

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE ROLE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
AND CHILD SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES IN EARLY HEAD START SETTINGS

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By TONYA L. THOMAS
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THE ROLE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
AND CHILD SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES IN EARLY HEAD START SETTING

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Kyong-Ah Kwon, Chair

Dr. Vickie Lake

Dr. Diane Horm

Dr. Libby Ethridge

Dr. Timothy Ford

DEDICATION

“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” James 5:11b

This is dedicated to my husband, Mark, and son, Joshuwa, for their love and support during this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	8
Background and Research Problem.....	8
Research Purpose.....	10
Research Questions.....	10
Organization of the Study.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	12
Definition of Terms.....	14
Conceptual Framework.....	15
Bio-ecological Model.....	16
Attachment Theory.....	17
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
Conceptual Framework.....	20
Background.....	23
Culturally Responsive Practices and Beliefs in Infant and Toddler Care	34
The Role of Culturally Responsive Practices in Family Engagement and Child Outcomes.....	38
Culturally Responsive Practices and Child Outcomes	42
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	45
Research Questions.....	45
Research Design.....	46
Participants.....	46
Procedures.....	49

Measures.....	50
Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcomes Expectancy.....	50
Family and Provider Teacher Relationship Quality.....	51
Devereux Early Childhood Assessment.....	52
Teacher and Parent Interviews.....	53
Ethical Considerations.....	54
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS.....	59
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	87
LIMITATIONS	95
IMPLICATIONS	96
CONCLUSION.....	97
REFERENCES.....	101
APPENDIX.....	109
Appendix A.....	109
Appendix B.....	111
Appendix C.....	112
Appendix D.....	113
Appendix E.....	114
Appendix F.....	115
Appendix G.....	116
Appendix H.....	117
Appendix I.....	118
Appendix J.....	119

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. Demographics of Parent and Teacher Participants.....	51
TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures.....	53
TABLE 3. Correlation Table of Study Variables.....	54
TABLE 4. Correlation Table of Study Variable by Gender.....	55
TABLE 5. Results of Structural Equation Modeling: Culture.....	55
TABLE 6. Model Fit Statistics Summary.....	57
TABLE 6. Results of Structural Equations Modeling: Cultural Responsiveness.....	57
TABLE 7. Results of Structural Equations Modeling: Interactions.....	58
TABLE 8. Model Fit Statistics Summary.....	58
TABLE 9 Results of the Mediation Model: Practices.....	59
TABLE 10. Model Fit Statistics Summary.....	59
TABLE 11. Overarching Teacher Themes.....	58
TABLE 12. Overarching Parent Themes.....	59

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Culturally Responsive Classroom.....	23
Figure 2. Family Engagement Mediation Model.....	46
Figure 3. Structural Equation Model Predicting Child Outcomes: Cultural.....	69
Figure 4. Structural Equation Model Predicting Child Outcomes: Interaction.....	70
Figure 5. Structural Equation Model Predicting Child Outcomes: Practices.....	71

Abstract

Early childhood classrooms have seen a dramatic rise and demographic changes in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations. In Early Head Start (EHS) center-based classrooms, at least 67% of EHS families are identified as culturally diverse (Office of Head Start, 2018). It is imperative that EHS teachers understand how to provide developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive and relevant practices for children and their families. Although research regarding culturally responsive practices (CRP) is sparse, this study will examine how CRP implementation influences family engagement practices and child outcomes, specifically focusing on social and emotional outcomes, in EHS infant and toddler classrooms. The analysis of the literature suggests that most research focused on CRP implementation relied heavily on teachers' self-reporting. However, this study is significant because teachers' and parents' perceptions about CRP implementation, family engagement, and child outcomes were explored and analyzed.

Keywords: Attachment theory, Bio-ecological model, child outcomes, culture, culturally responsive practices, Early Head Start, family engagement, infants and toddlers, social and emotional development

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there has been an increase in culturally diverse populations in US schools. The US Census Bureau (2018) reports that the changing racial and cultural makeup can be seen first with the number of culturally diverse children attending various educational settings. Reports show that ethnically diverse children under 18 years are projected to double in size from 5% to 11% by 2060. With the rise of culturally diverse children attending various educational institutions, including early care and education (ECE) settings, research has increased to address the implementation of curriculum and teaching strategies that are culturally sensitive as well as relate to the child's experiences (Durdan et al., 2015). In ECE settings, teachers have been challenged to implement responsive, engaging, and culturally sensitive learning experiences that build on children's unique cultural backgrounds (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009).

As such, implementing engaging, high-quality, and culturally responsive learning activities for diverse children has recently become the focus of Early Head Start (EHS) staff. Since its inception, EHS has aimed to narrow the impact of educational inequalities while ensuring more positive outcomes for infants and toddlers from low-income families (Love et al., 2011). One of the principles outlined in Head Start and Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) states that each child brings skills, talents, abilities, and strengths embedded in her family's culture, background, and beliefs (Office of Head Start, 2015).

For the 2022-23 school year, families representing 36% of Hispanics, 29% of African Americans, 22% of Whites, 13% of bi-racial and multi-racial identified themselves as culturally diverse in EHS programs (Office of Head Start, 2024). Considering the diverse population shows why implementing culturally responsive practices (CRP) into the classroom environment is

critical to support culturally diverse children as they acquire skills, behaviors, and knowledge to have a successful school experience throughout life (Gay, 2018; Office of Head Start, 2015). CRP implementation promotes a strength-based approach that embraces ongoing collaborations with and interactions between teaching staff and families (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018)

As two prominent scholars, Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2018) noted, CRP is a pedagogy that utilizes the cultural knowledge, background experiences, and performance abilities of ethnically diverse children and their families to ensure that learning opportunities are most relevant and effective for them. Educational institutions have seen an increase in empirical studies that focus on teachers' implementation of CRP.

However, the existing studies on CRP implementation focus primarily on preschool and upper elementary through high school (Byrd, 2016). There are few studies that address teachers' implementation of CRP in the classroom for low-income infants and toddlers and their families (Gichuru et al., 2015).

In addition, research studies are still sparse that examine how CRP implementation is associated with infant and toddler social-emotional abilities as well as family engagement practices. For the purposes of this study, CRP will be defined as an approach to instructional practices and children's learning that uses the families' cultural background, prior family knowledge, and the child's individual learning preferences to create culturally appropriate classroom environments and engaging activities (Siwatu, 2007). In this research, the level of family engagement relied on parents' perspectives on how teachers chose to engage and involve families in various forms. For this study, family engagement will be defined as parents' perceptions about teachers' practices on family engagement.

Research Purpose

To address the limitations in the literature, the purpose of this research is to present various insights from ECE teachers and parents of infants and toddlers in EHS settings. Specifically, teachers' culturally responsive teaching practices and the association with family engagement practices and child outcomes will be examined. In addition, teachers' views about culture, being culturally responsive in the classroom setting, collaboration between teacher and parent, and successes and challenges encountered that pertain to CRP implementation will be shared in this research. The study explores how EHS teachers support the development of infants and toddlers while providing classroom experiences that recognize each child's cultural experiences. This research also explores how EHS teachers utilize families' cultural backgrounds and beliefs while incorporating high-quality teaching methods that are developmentally appropriate and foster positive child outcomes in young children.

Research Questions

To meet the research purpose, this study seeks to use quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the following questions:

RQ 1. Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of parents' perception of teachers' culturally responsive practices for infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 2. Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of social and emotional outcomes of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 3. Do parents' perceptions of teachers' culturally responsive practices mediate the association between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and social and emotional child development for parents of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 4. What beliefs do teachers of infants and toddlers demonstrate about the implementation of cultural responsiveness in EHS classroom settings?

RQ 5? What are the parents of infants and toddlers' perceptions about teachers' implementation of culturally responsive practices in EHS classroom settings?

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is separated into five chapters which includes the Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion, and Conclusion sections. The first chapter introduces and provides an overview of the research that was investigated. The Introduction chapter focuses on the background of the research and problem statement, research purpose, research questions, significance of the research, conceptual framework, and pertinent definitions of key terms used throughout the research.

Chapter two looks at the literature related to the study. First culturally responsive practices and beliefs in infant and toddler care will be explored. Next, the role of culturally responsive practices in family engagement, which is based on parents' perceptions will be explored. Then, the next section will focus on CRP and positive child outcomes as well as the potential mediational role of family engagement.

Chapter three gives a description of the research's methodology. This study used a mixed methods research design consisting of a collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used for this research study. This design included connecting and analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data that is collected (Creswell, 2014). Teacher and parent questionnaires will be collected for quantitative data analysis which will be further explained and understood by the collection of qualitative data. This design allowed the researcher to understand teachers' and

parents' perceptions of CRP implementation in EHS infant and toddler classrooms through surveys and individual interview sessions.

Chapter four presents and interprets the findings that emerged from the data analysis regarding answers given about teachers' and parents' perceptions of implementation of CRP in EHS infant and toddler classrooms, how CRP influences family engagement practices, and how CRP influences children's social and emotional outcomes. The findings were organized and answered by result questions.

Chapter five is organized and discussed by research questions within the context of the larger body of literature. This is followed by discussions about the study's limitations and implications for future research.

Significance of the Study

Many factors such as teacher-child relationships, level of student ability, and student behaviors have been used to explain the widening school readiness gap of young children. However, other contexts such as culture and culturally responsive teaching practices need to be considered to provide a more comprehensive answer to explain poor academic performance (Cramer et al., 2014). One of the goals of EHS programs is to narrow the impact of educational inequalities and ensure more positive outcomes for disadvantaged, culturally diverse young children (Office of Head Start, 2015). Since many children of diverse cultures attend EHS programs, it becomes crucial for EHS teachers to provide developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching practices for infants and toddlers in the classroom setting.

The present study is significant because it seeks to address the gaps in literature that examines the implementation of culturally appropriate and responsive activities in EHS infant and toddler classroom settings. First, CRP studies that focus on instructional practices of teachers

of low-income infants and toddlers and their families are sparse and far fewer than studies conducted in upper elementary and secondary schools (Debnam et al., 2015; Gichuru et al., 2015). It is essential that research regarding CRP is conducted in early childhood settings because the early experiences that affect developmental outcomes of infants and toddlers, such as social and emotional competence, are a critical component of school readiness (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018; Gay, 2018). In addition, scant research has been conducted in EHS settings to show how a potential mediational role of parent's perception about teachers' practice on family engagement has with teachers' implementation of CRP and positive social and emotional outcomes for infants and toddlers. Second, research findings have shown that CRP implementation can be beneficial as well as support developmental skills, such as social and emotional competence skills, in infants and toddlers (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Third, given that CPR studies rely heavily upon teachers' self-reporting and teacher interviews, research studies leave out the perceptions and beliefs that parents have about CRP implementation in the classroom (Cruz et al., 2019; van As et al., 2020). Thus, it is pertinent to hear about and examine the perceptions of teachers and parents simultaneously to get a better understanding of their perceptions about how the role CRP implementation has on child outcomes.

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions of terms will be used in this study:

Attachment Theory: a theory that was developed by John Bowlby, who proposed that the mother or caregiver is used as a secure base for the child to explore her environment. Later, Mary Ainsworth expanded the theory to include three subgroups of attachment-secure, anxious-avoidant, and anxious-resistant.

Bio-ecological Model: theory first developed by Uri Bronfenbrenner who proposed that a child's development is influenced by a complex system of relationships that are impacted by enduring and persistent forms of interactions, which are called proximal processes, in the immediate environment that influences the developmental processes over a period. The proximal processes vary and affect individuals differently, so the focus needs to be on the person, context, and developmental outcomes to understand the effect of the proximal processes.

Child Outcomes: measurable results used to determine the growth of a child's development and learning.

Culture: the knowledge, rules, traditions, values, and beliefs shared commonly within groups of people through spoken language, behaviors, and practices (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). Culture influences every facet of human development. Young children acquire cultural behaviors and norms through repeated daily interactions with the people around them while maturing.

Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP): instructional strategies and practices implemented in the classroom to effectively teach culturally diverse children.

Early Head Start (EHS): federally funded US early childhood programs that serve low-income infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. The program offers intensive and comprehensive resources that are designed to promote the development of young children and their families.

Family Engagement: collaboration between families and center staff to support children's educational experiences and foster school readiness skills in young children.

Infants and Toddlers: typically defined as children from birth to thirty-six months.

Social and Emotional Development: emergent domains in child development that encompass skills such as understanding, experiencing, expressing, and managing emotions as well as the development of meaningful relationships with others.

Conceptual Framework

Since young children are naturally inclined to use their cultural knowledge to explore and learn about the world around them, there is a growing need for early childhood educators to be culturally responsive in the classroom (Durden et al., 2014; van As et al., 2020). Gay (2018) asserted that effective teaching begins when ecological factors such as cultural backgrounds, family experiences, and ethnic identities are included in the design of instructional practices and then implemented in classroom activities and experiences. Bio-ecological and attachment theories show how significant and relevant it is to focus on the child's immediate relationships and proximal processes, partnerships with the child's family, understanding of the child and the family's cultural upbringings and values, and other important environmental factors when planning for and designing effective culturally responsive instructional teaching practices in the classroom. For this reason, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (1977, 2006) and Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1982, 1989) attachment theory will serve as the conceptual framework for the current study.

Bio-ecological Model

Implementation of CRP is most effective when ecological factors such as children's characteristics, their prior experiences and cultural backgrounds, and relationships with families are considered (Dallavis, 2011). The core of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model consists of four properties which are process, person, context, and time. The four properties (PPCT) examine the proximal processes of interactions (process), the infant or toddler (person), the

environment and situation in which the interactions occur (context), and the allotted period (time) over which the proximal processes take place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). PPCT operates within nested systems, which are known as *microsystem* composed of the immediate family and teachers, the *mesosystem* composed of the connections and interactions between parents and the child's teacher, the *exosystem* composed of parents' workplace and community, *macrosystem* composed of the cultural values and customs, and the *chronosystem* composed of time as it relates to the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Swick & Williams, 2006). The focus of this study will center on the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem, specifically focusing on children and families' cultural values, and norms.

In ECE environments, parents and teachers are the persons who are most proximal or closest to infants and toddlers as the microsystem. The interconnections in the mesosystem between the various segments of the young child's life, such as family, ECE settings, peer groups, and neighborhoods are important to the child's developmental processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and customs. During the interactions between the two proximal subsystems for infants and toddlers, cultural beliefs of parents and teachers govern their childcare practices and habits. Direct interactions with parents give teachers information about culture-specific aspects of behavior that will help develop children's social-emotional competence (Mendez et al., 2002). In addition, understanding the specific parenting practices of families who live in poverty is critical because of the racial, ethnic, and cultural discontinuities that exist between those families and schools that are not conducive to supporting and maximizing child development and learning (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016).

Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory offers a framework for understanding why and how intimate and secure relationships with primary caregivers are crucial for cognitive, physical, mental, language, and social and emotional development in children. Taken together with the bioecological theory, attachment theory supports the understanding that available and responsive care from a person who has formed a close relationship with the developing child helps shape the child's internal working model for later behaviors within social interactions at home and school (Bowlby, 1982).

One premise of Bowlby's attachment theory is that infants have a behavioral system that relies heavily on close proximity to the caregiver (Wallach & Caulfield, 1998). Additionally, Bowlby's attachment theory has also been used to understand how human behavior evolves during the first years of life and in specific social contexts such as at home and school (Bretherton, 1992). During the early years, close and secure relationships allow infants and toddlers to develop patterns of their behaviors on meaningful parental practices that are shaped by cultural beliefs and customs (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bagdi & Vacca, 2006; Wallach & Caulfield, 1998).

These secure attachment relationships and responsive caregiving can also be seen and implemented in the ECE settings. When infants and toddlers enter an ECE setting, they need to build secure attachment relationships with their teachers for responsive and nurturing care. As they develop relationships with children and parents, teachers are able to incorporate cultural experiences in the classroom that will help construct an internal working model to support an infant or toddler's positive view of self (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), which is one predictor of social and emotional development and early learning success (Bagdi & Vacca, 2006).

