

Assessing Teachers’ Cultural Competency

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Abstract

There is a tremendous need to enhance the cultural competency of teachers working in PK-12 schools. Research indicates that culturally competent teachers who utilize transformative and justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy provide classroom spaces that are more welcoming and engaging, and that showcase diversity, inclusion, and democracy in societies at large. This article contributes to the scholarly and professional literature on cultural competency and education by examining two widely-used surveys used to assess teachers’ cultural competency. Methodologically, it uses content analysis to delineate what factors these surveys are assessing. From this analysis, three main themes have emerged: recognizing culture; utilizing resources for teaching and learning; and creating a sense of community. The article then discusses the implications of these results and concludes with potential directions for future research.

Keywords: teachers, cultural competency, culturally relevant, culturally responsive, content analysis, culture, teaching and learning, community, multicultural education

Introduction

There is a tremendous need to develop and enhance the cultural competency of teachers working in PK-12 schools in the United States. Research has pointed out the persistent racial/ethnic demographic gap between teachers and their students. Teachers are over 80% White, while students of color already constitute the majority in our schools

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(Sleeter, Neal, & Kumashiro, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), in 2018, 50.7 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Of this total student enrollment, 47% are White, 27% are Latinx, 15% are Black, 5% are Asian, and 4% are of two or more races. These figures are quite a shift from a decade prior when, in 2009, White students constituted 54% of all the students in US public schools, while students of color made up 46%. Although various initiatives have been launched to increase the number of teachers of color, the urgency for White teachers to strengthen their cultural competency, knowledge, skills, and dispositions needs to continue as a top priority.

Cultural competency, according to Vernita Mayfield (2020), is “the ability to use critical-thinking skills to interpret how cultural values and beliefs influence conscious and unconscious behavior; the understanding of how inequality can be and has been perpetuated through socialized behaviors; and the knowledge and determined disposition to disrupt inequitable practices to achieve greater personal and professional success for yourself and others” (p. 15). According to Moule (2012), cultural competence is the “ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own” (p. 5). What this means is “developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching” (ibid.). For Mayfield (2020), culture is composed of the “values, beliefs, and behaviors on which [we] operate daily” (p. 15), while competence “suggests that [we] are endeavoring to become fluent in a set of practices of skills that advance [our] professionalism” (p. 16). Building upon Mayfield and Moule, we define “culture” as a complex way of living and understanding that shapes and guides one’s beliefs, knowledge, actions, and practices. It is shared by a group of individuals, contextualized by temporal and spatial dimensions, and embedded within relations of power. It is observed, espoused, and intangible; it is fluid and never static; and it is transmitted across people and generations, often in implicit ways. We also define “competence” as one’s capacity to think, plan, decide, and act, and to reflect individually or collectively in order to meet particular goals or outcomes.

Researchers, policymakers, and educators have ardently called for the development and enhancement of educators’ cultural competency. The National Education Association, the largest labor union in the United States, has delineated a number of important reasons why educators should be culturally competent. In addition to the increasingly diverse student population in PK-12 schools, the other reasons are: culture plays

a critical role in learning; cultural competence leads to more effective teaching, helps address student achievement gaps, and helps educators meet accountability requirements; culturally competent educators are better equipped to reach out to students' families; and lastly, cultural competence reinforces American and democratic ideals (National Education Association, 2008). Consequently, school districts and professional education associations promote the ongoing development and enhancement of the cultural competency of school teachers, administrators, and staff by offering professional development sessions and training programs. For example, the National Education Association (2021) provides a Cultural Competence Training Program that aims to “deepen participants’ own cultural self-awareness; increase their understanding of the link between cultural self-awareness and cultural competence; identify culturally responsive teaching practices; [and] share strategies for promoting culturally responsive instruction.”

