TEACHER CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND THE EFFECT ON SLAVIC STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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TEACHER CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND THE EFFECT ON SLAVIC STUDENT PERFORMANCE

By

Erin Marston

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By

Erin Marston
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the three participating teachers and to my family. Throughout this journey, I have been supported by the hard-working three participating teachers, my amazing wife, my wonderful son, and my parents. In my pursuit to obtain my doctoral degree, I was met with many obstacles. This group of individuals helped make the journey more enjoyable and less stressful.

My wife Jaime took care of our home, our son, and our fur babies. Her unwavering support of me while on this journey helped make our home and family thrive. Thank you for all the cooked dinners brought to me while I worked, for the cleaning on the weekends so I could write, the conversations we had to help encourage and reignite my drive, and for all the hugs and kisses to remind me I was not alone.

The three participating teachers in this study are the reason this work happened. Thank you for your communication support, your trust in my ability to lead you through this work, for your openness and taking risks, and for all of your hard work. Your support meant the world to me.

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To Dr. Githens for believing in me and allowing me to be part of Cohort 3. To my Cohort 3 colleagues, thank you for your support in our classes and our wonderful weekend lunches, to the wonderful teaching staff at University of the Pacific who helped me gain the knowledge to be a successful doctoral student and complete my dissertation, and to Meredith Linden, the best editor, thank you for helping my work look its best.
Student demographic data in today’s elementary and secondary schools have shown an increase in the numbers of diverse students in classrooms across the United States. This change in classroom demographics has established the need for changes to both the classroom educational environment and the preparation of our teachers. Research supports a few documented ways teachers can support both their student experiences and academic performance. Culturally competent teachers, cultural humility, and culturally relevant pedagogy are a few of the ways educators can adapt to the change in student demographics. Linking the literature to these findings will help provide an overview of several factors associated with teacher cultural competency and student academic performance. Included in the research are classroom demographics, cultural bias, teacher education and experience, relational capacity, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The research suggests that the more teachers are aware of their own bias through culturally competent teacher education, the more successful teachers are at reaching diverse students in the classroom. The goal is to provide information on the importance of teacher cultural competency and how it relates to student success. This action research, case study analyzed the relationship between teachers’ cultural competency and their students’ academic performance through a post-positive research study. Data were collected from various resources: classroom observations; teacher, parent, and student focus groups; academic data; and
observations of classroom instruction. This study was a 9-week, two-intervention cycle of action research. The purpose of this action research, case study was to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms where teachers were of Slavic descent and classrooms where teachers were of non-Slavic descent. This action research, case study aimed to answer multiple research questions to investigate why there were discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy and the academic success of Slavic students. Past research has supported a wide array of culturally responsive teaching techniques for a variety of ethnic and linguistic subgroups. The past research did not specifically look at, or study, the Slavic cultural needs in the classroom. This action research, case study specifically looked at the Slavic cultural needs at one particular school. This is the first study to provide information on the importance of culturally responsive teaching for the Slavic community and how teacher cultural humility with Slavic students can potentially improve perceptions, experiences, and academic success. This study can help fill the gap and potentially lead to further inquiry into Slavic cultural humility.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Over the past decades, the student population in United States public schools has become increasingly diverse. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 2017), public K-12 schools in the United States have seen classroom demographics shift to include an increase in the number of Hispanics, Asians, and children of two or more races. Data from the NCES report also show the English language learner (ELL) population has risen in the United States based on the number of students participating in ELL programs. The NCES study highlights the unbalanced racial/ethnic composition of the classroom. The racial/ethnic make-up of diverse cultures and languages in the classroom environment should bring attention to the importance of public K-12 teachers understanding their diverse students’ culture and language. It is important to address these changes in the classroom environment to ensure proper support to both the teachers and the students in our schools.

According to the National Education Association (NEA; 2017), student demographic data in elementary and secondary schools have shown an increase in numbers of diverse students in classrooms across the United States. This change in classroom demographics has brought light to the need for culturally competent teachers who can create culturally responsive classrooms to support their diverse student body. This is especially true for the state of California, where this action research case study took place. The state of California has a diverse K-12 student population and the teaching force in California is predominately White (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019a). Based on these data, it is likely the teacher will not reflect the racial/ethnic background of most students. The unbalanced racial/ethnic composition creates
classrooms that lack culturally responsive teaching. Studies suggest the unbalanced racial/ethnic composition of teachers and students in classrooms creates a gap in academic performance and educational attainment, known as the achievement gap (Carpenter et al., 2006; Gutierrez & Zavella, 2009; Madrid, 2011). According to California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP; CDE, 2019b), California state testing data each year show achievement gaps in both English language arts and mathematics between White students and other subgroups of students. In 2017, the California Smarter Balance state wide assessment results showed a 36.47% gap in English language arts performance and a 25.24% achievement gap in mathematics performance between English language learners and White students. These data have led many people to look into reasons for these educational gaps. Some research has identified teacher cultural competency as one of the major factors contributing to this educational gap as well as the instruction of ELLs who are students whose first language is not English (Dantas, 2007; Farr et al., 2005; Samson & Collins, 2012).

The CASPP (CDE, 2019b) does not differentiate between proficient English-speaking White, or Caucasian, students with White ELLs. The Slavic community here in the United States is a group that includes both subgroups of White and ELL students. The Slavic subgroup of White students includes a rich and diverse cultural history, cultural experience, and language in the United States. Educators who have Slavic students in the classroom should be equipped with training on how to support this diverse subgroup of students to ensure their successful academic progress is not lost between the two subgroups.

California is home to the second largest influx of European immigrants from 2012 to 2016 (Alperin & Batalova, 2018). “The fall of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s ushered in the most recent wave of European immigration, dominated by people from Eastern Europe and the
former Soviet Union” (Alperin & Batalova, 2018, p. 1). Pepper County is used as a pseudonym in this manuscript to protect all participants in this study. Pepper County, located in northern California, has also seen waves of Slavic immigration (Gurzhiy, 2015). According to Gurzhiy (2015), Pepper County is home to around 75,000 Slavic descendants. Data found in the United States Census Bureau collection for race and origin do not distinguish for Slavic regions. The data are housed in a “White alone” race and origin collection pot. The White alone definition is described as, “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (United States Census Bureau, 2018, para. 2). To decipher these data into potential categories of who represents White alone, one can research languages spoken in the home and foreign-born residents living in the area.

Researching languages spoken in the home as well as foreign-born residents of the United States can provide a more accurate account of the number of Slavic people living in an area. According to the United States Census Bureau (2015), over 47,000 Slavic-speaking residents were living in Pepper County in 2013 and over 42,000 residents were born in a Slavic country. The United States Census Bureau also provides data on when foreign-born people immigrate to the United States. According to Schmidley and Robinson (2003), in 2001 an average of 465,000 foreign-born Russians was living in the United States, and the number increased in 2002 to 508,000. These data from the United States Census Bureau (2018) show a large majority of Slavic immigrants moving to Pepper County between 1990 and 2000. In 2012, an estimated 42,116 Russian and Ukraine-born residents lived in Pepper County (Gurzhiy, 2015). The number of Slavic immigrants moving to the United States, more specifically Pepper County, is evidence of a need for Slavic cultural competency to help meet the needs of our
diverse community. The Slavic immigrants moving to Pepper County are in need of a quality education for themselves and their families.

California, where this present study took place, has seen a large increase in Slavic immigrants living in a northern California city. Over 90% of the student population of a local charter school in the area come from a Slavic culture. These families originate from the following Slavic countries: Russia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. Despite cultural differences from these countries, the majority of these families have relocated to the United States for religious and political freedoms. The families immigrated to the United States with support from one specific Russian Baptist church located in this northern California city. This church has ties to multiple Slavic countries and has helped Slavic families immigrate to this city since the early 1990s. Religious “refugees from the former Soviet Union came to the shores of Pepper County in search of a better life” (Gurzhiy, 2015, p. 1). Many of the students in this charter school came to this city through support from this local Russian Baptist church. The students are either first generation born in the United States or recent immigrants to the United States. During my almost 3 years working at this study’s charter school, I saw discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy, parent involvement, and the academic success of students. These discrepancies shed light on a problem the school has been facing since its inception in 2015.

One of the trends in schools with regard to student experience and academic performance is the need for culturally competent teachers. Culturally competent teaching is described as “teaching in ways responsive to the cultures of our students which is vital to enhance equity of access to achievement” (Averill et al., 2015, p. 65). Cultural humility and cultural competency are effective ways for teachers to develop a deep understanding of the individual student in ways
that go beyond their age and gender. Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. “It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching” (NEA, 2017, para. 1).

Past studies researching cultural competency in education (Brown et al., 2016; Flores et al., 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Lund & Lee, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017) identified the importance of providing training on culturally responsive teaching techniques to new teachers. Both the teacher and the student face challenges when the teacher lacks the cultural knowledge of the students in the classroom. “Cultural competence is the key to thriving in culturally diverse classrooms and schools - and it can be learned, practiced, and institutionalized to better serve diverse students, their families, and their communities” (NEA, 2017, para. 1). According to Anderson (2011), when teachers and school leaders build relationships with all their students, regardless of culture or language barriers, they improve students’ and parents’ connection to the school and thus the academic success of the students. These past studies have supported a wide array of culturally responsive teaching techniques for a variety of ethnic and linguistic subgroups. This research did not look at or study the Slavic experience in the classroom; hence, it lacks information on culturally responsive teaching techniques for the Slavic community in the United States. With the increase of the Slavic demographics in the United States, more research needs to be conducted to support Slavic students in the classrooms.

One way culturally responsive teaching has been addressed is through teacher education, which has been evolving in an effort to support all teachers in meeting the needs of these changing classroom demographics. Teacher education programs have developed courses to train
preservice teachers to be more culturally competent in the classroom. To ensure success of teachers already in the classroom, culturally competent professional development seminars have also been developed (Averill et al., 2015; Lund & Lee, 2015). Tinkler and Tinkler (2016) reported the importance of paying attention to the teachers’ experiences and ideas when training them to support students whose cultures are different from that of the teacher. Initial teacher education, the adoption of a critical social justice framework, professional noticing, modeling, and service learning are a few of the effective ways educators are being trained to identify and develop cultural competency (Averill et al., 2015; Lund & Lee, 2015; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016).

To help meet the needs of all learners in a classroom, some teacher education programs have been redesigned to develop teachers’ efficacy with their eclectic students’ demographics (Farr et al., 2005). The research on teacher education training does not include the Slavic culture in the United States. This subgroup of students has cultural needs that can also be supported by having culturally competent, professionally developed teachers. Slavic students need to see their cultures and languages recognized, celebrated, and valued by their school and teacher. Teacher efficacy is the first step to support diverse classrooms.

Personal teacher efficacy is the confidence a teacher has about their own teaching abilities. Research has shown a correlation between teacher efficacy and better classroom management and academic scores. According to Callaway (2017), “teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly, tend to set attainable goals for students, are less afraid of student conflict, and are more likely to take greater intellectual and interpersonal risks in the classroom” (p. 3). Callaway further described, “a positive statistically significant relationship found between culturally responsive teaching and personal PTE” (personal teacher efficacy; p. 19). Callaway (2017) went on to suggest when a
safe classroom environment is created, all students should be given opportunities to investigate and learn topics that interest them. Teacher efficacy also plays an important role in the development of the teacher and their effectiveness in the classroom. “Teachers must develop a knowledge about culture – their own and that of others and attitudes and beliefs necessary to teach diverse students effectively. The majority of teachers continue to be middle class and White” (Christian & Zippay, 2012, p. 38). A large part of this process is for teachers to also recognize their own cultural bias.

Identifying cultural bias and developing cultural competency is important to support the work done in these diverse classrooms. According to Tinkler and Tinkler (2016), both teacher and student demographics have changed in the last few decades. Another important part to supporting the work done by both teachers and students in the classroom is building relational capacity. Tinkler and Tinkler (2016) reported, “meaningful partnerships require youth to have a chance to engage in learning experiences that embody their stories, dreams, their aspirations, and their reality. By approaching learning partnerships with humility, educators . . . can value stories, dreams, and aspirations with attention to relevance” (p. 200). This cannot be done without getting to know the students in the classroom. Relational capacity is when the teacher has built a meaningful and trusting relationship with students and their families (McDonald et al., 2013). Relational capacity is important because it leads to the creation of a safe place in the classroom, which ultimately results in the students trusting their teacher (McDonald et al., 2013).

The relationship between the teacher and the student is very important in schools. The relationship among the teacher, school, and family is also important. Rossetti et al. (2017) stated, “Although there has been a consistent vision for multicultural education and family collaboration in teacher education programs for decades, collaborative partnerships between
Parents play an important role in their child’s education, and it is critical to have parent investment in their child’s education. A collaborative relationship between the family and the teacher can be negatively affected by a family feeling frustrated due to what they perceive as a teacher who is culturally obtuse. Rossetti et al. (2017) further explained communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships among the teacher, school, and family.

Past studies researching cultural relevant pedagogy (Averil et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2017; Young, 2010) identified the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy with regard to supporting academic success. Engagement to the content is crucial for the retention of the information. Ensuring the content is culturally relevant to the diverse student population can be difficult but not impossible. Callaway (2017) stressed how important it is to “authentically and holistically use in-depth information from multiple viewpoints and perspectives about our interdependent, multicultural, international, and global society to assure student engagement and achievement in the classroom” (p. 19).

Problem

American classrooms have experienced cultural changes, which have been in response to our nation’s changing demographics. This change has brought to light a growing disparity between teacher and student populations. The majority of the teaching force in America is non-Slavic White, native English speaking, and female while the student demographic population is seeing an increase in underrepresented student demographics, including ELLs (NCES, 2017). This discrepancy has been related to impacts on student success. For example, state testing data in California show achievement gaps between non-Slavic, White students and most other sub-
groups of students in both English language arts and mathematics (CDE, 2019b). The non-Slavic White, English-speaking teachers need tools to ensure the success of all student subgroups.

A multitude of research has been conducted on creating culturally responsive classrooms for a wide array of student subgroups; however, there is a lack of information regarding the correlation between Slavic student success and educator cultural competency. Cultural competency is defined as successfully teaching students who come from a different culture than the person leading the class (Averill et al., 2015), accomplished through incorporating cultural knowledge that extends beyond a surface-level awareness. Interpersonal sensitivity and awareness help support an effective cross-cultural classroom, which then supports the learning and identity of each student. As the research continues to show, it is important for effective classroom teachers to develop culturally competent practices within their own classroom pedagogy. Research lacks the Slavic perspective and the need for educators to be culturally responsive to the Slavic population. Filling this gap in the research is crucial to supporting the needs of all learners in schools.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this action research case study was to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms where teachers were of Slavic descent and in classrooms where teachers were of non-Slavic descent. Using a Cultural Competency Framework and data gathered from each cycle of the study, teachers took specific actions to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their practice. Insight gained from this study may support understanding of effective strategies to support Slavic students and families. The Slavic population in this study were first-generation and immigrant first-grade and second-grade
students and parents. The data and information gathered from this study may provide relevant information to help classroom teachers and school leaders more effectively support the Slavic population. It is important for effective classroom teachers to develop cultural competency practices within their classroom pedagogy in order to reach all learners in the classroom.

**Research Questions**

An important way for teachers to develop individual appreciation is through the development of relational capacity. The relational capacity between teacher and student helps the student feel connected to the classroom and the people within the school (McDonald et al., 2013; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). Another way to support the diverse classroom needs is through the relationship of the student’s parent(s). Building the relational capacity between the teacher and student and the teacher and parent(s) has been successful in other classrooms and with a variety of demographics (Rossetti et al., 2017). It is important to address these relationships within the classroom environment to ensure support of both teachers’ and students’ success in school and life beyond school. This case study action research design aimed to answer multiple research questions to investigate the problem at a local northern California charter school. The overarching question for this action research case study was: How would gaining knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perceptions of classroom practice over the course of the action research period? The following are the subquestions.

1. How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their culture?

2. How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teacher’s classroom action plan?

3. How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers?
4. How does the teacher’s classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom experience?

**Significance**

The significance of this study was to provide the reader with an overview of several factors associated with teacher cultural competency and student academic performance. The research suggests that the more teachers are aware of their own bias through culturally competent teacher education, the more successful teachers are at reaching diverse students in the classroom (Brown et al., 2016; Flores et al., 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Lund & Lee, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017). Multiple research and information sources are available for teachers on culturally responsive classrooms to support other diverse groups of students; however, no research currently exists on how to incorporate culturally responsive teaching for Slavic scholars. With the changing demographics of United States classrooms, most educators will have the opportunity to educate Slavic students. This Slavic cultural competency case study action research design provides a different lens for educators and provides a broader perspective on cultural competency strategies, applications, and understanding. Since current research lacks the Slavic perspective and the need for educators to be culturally responsive to the Slavic population, it is my intent this case study action research provides educators with tools and strategies to support their Slavic students. This will be the first study ever to provide information on the importance of Slavic teacher cultural competency and how it relates to Slavic student academic success.

This work will continue to broaden and deepen the cultural competency work for educators by providing strategies and insights on how non-Slavic teachers can implement a culturally relevant pedagogy specific to their Slavic student and family needs. These
contributions will support the education field on a large scale as this is the first step in understanding perceptions and needs of a specific Slavic community that may be helpful in informing other schools and districts who support Slavic families.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used for this study is cultural competence. Cultural competence is defined as harmonious attitudes, behaviors, and policies within a system and among professionals that allow all involved to work effectively in cross-cultural settings and situations (Cross et al., 1989). According to Kumagi and Lypson (2009), cultural competence is when professionals understand the needs of diverse populations with whom they serve. Cultural competence began as a conceptual framework established for research studies conducted in the medical field (Kumagi & Lypson, 2009). The framework quickly became popular in both the fields of social work and education. This study looked at both teaching and the education of Slavic TK-8th-grade students through the cultural competence conceptual framework.

The cultural competence framework helps identify teacher, student, and parent experiences with classroom teachers who are both culturally responsive and not culturally responsive. Since effective classroom teachers in the TK-8 northern California school must incorporate Slavic culturally responsive teaching, demonstrate their own cultural biases, and possess the skills and knowledge when working with culturally diverse students, this framework provides a lens to properly identify the gaps and the areas in which to improve. Callaway (2017) stated that effective classroom teachers must develop cultural competency practices within their classroom pedagogy because teachers who lack cultural responsiveness fail to meet the needs of diverse student populations. It is my intent that the cultural competence framework will support
the identification of information regarding the correlation between Slavic student success and educators’ cultural competency.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: Cultural competency model.

The cultural competency conceptual framework in Figure 1 is a combination of work from Ladson-Billings (1995), Hammond (2015), and Muniz (2019). This framework is used in conjunction with the qualitative and quantitative data to support the participating teachers in the creation of their classroom action plan. The first section of the framework is to support the individual teacher in gaining a deeper understanding of their own self. A deeper understanding is facilitated by looking at one’s own cultural values and biases to support the decision to adjust one’s own thoughts and behaviors. The next section is understanding of others. This section supports the teachers by having them take a deeper look into what cultural values, community values, and cultural learning styles are important for the scholars in their school. The third and
final section is titled teaching strategies. This section focuses on five ways the teachers can support their instruction in the classroom based on the information gathered from the first two sections. Teachers will need to ensure their action plans address two or more areas in this section based on data from parent and student feedback. The five areas in this section are: high expectations for all learners; building relationships with both students and families; drawing on students’ cultures in the taught curriculum; promoting respect for differences in the classroom; and delivering lesson activities like games, creating stories, and engaging students in conversation through the use of group work or partner work.

