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Bridging the Cultural Divide: Learning with Kayla

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Bridging the Cultural Divide: Learning with Kayla

Introduction

Before telling this story, it is important to contextualize this research study and article. This article was written as paper in the fall of 2018 when the researcher was a doctoral student in Baylor University's School of Education program. The original purpose of this article was to provide the researcher with an opportunity to conduct a single-subject case study as a mini-research project in a course titled EDC 5392, or Issues in Diversity. During that fall term in 2018, the doctoral student was a high school English teacher at a public high school in the Humble Independent School District (HISD). As a teacher, the doctoral student and emerging researcher chose one of her students as the subject for this study. The student's name is a pseudonym for privacy purposes, and all details shared here are with the consent of all parties involved. This article aims to share the learning of an emerging adult scholar throughout the research process and to contribute an example of a teacher building critical consciousness around multicultural and anti-bias/antiracist education practices.

Summer Creek High School (SCHS) is a grade 9-12 Texas public School in HISD. Four years ago, in 2017, there were approximately 2,338 students and 157 teachers at SCHS. According to the Texas Education Agency Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for SCHS that year, the enrollment demographics were African American 40.8%; Hispanic 41.0%; White 13.6%; American Indian 0.4%; Asian 2.4%; Pacific Islander 0.4%; Two or more races: 1.4%; Economically Disadvantaged 43.5%; English Language Learners: 6.4% (Texas Education Agency, 2017b).

By comparison, at Kingwood High School (KHS), another large high school in HISD

with 2,654 students enrolled, the TAPR demographics read African American 3.1%; Hispanic 17.1%; White 73.7%; American Indian 0.4%; Asian 3.9%; Pacific Islander 0.2%; Two or more races 1.6%; Economically Disadvantaged: 5.5%; English Language Learners: 1.0%. (Texas Education Agency, 2017a).

When Hurricane Harvey hit Kingwood, TX, in August 2017, Kingwood High School flooded. Consequently, on September 11, 2017, when Humble ISD would finally open its schools, Kingwood would have to remain closed until renovation efforts were complete. Those thousands of predominantly white students would have to find a temporary learning environment. In the weeks before the opening of the school year, The Texas Education Agency and the Humble ISD school board decided that Summer Creek High School, the campus where the researcher worked from 2014-to 2019, would become Kingwood High School at precisely noon each day.

The school schedule ran in 80-minute blocks, with 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th periods meeting only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and 2nd, 4th, and 6th period meeting only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Each day, Summer Creek would have school from 7 am to 11:19 am. At 11:19 am, Summer Creek High School became Kingwood High School. The transition was both fantastic and jarring. The researcher recounts how this transition impacted their relationships with her students and how it fueled their bonds through adversity and difficult circumstances.

Amid this trying schedule, the author led a spirited and eager 6th-period class of AP English and Language Composition students. All were cheerful and friendly with one another. Even though they would only share a learning space two days out of the week, the author grew particularly fond of this group of diverse learners. A student who will be known as Kayla for

this article was among those learners. Kayla often sat in the back of the classroom, in a row with other students of color, including Asian, Latinx, and White students. The author and Kayla ultimately developed an enriching relationship. She often shared bits of her family life and cultural background with the researcher, much of which had never been revealed or heard of before. As a result, the researcher invited Kayla to participate in this study.

Therefore, this article describes a single-subject case study. Following the problem statement, teachers sometimes lack the knowledge of their student's lived experiences to form a reciprocal relationship and create better pedagogical methods. Next, this article will review related literature that describes critical multicultural education and linguistic diversity. The writer describes the methodology, followed by a description of Kayla as the subject of the study. The author continues by describing the research findings, discusses the findings, and concludes with the implications for this study and a reflection overall on how teachers can improve best practices that support diverse student groups.

Problem Statement

Educators often do not create space for diverse learners to explain their realities as they are and leverage those stories to create a better pedagogy. The researcher interacted with Kayla almost daily, and those interactions were authentic and genuine. In addition, the researcher conducted an interview with Kayla and a home visit where she interacted with Kayla, her younger brother, and her parents. Exploring this idea with Kayla allowed me to learn and to give her words complete attention" (Delpit, 1995). The following review of the related literature provides clear connections to multicultural education, the relationship that Kayla and the author shared as co-learners and co-educators, and the justification for the choice the researcher made for Kayla to partner as the subject in this single-subject case study.