Moreover, various communities have called for more transformative and justice-oriented curriculum in schools in light of social movements, such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, that address racial inequities, discrimination, violence, and deaths (Coloma et al., 2021; Ransby, 2018). They contend that more culturally competent teachers that utilize more transformative and justice-oriented curriculum and pedagogy will be able to provide classroom spaces that are more engaging, supportive, and healing, that offer multiple and even competing perspectives, and that showcase the rich diversity and complexity of our society and democracy. For instance, in the edited book *Black Lives Matter at School*, Jesse Hagopian (2020) underscores how the “Black Lives Matter at School movement is the story of educators, students, parents, and community members defying the threats of violent white supremacists ... and the story of an uprising to uproot the racist policies and curriculum that are bound up in the American system of schooling” (p. 1). Many advocates fighting against anti-Asian racism have pushed for the integration of Asian American curriculum and history in public schools to raise awareness and minimize hostility against Asian Americans in schools and society at large. In July 2021, Illinois became the first state in the country to require the teaching of Asian American history in public schools (Petrella, 2021). In March 2021, California officially adopted an Ethnic Studies model curriculum that is grounded in the four “foundational disciplines” of African American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, Native American, and Asian American and Pacific Islander studies (California Department of Education, 2021).

This article aims to contribute to the scholarly and professional literature on cultural competency and education by analyzing two widely-used instruments used to assess teachers’ cultural competency—Culturally

Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE) and Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey: Teacher Form (MAKSS-T). We examine CRTSE and MAKSS-T for the cultural competency factors that these instruments are assessing. We situate the instruments in relation to the scholarly literature, especially their initial development and how they have been used by other researchers and educators. We also explain how we scrutinized these instruments methodologically using content analysis, and focus on three main themes that we identified from the analysis—recognizing culture; utilizing resources for teaching and learning; and creating a sense of community. For each of these themes, we delineate the different scale or survey items from CRTSE and MAKSS-T that provide further examples and explanations. We pursue this inquiry in order to highlight the importance of utilizing culturally relevant teaching and how teachers becoming aware of their students' cultural background can bridge the racial gap between teachers and students, enhance campus and classroom climate, and develop a sense of community that will positively affect students' school engagement and academic progress.

Literature Review

There are different curriculum and pedagogical strands that enact multicultural classroom teaching, such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017), ethnic studies pedagogy (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015), culturally congruent instruction (Mohatt & Ericsson, 1981), culturally appropriate instruction (Au & Jordan, 1981), and culturally compatible instruction (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). Although they offer varying definitions, goals, and approaches, there is a general agreement amongst them. They are approaches to teaching and learning that focus on students' cultural knowledge, experiences, prior knowledge, and different ways of knowing and learning in order to facilitate a more equitable and inclusive teaching and learning. They also emphasize a culturally compatible environment by including students' culture and using a variety of assessment techniques. They equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in larger business, commercial, and civic networks, and at the same time help them sustain their cultural identity, heritage language, and connection to their community. Paris (2012) proposes the term *culturally sustaining* to emphasize supporting the cultural and linguistic competence of students' communities while offering access to dominant culture competence.

One of the most commonly used scales in measuring teachers' cultural

competency is the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-efficacy Scale (CRTSE), developed by Kamau Oginga Siwatu in 2007. CRTSE drew from Bandura's (1997) definition of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to shape and execute the courses of action that are required to produce certain achievements. Bandura believed that the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and competence are not necessarily adequate predictors of future behavior or action (Pajares, 1996). Rather it is mediated by a person's belief in their abilities to put the acquired skills to use. Therefore, self-efficacy is the individual's belief in their capabilities to execute specific tasks.

The development of CRTSE was driven by three factors underlying culturally responsive teacher preparation and teacher efficacy research. First, many inquiries into teachers' efficacy beliefs focused on their perceived confidence to be instructionally effective (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), manage effective learning environments (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990), and influence student learning (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Second, the rising theoretical concerns about existing measures of teachers' sense of efficacy fueled the need to create a theoretically grounded instrument. Siwatu (2007) believed that the best approach was to revisit Bandura's theoretical guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 2001). Third, in light of increased efforts to prepare culturally responsive teachers, the development of the CRTSE provided administrators and teacher educators with a useful tool to assess the effectiveness of their programs. CRTSE includes 30 statements, divided into four competencies: curriculum and instruction, classroom management, student assessment, and cultural enrichment. Using the culturally responsive teaching competencies as a guide, the development of the CRTSE scales began by writing several self-efficacy items that mapped onto 27 competencies (Siwatu, 2007). The CRTSE scale contains teaching practices throughout the easy–difficult continuum. The “easy” side of the continuum reflects skills related to general teaching practices (e.g., “I am able to use a variety of teaching methods,” “I am able to build a sense of trust in my students”). The “difficult” side of the continuum contains skills that reflect more culturally responsive teaching practices (e.g., “I am able to teach students about their cultures' contribution to science,” “I am able to implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students' home culture and the school culture”) (Siwatu, 2007, p. 4).