The cultural competence framework was applied to this study through teacher, student, and parent focus groups. The term cultural competence is made of two words, culture and competence. Culture is defined as learned, shared, and transferred beliefs, values, life practices, and norms among a group of people (Leininger & McFarland, 2002). This study looks at both the shared Slavic culture of teachers, families, and students as well as the American culture of teachers. Educators should have the competence to educate and care for students from a diverse set of backgrounds. The focus groups are designed to find gaps in communication style, linguistic understanding, and a lack of knowledge for culturally appropriate teaching techniques and materials.

**Methods of Inquiry**

This case study examined the relationship between teachers’ cultural competency and their students’ academic performance through post-positivist research study, where “researchers believe that human knowledge is based not on unchallengeable, rock-solid foundations, but rather upon human conjectures” (Your Dictionary, 2019, Definition 1). This mixed-methods,
case study design was conducted to provide insight and empirical support for both teacher cultural competency and Slavic student academic success as applied to this study’s school.

Post-positive qualitative researchers increase the knowledge of others by collecting research data through methodical practices, based on group interactions (Hacking, 1983). This study uses the post-positive approach by analyzing observations, surveys, focus group interviews, and interactions. According to Hacking (1983), post-positivism knows that theory is revisable and observation can be flawed. Post-positivist researchers believe “the goal of science is to hold steadily to the goal of getting it right about reality, even though we can never achieve that goal” (Hacking, 1983, p. 41).

This study analyzes data from classroom observations; teacher, parent, and student focus group interviews; academic data; parent involvement data; and group interactions. This 9-week, two-intervention cycle of action research provides insight into the teacher-Slavic student relationship and Slavic student academic success.

**Delimitations and Assumptions**

This study looks at elementary school classroom teachers, their students, and their students’ families who attend a public charter school in northern California. The teachers in this study have not been provided with training in Slavic culturally relevant practices. Training provided to these teachers in pre-service courses did not focus on the Slavic student needs, and the multicultural training in these courses may have little influence on teacher pedagogy with their Slavic student population.

The charter school used in this study was established by families in the northern California community to help preserve both the Slavic culture and the Baptist Christian perspective. The school started out in a local Russian Baptist church located in the northern
California area for the first 3 years of operation. The majority of families who attend this church send their children to this charter school. The school currently occupies the second floor of a commercial building and has done so for the last 3 years.

The study looked at teachers from the same grade level where one teacher is from the Slavic culture and the other is from a non-Slavic culture. Out of the 17 classroom teachers, four teachers were part of this study. The teachers were in the primary elementary grades, two first-grade classrooms and two second-grade classrooms.

**Key Terms**

*Critical awareness.* Critical awareness is an active, effective, and persistent awareness of oneself (Kumagai & Lypson, 2016).

*Cultural competency.* Cultural competency is the ability to effectively interact with people from different cultures. Cultural competency is the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own. It entails mastering complex awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching. (Moule, 2012, p. 11)

*Cultural humility.* Cultural humility is when a person is open to other cultures that are different from their own (NEA, 2017).

*Culturally responsive teaching.* Culturally responsive teaching is when teachers use their skills and knowledge to both expose and empower their students by providing content that can be related to the students’ cultures (Brown et al., 2016).

*English language learner.* English language learner students are students whose guardian reported their primary language as anything other than English on the CA state-approved Home Language Survey “and who, on state-approved English language assessment, has been determined to lack the clearly defined English language skills of listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to succeed in the school’s regular instructional programs” (CDE, 2019d, para. 9 under “E”).

*Pedagogy.* Pedagogy is when the theory and practice of teaching is used in the classroom to support student knowledge (Averil et al., 2015).

*Relational capacity.* Relational capacity is when the teacher has built a meaningful and trusting relationship with scholars and their families (McDonald et al., 2013). Relational
capacity is important because it creates a safe place in the classroom, which ultimately results in the scholars trusting their teacher.

Teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is the belief a teacher has in his or her own abilities to teach their students (Callaway, 2017).

Summary

Student demographic data in elementary and secondary schools have shown an increase in numbers of diverse students in classrooms across the country. This change in classroom demographics has established the need for changes to the classroom educational environment. Research supports a few documented ways teachers can support student experiences and academic performance. Culturally competent teachers, cultural humility, and culturally relevant pedagogy are a few of the ways education can adapt to the change in student demographics. Teacher efficacy with regard to cultural proficiency also plays an important role in the development of the teacher and their effectiveness in the classroom. A large part of this process is for teachers to also recognize their own cultural bias. Another important part to supporting the work done by both teachers and students in the classroom is building relational capacity (McDonald et al., 2013). Research shows the relationship between the teacher and the student are important to student success. Parent participation is also crucial, as parents play an important role in their child’s education.

This case study analyzes the relationship between teachers’ cultural competency and their students’ academic performance through post-positive research study. Data were collected from various resources: classroom observations; teacher, parent, and student focus groups; academic data; parent involvement data; and observations from group interactions. This study was an 9-week, two-intervention cycle of action research. It was my intent to provide insight into the teacher-Slavic student relationship and Slavic student academic success.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Student demographic data in United States elementary and secondary schools have shown an increase in numbers of diverse students in classrooms across the country. This change in classroom demographics has established the need for changes to the classroom educational environment. Research supports a few documented ways teachers can support student experiences and academic performance (Averill et al., 2015; Lund & Lee, 2015; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). Culturally competent teachers, cultural humility, and culturally relevant pedagogy are a few of the ways education can adapt to the change in student demographics. Teacher efficacy with regard to cultural proficiency also plays an important role in the development of the teacher and their effectiveness in the classroom. A large part of this process is for teachers to also recognize their own cultural bias. Another important part of supporting the work done by both teachers and students in the classroom is building relational capacity (McDonald et al., 2013). Research shows the relationship between the teacher and the student is important to the student’s success in the classroom (Anderson, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2017; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). Parent participation is also crucial, as parents play an important role in their child’s education.

The change in student demographics has brought to light a growing disparity between teacher and student demographics. This disparity has been related to impacts on student success. For example, California state testing data show achievement gaps between White students and most other subgroups of students in both English language arts and mathematics. White students outperformed African American, Hispanic, and English language learners (ELLs) on the 2018
California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) state test in both English language arts and mathematics. According to the Department of Education, State of California’s CAASPP website (2019b), in the 2018-19 school year, the English language arts results were as follows: 65.64% of White students were meeting or exceeding state standards, which is much higher than 33.19% of African American students, 40.81% of Hispanic students, and 12.81% of ELLs. For mathematics test results that same year, 54.23% of White students were meeting or exceeding state standards, which again is much higher than 20.55% of African American students, 28.05% of Hispanic students, and 12.58% of ELLs. This continued academic disparity has prompted inquiries into reasons for these educational gaps. Some research (Brown et al., 2016; Flores et al., 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Lund & Lee, 2015; Wilson & Brown, 2017) has identified teacher cultural competency as one of the major factors contributing to these achievement gaps. In addition, students who are ELLs may not perform as well as other student groups. One reason ELL student performance is not as high is a result of the demographic disparity. Slavic students are a demographic of students not well represented in the state testing data. The Slavic cultures are termed Caucasian, which is grouped with White students; however, Slavic students may also be part of the ELL student subgroup. Due to the grouping of subgroups, the California CAASPP system does not report on the achievement gap of Slavic students.

According to the NEA (2017), “Cultural competence is the key to thriving in culturally diverse classrooms and schools - and it can be learned, practiced, and institutionalized to better serve diverse students, their families, and their communities” (p. 1). Cultural competency is defined as successfully teaching students who come from a different culture than the person leading the class (Ebersole et al., 2016; Kumagi & Lypson, 2009). Such teaching is done
through a cultural knowledge that extends beyond a surface-level awareness. Interpersonal sensitivity and awareness help support an effective cross-cultural classroom, which supports the learning and identity of each student (NEA, 2017).

This literature review addresses classroom demographics, teacher education and experience, cultural bias, relational capacity, culturally relevant pedagogy, the Slavic culture, and the framework used in this study. Additionally, challenges faced by the classroom teacher and their students are addressed. This literature review discusses what the research says about the importance of building cultural competency in the classroom.

**Classroom Demographics**

The demographics of the classroom population in United States schools have changed over the last few decades. There has been an increase of both student and teacher diversity, in ELLs, and teacher assignments. According to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES; 2017), which published a statistical analysis report of the teaching force from 1987 to 2012, the number of main assignments for American teachers grew at “above-average rates” in the areas of teaching English as a second language (ESL), special education, English/language arts, mathematics, natural sciences, and foreign language. Additionally, the IES study also reported, “the teaching force in high-poverty public schools (those in which at least 75 percent of the students were approved for the free or reduced-price lunch program) grew by nearly 325 percent” (p. iv).

The student population in the United States has also seen changes over the last few decades. According to a report published by the NCES (2017), the numbers of White and African American students in public schools in the United States has decreased whereas the number of Hispanic, Asian, and children of two or more races has increased. The ELL student
population has also risen and “in 2014, about 4.7 million public school students participated in English language learner (ELL) programs, and the overall percentage of students in ELL programs increased from 9.0 percent in 2009 to 9.3 percent in 2014” (CDE, 2019a, para. 1).

ELLs are students in Kindergarten through grade 12 whose primary language is not English and who also do not have a proficient understanding of how to read, write, speak or understand English based on data from the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC; CDE, 2020a). All Kindergarten through grade 12 students who are categorized as ELL take a yearly ELPAC assessment to determine if they can be reclassified as a fluent English speaker, or Fluent English Proficient (FEP). FEP scholars are “students who are fluent-English-proficient are the students whose primary language is other than English and who have met the district criteria for determining proficiency in English” (CDE, 2019d, para. 3 under “F”). Each district is responsible for reclassifying ELL students and must follow the state’s legislation to create their reclassification guidelines. According to the CDE (2020b), all districts must adhere to at least four criteria, in addition to district testing and performance. The state of California has a very diverse range of ELL languages, needs, and strengths. It is crucial for districts, individual schools, and teachers to have the tools and resources needed to educate, prepare, and support their ELL student population.

New highly qualified teachers are a need in the United States. In their report A Quarter Century of Changes in the Elementary and Secondary Teaching Force: From 1987 to 2012, Ingersoll and Merrill (2017) highlighted the need for new teachers in both elementary and secondary education. The report details the need for qualified teachers in the areas of math, ESL, science, and special education. This study also highlighted the disproportionate numbers of White teachers and minority students. They reported that about 44% of “all elementary
secondary students were minorities” (p. 6) while about 83% of teachers were White. The report highlighted the unbalanced racial/ethnic composition of the classroom. The report went on to say the proportion of the minority teaching force growth is greater than that of the minority student growth rate; however, the proportion of minority students is much greater than that of minority teachers. In October 2018, Ingersoll et al. released a report titled Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force. In this 25-page report, seven prominent trends were communicated and summarized with regard to the American teaching force showing the teaching force is: (a) larger; (b) grayer; (c) greener; (d) more female; (e) more diverse, by race-ethnicity; (f) consistent in academic ability; and (g) unstable. “What is clear is that large-scale changes are happening to one of the nation’s largest occupational groups” (p. 22). As the teaching force is growing, being replaced and remade, we have the opportunity to ensure our current and new teachers are equipped with the tools to support their diverse classrooms.

The demographic disparities between White teachers and their diverse students calls attention to the importance of teachers’ understanding of their individual students’ cultural background, language, home lives, and developmental needs. These understandings can occur when teachers purposefully build relationships with their students. Both students and teachers benefit when positive relationships are developed. According to Anderson (2011), when teachers and school leaders build relationships with all their scholars, regardless of culture or language barriers, they improve students’ and parents’ connection to the school and thus the academic success of the students. One way teachers learn of the importance of relationships is through teacher education. Teacher education has been altered in an effort to support all teachers in meeting the needs of these changing classroom demographics.
Teacher Education

One of the trends in schools related to student experience and academic performance is the need for culturally competent teachers. Most people who step foot in a classroom today are able to see the diversity discrepancy between the teacher and their students. With the increase in student diversity, teacher preparation programs have the responsibility to train future teachers on how to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students. Past studies on cultural competency in education (Brown et al., 2016; Flores et al., 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Lund & Lee, 2015; Wilson & Brown, 2017) identified the importance of training new teachers in the use of culturally responsive teaching techniques. Culturally competent teaching is described as “teaching in ways responsive to the cultures of our students which is vital to enhance equity of access to achievement” (Averill et al., 2015, p. 65). Both the teacher and the student face cultural competency challenges when the teacher lacks the cultural knowledge of the students in the classroom.

Teacher preparation programs have developed courses to train preservice teachers, that is, adults training to be teachers, to be more culturally competent in the classroom. To ensure success of teachers already in the classroom, culturally competent professional development seminars have also been developed. Tinkler and Tinkler (2016) reported the importance of paying attention to the teachers’ experiences and ideas when training them to support students whose cultures are different from that of the teacher. Initial teacher education, the adoption of a critical social justice framework, professional noticing, modeling, and service learning are a few of the effective ways educators are being trained to identify and develop cultural competency (Averill et al., 2015; Lund & Lee, 2015; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016).
One way teachers can be more culturally competent is through culturally responsive teaching practices. Gay (2002) conveyed culturally responsive teaching to use “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). Research has shown teacher preparation programs need to expand preservice teachers’ level of sociocultural consciousness to support the confidence in their ability to implement culturally responsive practices in their teaching (Gay, 2002; Skepple, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

A study on culturally efficacious teacher preparation programs published by Flores et al. (2015) concluded the teacher preparation courses should have a cycle of “awakening cultural consciousness, acquiring cultural competence, developing cultural proficiency, actualizing cultural and critical responsivity, and realizing cultural efficacy” (p. 26). This study promotes the use of cultural humility approaches in correlation with the cultural competency model, as both are crucial for successful diverse classroom instruction. According to the authors, cultural humility engages preservice teachers with community and social justice issues whereas the culturally competent approach focuses on the development of certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, while also understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge (NEA, 2017).

Research has shown a correlation between teacher efficacy and better classroom management and academic scores. According to Callaway (2017):

Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly, tend to set attainable goals for students, are less afraid of student conflict, and are more likely to take greater intellectual and interpersonal risks in the classroom. (p. 2)

Courses have been developed to support preservice teachers, and classroom teachers identify and learn cultural competency to support their efforts in the classroom. Cultural
humility and cultural competency are effective ways to develop a deep understanding of the individual student in ways that go beyond their age and gender. Teacher efficacy also plays an important role in the development of the teacher and their effectiveness in the classroom. “Teachers must develop a knowledge about culture – their own and that of others and attitudes and beliefs necessary to teach diverse students effectively. The majority of teachers continue to be middle class and White” (Christian & Zippay, 2012, p. 38).

A study conducted by Taylor et al. (2016) showed there is a willingness of preservice teachers to study and work towards a cognizance of multicultural awareness in order to support their classroom effectiveness. This study concluded that preservice teachers are aware of the multicultural diversity of immigrant and minority students in classrooms and the challenges this poses for these linguistically and culturally diverse K-12 students. The understanding of the challenges immigrant and minority students face in the classroom is a great start to build cultural competence in education. It is also important for teachers to recognize their own cultural bias in order to reflect on their practice and implement change.

**Cultural Bias**

Past studies on developing a critical awareness of privilege and power, or one’s own cultural bias (Barrera et al., 2017; Kumagi & Lypson, 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2009; Rossetti et al., 2017; Young, 2010), have identified the need to investigate issues of inequality and the cultural divide between White, middle-class professionals and culturally and linguistically diverse customers. These studies looked at special education, the teaching field, and service-learning programs. It is important for educators to “recognize how their emerging practice, which is entrenched within their own positionality, impacts individuals that they work with as well as the broader community” (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016, p. 192). The lens a teacher uses when teaching
students must be identified while teachers must also have the ability to use different lenses to support the students in the classroom. When teachers recognize their own cultural bias, as well as the cultural bias in the taught curriculum, they are able to see the negative effects cultural bias has on the education of their students. Teachers need to have a deep understanding and connection to the knowledge of oppression, inequalities, barriers as well as privilege and power to recognize cultural bias. My research turned up no published research studies identifying positive or beneficial outcomes to teacher bias. I have, however, found many reasons why identifying teacher bias supports the learning of all students in the classroom.

According to Ebersole et al. (2016), “Teachers need more opportunities to engage in critical discussion to challenge the injustices and inequalities of the status quo” (p. 102). Students in the classroom should also be equipped with the skills to question equity and challenge the status quo. Teachers need to facilitate this learning as well as provide their own experiences questioning power structures in order to shape and develop a system to recognize bias.

Teachers who are able to recognize cultural bias within the curriculum, the educational system, and themselves are able to create classrooms where students feel safe to take risks and question the dominate culture. These culturally competent teachers see their students’ cultures as an asset and empower students to question power structures. The benefits from this recognition can connect back to an increased achievement of academic outcomes for students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Ebersole et al. (2016) went on to say that “teacher educators must help teachers understand their own socio-cultural history and help teachers see that they come with their own cultural identity which positions a person to various forms of oppression and privilege” (p. 98).
They concluded that despite some course offerings, culturally responsive teaching is not happening in our elementary and secondary schools because teacher preparation programs are failing to teach culturally responsive practices to future educators as a result of a “privileging of Whiteness in teacher preparation” programs (p. 98). Multicultural classes for educators have shown an inconsistent effect on teachers’ diversity integration in the classroom. “Teachers negate the need to be culturally responsive by resisting conceptions of diversity and maintaining their naïve understandings of equity” (Ebersole et al., 2016, p. 97).

Many articles and studies have been published regarding the one-dimensional portrayal of history, mathematics, science, and literature. The adopted curriculum taught in schools across the country are said to be designed using a lens of power and privilege (Friere, 1970/2000). The curriculum taught has a deep imbedded bias of the White, Anglo-Saxon version of history and language. According to Harvey (2017), the curriculum taught in schools poses dangers, “one of the greatest is deep damage to our children’s perceptions of race, gender and other kinds of difference” (para. 4). This biased curriculum affects mathematics, English/language arts, and history instruction. The teacher is the conduit responsible for adapting the content of the curriculum to reach the students in the diverse classrooms. Unfortunately, teachers are not trained to look at the curriculum this way and are confused as to why their students are not engaged with the content (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). This cultural bias in the classroom has a very negative effect on the performance of the students, according to Brown et al. (2016). If a student cannot connect to what is being taught in the classroom, their learning suffers. Students become apathetic towards learning as their interest in the content declines. According to Kumagai and Lypson (2016), for the purpose of effective teaching, it is imperative the teacher looks at the students “as individuals – with all the emotional, experiential, and cultural richness
and depth that comprise an individual’s identity – with fairness and compassion” (p. 787).

Kumagai and Lypson further concluded the need for multicultural education to encourage critical awareness in students to support their understanding and acceptance of people to establish cultural openness.

Once a teacher can identify their own cultural bias and is able to use different lenses to see the oppression, inequalities, and barriers, as well as White privilege and power, the teacher is better equipped to support the needs of diverse scholars. Identifying cultural bias is important as well as developing a strong individual appreciation for each scholar. One way this can be done is through the development of relational capacity.

