration of the coaching cycle. Catherine chose to focus on supporting students' critique of social inequities. Nicole's goal would be to support students' examination of their own identities and cultures. To support teachers with these goals, I shared challenges and approaches for each area of focus. I also discussed features of individualists and

collectivists cultures as a way to deepen the focal teachers' understanding of the ways students learn differently depending on their cultural reference points. I followed the discussion with two offerings:

- We can work together to identify and plan for places in your upcoming lessons that you could focus on your goal.
- We can look at clips and look at your own teaching to talk about ways to incorporate/extend/enhance your focus area in your instruction.

Both focal teachers shared feedback on what would be most helpful for them, and what they would need in order to refine this aspect of their practice. We concluded the session by creating “look-fors” using the following prompts:

- How will we know when you've refined this practice?
- What might we see/hear in your instruction?
- What might we see/hear in your students' talk?

Catherine stated that evidence of more back and forth dialogue, students making real life connections to the learning experience, and her guiding rather than leading class discussions would be evidence of CST in her classroom. Nicole emphasized students making real life connections to lessons, more project-based learning opportunities, and creative ways to elicit students' interests would be key elements she would look for in her instructional practice.

4.1.3 Observations

I set out to observe the two teachers' instruction in order to learn more about them as teachers and to see where they were already doing forms of sustaining pedagogy. I initially thought I would look for and identify examples of sustaining teaching related to their goals so that I could

bring those examples back to the teachers to work with them on deepening or expanding those aspects of their practice. I observed Catherine 8 times (332 minutes) and Nicole 7 times (297 minutes) during my first loop.

When I began observing in the teachers' classrooms, I was surprised by what I observed. I noticed that the same students were speaking up, offering their thoughts and answers to the focal teachers' questions. Also, both focal teachers were engaging in the same approach to classroom discourse, resulting in a rigid verbal exchange between teachers and students. I began to wonder how we could even foster noticeable change with the teachers' engagement in CST without attention being given to student voice.

The heavy reliance on typical interaction patterns seemed to preclude opportunities for student voice and conversation. This was something that clearly needed to be prioritized. If we are to value and sustain our multicultural, multilingual students, creating space for their authentic contributions to classroom conversations is essential. So, I adjusted my own coaching and analysis plan to more specifically focus on how teachers were managing and facilitating classroom talk. In my observations, I began to pay even closer attention to the types of questions the teachers were asking, students' frequency of talk and depth of engagement, and how these patterns might be falling along racial lines.

Prominence of IRE. I found that both teachers were relying heavily on I-R-E (initiate-response-evaluate) patterns of classroom talk. Across my observations of Catherine, I noted 67 instances of IRE. For example, when teaching a lesson about quotation marks, Catherine asked, "What's the purpose of informational writing?" She directed this question to a specific student. The student responded by saying, "Sometimes the purpose of informational writing is to share formal information so then people will know something new, like 'Oh I didn't know that!'"

Catherine evaluated the response by saying, “Yes! So your point of your informational writing is to share what you know. Excellent!” In this exchange, the teacher initiated by asking for “the purpose” of informational writing, a student gave a reply, and the teacher evaluated the response by saying “yes” and “Excellent!” This exchange shows the typical dynamic of IRE, where students are assessed to see if they know or can provide the correct answer. This instance is also interesting because the student’s response actually suggests that she thinks there are multiple purposes for informational writing, but the teacher rephrases the student’s idea to fit within a single-answer frame.

Similarly, I noted 144 instances of IRE in Nicole’s classroom. For example, Nicole asked, “What does area mean?” Students stood up and began to physically demonstrate while one student responded, “You would have to spread all around,” as she swished her arms from side to side. Nicole evaluated by affirming the student’s response, “Yes you would have to lay down and cover it up. You would have to all lay down.” The typical dynamic of IRE is evident in this exchange. Interestingly, the student appeared to want to share more of her thoughts; however, the teacher proceeded to expand upon the student’s initial response without allowing space for the student to offer more thoughts. In most cases, Nicole sought student participation by either directing questions toward a specific student, eliciting raised hands from students, or even encouraging students to shout out responses.

In the case of both teachers, it was rare for the classroom talk to be anything other than the I-R-E pattern.

Prominence of closed questions. A key feature of I-R-E discourse is the prevalence of closed questions, which are the type that most lend themselves to “evaluating” for correctness. In both teachers’ classrooms, I noted their prominent use of closed questions. For example, Catherine

asked, “Do you think Fox is a good hunter?” during a lesson. The correct answer was “Yes.” Another example of a closed question is when Nicole asked, “Would I give her \$4?” The correct answer was, “No.”

Closed questions themselves are not always a problem. Sometimes it is important to ask closed questions to establish a shared understanding or to check for understanding before moving into more intellectually rich conversations. However, what I noted in Loop 1 was that the closed questions seemed to crowd out space for potential open questions. This was especially the case for Nicole, who leaned towards asking closed questions in rapid succession to check for understanding.

Uneven rates of participation. Overall, I found unevenness in students’ classroom talk in Loop 1. In Catherine’s class, average volunteer participation rates by students ranged from 6 contributions to 23. In Nicole’s class, they ranged from 3 to 39 contributions.

I also examined students’ rates of participation by their race/ethnicity. I wondered whether white students were contributing more than students of color on average. In Loop 1, I found that the most vocal student in Catherine’s class and the most vocal student in Nicole’s class both identify as white. The most vocal student in Catherine’s class spoke an average of 23 times, whereas the class average number of contributions was 8. The most vocal student in Nicole’s class spoke 39 times, whereas the class average number of contributions was 12. In Nicole’s class, the quietest student who only spoke once across all of my observations identifies as Indian.

Even though there was unevenness in talk, it was not as simple as the white students talking more on the whole than the students of color. There were some more and less talkative students of each race/ethnicity. For example, a black student in Nicole’s classroom contributed almost as many times to class talk as the most talkative (white) student in that classroom.

Importantly, even though there were uneven participation rates of students' voluntary contributions, there was not a clear pattern of teachers disproportionately calling on white students. Both focal teachers demonstrated an even distribution of calling on students to engage in the IRE pattern across racial/ethnic differences.

4.1.4 Planning for Loop 2

After conducting Loop 1 observations, I spent two weeks considering what I was seeing, what teachers and students seemed to be indicating, and how to move forward. Major points of insight were:

- The same few students continued to dominate classroom discourse.
- Not hearing from some students made it challenging to discern whether or not they understood the content, or lesson being taught.
- Both focal teachers relied heavily on IRE patterns for facilitating classroom discourse.