In order to capture and understand the developmental processes, experiences, and outcomes of culturally diverse children in early childhood settings, Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological theory and Attachment theory will be utilized as the conceptual framework for this research. As such, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory offers a systematic framework for understanding the interactions that occur between a developing child and her environment at various levels (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model highlights the interactions, relationships, contexts, and characteristics that influence children's growth and behavior over time. Additionally, bio ecological theory provides a framework that is helpful in designing responsive teaching strategies and learning materials that meet the learning needs of culturally diverse children (Smith, 2011). With the PPCT construct, bio-ecological theory later evolved to consider the significance of the developing child and her interactions with the environment. Since social and cultural patterns of behaviors are learned through interactions with primary caregivers, PPCT will help teachers understand how to implement CRT in the early childhood setting (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; Nieto, 2010).

As a supporting concept to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, Bowlby's attachment theory is a key component to understanding the importance of early relationships with primary caregivers and the significance in shaping a developing child's emotional progression (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theory emphasized the importance of early bonds of the developing children with primary caregivers and how early experiences influenced later relationships with others (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Both Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological and attachment theory highlight the importance of close connections with caregivers in fostering positive outcomes for the developing child. Using Bronfenbrenner's (2006) bio-ecological model along with PPCT and Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory will show how teachers develop meaningful, secure

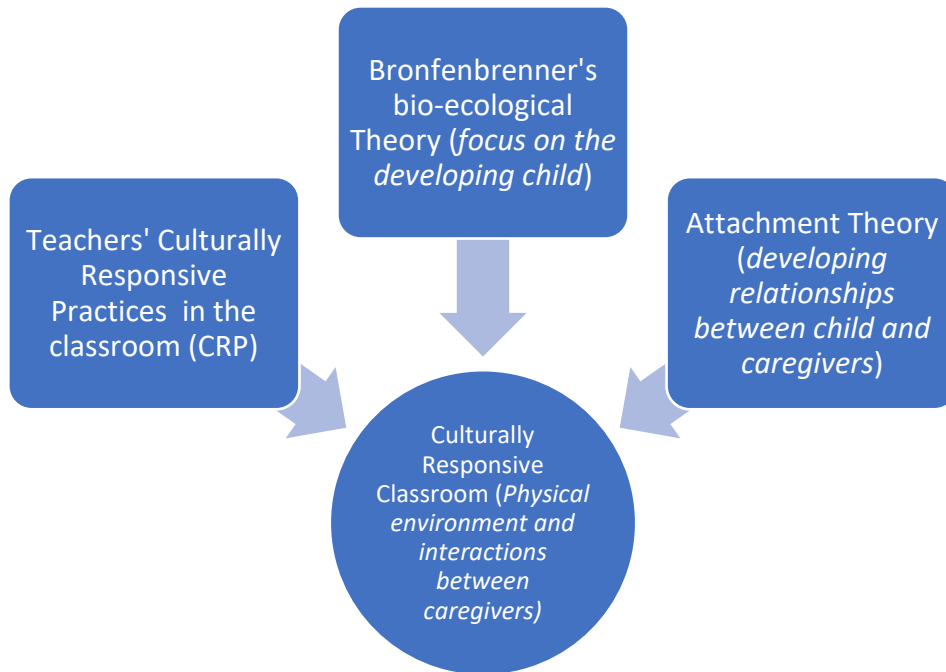
attachments with the child and family while implementing child-centered, culturally responsive approaches in the EHS setting.

To connect bio-ecological and attachment theories with high-quality learning and best teaching practices in EHS classrooms, CRP serves as a relevant and responsive pedagogy for supporting children with culturally diverse backgrounds and experiences. CRP is fashioned in an ecological context given that the components of CRP require teachers to consider various contexts of children's lives as a significant resource for learning and development (Billen & Billen, 2022). Strategies essential to the implementation of CRP include teachers developing relationships with children and families, demonstrating high expectations for learning, valuing social and emotional development, creating a learning environment that implements developmentally appropriate instruction and relational teaching, and establishing positive home to school partnerships (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). CRP is based on the belief that learning takes place when children have classroom activities that align with their lived experiences and backgrounds (Alaca & Pyle, 2018).

Considering the enormous teaching challenges at hand for early childhood teachers of culturally diverse children, the two theories work together to connect curriculum and teaching practices to children's daily lives, cultural backgrounds, and ensure that families are engaged in and involved with their children's educational growth and development (Muniz, 2020). Figure 1 is a visualization of how Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, attachment theory, and CRP are interconnected to create a culturally responsive classroom.

Figure 1

Culturally Responsive Classroom



Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) contended that multiple ecologies, which are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem, lie in distinct nested systems, which are interconnected and interact with one another, that exist around the individual child and are necessary for development. Each system gives further understanding about how children develop and are viewed within cultural and social contexts. For example, the cultural patterns and behaviors that the child learns at home influence how she interacts with teachers and peers at school. The patterns of beliefs and values can impact the child's effort, persistence, participation, interest, and engagement within the various contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Given that attention should be focused on the characteristics of the developing child when planning activities and experiences, teachers need to be more attentive to the instructional practices implemented in the classroom (Office of Head Start, 2015). With the bio-ecological model, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) described *person* characteristics of the developing child which affect the way proximal process interactions are shaped in a child's life. The three

types of person characteristics include *force*, *resources*, and *demand* traits. As a person with force characteristics, the child is curious, self-sufficient, and persistent. A child with disruptive force characteristics is seen as impulsive, explosive, distractible, and may resort to aggression and violence. A child who is considered to have disruptive force characteristics will have difficulty engaging in proximal processes that require more complex reciprocal interactions with others (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Resource characteristics describe the abilities, experiences, knowledge, and skills that infants and children bring to continue proximal processes over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Xia et al., 2020). Resource traits are sometimes developmental assets and other times it can limit or disrupt functions of development such as when a young child has physical handicaps, and severe illnesses. Demand characteristics are visible features that affect development by encouraging or discouraging proximal processes from occurring with others. For example, children may be approached differently by their teachers depending on appearances. For some cultures, a young girl may be discouraged to participate in certain activities just by merely being a female (Xia et al., 2020).

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, Attachment theory examines the inner workings of relationships that develop from the interactions between children and those who are closest in proximity to them (Bretherton, 1992; Cortazar & Herreros, 2010; Wallach & Caulfield, 1998). The attachment involves the real-life experiences of daily connections between an infant and a primary caregiver, who is usually the mother or teacher. According to Bowlby's stages of attachment development, infants and toddlers have various attachment behaviors or signals such as crying, vocalizing, cooing, imitating, smiling, and clinging to convey needs, wants, and desires (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1984). A secure attachment develops

between the primary caregiver and the child when the primary caregiver shows sensitivity towards the infant's and toddler's signals. Thus, in accordance with Attachment theory, a reciprocal relationship is formed between the primary caregiver and the young child (Bowlby, 1984).

With secure attachments, young children sense comfort and reassuring support and thus develop an internal working model and belief of worthiness of care. In an early childhood setting such as EHS, a secure attachment with a teacher would offer children a predictable, consistent, and stable environment with responsive care (Cortazar & Herreros, 2010). In a responsive classroom setting, children's emotional needs are recognized and met which has a long-lasting influence on learning skills to regulate emotions (Crouch, 2015).

Contrarily, when caregiving presents challenges between the young child, family, and teacher then insecure attachments occur and intense anxiety and unhappiness are the behaviors that are exhibited (Bretherton, 1992; Gross, 2019). When caregivers consistently reject signals of comfort and exploration, infants and toddlers are likely to construct an internal working model that represents self as unworthy or incompetent. Insecure attachments translate into a negative impact on emotional regulation which can affect school readiness skills (Crouch, 2015).

To expand on the bio-ecological theory about child identity, attachment theory proposed that young children show different characteristics or feelings with various attachment styles (Peluso et al., 2004). Children who are securely attached to their caregivers will display feelings of intimacy, emotional security, and physical safety. Secure attachments provided for more positive interactions and less anxiety for young children when separated from their primary caregivers. With this type of character trait from the child, teachers and parents feel comfortable working collaboratively to support developmental needs. In EHS settings, teachers who actively

seek to build secure relationships with culturally diverse families need to be aware of different strategies of caregiving across various cultures. Many times, there are tremendous cultural and contextual variations between parenting behaviors and the caregiving behaviors of others closest to young children (Keller, 2012). For example, parents and teachers may respond differently to a crying infant with varying caregiving methods because of contrasts of cultural beliefs and norms. Thus, when teachers are able to spend more time with children as well as affirm and integrate the family's cultural norms and values as it relates to childrearing, secure attachments are formed between child and teacher, which are necessary for other key school readiness skills (Horn et al., 2018). A secure attachment with a responsive and sensitive teacher helps increase trust for parents and strengthens the parent-teacher partnership that is needed for children's optimal development, particularly for culturally diverse children living in low-income environments (Murray, 2009).

However, insecure attachments can foster unmet emotional needs, less physical contact with primary caregivers, and use disconnection or avoidance from others as a defense mechanism (Peluso et al., 2004). Children with insecure attachments display a lack of willingness to explore, while increasing reckless behaviors. With this type of character trait, the home to school relationship may be less positive along with having negative interactions.

The Power of Proximal Processes

Although a complex theory, Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological approach described several intricate facets within the nested systems where child development is impacted by four components that are interconnected and described as the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Morales-Murillo & Fernandez-Valero, 2020). Within Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems, the PPCT components are interdependent, interactive,

and interrelated (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In human development, PPCT can be described as the person (child) who has a variety of processes (interactions) with those that are closest to her in various contexts (settings and environments) over time that impact child developmental outcomes. In this case, an example would be cultural values and beliefs that influence the specific processes that occur during the interactions between the child, parent, and teachers (Miller, 2016).

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the proximal process, the core of the PPCT model, is considered the primary engine or foundation of development that operates over time. Proximal processes involve the interactions between the developing child and with people, objects, and symbols. Over time, the interactions with the child should become more complex and exchanges should be reciprocal (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Xia et al., 2020). Examples of ongoing modes of interactions involve feeding or providing comfort to a young child, playing with a toddler, and reading to an infant (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In EHS settings, proximal processes are significant for developing infants and toddlers because it is through engaging activities, interactions, and relationships that individuals make sense of the world surrounding them. The uniqueness of the teacher-child relationship in EHS settings is more intimate because of the constant opportunities of feeding, soothing, and diapering those in the early learning setting (Mortensen & Barnett, 2015).

In EHS settings, proximal processes are significant for developing infant-toddlers because it is through engaging activities, interactions, and relationships that individuals make sense of the world surrounding them. Young (2012) stated that children's developing skills cannot be addressed without considering the influences of culture, customs, and values. Over time, cultural nuances are relayed through interactions with young children. Likewise, according

to Bowlby's stages of attachment development, infant toddlers use several attachment behaviors, such as crying and smiling to seek proximity to and elicit care from their attachment figure (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1984; Bretherton, 1992; Gross, 2019). When the primary caregiver shows sensitivity to the infant toddler's signals, then a secure attachment develops between the young child and the caregiver. Similar to Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, secure attachments also are dependent on the characteristics and personalities of the child and caregiver (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For young children, secure attachments correlated with sensitivity, comfort, and reassurance support development of the internal working model and the belief that they are worthy of care.

Conversely, when interactions between infant toddlers and caregivers result in conflicts, then insecure attachments occur and intense anxiety and unhappiness are exhibited behaviors (Bretherton, 1992; Gross, 2019). When caregivers frequently reject signals for comfort or exploration, young children are likely to construct an internal working model that represents self as unworthy or incompetent. Infant toddlers who display behaviors that show resistance, distrust, distress, and unpredictable moods have often alerted them by the caregiver's behaviors (Gross, 2019). Given that an increasing number of young children are spending more time away from their parents and in non-parental care, it is critical that children develop secure attachments with caregivers who are outside of the home.

With CRP, teachers are in close proximity to children to ensure that learning is engaging and relational as well as utilizing the children's culture to improve student outcomes (Shivers et al., 2011). CRP is a model that is child centered that infuses children's home lives and considers culture as an asset of learning (Byrd, 2016) as well as their unique individual identity (Billen & Billen, 2022). Similar to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, individual identities are

pertinent aspects of development. For older children, culturally responsive teachers rely on student input to create assignments and projects. In the case of EHS settings, teachers who are culturally responsive will seek parents' input into various classroom activities because of the age of the child. Harmon (2012) reported that teachers who engaged in CRP had a feeling of kinship or connection with their students. To create classroom activities for culturally diverse children, teachers will need to build relationships and directly interact with families and children to understand their cultural values and norms.

The Crux of Context

In the bio-ecological model, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) draw attention to the immediate and remote environmental influences on young children's lives. As noted in Proposition II, both person and context have an indirect effect on the proximal processes that children need for development. For young children, the context within which development occurs is the family where social standards and norms are internalized and displayed (Hayes et al., 2017). As co-founder of HS, Bronfenbrenner was a strong proponent of consistent and strong contact and mutual support between two different contexts of home and school environments. A positive partnership between home and school contexts is beneficial for families from diverse cultural backgrounds. With a collaborative partnership, culturally diverse families can share information about and help shape their child's educational goals (Hayes et al., 2017).

With Attachment theory, development predominantly occurs within the context of family. According to the Attachment theory, the family structure is the context in which the child develops. Positive interactions between mother, as well as other adults, and child allows the child to feel safe to develop and grow (Shirvanian & Michael, 2017). Within the context of family relationships, children incorporate cultural values and norms. However, many young children do

not spend time with their families during the day but attend early childcare settings. This point draws attention to the importance of non-parental caregivers and the relationships that develop with families and teachers (Hayes et al., 2017). Whether in family or school context, young children are cared for in relational systems that are composed of different people with various cultural backgrounds and experiences (Keller, 2022).

With CRP, culturally responsive teachers promote learning environments that are caring, affirming, and inclusive. Further examination of CRP from the context of the classroom will shift the teacher's mindset from deficit perspective to a strength-based perspective. For example, teachers will not see themselves as the expert but as a learner of families' cultural norms and values (Billen & Billen, 2022; Early Head Start Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). When teachers implement CRP, the different ways learners might experience the classroom environment is taken into consideration as they help children value their own and others' cultural behaviors and norms (Muniz, 2020). In a CRP classroom, teachers believe that learners are capable of meeting high academic standards if given the proper support and resources. With CRP, a space is created in the classroom where culture is moved into the microsystem to include pertinent components of a child's life (Billen & Billen, 2022).

The Role of Time and Place

As time continues and children grow older, proximal processes, influenced by the characteristics of the developing person as well as the context, must also become more challenging and complex (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2016). In other words, given that infant-toddlers are heavily dependent on their primary caregivers, particularly in the EHS setting, teachers fulfill an important role by providing challenging activities to help young children become increasingly competent with various developmental skills over time. It is

important to note that the activities and interactions implemented by the teacher are dependent on the context as well as the characteristics and personality of the developing child.

Time is an important component of the PPCT model and involves three types including microtime, mesotime, and macrotime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Each time component represents periods during the life of the developing child. Microtime refers to what is occurring and the frequency of the occurrence during different periods of proximal processes for the developing child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Sirag & Huang, 2020). Mesotime refers to how the proximal process occurs over days, weeks, and months. Microtime involves how the experiences and proximal processes occur over a longer period of time that are within and across generations (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Koller et al., 2020). In an EHS setting, microtime might manifest in the child's engagement in the various manipulatives or other classroom activities. For the same child in EHS, mesotime might refer to the child transitioning to a HS classroom and macrotime would involve generational experiences such as the child and her family having a history of homelessness (Koller et al., 2020).

With attachment theory, the child will develop an internal working model that will shape behavior and relationships with others over time (Peluso et al., 2004). The consistency of a loving, caring, and committed caregiver allows the child to evolve through developmental stages (Crouch, 2015). Over time, young children who have secure relationships respond positively and are willing to explore new settings without the caregiver's help (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989).