**Relational Capacity**

An important aspect of supporting the work done by both teachers and students in the classroom is building relational capacity (McDonald et al., 2013). Relational capacity is when the teacher has built a meaningful and trusting relationship with students and their families. Tinkler and Tinkler (2016) reported:

> Meaningful partnerships require youth have a chance to engage in learning experiences that embody their stories, dreams, their aspirations, and their reality. By approaching learning partnerships with humility, educators . . . can values stories, dreams, and aspirations with attention to relevance. (p. 200)

This relationship can only be accomplished when teachers get to truly know the students in their classroom. Relational capacity is important because it creates a safe place in the classroom, which ultimately results in the students trusting their teacher. The relationship between the teacher and the student is important. Wilson et al. (2017) concluded the competency of the student was influenced by the teacher-student relationship. They suggested it is crucial the student feels safe, respected, and supported by the teacher while the teacher interactions ensure all students were treated equally.
The relationship among the teacher, school, and family is also important. According to Rossetti et al. (2017), “Although there has been a consistent vision for multicultural education and family collaboration in teacher preparation programs for decades, collaborative partnerships between culturally and linguistically diverse families and their children’s educators remain elusive” (p. 329). Parents play an important role in their child’s education, and it is critical to have parent investment in their child’s education. A collaborative relationship between the family and the teacher can be negatively affected by a family feeling frustrated due to what they perceive as a teacher who is culturally obtuse. Rossetti et al. (2017) further explained communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships among the teacher, school, and family.

The relational capacity between teacher and student helps the student feel connected to the classroom and the people within the classroom (McDonald et al., 2013). The family of the student must also have relational capacity with the teacher and the school to ensure a culturally responsive, collaborative relationship. It is also important to ensure the curriculum taught in school supports as well as represents both the diverse demographics and the diverse needs of the student.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Past studies researching culturally responsive teaching (Brown et al., 2016; Flores et al., 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Lund & Lee, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017) identified the importance in training culturally responsive teaching techniques to new teachers. Callaway (2017) agreed with this research and further explained, “A positive statistically significant relationship found between culturally responsive teaching and personal PTE (personal teacher efficacy)” (p. 104).
Personal teacher efficacy is the confidence a teacher has about their own teaching abilities. Callaway (2017) went on to suggest when a safe classroom environment is created, all students should be given opportunities to investigate and learn topics that interest them. With access to the Internet, nearly all American classrooms are now equipped with millions of resources from which to teach and learn. Teachers need to possess cultural humility, an understanding of cultural bias, culturally responsive techniques, as well as culturally relevant pedagogy to support their teaching in our technologically advancing classrooms.

According to Callaway (2017), cultural teaching, when in combination with teacher efficacy, increases student engagement in the classroom. He stated research has shown improved student engagement when the classroom teacher purposefully and intentionally includes personalized, relevant, culturally connected lessons. Teachers with a strong sense of culturally relevant pedagogy tend to make educational decisions that support the best interest of their students (Callaway, 2017).

Past studies researching culturally relevant pedagogy (Averil et al., 2015; Young, 2010) identified the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy with regard to supporting academic success. Engagement to the content is crucial for the retention of the information, according to both Ladson-Billings (1995) and Young (2010). Part of the culturally relevant engagement to the material is when students see their culture, their life, and their history embedded in the lesson. Ensuring the content is culturally relevant to the diverse student population can be difficult but not impossible. Callaway (2017) stressed how important it is to “authentically and holistically use in-depth information from multiple viewpoints and perspectives about our interdependent, multicultural, international, and global society to assure student engagement and achievement in the classroom” (Callaway, 2017, p. 110).
Slavic Culture

The Slavic culture consists of many countries in Eastern Europe. As of 2018, there are 13 Slavic countries: Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine (Slavic Countries Population, 2019). The Slavic countries are divided into three divisions: the East Slavs—Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine; the West Slavs—Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia; and the South Slavs—Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). According to the Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019), “Slav, member of the most numerous ethnic and linguistic body of peoples in Europe, residing chiefly in eastern and southern Europe but extending also across northern Asia to the Pacific Ocean” (para. 1).

Like for most other cultures, religion is a part of life for Slavs. Slavic countries comprise groups that practice two main religions. The first is Eastern Orthodox, mainly comprising Russians, Macedonians, Serbs, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Bulgarians. The second main religious group is Roman Catholic, primarily including Poles, Slovenes, Croats, Czechs, and Slovaks. The Slavic countries also include minority religious groups such as Jews, Muslims, Baptists, Protestants, and atheists (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

Slavic countries are divided by multiple religious affiliations and two types of alphabet usage. Half of the Slavic countries use the Cyrillic alphabet, also known as the Slavic alphabet. The remaining Slavs: Polish, Slovak, Czech, Croatian, Bosnian, Slovenian, use the Latin alphabet, also known as the Roman alphabet, which is the most widely used alphabet in the world. Each of the Slavic countries has developed their own modified version of the alphabet over the many years of usage. Despite the religious, language, and alphabet differences, most
Slavic people speak the Russian language based on the political history of the Slavic countries as well as the large population of Russians, over 81%, in the Slavic regions (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

Hosking et al. (n.d.) reminded us the Slavic culture has had a very strong tradition of achievement in many arenas, which have all had considerable influence on the world. Some of these achievements are in ballet, literature, philosophy, classical music, painting, architecture, and folk dancing. In addition to these achievements, politics has also played a vital influence in our world. Some of the more current Russian politics include the rise of the Communist Party in Russia, Mikhail Gorbachev’s political and social restriction reforms, the fall of the iron curtain in the 1990s, and the rise of Vladimir Putin’s political reign. Slavic popular culture includes many folk holidays, which are accompanied by both traditional foods and traditional dress. Many of the Slavic festivities include feature entertainers and street carnivals (Hosking et al., n.d.).

The Slavic community at this study’s school immigrated to California for political and religious freedom. Many families are devoted to their beliefs due to prosecution and hardships in the former Soviet Union. The staff at this one school has outlined these cultural differences in their staff manual. This section of the staff manual was created by the Slavic families, the Slavic employees, and the local Slavic Baptist church to support non-Slavic employee understanding of some of the cultural differences (The Great School, 2018). The first cultural difference outlined in this manual is the lack of understanding of The Pledge of Allegiance. Some Slavic families will not allow their child to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This is deeply rooted in the experiences from former Soviet Union because families had to pledge themselves to their governmental authority or face consequences. Teachers at this school must get family permission to have students recite and stand for the Pledge of Allegiance if it is offered in the
classroom. The staff manual also informs staff that Slavic families do not participate in Halloween or any other fantasy or magical festivity, including Halloween, fantasy, and magical books, decorations, and classroom activities. The Slavic families in this community do not want their children playing card games due to an association with cards and fortune telling and gambling. Additionally, the staff manual describes why Slavic families do not view special education in a positive manner and have difficulty agreeing to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The misunderstandings of special education are rooted in the way the former Soviet Union used special education services. Special education was for severely mentally handicapped children who were then kept in isolation from other children.

According to The Great School (pseudonym to protect confidentiality) Staff Manual (2018), Pepper County has the highest concentration of former USSR refugees in California. The staff manual states the majority of the Russian community is located in four local communities. The communities have organized around 73 churches in these four communities. The Slavic immigrants in these communities have owned or operated about 1,500 small businesses in Pepper County. These businesses include automotive, child care, grocery stores, medical and dental clinics, and real estate. This staff manual also describes a growing presence of Slavic media resources in these four communities. The Slavic media resources comprise over 15 Russian newspapers and magazine businesses, five Russian radio stations, the Russian Yellow pages book, Russian television studios, and websites. This media presence helps keep the Slavic community informed of different community organizations to help build positive relationships with Slavic local institutions. The Slavic-American Democracy in Action (SLADA) organization was the first organization to integrate elected officials and government representatives to support the Slavic community in Pepper County (The Great School, 2018;
Kitanoff, 2006). Additionally, the Coalition of American Slavic Leaders (CASL) is the first organization in Pepper County to bring together diverse Slavic leaders to support the Slavic community (Sheriff’s Outreach Community Advisory Board, 2020). The Slavic communities in and around Pepper County have built a new life in northern California and are sharing their Slavic culture with others.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used in this study is cultural competence, chosen based on my own experience with my teacher preparation program and my career background. This conceptual framework has helped shape my own journey to be more culturally competent in the work I do every day. The term cultural competence is made of two words, culture and competence. Culture is defined as learned, shared, and transferred beliefs, values, life practices and norms among a group of people (Leininger & McFarland, 2002). The Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defined competence as the ability to do something well. The term cultural competence was defined by the work of Cross et al. in 1989 and established a foundation for the health field. Cross’s (1989) work defined cultural competence as harmonious attitudes, behaviors, and policies within a system and among professionals that allow all involved to work effectively in cross-cultural settings and situations. The term has been modified by others, such as Betancourt (2002), who brought the term to improve health care systems to provide care to patients. The National Center for Cultural Competence (n.d.) developed a modified version of cultural competence to support organizations that work cross-culturally. Mackenzie and Lavizzo-Mourey (1996) adapted the term to integrate health-related beliefs and cultural values, treatment efficacy, and disease incident and occurrence. Roberts et al. (1990) modified the term to incorporate levels of administration, policy and practice.
For purposes of this study, I use the framework of cultural competency from Cross et al.’s (1989) work stated as:

Culturally competent agencies are characterized by acceptance and respect for difference, continuing self-assessment regarding culture, careful attention to the dynamics of difference, continuous expansion of cultural knowledge resources, and a variety of adaptation to service models in order to better meet the needs of minority populations. (p. 17)

Cultural competence is when professionals understand the needs of diverse populations with whom they serve. This study looked at the cultural competence of teachers and their work in a Slavic TK-8 school. The cultural competence conceptual framework drives the work with these teachers (see Figure 2).

\[\text{Figure 2. Conceptual framework: Cultural competency model.}\]
The cultural competence framework helped identify teacher, student, and parent experiences with classroom teachers who were both culturally responsive and not culturally responsive. Since effective classroom teachers in the TK-8 northern California school must incorporate Slavic culturally responsive teaching, demonstrate their own cultural biases, and possess the skills and knowledge when working with culturally diverse scholars, this framework provided a lens to properly identify the gaps and the areas in which to improve. Effective classroom teachers must develop cultural competency practices within their classroom pedagogy because teachers who lack cultural responsiveness fail to meet the needs of diverse student populations. It was my intent that the cultural competence framework support the identification of information regarding a correlation between Slavic student success and educators’ cultural competency.

The cultural competence framework was applied to this study through teacher, student, and parent focus groups during the action cycle work with teachers and during classroom observation. This study looked at both the shared Slavic culture of teachers, families, and students, as well as the American culture of teachers. The cultural competency framework purports agencies need to seek minority staff, hire unbiased employees, seek advice and consultation from the minority community, and “actively decide what they are and are not capable of providing to minority clients” (Cross et al., 1989, p. 17). Schools should be equipped with the competence to educate and care for students from a diverse set of backgrounds to ensure each student’s individual success in school. Schools should also be committed to policies that enhance their services to their diverse families. This study looked at the experiences of three teachers, their students, and their students’ families to determine if cultural competency is needed to ensure the success of their Slavic student population.
Summary

Classroom demographics, teacher education and experience with regard to cultural competency, cultural bias, relational capacity, and culturally relevant pedagogy have all been addressed. The challenges faced by teachers and their students were described as well as what the research says about the importance of building cultural competency in the classroom. American classrooms have experienced cultural changes, which have been in response to the changing demographics of our schools.

It is important to address these changes in the classroom environment to ensure support of both teachers’ and students’ success in school and life beyond school. One way this has been addressed is through teacher education. Teacher education has been altered in an effort to support the diverse classroom environments. Courses have been developed to support teachers’ identification and learning of cultural competency to support their efforts in the classroom.

Developing the cultural competency of teachers is one way to develop a deeper understanding of the individual student in ways that go beyond their age and gender. A large part of this process is for teachers to also recognize their own cultural bias. Once a teacher can identify one’s own cultural bias and is able to use different lenses to see the oppression, inequalities, and barriers, as well as White privilege and power, the teacher can then develop an individual appreciation for each student.

An important way for teachers to develop individual appreciation is through the development of relational capacity. The relational capacity between teacher and student helps the student feel connected to the classroom and the people within the school. Another way to support the diverse classroom needs is through the use of a multicultural curriculum, or culturally relevant pedagogy. Such a pedagogical focus can ensure that the curriculum taught
supports both the diverse demographics and the diverse needs of the students within the classroom.

Classroom demographics, teacher education and experience, cultural bias, relational capacity, and culturally relevant pedagogy are factors that contribute to the need for cultural competence in our schools and classrooms. As the teaching force is growing and being replaced and remade, we have the opportunity to ensure our current and new teachers are equipped with the tools to support their diverse classrooms.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this action research, case study was to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms where teachers are of Slavic descent and classrooms where teachers are of non-Slavic descent. The problem I saw is a discrepancy between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy, student daily attendance, parent involvement, and the academic success of students. I chose an action research case study to investigate this problem based on my own experience in the educational field, as well as having the knowledge that most teachers are data-driven individuals who implement next steps based on data. Action research helped examine the complex dynamics in each of the four classrooms and try to improve results based on continuous cycles of investigation in hopes of supporting the overall effectiveness of the classroom learning (Stringer, 2014). The premise behind action research is taught to educators during their teacher preservice education; it is reinforced through the process of clearing a teaching credential and soon becomes instinctual to most educators. It was my assumption that this approach would yield the best results for the overall education of the Slavic students in this study’s northern California school as well as provide actionable next steps for other educators.

This study was action research bound by a case study design. This study took place in one small school that presented a lack of cultural competency with non-Slavic teachers to support their Slavic students. The lack of cultural competency was affecting the parents, teachers, and students in this one small school and the action to remedy this will impact their experience (Yin, 1981). This study can be replicated at another school; however, it may provide
very different results and outcomes for the participants. Action research is the method of inquiry and it is how the information was collected. The methodology was a case study design because it affected only the parents, teachers, and students at this one school and affected them only in this context (Yin, 1981).

Action research is defined as “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives” (Stringer, 2014, p. 1). It was my intent to support four classroom teachers in incorporating Slavic culturally responsive teaching in their classroom to support overall improvement of students’ academic grades, the students’ daily attendance rates, and individual teacher’s parental classroom involvement. According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching is defined as teaching to and through students’ strengths. Gay (2018) went on to define culturally responsive teaching as using student’s prior experiences, cultural knowledge, performance styles, and their frames of reference to make the classroom learning more relevant.

This research design, case study action aimed to answer multiple research questions through the lens of culturally responsive teaching and, under the cultural competence conceptual framework, to investigate the problem at this study’s school in northern California. The research questions driving this case study action research design were:

1. How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their culture?

2. How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teacher’s classroom action plan?

3. How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers?

4. How does the teacher’s classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom experience?
It was my intent to clarify why there are discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to student daily attendance, parent classroom involvement, and the academic success of students.

Research, theory, and practice show a lack of information regarding the correlation between Slavic student success and the use of culturally responsive teaching. This study will help add to the research by focusing on the Slavic community’s needs with regard to the education of first-generation and immigrant first- and second-grade students.

The Slavic population in this study were first-generation and immigrant first- and second-grade students attending school in this study’s northern California school. The Slavic academic and attendance results in non-Slavic-led teacher classrooms have different outcomes than academic and attendance results in Slavic-led teacher classrooms. Some of these differing outcomes are overall student grade performance, parental involvement in the classroom, and student attendance. Research has shown that effective classroom teachers must incorporate culturally responsive teaching, demonstrate their own cultural biases, and possess the skills and knowledge when working with culturally diverse students (Callaway, 2017; Ebersole et al., 2016; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As the research continues to show, it is important for effective classroom teachers to develop cultural humility practices within their classroom pedagogy (Anderson, 2011; Averill et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2016; Callaway, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lund & Lee, 2015; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). This study promotes the use of cultural humility approaches in correlation with culturally responsive teaching, while using the lens of the cultural competency conceptual framework. Successful teachers need to possess cultural humility, an understanding of their own cultural bias, have culturally responsive teaching
techniques, as well as possess culturally relevant pedagogy to support their diverse student populations.

The teachers who lack cultural responsiveness fail to meet the needs of their Slavic student population in this northern California school. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), cultural responsiveness is an instructional practice used by teachers to empower students’ emotional, social, intellectual, and political connection to the material. Empowerment is achieved by including cultural references in the academic lesson to communicate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in hopes of supporting each student’s sense of belonging in the classroom. This student-focused approach helps connect students to both the material being taught and their classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This action research project was conducted to support individual teacher’s implementation of cultural responsiveness and cultural competency into their classroom pedagogy. The three teachers in this study used both qualitative and quantitative data to support the creation of a culturally responsive classroom action plan based on their perception of their Slavic students’ cultural needs. This insight was gained from the data collected in surveys, focus group conversations, and qualitative data sets. It was my intent that with purposeful planning and proper implementation of the plan, the teachers in this study would be able to more effectively empower their students’ social, intellectual, emotional, and political connections to the material in the classroom. The cultural connections made by the teachers will hopefully engage their students’ families and support a classroom environment where teachers are happy and successful; students are flourishing academically, socially, and emotionally; and families are happy and supportive of the educational environment.
Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than the person leading the class (Averill et al., 2015). “It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching” (NEA, 2017, para. 1). It is important for effective classroom teachers to develop cultural competency practices within their classroom pedagogy in order to reach all learners in the classroom. “Cultural competence is the key to thriving in culturally diverse classrooms and schools – and it can be learned, practiced, and institutionalized to better serve diverse students, their families, and their communities” (NEA, 2017, para. 1).

The cultural competency conceptual framework was used to assess and inform teacher practice and parent and student perceptions through the phases of this study. It was my hope teachers would create their 4-week action plans using the cultural competency model in an effort to improve the experiences of students and parents in the classroom and with their teacher. I also hope this work will support the improved experience of the teachers in the classroom as they see the benefits of culturally responsive teaching. The success of this study included the improved experience for all three participant groups.

**Post-Positivism**

This case study action research design used the post-positivism paradigm, which “accepts values and perspective as important considerations in the search for knowledge” (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005, p. 5). I used the post-positivist paradigm in this action research, case study because I conducted the study in a naturalistic setting, I used a holistic approach to create emerging opportunities, and I looked for specific things based on both my experience as an educator and as a prior staff member at this school. Post-positive qualitative researchers increase the knowledge of others by collecting research data through methodical practices based on group interactions (Hacking, 1983). This study used the post-positive approach by analyzing observations, surveys, and focus group interviews and through the creation of teacher action plans and observation rubrics. According to Hacking (1983), post-positivism indicates theory is revisable and observation can be flawed. Post-positivist researchers believe their goal is to work hard to ensure truth is found despite the impossibility of accomplishing this task (Hacking, 1983).
Conducting the Study/Inquiry Approach

This study involved the following: data report gathering, survey administration, focus groups, teacher action plans, observation rubric creation, and observation data. I looked at both qualitative methods and quantitative methods throughout this case study action research. I began by gathering quantitative data from each of the three total classrooms. I gathered data on participant student academic grade point average (GPA), participant student daily attendance rates, and parent participation rates. The data were gathered to determine if any changes occurred during this case study. This action research, case study design primarily focused on qualitative data, which helped identify Slavic family needs that should be incorporated into the classroom setting. To do this, I sent out a 5-question survey to determine areas of discrepancy among the teacher, parent, and student responses with regard to experiences in the classroom. The survey responses from the teachers, parents, and students helped support the creation of the focus group questions. The focus group sessions consisted of the three classroom teachers, a few of their students, and their students’ families. The focus groups were facilitated to isolate teacher behaviors and attitudes that contribute to the relationship with students and parents as well as help me identify themes. The focus group questions asked parent and student participants to:

- identify their cultural identity,
- explain what they liked about their cultural identity,
- describe what parts of their cultural identity they were most proud of,
- describe the parts of their cultural identity they saw in the classroom,
- share what aspects of their cultural identity would they like to see in the classroom,
- communicate what parts of their community values align to the classroom values,
- share what community values they would like to see added to the classroom,
- discuss cultural learning styles and determine if these are aligned to the classroom instruction,
- determine what parts of the their cultural learning styles are part of the classroom and what additions they
would like to see added to the classroom, and share their immigration history. According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), culturally responsive teachers must be able to engage diverse students, and knowing students’ immigration history, family makeup, strengths and areas of opportunity will help teachers connect with their diverse students. It is my hope that these focus group questions helped the participating teachers see their students’ culture as an addition to the classroom culture, and the responses from their students and families will help guide them with what to add. The qualitative data included a descriptive analysis of teachers’, students’, and parents’ perceptions. Descriptive analysis helps communicate simple summaries of the data collected during both the quantitative and qualitative sections of this action research.