I continued to wonder, if this classroom discourse experience continued over an extended period, how would it impact students? How could a different discourse structure better support students?

These insights warranted a pivot in goals with the two teachers. It was important to me that I did not approach this shift from an authoritative stance. Instead, I wanted to intentionally and collaboratively bring the focal teachers to a place of agreement with me that this would be a productive place for us to focus our work. The following journal entry captures my thoughts at this particular moment in the coaching process:

I must admit I'm a little frustrated and perplexed at what I am observing. The same students continue to shout out responses, while others remain silent. I can't even tell whether or not every student has an understanding of the concepts being taught. This challenge is common in classrooms, yet I must admit this will probably be a difficult challenge to bring up to the focal teachers. I want them to see what I am seeing, and come to a mutual understanding and agreement we need to address this.

4.2 Loop 2

4.2.1 Goal Setting with the Teachers

I set in motion our second loop by having a meeting with the two teachers together. I planned to share a specific clip from each teacher's classroom that would highlight the teacher/student talk patterns I had been noticing. To establish the purpose of our conversation, I shared that while their named areas of focus are important aspects of engaging in CST, we should observe, review, and reflect on the video observation clips I selected with an open mind, and see what other aspects of CST come to the forefront.

In one part of our conversation, the teachers and I turned to what we noticed about the classroom talk:

Denise: Share with me who was speaking. What else did you notice about the dialogue?

Nicole: In mine, I was speaking.

Catherine: Yeah, I was gonna say I was speaking... I mean the girls were speaking, but it was not like a... Like, I did the teacher thing of being like, "I have an answer in mind that I want you to get to, so I'm just going to keep asking leading questions until you get to that answer."

Nicole: Yeah I have a feeling in mind that the kids were like, "Please stop talking and let us do this. You can tell us all that stuff later just give me my paper and let me at it." And I probably could've just done that.

Denise: Yes, but this is helpful information... You're absolutely right. One of the things that we do that I'm learning is directly connected to culturally responsive and sustaining teaching is the ways that we interact with our students in the classroom, those patterns that are typical is our go-to because for a couple of reasons. Number one, that's what we experienced in school. Number two because of the time and pacing of things. One of the things I thought about earlier is that this is a great opportunity. It's not that this is what I saw all throughout all the videos, but this is something I think Ellis-wide... I'm going to challenge us to explore looking for ways to disrupt those typical interaction patterns that happen in the classroom.

Through discussion, the teachers agreed that we should pivot and establish new goals. Collaboratively, we concluded that our two goals for Loop 2 would be the following: disrupting typical classroom interaction patterns, and creating space for student conversations. Both of these areas of focus are necessary conditions for fostering a culturally sustaining instructional environment. In other words, in order for students to be exposed to and gain multiple perspectives in the classroom, a wide range of voices must be heard.

4.2.2 My Coaching

To work toward our refined goals, I sought to support the teachers to further examine their current patterns of classroom discourse and look for ways to disrupt their current patterns by imagining other ways of managing interactions. For example, I encouraged both focal teachers to imagine how quieter students would respond to the instructional shifts that could occur while I tried to name simple instructional changes that had the potential to make a difference in classroom discourse.

Denise: Discussion versus interaction. So we do interact a lot with our students, but are we really engaging in discussion?...We will have to think about what do we anticipate some students - the quieter students versus the more assertive, outgoing students...How do we think they will respond? And something as simple as just turning to your neighbor and discussing something, that gets all of that out of their system and they feel heard, even if the teacher doesn't get a chance to call on them. Creating space for student voice really goes directly to our mission and vision.

In addition to highlighting the importance of creating space for student voice, I provided resources to help us think. The resources I offered included background information and an explanation of the I-R-E- model for classroom discourse, lists of classroom discourse alternatives, and excerpts from a text both teachers were reading independently, *We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be*, that directly connected with our goals.

Together, we co-planned possible scenarios that included remote learning instruction. For example, we took a close look at the list of classroom discourse alternatives, and reimagined and categorized the list based upon what could work in a remote learning environment. Next, we

communicated through email as our school made plans to temporarily shift to remote learning. As our school shifted from in person to remote learning, it was important that these resources became more directed toward classroom discourse alternatives that are more appropriate for remote learning. My initial email reassured both focal teachers that I will continue to offer support. I provided the teachers a document, “Zoom-Friendly Classroom Discourse Strategies,” that included strategies for facilitating classroom discourse in a remote learning environment:

Hi Catherine and Nicole,

Hope all is well with both of you. I've been thinking about you all and do not want to leave you hanging. This journey is not about me fulfilling a graduation requirement. It is about me offering you both support no matter what learning looks like in these uncertain times. I've created this Cheat Sheet for both of you to use so that you do not lose the thread on what we discussed previously.

I will be sure to check in with you all and please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you need anything. Let's continue to record math and reading Zoom lessons and you can forward them to me. I will look for ways to further support both of you with your goal. This aim we have set should definitely help with the remote learning experience.

With love and appreciation,

Denise

Catherine responded with the following email:

Thanks for sharing, Denise!

I had an idea for giving girls some sharing space that I'm going to try out this week, we'll see how it goes! I made a Google Slide for each class, and each

slide is basically just a table with their names. I'm going to screen share in present mode and given them time to answer a question using the pen or text box features. Who knows what will happen, but at least it's something! I appreciate the reminder to establish norms, too. We definitely have that as a goal for Monday, but I'm sure it'll take the whole week to really feel like we're in a good space with all of that.

Hope you've enjoyed your break!

Catherine

I always made myself available for one on one meetings, or by email. Catherine scheduled a meeting with me during Loop 2 for an issue unrelated to our goals for the coaching experience.

I also allowed space for both focal teachers to express any concerns, frustrations, or challenges they may have been experiencing due to the new safety and health protocols, and tighter schedule as a result of the pandemic. One of the challenges that often came up was the challenge of hybrid teaching (teaching students in person and students online simultaneously):

Catherine: I just feel like this year, with them so far spread out, and not being able to... that's where I feel like I've just gone back to like didactic teaching a lot more. And I don't... I don't love it, but especially with the Zoom kids, where I feel anchored here, because I don't want to move too far from them, and so I'm like, 'Hello children.' It doesn't feel good, but it's also like I don't know what else to do right now.

Nicole: And it's really hard with them on Zoom to... Well when there's only two it's a little bit easier but to get them to interact when there's more than two then you can't talk over each other and in that group there's a talker and there's a 'Hello! Come in' child and you're like...