Review of Related Literature

Critical Multicultural Education

This review of related literature is a dialectic synthesis of Cerecer's Critical Multiculturalism: Transformative educational principles and practice, chapters one and two of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, chapter one of Wayne Au's Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice, and Sonia Nieto's Critical Multicultural Education and Student's perspectives (Cerecer et al., 2010; Freire, 2018; Lee, 2014; Nieto, 1999). Each of these readings establishes a foundational analysis of some aspect of the critical theories concerning multicultural education, its relationship to critical pedagogy, and the establishment of multicultural critical education, leading to the essential nuances of antiracist education. By synthesizing these readings, the author hopes to concretize how each reading engages these topics and identifies and builds an awareness of the themes and relationships between these educational practices and their significance to the author's teaching practices and research.

Patricia D. Quijada Cerecer's incisive dialogue concerning Critical Multiculturalism provides a thorough overview of critical pedagogy theorists and a meticulous and pointed call to action. Cerecer provides an overview of James Bank's work on curriculum integration. She promotes his notion of the "transformative" approach over the "additive" approach (Cerecer et al. p.149) because in the "transformative," the curriculum is overhauled and interacts with histories, social concerns, values, etc. in meaningful ways, that must all culminate and thrive with some form of social action. The words "social action" empowers educators to improve very sanitized curricula centered on Whiteness and to form a multicultural, antiracist, and problem-posing curriculum that decenters Whiteness and is a true mark of actively critical

pedagogy. Cerecer's explication of Bank's work provides educators with ways to be more intentional in their approaches to rehabilitate not only social action curricula but also reshape other broader curricula as well. The need for this sort of transformative work within critical pedagogy also considers Paulo Freire's piercing analysis of oppression and its effects on the human condition (Freire, 2018).

Freire begins his discussion of critical pedagogy with a look at the problem of dehumanization. This discussion lends itself to an understanding of how humans oppress one another and how that process shapes the response of the oppressed group. Freire notes that dehumanization "marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen but also those who have stolen it. It is a distortion of the vocation of becoming fully human" (Freire, 2018, p. 44). This reciprocal loss of humanity establishes the need for critical theory or theories that enable humanity to constantly check and balance our interdependence and flesh out what it means to live into our common human stories wholly. According to Freire, the oppressed who are aware of their dehumanization by the oppressors must break free for themselves; however, they are terrified of the freedom that comes with this assertiveness.

In the introduction to the 50th edition of the text, Donaldo Macedo remembers Freire breaking down this call to the transformative. Macedo recalls, "Freire shared with me, semi-joking, that the "ruling class will never send us to Copa Cabana for a vacation. If we want to go to Copa Cabana, we must fight for it" (Freire, 2018, p. 3). This statement reinforces the notions on page 47, where Freire states, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift (Freire, 2018, p. 47)" This passage reminds educators of the shared responsibility in correcting the "distortion" that Freire described earlier (Freire, 2018, p. 44). Specifically, Wayne Au's interview with Enid Lee describes the distortion as it relates to the translation of multicultural

education to a more critical and antiracist format and how naming this format correctly can help achieve the goal of acquiring a more robust pedagogy (Lee, 2014).

Enid Lee describes the significance of antiracist education and its implications for the white teacher who may need to adjust their understandings of multicultural education frameworks. Lee posits that we must get beyond the heroes, sheroes, festivals, and food rhetoric commonplace in a sanitized form of multicultural education. Lee aptly writes, “I have met teachers who think that just because they have kids from different races and backgrounds, they have a multicultural classroom. Bodies of kids are not enough.”(Lee, 2014, p. 11). She often describes education that is not critical, as in not holding itself accountable, and the moral obligation of all to be educated as teachers to do what it takes to provide a more holistic view of the world. The researcher wonders how might educators begin to shape humanity as a curriculum on behalf of young and diverse learners? How might educators respond to their student’s humanity in ways that will honor their intersectional identities? Sonia Nieto’s work in this field provides more insight into the necessity for continued inquiry into the design and effective delivery of critical multicultural education (Nieto, 1999).

Nieto’s (1999) discussion of “The Case Studies from a Critical Multicultural Education Perspective” includes a challenging commentary on “dangerous discourse” (Nieto, 1999, p. 209). Teachers must fight the fear of engagement and solidify within their practice that teaching is indeed an activist profession. For educators to engage in this style well, we must be actively pursuing a reciprocal relationship with our students, vulnerably listening, fearlessly disrupting monocultural education, and learning from the learner.