Each of the three iterations of the teacher focus group questions was different. The first set of focus group questions was identical to those asked of the parents and students. The second and third teacher focus group questions were different from the first set and different from each other. The second set of questions were designed to help the teachers reflect and brainstorm ideas for the next iteration of their classroom action plan. The third, and final, teacher focus group questions were designed to have the teachers reflect, plan for the rest of the school year, and communicate what they each learned during this action research case study. Figure 4 outlines the three sets of teacher focus group questions.
Next, I met with the three classroom teachers in a group setting to communicate and analyze the data gathered from the surveys, the themes from the three different focus group conversations, and individual teacher quantitative data sets. During this time, teachers created their own individual classroom action plan and observation rubric based on the presented data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were provided to each individual teacher to support the creation of their individual classroom action plan and their observation rubric. The creation of the individual action plan supported the individual needs of each teacher to ensure their area of need(s) were addressed in a manner that was comfortable to them and their class. The observation rubric helped facilitate focused observations of each teacher to support their area(s) of focus. At least two classroom observations were conducted in each teacher’s classroom during each of the two cycles. The observation data provided additional information for the next creation and implementation of the teachers’ action plans.

Figure 4. Teacher focus group questions.
I conducted sets of observations, focus group interviews (with the three teachers, their students, and students’ parents), and collected data over two cycles. Each group participating in the focus group interviews was interviewed separately. There was a focus group with the participating teachers, one group with parents, and the third group with the students. I also included adherence to the teacher-created action plan during the classroom observations by using the teacher-created observation rubric and through teacher feedback during the focus group sessions. Any irregularities in following the intervention plan were recorded on the observation sheets and discussed at the next action research debrief. This cycle was followed by another 4-week action cycle. The data gathered during each inquiry cycle supported the plan moving forward.

The data compiled for teachers for each “analyzing data” and “communication” portion of the action cycles consisted of quantitative data sets: parent involvement, academic grade point average (GPA), and student attendance per class for a total of three classes. The quantitative data discussed were: survey results, focus group themes, students’ GPA, students’ attendance, and parent participation rates during cycles one and two. The data were compiled for each of the three teachers to determine if the teachers’ cultural interventions were working. Each of the three teachers had her own set of data results from which to work.

Parent involvement, academic GPA, and students attendance per class were looked at pre-intervention and post-intervention for both cycles of this action research, case study design. I first determined the change between each of the three variables before and after each cycle of the teachers’ classroom interventions. I then looked at each of the three sets of data separately. Finally, I looked at the mean of each change data set to determine if the intervention increased or decreased the data.
Participants and Stakeholders

The school used in this study is located in northern California with a student body of just over 430 students, a faculty of 45, and an administration staff of two. The creation of this particular school was spearheaded by the Slavic parents in this community through the support of the local Russian Baptist church. Parents have a strong, vested interest in the school and its success. The study focuses particularly on two primary grade levels where each grade level has one classroom teacher from a non-Slavic background and the second classroom teacher from a Slavic culture. Non-Slavic students and their parents were not part of this study. Each classroom had at least one student and parent who participated in the survey portion of this study. One student and their parent from each class were asked to participate in the focus group portions of the study. These grade levels were selected for this case study action research design because of the teachers’ ethnic background, the similarity in teachers’ overall classroom experience, and the similarity in teachers’ classroom pedagogical practices.

The students and parents who participated in this study were all from the four classrooms and all identified as being from a Slavic culture. Families who did not identify as Slavic were not asked to participate in the survey. The students and parents who participated in the survey portion of this study volunteered to do so. These families and their teachers completed a consent form to participate (see Appendix A). The survey was given to the teachers and to the Slavic families both online and as a hard copy to ensure all families had access to the survey. The survey was translated in Russian to ensure all Slavic families who wanted to participate had the means by which to do so. Russian was chosen, as all families at this school spoke Russian despite their Slavic country of origin. Regardless of the religious, language, and alphabet differences, most Slavic people speak the Russian language because of the political history of the
Slavic countries (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The hard copy of the survey was given to the Slavic students during class (see Appendix B). All surveys were completed anonymously.

The three focus groups consisted of the three participating teachers, some of their students, and a parent from the students’ family. The students and parents who participated in the focus group portions of the study volunteered. These families and their teachers complete a permission slip to participate (see Appendix A). The three focus group sessions were held separately. The first focus group consisted of all three teachers. The second focus group consisted of one Slavic volunteer student from each of the three classes. The third, and final, focus group consisted of one family member from each of the three classes. The initial focus group was a one-hour discussion based on survey data, and the two following focus-group discussions were based on themes discussed at previous focus group discussions. The same teachers, different students, and different family members participated in each of the focus group discussions to ensure different perspectives of Slavic needs were heard and addressed. The data from the focus groups came from three sources: three primary elementary school classroom teachers, Slavic students in these three classrooms, and the Slavic parents from each teacher’s classrooms.

This action research, case study looked at teachers from the same grade level where one teacher was from the Slavic culture and the other was from a non-Slavic culture. Out of the 17 classroom teachers, three teachers were part of this study. The teachers were in the primary elementary grades, two first-grade classrooms and two second-grade classrooms. The teachers were chosen based on specific dynamics and cultural background. The teachers were part of a two-class, grade-level team where one teacher has a Slavic culture background and the other
teacher is from a non-Slavic culture. These teachers also had very similar classroom experiences and teaching styles and they planned their units and lessons together. The three teachers in this study had very different experiences with their students, families, and the community.

A few groups would find this research beneficial for their organization. The first group to benefit from this study is the school site with which this study was conducted. The majority of the classroom teacher leaders are non-Slavic and 98% of the student population is Slavic. This dichotomy can benefit from data to help build cultural humility for both its non-Slavic teacher leaders and Slavic teacher leaders. It was my intent that the school’s administration would use these findings to further develop and support the school staff as a whole with Slavic cultural humility practices.

Another group to benefit from this is the school district in which the school in this study resided. The school district has multiple school sites that serve the Slavic scholar population in and around the northern California area. The majority of the teachers in these schools are from non-Slavic cultures. Building cultural humility within this district’s administration and the school site’s teacher leaders will benefit the individual schools and the district as a whole.

It was my intent that other schools and educators find this research helpful to their own school and district. This study will lend to the cultural humility discussion educators are having as we continue to look for ways we can best support our students in the classroom. The research community can also benefit from this study. There is very little research on Slavic cultural humility and no research on educational Slavic cultural humility. This study can help fill the gap and potentially lead to further inquiry into Slavic cultural humility.
Site, Scope, and Setting for the Research

The research study took place at a TK-8 school located in northern California. The focus was on three classrooms in the primary grades, two grade levels, that have one Slavic classroom teacher and one non-Slavic classroom teacher. The majority of the school has non-Slavic teachers in the classrooms teaching predominately Slavic students, and the majority of the administration for the school comes from a non-Slavic background. The majority of the para-educators in the school (93%) as well as the majority of the office staff (57%) are from a Slavic cultural background.

Data-Collection Instruments, Procedures, and Timeframe

Triangulation of data collection was implemented to enhance validity and reliability of the data. Focus group interviews and observations were used as qualitative data points. Attendance data, academic data, and parental involvement data were used as quantitative data to enhance the qualitative findings. The mixed-methods combination of the data collection was to create a larger filter to find root causes and next steps to improve cultural humility and culturally responsive teaching among non-Slavic teachers.

To address the research problem, several data collection tools were utilized in this case study, action research design. This was a mixed-methods study looking at both qualitative methods and quantitative methods. During the gathering information portion of this action research, case study design, I conducted focus group interviews with each of the three teachers, with one student from each class, and with one family member from each student’s family. A total of 13 people participated in each of the focus group interviews. In addition to the focus group interviews, I conducted classroom observations in each of the three classrooms before and after the gathering information portion of the study. Finally, I looked at specific data sets for
each of these three classrooms. The data compiled consist of students’ academic grades, student daily attendance, and parent classroom involvement.

The data were compiled into four sections for clear communication: focus group data, observation data, academic data, and attendance data. The data were organized into a chart for easy understanding and a short summary of the data findings. This was the communication portion of the case study, action research design, which was delivered to the three teachers during the “communication” portion of each cycle.

Once the focus group interviews, observations, and quantitative data were collected, the results were shared, or debriefed, with the three teachers. During this communication portion of the action research process, the three teachers, together with me, developed an intervention plan to support the needs of each classroom over the next four school weeks. It was my intent to increase teacher buy-in by both sharing the data results with the three teachers and by collaborating with the three teachers. The intervention planning process was observed and communicated by the researcher.

The teachers and I used Charlotte Danielson’s *Domains of Professional Practice: The Danielson Framework: The Professional Portfolio* (2013) to help with the planning portion of the teachers’ individual intervention plans during each of the two phases of this action research project. We began our work by looking at what is called the planning and preparation stage (Danielson, 2013), during which the classrooms teachers demonstrated their knowledge of content and pedagogy, identified students’ language proficiency, shared their knowledge of students’ interests and heritage, set instructional outcomes, demonstrated knowledge of resources, and designed their instruction and assessment. This stage was to help improve the lessons taught in the classroom.
Next, we focused on the classroom environment stage (Danielson, 2013) in which teachers used a culturally responsive teaching lens (Gay, 2018) while they planned out their teaching and learning context. We looked at intellectual humility, cultural competency, authentic voice, and representation in the classroom environment. Teachers discussed their interactions with students, both through their words and actions; student interactions with other students; how they establish a culture for learning; what their classroom procedures are with groups, transitions, using shared supplies; how they manage student behavior; and how they use their classroom’s physical space.

The next phase used the instruction phase (Danielson, 2013) in which teachers discussed how they communicate with students; their classroom expectations, directions, and procedures; and how explanations are given to their students. We also discussed teachers’ questioning and discussion techniques, student engagement, both formal and informal assessment, and how teachers build on students’ interests in the classroom.

Finally, we used the professional responsibilities phase (Danielson, 2013). The last phase helped the teacher identify their own personal and professional identity and their own beliefs and practices as they planned out their next steps. Each teacher developed the observation rubric I used during my classroom observations. Each teacher had a template based on Charlotte Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching* (2013), which replicated the template used for the classroom action plan.

During the second cycle, I again conducted observations and the focus group interview with all teachers, four different students, and the students’ families. Then I collected data over four weeks. I also included adherence to the plan by the classroom teachers during both the classroom observations and teacher interviews during the focus group session. Any irregularities
in following the intervention plan were recorded and discussed at the next action research
debrief. This cycle was the conclusion of the study’s classroom intervention cycle.

Data Analysis

To address the research problem, several data collection tools were utilized in this action
research, case study design. This study looked at both qualitative methods and quantitative
methods. I used a five-question survey to determine areas of discrepancy among the teacher,
parent, and student responses. The survey responses supported the adaptation of the proposed
focus group questions. The focus group consisted of three teachers, a few of their students, and
their students’ families. The focus group discussions helped me identify themes to focus my
efforts. Next, teachers created their own individual classroom action plan and observation rubric
based on the focus group themes and responses during each of the two cycles. Classroom
observations were then conducted to provide feedback to the teachers to support the process
during the creation of the next cycle’s teacher action plans. Qualitative data supported the
information presented to teachers during the individual classroom action plan creation. The data
compiled for teachers consisted of students’ academic grades and student attendance. Finally, I
used the teacher-created observation rubric in each of the three classrooms during my
observations. The classroom observations were all scheduled and planned by the participating
teachers. The data were used to support the next phase of implementation. The first and second
cycles of this action research took place over a total of 4 weeks in length each for a total of 8
weeks. The ninth and final week was designed to meet with the three participating teachers for
their final focus group interview. The full length of this action research, case study was 9 weeks.

The five-question survey (see Appendix B) given at both the beginning and end of this
study contained questions with similar themes between each of the two surveys (pre and post) for
each participant group: teachers, students, and parents. It was my intent to find discrepancies between individual questions among the three groups to determine the “missing piece” to investigate further during the focus groups. Questions 1 and 2 focused on teacher satisfaction; Question 3 helped determine student preparation; and Questions 4 and 5 helped determine communication practices. The results from the survey were used to adapt the proposed focus group questions to help determine “root causes” and to help create the teacher action plans and observation rubrics.

Once the focus groups were concluded, notes and recordings were coded and examined to find any additional themes and to validate themes from the survey. Two parent and student focus groups interviews were organized for this study, one during each of the two cycles. Unfortunately, the second focus group interviews for both the participating parents and students did not take place. This is discussed more in Chapter 4. The teachers participated in three focus group interviews, one during each of the two cycles and one at the conclusion of the study. The teachers were chosen based on specific dynamics and cultural background. The teachers were part of a two-class, grade-level team where one teacher was of a Slavic culture background and the other teacher was from a non-Slavic culture. These teachers also had very similar classroom experiences and teaching styles and they planned their units and lessons together. The three teachers in this study had very different experiences with their students, families, and the community.

The focus group questions for teachers were structured to begin by having the participants look back on their classroom experiences. Each of the three iterations of the teacher focus group questions was different. The first set of focus group questions was identical to those of the parents and students. The second and third teacher focus group questions differed from
the first set and differed from each other. The second set of questions was designed to help the teachers reflect and brainstorm ideas for the next iteration of their classroom action plan. The third, and final, teacher focus group questions were designed to have the teachers reflect, plan for the rest of the school year, and communicate what they each learned during this action research case study.

To analyze the data, I used many steps to both analyze and code the data. The first step was to review the notes and recordings to gather an overall understanding of the tone, mood, and intent of the focus group interviews. Next, the individual contributions to the interview sessions were analyzed to identify emergent topics. *In vivo coding* was used to extract exact words used in the focus group interviews to create categories and themes. Since the naming of the categories and themes were words used by the participants, this technique helped reduce researcher bias. The results and responses from the second and third sets of focus group interviews were compared to the previous set(s). The themes were shared with the teachers to help create the action plan.

**Limitations**

The following limitations were identified. This study looked at one small school in northern California. This particular Slavic population shares a set of beliefs and cultural norms. Most of the families, and some of the staff, at this school immigrated to the United States with the support from a local Russian Baptist church. These families are connected back in their home country as well as here in California. Approximately 88% of the school’s population is either immigrant Russian students or first-generation born Russian. The students attend this study’s school because of the support the school receives from the local Russian Baptist church. The school also has a small population, approximately 3%, of Ukrainian students who also
received United States immigration support from the local Russian Baptist church. It is also notable to say this study’s school started its charter in the local Russian Baptist church. The school was located in the church for 3 years before it moved to its current school building. Additionally, teachers, parents, and students may not have been completely honest during the focus group interviews. Due to their relationship with me and their relationship with each other, they may have said what they thought was appropriate or what they thought others wanted to hear. Teachers and students may have behaved or interacted differently during the observations. Due to their relationship with me, they may have “performed” during the observations. There was also a potential for external factors to influence responses and observation data. Teaching in a particular way may have been a result of learned behavior from a teaching preparation program and bias from participants may have been a direct result of a life experience. Finally, this study may not fully apply to the non-Russian Slavic student population at this school, which is about 12% of the student body.

**Usefulness of Findings to Stakeholders**

The findings of the study may be beneficial to the success of all stakeholders in the district and the surrounding community. Stakeholders include the school, its teachers, students, families, and administration; the district, the charter authorizer; the northern California Slavic community; and any school serving Slavic families. The findings could depict the need for more cultural humility training for both Slavic and non-Slavic teachers and families as well as best teaching practices for educators teaching in a predominantly Slavic setting.

**Ethical Considerations and Participants’ Rights**

During the focus group interviews and observations, I had to take deliberate steps to protect the privacy and rights of the participants. I am an insider within the organization, and I
have personal relationships with most of the participants. Action research takes into account researcher bias; however, I want to call out the potential bias due to these relationships for both the participants and the researcher. Privacy of the participants was crucial to ensure the identity of the participants is unknown. All identifying responses and information were removed to protect the participants’ privacy.

The focus group interviews were transcribed, and all identifying factors and names were removed. Recordings were made during the focus groups interviews and observations, and all recording were kept on a secure device and in a secure location. Additional steps were taken to protect the participants and their identity. Confidentiality and informed consent were addressed by means of a letter during each step in the inquiry process (see Appendix A) to all participants. The letter described the purpose of the meeting, the questions being asked, how the gathered information would be used, and a clear description of the steps taken to maintain confidentiality during the process. Additionally, all participants were given the option to decline their initial participation in the study as well as the ability to opt out at any time. To further ensure confidentiality, prior to the focus groups, all participants were asked to sign a statement of confidentiality to keep the identity of the other participants and the contents of these discussions confidential (see Appendix A).

**Potential Biases and or Subjectivity of the Study**

I am an insider with this organization, and I have been working with this community and in this organization for over 4 years. It was reasonable to believe these ties to the community and the organization could have led to bias, which could have affected the recommendations and outcomes of this study. It could also be true, these ties to the community and organization could
have led to more honest and deeper conversations with the participants in this study. To me, the success of the research and the success of the school are important.

There was also a potential for cultural limitations for the participants of the study. The school community is very close and has ties to the outside Slavic community. The students and some of the staff have known each other since their arrival in the United States and they also attend church and church events together. The church these families attend helped most of them gain access to the United States. The church is also a way to keep their culture and heritage flourishing in American society. There is a close bond and loyalty from these families to each other and the church. This was a possible limitation, as the church is a sounding board for these families and the conversations from the church could have skewed the answers provided by the participating families and their children.

**Summary**

The purpose of this case study, action research was to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms in which teachers are of Slavic descent and classrooms in which teachers are of non-Slavic descent. This action research, case study aimed to answer multiple research questions to investigate why there are discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy, parent involvement, and the academic success of scholars: How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as related to their culture? How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teachers’ classroom action plan? How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers? How does the teacher’s classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom
experience? According to Tinkler and Tinkler (2016), “Meaningful partnerships require youth have a chance to engage in learning experiences that embody their stories, dreams, their aspirations, and their reality. By approaching learning partnerships with humility, educators . . . can values stories, dreams, and aspirations with attention to relevance” (p. 200). This cannot be done without getting to know the scholars in the classroom.