Other users have utilized CRTSE for their studies. For example, Lastrapes and Negishi (2012) examined preservice teachers' cultural consciousness and self-efficacy while tutoring diverse students during an initial urban field experience. Frye and her colleagues (2010) described how history, literacy, and art were integrated in the college classroom

and then taught in elementary classrooms by teacher candidates as a step in becoming culturally responsive. At the end of the semester, the candidates re-evaluated themselves using the same survey, and then reflected on their experiences, the competencies they had gained and enhanced, and the skills and knowledge they still wanted to learn to become culturally responsive teachers.

Dickson, Chun, and Fernandez (2015) described the development and initial validation of a measure for middle school students' perspectives of culturally responsive teaching practices. They developed the Student Measure of Culturally Responsive Teaching (SMCRT) by modifying items on the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE). SMCRT measures students' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices in order to look into the impact of culturally responsive teaching on students' academic outcomes, and to guide teachers' training and the development of culturally relevant curricula.

The Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey: Teacher Form (MAKSS-T) was developed by Michael D'Andrea, Judy Daniels, and Mary Jo Noonan (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Noonan, 2003). The MAKSS-T drew from the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey: Counselor Edition (MAKSS-CE) that was originally created by D'Andrea, Daniels, and Ronald Heck at the University of Hawai'i in 1991. Whereas the MAKSS-CE was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of counseling psychologists to work with patients who are culturally different from them, the MAKSS-T was designed to gauge the multicultural competence of teachers who work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The MAKSS-T consists of 60 statements that function as a self-assessment on three constructs of multicultural competence—awareness, knowledge, and skills. For the three constructs of multicultural competence, awareness means “openness to learning about differences associated with various cultures and being conscious of biases and assumptions we hold and the impact they have” (Gayles & Kelly, 2007, p. 194). For instance, one “awareness” survey question asks: “At this time in your life, how would you rate yourself in terms of understanding how your cultural background has influenced the way you think and act?” Another “awareness” question asks: “At the present time, how would you generally rate yourself in terms of being able to accurately compare your own cultural perspective with that of a person from another culture?” Knowledge highlights recognition of diverse cultures and groups and “an understanding of within group differences and the intersection of multiple identities” (Gayles & Kelly, 2007, p. 194). For example, one “knowledge” survey statement says: “Most of the immigrant and ethnic groups in Europe, Australia, and Canada face problems similar

to those experienced by ethnic groups in the United States.” Another “knowledge” survey statement says: “In teaching, students from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds should be given the same treatment that White mainstream students receive.” Lastly, skills “involve the capacity to work effectively with individuals from various cultural backgrounds by translating awareness and knowledge... into good practice” (Gayles & Kelly, 2007, p. 194). For instance, one “skills” survey question asks: “How would you rate your ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of educational tests in terms of their use with persons from a different cultural/racial/ethnic background?” Another “skills” survey question asks: “In general, how would you rate your skill level in terms of being able to provide appropriate teaching services to culturally different students?” Overall, the MAKSS-T survey is structured in a way that foregrounds multicultural awareness in the first 20 statements, multicultural knowledge in the next 20 statements, and multicultural skills in the last 20 statements. Participants who complete the survey are provided two sets of Likert-type options in response to each item. They can answer using the options of either very limited, limited, good, or very good; or strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree.