Linguistic Diversity

A foundational truth that resonates throughout our national discourse concerning

language diversity and schooling: there has never indeed been a time in the United States of America where bilingual, multilingual, and welcoming bidialectal education was normative or where the learners in our bilingual programs have been truly centered and honored for their unique lived experiences. Or perhaps not viewing English language learners (ELLs) as valuable contributors to the typical American experience. Language diversity has been thwarted and suppressed by political tactics and policies that the hegemonic class has ultimately shaped. While the US promotes quick assimilation to American culture, wholesale erasure of folk's cultural identities takes place.

Previously, the researcher posed two questions that continue to define the pedagogical modes of the researcher's role as an educator. Primarily, how might educators begin to shape humanity as a curriculum on behalf of their young and diverse learners, and how might educators respond to their student's humanity in ways that will honor their intersectional identities? Studying language diversity helps concretize some essential understandings in response to this inquiry, thereby empowering educators to begin to foster not only an increasingly multicultural and robust classroom environment for their learners but also gain confidence to imagine a way forward in transforming policies that increase access and equity concerning a learner's unique linguistic identity. This way forward involves critical awareness of how policies continue to support English-only programs, proper resistance to structures that harm ELL populations, and accountability in the ways that, as an educator, many educators have knowingly and unknowingly been complicit in harmful educational practices. And yet, when marginalized learners gain access, everyone benefits. However, while there are more ELLs than ever in schools, the policy responses, by and large, contradict what US society would benefit from (Berchini, 2017; Fives & Buehl, 2014; Settlage et al., 2014).

This contradiction is dehumanizing, as the whims of politics play such a decisive role in shaping bilingual education, and the future success of so many learners is at stake. Although the evidence is that properly implementing bilingual education works for English language learners, they are being pushed into English-only programs or getting less instruction in their primary languages at the appropriate grade levels. I have several educator friends who are ESL teachers, and it takes a patient, passionate, and well-qualified individual that values each of those learners and their unique narratives. Yet even on the HS campus that is the site of this study, the ESL classes tend to lack the quality and attention that other classrooms receive.

Many English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes, especially at the secondary level, are what are known as “sheltered” English classes where both English and other subject matter are taught (Settlage et al., 2014). At SCHS, there were English-only policies, and the district rolled out a new online platform for ESL teachers. The hope is that this tool would help teachers provide ELLs with better instruction; however, there is a fear that many will continue to treat ELLs with a second thought. It doesn’t help that standardization tends to ruin many innovative and progressive school programs (Allen, 2004; Howard, 2006; Matias & Mackey, 2016).

America’s hegemonic class, usually made up of the normative white middle class, adopts and upholds policies and procedures that are not driven by those who are conversant with multicultural and bilingual education, and who prevent teachers from genuinely learning and valuing multicultural narratives, and enables teachers who are uncomfortable with topics such as racism to continue to educate diverse learners (Allen, Ricky Lee, 2004; Matias & Mackey, 2016). Consequently, educators are seeing a bland and flat standardized mode of pedagogy that continues to satisfy the powerful while it keeps English learners on the margins

(Delpit, 1995). Such a lack of awareness and attention to the cultural benefits of language diversity creates a need for resistance to the policies and practices that dehumanize learners. It is imperative that educators who understand the implications of how power dynamics can be harmful to linguistically diverse learners learn how to establish historically relevant relationships with their students and influence decisions at the school and district levels (Affolter, 2017; Bottiani et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The researcher would often wonder about the possibility that the teachers she worked with each day might be negligent to the ways that our school, like all other schools in the US, is based on perceptions of socioeconomic status and the racial and gender intersections of student's lives (Bartolome, 1994). As their teacher, the researcher had already made a concerted effort to learn the cultural backgrounds of most of her students. While searching for a student to work with for this case study, the researcher examined her assumptions and decided not to focus on an African American learner. Within this context, the researcher came to realize that much of the literature proposes; that dialogue and listening to the stories of my learners was the way forward to a better academic experience for her learners and pedagogical growth for myself (Delpit, 1995; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; McClaren, 2003).