It was evident that both focal teachers were frustrated at the hybrid model of instruction, often feeling like they were not adequately engaging with in person students and remote learning students. Interestingly, shifting to a fully remote learning model was a welcomed change. In other words, a fully remote learning model had the potential to support the teachers in being more intentional about creating space for student conversation, and disrupting typical classroom interaction patterns.

As a coach, I began to feel apprehensive about the shift to remote learning.

I wrote the following in my coaching journal:

It was announced that we'd be shifting to full remote learning for three weeks prior to winter break. While this won't impact the coaching loop logistics, I have been very concerned that we'll lose the thread of creating more space for student conversation. Why?

1.The new classroom setting... How will I be able to compare, or track progress?

2.The distraction of being overwhelmed by the logistics of the shift (teachers).

3.Confusion from the teachers on what classroom discourse that's more student-centered looks like in the virtual realm.

4.2.3 Observations

Overall, despite the challenges of moving to remote learning, I noted observable differences in the nature of classroom interactions in Loop 2 in both teachers' classrooms.

4.2.3.1 Observations: Catherine

I observed Catherine 7 times (414 minutes) during Loop 2.

Decrease in I-R-E pattern. In Catherine's classroom, there were fewer instances of Catherine using the I-R-E model. In Loop 1, Catherine engaged in the I-R-E pattern 67 times. There were 42 moments of Catherine using the I-R-E pattern in Loop 2.

In Catherine's classroom in Loop 2, there were richer opportunities for students to express themselves and their ideas. Whereas students' talk was often short and focused on right answers in Loop 1, in Loop 2 students' voices were more prominent. For example, in Loop 2 students made contributions to the classroom discussions such as:

- Using the annotation feature in Zoom to individually respond to Catherine's questions about quotation marks, placing quotation marks around the proper text and using appropriate punctuation. Ex. "Glenda's and Olympia's quotes connect! And so does Chelsea's and Genesis's! So I have a question. Why is Millie scared?"
- To check for understanding, Catherine had each student take pictures of examples of quotation marks being used in their self-selected novels, and share the dialogue with their classmates. Students got an opportunity to share who was speaking in the text, and give some details and opinions about the book in general. For example, a student exclaimed, "I smell him!" "I smell him, too!" The dogs are talking and there's a dog named mouse." A classmate said, "Please tell me there's a mouse named dog!" The student replied, "No, but he's a big dog."
- Students were asked to discuss the question, "Who gets to decide your name?" in small groups located in breakout rooms. The conversation led to students discussing how some of their peers have nicknames, but gave their friends permission to use

them, among other revelations. Students responded, for example, “Your parents. You! Nobody else should get to decide what to call you!” “Like we call Gennie ‘GenGen,’ but we asked her if it was okay at first and she said, ‘Yes.’”

These instances of student talk were notably different because they offered new perspectives that incorporated students’ identities and lived experiences. For instance, students not only shared their understanding of quotation marks, but also had the opportunity to share information and feelings about a book that mattered to them. This generated excitement and genuine interest in what others were reading, and gave students a chance to receive recommendations on what book series to read next. Furthermore, students engaging in small group conversations about names and who decides what to call an individual, created space for students to share their lived experiences, make connections to the text that was linked to the question, and hear multiple perspectives.

Relatedly, I noted an increase in alternative discussion structures used by Catherine. In Loop 1, I mostly saw I-R-E, but in Loop 2, I saw a wider variety of discussion structures.

Table 5. Alternative Discussion Structures Used by Catherine

Loop 1	Loop 2
Partner share each other’s legends and make suggestions	Use of the annotation feature in Zoom
	Use of whiteboards to respond to questions
	Use of self-selected book and camera to demonstrate understanding of quotation marks
	Breakout rooms to discuss the question, “Who gets to decide your name?”
	Breakout groups to read and discuss texts
	Use of the private chat feature to explore different sentence types

	Students placed in groups of 3 to work together on a digital assignment and complete a response sheet to Chapter 2.
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The above table displays the increase in alternative discussion structures between Loop 1 and Loop 2. Catherine discovered and used classroom discourse strategies appropriate for the virtual space that can also be reimagined and used for in person learning.

Increase in open questions. In Catherine’s classroom, I also noted a slight increase in the number of open questions she posed to students, from 6.2 open questions per class to an average of 6.5 open questions per class. The following are examples of open questions Catherine posed in Loop 2:

- “Who gets to decide what you are called?”
- “So what do you think she might be talking about?”
- “What question would you ask your students?”

These types of questions are distinct from closed questions, because they ask students to make sense of what they are doing or reading, and they invite multiple perspectives from students.

More even patterns of participation. While the same student - who identifies as white - remained the most vocal in Loop 2, the number of times each student spoke in Catherine’s class became more evenly distributed in Loop 2. Three out of the five students of color in Catherine’s class increased in vocal participation in Loop 2.

Catherine shared a surprise that emerged from this coaching process:

I was surprised at how easy it was to find ways to incorporate more student voice throughout my instruction, both in the lessons that were recorded and the ones that weren't. For example, I began encouraging the girls to use each other as

resources on Zoom, and I think in the spring I wouldn't have imagined that could work. At first they were a little unsure, but once they got used to asking questions to the group, and realized that most of the time one of them had the answer, it really worked well to de-center me as the authority and let them rely on each other's knowledge more.

4.2.3.2 Observations: Nicole

I observed Nicole 8 times (415 minutes) in Loop 2. In Nicole's classroom, some of the patterns I reported above were present but they were less pronounced.

Like Catherine, in Nicole's classroom in Loop 2, there were richer opportunities for students to express themselves and their ideas. For example, in Loop 2 students made rich contributions to the classroom discussions such as:

- Students engaged in small group brainstorming sessions about things that come in 2s and 5s. Ex. "Toes and fingers... a book series... a nickel... the minutes on the clock!"
- Students were placed in small groups to time each other engaging in a variety of movement activities as a way of understanding the concept of time. Ex. "The alphabet took long and the jumping jacks was shorter... We could use a clock to measure... We could use the second hand or the minute hand."
- Students using individual learning clocks to demonstrate understanding of various concepts of time, answering questions and sharing their ideas. Ex. "I decided to start on 2 and end up on the 4 to show 15 minutes."

I noticed there were fewer instances of Nicole using the I-R-E model for classroom discourse. In Loop 1, Nicole engaged in the I-R-E pattern 144 times. There were 112 moments

of Nicole using the I-R-E pattern in Loop 2. Relatedly, I noted an increase in alternative discussion structures used by Nicole. See Table 6.