Other researchers and educators have utilized the MAKSS-T for their studies. For instance, Warring (2005) employed the MAKSS-T “to assess the multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skill levels of candidates in teacher preparation programs and to compare data across undergraduate and graduate level courses taught by different instructors to see if any significant differences or similarities occur” (p. 109). With a participant size of 112 students enrolled in required courses on human relations/multicultural education and social foundations of education, his research is based on a “premise that attitudes, knowledge, and skills can be assessed and a purpose of assessment should serve as a tool to improve teacher preparation” (p. 109). Vincent and Torres (2015) utilized the MAKSS-T “to describe the constructs of multicultural competence in school-based agriculture teachers and their relationship to the ethnic diversity of local FFA [Future Farmers of America] membership in selected high schools” and to analyze the “constructs of multicultural competence in school-based agriculture teachers, as perceived by their students” (p. 66). One important factor made by the Vincent and Torres (2015) study is the addition of students’ perception of their teachers’ multicultural competence. On the one hand, the “teacher questionnaire asked the teacher to rate their competence level among various statements and, on the other hand, “the student questionnaire asked the students to rate their teacher’s competence level among various statements” (p. 67). With a participant size of 32 teachers and 21 students, Vincent and Torres found that teachers with diverse FFA

chapters reported a higher mean score for multicultural competence, and students in diverse FFA chapters “perceived their teacher to have a higher level of multicultural competence than students in non-diverse FFA chapters perceived their teacher” (p. 69). This study confirms that teaching and learning in diverse contexts benefit both the educators and their students. Moreover, doctoral students have utilized the MAKSS-T for their dissertation studies. Perkins (2012) used MAKSS-T for her mixed-method study of 36 prospective teachers in their final year of coursework at three universities. She found that, in their survey responses, prospective teachers felt they were being prepared to work with diverse students; yet, in their interviews, they did not feel as confident in their preparation to work with diverse populations. In a more recent study, Jones (2019) mobilized MAKSS-T as a complementary tool in a primarily qualitative case study of five teachers and their supervising administrators in two high schools. The survey was given to consenting teachers at the two schools, and the teachers selected for the research study scored the highest for multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills based on the MAKSS-T survey.

Methodology

For our examination of the CRTSE and MAKSS-T, we utilized qualitative content analysis, a systematic, rigorous approach to analyzing texts. It can be used either as a method by itself or in combination with other methods (White & Marsh, 2006). The objective in qualitative content analysis is to transform a large amount of text to an organized and concise summary (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). It aims to organize and elicit meaning from the data and to draw realistic conclusions from it (Bengtsson, 2016). The initial step in content analysis is to read and re-read in order to get a general understanding of the whole. Then, texts are condensed into smaller meaningful units. The step after that is to code these condensed units. Codes can be thought of as labels that describe the meaningful units, normally one or two words. Then, these codes are organized into categories. Categories are formed by grouping together the codes which are related to each other, due to their similarities or differences. The final step is to create themes from the categories; a theme describes the meaning of two or more categories. The final themes that describe the underlying meaning of the content are drawn from the data (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

For this study we examined two instruments, the CRTSE scale and the MAKSS-T survey, and each researcher focused initially on one instrument and subsequently on both. We followed Erlingsson and Brysiewicz’s (2017) steps to conduct the qualitative content analysis method. While following

the process of content analysis, some of the steps were done separately, others jointly. First, we read and reviewed our respective instruments, and created spreadsheet tables that included all items: 40 items for the CRTSE scale (numbered from C1 to C40) and 60 items for the MAKSS-T survey (numbered from M1 to M60). These items became the “meaning unit” as described by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) in their content analysis protocol. Then, we shortened the meaning units into “condensed meaning units” to highlight major concepts and terms. For example, an item or “meaning unit” in the CRTSE scale is “Develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds,” which was shortened as a “condensed meaning unit” to “building a sense of community.” After all the items or meaning units in the CRTSE and MAKSS-T were transformed into condensed meaning units, we generated “codes” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) to further abbreviate the units into key words for our own instrument and then for our co-author’s instrument. In other words, we separately gave codes to the condensed unit for each instrument. For example, for the condensed meaning unit of “building a sense of community,” Hamdan gave a code of “sense of community” while Coloma’s code for the same condensed meaning is “student needs/preferences.” There were various instances when we generated similar codes as well as codes that were different from one another. In generating a joint code, we discussed by reviewing the original items in the instruments as well as the process and thinking in the shortening to condensed meaning units and eventually to codes. For example, in the case of differing codes for “sense of community” and “student needs/preferences,” we came up with the joint code of “community building.” After that, our joint codes were grouped together and organized into “categories” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). We identified eight categories for the CRSTE scale and eight categories for the MAKSS-T survey. With a total of 16 categories, we discussed significant and converging ideas that reflect the goals and purposes of both instruments. These converging ideas became the “themes” which, according to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), are “higher levels of abstraction” that “reflect the interpreted, latent meaning of the text” (p. 94). Ultimately, the three themes that we developed together for the two scales were: (1) recognizing culture; (2) utilizing resources for teaching and learning; and (3) creating a sense of community. These three themes will be discussed further in the next section.