A 4-week, two-series, action cycle was used as the “action” portion of the study. The first and second cycles of this action research were a total of 4 weeks each in length for a total of 8 weeks. The full length of this case study action research was 9 weeks (see Appendix C). Teacher, student, and parent focus groups and quantitative data were gathered over the course of this study. The data gathered were coded, categorized, and put into themes. In vivo coding of the focus group interviews was used during this process to help reduce researcher bias in the creation of the themes. The themes were shared with the teachers to help create an intervention action plan at the beginning of each inquiry cycle.

The findings of the study could benefit the success of all stakeholders in the district and the surrounding community. The findings can depict the need for more cultural humility training for both Slavic and non-Slavic teachers and families as well as best teaching practices for educators teaching in a predominantly Slavic setting. The significance of this study is to provide the reader with an overview of several factors associated with teacher cultural humility and student academic performance with a focus on the Slavic culture. This is the first study to provide information on the importance of culturally responsive teaching for the Slavic community and how teacher cultural humility with Slavic students can potentially improve perceptions, experiences, and academic success. This study can help fill the gap and potentially lead to further inquiry into Slavic cultural humility.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This action research, case study was designed to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms where teachers were of Slavic descent and classrooms where teachers were of non-Slavic descent. A cultural competency conceptual framework was used along with data gathered from each cycle of the study to support three teachers’ classroom action plans to incorporate specific Slavic culturally responsive actions into their practice. Using a cultural competency framework and data gathered from each cycle of the study, teachers took specific actions to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their practice. The action research case study was designed around an overarching research question: How would gaining knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perception of classroom practice over the course of the action research period? This case study action research design answers the following four research questions aimed to close discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy, parent involvement, and the academic success of students at a northern California charter school:

1. How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their culture?

2. How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teacher’s classroom action plan?

3. How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers?

4. How does the teacher’s classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom experience?
This chapter discusses the findings from the culmination of this nine-week action research case study. The findings discussed highlight things The Great School (pseudonym to protect confidentiality) did well and what they did differently to incorporate Slavic cultural competency into their classroom learning environment. The findings discussed came from a variety of data collection tools used in this study.

Participants

This study took place in a small charter school in Northern California. The 13 participants were members of one first-grade class (Class A) and two second-grade classes (Class B and Class C) at The Great School. Overall, this action research study had five student participants, five parent participants, and three teacher participants (see Table 1). Each of the three classes had at least one parent and one student participant.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>Teacher Participants</th>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Parent Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *The Class A teacher was also a parent and was asked to not take the parent survey.  
** Non-Slavic

Class A had one teacher participant, two student participants, and one parent participant. The teacher of Class A is of Slavic descent and all parent and student participants are of Slavic descent. The teacher in Class A had agreed to be a teacher participant, as well as a parent.
participant, and allowed her child to be a student participant in this study. The teacher’s child
was also one of the first-grade students in Class A. In an effort to receive honest parent
feedback, I did not have the teacher participate in the parent survey or the parent focus group
interviews. The Class A teacher only participated in the teacher survey and the teacher focus
group interviews. All participants from Class A agreed to participate in all portions of this action
research case study.

Class B had one teacher participant, two student participants, and three parent
participants. The teacher in Class B is of Slavic descent and all parent and student participants
from Class B are also of Slavic descent. Out of the three parent participants, one parent wanted
to only participate in the survey portion of this study. The other two parent participants and the
two student participants wanted to participate in all portions of this study. During Week 2 of this
study, one of the families in this class dis-enrolled from the school and, according to the school,
enrolled their child in a public school. This study concluded with having only one teacher, one
student, and two parent participants.

Class C had one teacher participant, one student participant, and one parent participant.
The teacher in Class C is of non-Slavic descent and the parent and student are both of Slavic
descent. Both the parent and the student agreed to participate in all portions of this action
research case study. I received one additional parent and one student permission form in Week 2
of this 9-week action research case study. Due to the possibility of skewing post-intervention
results, I did not add the parent or the student to the study.
This 9-week mixed methods action research case study was designed with two 4-week action research cycles (see Figure 5). Cycle One was the Shifting Teacher Practice cycle where the participating teachers used data collected from surveys, focus group interviews, and student participant GPA and ADA to develop their own classroom action plan. This phase concluded the “Plan” portion of the first phase. Next, in the “Act” phase, the participating teachers implemented their classroom action plans while I took classroom observation notes of them implementing their classroom action plans. Then, all the observation data was gathered and analyzed by me and more focus group interviews were conducted as the first step in the “Reflect” phase. Once this was done, the observation data and focus group data were presented to the participating teachers. The “Reflect” phase ended with teachers reflecting on their own
implementation of their first action plan based on their experience and the observation data collected.

The second cycle was the “Deepening Teacher Practice” cycle to support the participating teachers deepening their knowledge of Slavic cultural competency and act on this new knowledge. This cycle was also four weeks in length. The cycle began with the “Plan” phase. In the “Plan” phase, focus group data was presented to the participating teachers. The participating teachers used their reflections from the first phase, in correlation with the new focus group data, to help them plan their next classroom action plans to address their Slavic students’ needs. Once the action plans were complete, the participating teachers implemented them in their classroom during the “Act” phase. Again, I took classroom observation notes of the individual participating teachers implementing their plans. After four weeks, the observation data was provided to the teachers so they could reflect on their implementation of their plan during the “Reflect” phase. During this phase additional data was collected from all three participant groups. The post data consisted of surveys, GPA and ADA. The “Conclusion” phase of this action research case study was a final focus group meeting with the three participating teachers. During this time, we discussed classroom impact, new learning, and next steps. The culmination of the 9-week action research case study supported the findings from this work using the cultural competency conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework used for this study was cultural competence. Cultural competence is defined as harmonious attitudes, behaviors, and policies within a system and among professionals that allow all involved to work effectively in cross-cultural settings and situations (Cross et al., 1989). According to Kumagi and Lypson (2009), cultural competence is when professionals understand the needs of diverse populations with whom they serve. The
cultural competency model used in this study (see Figure 1) helped identify teacher, student, and parent experiences with their classroom teachers and helped the teachers better understand the needs of the Slavic community.


The cultural competency conceptual framework was used along with data gathered from each cycle of the study to support three teachers’ classroom action plans to incorporate specific Slavic culturally responsive actions into their practice. Using a cultural competency framework and data gathered from each cycle of the study, teachers took specific actions to incorporate culturally responsive strategies into their practice. After the conclusion of the 9-week action research case study the cultural competency framework helped reveal the below findings.
Findings

This 9-week action research case study revealed four main findings and five sub-themes. The four main findings are: (a) the culture at the school meets the Slavic community values; (b) Slavic parents and students want more singing and penmanship incorporated into classroom lessons; (c) the importance of listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into the classroom culture; and (d) Slavic parents have high academic standards for their children, which can cause pressure for students to be perfect. The five sub-themes emerged from the focus group interviews with the participant groups and are discussed more in Chapter 5. The five sub-themes that emerged from the focus group discussions are: (a) the Russian language and culture are very important to the Slavic population, (b) Slavic families want the flexibility of the classroom to honor different types of learning styles, (c) teachers need to provide students with more time to express themselves, (d) the teachers want to incorporate successful strategies while teaching through distance learning, and (e) music supports Slavic English language learners.

School Culture Meets Slavic Community Needs: Understanding of Others

The focus group questions were designed to illuminate Slavic cultural values, community values, and cultural learning styles and to determine if these cultural pieces had been integrated into the classroom structure. The overall perceptions of the Slavic parents and students were very favorable towards both their school and classroom experience. The participating families and students communicated their appreciation for the way the classroom met their cultural values, community values, and cultural learning style. The Great School met the Slavic parents’ and students' cultural values, community values and cultural learning styles which is part of Understanding of Others in the cultural competency conceptual framework (see Figure 6). One parent said during the initial focus group interview, “I identify with his classroom and with my
background, my cultural background.” During the initial parent focus group interview the parents made a lot of connections to their cultural background experience and the experience of their child. The Slavic parents were very satisfied with the teacher and the classroom. This is evident in both the pre- and post-survey parent data (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Parent Pre-Survey</th>
<th>Parent Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
<td>Yes=100% No=0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the initial parent focus group interview the parent participants were asked if the school met their community values. When asked this question, a parent responded by saying:

The school is doing a great job because they have to blend into this community primarily, and they need to know what our expectations are, you know. And our kids are taught here since kindergarten and they are taught at home and at school don't interrupt and be respectful. So, it's kind of them (school) being international for the most part. They do a good job aligning to our community values.

The other parent participants in this initial parent focus group interview agreed. They all felt as if the school did a good job of connecting the school and classroom culture and
expectations to that of this Slavic community. Another parent responded to this question by saying:

I would say definitely yes, especially at the beginning of the school year when they do a social contract. When they put to respect each other, active listeners, what they have to do in class and all those types of things. The whole social contract list with those values that they go by everyday, and they (students) remind each other, and they help each other to stay on top of the social contract.

The data from this study revealed this particular school was doing many very purposeful things to support this particular Slavic community. The work with IB and the character traits, the work with CKH and the use of classroom social contracts, the art and music program, and the implementation of Russian classes to keep the Russian language alive for the younger generation were all positive things done for the Slavic community to meet the Slavic community needs.

The focus on academics was also a highlight for the Slavic parents. One parent said:

(The) education is very good I've noticed compared to some of my other family members who go to different school. They learn a lot more at (this school) and they're more ahead of like the students that are like in the same grade.

The parents were satisfied because their child had Russian language and culture classes, some staff spoke Russian, their child participated in art classes, the classroom was using the IB Programme, and the class implemented the CKH program. The parent survey data had a 100% satisfaction rating for all five survey questions in both the pre- and post-surveys. The parent focus group interview had only positive things to say about their child’s classroom with a focus on the classroom design supporting cultural learning styles and community values.

Overall, both the parents and students expressed high satisfaction regarding their perceptions of their classroom experience as it relates to their Slavic culture. The school has done many things to support this satisfaction rating such as include Russian language classes and art classes and implement school-wide programs to support learning and the classroom
community. The parent participants agreed the Russian language classes integrated their Slavic culture well at the school and in the classroom. One parent said, "I like that they teach Russian in the class" and another parent said, “I think we already have what we need for our culture, we have Russian language classes as part of our school.” The satisfaction ties to the next theme of Slavic parents and students wanting more singing and penmanship incorporated into classroom lessons.

**Singing and Penmanship: Understanding of Others: Teaching Strategies**

The teachers implemented feedback from parents and students to improve the inclusion of singing and penmanship activities in the classroom in both cycles of their classroom teacher action plan. The initial focus group interviews from the participating students and parents provided this information to the participating teachers. The first focus group interview from the student participant group provided the participating teachers with the information needed to implement singing into their classroom action plans. When the participating students were asked “what part of your cultural identity are you most proud?” one student said, “I like singing at church. I sing all the time and I sing with my parents and I am the loudest. I'm one of the loudest person at the church.” When asked “what parts of your culture would you like to see added to your classroom?” another student said, “I don't know . . . I would like to sing more.” The participating parents also commented on how their children liked singing and they wanted to see more singing in school when asked “what parts of your community would you like to see added to your classroom?” One parent said, “I can't really think of anything right now . . . maybe more singing. My child really likes to sing.”

The other area the Slavic parents wanted to see added to their child’s classroom was time to practice English handwriting skills. The parents discussed in the first focus group interview
that the school did a great job having students practice writing in Russian; however, the handwriting in English did not get as much attention. One parent said, “We already have speaking Russian classes. Russian language as provided particularly in our charter school so I think it's great but they need practice in writing English too.” During the initial teacher focus group interview one teacher said:

For me one thing I noted in the Russian culture is to write neatly. They spend like hours in classes to teach kids how to write nice and neatly and no erasing. You have to be so perfect when writing on paper. No turning in messy papers. So I am struggling sometimes because parents keep asking me like Ms. Teacher, why don't you ever like practice handwriting, but I'm like I do. This is something I could add in my classroom, like handwriting time in my classroom.

The inclusion of both singing and penmanship into these participating classrooms supported the overall satisfaction of the Slavic parents and students as seen in the parent pre- and post-survey data. This ties to the cultural competency conceptual framework in two sections, in understanding of others and in teaching strategies.

The Great School met the cultural values, community values and the cultural learning styles of the Slavic community. This understanding of others helped support the implementation of teaching strategies to meet these Slavic needs. The lesson delivery drew on the students’ Slavic culture and supported the implementation of singing and penmanship into the participating teachers’ classroom action plans. This further supported the positive experience for the Slavic parent and student participants. This finding ties to the next section of the importance of listening to and incorporating Slavic parent and student needs into the classroom culture.

**Slavic Parent and Student Needs: Teaching Strategies**

The third finding is the importance of listening to and incorporating Slavic parent and student needs into the classroom culture. This is done through the building and maintaining of relationships which is part of Teaching Strategies in the cultural competency conceptual
framework (see Figure 6). Listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into classroom culture helps develop a strong relationship between school and home. The relationship between the teacher and the student is important. Wilson et al. (2017) concluded the competency of the student was influenced by the teacher-student relationship. They suggested it was crucial the student felt safe, respected, and supported by the teacher, while the teacher interactions ensured all students were treated equally. These relationships play an important part of student classroom perceptions because the relationships are part of students’ classroom experience.

The relationship among the teacher, school, and family is also important. According to Rossetti et al. (2017), “Although there has been a consistent vision for multicultural education and family collaboration in teacher preparation programs for decades, collaborative partnerships between culturally and linguistically diverse families and their children’s educators remain elusive” (p. 329). Parents play an important role in their child’s education, and it is critical to have parent investment in their child’s education. Rossetti et al. (2017) further explained communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships among the teacher, school, and family. The relationship between the classroom teacher and their student’s family plays an important role in parents’ overall perception of the classroom.

This particular school has done a great job listening to their Slavic families, as noted from the first finding, the initial focus group interview with the participating families, and the pre- and post-student and parent survey results. A collaborative relationship between these families and their child’s teacher can be negatively affected by a family feeling frustrated due to what they perceive as a teacher who is culturally obtuse. The pre- and post-parent survey data showed this
is not true with these particular teachers. The feedback from participating parents and students had an impact on the teachers’ classroom action plans. All three participating teachers used parent and student feedback to implement more art into their classroom instruction. Two teachers added writing and singing chants to enhance their lessons. The third teacher implemented penmanship time in her classrooms to support her students’ penmanship. Singing and penmanship were themes extracted from the first set of focus group interviews. The three participating teachers understood and implemented their parents’ and students’ suggestions into their classroom action plans, ensuring both Slavic student and parent satisfaction, which is evident in the post-survey data.

The cultural competency conceptual framework helped identify the impact Slavic students’ and parents’ perceptions had on the teachers’ classroom action plans (see Figure 6). It was important for Slavic students of this Slavic community to have singing and penmanship included in the classroom instruction. This information was revealed in the first focus group interviews and was communicated to the participating teachers during Week 2. Even though this school already provided art classes, a music program, and penmanship activities, these were identified as ways teachers could improve the Slavic experience in their individual classrooms. During the teacher focus group interviews, the teachers reported affirmations from both Slavic parents and students based on their classroom action plans, which implemented singing and penmanship activities. One teacher said during the last teacher focus group interview, “by incorporating that (singing) just increased engagement and enjoy ability of lessons.” Another teacher said, “I shouldn't have but I was surprised at how students are very art and music focused.”
Finding three shows the importance of listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into the classroom culture. The participating teachers received affirmations from both Slavic parents and students due to their work incorporating singing and penmanship into their weekly lessons. One teacher commented on the change in a student’s attitude towards penmanship, “One of those boys who hated writing the most (asked) did you check my handwriting did you check, and I'm like so he cares now.” Another teacher commented that it is important for her to really listen to her parents and students because when they work as a class community, it only helps the students’ academic success. People feel valued when they are heard, and helping parents and students feel valued at school is important to gaining trust and building strong relationships. The participating teachers put value into creating this strong relationship with both their parents and students.

These Slavic parent and student suggestions impacted these teachers’ classroom action plans both during and after the conclusion of this action research case study. The key takeaway is to engage Slavic parents and students to see what pieces of the Slavic culture are important and then innovate ways to implement them into the classroom instruction.

**Slavic High Academic Standards: Teaching Strategies**

The fourth finding from this 9-week action research case study was Slavic parents have high academic standards for their children which can cause pressure for students to be perfect. During my classroom observations I noticed all three participating teachers providing a lot of student affirmations. The teachers made it a point to affirm their Slavic students during my observations and I wanted to gather the data because research shows the relationship between the teacher and the student is important to the student’s success in the classroom (Anderson, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2017; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). The data are important because the three
participating teachers wanted to provide feedback and encourage student engagement during their lessons. I started to track this information on my observation sheets. At each data debrief meeting with the participating teachers I presented the affirmation and correction data. The data show the teachers building and maintaining their relational capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1 Average Teacher Affirmations</th>
<th>T1 = 6.5</th>
<th>T2 = 7</th>
<th>T3 = 15</th>
<th>Total Average Affirmations = 10.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2 Average Teacher Affirmations</td>
<td>T1 = 16.5</td>
<td>T2 = 11</td>
<td>T3 = 20</td>
<td>Total Average Affirmations = 15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 1 Average Teacher Corrections</td>
<td>T1 = 4</td>
<td>T2 = 3</td>
<td>T3 = 5</td>
<td>Total Average Corrections = 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2 Average Teacher Corrections</td>
<td>T1 = 1</td>
<td>T2 = 2.5</td>
<td>T3 = 4</td>
<td>Total Average Corrections = 2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. A visual of the affirmation and correction data gathered during cycle one and two.*

The Slavic parent value on perfection was both a concern and an area the participating teachers worked on with their students. One teacher mentioned, “They (students) all strive for perfection so if they don't have 100% correct, they feel bad about themselves and they feel like they're not doing well at all.” Another teacher said:

I saw a couple of those students crying constantly like Mom is sitting next to them and it broke my heart so I am stopping often and I just tell them like, “Did you try your best? Just try your best. If you're doing your best you're fine, you're doing a wonderful job.” So I’m like praising mostly. I tell them that, “If your parents have high expectations, and they're not met, don't be upset, you're doing an excellent job. I see you're trying.” The thing that this distance learning has affected a lot of these students’ high expectations.
The compassion and cultural understanding from the three participating teachers towards their Slavic families and students are important to note. The parents have high expectations of their students, and they want perfection. The three participating teachers understand high expectations is a cultural norm and thus work with their families and students to address the expectations in a way that provides grades to parents while also providing social and emotional support to their students. This adaptation is part of Understanding of Others in the cultural competency conceptual framework (see Figure 6) for having high expectations for all learners.

All three teachers commented on the pressure they see from their Slavic parents and experience from their Slavic students. The teachers make it a point to affirm their Slavic students to help bridge the gap between the expectation to be perfect and the reality that mistakes happen when learning. The participating teachers continue to hold high expectations for their scholars, but do so with a healthy balance of affirmations and corrections. Due to the strong relationships these teachers have with their families, they know who they need to support with purposeful affirmations. This was confirmed when a teacher said, “There’s a few kids I know that their parents put a lot of pressure on them, so especially those kids I especially try to find small celebrations that we can celebrate with them.”

**Teacher Perceptions**

The perceptions of the three participating teachers were affected by this 9-week action research case study. The incorporation of singing and penmanship activities helped the three participating teachers understand singing and penmanship activities are important to the Slavic community, singing and penmanship activities support Slavic English language learners, and listening to and implementing parent and student suggestions is the key to building strong
relationships with Slavic families which in turn supports overall Slavic classroom success. These teacher perceptions were revealed during the focus group interviews.