Table 6. Alternative Discussion Structures Used by Nicole

Loop 1	Loop 2
Working with a partner to hunt for treasure as an introduction to coordinate grid	Use of breakout rooms to for groups to discuss things that come in 2s and 5s
Coordinate grid game with partner	Use of breakout rooms for groups to quiz each other on multiples of 2s and 5s
Shopping at each other's store (partners) to practice money concepts	Use of annotation feature in Zoom
	Movement activity in breakout rooms for groups to answer questions related to time
	Use of breakout rooms to respond and discuss several big idea questions about clocks and telling time.
	Use of individual learning clocks to respond to questions about time
	Use of breakout rooms to discuss questions about the differences between addition and multiplication
	Use of whiteboards to record conversations and responses to questions
	Use of individual learning clocks for students to practice elapsed time

Similarly to Catherine, Nicole engaged in more alternative discussion structures in Loop 2 than she did in Loop 1. This increase allowed students to engage in more interactions and discussions with each other. Some of the classroom discourse strategies took a multisensory approach, offering students opportunities to move their bodies and work with manipulatives, such as individual learning clocks.

Decrease of open questions. I saw a decrease in Nicole’s use of open questions, from an average of 7.8 open questions per class to an average of 3.2 questions per class. The following are examples of open questions Nicole asked in Loop 2:

- “Why do we need clocks?”
- “Why do we need to know the time of day?”
- “What’s one thing you noticed or thought about for the difference between more than something and times something?”

At first I was a bit surprised about the drop in the frequency of open questions. I had expected that the number of open questions might increase. But, when I looked more closely at what was happening in the classroom, I noticed that there was actually an improvement in the richness and quality of the questions she was asking. During Loop 2, Nicole seemed more intentional about planning and creating the space for open questions. For instance, she posed the question, “Why do we need clocks?” for the students to quietly reflect on, discuss in small groups, and share thoughts with the whole class. Students shared their perspectives, such as the importance of being on time to places and events like school and dance classes.

More even patterns of participation. The number of times each student spoke in Nicole’s class became more evenly distributed among students across differences. Noticeably, three out of the four students of color in Nicole’s class spoke more frequently. Furthermore, students were offered a wider variety of alternative discussion structures, encouraging them to engage in classroom discussions in diverse ways.

Nicole offered some personally reflections on what she learned between Loop 1 and Loop 2:

I always have a tendency to want to have something be perfect from top to bottom before it's implemented, which of course is the enemy of doing much of anything (though great for procrastination!) This experience reminded me that small changes or additions or variations work. It's much more doable to add one thing or remember to find the moment for one thing in each lesson than to ponder revising everything all at once.

It feels like a smarter way of using my time and likely much more effective. I can try one small change and adjust from there. If it didn't work, why? Was I not doing it right, was it not a good fit for my style or for that lesson, was it just a bad idea?! If it was one day, it's not a big gain or loss. Then it can be tweaked for the next day. Then make another small change or addition, and so on. It seems like that daily accretion of changes, of new ways of doing things is more likely to end up in more permanent long-term changes.

4.2.4 Closing Reflections

At the end of Loop 2, I gathered some feedback from the teachers. Catherine stated the following:

I am feeling more aware of culturally sustaining teacher practices, and I feel like I have that lens with me whenever I'm planning a lesson, specifically looking at increasing student conversation. It's been helpful to think about ways to let the students lead things more frequently, and giving them time to talk with each other.

I think I've been successful in incorporating more student voice over the past 7 weeks, and I appreciate that.

Nicole expressed what she believed to be the most useful part of the coaching experience:

The most helpful part was having a "right-sized" chunk of practice to think about. In the flurry of teaching, particularly this year, it was helpful to just be able to scan through each day's plan with one idea in mind and make sure that it was in there or add it.

Perhaps the most important question I asked both focal teachers was whether or not they believe this instructional change would be sustainable for them. Both focal teachers concluded that the instructional change would be sustainable for them for several reasons. First, they now have a method in which to incorporate the change. Next, they have access to resources to support them in sustaining the instructional change. Catherine appreciated having a "process-oriented" focus as opposed to a "content-oriented" focus because it allows her to do a quick and constant check-in to be sure she is incorporating the instructional change. Finally, both focal teachers noted the importance of having me as their coach for ongoing support, conveying that having me "to run things by and check in with feels like a much more doable way of promoting long-term positive change," as Nicole expressed.

My coaching journal was the space that I used to reflect about the entire coaching process. Overall, I feel that the coaching cycles went well in the sense that both focal teachers feel more knowledgeable about CST and believe they have experienced a noticeable change in their use of CST practices. Prior to my data analysis, I observed noticeable change in both focal teachers' understanding of and engagement with CST. However, I must admit that I was hoping for an even

stronger instructional transformation in both teachers' use of CST. I continued to observe some instructional practices that do not align with CST. I noted the following in my journal:

It's frustrating to witness the teachers defaulting back to typical interaction patterns. It appears as though each teacher intentionally plans 1-2 CST moments in their lessons without paying close attention to the entire learning experience they are creating for the students. This leads them to neglecting to recognize opportunities for CST, and as a result, have a "check off the box" approach. At the same time, I believe in giving grace for the journey. It's very evident that each teacher is trying to improve her understanding and use of CST. We are off to a solid start, but are in no way mastering CST!

I also found myself journaling about the choice I had to make as we concluded the coaching loops and approached our final meeting:

The reality is I witnessed some improvement toward our two goals, yet I experienced some frustration as I observed missed opportunities... How would I approach our final meeting? What would be the most effective approach to take that would help me achieve my aim and inspire them to continue on this journey? After much reflection and placing myself in their shoes, I realized that the best approach would be to share clips of each teacher implementing the goals. This, I'd hoped, would inspire the teachers to keep fighting the good fight. Nicole confirmed that my instinct was spot on.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned as an instructional leader is that teachers have to see the instructional change within themselves and within their classroom in order to be inspired to sustain the change. Ongoing support and inspiration go hand in hand.

5.0 Discussions and Conclusions

I embarked upon this PDSA cycle with the intention of finding ways to support Ellis faculty's culturally sustaining teaching. Initially, I thought my Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework would offer a pathway for a meaningful and effective coaching experience for the focal teachers. Although the framework offered guidance in the coaching cycle, I quickly discovered that as an instructional coach I would have to embody the same qualities that are expected of a teacher engaging in CST – adaptability, flexibility, and a willingness to pivot in response to the individual needs of others. In other words, the instructional framework gave us a starting point, but its use had to be reimaged once video observations revealed what the focus and goals should be.