Methodology

The research procedures included anecdotal observations, aided by the researcher's background knowledge of Kayla's story and her daily presence in my classroom. The researcher also performed an interview with her one day after school and visited her home with the permission of her parents. The researcher enjoyed having Kayla in her class for two years and was proud of her growth as a learner. Kayla is academically astute, persistent, and easy-going in the classroom. However, beyond my classroom, Kayla might have different

experiences at home and school. Therefore, the researcher sought a more holistic view of her life by seeking her parent's perspectives, so her family and I devised a plan to spend some time together at their home after school. It was an intimate and pleasant encounter, one which not only informed the researcher's teaching practice but which also proved to be personally enriching. Through this process, the researcher gathered some field notes and voice memos. The researcher asked Kayla and her family a series of questions that would inform more about her as a whole student beyond my classroom and which would help process how educators might leverage this kind of research into a more culturally responsive pedagogy. Specifically, the researcher sought out answers to the following questions:

- (1) What identities help Kayla negotiate her lived reality?
 - (2) In what ways have they been leveraged and suppressed in school?
- How can what I learn from Kayla and students like her help me build a more culturally conscious pedagogy?

To answer these research questions, the researcher collected data using a combination of interviews, observations, and background knowledge of Kayla's time as her student.

Subject Description: Kayla

During this study, Kayla, a senior in high school, is a vibrant biracial (Thai/White) and bidialectal (Thai/English) 17-year-old woman. She is Asian-American with dual citizenship and was born in Colorado. Her father is a kind-hearted and generous Caucasian man who grew up on a farm in Oklahoma, and her mother is a devout and secure Thai woman who, at 13 years old, moved from her village in Northeast Thailand to Bangkok, where she would live with her aunt and work to send money back to her parents. Kayla described that her father's upbringing taught him about respect and responsibility, while her mother's upbringing

instilled in her mother how to nurture and honor family and eldership. Kayla also shared this with the researcher over the year they spent on their alternate Tuesday and Thursday classes schedule. When asked how she felt about her experiences as an SCHS student, Kayla responded by describing how teachers usually prescribe a one size fits all model of classroom dispensation, and often do not go beyond the learning rubric. As a learner, Kayla craves interactions with her teachers that transcend the traditional narrative exchanges that many teachers often espouse. Whenever I taught a lesson that forced critical engagement, Kayla was one of those learners who constantly projected interest and encouraged me in my efforts to challenge students beyond the prescribed norms of a traditional public-school education.

Kayla has a whole social life, surrounding herself with a homogenous group of teenagers in her class, made up mostly of others who, like her, are dedicated members of the Summer Creek HS swim team. As aforementioned, during the 2017-2018 school year, Kayla was in the author's 6th period AP English Language and Composition classroom. This year, Kayla wanted the author as her teacher for her senior year and decided to enroll in the author's Family and Community Service class, nicknamed Social Action. Armed with an antiracist and anti-bias curriculum, the Social Action class provided time and space to co-create and co-learn a way out of oppressive systems; the learned consent to the hegemonic power structures that suppress creativity. In analyzing field notes, observations, and interviews with Kayla and her family, several themes emerged:

- (1) A Multiracial Identity: Kayla's identity as a multiracial student mark her overall school activities and experiences. She often refers to herself as "mixed" and is mistaken for Latina instead of Asian due to her phenotypical skin and hair colors.
- (2) Linguistic Diversity: Kayla is a linguistically diverse student; however, the Thai

language has not been reinforced at school due to a lack of bilingual instruction and awareness from teachers. Therefore she primarily speaks English everywhere and some Thai words at home.

(3) Religious Diversity: She also serves as an acolyte in the Episcopal Church and performs with a cultural dance troupe at the Thai Buddhist Temple, which she enjoys more than the Church because of the relational nature of the community Temple.

The following sections consist of the findings that emerged throughout the researcher's experiences with Kayla and her family.

Findings

Being Multiracial

When asked about her identity, Kayla refers to herself as “Wasian,” White, and Asian. Having spent the first five years of her life in Thailand, she developed a close kinship with her older sister, with whom she shared a room and played childhood games. Kayla described her early years in America through the lens of her elementary school year, which she spent in two different elementary schools. Kayla admitted to being “mean and bad in her earliest memories of elementary school, saying that she was only bad because her sister was there and she wanted to be taken to her sister. The researcher wondered whether it was because she and her sister spoke Thai, a linguistic relationship that will be discussed further in the next section. Another reason could be that she and her sister are “Wasian.”