Conclusion

As culturally diverse populations increase, it is imperative that educators seek ways to meet the educational needs of all young learners. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (1977, 2006) and Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1982, 1989) attachment theory serve as the conceptual

frameworks for the current study. With culturally diverse children, the goal is to foster the values, beliefs, and norms of various cultures in the classroom rather than occasionally relating activities of the various cultures (Billen & Billen, 2022). In the classroom, teachers are able to question and express reservations about the traditional curriculum.

In ECE settings, developmental and learning challenges occur that are associated with children of culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Mann, 2010). Challenges, such as those addressing culturally diverse children's learning and interaction styles as well as a family's communication style, may cause contention and resistance from teachers who may not understand the role that culture plays in planning instructional techniques (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2018). Bio-ecological and attachment theory show how significant and relevant it is to focus on the child's immediate relationships and proximal processes, partnerships with the child's family, understanding of the child and the family's cultural upbringings and values, and other important environmental factors when planning for effective instructional teaching practices in the classroom.

The use of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model and attachment theory is essential for this study. Drawing upon the bio-ecological model provides a path for understanding the contexts in which young children learn and develop. This includes recognizing that the implementation of high-quality teaching practices, such as CRP implementation, is a way to focus on the developing child and to utilize the families' cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and norms to foster positive child outcomes. Both the bio-ecological model and attachment theory consider the people, such as family and teachers, who are closest to the developing child. The study focused on understanding the perspectives of teachers and what is utilized in the classroom to support culturally diverse children. Since parents are key to the developing child, their

perspectives helped to identify more specific social and cultural features that would ultimately affect the processes that occur within the child's immediate environment. Although attachment theory does not directly address CRP, the theory focuses on teachers' sensitivity and responsiveness and secure attachments between teacher and child. Attachment theory also explains how teaching practices specifically tailored to culturally diverse children, such as CRP, could possibly result in positive social-emotional outcomes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review will focus on the literature related to culturally responsive practices in infant and toddler classrooms and the role of culturally responsive practices in family engagement and child outcomes. Teachers' beliefs about CRP will be explored as well as teachers' implementation of practices for culturally diverse children. Last, attention is given to CRP and its influence on child outcomes as well as the potential mediational role of parents' perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in Infant and Toddler Classrooms

Infants and toddlers require distinct and individualized attention because the first three years are the most critical and vulnerable developmental period (Copple et al., 2013). The first few years of life is a time where development and learning occur in multiple contexts. During this unique period for infants and toddlers, developmental domains such as physical, cognitive, and social-emotional skills are fundamental for growth and progression (Horn et al., 2016). Many young children who come from racial, ethnic, and linguistically diverse backgrounds encounter negative life experiences, have delays with development, and have more challenges engaging in practices and classroom activities that are different from those that they are more familiar with at home than their White peers (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). However, in a culturally responsive classroom environment, such as in high-quality EHS programs that support culturally diverse children, teachers establish strong and positive relationships with parents so that families can speak and share information about their culture, values, and norms (Gichuru et al., 2015). Subsequently, CRP implementation addresses the need to implement high-quality instructional practices for culturally diverse infants and

toddlers in EHS classrooms that would foster school readiness skills, such as social-emotional competencies.

Culturally Responsive Practices and Beliefs in Infant and Toddler Care

Early childhood teachers are suited to help children from ethnically and culturally diverse children navigate learning experiences in the classroom that may conflict with the family's norms and values experienced at home. Addressing the challenges that culturally diverse young children and their families may encounter can be accomplished with caring and responsive teachers who implement CRP in the ECE setting (Muniz, 2020).

Although implementing CRP with infants, toddlers, and their families can be challenging, culturally responsive educators need the tools and support to implement teaching practices that are guided by cultural contexts and are relatable to the learner (Savage et al., 2011). Knowledge about children's cultural strengths and assets will help teachers design and implement high-quality and culturally relevant instructional strategies in the classroom setting (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018; Saracho & Hancock, 2007). Then, teachers will be better prepared to support culturally diverse children with an individualized, culturally sensitive educational program (Gay, 2018).

For young learners, a culturally sensitive and responsive classroom is multidimensional and comprehensive with indicators that include warm and nurturing interactions and relationships that occur throughout the day between teachers, children, and families; materials and activities that are created with the child's culture in mind; teaching practices responsive to the cultural backgrounds of culturally diverse children; and meaningful family engagement that promote high-quality experiences for children (Bennett et al., 2018; Gichuru et al., 2015; Kidd et al., 2008).

Although the focus of CRP implementation has been on reflecting the cultural diversity of children within the physical environment, consideration has been given to how process qualities are reflected in CRP implementation in ECE settings. Bennett et al. (2018) addressed how important positive relationships and interactions between the child, parents, and teachers are important to the implementation of CRP. Building strong, responsive relationships and interactions between home and school settings creates a community of trust where effective communication is established. When parent-teacher relationships, interactions, and communication are positive, families are able to share their cultural norms and behaviors with teachers. As this information about the families' cultural background is gathered, teachers are able to include the families' traditions and customs in their child's learning experiences (Gichuru et al., 2015).

In the physical environment of an EHS classroom, Gichuru et al. (2015) found that teachers can support CRP implementation by ensuring that the physical environment reflects children's diversity. Tarman and Tarman (2011) highlighted the importance of depicting the diversity of children's race and ethnicity in various classroom materials, such as using a variety of paint, paper, markers, crayons, puzzles, games, and other manipulative materials. According to Saracho and Martinez-Hancock (2007), examples of CRP implementation in an ECE classroom included introducing culturally diverse music and art, cooking experiences, and storybooks. When posters and pictures of culturally diverse children and their families are displayed, teachers are showing sensitivity to the children's cultural background (Gichuru et al., 2015).

As CRP is embraced in ECE settings, teachers who implement CRP will challenge traditional educational techniques such as 'holidays around the world', which is often presented

as being culturally responsive (Bennett et al., 2018). Frequently, teachers use educational curriculum programs that package sets of activities and materials that mainly focus on holidays that the mainstream population celebrates. Derman-Sparks et al. (2001) suggest making a connection between holiday activities and the beliefs of children and families. Another way to address the use of prepackaged holiday materials is to honor each person's cultural traditions and not trivialize the different ways families celebrate.

CRP aligns with the qualities and characteristics of teachers who implement teaching practices that intentionally support children and families of diverse cultures. Muniz (2020) presented competencies that described what culturally responsive teachers know as well as sharpen their responsive practices for culturally diverse children. For example, culturally responsive teachers reflect on their own life experiences to develop an understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for the values and belief system of others. In addition, culturally responsive teachers collaborate with parents to learn about their norms and beliefs to implement individualized activities for culturally diverse children (Muniz, 2020). The benefits for ECE teachers who implement CRP are in the best interest of the child and include strengthening connectedness with families and incorporating family values and beliefs in various classroom experiences (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Although there are advantages for CRP implementation, there are also challenges that teachers encounter when implementing CRP in the classroom. As schools and other educational settings adapt to the growing cultural diversity of children, teachers are ill equipped to change their teaching practices to address the cultural and ethnic needs of the children they serve (Bullock et al., 2013). Since curriculum and instruction were shaped by middle class standards, traditional and mainstream curriculum will no longer be appropriate for culturally diverse

children. Similarly, meaningful connections and relationships with families are indicators of CRP implementation (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). Collaborative partnerships between teachers and parents are vital to the success of children's educational experiences. When home and school relationships and communication are strained, it is more difficult for teachers to obtain essential information about specific cultural behaviors and practices of families.

Despite the theoretical and practical significance of CRP for infants, toddlers, and their families from diverse backgrounds, empirical studies are sparse and rarely focus on the techniques and strategies that teachers use to implement CRP in the classrooms. Research studies have mainly been conducted in preschool, upper elementary, and high school classrooms and have focused on teachers' perceptions of CRP implementation (Bennett et al., 2018; Riley et al., 2015; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Another critical gap in the literature is that there are limited empirical studies that examine parents' perspectives on the teachers' CRP implementation in the classroom (e.g., how they engage families from culturally diverse backgrounds). As a being in the child's immediate sphere of influence and an important partner for the program, parents' perspectives are critical to understanding a child's cultural background, strengths, and strengths and their family values, traditions, and expectations to support the child's growth and development. Seeking to understand parents' perceptions about CRP implementation in the classroom provides insight into background experiences, informing teachers of how relevant their current teaching practices are for culturally diverse children and their families. Thus, more research is needed to understand the beliefs and perceptions of both teachers and parents about CRP, especially their ideas about the implementation of CRP experiences in the classroom.

The Role of Culturally Responsive Practices in Family Engagement and Child Outcomes

An increasing number of families are choosing out-of-home nonmaternal center-based care for their infants and toddlers (Mendez, 2010). In EHS, many of these children are from culturally diverse families and backgrounds and often lag behind academically which can impact school readiness skills (Landry et al., 2017; Office of Head Start, 2015; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). CRP is an opportunity for teachers to collaborate with parents of diverse cultures to create and design activities that will support the learning needs of the individual child. With the child as the focus, teachers will be able to learn about and build on the strengths of each family to provide equal learning opportunities in the classroom setting (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). Likewise, when teachers implement CRP, the developmental needs of culturally diverse children are considered when planning, optimal learning takes place, and the achievement gap decreases.

Specifically, teacher and parent partnerships are a critical component to the EHS program that will help address what is needed for children's development and well-being. Research has shown that family engagement enhances continuity of learning between home and school settings that is critical to the successful educational progression of young learners (Ma et al., 2016; Mendez, 2010). Partnerships between family and teachers help maintain consistency in routines across various settings, especially for infants and toddlers who are dependent on parents to communicate information about culture-specific patterns of behaviors (McWayne et al., 2016). Since this research aimed to understand parents' perspectives regarding how teachers engage and involve families at the center and classroom level, parents' perceptions about teachers' practices on family engagement will be used in this study. From this study, it was found that additional research that examines the indicators or predictors of family engagement in EHS settings is

needed to assist teachers with implementing teaching strategies that would improve developmental outcomes for young children (Kathan, 2023).

Teachers' Culturally Responsive Practices and Family Engagement

Family engagement can be described as a shared partnership between families and programs to support children's educational experiences in various forms for optimal learning and positive developmental outcomes (Jeon et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016; McWayne & Melzi, 2014; Mendez, 2010). Family engagement is a key component of the EHS program and is comprised of the relationships formed between parents and EHS staff and the level of program engagement by the parents. Specifically, program engagement involves parents who interact and engage directly with their child's school through attending workshops, engaging in school events, or volunteering in the classroom. Parent-staff relationships also involve warmth and trusting feelings during family engagement opportunities between parents and teachers (Jeon et al., 2020; McWayne et al., 2016). The level of program engagement and parent-staff relationships are two dimensions that were considered as family engagement. In this study.

Research has shown that there are well-established links between family engagement and various child outcomes in social and emotional development (Early Childhood and Knowledge Center, 2018; Ma et al., 2016; McWayne, Manz, & Ginsburg-Block, 2015). Although there are fewer studies that examine the association between family engagement and child outcomes for infants and toddlers, one study conducted in EHS considered the impact of incorporating sociocultural components into family engagement practices rather than utilizing the traditional understanding of engagement (Kathan, 2023). This study concluded that more research is needed to examine how including sociocultural factors can alter or change family engagement practices.

Although family engagement is one of the key components of the EHS model, it varies greatly across EHS centers where it is sometimes difficult to engage culturally diverse families (McWayne et al., 2016). In general, teachers who display openness, respect, and acceptance of various cultures, traditions, and practices of culturally diverse families are more likely to improve relationships and influence families to increase involvement in center events and activities (Forry et al., 2012; Sheridan et al., 2019). As a component of CRP implementation, establishing meaningful connections and relationships between teachers and families is crucial to positive child and parent outcomes (Kathan, 2023; McWayne & Melzi, 2014).

Mendez (2010) and van As et al., (2020) found that parents were highly satisfied with and were favorable to ECE teachers that acknowledged parents as the child's first educator as well as affirmed the family's cultural norms and values. Teachers who focus on children and families' strengths and skills are better able to implement culturally relevant and appropriate instructional practices. In addition, van As et al., (2020) noted that teachers could enhance and support conversations pertaining to culture when parents' views about their own culture are welcomed and incorporated into the daily routines and classroom activities.

In the research, examples of several key features for CRP implementation in HS classrooms were provided (Mendez, 2010). The HS teachers displayed culturally relevant materials in areas of the classroom specifically for families to utilize. Additionally, teachers displayed pictures and materials from children's home environments in the classroom, which made families feel a sense of comfort and safety. Teachers also shared educational activities with families that increased adult-child interactions at home. As a result of teachers scheduling workshops and events in the classroom to build strong relationships with families, parents began to implement the activities into the home setting which increased child outcomes.

In a HS setting, Riley et al. (2012) conducted a focus group study that examined the cultural responsiveness implemented in classrooms from the perspective of culturally diverse families. Research participants consisted of twenty-four Hispanic and eleven African American families who were selected from six HS centers where focus group interviews were conducted for the study. The researchers found that teachers' cultural responsiveness began with open, two-way communication with parents and that communication was essential for gaining knowledge about specific cultural behaviors and practices of families. For example, teachers made earnest efforts to communicate daily to Hispanic and African American parents through phone calls, face-to-face interactions, or written communication to find out and convey information about their child's learning experiences and social behaviors. One of the major points of discussion was about suggestions for culturally relevant activities based on the child's needs that parents and children could do together at home. From the parents' perceptions, they were able to trust the teachers and believed that daily communication informed them of the activities the children were doing in the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Practices and Child Outcomes

Since children from culturally diverse backgrounds often enter kindergarten behind in essential developmental skills, it is pertinent that teachers utilize instructional techniques that would support the unique learning styles of each child, considering various strengths and challenges that their culture would bring. Culturally responsive teachers rely on children's home cultures as a medium for understanding how to support various developmental skills, such as social and emotional competencies, that are essential for optimal learning and school readiness (Durden et al., 2014; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Given that children's social and emotional development is influenced by the relationships with and behaviors of the child's

caregivers, teachers need to understand the extent to which CRP implementation can benefit social competence at a young age (Garner et al., 2014). However, research that examines how CRP implementation influences infant and toddler's social-emotional development in EHS classrooms is scarce. For example, one study examined how CRP implementation influenced social-emotional competencies in kindergarten through eighth grade. Results showed a positive correlation between culturally responsive teaching and the observation of children's positive social and emotional skills. Although Debnam et al (2015) showed how CRP is associated with positive social and emotional outcomes with elementary school children, more research that shows the association between CRP implementation and increased positive social and emotional behavior is needed in infant and toddler classrooms.

Potential Mediation Role of Family Engagement

Given the associations between CRP and family engagement and between family engagement and child social and emotional outcomes found in the previous studies (Jeon et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016; McWayne & Melzi; Mendez, 2010; Riley et al., 2012), an assumption is made that teachers' CRP beliefs and implementation would promote higher levels of family engagement from the parents' perspectives, which would then increase positive infants and toddlers' social and emotional competencies. Thus, CRP implementation in educational settings provides a pathway for developing stronger family engagement practices, which positively impacts the development of social and emotional skills of culturally diverse children (McWayne et al., 2019).

For example, as teachers begin to identify children's unique individual needs and backgrounds because of CRP implementation, they would then be better able to understand families' norms and behaviors. This would encourage parents to become more actively involved

in the program. When parents participate in school-based activities at an increased level, they are provided with ideas from the teacher. In addition, parents feel comfortable sharing ideas with the staff. Thus, the interactions between parents and teachers influence growth with children's cognitive, language, physical, and social and emotional development.

CRP implementation also allows teachers the ability to adjust classroom activities to incorporate culturally relevant materials for children (Debnam et al., 2015). Through modeling and learning from teachers, parents who engage with their children's school are more likely to integrate high-quality practices, such as CRP, within home activities (McWayne et al., 2015), which would have positive impacts on children's social and emotional outcomes.