Before elaborating on the three themes, we take note of the limitations of using the CRTSE and MAKSS-T to identify, examine, and assess the cultural competency of teachers. The first limitation is the instruments’ subjective nature due to teachers’ self-assessment and self-disclosure. Teachers complete them based on their understanding and perception of themselves as well as how they select to represent themselves. Such

self-assessment does not claim to be objective or value-free; rather, it relies on the teachers' willingness to take stock of their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in relation to cultural competency and to share them through their responses to the scales. As Perkins' (2012) study points out, teachers rated themselves in surveys as prepared to work with diverse students; however, their follow-up interviews revealed they were not as prepared and confident as they had indicated. Hence, it is important for researchers and educators to not determine one's cultural competency exclusively based on self-assessment instruments. As measures that rely on self-assessment, these types of quantitative instruments are not necessarily invalid, faulty, or wrong. We ought to consider them as inherently limited, like all singular tools. What these instruments showcase, in fact, is how respondents view and think of themselves and how they would want others to perceive them. This statement still leads to a set of research findings. But what we cannot and should not conclude is that such findings from these instruments offer a fully accurate measure of teachers' cultural competency. For more robust and holistic assessments of cultural competency, these instruments can be complemented and triangulated with qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observations, and the two other limitations below also need to be addressed.

The second limitation is the scales' ability to track consistencies and changes in teachers' cultural competency over time. The existing scholarly literature on the use of these instruments reveals that they have been primarily employed in singular ways. In other words, the instruments are generally utilized as a one-time self-assessment of teachers. They have the potential to track changes over time, for instance, if they are used for pre- and post-assessments when they participate in professional development on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lastly, the third limitation is the instruments are products of their particular temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts. The MAKSS-T and CRTSE were developed and released in 2003 and 2007, respectively, and represent concepts, terms, and understandings of cultural competency that were relevant and significant at the time. This is not to say that they are too dated and no longer useful now. Rather, they need to be understood and analyzed as being generated within specific temporal and spatial contexts. For instance, within the past 10 to 15 years, student and community demographic changes, social and political movements, as well as social media and technology have dramatically shifted a number of the terms and understandings related to cultural competency.

Findings and Discussion

The table (see Table 1) highlights the three themes that emerged from our qualitative content analysis of the CRTSE scale and MAKSS-T survey: (1) recognizing culture, (2) utilizing resources for teaching and learning, and (3) creating a sense of community. These three themes reveal the major cultural competencies that the two instruments are aiming to identify, develop, and/or promote among the teachers completing their self-assessment. Under each theme, we delineated the various categories derived from each instrument. For the first theme of recognizing culture, the categories drawn from the content analysis of the

Table 1
Contents Analysis Findings

Theme #1: Recognizing Culture

<i>CRTSE Categories</i>	<i>MAKSS-T Categories</i>
student background (C2, 8, 13-14, 16, 21, 37-38)	key concepts (M21-32)
differences between school and home (C5-6, 15)	teaching diverse groups (M7, 13, 41-42, 51, 54-60)
different learning styles (C3-4, 34, 35, 39)	similarities across differences (M35-38)
	cultural awareness and knowledge (M1, 6, 8, 10, 45, 48)
	cultural impact (M2-4, 39-40)

Theme #2: Utilizing Resources for Teaching and Learning

<i>CRTSE Categories</i>	<i>MAKSS-T Categories</i>
assessment (C7, 23, 33)	education, teaching, and culture (M9, 18-19, 44, 47, 49-50, 52)
instruction/pedagogy (C1, 11, 17, 27-30, 35-36, 40)	teaching foundation requirements (M5, 12-14, 17, 20, 33-34, 43, 46, 53)