5.1 Importance of Classroom Talk for CST

The evidence of rigid verbal exchange between the teachers and students that I observed early on was in direct contrast with the linguistic conditions necessary for CST. Students enter the classroom with a variety of linguistic experiences which are connected to their cultural ways of being and interacting with others. Paris (2012) urges educators to understand and embrace the “cultural fluidity” students of color engage in (p.95). Furthermore, linguistic fluidity has become a critical skill for successfully navigating our increasingly diverse society. Students of color have been denied access to opportunities in our society. Exposing students to linguistic and cultural fluidity not only honors individuals across our differences, but Paris and Alim (2014) argue it is a

necessary pedagogy for supporting access to power in a changing nation. What's more, "Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued" is listed as an Ellis Faculty Expectation and appears across four dimensions of the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework. It was imperative that I disrupt the rigid and traditional interaction patterns that were taking place in both classrooms.

5.2 Explaining Teachers' Development towards CST

Both focal teachers had an added challenge of teaching during the pandemic. The Ellis School was run fully in person with a remote learning option. Our school shifted to being fully remote during Loop 2 of the coaching cycle. Needless to say, this was an atypical school year for teachers and students. Despite these potential stressors, both focal teachers were willing to give attention to CST. I learned that it is possible for teachers to make changes in their instructional practices.

I witnessed progress on the part of both teachers who entered this coaching cycle with different length and depth of teaching experience. I have since wondered what it took for these educators to make the amount of change that they did. Upon reflection, I have come to realize some key components of the PDSA cycle that I believe contributed to the professional growth of both focal teachers and their development toward CST. First, the coaching model moved beyond the workshop-based model of professional development. Coaching offered both focal teachers an ongoing process that allowed for feedback and reflection. CST is a complex form of pedagogy that requires time to learn and consider. Individualized goals were imperative in creating noticeable change in both focal teachers' use of CST. Workshop-based professional development models do not offer educators the individual attention needed to meet their professional needs. On

the other hand, a coach-based model provided both focal teachers with individualized attention and support in real time. Perhaps the most critical element missing from a workshop-based professional development model is relationships. At the foundation of my work with the focal teachers were relationships based on trust, vulnerability, and respect. It was from this foundation that I was able to share hard truths with both focal teachers and they were able to unpack their frustrations with me in a safe space. Finally, my connection to the school community played a crucial role in supporting the teachers' growth in CST. I am an instructional coach who was able to identify, name, and support changes based on our mission, vision, values, expectations, and goals as a school community.

As I reflect on how this process went, I must admit that I ambitiously hoped and aimed for the focal teachers to achieve even more noticeable change in their understanding of and engagement with CST. I even took the small change personally, wondering if I could have done something different or better as a coach. Over time, I realized that such complex and important changes take time and actually confirm my belief that a coach-based model for professional development is necessary in supporting teachers' engagement with CST. I was pleased to observe an increase in alternative discourse structures during Loop 2 of the coaching cycle. However, I noticed these opportunities for student voice still fell short of being a true reflection of CST. Both focal teachers continued to display a rigidity in their approach, not taking the stance of facilitator or guide, but instead taking more of an authoritative stance. This authoritative stance left little room for students to authentically share their deepest thoughts and responses to prompts. Students were limited by time constraints and the teacher's agenda, what they were hoping the students would say. Paris and Alim (2014) assert that "power is now based in part on one's ability to communicate effectively to more than 'standard' English" (p. 89). In other words, power and

access is about gaining dominant skills and knowledge while also maintaining their multiple ways of speaking and being.

Going forward, I would like to work with both focal teachers on enhancing the quality of their alternative discourse structures. I want to support both focal teachers in feeling comfortable with facilitating conversations around challenging topics, such as race. I also want to support both focal teachers with embracing the cultural and linguistic richness that exists within the classroom. All of these future action steps come with the understanding that classroom interaction is just an opening to more robust professional development about CST and its complexities.

5.3 Implications for Professional Development

To really support teachers toward CST in a long-term way, our school needs to invest time and other resources differently. This coaching cycle offered several implications for a school wide professional development model. My work suggests that we should scale back on the workshop-based professional development model if we are prioritizing culturally sustaining teaching. Similarly, while the book studies that we provide are one part of our professional development around CST, such opportunities may not necessarily change what teachers are doing day to day. At most, book studies can bring awareness to CST and other diversity, equity, and inclusion topics and practices. The teachers I worked with did not feel confused about what the goals were or hesitant about the importance of them. And still, their actual instruction with students fell far short of what Paris and Alim would recognize as CST. This suggests that the type of support teachers most need is support in application and translation to their own classroom contexts.

I firmly believe that we should focus our resources, finances, and efforts into a coach-based model based upon the noticeable change I witnessed in both focal teachers' instructional practices. At the onset of this PDSA cycle, I saw the value in a coach-based model from my own professional teaching experience and the review of the literature. However, engaging in this coaching experience and analyzing the data derived from the experience made the need for a coach-based model even clearer to me.

A shift from workshop-based to coach-based professional development requires changes to our school structure and approach to supporting teachers' professional growth. Our daily schedule would have to allow for teachers to work effectively with the instructional coach. Our allotted time for school-wide, workshop-based professional development would have to be reimagined and perhaps replaced by time for teachers to meet with the instructional coach, or even work, observe, and reflect on instructional changes. The teachers will also have to begin to identify and name that what they are asking for is coaching support, not more workshops. My role as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will have to be restructured to allow for me to be able to support our faculty in this manner.

I would like to continue my work with the two focal teachers. I envision our partnership as a means to develop teacher leaders in CST. The focal teachers will serve as a valuable source of knowledge and experience for their colleagues. As I begin to offer CST instructional coaching, it will be imperative that I have strong teacher leaders to support faculty who are novice users of CST. Catherine is already a member of Ellisions for an Inclusive School Community, our faculty and staff group focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion work. I sought her out to be a facilitator of book study discussions that were centered on engaging in more culturally sustaining instructional practices. Over time, I wish to continue to expand upon the work the focal teachers

and I collaborated on through the coaching cycle. Although they will have a new set of students in the fall of 2021, further exploring ways to improve the quality of alternative discourse structures will be beneficial to any group of students. The focal teachers have a solid start with this work with room for continued growth and improvement.

5.4 Reflections on My Own Role

My experience as an instructional coach was full of joys and challenges. I admittedly entered the coaching cycle nervous about whether or not I could make an impact on the focal teachers' understanding of and engagement with CST. I was able to work through those emotions and utilize my own understanding of and engagement with CST, and my experience as Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to offer the focal teachers the best possible coaching experience. I found myself balancing frustration with effective communication. For instance, I would become frustrated whenever I observed the teachers limiting space for student voice, while knowing that I had to be able to communicate this frustration in an effective and professional manner. I had to stay focused on the fact that my role was to support teachers' CST practice, not make myself look good. This was an opportunity to do the coaching cycle, study the experience, and reflect on next action steps.