In the context of EHS, as parent engagement is one key component of the program, these centers are prime environments to examine whether CRP implementation has an influence on child outcomes via family engagement. As a construct of process quality in ECE settings, it is reasonable to expect that when teachers implement CRP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), they are better able to help parents improve and enhance their parenting practices that are beneficial to young children's developmental outcomes. However, there is limited research available that focuses on how family engagement would serve as a mediator for the associations between CRP and children's outcomes in EHS programs.

The current study seeks to examine the implementation of culturally appropriate and responsive teaching practices in EHS classrooms. Examining these practices will be done by identifying teachers' beliefs and parents' perceptions of CRP implementation and how the influence on family engagement and children's social-emotional outcomes with a focus on mediational role of parents' perception of teachers' family engagement practices in the

classroom (see Figure 2). To address the gaps in literature, quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in the research.

Figure 2

Family Engagement Mediation Model



Chapter 3: Methodology

With an increase of culturally diverse children in EHS programs, there is a need to understand the unique teaching strategies and techniques implemented in the classroom for these children. The purpose of this research was to examine the teachers' and parents' perceptions about CRP implementation in EHS classrooms. Utilizing multiple methods of data collected from EHS teachers and parents with infants and toddlers in various locations in the US. Data sources included surveys that captured teachers' and parents' beliefs about CRP implementation, teacher-parent relationships, and children's social and emotional competencies. The study also utilized semi-structured teacher and parent interviews. The current study was guided by the following research questions (RQ):

Research Questions

RQ 1. Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of parents' perception of teachers' culturally responsive practices for infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 2. Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of social and emotional outcomes of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 3. Do parents' perceptions of teachers' culturally responsive practices mediate the association between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and social and emotional child development for parents of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

RQ 4. What beliefs do teachers of infants and toddlers demonstrate about the implementation of cultural responsiveness in EHS classroom settings?

RQ 5? What are the parents of infants and toddlers' perceptions about teachers' implementation of culturally responsive practices in EHS classroom settings?

Research Design

This study will use a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data that responds to research questions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design includes connecting and analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data that is collected (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design will be used for this research study. Teacher and parent questionnaires will be collected for quantitative data analysis which will be further explained and understood by the collection of qualitative data.

Participants

Participants were first recruited from an EHS grantee located in the south-central region of the US. After realizing a need for more participants, recruiting for teachers and parents of infants and toddlers was conducted across various EHS classrooms in the US. Early Head Start teachers-parent-child triads participated in the study. At least one lead or assistant teacher, a parent, and a child from the same classroom was necessary to participate in the study. Permission for recruitment of teachers and parents was given from EHS program leadership where programs offered full-day services for low-economic families and their children. Infant classrooms consisted of children birth through age 24 months. Toddler classrooms consisted of children who were 24 months through 36 months old. The first phase of data collection began with EHS centers located in a metropolitan city in a Midwestern state during COVID. School leadership decided to conduct virtual learning via Zoom for all age groups. Informed consent forms, flyers, and emails describing the study purposes and procedures were distributed to potential participants. Since enrollment numbers were low because of COVID-19 challenges, there was difficulty recruiting teachers and parents for the study. The second phase of data collection

involved EHS centers located in a metropolitan city in a southeastern state because of the relocation of the researcher. Again, informed consent forms, flyers, and emails describing the study purposes and procedures were given to potential volunteers. Then, collection of data was conducted with EHS teachers and parents located in various cities in the US. Once more, informed consent forms, flyers, and emails describing the study purposes and procedures were given to potential participants.

A total of ninety-eight EHS teacher-parent-child triads agreed to participate and complete the questionnaires. Regarding the qualitative measure, 12 teachers of infants and toddlers in EHS settings throughout the United States agreed to be interviewed. Of the teachers who completed the questionnaire, 39% of EHS teachers attended some college or held an associate's degree and 38% of EHS teachers held at least a bachelor's degree or master's degree. Approximately, 35% were African American, 5% were Hispanic, and 40% were White. The age range consisted of 30% of teachers between 23-32, 19% were 33-42, and 36% were forty-three and over. Seventy percent of EHS teachers taught toddler classrooms and 28.1% of teachers were in infant classrooms.

Out of the ninety-eight EHS parents of children who participated in the study, forty-nine answered questionnaires related to their demographics. Regarding the qualitative measure, ten parents of infants and toddlers in EHS settings throughout the United States agreed to be interviewed. Of the parents who completed the questionnaires, 12% graduated high school, 34% attended some college, 45% had an associate's degree, and 8% had a bachelor's degree. With parents, approximately 54% were African American, 36% were White, and 8% were Hispanic. There was information collected about 28% of infants and 66% of toddlers whose parents participated in the study. Additionally, fifty-seven percent of EHS children were girls and 42.7%

were boys. Sixty-seven percent of EHS children were twenty-four months old, 25.8% were twelve months, 4.1% were thirty-six months old, and 3.1% were less than twelve months old. With the children, parents identified fifty-four percent of their children as African American, 36% of parents identified their children as White, and 8% of parents identified their children as Hispanics.

In addition, from the group of teachers who volunteered to participate in an interview nine were African American and three were White. The demographics of the parents who volunteered to participate in an interview included eight African American, one Hispanic, and one White.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Parent and Teacher Participants

	<u>Parent (N=98)</u> <u>N (%)</u>	<u>Teacher (N=97)</u> <u>N (%)</u>
Education		
HS diploma	6 (12.2%)	10 (10.3%)
Some College	17 (34.7%)	6 (6.1%)
Associates degree	22 (44.9%)	25 (26.7%)
Bachelor's degree	4 (8.2%)	38 (39.1%)
Master's degree	0 (0%)	6 (6.1%)
Missing	49	12
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	42 (54%)	34 (35.1%)
White	28 (36%)	39 (40.2%)
Other	2 (3%)	5 (5%)
Hispanics	6 (8%)	5 (5%)
Missing	20	14

Research Procedures

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was filed with the University of Oklahoma for research approval. The researcher contacted by email and phone EHS agency leadership as well as individual EHS teachers to inform them of the nature of the research study and about the recruitment process. Classrooms were chosen based on whether the child was in an infant or toddler classroom. Only teachers and parents of infants and toddlers were asked to participate. The ages of children in infant classrooms ranged from birth to 24 months and the age for the toddler classroom ranged from 24 months to 36 months. Once classrooms were identified and teachers agreed to participate, the researcher emailed a consent form and questionnaire for the teachers to complete. After teachers returned the consent form and questionnaire, the researcher selected teachers who answered the questionnaire so that a Zoom interview (for an average of 30 minutes) could be scheduled and where open-ended questions were asked about perceptions of and beliefs about implementation of culturally responsive practices for diverse children as well as perceptions about their relationships with families. Teacher responses were transcribed using Otter.ai.interface. Then the teacher transcriptions were entered into Dedoose for initial coding, descriptions, categories, and overarching themes.

Next, EHS teachers who completed the questionnaire were asked to identify parents who would be interested in participating in the study. Interested parents who had infants or toddlers enrolled in the selected teachers' classrooms were given a consent form and asked to complete a parent questionnaire, which evaluated parents' perceptions about their teachers' actions concerning responsiveness, collaboration, communication, and cultural diversity in the classroom environment, as well as responding to a questionnaire about their child's social and emotional behaviors. Along with the demographic questionnaire, a parent or guardian was asked to answer semi-structured open-ended questions for a one-time Zoom or phone interview for an average of

30 minutes about their perceptions of the teachers' implementation of culturally responsive practices as well as their involvement in the classroom. The parent interviews gave the researcher a better understanding of parents' perceptions of the instructional techniques that are being implemented in their child's EHS classroom. Also, the interviews provided information about parents' perceptions about their relationship to their child's teacher. Parent responses were transcribed using Otter.ai.interface. Then parent transcriptions were entered into Dedoose for initial coding, descriptions, categories, and overarching themes.

Each teacher who completed the teacher questionnaire was compensated with a \$30 gift card. Each parent who completed the parent and the social and emotional questionnaires was compensated with a \$30 gift card. Also, each teacher and parent who agreed and participated in the Zoom interview was compensated with a \$50 gift card.

Measures

Several measures were used to collect data from teachers and parents. Quantitative data measures that were used for this research include Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcomes Expectancy (CRTOE), the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ), and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) for infants (DECA-I) and toddlers (DECA-T). Table 1 provides an overview of the different measures used to collect data for this study. Qualitative measures included teacher and parent interviews. A description of each measure is provided below.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcomes Expectancy (CRTOE)

The CRTOE examined teachers' perceptions and beliefs about culturally responsive instructional practices and child outcomes. The Likert-type scale consisted of 26 items in which participants were asked to rate their beliefs about a given behavior that they have towards

teaching culturally diverse children will have a positive outcome for students. The 26-item scale was designed to assess teachers' perceptions that engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices would have positive outcomes in the classroom for students. Teachers had to rate the probability that would lead to a specified outcome by indicating this on a scale from zero (entirely uncertain) to one hundred (entirely certain). Example questions on the CRTOE include 'students will be successful when instruction is adapted to meet their needs, revising instructional materials to include a better representation of the students' cultural groups will foster positive self-images, and using culturally familiar examples will make learning new concepts easier'. Internal reliability for CRTOE is .95, as estimated by Cronbach's alpha. For this study, several subscales are included in the Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcomes Expectancy (CRTOE) questionnaire for teachers. For the CRTOE, the subscales included cultural responsiveness such as providing aids and understanding students' cultural background, interactions such as having positive home-school relationships with culturally diverse families and finding ways to increase parental involvement, and teacher practices such as matching instruction to students' learning preference and classroom materials reflecting culturally diverse students.

The CRTOE has three subscales that include cultural responsiveness, teacher interactions with culturally diverse children, and teacher practices. Example statements on the measure included instruction is adapted to meet the student's needs, revising instructional materials in the classroom to include a better representation of students' cultural group, use of native language, use of culturally familiar examples in the classroom. Teachers had to rate their behaviors pertaining to the three subscales with a range between zero and one hundred.

Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ).

The FPTRQ/parent questionnaire measured the parents' perceptions about teachers' family engagement practices. The responses were based on each families' presumptions and viewpoints about their teachers' actions concerning responsiveness, collaboration, communication, and cultural diversity in the classroom environment. The FPTRQ measures included multiple subscales under three broader constructs which are Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices. The subscales included family specific knowledge, collaboration, responsiveness, communication, family-focused concern, commitment, understanding of context, and respect. Example questions of family engagement for the FPTRQ parent questionnaire include my childcare teacher respects me as a parent, treats me like an expert on my child, and encourages me to be involved in all aspects of my child's care and education. Example questions of CRP for the FPTRQ parent questionnaire include my childcare teacher reflects the cultural diversity of students in activities, shows respect for different ethnic heritages, and communicates the cultural values and beliefs I want my child to have. Overall, the FPTRQs have high individual item response rates and are found to be reliable. The Cronbach alpha scores for each subscale range between .75 and .94. For this study, several subscales are included in the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) for families. The subscales for the FPTRQ consist of several minor constructs that form three subscales which include knowledge, practices, and attitudes.

The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)

The DECA measured parents' perceptions about their child's social and emotional growth. The DECA measured children's social emotional development as well as provides strategies to promote protective factors associated with resilience. The DECA-I (infant screener) subscales included children's initiative, attachment to others. The DECA-T (toddler screener)

subscales included children's initiative, attachment to others, and self-regulation skills. Example questions for DECA include 'how often did the infant calm down with a familiar adult, try to do new things, enjoy interacting with others, and keep trying when unsuccessful'. Parents were asked to rate the frequency of certain behaviors that they see at home. DECA subscales included initiatives such as using independent thought and action to meet own needs, self-regulation such as ability to control self from excitement, frustration, and other stimuli, and attachment such as having mutual strong, long-lasting relationships between child and adult.

Internal reliability coefficients of consistency range from .80 to .94 on the Parent Rating scale for infants and .87 to .94 on the Teacher Rating scale for infants. On the toddler scales, the Parent Rating scale ranges are .79 to .94 and .83 to .95 on the Teacher Rating scale. Test-retest coefficients for Total Protective factors were .84 and .91 among teachers and .91 and .99 among parents. Interrater reliability for combined groups was not statistically significant. For this study, several subscales are included in the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for children. The subscales for DECA consist of initiatives, attachments, and self-regulation for toddlers. For infants, DECA had only two subscales which are initiatives and attachments.

Ethical Considerations

Many considerations were given when striving for high ethical standards while conducting research (Yin, 2014). As a researcher, a responsibility to ensure that information in the study is credible, valid, reliable, trustworthy, and dependable is paramount. The researcher has previously met CITI training requirements and obtained human subjects review clearance by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Oklahoma. Participation in the research study was strictly voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants were ensured confidentiality and anonymity to protect the information of the participants.

The researcher for this study was employed by one of the HS grantees where teachers, parents, and children were recruited. Possible assumptions and biases by the researcher, teachers, and parents may be reflected because of the close affiliation that the researcher had with the HS agency. Critical self-reflection, assessing whether the data has been influenced while being collected, and thoroughness of quantitative and qualitative analysis by the researcher will improve the likelihood of a trustworthy outcome.

Validity and Reliability

In a quantitative research study, the researcher ensured that valid and reliable information produced meaningful and useful interpretations from scores on the instruments (Creswell, 2014; Warner, 2013). In a qualitative research study, validity and reliability mean that the study is checked for accuracy of the findings and the study approach remains consistent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researcher checked preliminary findings or the responses from teachers and parents who completed the questionnaires by soliciting additional feedback during the interviews.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data is connected directly to the sensitivity, competency, and dependability of the researcher who collects and analyzes the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The experience, training, and intellectual competence of the researcher determined the trustworthiness of a qualitative and quantitative research study. In this study, trustworthiness is ensured on the assumption that the perceptions about and implementation of CRP is a reality and that investigating it yielded the same or similar results.

As an area of trustworthiness, credible research findings need to be congruent with reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal of credible research is to ensure that readers believe the results and conclusions of the study (Bazeley, 2014). Credibility is dependent on the clarity of purpose and questions, having a sound conceptual premise, the thoroughness and depth of the analysis, and a specific way to pull together an argument for the conclusions of the study. In this study, several interviews were conducted and analyzed to understand and explore the perceptions of teachers and parents about cultural responsiveness in EHS classrooms. The interviews were triangulated with questionnaires.

Triangulation

The data collected from the various quantitative and qualitative sources was examined and coded. Triangulation was achieved by comparing the findings among the data sources which built a solid and coherent reason for themes and ideas that surfaced (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, triangulation was achieved by comparing the findings from teacher and parent questionnaires, child social and emotional assessment as well as parent and teacher interviews.

Analytic Approach

The study adopted a mixed-method approach. For the quantitative survey data, all analyses were conducted using SPSS version 29. Preliminary analysis was completed to determine if the quantitative data was reliable and to ensure accuracy. Descriptive statistics were conducted to calculate the means and standard deviations for each of the research measures (i.e., CRTOE, FPTRQ, and DECA). Brief demographic characteristics of the teachers and parents such as their education and race/ethnicity are summarized using the percentages. Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the subscales for each of the questionnaires and the correlations between the subscales were calculated to examine the relationship between them.

Then, Cronbach alpha was conducted to determine the internal consistency or reliability of the subscales of DECA, C-Initiatives and C-Attachment, for both infant and toddlers, and the high internal reliability of the measure ($r=.93$), the overall composite score of DECA was used for further analysis.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using STATA 18 to answer RQ3, which is a mediational model between CRP, family engagement, and child outcomes. Subscales of family engagement were used as mediators between CRP and DECA to examine the association between teachers' beliefs about CRP implementation and social and emotional competence with family engagement as the mediator. Figure 2 describes this mediation model. With the SEM analysis, children's age, whether the child is an infant or toddler, and parents' education and race/ethnicity were used as control variables. The CRP scores and family engagement scores were converted to z-scores with the mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1 prior to the SEM analysis. Missing data was handled using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML).