Theme #3: Creating a Sense of Community

<i>CRTSE Categories</i>	<i>MAKSS-T Category</i>
community building (C12, 19, 26, 32)	teaching and support (M11, 15-16)
student-teacher relationship (C9, 18, 20, 22, 38-40)	
home-school relationship (C10, 24-25, 31)	

CRTSE scale are student background, differences between school and home, and different learning styles. The term “learning styles” is used here as it’s historically salient and acceptable at the time the surveys were created. The categories from the MAKSS-T survey are key concepts, teaching diverse groups, similarities across differences, cultural awareness and knowledge, and cultural impact. For the second theme of utilizing resources for teaching and learning, the CRTSE categories are assessment and instruction/pedagogy, and the MAKSS-T categories are education, teaching, and culture as well as teaching foundation requirements. Lastly, for the third theme of creating a sense of community, the CRTSE categories are community building, home-school relationship, and student-teacher relationship, and the only MAKSS-T category is teaching and support.

Under each category in the table, we include the scale or survey statements that we used to generate that particular category through our content analysis. With the CRTSE scale of 40 statements, each statement was numbered from C1 to C40. With the MAKSS-T survey of 60 statements, each statement was numbered from M1 to M60. Hence, for instance, under the CRTSE category of student background, we listed statements C2, 8, 13-14, 16, 21, 37-38 based on our content analysis.

In this section, we will elaborate on and discuss our findings by highlighting certain scale or survey statements for various themes and categories not only to be transparent in our methodological process, but also to explicitly showcase knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are crucial for teachers’ cultural competency to foster equity, inclusion, and democracy in diverse classrooms and schools.

Theme #1: Recognizing Culture

In the CRTSE scale, the first theme of recognizing culture is evident in the three categories of student background, differences between school and home, and different learning styles. For student background, the scale inquires into the respondents’ ability to use students’ cultural background, prior knowledge, and interests to “help make learning meaningful” and “make sense of new information” (C13, C14, C38). For differences between school and home, respondents determine their ability to identify the differences between school culture and the students’ home culture (C5), and how to “minimize the effects of the mismatch” between the school and home cultures (C6). For different learning styles, the scale asks respondents to assess their ability to “use a learning preference inventory to gather data” on how students like to learn (C35).

In the MAKSS-T survey, the first theme of recognizing culture is evident in the five categories of key concepts, teaching diverse groups,

similarities across differences, cultural awareness and knowledge, and cultural impact. For the key concepts, the scale asks “at the present time, how would you rate your own understanding” of different terms or concepts, such as culture, ethnicity, racism, mainstreaming, prejudice (M21-32). For these items, educators can rate themselves as “very limited,” “limited,” “good,” and “very good.” For teaching diverse groups, the scale probes into their “ability to accurately assess the educational needs” of various identity groups, such as female and male students, gay and lesbian students, students with disabilities, and students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds (M54-60). For the category of similarities across differences, the scale asks the respondents’ agreement or disagreement in regards to “close to parity” in the academic achievement of racial/ethnic minorities (“African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans”) compared to “White mainstream students” (M35), or equal achievement of girls and boys in mathematics and science (M36). For cultural awareness and knowledge, the scale gauges the respondents’ “level of awareness regarding different cultural institutions and systems” (M6) and their rating of “being able to accurately compare your own cultural perspective with that of a person from another culture” (M8). For cultural impact, respondents are asked about their “understanding of the impact of the way you think and act when interacting with persons of different cultural backgrounds” (M4).

In our analysis of the two instruments, the categories of “teaching diverse groups” and “student background” overlap as similar categories that urge teachers to get to know their diverse students and their backgrounds as crucial in developing and enhancing cultural competency. For the theme of recognizing culture, additional elements need to be considered, including taking into account cultural awareness, knowledge, and impact; examining differences between school and home as well as learning styles; and showcasing similarities across differences. These categories and elements are consistent with the ways theorists, researchers, and educators have conceptualized and enacted culturally relevant, responsive, and sustainable teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Gay, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). As noted in our literature review section, these approaches have different definitions and nuances, yet have important general agreements. They foreground students’ cultural knowledge, backgrounds, and experiences as assets and resources for teaching and learning. They cultivate culturally compatible settings in classrooms and schools so that students feel affirmed, safe, and cared for. They also support students to navigate what Lisa Delpit (2006) calls the “culture of power” as they are equipped with knowledge and skills to succeed in mainstream settings, while embracing and nurturing their home and heritage cultures. In acknowledging and affirming students’

cultural backgrounds, culturally competent teachers work intentionally to get to know their students in meaningful ways and continuously educate themselves on social, economic, and political issues that impact the wellbeing of their students and their families and communities. In democratic schools and societies, recognizing diverse cultures is an important starting point when addressing stereotypes and misconceptions about marginalized individuals and groups.