I see myself growing in ways I can effectively offer and communicate support for faculty. I have such a deep level of knowledge of CST, and always more to learn. Yet I must always keep in mind that our faculty's knowledge of CST is not at the same level as mine. I would like to work on ways I can meet faculty where they are, one step at a time. I will continue to build strong relationships with faculty to serve as the foundation for effective instructional coaching. I must

always have a connection with the Ellis community's mission, vision, goals, and expectations. I must continue to have a seat at the table, sharing research-based reasons for CST to remain a priority for our school. Resources are needed to make the instructional coaching experience possible. Resources include, but are not limited to time, instructional coaching training, and video equipment dedicated to this process.

The Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework turned out not to play such a critical role in the coaching process. In the beginning, the framework served as a guide for both focal teachers to choose an area of focus for the coaching cycle. This was particularly helpful given the fact that both focal teachers' understanding of CST was limited at the time. It became clear, however, that we needed to pivot from the originally stated goals for the coaching cycle. While our new areas of focus were not explicitly stated in the framework, there are elements within the framework that reflect the importance of student voice, including "Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued," and more. I believe that the best way to utilize the framework would be for faculty's reference. Also, since many of the Ellis Faculty Expectations are a part of the framework, and those expectations are used as an evaluation tool for administrators, school leaders can utilize the framework to look for evidence of CST. Ultimately, I believe there is a need for me to lift up student voice as an area of focus for our school since this instructional practice is closely connected to our mission, vision, and faculty expectations. I think a good plan is for me to break down the expectation of "Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued," into the two goals the focal teachers and I collaboratively addressed. This would be an important, foundational step toward our faculty becoming more knowledgeable of and engaged with CST.

It will be important for me to resist representing CST as the sort of thing that can be easily learned and done by teachers. It is not a single "thing" to be implemented. Even though frameworks

and assessment tools are typical in schools, they do not lend themselves to goals of CST. Frameworks tend to be static documents which is in direct contrast to the fluidity, adaptability, and flexibility that CST requires of educators. On the other hand, it is necessary to have a way to accurately articulate and capture the essence of CST to ensure its use and sustainability. I imagine modifying the framework to be used as a starting point for recognizing some of the essential components of CST. Faculty can use this guide to reflect upon and establish instructional goals with me as the instructional coach while remaining flexible and open to a shift in focus when necessary. Renaming this framework to present it more as a guide makes more sense.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of next action steps is to continuously remind faculty of the complexities of CST while centering our work on classroom discourse and student voice. I do not want our school to be misrepresenting CST by operating under the misunderstanding that fully engaging in such instruction only involves attention to classroom discourse. While there is so much more to learn and practice with CST, it is clear that Ellis needs to devote time to mastering classroom discourse. I will have to think of creative and effective ways to layer in other features of CST simultaneously. For instance, continued book studies, scheduled conversations and workshops specific to content area departments and school divisions, inviting CST scholars to speak on relevant topics could be a means for continuing the broader conversation about CST.

5.5 Reflecting on Improvement Science and Systems Thinking

My aim for the coaching intervention was to increase evidence of teachers' understanding of and engagement with CST. This aim emerged from data and observations that revealed attention

had not been given to students' cultural diversity at Ellis. Classroom discourse became the fundamental feature of my coaching during this PDSA cycle. As I continue to focus on classroom discourse next school year, it is necessary for me to determine what I should prioritize next in my CST coaching and why. Based upon my work with faculty this year and the results of a survey I conducted on future DEI professional development which garnered 30 teacher participants, classroom discourse must remain at the center of my CST coaching. Additionally, there is a call for me to provide coaching on how to facilitate difficult and sensitive conversations as they pertain to a wide range of DEI topics.

As I reflect on my driver diagram, I notice that my CST coaching allowed the focal teachers to engage in ongoing self-reflection and receive feedback via peer observations since we conducted all of our meetings as a team. These secondary drivers have the potential to positively impact a teacher's engagement with and understanding of CST in ways that go deeper than a one day workshop-based learning experience. I believe these moments will support me in continuously reminding CST is more than classroom discourse and classroom conversations about race, ethnicity, culture, and societal injustices. In other words, ongoing self-reflection and observation of instruction can illuminate other aspects of CST in authentic and meaningful ways.

5.6 Final Conclusions

I entered the doctoral program with the goal of acquiring the knowledge I needed to become a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at an independent school. Never in my wildest dreams did I foresee that goal coming to fruition during my doctoral studies in the EdD program at Pitt. More importantly, my experience in the EdD program led me on a path of establishing,

achieving, and reestablishing goals in response to my school context and professional growth. Through this Dissertation in Practice and PDSA cycle, I have gained several takeaways that leave me even more energized and hopeful to do my part in centering equity at my place of practice. First, I have learned to embrace the ambiguity of asset pedagogies and adaptive leadership. We live in complex times, with complex challenges, and an increasingly diverse society and classroom. Those are realities to celebrate, honor, and embrace, not shy away from. Next, I have learned to trust the process of improvement science. I am by nature a solution-driven individual who has learned to seek more questions than answers as I seek ways to improve our efforts towards equity and inclusion at my place of practice. Upon deep reflection, I realize that I was the intervention. I feel empowered to continue to be a change agent at The Ellis School, and now have the necessary tools and research-based approach to make myself effective and confident in that role. Additionally, I have learned that the most successful scholars view themselves as learners, approaching their work with humility, vulnerability, and an enormous respect for those who have paved the way before them. My approach to this work is student-centered, and I hope that is one thing that never changes.

My intention for my next PDSA cycle is to give attention to the quality of the alternative discourse structures that faculty use in their classrooms after they have received training on the Ellis Faculty Expectation “Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued” which is listed in the Culturally Sustaining Guide. As I conclude this part of my scholarly journey, I fully recognize that it is not the end, but rather the beginning of my work as a leader scholar practitioner. It is my hope that I will take all I have learned from my doctoral studies and use it as the foundation for future equity and inclusion work that will make an impact on faculty and students for years to come.