As a mixed method research, a phenomenological approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. Teachers and parents participated in one semi-structured open-ended question for a 20–45-minute interview. For RQ4, teacher interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. Each transcription was then loaded onto Dedoose for further analysis to understand teachers' beliefs about their CRP implementation in the classroom. In Dedoose, initial coding was found and highlighted from each interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the initial coding, focused coding or level two analysis was done by re-examining and collapsing initial codes into categories. After collapsing the codes, themes emerged. Last, the development of five themes from the data was found.

For RQ4, a descriptive statistic of teachers' perceptions about their implementation of CRP was conducted using a teacher questionnaire. Findings summarized highest scored items as well as lowest scored items on the teacher questionnaire were included. Teachers' interviews were also utilized to merge and compare the qualitative and quantitative findings to draw conclusions, enhance the validity of, and allow for richer insights about teachers' perceptions about CRP implementation.

For RQ5, parent interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. Each transcription was then loaded onto Dedoose for further analysis to understand parents' perceptions about teachers' CRP implementation in the classroom. In Dedoose, initial coding was found and highlighted from each interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the initial coding, focused coding or level two analysis was done by re-examining and collapsing initial codes into categories. After collapsing the codes, themes emerged. Last, the development of three themes from the data was found.

For the research variables, Table 2 reports the average score for each key research variable for teacher, parent and child items on the survey in descending order. Among the teacher variables, teacher interactions received the highest mean score of 92.9 (SD =7.95), teaching practices had a mean score of 92.6 (SD = 8.14), and the mean score for teacher perceived cultural responsiveness was 91.4 (SD =9.20). Among the parent perceived teacher cultural responsiveness context had the highest mean score of 3.54 (SD =.46), the mean score for collaboration was 3.51 (SD= .44), the mean score for commitment was 3.43 (SD = .38), the mean score for concern was 3.38 (SD =.41), the mean score for responsive was 3.34 (SD =.49), the mean score for communication was 3.32 (SD = .45), the mean score for respect was 3.25 (SD = .60), and the mean score for knowledge was 3.12 (SD = .42). Among the child variables,

attachment received the highest mean score of 4.33 (SD =.62) and initiatives received a mean score of 4.24 (SD = .71).

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides results that include teachers' and parents' perceptions about teachers' practices on family engagement and how they are associated with children's social and emotional outcomes in EHS classrooms. Chapter four also includes results for the mixed method data collection.

Preliminary Findings

Table 2 describes the means and standard deviation for key variables for the research.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness
Teachers' Culturally Responsive Belief							
Overall Score	97	57.6	100	92.2	7.9	63.4	-1.9
T-Interactions	97	64.4	100	92.9	7.9	63.2	-1.5
T-Practices	97	55.5	100	92.6	8.1	65.8	-2.1
T-Cultural	97	56.6	100	91.4	9.2	85.6	-1.5
Parent Perception of Teachers' Family Engagement Practices							
P-Communication	98	1.5	5.0	3.3	.45	.20	-.45
P-Concern	98	2.0	5.0	3.3	.41	.17	-.48
P-Commitment	98	2.6	5.0	3.4	.38	.14	.14
P-Context	98	2.0	5.0	3.5	.46	.21	-.47
P-Respect	98	1.8	5.0	3.2	.60	.36	-.63
P-Knowledge	98	2.6	5.0	3.1	.42	.18	2.8
P-Collaboration	98	1.6	5.0	3.5	.44	.19	-.89
P-Responsive	98	1.6	5.0	3.3	.49	.24	-.12

**Parent Report
Child Social and
Emotional
Outcomes**

Total Score	93	2.7	5.0	4.3	.63	.40	-.57
C-Initiatives	93	2.1	5.0	4.2	.71	.50	-.82
C-Attachment	93	2.5	5.0	4.3	.62	.38	-.63

Note. T=Teacher; P=Parent; C=Child

The average mean score on the for the teacher report about CRT was 92.2 on a 26-item scale which indicates overall teachers were entirely certain about their beliefs that engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices would lead to positive classroom and child outcomes. Among the teachers, the Interactions average score (m=92.9) was slightly higher than the Practices average score (m=92.6) and Cultural knowledge (m=91.4) scores. For the variables that described parents reporting about teachers' practices on family engagement, the context variable had the highest mean score (m=3.54) and the knowledge variable had the lowest mean score (m=3.12). With the context variables, parents strongly disagreed that their child's teacher judged their family because of faith, religion, race, and ethnicity. The knowledge variable on the questionnaire referred to statements related to parents feeling comfortable sharing information about household schedule, employment status, and financial situation.

The average score for children's social and emotional outcomes was 4.3 on a 5-point Likert scale which indicates that overall, the children in the study had a high level of social and emotional development. The Attachment average score (m=4.33) was slightly higher than the Initiatives average score (m=4.24).

RQ1: Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of parents' perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices for infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

In this study, analyses were conducted to determine if there were any associations between teacher's cultural responsiveness beliefs and parents' perception of teacher's and teachers' family engagement practices. Correlations between teacher cultural responsiveness subscales, such as interaction, practices, and knowledge, and family engagement subscales, which include knowledge, practices, and attitudes, were analyzed. Findings reveal that there are no statistically significant correlations between teachers' cultural responsiveness and parents' perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices. Table 3 describes the results of the correlation between the subscales for teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and parents' beliefs about teachers' family engagement practices.

RQ2: Are high levels of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs associated with higher levels of social and emotional outcomes of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

Overall, there were no significant associations between culturally responsive variables and social and emotional variables for all children. However, there were differences in the associations by child gender. For example, specifically for boys, there were positive correlations of some subscales of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs. They included teacher interactions ($r = .46, p = .005$), teacher cultural practices ($r = .51, p = .001$), and teacher cultural responsiveness ($r = .47, p = .004$) with child's initiatives. I found additional positive correlations of interactions ($r = .40, p = .015$), teacher cultural practices ($r = .43, p = .008$), and teacher cultural responsiveness ($r = .40, p = .016$) with child attachment with a caregiver for boys only. Tables 3 and 4 are used to describe the results for the RQ2 question. Table 4 describes the results of the correlations between the subscales for teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and child gender. For the overall score for social-emotional variables, there were positive correlations of subscales of teachers' culturally responsive beliefs. They included the teachers' culturally responsive

beliefs ($r=.46$, $p=.004$), teacher interactions ($r=.42$, $p=.010$), teachers' cultural practices ($r=.46$, $p=.004$) and teacher cultural responsiveness ($r=.42$, $p=.010$)

Table 3*Correlation Table of Study Variables*

	<i>DECA</i>	<i>C-Initiatives</i>	<i>C-Attachment</i>	<i>T-Interaction</i>	<i>T-Practices</i>	<i>T-Cultural</i>	<i>P-Knowledge</i>	<i>P-Practices</i>	<i>P-Attitudes</i>
	<i>Cul Teach</i>								
<i>DECA</i>									
<i>C-Initiatives</i>	.96***								
<i>C-Attachment</i>	.99***	.92***							
<i>CUL Teacher</i>	.10	.15	.08						
<i>T-Interaction</i>	.11	.16	.09	.89***					
<i>T-Practices</i>	.03	.09	.01	.94***	.79***				
<i>T-Cultural</i>	.14	.17	.13	.94***	.79***	.80***			
<i>P-Knowledge</i>	-.07	-.03	-.08	.07	.04	.10	.05		
<i>P-Practices</i>	-.10	-.12	-.10	-.06	-.12	-.01	-.07	.21*	
<i>P-Attitudes</i>	-.00	-.01	-.00	-.07	-.12	-.07	-.03	.13	.32***

N=82-97. * $p < .05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4

Correlation Table of Study Variables by Gender: Boys (top) and Girls (bottom)

	<u>DECA</u>	C- Initiatives	C-Attachment	CUL Teacher	T- Interaction	T-Practices	T-Cultural	P-Knowledge	P-Practices	P-Attitudes
<u>DECA</u>	=	.96	.99	.46***	.42**	.46***	.42**	.08	-.10	.00
C-Initiatives	.96	=	.93	.51***	.46**	.51***	.47**	.02	-.13	-.03
C-Attachment	.99	.92	=	.44	.40	.43	.40	.01	-.08	.01
CUL Teacher	-.13	-.11	-.13	=	.90	.95	.95	-.11	-.19	-.11
T-Interaction	-.08	-.05	-.09	.88	=	.82	.82	.01	-.19	-.00
T-Practices	-.25	-.22	-.25	.93	.78	=	.83	.03	-.12	-.11
T-Cultural	-.02	-.02	-.02	.94	.79	.78	=	-.32	-.24	-.15
P-Knowledge	-.09	-.04	-.11	.14	.03	.14	.17	=	.44	.20
P-Practices	-.10	-.10	-.10	.07	-.06	.10	.10	.08	=	.38
P-Attitudes	-.00	.00	-.00	-.03	-.25	-.06	.09	.09	.21	=

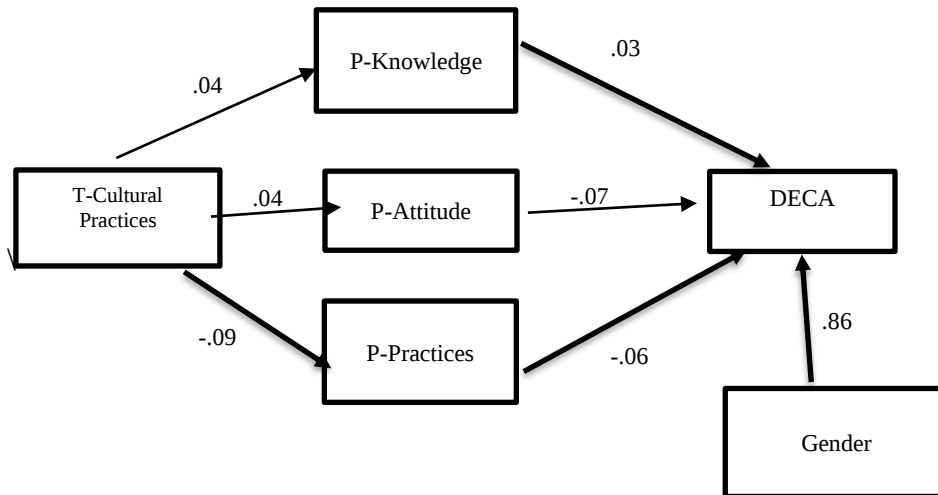
*N=36-52. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.*

RQ3: Do parents' perceptions of family engagement mediate the association between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and social and emotional child development for parents of infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms?

As stated previously, Figure 2 shows the mediation model for teachers' CRP and child outcomes. Figures 3-5 and Tables 5-7 describe the results of the SEM analysis of the three different subscales of teachers' perceptions of CRP implementation. Results for Figure 3 and Table 5, the mediation model for the association between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and child social and emotional outcomes, mediated by parents' perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices, was found to be not statistically significant. The effects of teachers' cultural responsiveness on child outcomes by way of knowledge, attitudes, and practices did not have any statistical significance. Results for Figure 4 and Table 6 showed the effects of teachers' interactions on child outcomes by way of knowledge, attitudes, and practices did not have any statistical significance. Results for Figure 4 and Table 7 showed the effects of teachers' practices on child outcomes by way of knowledge, attitudes, and practices did not have any statistical significance.

Figure 3

Structural Equation Model Predicting Child Outcomes



Note: This structural equation model predicts child outcomes from teachers' cultural responsiveness with mediating effects of family engagement variables (attitudes, knowledge, and practices).

Table 5

Results of Structural Equation Modeling for T-Culture → Family Engagement → DECA

Path	B	S.E.	z	p
P-Practice → DECA	-.06	.07	-.95	.34
P-Attitude → DECA	-.07	.07	-1.0	.32
P-Knowledge → DECA	.03	.07	.39	.70
T-Cultural → P-Practice	-.09	.11	-.80	.42
T-Cultural → P-Attitude	-.04	.11	-.32	.75
T-Cultural → P-Knowledge	.04	.12	.37	.71
T-Cultural → DECA	-.04	.04	.93	.35

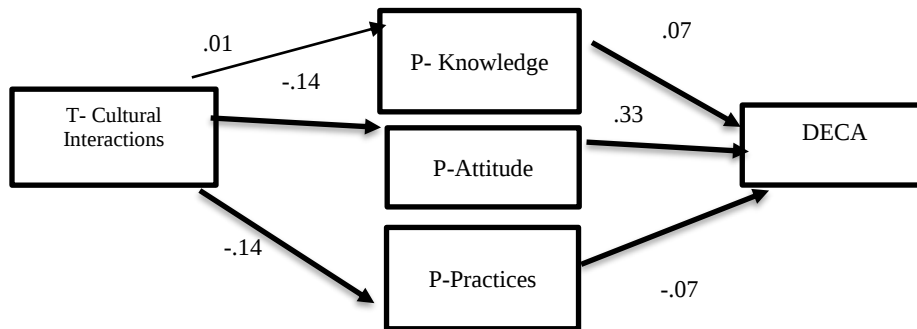
Table 6

Model Fit Statistics Summary

Model	χ^2	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
T-Cultural mediation	26.89	21	0.17	0.00	-4.37	0.05

The mediation model for T-cultural responsiveness had an acceptable fit, $\chi^2=26.81$, $p=.17$, CFI=.00, TLI=-4.37, and RMSEA=.05 (Table 6).

Figure 4
Structural Equation Model Predicting Child Outcomes



Note: This structural equation model predicts child outcomes from teachers' cultural interactions with mediating effects of family engagement variables (attitudes, knowledge, and practices).

Table 7

Results of the Mediation Model for T-Interactions → Family Engagement → DECA

Path	B	S.E.	z	p
P-Practice → DECA	-.07	.07	-1.0	.31
P-Attitude → DECA	.33	.07	.46	.65
P-Knowledge → DECA	.07	.07	-.94	.35
T-Interactions → P-Practice	-.14	.11	-1.3	.20
T-Interactions → P-Attitude	-.14	.11	-1.2	.22
T-Interactions → P-Knowledge	.01	.11	.06	.95
T-Interactions → DECA	-.02	.08	.25	.80

Table 8

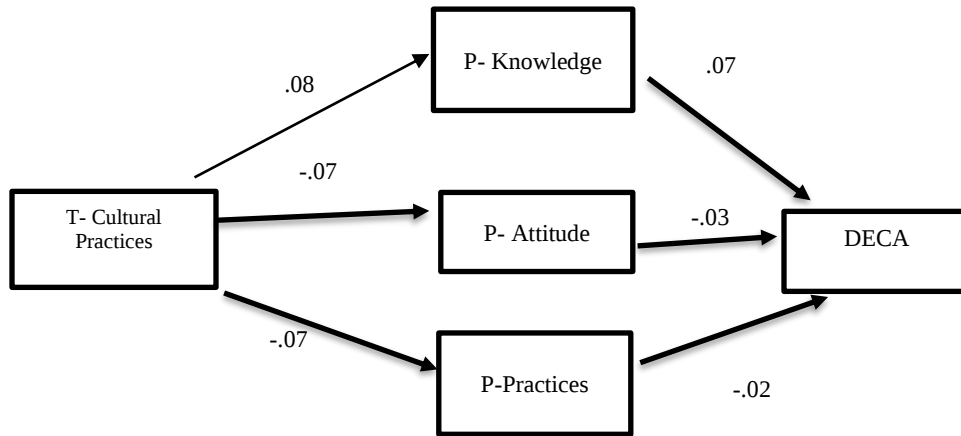
Model Fit Statistics Summary

Model	χ^2	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
T-Interaction mediation	27.24	21	0.16	0.00	-1.91	0.05

The mediation model for T-interaction had an acceptable fit, $\chi^2=27.24$, $p=.16$, CPI=.00, TLI=-1.91, and RMSEA=.05 (Table 8).