Kayla and the researcher continued to discuss her identity further, and she shared that her upbringing was “heavily whitewashed.” When I asked what she meant by this statement, she clarified that her mom encouraged her and her sibling to be more White than Thai, a

puzzling problem for her as a young child but one that she has begun to challenge as she grows older. Kayla noted that on paper, since there is not usually a listing for “Wasian” on applications and forms, she might put other. Her mother often encouraged her to list herself as white, to which she now responds by arguing, “being Thai helps set me apart, instead of blending in, and it gives me something to be proud of.” Here it seems, White culture is seen as having more to offer than the cultural capital that Yosso describes (Yosso, 2005). She embraced her Thai heritage and shared that she is growing in confidence to assert both of her cultural identities. For Kayla, being mixed is something she owns with pride as she navigates the cultural terrains of her school and home life (McLaren, 2003).

Another factor in her life as a young woman of color is her difficulties with her outer appearance. Since Kayla does have fairer skin color, many of her school friends mistake her for white or Mexican. She described a conflict that occurred with an African-American girlfriend, who, assuming she was “all White,” made some offensive remarks about her interest in K-Pop. She found the strength and courage to confront her friend and resolve the conflict; however, she accepts this as an ongoing assertion that she has to make based on the color of her skin.

While Kayla is proud to be Thai, she felt as if her dad’s side of the family, which is predominately White, did not appreciate or encourage her Asian heritage. She felt as if this forced a wedge between herself and her family members, even describing how she “claps back” at their inquiries into how her mother influenced and raised her and her siblings. She described them as not supporting Asian-related practices and not wanting to understand. Consequently, she reported not having a good relationship with many of her White family members.

Being Multilingual

Along with a discussion on race and identity, Kayla and the researcher also spent a considerable amount of time discussing Kayla's linguistic background. She described Thai as a complex language that can be spoken formally or informally, depending on the purpose and the audience. As noted previously, Kayla mentioned that she felt more attached to her sister in American public schools, perhaps because they both relocated to America after having spent five years speaking Thai and learning in Thai schools. At home, Kayla mostly speaks English because, during her family's earliest days in the US, her mother would encourage them to speak to her in English and not Thai while attempting to gain her citizenship status. With no one else nearby to speak Thai, Kayla and her siblings forgot the language. She also described being at school with a "funny" accent and how the other children were prone to teasing.

Despite having forgotten the Thai language, Kayla did express wanting to relearn and practice Thai more often. She expressed an awareness of acknowledging and living into both sides of her cultural identity, displaying resistance to the silencing of her voice as Delpit (1995) describes. When asked how the Thai language sounds, Kayla shared several words with the researcher, including how vital intonation and pitch are for expressing different words. The researcher learned three words from Kayla: *M̂ā*- Horse; *H̄mā*- Dog; *S̄wās̄ dī*- Hello. The Thai words for Dog and Horse sound virtually the same; they are simply inflected differently. As she described and spoke these words, she also included some lessons on how certain words are used to show respect for elders or gender. Kayla also shared that while most people will ask "how are you?" as a form of greeting, for Thai people, their relationships are bound together by cuisine, so Thai people will often greet each other by saying, "have you

eaten? Yet?”

When asked about her school relationships and whether she knew many Thai students her age, she said she knew only one, a Thai student the researcher also knew and taught the previous school year. She also shared that one teacher she knew had lived in Thailand for several years and still spoke some Thai. She spoke of her classes at the Thai Buddhist Temple, where there are more Thai youths and where she can sometimes practice her Thai. She also described how regional differences in the language, for instance, her mom being from Laos, or North-East Thailand, and her friend’s parents and family is from Bangkok, which is in south Thailand, put somewhat of a strain on communication, however, that she and her friends quickly begin to realize this and make adjustments where they can. She shared that this linguistic connection helps her get along with her classmates.

Religious Diversity

Along with her multiracial identity and linguistic diversity, a significant feature of Kayla’s cultural capital is her religious diversity (Yosso, 2005). She participates in her father’s traditional episcopal expression as an acolyte in Church while simultaneously participating in the rich cultural and spiritual life and a dance troupe for teen girls at the Thai Buddhist Temple. According to her parents, both see this as vital to her upbringing and formative years, and they encourage her equally and support her as well. The researcher noticed this while visiting their home, where they sat on couches in their living room and discussed the differences between Church and Temple. For Kayla’s dad, who often travels for work, leaving for several months at a time, it is essential to have the constancy and stability of the Episcopal tradition. He described trying out different versions of the Episcopal communion, finding solace in a more conservative approach. For him, the traditional nature of the service attached

him, and he admits to wishing he had involved Kayla and her siblings in that tradition more actively. As a result of her father's absence during his time away from work, Kayla spends more time with her Temple cohort, learning and performing traditional Thai dances in colorful costumes at various festive events throughout the year, including the ultimate celebration, the Thai New Year which occurs in April.