Theme #2: Utilizing Resources for Teaching and Learning

In the CRTSE scale, the second theme of utilizing resources for teaching and learning is evident in the two categories of assessment and instruction/pedagogy. For the assessment category, the survey asks teachers to rate their abilities in assessing students' learning using various types of assessments (C7), and identifying if standardized tests may be biased towards linguistically and culturally diverse students (C23, C33). For the instruction/pedagogy category, teachers are asked to rate themselves in regards to: adapting instruction to meet the needs of students (C1), revising instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups (C27), critically examining the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes (C28), using examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds (C35), and designing instructions that matches students' developmental needs (C40).

In the MAKSS-T survey, the second theme is evident in the two categories of education, teaching, and culture as well as teaching foundation requirements. For education, teaching, and culture, the survey asks teachers to rate their ability to deal with discrimination, prejudices, and biases (M9, M44), their ability to articulate students' problem from cultural group different from their own (M47), and their ability to consult with education professionals concerning students with different cultural backgrounds (M52). For teaching foundation requirements, educators indicate their agreement or disagreement to statements, such as "There are some basic teaching skills that are applicable to create successful outcomes regardless of the students' cultural background" (M53), "Promoting a student's sense of psychological independence is usually a safe goal to strive for in most teaching situations" (M14), and "Teachers without formal training and a license use similar techniques as those who are licensed" (M33).

Both instruments highlight teachers getting to know their diverse students, which is consistent with the scholarly literature as culturally relevant teaching demands teachers to utilize students' culture as a bridge to facilitate their learning process. Gay (2002) reinforced that

when academic knowledge and skills are related to the students' lived experiences, they are more personally meaningful and students learn more easily and thoroughly. Students' academic achievements will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996; Kleinfeld, 1975). The instruments also emphasize developing teachers' critical consciousness, which is important for teachers not only to achieve cultural competence and professional efficacy, but also to critique social norms and values that maintain social inequities. For Ladson-Billings (1995), critical consciousness takes form in cultural critique whereby "teachers themselves recognize social inequities and their causes" and are "not reluctant to identify political underpinnings of the students' community and social world" (pp. 476-477). The instruments also stress that teachers should pay attention to the cultural contexts and experiences of their students as well as their specific academic and personal needs. Gay (2010) emphasizes teaching that builds on students' personal and cultural strengths as well as their intellectual capabilities and prior accomplishments (p. 26). Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1995) stresses that cultural competence requires reshaping curriculum by building on students' knowledge, as well as teachers establishing good relationships with students and their families. To achieve democratic education, curriculum materials and pedagogical approaches should reflect the diverse demographics of students, and teachers should look at local communities as funds of knowledge to make teaching and learning more culturally relevant. In light of current debates about the teaching of critical race theory in schools and the controversial banning of certain books in schools and libraries, culturally competent teachers will insist on curricular and instructional materials that showcase critical and multi-perspectival sources and understandings of US history, culture, and democracy (Coloma et al., in press).

Theme #3: Creating a Sense of Community

In the CRTSE survey, creating a sense of community is apparent in the categories of community building, home-school relationship, and student-teacher relationship. For community building, educators are prompted to assess how they develop a community of learners among students from diverse cultural backgrounds (C12), design a classroom environment that displays a variety of cultures (C19), help students develop positive relationship with classmates (C26), and help students feel like important members in their classrooms (C32). For student-teacher relationship, teachers are to rate themselves in regards to building a sense of trust with their students (C9) and developing a personal rela-

tionship with them (C20). For home-school relationship, the scale elicits information about how respondents are communicating with parents regarding their children's educational progress (C24) and structuring parent-teacher conferences so that the meeting is not intimidating for parents (C25). In the MAKSS-T survey, there is only one category, which is teaching and support, for this theme. The survey items in this category inquire into universal definitions of normality (C11), formal teaching services (C15), and educational services to support students under stressful situations (C16).

Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) define learning community as a community that restructures curricular materials so that students have opportunities for deep understanding and engaging interactions with their teachers and classmates as fellow participants in the learning process. In a learning environment that focuses on creating a sense of community, both students and teachers learn and work together in an environment that emphasizes cooperation rather than competition (Nieto & Valery, 2006). To create strong learning communities, culturally competent teachers acknowledge the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students and celebrate them in their classrooms. They support diverse learners to socialize together and build positive relationships. They also communicate with their students' families and allow them a space to actively participate in the learning process of their children as an intentional practice of democratic education. For some parents and guardians, school was not a positive and supportive space when they were students. In fact, their experiences in school and their interactions with peers, teachers, and/or administrators were toxic, alienating, hostile, and unbearable. Hence, culturally competent teachers intentionally and proactively foster caring relationships with parents and guardians that are built on mutual commitment to the students' academic and personal wellbeing, on genuine respect for one another, and on trust and communication. By forging such relationships with parents and guardians, teachers find true partners and collaborators at home, and also work to heal some of the trauma they had gone through in their schooling.

Conclusion

Culturally competent teachers are conscious about their own biases that could impact the way they understand and interact with students from different cultures. They think and reflect on how biases could affect what they expect from students. They understand how students' cultures, backgrounds, and experiences might affect their understanding and use them as assets in the learning process. They support students

to succeed in a pluralistic society while maintaining pride in their own culture. They develop trusting relationships with students and families and build a strong learning community, which will positively affect students' level of engagement. Culturally competent teachers role model respect for diversity and use the classroom as a safe and supportive space for students to have intercultural dialogue. They encourage students to think critically about controversial and real-world issues, and unpack unequal distributions of power. They utilize the classroom as a stage to empower students to use their voices to condemn inequality and advocate for social justice. Culturally competent teachers promote democratic principles and practices by addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools, which will impact society at large.

In analyzing the scholarly literature on assessing teachers' cultural competency and the two widely-used surveys, Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale and Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey: Teacher Form, we chart three critical directions for future research. First, since these surveys are completed by teachers as a form of self-assessment, what insights about and impact on the teachers' sense of self might be generated when a version of these surveys is completed by their students, especially those who come from marginalized backgrounds? Having students respond to surveys to assess their teachers' cultural competency offers an important yet largely missing perspective from the scholarly literature. Opportunities to compare and contrast teachers' and students' viewpoints on the teachers' cultural competency can reveal convergences and gaps that can be further examined. Second, these surveys are likely to be completed by those in dominant groups, for instance by White teachers to assess their cultural competency when working with diverse students. According to a 2016 US Department of Education report, White teachers made up over 80% of the public school teacher workforce, a figure that has not changed over the past 20 years. How might the results of such surveys be similar and/or different when completed by teachers who come from diverse and marginalized backgrounds, such as teachers of color, immigrant teachers, or LGBTQ teachers? What new ideas and understandings on cultural competency might emerge when we focus on the experiences and perspectives of teachers from diverse backgrounds? And how might the purpose, content, and focus of the surveys shift when the target audience is not those in dominant groups, but rather those from marginalized backgrounds? The strengths and areas for improvement in the cultural competency of diverse teachers are an under-explored topic of investigation in the area of assessing teachers' cultural competency. Lastly, there is a continuous need to develop and analyze surveys that emphasize intersectionality. Most surveys on assessing teachers' cultural competency highlight a

particular identity or cultural background, such as race, class, gender, or sexuality, in their questions or statements. The strength of such an approach is that researchers and educators can point to a specific area and determine strategic goals and plans to address it. However, teachers (as well as their students) have different and intersecting identities and backgrounds that shape their beliefs, values, perspectives, actions, and interactions. How might intersectionality generate different views and understandings on cultural competency? And how might surveys change when we put intersectionality at its fundamental core focus? Ultimately, we point to these three critical areas of foregrounding the perspectives of students, of teachers from diverse backgrounds, and of intersectionality as important and necessary directions in order to further advance the research and use of assessing teachers' cultural competency.

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