Figure 5

Structural Equation Modeling Predicting Child Outcomes



Note: This structural equation model predicts child outcomes from teachers’ cultural practices with mediating effects of family engagement variables (attitudes, knowledge, and practices).

Table 9

Results of the Mediation Model for T- Practices → Family Engagement → DECA

<u>Path</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>S.E.</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>p</u>
P-Practice → DECA	-.07	.07	-1.05	.30
P-Attitude → DECA	-.03	.07	.40	.69
P-Knowledge → DECA	.07	.07	-.97	.33
T-Practices → P-Practice	-.02	.11	-.22	.83
T-Practices → P-Attitude	-.07	.12	-.61	.54
T-Practices → P-Knowledge	.08	.12	.71	.48
T-Practices → DECA	-.02	.07	.21	.83

Table 10

Model Fit Statistics Summary

<u>Model</u>	<u>χ^2</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>CFI</u>	<u>TLI</u>	<u>RMSEA</u>
T-Practices mediation	26.89	21	0.175	0.000	-4.371	0.054

The model for T-practices had an acceptable fit, $\chi^2=27.23$, $p=.01$, CFI=.00, TLI=-8.06, and RMSEA=.05 (Table 10).

RQ4: What beliefs do teachers of infants and toddlers demonstrate about the implementation of cultural responsiveness in EHS classroom setting?

The qualitative component of the research explored teachers’ cultural responsiveness in the classroom setting, collaboration with parents to learn about children’s cultural values and norms, and challenges and barriers to implementation of CRP. Five major themes emerged after looking for patterns, categories, and themes that examined the data sources (see Table 8): 1) importance of teachers’ cultural understanding and experiences, 2) representing and incorporating the families’ culture in the classroom, 3) the home/school collaboration experience, 4) the barriers of teachers’ cultural responsiveness, and 5) the COVID dilemma and accommodation.

Table 11

Overarching Teacher Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Importance of Teachers’ Cultural Understanding and Experiences	Differences in background, family history, traditions, belief systems	Culture reflects growing up, different for everyone Reflects traditions, beliefs, ways of life Learning about families’ culture Diversity
	Acceptance of others, builds classroom community	Have an open mind Culture helps broaden views and understanding about others
	Respectful of culturally diverse families	Learning to accept people from all backgrounds
	Influence how one thinks, feels, and learns about topics	Professional development conversations about brain development and culture
	Influence social-emotional behaviors	Enhance learning with classroom activities and experiences that incorporate culture that support

Representing and Incorporating the Families' Culture in the Classroom	Unique cultural differences, incorporate more meaningful experiences between home and school Use culturally diverse resources: songs, materials, and books	Make connections with families, Respect the home language Intentionally have books, songs, pictures that reflect each child Ask more in-depth questions about children and families
Home/School Collaboration Experience	Classroom experiences: involve parents, consistent relationships develop between teacher and families	Welcome parents in the class, use cultural items from home, parents are in contact with teachers, belief that parents feel comfortable sharing information
Barriers of Teachers' Cultural Responsiveness	Misunderstanding about cultural practices, different practices, Parent accustomed to mainstream curriculum, Need for professional development	Efforts made by teachers to understand families' cultural norms, Disciplinary actions are different from home to school, Mismatch with behavior management between Home and school
COVID Dilemma and Accommodation	Relationships between teachers and parents limited during COVID, Varied methods to teach children and communication, Decrease of family engagement	New ideas and communication style Keep in contact with parents, Zoom and educational apps were utilized, restriction to in-person contact with parents and children during COVID, Restrictions in place for parent volunteers and family engagement activities

Importance of Teachers' Cultural Understanding and Experiences

Teachers gave varying definitions when trying to define their perceptions about culture, which is to be expected given that understanding the term culture is not necessarily simple or easily explainable. During the interviews, teachers agreed that culture is described as one's own personal experiences and, as they talked, continued to share that culture represents a person's background. Some teachers stated that culture is the customs, beliefs or ways a particular people or nation are used to doing things. For example, in their definition, teachers recognized that culture is reflected in different backgrounds, personal experiences, traditions, and belief systems. Ten out of the twelve teachers specifically mentioned culture as having differences in background and beliefs before they expounded on the topic to include thoughts about religion, traditions, and holidays. For example, one teacher stated what many teachers indicated in their responses about their definition of culture,

Culture is our own personal experiences and background. It's having different backgrounds and belief systems, like religion or traditions. It's participating in different holiday routines and what you learn about your family's history and cultural practices during those special times.

Ten out of the twelve teachers acknowledged that their personal background and experiences helped them to become more culturally aware and respectful as an adult. Personal experience with others about their cultural differences helped these teachers become more accepting of people from all ethnic and racial backgrounds. This has allowed parents from diverse cultures to trust teachers and feel comfortable leaving their child in the classroom. Teachers are more likely to ask parents probing and more in-depth questions to find ways to support the child in the classroom. Although each of the teachers stated that they began with more surface questions and asked about the holidays that the family celebrated, eight teachers

stated that they liked to find out more detailed information about each of the families in the classroom. As one teacher stated,

I continue to ask questions so that I understand the family's history and routines better. I know as a Head Start teacher, I sometimes have to ask detailed personal questions, but I like to go a little bit deeper so that I know a little about the child that I'm working with as well as the family. Not only do I ask about holidays, but I also ask about habits and routines and how it's handled at home.

Teachers also perceived that culture has its place in learning and development with children. In the classroom setting, children are exposed to different cultural behaviors and routines such as social rules and expectations from others and, at times, may be expected to engage in cultural practices that are different from those that they know. Exposure to the various cultural practices helps children to appreciate and respect others while expanding opportunities for positive learning experiences. As one infant teacher stated,

I understand culture as our own personal experiences, environment, and family values. Culture plays an important role, because it can affect how you think and feel about something, and it can enhance learning when it is embraced in the classroom setting. Learning about differences is very important in learning to accept people from all different kinds of backgrounds.

Each of the teachers seemed to have an open mind with learning about others' cultures and believed that their own background experiences have permitted them to be respectful of others' cultures. When there were occasions that caused misconceptions about families' beliefs or norms, teachers needed better understanding and requested help from school leaders or other teachers. In one incident, a mother became very upset with the teacher because her young Black daughter was playing with the sand and at the end of center time the sand was in the little girl's hair. The teacher, who was White, could not understand why the mother was so upset about the sand. After talking with the instructional coach, the teacher called the parent and discussed the situation about the child's hair and sand. After the phone call with the parent, the teacher commented,

After I spoke with the parent, I understand now why she had gotten so upset. The mom had spent some time washing and fixing the child's hair this past weekend. Just listening to mom, it takes a while to fix the child's hair. And, once it's (hair) done then mom doesn't have to really worry about the long process of fixing M's hair until the following weekend. Mom takes a lot of time and care. Mom said that's like a special time that she spends with her daughters, while she does their hair. So, I asked mom if she had any suggestions about M when she played in the sand. At first, Mom didn't want her to play but I asked if there was anything else we could do at school because M loves to play in the sand. so, we came to a compromise. M will have to wear a plastic cap when she plays in the sand.

Teachers commented on their past experiences when they encountered differences with beliefs and cultural norms of others. Teachers stated that in order to get along with others they had to move past the differences and opposing views. One teacher commented,

My culture and my experiences have prepared me for working with infants and toddlers. In my cultural background, we have a great big family with aunts and uncles and cousins that I would visit. And, we would always have lots of friends around who didn't believe or behave like my family did, especially for holidays and such. I didn't realize it at the time, but now that I'm thinking about it, I didn't laugh at them or shy away from them, but I wanted to know more about what they did in their household. For example, I had a friend who didn't celebrate birthdays. Well, I wanted to know why and once I listened and understood then I thought to myself that's how their family operates and that's ok. It's like our toddler families. Some of the families have celebrations or values that are so different than mine, but I still love on the families.

As teachers recalled, sometimes misunderstandings about cultural practices trickled over into the classroom and affected their relationships with their co-teacher. As an example, a problem arose between two teachers who had different opinions about the music that the children listened to during group time. The lead teacher wanted the children to listen to various forms of music because she believed that this would help children with social and emotional regulation. The assistant in the classroom who had worked in early childhood settings for twenty-eight years wanted the children to listen to one specific type of music every day that she was used to listening to at work, home, and with friends. The teachers acknowledged their cultural differences with music and agreed that both ideas about music were effective with children. The teachers decided that the lead teacher would decide the music choices three days a week and the assistant would decide the music choices two days a week. Both teachers realized the impact that

their cultural backgrounds had on their decision-making with each other and the children. In this case, children were exposed to different cultural experiences based on background

The importance of understanding culture and one's cultural background is not only significant for children's learning and development, but it is also relevant to understand its impact on teaching teams. Each EHS teaching team consists of two to three teachers, which includes a lead and assistant teachers. Teaching teams must learn to communicate and work harmoniously to create an environment that supports the development of young learners. Many times, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences exist within the teaching team that may influence children's learning and development. As a researcher and instructional coach, I encountered various confrontational situations that were because of the teachers' cultural differences. For example, one teaching team disagreed about the type of music that children listened to in the classroom. One member of the team listened to hip hop and wanted the songs played in the classroom to reflect this style of music. The teacher believed that hip hop music represented her culture. The other member of the teaching team wanted children exposed to a variety of music because she grew up listening to classical, opera, hip hop, rock, and jazz music. She believed that exposure to diverse types of music helped with children's learning and development. The teaching team worked through their music differences by agreeing to allow the other specific days to play their types of music in the classroom.

Representing and Incorporating the Families' Culture in the Classroom

When asked about how culturally responsive practices are implemented with their infants and toddlers, one of the most prevalent responses from teachers was to try to represent and incorporate the families' culture in the classroom. Ten out of the twelve teachers believed that because of the positive relationship they had with parents, families were responsive to any

request for materials and items as well as sharing any pertinent information that would help with creating classroom activities that would best support their children. As one teacher reported,

Being culturally responsive means considering each child as an individual and their families with a different set of cultural beliefs that they bring into the classroom. This also means welcoming cultural items in the classroom that represent the children's culture. This means that I must build a solid relationship with the family to be able to ask for some of the specific items that are precious to them to support children's learning, especially trusting that it will be taken care of with toddlers in the classroom.

Similarly, another teacher mentioned the importance of bringing artifacts, materials, and even music from home that represent their culture and tradition. She stated,

I enjoy having each of my families make an All About Me book with pictures of the child, the family, pets, family artifacts, and things the child is interested in. I try to have dolls and toys that represent different cultures, too. I also ask families what music they listen to at home and try to listen to it in the classroom with the children, if appropriate. Occasionally, I get music and songs from parents that will have no instruments, and we get to talk about why this song has no instruments. We compare that to what we usually listen to in class.

Most EHS centers are well-stocked with various materials that are uniquely tailored for the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Most teachers noted that displaying dolls, art supplies, toys, and pictures helped the children, and their families feel welcomed. The All About Me book was an activity that teachers often used to highlight and reflect families' cultures as well as give an opportunity for children to develop their identity as a unique individual and cultural being and see themselves in the classroom environment. To further create a school community, many teachers displayed pictures of teachers and other staff members, such as the school director and instructional coaches near the families' pictures. They reported that displaying pictures of program staff, for example, in the classroom would be another way for children to see and appreciate cultural differences among children, families, and program staff in school.

During the interviews, several teachers reported that this type of cultural representation would provide opportunities to notice and discuss differences among peers, facilitate positive social interactions, increase parent participation, and help children develop cultural self-identities within the classroom. Teachers believed that in such classroom settings, they could create a positive and safe classroom community. As one teacher reported,

We have pictures of different nationalities up and when we use crayons we have different colors for different skin tones. Of course, we don't use the word cultural with the kids, but we do point out how we are all different from each other. We talk about that everyone is different. That it is okay to be different and we can still have fun and be safe with our differences. This also helps later on when a child has a disagreement with another child, or a child is upset about something. We talk about differences when we explain that this child wants to read a book to calm down or this child wants to be hugged to calm down.

Most participating teachers also mentioned that conveying a message that parents are an important part of the classroom for their practices to be culturally responsive. For example, teachers would ask parents specific questions about their child's potty-training routines, eating habits, and napping schedules. They tried to incorporate any differences with eating rituals practiced at home into the classroom setting, whether it was holding an infant a specific way or using a preferred cloth from home during feeding. but one teacher responded that while she had an open mind about cultural responsiveness in her classroom, one way she was culturally responsive is that she treated all of her children the same. According to the teacher, having similar activities with little variations in instructional practices was being culturally sensitive to her children in her opinion. This teacher explained,

Our kids come from low-income families and their families already don't have much. I just see it as sensitive and responsive when I plan activities and children are using the same types of materials. No one's fussing about differences. They see that mostly things are the same. Like stacking blocks. I have green, red, and blue ones. They look the same but just a different color. Now if I have a parent that has something from their culture that they want to share, then that's fine. But I don't push it because the kids are getting used to what they see in the classroom, and they don't get overwhelmed with differences.

The Home and School Collaboration Experience

The vast majority of participating teachers highlighted establishing positive home-school relations as a key element of the CRP, and they tried hard to find ways to build the home-school collaboration. One of the most common ways that teachers create positive bonds and communicate with parents during home visits and teacher-parent conferences. Since at least two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences are required for EHS programs, all teachers stated that it is during these scheduled sessions in the school year that they meet and collaborate with parents (Office of Head Start, 2024).

At the beginning of each school year, teachers are expected to adapt to a wide range of family cultures and lifestyles as new families are enrolled in the EHS program (Roggman et al., 2016). After a scheduled time is agreed upon, EHS teachers, the lead and assistant, visit the home of the child. Visiting each child's home is a way for teachers to build collaborative relationships with parents. During these vital meetings, parents share individualized and personalized information about their child. In turn, responsive teachers identify ways to individualize activities based on what is shared about the family's strengths and cultural norms. With documents in hand, teachers ask reflective questions and follow the parents' lead with the direction of the conversation as they collaborate with the parents to plan for classroom activities that will capitalize on the family's cultural beliefs and norms.

Program documents and forms such as the Individual Care Plan are completed to find out more in-depth information about the child and family that would help support the child in the classroom. The form helped to guide the EHS teachers to ask about topics that included parents' future goals for their child, families' cultural experiences that would help support the child, and various ways parents could be involved in the classroom experience. Some teachers reported

other ways to engage the family in program activities, such as parents reading a book in their home language, sharing a song about their culture, and cooking activities in the classroom that occurred prior to COVID. ne toddler teacher who stated,

I collaborate with parents by doing our individual care plan and first home visits and parent conferences to learn more about the child and family. In a normal non-Covid year, I would invite parents to participate in the classroom during certain activities or to share something from their culture with the class whether it is a song, story, or other activity.

Some teachers encouraged parents to complete activities at home, return to the class, or share them with children in the classroom as a way to connect and collaborate with families.

Some teachers took further steps not only to inform parents of what they have done or plan to do, but also made efforts to actively involve parents in planning, including asking parents a series of questions about their child's interests. For example, they asked for suggestions about what parents would like teachers to work on with their child or what they want teachers to do differently. Although teachers' perceptions that planning with parents is essential for learning, there were minimal opportunities for teachers and families to actually plan activities together that would be implemented in the classroom. As one teacher stated,

When we involve parents, we usually tell them what curriculum study we are about to learn about and discover and ask them if there is anything they would like for us to add or not cover with this certain study. Sometimes parents will respond, and we'll add that information. Usually, we'll take a picture of that activity for that family. But for most of our families we'll share what we are working on in the classroom.

Although teachers and parents seldom planned for specific activities together, teachers perceived that they had built a secure and trusting relationship with parents. They reported that parents seemed comfortable sharing personal information about their children and families. An infant teacher described her relationship with her parents as cooperative because communication occurred almost every day, and they built shared understanding through clear and frequent daily communications.