When the three teacher participants noticed the improved engagement from their Slavic students in cycle one, they increased their singing and penmanship activities in their action plans to include more student-centered activities for cycle two. The increase was made to improve Slavic student engagement and eliminate the student and material disconnect by making the delivery of the content specific to Slavic cultural learning style. The incorporation of Slavic culturally relevant pedagogy (Averil et al., 2015; Young, 2010) supports the academic success of Slavic students through engagement with the material. Engagement to the content is crucial for the retention of the information, according to both Ladson-Billings (1995) and Young (2010). Part of culturally relevant engagement to the material is when students see their culture embedded in the lesson.

The purposeful incorporation of singing and penmanship activities into the three participating teachers’ classroom action plans supported the importance of the arts to their Slavic parents and students and helped create more engaged students. One participating teacher reported, “I shouldn't have been but I was surprised at how students are very art and music focused.” Another teacher said, “By incorporating that (singing) just increased engagement and enjoy ability of lessons.” These three participating teachers wanted to continue to implement these new learnings into future classroom lessons. One teacher said, “I'm going to try to find more opportunities for them to be more creative and share their own forms of art.” After this work the three participating teachers understand singing and penmanship activities are important to the Slavic community
The second teacher's perception change was the knowledge that singing and penmanship activities helped Slavic English learners connect to the material. The participating teachers discussed the importance art and music is for supporting their English learner students and attributed this to the Slavic cultural learning style. One teacher mentioned, “Incorporating music and art is a great segue for English learners because they're able to connect.” Another teacher mentioned that during her lesson, one of her English learner students was unable to read a sentence very well, but when asked to sing the sentence, the student was able to do so with less trouble. The participating teachers’ knowledge of the importance of art, music, and writing in the Slavic community was confirmed after implementing their two action plans. These teachers were also able to recognize art, music, and writing as an aide to support their EL students connecting to the academic content.

The third teacher perception that was identified was the importance of listening to and trying to implement both Slavic parent and student suggestions. The findings from this 9-week action research case study show that positive Slavic relationships between the school and home will support the overall satisfaction of teachers, Slavic students and Slavic parents. Anderson (2011), when teachers and school leaders build relationships with all their students, regardless of culture or language barriers, they improve students’ and parents’ connection to the school and thus the academic success of the students. Rossetti et al. (2017) further explained communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships among the teacher, school, and family.

Listening to and implementing feedback from Slavic students and families is an important way to build relationships. The participating teachers wanted to reach every student
during distance learning and their classroom action plan was an attempt to do this in a culturally competent and strategic manner. One teacher said, “I just really learned to listen to parents and students and try to accommodate them to the best I can.” Listening to and implementing parent and student suggestions is the key to building strong relationships with Slavic families which in turn supports overall Slavic student success.

The perceptions of the teachers verify the findings of this 9-week action research case study. The importance of connecting the classroom lessons with the Slavic cultural values, community values, and cultural learning styles will benefit Slavic students and Slavic English language learners. To be able to incorporate what is important to the Slavic community it is crucial to actively engage, listen to, and implement Slavic parent and student suggestions on how to improve current teaching strategies. Having this understanding of others, and an awareness of self, will support teachers in becoming more Slavic culturally competent.

Chapter Summary

This action research case study was a 9-week, two-cycle process (see Appendix C). Our four main findings and five sub-themes can support educators in their journey to be more Slavic culturally competent. The four main findings were: the culture at the school meets the Slavic community values; Slavic parents and students want more singing and penmanship incorporated into classroom lessons; the importance of listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into the classroom culture; and Slavic parents have high academic standards for their children which can cause pressure for students to be perfect. The five sub-themes emerged from the focus group interviews with the participant groups and are discussed more in Chapter 5. The five sub-themes that emerged from the focus group discussions are: the Russian language and culture are very important to the Slavic population; Slavic families want
the flexibility of the classroom to honor different types of learning styles; teachers need to provide students with more time to express themselves; the teachers want to incorporate successful strategies while teaching through distance learning; and music supports Slavic English language learners.

These findings can shed light on the need for more cultural humility training for both Slavic and non-Slavic teachers as well as best teaching practices for educators teaching in a predominantly Slavic setting. The significance of this study is to provide the reader with an overview of several factors associated with teacher cultural humility and student academic performance with a focus on the Slavic culture. This is the first study to provide information on the importance of culturally responsive teaching for the Slavic community and how teacher cultural humility with Slavic students can potentially improve perceptions, experiences, and academic success. This study can help fill the gap and potentially lead to further inquiry into Slavic cultural humility. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings of the study in more depth, the four guiding research questions, and if this information can benefit the success of all stakeholders in the district and the surrounding community.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This action research, case study was designed to gain insight into teacher, student, and parent experiences and perceptions of classrooms where teachers were of Slavic descent and of classrooms where teachers were of non-Slavic descent. A cultural competency framework was used along with data gathered from each cycle of the study to support three teachers’ classroom action plans to incorporate specific culturally responsive actions into their practice based on survey and focus group interview data. Cultural competence is when professionals understand the needs of diverse populations with whom they serve (Cross et al., 1989). This study looked at the cultural competence of teachers and their work in a Slavic K-8 school. The one overarching question and four research questions aimed to close discrepancies between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers with regard to the classroom pedagogy and the academic success of students at a northern California charter school. The overarching research question used is: How would gaining knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perceptions of classroom practice over the course of the action research period? This work was also designed to answer the four following research questions:

1. How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their culture?

2. How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teacher’s classroom action plan?

3. How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers?
4. How does the teacher’s classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom experience?

The action research, case study design implemented a systematic approach to this investigation. It supported the teachers in finding an effective solution they could implement in their classroom on a regular basis in an effort to bridge the Slavic cultural gap identified by parents and students (Stringer, 2014). The participants in this study worked in collaboration with me to work towards a deeper understanding of what was missing from the classroom environment in terms of Slavic student and parent needs as well as supporting a deeper understanding of Slavic cultural needs among the teacher participants. Action research helped us look at the complex dynamics in each of the three classrooms to improve results based on continuous cycles of investigation in hopes of supporting the overall effectiveness of classroom learning (Stringer, 2014). This action research also helped both the participants and me engage in reflective practices that improved our Slavic cultural competency awareness and informed subsequent cycles. The teachers implemented their classroom action plans to address the lack of Slavic cultural competency in their classroom based on data from action cycles presented throughout study. Both 4-week action research cycles continued the iterative plan, act, observe, and reflect process aimed at cultural competency improvement in the classroom (McNiff, 2017; Stringer, 2014).

Using findings from Chapter 4, this chapter discusses and answers each of the four research questions and the study’s results and link prior research from the field to help illustrate classroom Slavic cultural competency as it relates to this particular study.

This study was designed around an overarching research question: How would gaining knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perceptions of classroom practice over the course of the action research
period? The participating teachers’ classroom action plans were significantly impacted by their knowledge of both parent and student cultural values. All three participating teachers implemented action plans based on the focus group data and themes derived from the first set of focus group interviews with parents and students.

Conclusions

During my research, I was able to identify many things this particular school was implementing to meet the cultural needs of their Slavic population. As a reminder, over 98% of this school’s student population self-identifies as Slavic. The three participant groups in this study discussed very specific efforts this school was doing well to show value to both their culture and community norms. The inclusion of the arts into the classroom was in addition to the multiple things this school was doing to serve their Slavic population. The items participants discussed that the school was doing well were: having Russian language and culture classes as a core subject taught to all grades, having visual arts such as painting and drawing in all grades as another core subject, the school-wide implementation of the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB), the school-wide implementation of the Capturing Kids Hearts program (CKH), and the number of Russian-speaking staff members to support the school-to-home communication. All of these efforts are discussed later on in this chapter in Recommendations for Practice.

The parent focus group discussion revealed the efforts this school was already doing to support their Slavic community, something that is not typical of most schools in the area. It is clear the administration, district, and staff engage the community they are serving and implement programs to support their Slavic student population. One item surfaced more than once during the focus group interviews with both the parents and the students that could not be addressed due
to the limits of this study. The issue raised was the need for a better school lunch program at the school. In the parent focus group, a parent said:

My child responds to food . . . have Russian meals somehow available during lunches . . . I don't know if it's possible but that would be great because this is what their taste buds are adapted to and when a kindergartner goes to kindergarten and they're exposed to this new food they have hardships.

While I met with the students, one responded to my question of what parts of your culture would you like to see added to your classroom by saying, “Food, Russian food. My favorite is plov.” During my time as the principal at this school, this was a major source of frustration with both the Slavic parents and students. The Slavic families wanted more Slavic traditional food and not the local district meal program offered to them by the school. The school is a Title I school, meaning the majority of the families are from a low socio-economic background. These families rely on the school to supply breakfast and lunch meals to their children, and they have been advocating for Slavic meals. It is important for me to note this item, as this can provide more information to help support the Slavic community in other schools.

**Research Question One: How Do Slavic Students and Parents Perceive Their Classroom Experience as It Relates to Their Culture?**

The first research question for my study was answered using the focus group data from the three focus group interviews. The Slavic parents and Slavic students both perceived their classroom experience as inclusive of their Slavic culture. The Slavic parents and students were only interviewed at the beginning of the study. Their perceived classroom experience was inclusive of their Slavic culture prior to this study. A review of the focus group interviews and survey data at the conclusion of this study shows Slavic parents and students have a positive perception of their classroom experience as it relates to their culture.
1. The survey data and focus group interviews show that prior to the start of this study the Slavic parents and students generally had a positive perception relative to the school’s inclusion of their Slavic culture.

When reviewing the focus group data at the conclusion of this study it was evident that the Russian language and culture classes were one of the primary reasons the Slavic parents and students had positive perceptions of their classroom experience. The Russian language and culture is very important to the Slavic parents and having Russian language and culture being taught as a core class at this school was discussed in all three focus group interviews.

Prior to the start of this study, both the Slavic parents and Slavic students perceived their classroom experience as inclusive of their Slavic culture and they had a positive perception of their classroom experience as it relates to their culture. The school has done many things to support this satisfaction rating such as including Russian language and culture classes as a core subject, creating and maintaining positive relationships between teachers, parents and students, and teachers implementing feedback from parents and students to create a school culture that incorporates Slavic community values.

2. Study highlighted the importance of positive relationships between teacher and Slavic parents, teacher and Slavic students, and the school and Slavic parents and students.

The relationship between the classroom teacher and their Slavic parents and students was important to the positive perception of Slavic parents’ and students’ classroom experience as it relates to their culture. This is one of the main findings identified in Chapter 4; the importance of listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into the classroom culture. This finding revealed that listening to Slavic parents and students and incorporating their needs into the classroom culture helps develop a strong relationship between school and
home. The relationship between the teacher and their Slavic students and parents was built on listening to and understanding the cultural norms and community values. A review of the focus group interviews from the teachers and parents revealed insight that a positive relationship supports a positive classroom experience as it relates to their Slavic culture.

3. The results of the focus group data revealed Slavic parents’ and students' desire for more music and a stronger focus on penmanship as ways to improve the Slavic positive perception of their classroom experience.

The focus group questions were designed to illuminate Slavic cultural values, community values, and cultural learning styles and to determine if these cultural pieces had been integrated into the classroom structure. The missing pieces identified by the Slavic parents and students in the focus group interviews highlighted the need for more music and penmanship activities in the classroom. The school culture did meet the Slavic community values which helped Slavic parents and students have a positive perception of their classroom experience as it related to their culture. This is also one of the main findings identified in Chapter 4. The overall perceptions of the Slavic parents and students were very favorable towards both their school and classroom experience as they discussed ways the school and classroom met their unique needs as a Slavic community. Data revealed parents and students perceived the school and classroom as meeting their cultural values, community values, and cultural learning style.

**Research Question Two: How Does the Understanding of Slavic Parent and Student Perceptions of Their Classroom Experience Impact the Teacher’s Classroom Action Plan?**

The second research question was answered using the teachers’ action plans and data from the classroom observations. A review of the data at the conclusion of the study showed two themes: student engagement and relationships. These two themes support the conclusion that
teachers understood the impact and importance of authentic relationships with parents and students.

1. The understanding of Slavic parents’ and students’ perceptions provided information for improved Slavic student engagement in the classroom.

The teachers in this study used the feedback from the focus group interviews, from both Slavic students and Slavic parents, to support their classroom action plans. The participating teachers took this feedback to create more meaningful lessons to support their Slavic student population. The feedback was implemented in the classroom and recorded by me during weekly classroom observations.

The findings from the observations showed that Slavic students were more engaged during the lessons when the participating teachers implemented their classroom action plans. According to Callaway (2017), cultural teaching, when combined with teacher efficacy, increases student engagement in the classroom. He stated research has shown improved student engagement when the classroom teacher purposefully and intentionally includes personalized, relevant, culturally connected lessons. Teachers with a strong sense of culturally relevant pedagogy tend to make educational decisions that support the best interests of their students (Callaway, 2017). The teachers’ action plans purposefully added pieces of their Slavic parents’ and students’ cultural needs based on information gathered from the first focus group interviews. This data was recorded on the observation sheet during the observation. The incorporation of music and penmanship into the three participating teachers’ classroom action plans supported Slavic classroom needs and helped create more engaged students. One participating teacher reported, “I shouldn't have been but I was surprised at how students are very art and music
focused.” Another teacher said, “By incorporating that (art and music) just increased engagement and enjoy ability of lessons.”

2. The collaborative relationship between the Slavic parents and students helped the teachers create classroom action plans that incorporated more singing and penmanship activities. The participating teachers know parents play an important role in their child’s education, and it is critical to have parent investment in their child’s education. Rossetti et al. (2017) explained communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships between the teacher and family. The feedback from the Slavic participating parents and students had an impact on the teachers’ classroom action plans. All three participating teachers used parent and student feedback from the focus group interviews to implement more music and penmanship activities into their classroom instruction. One student said, “I like singing at church. I sing all the time.” When asked what the teachers could add to their classroom instruction, one student said, “I would like to sing more.” Two of the three participating teachers added writing and singing chants to enhance their lessons based on the feedback from their Slavic students. The third teacher implemented penmanship time in her classrooms to support her students’ penmanship. This was included because a parent said, “They can do more writing in English. The Russian classes have writing practice time and I think it would be good to have this for English too.” Singing and penmanship were themes extracted from the first set of focus group interviews based on Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience. The three participating teachers understood and implemented their parents’ and students’ suggestions into their classroom action plans, ensuring both student engagement and continued collaborative relationships.
The participating teachers also felt that listening to and incorporating their Slavic parent and student perceptions into their classroom action plans would improve their overall experience. One of the teachers said:

Thanks to the parents and students and what they want, like penmanship and writing neatly. It was important for me to incorporate it . . . Part of our culture and our community is listening and valuing others and their opinions, and I did that by incorporating penmanship into my classroom lessons.

Another teacher said:

Adding the value of music and art . . . incorporating that more into my classroom . . . based on feedback from the parents and students in my classroom . . . listening is part of a Slavic community value that I incorporated.

The participating teachers also received feedback from Slavic parents during school events. One teacher mentioned:

Many parents asked me . . . everything goes so fast that we don't have time to write neatly or nicely and we have to redo our work . . . maybe you can slow down and we can focus more on writing nicely and neatly.

This importance of collaborative relationships was evident in the teachers’ classroom action plans during this study based on how they incorporated the feedback into their classroom action plans.

Research Question Three: How Do the Perceptions of Slavic Students and Parents Impact Teacher Cultural Competency Perceptions of Slavic and Non-Slavic Teachers?

Research Question 3 was also designed to be answered by looking at the participating teacher’s classroom action plans and teacher focus group data. The Slavic parent and student perspectives given during the focus group interview and surveys helped the participating teachers determine what aspects of both the Slavic culture and Slavic community values were missing from their classroom. As mentioned above, it was important for the Slavic students and parents to have music and penmanship included in the classroom instruction. The teachers used this
Slavic parent and student feedback to both strengthen their Slavic cultural competency and their understanding of what actions they could take to support the Slavic cultural inclusion both their students and families needed.

A review of the data at the conclusion of the study showed the following impacts on teachers’ cultural competency perceptions:

1. Slavic teachers understood the impact of Slavic students’ and parents' perceptions on their cultural competency.

   This impact was evident in the Slavic participating teachers’ communication during the second and third focus group interviews. The Slavic teachers had their own background with the Slavic culture; however, this study supported them both in discovering new ways to grow their classroom cultural competency. During the second focus group interview the teachers were asked what pieces of the Slavic culture they incorporated into their lessons. One teacher said:

   I started incorporating more songs and poems so we've been having more poems... having the kids read them together. I've also tried to find some songs about the topics we're learning about so that we can play them and the kids can hear about them.

   Another teacher said, “Handwriting penmanship in my classroom...that is something that is very important for the Slavic community, in our culture to be able to write neatly.” It is important to note that music and penmanship activities were not happening prior to this study. These two Slavic teachers used the perceptions of their Slavic students and parents to improve their classroom cultural competency by including music and penmanship activities into their classroom action plans.

   The Slavic teachers’ classroom action plans also showed that the Slavic teachers understood the impact of Slavic students’ and parents' perceptions on their cultural competency. The classroom action plans showed significantly more student affirmations than student corrections. The Slavic teachers spoke to the high expectations of Slavic parents on their
children in our third focus group interview. One teacher said, “Many Slavic parents have high expectations of their kids not to make a mistake.” All three teachers commented on the pressure they see from their Slavic parents and experience from their Slavic students. The teachers make it a point to affirm their Slavic students to help bridge the gap between the expectation to be perfect and the reality that mistakes happen when learning. The participating teachers continue to hold high expectations for their scholars, but do so with a healthy balance of affirmations and corrections. To support their Slavic students the Slavic teachers would praise and affirm their students frequently. A teacher said:

I try to find small celebrations that we can celebrate with them even though they might be struggling in different areas . . . the areas that they are doing well, we like to celebrate and highlight that and spotlight it.

This came up again in our focus group interview and another teacher said:

I am stopping often and just telling them . . . try your best, if you're doing your best you're fine. You're doing a wonderful job . . . don't be upset you're doing an excellent job I see you're trying.

During the third focus group interview the two Slavic participating teachers had plans to continue to incorporate Slavic cultural pieces into their classroom activities. When the teachers were asked if they had adapted the cultural learning style in their instruction, one teacher said, “In the future I want to incorporate Slavic traditional folk tales into my class. So, I've been gathering more research and inquiring with people who have more knowledge about the Slavic culture and the arts.” This Slavic teacher expanded their classroom cultural competency based on the perceptions of their Slavic parents and students. Another question asked was what pieces of the Slavic community values were added to the classroom. One teacher said:

“Communication in the community is important and that's the value that I added to my classroom . . . writing neatly and nicely so the other person can read the writing and enjoy your ideas, thoughts and communication . . . whatever you're trying to communicate.
2. The non-Slavic teacher understood the impact of Slavic students’ and parents’ perceptions on their cultural competency.