As Kayla's mother describes, life at the Temple has a deeply embedded spirituality that differs significantly from the ordered nuances of the Episcopal Church. In this way, Kayla learns the Buddhist principles as they are lived out in the community, not as a liturgically compartmentalized set of prescriptive norms to abide by. These are why Kayla shared preferring the Temple to her time at the Church. She is thankful that she gets to participate in both places of worship so that she can begin to form her own spiritual life; however, for now, she is content identifying as an agnostic; someone who claims neither faith nor disbelief.

Implications

Kayla and the researcher were both subject to the many ways to construct knowledge and its power relations impact us (McClaren, 2003). It is clear that Kayla is acutely aware of what she realizes many of her teachers do not understand: that an educator's attitudes towards cultural diversity are potent indicators for potential learning opportunities and outcomes for diverse learners (Arias, 2019; El Ashmawi et al., 2018; Gay, 2002; Gibson, 2021; Kirkland & Gay, 2003). From her detailed comparisons of her American family to her Thai classmates, the Thai language to English, and the ways Asian culture is bound up in the life of the Thai Buddhist Temple, it is clear that Kayla brings a considerable wealth of culturally diverse assets to her life as a student.

Kayla's attempts to negotiate the linguistic borders of her own social life could benefit educators who create space and equitable access for such learners (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). What she recognizes as missing are educators who can be sounding boards, advocates, listeners, co-creators, and visionaries to empower her along her learning journey. Thankfully, Kayla is already on the path, and the researcher was able to see her through to the end of the school year when she graduated in May 2019. However, the call to action is valid for educators, who may be curious enough to ask, build relationships, and allow what they learn from their students to penetrate their pedagogy in ways that can disrupt the status quo and dominant power systems.

Discussion

Perhaps the best place to begin for educators is by listening to their learners. As Delpit (1995) notes, educators must keep the perspective that people are the experts of their own lived experiences. Teachers have the chance to initiate this dialogue and seek the perspectives of students (Delpit, 1995). As educators dialogue, they have the opportunity to listen intently. As Kayla so poignantly asserted, "paying attention long enough" enables educators to transform diversity that is known and recognized into a pedagogical advantage. Teachers can learn that even the surface-level simple examples, such as Kayla's love for Korean boy bands, also known as K-Pop, which she shared with the researcher during an attempt to reprimand her for off-task behavior during an AP English class, reveal substantial "funds of knowledge" and leverage those to forge a prosperous and invested relationship that founded on the generative spirit of what it means to be fully human (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

It has become increasingly clear that teachers have many opportunities to form some plan to address the student's cultural identity, and not only that, to allow what they learn to

change them from within as humans. Educators can allow the beautiful differences of each learner to change their teaching methods (Howard, 2006). Considering Racial diversity in how culturally relevant pedagogy is enacted (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). In practice, for example, educators can do this by creating problem posing learning alongside their students and allowing them to personalize their learning by developing critically how their culture impacts their everyday lives as students. By bringing it to the SCHS context, and inviting other educators to attend and volunteer, the researcher, invited educators to a new way to listen to and perceive their students, as well as giving students an academic outlet in which to express both their concrete and abstract lived experiences.

The researcher's original inquiry helped her realize how she has been subject to policies that create barriers for students and educators alike. In Bobbi Harro's model of liberation, the researcher rests somewhere between coalescing and creating change (Harro, 2013). One would think that the difficult circumstances at SCHS and KHS that school year would cause an educator to focus solely on efficient standardization of the curriculum, instruction, and assessments, given the pressures of time constraints and district oversight. In the case of the researcher's SCHS colleagues, this is how they survived the duration of having a split schedule. However, the researcher could not ignore the reality that the presence of Kingwood High School had made the racial divide within the district even more prominent, and the researcher felt she would be doing her students a disservice not to address it through teaching practice as their teacher openly. The researcher knew she would have to double her efforts to get to know her learners and provide a dynamic and rigorous culturally responsive learning environment.

Conclusion

Educators can interrogate and wield our agency in ways that promote attention to the history of the policies they are obligated to adhere to. Building up an awareness that impacts an educator's ability to listen critically adds nuance to their perceptions of their learner's lived experiences and increases their self-evaluation. Educators can consistently orient their minds and hearts away from discriminatory and racist practices that keep English learners fighting on the margins. If nothing else, an educator can be willing to stand on the margins alongside them until they can make positive and long-lasting changes.

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