We talk to the parents almost every day, every day we try to see where they are, you know how it's going at home? It's important that we know because it may affect the child's behavior at school. Parents may not share much at the time but then at another time parents will feel more comfortable, because we've been talking with them, telling us what's going on with them and their families.

Barriers of Teachers' Cultural Responsiveness

Data collected from the teacher questionnaire showed that most teachers agreed that CRP implementation is beneficial for culturally diverse children. According to the questionnaires, approximately ninety-four percent of teachers believed that using culturally familiar instruction and examples will make learning new concepts easier. Most teachers believed that they fostered development and learning by individualizing certain activities that supported the needs of culturally diverse learners. An example most teachers agreed with include,

We are able to have activities that children are interested in and if they need further help then we can help them with manipulatives that they are familiar with. Sometimes we can buy them or sometimes we just ask the parents to bring in materials that they use at home, of course if we believe it's appropriate. I believe children feel safer, are calmer, and more comfortable with us because we have them in mind with different activities.

Despite the benefits of employing CRP in the classroom, teachers found that there were barriers in implementing what they perceived to be CRP in the classroom setting. Their perceptions about barriers included not understanding specific cultural practices, reluctance to move away from mainstream curriculums and traditional educational techniques, and the lack of professional development, coaching, and guidance in CRP implementation. One teacher commented,

I can admit that some cultural practices I really don't understand why certain things are like they are. For example, in some cultures it's okay for babies or older children have pacifiers for long periods of time and have bottles for long periods of time. And, and that's how the parents like it, they don't want to change it. I asked and one parent told me that's what she did when she was younger. I don't know, I guess there's nothing wrong with that. But I feel like if you're open with parents and you have the child's best interests at heart, I think that openness and caring breaks down any barriers.

This teacher admitted that she did not understand some of her families' cultural norms, expectations, and routines but was willing to work with the parents to find what works best for the child and the family. At times, teachers stated that they had limitations when trying to ask parents probing questions to familiarize themselves with the families' cultural behaviors because of communication difficulties, language differences, and interpreting cultural expressions. One teacher explained that language barriers are also problems with understanding families' cultural norms and values.

Another barrier to teachers' implementation of CRP is the hesitancy to implement teaching practices that were different from what they have relied upon for many years. The experienced teachers explained that they had pre-packaged sets of materials that had been collected over the years. They went on to explain that some of the materials that were collected years ago would be used for their current group of children. However, the experienced teachers were realizing that as their classroom demographics changed that what had been implemented in the classroom as a traditional curriculum during previous years would not support the developmental needs of their current group of children.

I have books, games, and other materials for my two-year-olds that I collected over the years. Two years ago, one of my children came from Nigeria. When I looked at all the stuff that I collected that I thought would help me teach I realized that everything I had was not appropriate for my little boy from Nigeria. He needed something else different. That's when it dawned on me that not only would my Nigerian child benefit that all of my children would benefit if I focused and tailored my plans to what's unique to them and their families.

Each teacher articulated that professional development and time for implementation are necessary if teachers are to transition from mainstream teaching practices to CRP implementation in infant and toddler classrooms. Each teacher agreed that professional development and coaching are key to understanding cultural norms and behaviors so that

teaching practices can better ameliorate the learning gaps of culturally diverse young learners. One teacher specifically mentioned getting school leadership support for professional development to improve their understanding of different cultural norms and traditions and implement CRP. The teachers who were interviewed noted that they were fully committed to high-quality instructional practices such as implementing CRP to promote positive child outcomes. As one teacher noted,

Books and articles for the practitioner are really important to help bring things to mind about other cultures and maybe think of things you haven't thought of before. I would love at my school to have like, like a lending library where I can go and grab a book and check it out for a couple of weeks and peruse through it. I like to gain information through reading and reflecting so I think I would love a lending library.

The COVID Dilemma and Accommodation

Since COVID protocols were still in place during the bulk of the data collection for this research, teachers spoke about the difficulty of planning and sustaining family engagement. Although they knew the protocols were a safety measure ordered by the government, parents had a difficult time with the limitations placed on them about entering the building. The protocol issue restricted the relationship building process between teachers and families. Since parents would normally attend weekly and monthly events and activities at the center, COVID protocols limited opportunities for parents to become involved and to feel isolated from the school community. Every teacher stated that they utilized Zoom to communicate with parents and children. Some teachers became creative and utilized educational apps since face-to-face conversations with parents were limited. One major HS grantee located in the east utilized Class Dojo to make sure there was open communication between teachers and parents. Parents became comfortable using the Class Dojo appt. One teacher explained,

When COVID hit, school leadership had to come up with some ideas about how to keep the communication with parents going when parents were told they couldn't come into the building.

And we didn't know how long this would last. Some parents complained because they were so used to seeing us and talking to us every day. We looked for ways to communicate with families. Of course, we had the phone, but we also started utilizing Zoom and Class Dojo. For example, during one of our weekly Zoom meetings, one of my families shared that he wanted his daughter to learn more vocabulary related to doctors. We took advantage of that during our clothing study and his daughter loved dressing up as a doctor. Ms. C made Doctor ID badges for all the children, so no one was left out. The child was so excited, and we were able to share this on the next Zoom call with parents.

Another teacher explained that she utilized Zoom quite frequently to communicate with a parent about her child's sleeping habits. As the teacher noted,

There was a child that was not napping at school at all. She just cried and cried during nap time. She didn't nap at all. Usually, we would talk with the parents in the classroom when they picked up. But during our Zoom meeting we brought this up to the parents and we found out that she was sleeping closely with her parents. So, we helped her as much as we could by staying close to her and offering stuffed animals during nap time in order for her to get the feeling that she's close to someone.

Due to COVID restrictions, only program staff and children were allowed in the building. At the time of the interviews, COVID restrictions were decreasing, and teachers were excited to see that parents were allowed back inside the centers.

Before COVID I got parents involved in family engagements like coming to volunteer in the classroom either reading a book in their home languages to the kids or make and talk about a cultural dish, music, cultural attire, and holidays. We are so excited to have parents back in the building. Since we usually don't see parents because they pick up outside it's been hard to build relationships with them.

RQ5: What are the parents of infants and toddlers' perceptions about teachers'

implementation of culturally responsive practices in EHS classroom settings?

Three major themes evolved after reviewing parents' responses about their perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices. The three overarching themes found are: 1) Centering on trust and relationships, 2) uncertainty about teachers' cultural responsiveness, and 3) getting back to involvement in the EHS setting are shown in Table 9. The three overarching themes are essential components to appropriately implement CRP in the classroom setting.

Table 12*Overarching Parent Themes*

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Centering on Trust and Relationships	Critical to parents are trust and consistency, Genuine relationships are important to parents	Relationships with teacher are pretty good, no problems with teachers, truly trust and comfortable sharing information with the teacher, teachers have been consistent in families' lives
Uncertainty about Teachers' Cultural Responsiveness	Parents' cultural traditions and values reflected in classroom (physical environment and with interactions)	Parents unsure about level of Teachers' cultural responsiveness But noticed pictures and toys that reflect families' cultural, backgrounds in the classroom, children get to see themselves themselves and their family members in the physical environment, parents were able to share their routines and cultural traditions and norms, parents unsure
Getting Back to Involvement in the EHS Setting	Family engagement limitations, parents were involved at the center at various levels	Family engagement consists of monthly events, parents attend events where projects are completed, COVID protocols limited involvement at the center, parent challenges to attending family engagement events that include work, childcare, and lack of communication with teacher and school

Centering on Trust and Relationships

Most of the parents interviewed used the words trusting and being comfortable with the teacher, which were consistent responses during the interview. Overall responses to the question about the teachers and school were very positive. All parents had only good things to say about

their child's teachers. A majority of parents were happy to share within the first minute with the researcher that they believed that their relationship with their child's teacher was excellent, while the one parent stated that her relationship with her child's teacher was okay. The consistency of a trusting and positive relationship they build with teachers is the critical component in the implementation of CRP.

As a high-quality early childhood agency, EHS staff promotes relationship-based practices that are consistent with continuity of care practices. With CRP implementation, teachers and parents need to have stable, secure and trusting relationships with each other to ensure that children are able to be successful. During these relationships that sometimes last for years, teachers are able to adjust the environment based on the changes in children's abilities and interests.

One parent of a toddler, who was currently attending, noted that she has had a good relationship with her child's teacher over many years because her older son had previously attended the specific site location. The mother noted,

I can say that the relationship with my son's teacher is pretty good cause I actually have been knowing her since my older son first started at the center. I don't have any problems with the teachers. I truly trust that my child will do well with the teachers. And, I'm comfortable sharing information with each teacher. No problems at all.

Another parent stated,

Oh yeah. The teachers are really good. And it's not just with Ms. L, it's with the other two teachers too. My son feels safe with each and every one of them makes him feel comfortable and he has learned so much. And they give me ideas and activities to do at home with him. For me to be open to them like it took a little bit for me. It took a while for me to open up to Ms. L. But once I noticed they were genuine and every time I talked to them, I felt comfortable.

This parent shared with the researcher that she was, at first, scared to open up and share because she had grown up in a broken home and suffered from depression and anxiety. She conveyed that she worried a lot because she had noticed in other classrooms that teachers had

come and gone. This mother stressed that she was glad to see that, although one of the assistant teachers was pregnant and would be out for several weeks, that there was still a close bond with the lead teacher and the floater teacher, who was consistently stationed in her child's classroom. The parent stated that Ms. L, the lead teacher, initially would send her pictures of her son as he took part in various classroom activities during the school day.

Uncertainty about Teachers' Cultural Responsiveness

During the interview, parents asked that the question 'How has your child's teacher included your cultural values and beliefs within classroom activities and experiences?' to be repeated several times. The researcher noticed that there was greater hesitancy from parents when trying to respond to this question. Most parents expressed that since they had limited access in the building during COVID they were unfamiliar with the teaching practices that were specifically implemented for their child in the classroom setting. Each parent shared that their child's teacher asked questions related to the families' customs and routines but did not know how the information was used to plan for classroom activities.

When asked about the cultural norm or routine that they believed was important to share with the teachers, most parents stated that their beliefs about potty-training were the most difficult to convey to the teachers. Most parents stated that when they explained their potty-training routines at home teachers did listen. A few parents explained that after a back-and-forth discussion with the teacher, a compromise about potty-training their child was decided between the two parties. As one parent noted,

I told her that I wanted him to go to the potty every thirty minutes. Ms. P told me that she and the other teachers usually asked the children if they had to go. If they didn't then they (children) weren't made to go. But I kept insisting that I wanted him to go every thirty minutes because I thought my son learns best when he does something over and over again. So, after we discussed it some more, the teachers decided that they would stick with it every thirty minutes for two

weeks and then slowly stop. Then we would see at that point if we wanted to continue. I liked that idea.

Parents did their best when trying to explain about their teachers' cultural responsiveness within the classroom setting. Regarding cultural responsiveness and practices by the teacher, one parent responded by giving an example of a positive classroom environment that she believed was culturally responsive and welcoming for all families. This parent revealed during the interview,

Ms. A is pretty much great with every family in the class. Like when I walk in, I see a lot of different items set up in the classroom for the different backgrounds and cultures of families. I see lots of pictures, mostly family pictures, and some toys. All the children get to see themselves and their family members. It's very welcoming. I just enjoy being in there. It makes me feel like a great big family of different people, just like my real family. I know she asked other parents and me many times to bring in something about my family for all the children to see. I finally brought in a little postcard that a family member gave me that shows small pictures of where (location) my family is from.

Another characteristic that most parents perceived was the teachers' cultural responsiveness and then somehow implemented in the planning was the parents' belief that they were able to have input in or share their traditions, routines, and norms with the teacher. As one parent shared,

So, I give the teachers, like, an overview of what goes on in my house. They get an idea of the routines and the type of things I do in the home. For example, like when baby girl (daughter) is eating. I told the teacher that we (parent and daughter) always play a little game of hide and seek with the bottle. I think she drinks her bottle better after we play. So, I told the teacher, and they (teachers) started doing it when we first started. That's what I did with my son and that's what I do with my daughter now. Now, I'm really not sure if the teacher is still doing it at school but I know when we first started in the classroom, I was very happy that the teacher would even try to do what we do at home.

All parents interviewed had a perception that their child's teacher was implementing teaching practices that were culturally responsive to their child's culture as well as with the other children. Some parents believed once they shared any information with the teacher about their child that it was important enough that the teacher would somehow use it in the classroom. A

few parents perceived that if their child's teacher requested anything for classroom use that they were compelled to find materials that were needed to support the learning process in the classroom.

For example, if the teachers requested materials or items for the classroom, parents stated that they readily sent the item in, especially if the material was needed specifically to help their child. As one parent expressed,

Like when the teacher let us know that she needs something from home for a project I send it in as soon as possible. When I see my child's finished work, I know the teacher included parts of the items I sent to school. And, when I look at the other children's work, I know the teacher included a little part of each child or their culture.

Parents commented that they believe children are learning about cultures other than their own in the classroom. During the interview, parents mentioned different classroom posters, music, and books that were readily available for children to use in the classroom.

Getting Back to Involvement in the EHS Setting

Although a key component of the EHS model, parents had a mix of responses about teachers' family engagement practices. The EHS requires parents to be actively involved in the program. All parents were aware of the requirement and believed that the program offers many opportunities for family engagement. Most parents expressed an interest in participating in family engagement events and activities and wished they could do more. However, the level of actual family engagement varied. One parent commented,

Yes, there are family engagement activities that our family is a part of at school. Usually there are certain events each month and we make sure to attend. We go to the classroom and complete art projects but sometimes it's different (the activities vary each time). But I show up or try to make sure someone's there to represent our family.

Many parents shared challenges for participating in family engagement. The reasons include a busy work schedule, lack of communication from the center for rescheduled events,

and need of childcare for other children. For example, one parent mentioned that since she works at the center it was difficult for her to take time for the scheduled family engagement events at the school. This parent, who is an assistant teacher in another classroom, commented,

I feel like I'm less involved with my son during the school day for any engagement activities. I asked my supervisor if I could go to one event, he said that I would have to take time off to attend. I don't feel like I'm as involved as I want to be. I know it's hard because of COVID but I wish they would do more. I wish they would do more with parents interacting with their kid. I had shared with my FA that I wish they would have more parent activities like having a picnic or just reading a book to my son's class.

Despite the challenges, several parents stated the benefit of active family engagement for their child and families. One parent commented that, at the time, she was a part of the policy council for her two-year-old child's EHS center. This mother revealed that her older son, who had just graduated from high school, also attended the same EHS center years ago. She also made known that several years before when her son attended, she had worked at the same location. She noted,

Yes, my son went there (center) years before and now he's graduated from high school. Now my daughter goes there. I try to be a part of and engaged with what's going on as much as I can. I'm on the policy council. So, I get to see a different side of EHS. I try to get other parents engaged too but I know it's hard with having other children and sometimes working can get in the way of being engaged. I guess there's different ways to be engaged and involved. But it's important for your children to see you there for them. Also, when you're there at the center the teacher knows, and you get to know them and what they do a little bit better.

Although parents' understanding about family engagement was at varying levels, parents' perceptions were that engagement in EHS program services was an essential component for their child's development and learning. Parents committed to being involved and engaged regardless of other responsibilities.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

Creating respectful and inclusive environments that honor the diverse perspectives of children and families is an aim of EHS programs (Office of Head Start, 2015). One way that this can be done is to promote culturally responsive approaches and implement a curriculum that builds on children's and families' cultures. This study examined the implementation of CRP in EHS settings from the teachers' and parents' perspectives.

Discussion

Although EHS grantees enroll thousands of culturally diverse young children in their programs, there has been minimal research on the implementation of CRP and the mechanisms that family engagement has on child outcomes. This study examined the associations among teacher perceived CRP implementation and families' perceptions of teachers' cultural responsiveness, and infants and toddlers' social-emotional outcomes with a focus on the mediational role of families' perceptions of teachers' cultural responsiveness in EHS classrooms via a mixed method study. Insights from the study provide information about how teachers' instructional practices may influence family engagement practices and social and emotional outcomes for infants and toddlers in EHS programs. This study contributes to the field by providing a view of how perceptions and beliefs about CRP are associated with child outcomes, while examining the perceptions of teachers and parents of infants and toddlers through questionnaires and in-depth interviews in EHS settings.