Appendix A Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework - The Ellis School

<p>Self-reflection <i>I frequently reflect upon my own experiences and membership in various identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, social class, gender), asking myself, “How do these core identifiers influence my beliefs about cultural identity?”</i></p>		
Self-reflection	Guided reflection	JEP Grant for PD on CRT, CST, anti-racist education, etc.
	Reflective journaling	End of Year Reflection
	Group discussions	Goals
<p>Cultural Capital <i>I value the uniqueness and dignity of each student.</i></p>		
Cultural Capital	<u>Planning and Preparation - Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:</u> Information about students gathered by the teacher for use in planning and instruction	<u>Planning and Preparation - Designing Coherent Instruction:</u> Varied, diverse resources fostering intersectional learning and thinking
	<u>Planning and Preparation - Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:</u> Student interests, needs, and culture learned by the teacher for use in planning	<u>Classroom Environment - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport:</u> Acknowledgement of students’ backgrounds and lives outside the classroom
	<u>Planning and Preparation - Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:</u> Teacher-designed opportunities for culturally responsive teaching and learning experiences	<u>Instruction - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques:</u> Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued
	<u>Planning and Preparation - Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:</u> Outcomes demonstrating a challenging cognitive level	<u>Instruction - Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness:</u> Students’ interests and daily events incorporated into a lesson

	<u>Planning and Preparation</u> - Designing Coherent Instruction: Opportunities for student choice available	<u>Instruction</u> - Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness: The teacher differentiating instruction and process for the student as needed
	The teacher models how to engage across difference and embody respect for social, cultural, and linguistic differences	The teacher seeks to understand and instructs on how culture influences communication in both verbal and nonverbal ways
	The teacher supports students in sustaining the cultural and linguistic capital of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence	The teacher enacts cultural connectedness through understanding and embracing the cultural fluidity
	The teacher sustains the linguistic and cultural capital of students in both traditional and evolving ways	The teacher works to honor and accommodate home languages

Cooperative Learning

I recognize that human connectedness and collaborative problem-solving are highly valued in many cultures and ensure they are experienced in my classroom.

Cooperative Learning	<u>Planning and Preparation</u> - Designing Coherent Instruction: Teacher incorporating collaborative group activities	<u>Instruction</u> - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques: Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport: Discussion characterized by respectful talk, active listening, and turn-taking	

Social Emotional Learning

I recognize that teaching students of color about their culture fosters social emotional learning and ensure students are emotionally connected to their learning environment

Social Emotional Learning	<u>Planning and Preparation</u> - Demonstrating Knowledge of Students: Responsiveness to the needs of girls at various developmental stages (and cultures)	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Student Behavior: Teacher engaging in preventative and restorative action when needed
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Student Behavior: Consistent,

	Rapport: Acknowledgement of students' backgrounds and lives outside the classroom	proportionate, and respectful response to student behavior
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport: Non-verbal cues shown by teachers and students indicating warn them and caring	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Student Behavior: Reinforcement of positive behavior
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport: Politeness and encouragement	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Organizing Physical Space: Pleasant, inviting atmosphere
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport: Equitable treatment	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Organizing Physical Space: Safe environment
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Establishing a culture for learning: High expectations for learning, participation, and quality of work	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Organizing Physical Space: Accessible for all students
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Establishing a culture for learning: Recognition of effort, persistence, and risk-taking among students	<u>Instruction</u> - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques: Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Classroom Procedures: Students play an important role in carrying out the routines	<u>Instruction</u> - Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness: Seizing on a teachable moment
	<u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Student Behavior: Clear standards of conduct, possibly posted, and possibly referred to during a lesson	
<p>Active Engagement <i>The learning environment I create is interactive, emotionally engaging, hands-on, and filled with visual physical stimulation.</i></p>		
Active Engagement	<u>Planning and Preparation</u> - Designing Coherent Instruction: Varied, diverse resources fostering intersectional learning and thinking	<u>Instruction</u> - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques: Individual student voices invited, heard, and valued

	<p><u>Classroom Environment</u> - Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport: Discussion characterized by respectful talk, active listening, and turn-taking</p>	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Engaging Students in Learning: Student enthusiasm, interest, thinking, and problem-solving</p>
	<p><u>Classroom Environment</u> - Establishing a culture for learning: High expectations for learning, participation, and quality of work</p>	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Engaging Students in Learning: Diverse learning tasks requiring high-level student thinking and inviting students to explain their thinking</p>
	<p><u>Classroom Environment</u> - Managing Classroom Procedures: Students play an important role in carrying out the routines</p>	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Engaging Students in Learning: Students highly motivated to work on all tasks and persistent even when the tasks are challenging</p>
	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques: Discussion, with the teacher stepping out of the central, mediating role</p>	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Engaging Students in Learning: Students actively and intellectually engaged</p>
	<p><u>Instruction</u> - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques: Focus on the reasoning exhibited by students in discussion, both in give-and-take with the teacher and their classmates</p>	<p>The teacher employs lessons and regularly assigns projects that require learners to identify complex, real-world issues students encounter in their daily lives and propose solutions to those problems</p>
	<p>The teacher creates an instructional environment where students learn to see themselves as agents of change who aspire for a better world</p>	

Appendix B PDSA Form

Tester:	Denise LaRosa	Date:	May 22, 2021
Change Idea:	Culturally Sustaining Framework and Coaching Model		
Goal of the Test:	To increase each teacher’s frequency and quality of CST throughout the coaching cycles.		

1. PLAN	Predictions:
Questions:	
When I sought to coach two focal elementary teachers toward culturally sustaining teaching, how did their instruction change?	Direct feedback from stakeholders (teachers) will inform and assess the effectiveness framework and coaching model, or lack thereof.
How might my collaboration with the focal teachers inform the development of a locally and contextually specific coach-based approach to instructional change?	Focal teachers will have a deeper understanding and engagement with CST and a noticeable change will be evident.
Details:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I will coach two 3rd grade teachers on culturally sustaining instructional practices. Instructional coaching cycle will include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Launch interview ● Loop 1 interview ● Loop 1 observations ● Loop 2 interview ● Loop 2 observations ● End of cycle interview ● Coaching plans 	

- Coaching journal

2. DO

- The entire coaching cycle happened. It became necessary to pivot from the originally established goals for the coaching cycle. The shift to focusing on alternative discourse structures was in alignment with CST and served as the foundation for CST coaching.
- Both teachers were willing to fully engage in the process in order to improve their practice.
- Both teachers achieved noticeable change in CST.

3. STUDY

What were the results?

- There was evidence of noticeable change in both focal teachers' approaches to classroom talk.
- Noticeable change was small and will continue to take time.
- Decrease in I-R-E pattern.
- More even patterns of participation.

What did you learn?

- Teachers have to see the instructional change within themselves and within their classroom in order to be inspired to sustain the change.
- Ongoing support and inspiration go hand in hand.
- The Culturally Sustaining Framework is better used as a guide.

4. ACT

- Restructure the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework to use as a *guide* rather than framework. This guide will offer teachers a starting point for setting instructional goals.
- Expand coaching on classroom discourse to not only support the use of alternative discourse structures, but also improve the quality of those structures.