This impact was evident in their communication during the second and third focus group interviews. When asked what pieces of the Slavic community values have been added to the classroom, this teacher said, “I have been trying to add the Slavic value of communication . . . just communicating more with what we're doing in the classroom.” This teacher went on to say, “I also added things from the parent feedback and students’ feedback into my classroom . . . I believe that's part of the community value . . . listening to our parents and our students and valuing their input.” This non-Slavic teacher uses visuals in the classroom to support Slavic students to understand the material. When asked what had been adapted to support the cultural learning style of the instruction, this teacher said, “I don't speak Russian or any Slavic language . . . I try to use visuals to help display meaning . . . drawing sketches of words . . . visual aids to help learning.”

In the third focus group interview the non-Slavic teacher was asked how did the perceptions of the Slavic parents and students impact the classroom instruction. This teacher said, “By incorporating that (music) just increased engagement and enjoy ability of lessons for the students . . . definitely changed how I am going to go forward with classroom instruction.” When asked what pieces of the Slavic culture that were added were successful, this teacher said, “I'm going to try to find more opportunities for them to be more creative and share their own forms of art or the things that they feel special about.”

This impact was also evident in the classroom action plan during Cycle Two. This non-Slavic teacher wanted me to provide feedback on: students’ ability to follow the teacher’s instructions, students sharing their chant to the class, and student participation and engagement.
This non-Slavic teacher provided a lot of visuals to support the lesson to the Slavic students. The students used a lot of non-verbal hand signals to communicate their feelings and thoughts during the lessons. The teacher provided visuals to cue the students to use the hand signals and received very high engagement and participation. During Cycle Two, each observation had students sharing their chant to the class and singing it to their classmates and teacher. Based on the focus group interviews and the classroom observations, this non-Slavic teacher understood the impact of Slavic students’ and parents’ perceptions on their classroom cultural competency.

The cultural competence framework helped identify the teacher’s classroom action plan and its impact on Slavic student and parent perceptions of their overall classroom achievement. The three participating teachers in this study used their prior knowledge of Slavic cultural needs and new knowledge gained from this study’s surveys and focus groups discussions to improve their Slavic cultural competency. The cultural competence framework supported the identification of information regarding these educators’ Slavic cultural competency.

Research Question Four: How Does the Teacher’s Classroom Action Plan Impact Slavic Student and Slavic Parent Perceptions of their Overall Classroom Experience?

The fourth research question could be answered using the data from the pre- and post-surveys and focus group data from the three focus group participant groups. The data from the parent pre- and post-surveys showed no impact on Slavic parent perceptions after the implementation of the teacher’s action plan. The data from the first focus group interviews revealed Slavic parents and Slavic students both perceived their classroom experience as inclusive of their Slavic culture. Overall, the pre- and post-survey analysis showed the parent survey data yielded zero changes for the parent participants during the study, and the students’ perceptions improved for teacher investment in their long-term goals, but decreased in teachers
letting them know how students are currently performing in class. During this study only one parent and one student focus group interview was held. The second focus group interviews for Slavic parents and Slavic students did not occur due to the lack of response for focus group participation at the beginning of the second cycle. Due to this lack of participation in the second set of focus group interviews, I was unable to collect further data to reveal any impact on their overall classroom experience.

The initial parent and student focus group interviews and the surveys provided baseline data to show that both the parents and students had a positive perception of the school and classroom prior to this study. Based on the lack of parent and student participation for my final focus group interview, I was unable to conclusively determine if the teacher’s classroom action plans had any effect on student and parent perceptions. Due to this lack of data, I am unable to answer this research question fully.

**Growth Opportunities**

Because this is the first study to look at Slavic classroom cultural competency, there are many growth opportunities. This action research, case study had very few participants from the Slavic community and therefore only reported on the opinion of a few. Having an insider with the Slavic community may have helped gain the support and trust from Slavic families. This study was designed as an action research, case study, and it studied only one specific Slavic community in only two grade levels. Future work could benefit from studying more grade levels and different Slavic communities. A final growth area is the length of time spent with this action research study. More time could have benefited the overall outcome and could have identified new ways to support the Slavic cultural needs.
The limited number of parent and student participants is a major area for improvement. The themes used to guide the teachers’ action plans were based on the focus group themes. More participation from the Slavic families could have identified other missing pieces to improve the Slavic parent and student perceptions. The inclusion of more participants could have also given light to other culturally relevant suggestions to support the school and the individual teachers’ classroom action plans. I suggest this work be done by someone who is a trusted member of the Slavic community in an effort to bridge the gap between what is known and what is still elusive.

Another growth opportunity is to replicate this work in multiple schools and with multiple Slavic communities. This study is helpful as a first step but only identifies the needs of this one particular Slavic community. The insights gained from this work are only a sliver of the picture into the Slavic cultural needs in the classroom. More work needs to be done in multiple schools and in multiple grade levels. The needs of families change with their children’s age, grade level, community supports, school supports, and their classroom teacher.

The length of time spent on this study was 9 months due to the global pandemic and the effort needed from participants during a new way of teaching and learning. This study was originally designed to be a 22-week study implemented inside the classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic caused teachers to teach virtually, students to learn virtually, and parents to support the learning of their child like never before. The added stress of virtual learning may have limited the number of participants and may have yielded better results if conducted inside a classroom building during a non-pandemic time in history. This work may benefit from more time spent in the action research design and if this is conducted inside of the classroom once we all return to the brick-and-mortar classrooms.
Highlights

There are many highlights from this action research, case study. This particular school is doing many very purposeful things to support their Slavic community. Readers may learn ways they can increase support to their Slavic and other communities at their own school. This work is a case study design, so it is important to note that each Slavic community is not identical and it is crucial to build relational capacity with the particular Slavic community’s needs. Working with, and supporting, the Slavic community will help build alliances and support the learning of Slavic students for any school. Based on my own personal learning with this particular Slavic community, the Slavic community is a hardworking and academic driven community that will support teachers and the school once trust is built and maintained. Trust is not given easily, and the obstacles I encountered to secure participants could be used as evidence that the Slavic community is wary of outsiders to their Slavic community. This could also be evident due to the lack of research highlighting Slavic needs.

The need to establish trust with the Slavic community is paramount and this is done through conversations in which the inquirer listens to understand Slavic cultural needs. Schools should focus on the importance of the Slavic cultural needs in both the classroom lessons and the classroom community. With this work, it is my hope Slavic cultural needs spill over into the school community and help build an eclectic school community in which students can learn about different cultures in an effort to improve empathy and understanding of different cultures and people.

Recommendations for Further Research

My recommendations for further research seek to improve our understanding of Slavic cultural competency, which would then improve the work we do in the classroom and at school.
These recommendations tie to the growth opportunities listed above, as this is the first study conducted on Slavic cultural competency, and there is a need for so much more to be done. My recommendations for further research are to get Slavic cultural qualitative data from different grade levels and from a variety of different Slavic communities, to conduct the research while students are learning inside the brick-and-mortar classroom, to have Slavic researchers do this work to help non-Slavic efforts with this topic, to increase the amount of time spent collecting Slavic qualitative data, to have a study that focuses on educators’ implicit bias, and to conduct quantitative Slavic research. These five recommendations are not an exhaustive list of recommendations to improve this work.

The first recommendation, and the next best step in further Slavic cultural competency research, is to design a study in which Slavic cultural qualitative data are gathered from multiple grade levels and from a variety of Slavic communities. Older students can provide more information about what is missing from the classroom based on their experiences in school and in their Slavic community. The information gathered from younger children can also support the study, as they are still largely influenced by their family. If I were to repeat this study, I would include Slavic students, families, and teachers from different grade levels. I believe this adjustment would have supported additional information on Slavic cultural needs in the classroom.

My second recommendation is to conduct the research while students are learning inside the brick-and-mortar classroom. This study was done during distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If I were to repeat study, I would wait to conduct this study until students were back in the classroom. The virtual classroom made it difficult to observe the teachers and the students during class time. The virtual meetings and classroom observations also made it
more difficult to engage with the participant groups and to build a connection with them. Being physically present in the school and classroom environment may have provided more accurate data for me to communicate. The stress, the newness, and the anxiety this pandemic has caused most certainly affected this study and the data. It would be interesting to have this research compared to a replication study done in the brick-and-mortar classroom.

Another recommendation is to have trusted Slavic researchers study Slavic cultural needs to help bridge the gap for non-Slavic educators. This study revealed the importance of having a trusted insider to the Slavic culture perform this research to support Slavic participation and openness. Although I was an insider at this organization a couple of years ago, the resistance to my work was evident during my conversations with parents and staff. The trust families once had with me had been broken and resulted in fewer parent and student participants. Having a trusted Slavic insider may have increased benefits for this work.

My fourth recommendation for further research is to increase the amount of time spent collecting Slavic qualitative data during an action research, case study. This study was only 9 weeks long, and spending at least double this time, together with more participants, would help identify more Slavic culturally competent actionable steps for educators. Not all schools have the IB or the CKH program to support their classroom instruction, relationship-building tools, and classroom culture. The increased time spent researching Slavic cultural needs would help identify actions teachers can take in lieu of changing the school’s programs. This additional time would also allow more feedback from parents and students to support the efforts of the classroom teachers.

Another recommendation is to focus a study on teacher implicit bias to identify steps educators can take to reflect on and work towards eliminating their own cultural biases. Past
studies on developing a critical awareness of privilege and power, or one’s own cultural bias, have identified the need to investigate issues of inequality and the cultural divide between White, middle-class professionals and culturally and linguistically diverse customers (Barrera et al., 2017; Kumagi & Lypson, 2015; Lew & Nelson, 2009; Rossetti et al., 2017; Young, 2010). The lens a teacher uses when teaching students must be identified while they also have the ability to use different lenses to support the students in the classroom. When teachers recognize their own cultural bias, as well as the cultural bias in the taught curriculum, they are able to see the negative effects cultural bias has on the education of their students. Teachers need to have a deep understanding and connection to the knowledge of oppression, inequalities, barriers as well as privilege and power to recognize cultural bias. During my research, I uncovered no published research studies identifying positive or beneficial outcomes to teacher bias, and this next step will support educators and their Slavic students.

My last recommendation is to conduct a Slavic quantitative study and collect quantitative data. There is a need for educators to know and understand numerical data in order to make changes. This was a mixed-methods, case study design aimed to provide insight and empirical support for both teacher cultural competency and Slavic student academic success as applied to this one particular school. More quantitative data from a variety of sources can help improve the research on Slavic cultural competency. The quantitative data educators use most often are grades, test scores, attendance, participation, and family engagement. Quantitative data have advantages and are an important piece to a well-rounded understanding of cultural needs. A quantitative study focused on academic data, attendance data, and parent involvement data will provide additional data to add to the Slavic classroom cultural competency research.
Recommendations for Practice

The school used in this study can provide other significantly Slavic populated schools with a few recommendations. Some of the recommendations to help a school or district improve its Slavic cultural competency are explained in the below paragraphs.

My first recommendation is to have all Kindergarten through eighth-grade classroom teachers speak to their Slavic students and families to see what they can do to add to their Slavic cultural competency. This 9-week action research case study revealed the power in having these discussions with students and families. Such conversations will support improved engagement in the content and improved investment from Slavic students and families. According to the survey and focus group data, the particular classrooms in this school have done a great job listening to their Slavic families and students. Conducting this work for other schools and classrooms will support improved Slavic cultural competency for all teachers.

The second recommendation is to have the school administration meet with a variety of Slavic students and family members to see what the school is doing well and what they can do to improve their Slavic cultural competency. This conversation should include Slavic students and family members from each grade level in the school, and these conversations should have Slavic students and Slavic families meet in separate groups. This work will reveal what the school should continue to implement to support the Slavic community and what they can adapt, or add to their practice, to improve their service to the Slavic community.

Finally, schools should look into ways they can improve their meal service to include Slavic meals to their students. As mentioned earlier, this has been a source of contention for at least five years at this particular school and would be a huge win for any school in their service to their Slavic students and families.
The aforementioned three recommendations may support the improved service schools provide to their Slavic students and families. Based on the findings from this action research case study, when the school, Slavic students, and Slavic families work together to improve the school’s Slavic cultural competency, the school will grow to be more Slavic culturally competent.

Some additional recommendations based on what was working well at this particular school will support other schools in their effort to improve Slavic cultural competency. These additional recommendations for practice are to involve Slavic families and students in the classroom and school decisions; ensure Slavic language translation services are provided to support communication between school and home; teach the Russian language and culture at school; integrate music, art, and penmanship into the classroom instruction; affirm and encourage Slavic students; create a classroom culture that ensures respect is given to all; have classroom flexibility to honor the different learning styles of the students; and look into implementing both the IB and the CKH programs. The teachers, Slavic students, and Slavic parents in this study all felt like both the IB and CKH programs helped reinforce the Slavic cultural values of respect, being active listeners, and helping each other. The eight recommendations for practice were identified as actions done to positively impact classroom practice for Slavic students as well as positively impact Slavic student and parent perceptions of their classroom experience.

Involving Slavic families and students in the classroom and school decisions will help build school-to-home relationships. Communication is key to a thriving school. Rossetti et al. (2017) stated that communication, commitment, equity, competence, trust, and respect will support family engagement and the needed culturally responsive collaborative relationships
among the teacher, school, and family. School programs and policies can either support or harm the Slavic school experience. Having Slavic families and students collaboratively work with the school on both classroom and school decisions will improve the Slavic school and classroom experience and support the school’s Slavic cultural competency.

Ensuring Slavic language translation services are provided to support communication between school and home is crucial for a collaborative relationship. When teachers and school leaders build relationships with all their students, regardless of culture or language barriers, they improve students’ and parents’ connection to the school and thus the academic success of the students (Anderson, 2011). Communication is key to supporting improved Slavic cultural competence.

Teaching the Russian language and culture at school helps honor the Slavic culture here in America. The school in this study taught Russian classes to all grades and made this one of their core subjects. Not all schools need to make Russian classes a requirement; however, having this as an elective course will show the school’s Slavic population that their culture and language is honored and important.

Integrating music, art, and penmanship into the classroom instruction was key to the improved Slavic student engagement for the participating classes in this study. Using art, music, and penmanship in classroom instruction will help improve Slavic student engagement and support the Slavic experience in the classroom.

Affirming and encouraging Slavic students on a regular basis will support Slavic student engagement. This is important because research shows the relationship between the teacher and the student is important to the student’s success in the classroom (Anderson, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2017; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). Providing feedback and encouraging student engagement
during lessons will help bridge the gap between the expectation to be perfect and the reality that mistakes happen when learning. When working with Slavic students, it is important to make it a point to affirm Slavic students on a regular basis.

Creating a classroom culture that ensures respect is given to all is a very important part to building trusting relationships with Slavic families and students. The school and the classroom teacher must listen to Slavic parents and students and incorporate their needs into classroom culture; this helps develop a strong relationship between school and home. The relationship between the teacher and the student is important. Creating a classroom culture that ensures respect is given to all will create a strong relationship with Slavic students. Wilson et al. (2017) concluded the competency of the student was influenced by the teacher-student relationship. They suggested it was crucial the student felt safe, respected, and supported by the teacher while the teacher interactions ensured all students were treated equally. These relationships play an important part of student classroom perceptions because the relationships are part of students’ classroom experience.

Having the classroom flexibility to honor the different learning styles of the students is important to Slavic families. The Slavic families and students felt this was done through the work given by teachers. Projects, homework assignments, and the use of music, art, and penmanship were all favorable to both Slavic students and families. Working with your current Slavic families to know what cultural learning style is missing from the classroom will play an important part in adding the appropriate learning style to meet the Slavic needs in the classroom.

Looking into implementing both the IB and the CKH programs is my final recommendation for building Slavic cultural competency in schools. The Slavic families in this school communicated these two programs met their Slavic cultural needs and helped build a
strong school-to-home relationship. Adding these two successful programs will be a huge undertaking for any school. Program changes will need to be a school and or district decision and will take time if done right. Work with your school administration and district to look into these two programs to determine if they are appropriate for your school. This decision must also include other school stakeholders such as Slavic families, Slavic students, school staff, and all other school families and students.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this action research case study answered the overarching question of how gaining knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perceptions of classroom practice over the course of the 9-week action research period. Based on the data collected from the pre- and post-survey analysis, the parent survey data yielded zero changes for the parent participants during the 9-week action research period, and the students’ perceptions improved for teacher investment in their long-term goals, but decreased in teachers letting them know how students are currently performing in class. The teachers’ action plan implementation yielded an increase in student engagement in the classroom and a higher teacher satisfaction with this cultural competence work. The takeaways from this study are the importance of Slavic students learning the Russian language and culture in school, Slavic students’ parental pressure to achieve high academic grades, importance of Slavic students participating in both singing or chants, Slavic importance to have neat penmanship, and Slavic cultural norms integrated into the classroom structure. This study was complex and involved multiple pieces of data to yield these results.

It is also important to note that during my research, I was able to identify many things this particular school was implementing to meet the cultural needs of their Slavic population.
This study addressed the four research questions and helped identify other contributing factors necessary to implement a successful Slavic cultural school program. The three participant groups in this study discussed very specific efforts this school was doing well to show value to both their culture and community norms. The inclusion of singing and penmanship activities into the classroom lessons was in addition to the multiple things this school was doing to serve their Slavic population. The items participants discussed that the school was doing well were: having Russian language and culture classes as a core subject taught to all grades, having visual arts such as painting and drawing in all grades as another core subject, the school-wide implementation of the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB), the school-wide implementation of the Capturing Kids Hearts program (CKH), and the number of Russian-speaking staff members to support the school-to-home communication.

According to Harvey (2017), the curriculum taught in schools poses dangers, and “one of the greatest is deep damage to our children’s perceptions of race, gender and other kinds of difference” (para. 4). Our taught biased curriculum affects mathematics, English/language arts and history instruction as well as student engagement. The teacher is the conduit responsible for adapting the content of the curriculum to reach the students in the diverse classrooms. This study shows that when teachers are equipped with cultural knowledge of their students, they can support the learning in a more culturally relevant and engaging manner.

The conclusion of this study showed that when singing and penmanship were implemented in the participating teachers’ classrooms, based on focus group interview data from both parents and students at the beginning of this study, the Slavic students were more engaged in the learning activities. The incorporation of singing and penmanship into the three participating teachers’ classroom action plans supported the importance of the arts to their Slavic
parents and students and helped create more engaged students. When the three teacher participants noticed the improved engagement from their Slavic students, they increased their singing and penmanship activities in their action plans to include more student-centered activities. The increase was made to improve Slavic student engagement and eliminate the student and material disconnect by making the delivery of the content specific to Slavic cultural needs. The key takeaway is to engage Slavic parents and students to see what pieces of the Slavic culture are important to them and then innovate ways to implement them into the classroom instruction.

The conducting of further Slavic classroom cultural research is necessary to support our teachers and school administrators in meeting the needs of their Slavic families. There is a need for further research to collect Slavic cultural qualitative data from different grade levels and from a variety of Slavic communities; to conduct the research while students are learning inside the brick-and-mortar classroom; to have Slavic insiders do this work to help non-Slavic efforts with this topic; to increase the amount of time spent collecting Slavic qualitative data; and to conduct quantitative Slavic research. More Slavic classroom culturally responsive work must be done beyond this effort to provide educators with the tools to meet the needs of Slavic learners in the classroom.
CHAPTER 6: MY JOURNEY WITH THE STUDY

Beginning of This Journey

This journey began when I saw an equity issue at the high-Slavic population school where I was a principal. I was brand new to the Slavic culture and spent much time watching and learning from the Slavic staff, students, and families. During my observations, I noticed a very strong imbalance with the way Slavic parents treated Slavic staff and non-Slavic staff. A Kindergarten teacher was under fire from the majority of her class. I received a letter from these Slavic families upset that this non-Slavic teacher did not provide ample feedback to her Kindergarten students. I worked with the families and this particular teacher to remedy these issues and the remainder of the year went very well. At the end of that school year, the Slavic Kindergarten teacher did not finalize the gradebook and report cards were sent home to all her students with no final grades. This issue was noticed a few days later when we were filing the report cards in the students’ cumulative folders. We were able to fix the issue before summer break, and this Slavic teacher told me that her families knew her well enough to know she would catch her mistake and remedy it before the end of the year. These two very distinct and opposing reactions caused me to look harder and deeper into how non-Slavic teachers could get this same type of trust. Thus, my journey began.