Appendix C Coaching Outline

*Coaching plans will be fully determined by each teacher's response to initial interview questions.

- **Primary Objective**
 - Support teacher to identify and plan for growth along one dimension of CST

- **Additional Objectives**
 - Connect CRT and CST to The Ellis School's mission, vision, and Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Clarify terminology around asset pedagogy
 - Prepare teachers to engage in CRT and CST
 - Introduce culturally sustaining instructional framework

- **Coaching activity**
 - Look together at moment of teaching or artifact of teaching; analyze for presence/absence of focal professional development goal
 - Consider ways of increasing quality of focal CST dimension
 - Look to upcoming lesson plan to identify and plan ways of improving plan on focal CST dimension

Appendix D Coaching Interview Questions

Launch Interview

1. Identify specific instructional practice that will be the focus of the coaching.
2. Coach learns more about the teacher's current and typical teaching practices.
 - a. Strengths
 - b. Goals for professional development this year
 - c. Establish rapport
3. Coach describes the culturally sustaining instructional framework.
4. Teacher selects one strategy/area of focus from the Cultural Capital dimension as a goal.
5. Teacher and coach develop a plan for prioritizing this dimension this fall. Coach takes notes.
 - a. Coach offers process: look together at examples, look at upcoming lesson plans, and consider ways of ramping up teacher's focal goal
 - b. Coach asks for feedback on the process: what would also help you? What do you think you need in order to refine this aspect of your practice?
 - c. Coach and teacher set end-of-cycle goal: How will we know when you've refined this practice? What might we see/hear in your instruction? What might we see/hear in your students' talk?
6. Coach sends teacher summary of their plan for additional feedback.

Introductory Protocol

To launch our work together this semester, I'd love to ask you a few questions about yourself. Is it ok if I record our conversation?

I estimate our conversation will take between 45-60 minutes. Does that still work with your schedule today?

Great! Based on your answers, my hope is that we can identify on one specific aspect of your teaching practice that you'd like to refine this semester. I am excited to work with you and learn from you about how you develop your practice.

Questions

General

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. How long have you been teaching at Ellis?
3. Tell me about the populations/demographics of students you have taught in the past.
4. What would you say are your strengths as a teacher at Ellis?

Self-Assessment of CST

5. As you know, I'm especially focused on culturally relevant and sustaining teaching. When I say that, what comes to mind for you? To what extent would you say you're already doing "culturally sustaining" teaching? Was there anything about our recent CRT training that frustrated you? If so, what was it and why did it frustrate you?
6. Let's look together at the Ellis framework. Have you seen this before? Take a few minutes to think about the dimensions of teaching it describes. What is one place that you'd say you are already comfortable with or doing pretty consistently in your teaching?
 1. Can you give a specific example?
7. What is one place that you'd say you are less comfortable or aren't yet consistently doing in your teaching?
 1. Can you give an example? (if applicable)

Setting Specific Development Goal

8. Using this as a starting place, what is one specific aspect you'd like to work on together this semester?

Co-Creating Plan

9. Coach offers process: I suggest that we could work together in the following way. Based on your goal, we could look together at short video clips from classroom teaching to talk about ..., we could look at clips of your own teaching to talk about ..., and we could work together to identify and plan for places in your upcoming lessons that you could focus on your goal. After each time we meet, I could observe some of your teaching, and then we could come back together to talk about how things went and what you want to continue to build on.
10. Coach asks for feedback on the process: what would also help you? What do you think you need in order to refine this aspect of your practice?

Co-Creating "Look-Fors"

11. Coach and teacher set end-of-cycle goal: How will we know when you've refined this practice? What might we see/hear in your instruction? What might we see/hear in your students' talk?

End of Cycle Interview

- Coach and teacher review performance feedback

Weekly Questions

- How did things go for you this week?
- To what extent did you move toward your focal goal? How do you know?
- Coach shares performance feedback. (*Use video observation form.*)

Cycle-Level Reflection Questions

We've worked together for # weeks now.

1. How do you feel about your current *engagement* with culturally sustaining teaching practices?
2. How do you feel about your current *understanding* of culturally sustaining instructional approaches?
3. What have you learned?
4. What surprised you throughout this process?
5. Do you think this change will be sustainable for you?
6. How can I support you going forward?

Appendix E Instructional Coaching Plan

Teacher Name:	Date:
Session:	
Which dimension of the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework will be your focus?	
Which sub-dimension/strategy of the Culturally Sustaining Instructional Framework will be your focus?	
What are specific ways you will incorporate this focus into your upcoming lesson?	

Source: Best Foot Forward Project

Appendix F Video Observation Form

Teacher Name:	Date:
Session:	
Focus of the observation:	
Brief summary of lesson:	
Clip selection #1 (timestamp): Brief summary of clip: Reason for selection: <i>Coach Preparation: Annotations and private notes</i> Guiding Questions for public annotations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the teacher do and say?• What do the students do and say?• Relationship to goal? <i>Private Planning Notes:</i> Interpretations? Questions? What aspect(s) of practice will you talk about for these clips? How does it relate to the teacher's learning goal? What do you want the teacher to learn? (I.e., why is this the salient focus?) What will it look like when the teacher becomes more skilled at this? What are some specific and actionable suggestions you might make for the teacher to improve	

at this?

Clip selection #2 (timestamp):

Brief summary of clip:

Reason for selection:

Coach Preparation: Annotations and private notes

Guiding Questions for public annotations:

- What does the teacher do and say?
- What do the students do and say?
- Relationship to rubric?

Private Planning Notes:

Interpretations?

Questions?

What aspect(s) of practice will you talk about for these clips? How does it relate to the teacher's learning goal?

What do you want the teacher to learn? (I.e., why is this the salient focus?)

What will it look like when the teacher becomes more skilled at this?

What are some specific and actionable suggestions you might make for the teacher to improve at this?

Source: Best Foot Forward Project

- *Use this video observation form at the following interview session.*

Appendix G Video Feedback Form

Teacher Name:	Date:
Session:	
Focus of the observation:	
Brief summary of lesson:	
Clip selection #1 (timestamp): Brief summary of clip: Reason for selection: <i>Coach Preparation: Annotations and private notes</i> Guiding Questions for public annotations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the teacher do and say?• What do the students do and say?• Relationship to goal?	
Clip selection #2 (timestamp): Brief summary of clip: Reason for selection: <i>Coach Preparation: Annotations and private notes</i> Guiding Questions for public annotations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the teacher do and say?• What do the students do and say?• Relationship to goal?	

Source: Best Foot Forward Project

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