Challenges

My work with the Slavic community was both rewarding and enlightening. I learn from tackling challenges and making mistakes, and there were plenty to discuss here in an effort to help others. Before I began my dissertation work, I had to learn the hard way that this particular Slavic community holds status and title in a very high regard. I was the school’s principal, and
as such, it was not a good sight to see me sweeping up the floor or putting down chairs. This was not in my position’s duties to do this and I was making others look incompetent by helping out. I had my Slavic administrator who I noticed would not clean, put down chairs, or pick up chairs during events. This person would get one of our custodians to do this and this person would sit and chat with other staff. At about 3 months into my first year, and about three events later, I stopped being frustrated with this person; I asked why. I received a large crumb of useful knowledge, which helped me begin to adapt to the Slavic cultural norms.

I began to look back on my previous interactions that had a similar theme, title and status is very important, and I realized there were so many signs I had overlooked. One day at the beginning of my first year, I had written the names of the administration team with our positions and contact information on a whiteboard behind the front desk for our families. After about an hour of putting this up, I walked by and noticed someone had switched the order of information. My vice principal was no longer under my name, he was put as the third name down on the list, and my site manager, my “third in command,” was now under my name, second on the list. I initially thought of this as petty and insignificant; but it was not until later that I learned the whiteboard incident was very hurtful and demeaning to our Slavic community connection. This event was the inception of a very long 3 years as the principal at this predominately Slavic school.

Another challenge I faced was my sexuality. I was dating, then engaged, and then married to my now wife during my 3 years at the Slavic school. I knew that if my sexuality were revealed to the Slavic community, I would have met much professional opposition and resistance in my position. It was very difficult for me to hide a part of myself and not be fully honest. I had to be mindful of which pronouns I used, and I spoke very briefly about anything to do with
my personal life. I also did not have a family picture of my immediate family on my desk or talk about my wedding photo. People may believe discussing such things is not appropriate at the workplace; however, our culture is built on knowing about others outside of school. Every staff member had photographs of family on their desk, and during my 3 years at this school, four people were married. The weddings were discussed in the open at staff meetings as people shared their Good Thing, and our Sunshine Committee even held bridal showers at work for these staff members. This challenge was not severe; however, it did come out after my departure to have negatively tarnished my relationship with staff, families, and students.

I was asked in December to help lift one of our district’s failing schools out of Program Improvement. This opportunity was important enough for our superintendent that I was moved mid-year. When I left the Slavic school, I kept in touch with many staff, families, and students. I was invited to the Kindergarten promotion ceremony and the eighth-grade promotion ceremony at the end of the school year. One of the teachers who invited me let me know that my sexuality had been revealed and was being discussed among staff and families. When I arrived the day of the ceremonies, I was met with many awkward stares, avoidance, and rudeness from staff, families, and students. This was a very difficult experience for me, and I was hesitant to conduct my study at this school. After speaking with my superintendent and my dissertation chair, I decided to continue my research at this school and do what was right for this community. A part of me believes there was not as much participation in this action research, case study because I was outing. I have zero evidence to back this claim; however, the progress I had made with this Slavic community before leaving the school had faded, and I was again an outsider and not to be trusted.
The challenges for any outsider are not much different than my experiences. My biggest takeaway is to listen, watch, ask questions, and not assume. The power and privilege that comes with being a White, middle-class, female does not escape me. It is important to self-reflect, look for both explicit and implicit biases, and be open-minded. Cultural differences can lead to much miscommunication from which issues can arise. It is my hope that research like this can help bridge the gap for others and make their journey less turbulent.

**Throughout the Study**

Throughout this study, I was reminded to take stock of my reactions and my thinking in order to not reaffirm and further develop my implicit biases. I had to reflect upon each interaction and work to re-center myself. I discovered that based on my time working with this Slavic community, the news media, and movies I watched growing up, I have an implicit bias toward the Slavic culture. The school I am part of now has been working on identifying our implicit bias, and we have had myriad professional development to help us identify and work to improve our implicit bias. This work, and my work with this dissertation, has helped me grow and improve myself for the betterment of myself, this study, and my current school site.

Throughout my study, I reflected after each focus group session, after each observation, after each attempt to solicit participation, and before I started writing this manuscript. This helped me identify, work through, and reset myself. I discovered that I am able to provide students with a clean slate each time we interact; however, it is difficult for me to do this with adults. This work helped me build the tools I needed to develop these skills with adults. I am so thankful this work and my implicit bias work overlapped.
Lessons Learned

Findings from this 9-week action research, mixed-methods, case study provide lessons not only for me but also for the research community, the stakeholders in this district and the surrounding community, and Slavic students and their families. My biggest takeaway was the benefit of action research and the immediate positive effects it can have for the participants. The focus group interviews were very beneficial to the action research process as were the teacher-created action plans. These two tools helped collect knowledge of Slavic student and parent cultural values, and how these values can impact classroom practice and Slavic student and parent perceptions of classroom practice taught me a few things.

I learned that the cultural competence framework I created from the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), Hammond (2015), and Muniz (2019) helped me identify teacher, Slavic student, and Slavic parent experiences in their classroom. This research concluded effective classroom teachers must develop cultural competency practices within their classroom pedagogy to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Callaway, 2017). In consideration of these lessons, recommendations for further research, and this study’s limitations, it is possible for all educators to adapt their classroom actions to support the cultural needs of their Slavic students.

Where I Am Now

This study has taught me a lot about both myself and the Slavic community. The Slavic people I observed are a proud, hardworking, educated, and respectful people dedicated to building a strong future for the younger generations. Education is very important to these particular Slavic families, and perfection is important to Slavic students. It is important for educators and school personnel to work with and learn about each individual student and family in their school to ensure a more personalized experience. Overgeneralization of the Slavic
culture can be harmful to building relational capacity. I learned that listening to and implementing suggestions is the best way to build a trusting relationship with the Slavic community.

I am proud of this work and hope others adapt and help this research flourish. We need to work together to build our knowledge and understanding of cultures in an effort to grow as human beings. I am proud to have done this work and to have been the first person to study Slavic cultural needs in school. This is only the first step, and I need others to continue on with this work and do better than me. This is for the sake of our children and our educational system. I hope this work has helped you grow, too.
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(EJ1151903)

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http://www.yourdictionary.com/postpositivism
Scholar Assent Form

Child’s Name: ________________________

I am interested in how to help all scholars learn so that each scholar is happy and learning in school. I would like for you to help me by sharing your thoughts on how you like school, your classroom and your teacher.

I would like for you to take two short five question surveys on a piece of paper. All you will need to do is circle YES if you agree, or NO if you do not agree after your teacher reads to you the question.

If you do not want to take this survey, it is okay. If you start taking the survey and then want to stop taking the survey, it is also okay. If you do not want to take the survey, or if you want to stop taking the survey you will not get into any trouble and the survey will not be graded. Your name will not be written on the survey so I will not know what you wrote down as your answers.

If you want to take the survey, please write your name on the line below. Your family has already told me that it is okay with them for you to take the survey. Remember, you do not need to take the five question survey and you can stop taking the survey at any time.

NAME: ____________________________
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH SUBJECT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TEACHER CULTURAL COMPETENCY and the EFFECT on SLAVIC STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Name of Lead Researcher: Erin Marston

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH:

You are invited to participate in a twenty-two week action research study targeted at identifying teacher, student and parent experiences with classroom teachers who are both culturally responsive and not culturally responsive to their Slavic student population. This action research study aims to answer multiple research questions to investigate why there are differences in student performance, student attendance and parental involvement between classrooms led by Slavic and non-Slavic teachers. To do this three research questions will drive the study:

1. How do Slavic students and parents perceive their classroom experience as it relates to their culture?
2. How does the understanding of Slavic parent and student perceptions of their classroom experience impact the teachers’ classroom action plan?
3. How do the perceptions of Slavic students and parents impact teacher cultural competency perceptions of Slavic and non-Slavic teachers?
4. How does the teachers’ classroom action plan impact Slavic student and Slavic parent perceptions of their overall classroom experience?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You will be asked to take a two, five question anonymous survey at the beginning and the end of the study. The questions will ask your opinion of the classroom. Additionally, you are invited to participate in one of three focus group interviews. Only three family members, three students and the classroom teacher from each class will participate in this portion of the study. If given permission, all information gathered from you during the focus group discussion will be kept confidential by both me and the focus group participants. Finally, nine one-hour classroom observations will occur during the twenty-two week action research study to support the teacher and their individual action plan to support their Slavic scholars.

The expected time involvement of participation in this study will be no more than ten minutes for the survey and no more than one hour for the focus group interview.

The risks associated with this study could be discomfort with answering questions about the classroom, hearing other people’s answers, and possible stress or anxiety during the focus group interviews. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are a classroom that is tailored to Slavic children’s needs which could result in a greater appreciation and liking for school and their teacher, advancements in the recognition of the Slavic cultural needs, and improved academic performance in the classroom. I cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you or your child will receive any benefit from this study.

PARTICIPATION:

I expect to have 164 participants take part in this study.
Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your placement or participation in school events, and will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES:** None

**COLLECTION OF INFORMATION:**

All personal information will be removed from all records and data collection tools. No information will be used or distributed for future research studies.

**PAYMENTS:**

You will not receive any payments for your participation in this study.

**YOUR AND YOUR CHILD’S RIGHTS:**

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this research project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your assent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are also free to withdrawal your consent to participate in this research project at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. You also have the right to refuse to participate or answer particular questions.

I will take reasonable steps to keep confidential any information that is obtained in connection with this research study and that can be identified to you.

Measures to protect your confidentiality include: names will be omitted from surveys, any names written on a survey will be blacked out, participants will be referred to by an alphabet letter during the focus group interviews. I will not include any names or identifiable aliases in this research, the number of persons with access to the records will be limited to the extent reasonable, and the data collected during this study will be kept confidential and maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location.

Upon conclusion of the research study, the data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the research is completed.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Questions, Concerns, or Complaints: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research study, its procedures, risks and benefits, you should ask the Lead Researcher or Faculty Advisor:

Name of Lead Researcher: Erin Marston, 916-805-6247, e_marston@u.pacific.edu

Name of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Laura Hallberg, lhallberg@PACIFIC.EDU

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your child’s rights as a
participant, please contact the University of the Pacific, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs to speak to someone independent of the research team at 209-946-3903 or IRB@pacific.edu.

DISMISSAL FROM STUDY:

It is possible that we may decide that your participation in this research is not appropriate. If that happens, you will be dismissed from the study. In any event, we appreciate your willingness to allow your child to participate in this research.

I hereby consent: (Indicate Yes or No)

- To take the five question survey:
  _____ Yes   _____ No

- To participate in the focus group interview:
  _____ Yes   _____ No

- To be audio recorded during the focus group portion of this study:
  _____ Yes   _____ No

- For such audio records resulting from this study to be used for collection of data only:
  _____ Yes   _____ No

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that you completely volunteer to permit to participate in the research study, that you understand that you may withdraw your assent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

______________________________
Name (Please Print)

______________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.
### APPENDIX B: SURVEY IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher (x 4)</th>
<th>Student (x 80)</th>
<th>Parent (x 80)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(These are child friendly)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you believe the majority of your students like your class?</td>
<td>Do you like your teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you care about your students?</td>
<td>Do you believe your teacher cares about you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you believe you are preparing your students to be college and career ready?</td>
<td>Does your teacher ask you about what you want to be when you grow up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is it easy to communicate with families?</td>
<td>Is it easy to speak with your teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you provide detailed information on student progress to families?</td>
<td>Does your teacher let you know how you are doing in class?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This survey is a “yes”/“no” survey with a total of 164 responses: 4 teachers, 80 students and 80 parents.*

Survey (Russian): Using Google Translate and verified with School Site Administrator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher (x 4)</th>
<th>Student (x 80)</th>
<th>Parent (x 80)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(These are child friendly)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Тебе нравится твой учитель?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Как ты думаешь, твой учитель заботится о тебе?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Твой учитель спрашивает тебя о том, кем ты хочешь быть, когда вырастишь?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Тебе легко общаться с твоим учителем?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Тебе учитель говорит о том, как ты учился и о твоих оценках?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due Date</td>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu-27-Aug</td>
<td>Communicate with teacher participants (Thurs. 8-27-20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed-2-Sep</td>
<td>Schedule day and time for parent Zoom Informational Meeting (Wed. 9-2-20 @ 12:30 &amp; 4:30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-6-Sep</td>
<td>Start collecting Assent and Permission for participants (teachers, parents and students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu-17-Sep</td>
<td>Collect qualitative and quantitative data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-20-Sep</td>
<td>Start week 1 / cycle 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue-22-Sep</td>
<td>Teacher 1st Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed-23-Sep</td>
<td>Student 1st Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed-23-Sep</td>
<td>Parent 1st Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-27-Sep</td>
<td>Start week 2 / cycle 1 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon-28-Sep</td>
<td>Data Discussion #1 with Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Created Action Plan and Observation Rubric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-04-Oct</td>
<td>Start week 3 / cycle 1 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-11-Oct</td>
<td>Start week 4 / cycle 1 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri-16-Oct</td>
<td>Teacher 2nd Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-18-Oct</td>
<td>Start week 5 / cycle 2 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon-19-Oct</td>
<td>Data Discussion #2 with Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Created Action Plan and Observation Rubric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-25-Oct</td>
<td>Start week 6 / cycle 2 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-01-Nov</td>
<td>Start week 7 / cycle 2 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-8-Nov</td>
<td>Start week 8 / cycle 2 w/classroom observations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-15-Nov</td>
<td>Collect quantitative data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon-16-Nov</td>
<td>Last Teacher Focus Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Discussion #3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri-20-Nov</td>
<td>Complete week 9 –End of Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hello. My name is Erin Marston. I’d like to start by thanking each of you for your participation in today’s focus group interview. Today’s focus group discussion is number ___ of two total (three total for teachers) focus group discussions I will be conducting for my dissertation study. Today we will be here for about an hour.

The reason we are here today is to gather your opinions and attitudes about your experience with your classroom or your child’s classroom. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary and very much appreciated. If at any time you feel uncomfortable you have the right to refuse to participate or answer particular questions. It is okay to take a break and step outside during our time together. I also want to remind you that you may leave at any time and withdraw from this study if you are feeling uncomfortable. Your discontinued participation will not negatively affect you, your child, or your current position, and will not cause you any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

It is my hope none of you feel uncomfortable today, and I will do everything in my power to ensure this conversation is not uncomfortable for anyone.

The risks associated with today could be discomfort with answering questions about the classroom, hearing other people’s answers, and possible stress or anxiety. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this dissertation study are a classroom that is tailored to our Slavic children’s needs which could result in a greater appreciation and liking for school and the teacher, advancements in the recognition of the Slavic cultural needs in education, and improved academic performance in our EPIC classrooms. I cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you or your child will receive any benefit from this study.

I also would like for you to know this focus group discussion will be tape recorded. The identity of all participants will remain confidential. The recording will allow me to revisit our discussion today to ensure I captured what was said by each of you. This will help me during my conversation with your teachers and the data I will use in my dissertation paper.

Finally, I want to remind you that I am a mandated reporter. If at any time during our conversation I believe a child’s physical, mental or emotional safety is at risk, I will follow my duties as a legally obligated mandated reporter.

To allow for our conversation to flow more freely, I’d like to go over some group expectations:
- Only one person should be speaking at a time. This will ensure this person’s opinion is heard and will also provide me with support as I transcribe our taped conversation.
- Please avoid any side conversations.
- You do not need to answer every question asked of the group today. If you would like to add something to the discussion I’d like to hear from you.
- This is a confidential discussion. I will not report your names or who said what during this discussion. Names will not be used in any report of this conversation. This also means what is said in this room stays in this room. None of us should discuss who said what to anyone else.
- I am stressing confidentiality because I want us to be open and honest today. I want each of you to be able to comment on each other’s remarks without fear that your comments will be repeated later and possibly taken out of context.
- There are no “wrong answers” today; however, we may have different opinions. Please communicate your truth even if you feel you are the only one who may feel this way. Do not let the group sway your opinion; but, if you do change your mind, please let me know.
- If at any time you need to take a break, please get up and take care of yourself. The restrooms are _____ and there are pastries and juice _____ for you to enjoy.
- Does anyone have any questions before we move on?

Before we start, I’d like to know a little about each of you. Please tell me your: name and how you are associated with EPIC (teacher, student with corresponding grade level, or parent/guardian of which child). I will go first to model for you. My name is Erin Marston and I am a doctoral student with the University of the Pacific. I was the Principal of EPIC from June 2016 to January 2019. (Allow time for the twelve participants to introduce themselves).

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS for Parents and Students:
1. What is your cultural identity?
2. What do you like the most about your cultural identity?
3. What part of your cultural identity are you the most proud?
4. Is your cultural identity part of the learning in the classroom? If so, how?
5. What parts of your culture would you like to see added to your classroom?
6. Do your community values align to the classroom values? If so, how?
7. What parts of your community would you like to see added to your classroom?
8. Are your cultural learning styles aligned to the classroom instruction? If so, how?
9. What parts of your cultural learning style would you like to see added to the classroom?
10. What is your immigration history?

TEACHERS 1st Focus Group
1. What is your cultural identity?
2. What do you like the most about your cultural identity?
3. What part of your cultural identity are you the most proud?
4. Is your cultural identity part of the learning in the classroom? If so, how?
5. What parts of your culture would you like to see added to your classroom?
6. Do your community values align to the classroom values? If so, how?
7. What parts of your community would you like to see added to your classroom?
8. Are your cultural learning styles aligned to the classroom instruction? If so, how?
9. What parts of your cultural learning style would you like to see added to the classroom?
10. What is your immigration history?

TEACHERS 2nd Focus Group
1. What pieces of the Slavic cultural have you added to your classroom?
2. What pieces of the community values have you added to your classroom?
3. Have you adapted the cultural learning styles of your instruction? If so, how?
4. What has been the biggest impact to your classroom since we started?
5. What is something you would like to modify in your plan for our next cycle?
6. Looking back, what is one thing you wish you could have done differently?
7. Looking back, what is something that you did that makes you proud?

TEACHERS 3rd Focus Group
1. How did the perceptions of your Slavic parents and students impact your classroom instruction?
2. What pieces of the Slavic cultural have you added to your classroom that you believe were successful?
3. What pieces of the community values have you added to your classroom that you believe were successful?
4. Have you adapted the cultural learning styles of your instruction? If so, how?
5. What has been the biggest impact to your classroom since we started?
6. Looking back, what is one thing you wish you could have done differently?
7. Looking back, what is something that you did that makes you proud?
8. What is something you would like to incorporate for the rest of this year?
9. What have you learned from this experience?

Thank you for joining me today and for your valuable contribution to my dissertation study. I appreciate you.