First, in this study, there were no correlations between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and parents' perceptions of teachers' family engagement practices. In other words, there was no effect on parents' perceptions about teachers' family engagement practices. This is not consistent with the literature which states that teachers who display openness, respect, and

acceptance, and form close bond with parents will be able to tap into families' cultural backgrounds and children's prior knowledge to provide culturally responsive and meaningful learning experiences (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). In most cases, CRP are linked to parent engagement efforts which lead to positive child and family outcomes.

Research has shown that teachers who are culturally responsive are more likely to encourage positive relationships and influence families to increase engagement in school activities (Forry et al., 2012; Sheridan et al., 2019). As a component of high process quality, establishing meaningful connections and relationships with families are crucial indicators of CRP implementation (McWayne & Melzi, 2014).

Second, there were no correlations between teachers' culturally responsive beliefs and social-emotional behaviors for girls. However, there were significant associations between teachers' culturally responsiveness and child social-emotional outcomes for boys only. Although teachers' may have perceived that CRP was of the utmost importance to them and it was consistently implemented in the classroom, parents perceived that there was no increase in the girl's positive social-emotional behaviors displayed in the classroom.

Based on descriptive statistical data, most teachers perceived that they were implementing responsive practices for their culturally diverse children such as supporting strategies that are specific to the child's needs. A thorough review and analysis of the teacher questionnaire revealed that teachers' culturally responsive beliefs were highest for the possibility that "students' self-esteem can be enhanced when their cultural background is valued by the teacher". Research has shown that self-esteem has been associated with behavioral progression and positive social-emotional development (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). During the interviews, most teachers stated they understood that children's cultural

background, such as their personal experiences and family norms, was beneficial to children's development and learning, especially social and emotional outcomes. When teachers focus on children's self-esteem, such as creating activities that would support and focus on strengths, positive behaviors will be exhibited in the classroom.

Although there was no association between high levels of teachers' culturally responsive practices and increased levels of positive social and emotional behaviors overall for both boys, the study did find some association between teachers' CRP subscales and social and emotional subscales with boys. Specifically viewing the teacher subscales, there was some statistical significance between teachers' interactions and cultural responsiveness in the classroom and child initiatives and attachment for boys only. One probable reason that there was an association between CRP implementation and positive social and emotional behaviors with boys is that, in EHS programs, there has been a paradigm shift to focus on strength-based strategies to help manage challenging behaviors and develop independent thinkers, especially with young boys. To lessen the risk factors for school failure, a shift from a deficit perspective to a view that identifies the strengths of the individual child that will support the growth and development of culturally diverse boys and girls. In turn, teachers can incorporate cultural experiences in the classroom that will help construct an internal working model to support an infant or toddler's positive view of self (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Instead of looking for disruptive behaviors in one group of culturally diverse children, teachers can work to reverse the misconceptions about various cultural groups and create classroom environments where culturally diverse children feel welcome to learn, explore, and be themselves (Wright, 2020). Gilliam et al. (2016) found that 76% of early education teachers believe that boys, regardless of race, require the most attention because of the identification of challenging behaviors, which also may support these findings.

Third, the hypothesis of the mediation model for the associations between teacher-perceived CRP implementation and child social and emotional outcomes with family engagement as the mediator was not supported. In other words, teachers' culturally responsive practices do not indirectly influence children's social and emotional outcomes through family engagement practices. Partnerships between families and teaching staff are an important element of the EHS program. Teacher and parent partnerships are an essential component that will help address what is needed for children's well-being. Research has shown that family engagement enhances continuity of learning between home and school settings that is critical to the educational success of young learners (Ma et al., 2016; Mendez, 2010). Partnerships between family and teachers help maintain consistency in routines across various settings, especially for infants and toddlers who are dependent on parents to communicate information about culture-specific routines and norms (McWayne et al., 2016).

For RQ3, three SEM models were created with the three teacher subscales, which are teacher interactions, teacher cultural responsiveness, and teacher practices. Each of the models did not yield any statistical significance. One factor which emerged as a possible reason that teachers' culturally responsive practices do not influence social and emotional behaviors when family engagement increased was the COVID challenge. At the time of the questionnaire and during some of the interviews, COVID protocols were in place where children and families were not permitted in the EHS building. Teachers had limited contact with children so the usual manner in which teachers would model behavior strategies techniques in the classroom setting with children did not occur.

The challenge that COVID presented is supported by the interview data with teachers and parents. As a result of COVID, many families perceived implementation of teacher CRP

activities were canceled and never rescheduled. Home Visits, an essential component of HS and EHS so that teachers would get to know the children and families in their home environment, were conducted over Zoom meetings. Both teachers and parents held strong views about COVID restrictions. Teachers and parents believed that COVID restrictions hindered relationship building. Although EHS leadership and teachers tried various ways to involve and engage families in program activities, parents were used to in person contact with teachers and believed that they were more involved before COVID protocols. Indeed, Home Visits, where there is a more intimate setting for parents to provide teachers with a better understanding of the educational needs of their children, were conducted via Zoom during COVID restrictions (Lin et al., 2008).

Fourth, the results show that most teachers perceived that their ideas about CRP implementation were high-quality and relevant to the child's needs. In addition, teachers' average mean score overall on each of the CRTOE questions was high. Within EHS programs and with staff, there is a focus on optimizing child development and academic performance by building strong bonds between home and school. From the interview, teachers discussed their thoughts about CRP implementation. Most teachers mentioned that first understanding the importance of culture is a first step in becoming a culturally responsive teacher. Most teachers believed that creating an environment where representations of diverse cultural artifacts, such as pictures, books, music, and art materials, from families are displayed in the classroom. Most teachers believed that collaboration with families is a critical factor for cultural responsiveness in the EHS setting. Most teachers believed that through collaboration with parents they received pertinent information about the child that would support positive child outcomes.

Fifth, from the interview data, parents perceived that their child's teachers were implementing practices that were tailored to their family's cultural background. However, most parents had a difficult time explaining to the researcher what they believed were culturally relevant and diverse activities that their child experienced in the classroom. During the interviews, most parents' perceptions about implementation of cultural responsiveness in the classroom varied by participant. However, after some thought, parents responded with key words and phrases, such as 'my routines', 'home schedule', 'good relationship' that would identify specific characteristics of CRP implementation by their child's teacher. Most parents perceived that there was a good, working relationship with their child's teacher, and believed that their child had opportunities to gain experience about diverse cultures in class.

Overall, parents felt that they and their child's teachers were working together to ensure the child's success. As one Tulsa parent shared that she felt that her child's teacher always updated her on any news or discussions that were related to school. During the time of this interview, the single mother mentioned that COVID measures were being eliminated and families were slowly being allowed back inside the centers. As the researcher asked questions about cultural beliefs, routines, and norms, at first, the mother claimed that she was not traditional and had no cultural routines to follow. However, after further discussions with the researcher about the ideas and beliefs that she values, the mother began to share the norms and routines that she had for her son. The mother stated that during talks with the teachers that she had shared about her son's physical and emotional health and the personal routines that she exhibited at home that related to his health. The mother believed that sharing this information gave teachers ideas about the family's norms and beliefs that could be implemented in the classroom.

Lastly, although cultural understanding was mentioned relative to this research, it is also imperative to understand culture in relation to the adults teaching within the same classroom setting. The importance of understanding culture and one's cultural background is not only significant for children's learning and development, but it is also relevant to understanding its impact on teaching teams as well. Each EHS teaching team consists of two to three teachers, which includes a lead and assistant teachers. Teaching teams must learn to communicate, navigate through, and work harmoniously to create an environment that supports the development of young learners. Many times, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences exist within the teaching team that may influence children's learning and development. As a researcher and instructional coach, I encountered various confrontational situations that were because of the teachers' cultural differences. Children exposed to varying beliefs and different macro-cultural expectations (De Gioia, 2009).

Limitations

First, the high scores recorded on the self-reported teacher measure show that these reflect the teachers' perceptions about their implementation of CRP rather than the actual, confirmed strategies administered in the classroom. Also, items for the teacher questionnaire could have scores that varied from zero to one hundred. Although teacher interviews were completed, classroom observations were not conducted to examine whether techniques for culturally diverse children were executed in the classroom. Also, the participants' perceptions about the survey items within CRTOE are not as clear and definitive, which leaves some ambiguity in interpretation. Furthermore, child outcomes were assessed by parent report only, with no other independent, objective ratings of child social behaviors. The parents' ratings on the child's social-emotional measures may have been influenced by their perceptions of their child.

In other words, since parents self-reported on the questionnaire, parent responses may be inflated.

Second, this was not a longitudinal study and there were a lot of perplexing factors that cannot be explained with this research. For example, the children's genetic factors were not controlled in this study. With a longitudinal study, genetic components would explain a lot about the children's social and emotional development over time. A longitudinal study would take into account the initial state of children's social and emotional development that could better examine the relationship between teachers' implantation of CRP and changes seen in children's social and emotional development over time. With the current study, data was collected at one time rather than over data collected and analyzed during time periods.

Third, conversations with participants during the interviews revealed that the word culture and culturally responsive instructional practices were often misunderstood (Lin et al., 2019). Parents had some ambiguity over what represented CRP in the classroom as well as how culture plays a part in learning and development.

Fourth, another limitation with the research study has to do with the sample size. The start of the research began during the period of COVID. Some of the findings represent the point in time when the US began to respond to the pandemic and the closures that occurred during that time. Some of the results may lack statistical power due to small sample sizes. Future studies should include larger and more balanced numbers to better explore research variables of interest. Another limitation with the research is that goodness of fit was not conducted.

Fifth, one caveat to note is that the researcher was employed by one of the HS grantees that was part of the research study. Although possible assumptions and biases could be made on behalf of the researcher, teachers, and parents because of the close affiliation to the agency, the

researcher self-reflected and critically assessed whether the collected data would be influenced by presuppositions and speculations.

Implications

Given that there was a positive correlation for teachers' cultural teaching practices, interactions, and responsiveness and social and emotional skills with boys, suggests the need to examine classroom practices that are used specifically for boys than for girls. Research shows that forty-eight percent of young children are suspended more than once and shockingly boys receive out of school suspension more than three out of four times while in preschool (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). Specifically, African American boys made up 91% of children expelled from preschool. One factor that equated to high expulsion rates was infrequent implementation of developmentally appropriate practices. In this case, more professional development would benefit teachers who were seeking to become more culturally responsive when planning for classroom activities associated with school readiness, such as social and emotional outcomes.

As a strength-based approach to learning, the focus of CRP is on what culturally diverse children know and are able to do in contrast to what they cannot do and know, especially with school readiness skills such as social and emotional behaviors (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2018). Qualitative data from the research provided information on what teachers considered as adaptive measures to support culturally diverse infants and toddlers. During the interviews, teachers spoke about the importance and impact of collaboration with parents to ensure support of each child's unique cultural differences. Instead of having a shortsighted view of family engagement that just focuses on major holidays and events, future researchers can include input from culturally diverse parents as part of the discussion to improve

teaching practices and child outcomes. With the data, EHS agencies and center-based leadership can use parent information to expand the definition of and improve family engagement efforts.

As ECE teachers strive to engage all students in their learning, more professional development is necessary as well as time needed to implement and reflect on instructional practices for culturally diverse children (Bullock et al., 2013). Culturally responsive teachers need ongoing high quality professional development that provides feedback and practice to facilitate change with culturally diverse young children. In addition, collaboration with families is paramount to sustain positive changes in the EHS environment. Parents need to be included in professional development where families can share their experiences and help develop appropriate cultural activities for young learners.

Conclusion

Given the increase in culturally diverse student populations in the US, educators have been trying to find ways to address the achievement gap of culturally diverse children. For EHS children, the purpose of the research was to see if incorporating CRP in the classroom is significant as it allows teachers to individualize practices to the unique needs of children and families as well as impact child outcomes. More research is needed in regard to what culturally responsive practices are being implemented for infants and toddlers in EHS classrooms.

Although the findings did not yield results that were hypothesized, it is imperative that school leadership and teachers seek to understand parents' authentic thoughts and feelings about what occurs in the classroom setting. Since family engagement is a critical foundation of the EHS model, it is critical that teachers understand the families' experiences and traditions to be better able to have respectful dialogue, implement culturally responsive practices, and support children's unique developmental needs.

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Appendix A: Overarching Teacher Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Importance of Teachers' Cultural Understanding and Experiences	Differences in background, family history, traditions, belief systems	Culture reflects growing up, different for everyone Reflects traditions, beliefs, ways of life Learning about families' culture Diversity
	Acceptance of others, builds classroom community	Have an open mind Culture helps broaden views and understanding about others
	Respectful of culturally diverse families	Learning to accept people from all backgrounds
	Influence how one thinks, feels, and learns about topics	Professional development conversations about brain development and culture
	Influence social-emotional behaviors	Enhance learning with classroom activities and experiences that incorporate culture that support
Representing and Incorporating the Families' Culture in the Classroom	Unique cultural differences, incorporate more meaningful experiences between home and school Use culturally diverse resources: songs, materials, and books	Make connections with families, Respect the home language Intentionally have books, songs, pictures that reflect each child Ask more in-depth questions about children and families
Home/School Collaboration Experience	Classroom experiences: involve parents, consistent relationships develop between teacher and families	Welcome parents in the class, use cultural items from home, parents are in contact with teachers, belief that parents feel comfortable sharing information

Barriers of Teachers’
Cultural Responsiveness

Misunderstanding about
cultural practices,
different practices,
teachers accustomed to
mainstream curriculum,
Need for professional
development

Efforts made by teachers to
understand families’ cultural norms,
Disciplinary actions are different
from home to school, Mismatch
with behavior management between
Home and school

COVID Dilemma and
Accommodation

Relationships between
teachers and parents
limited during COVID,
Varied methods to teach
children and
communication, Decrease
of family engagement

New ideas and communication style
Keep in contact with parents, Zoom
and educational apps were utilized,
restriction of in-person contact with
parents and children during
COVID, Restrictions in place for
parent volunteers and family
engagement activities

Appendix B: Overarching Parent Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Centering on Trust and Relationships	Critical to parents are trust and consistency, Genuine relationships are important to parents	Relationships with teacher are pretty good, no problems with teachers, truly trust and comfortable sharing information with the teacher, teachers have been consistent in families' lives
Uncertainty about Teachers' Cultural Responsiveness	Parents' cultural traditions and values reflected in classroom (physical environment and with interactions)	Parents unsure about level of Teachers' cultural responsiveness But noticed pictures and toys that reflect families' cultural, backgrounds in the classroom, children get to see themselves themselves and their family members in the physical environment, parents were able to share their routines and cultural traditions and norms, parents unsure
Getting Back to Involvement in the EHS Setting	Family engagement limitations, parents were involved at the center at various levels	Family engagement consists of monthly events, parents attend events where projects are completed, COVID protocols limited involvement at the center, parent challenges to attending family engagement events that include work, childcare, and lack of communication with teacher and school

Appendix C: Internal Review Board Study Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: February 19, 2021

IRB#: 13027

Principal Investigator: Tonya Leigh Thomas

Approval Date: 02/19/2021

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Culturally Responsive Practices and Child Outcomes in Early Head Start Classrooms

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix D: IRB Inactivation



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Final Report – Inactivation

Date: December 12, 2024

To: Tonya Leigh Thomas

IRB#: 13027

Study Title: Culturally Responsive Practices and Child Outcomes in Early Head Start Classrooms

Inactivation Date: 12/12/2024

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the Final Report for the above-referenced research study. You have indicated that this study has been completed and should be inactivated. This letter is to confirm that the IRB has inactivated this research study as of the date indicated above.

Note that this action completely terminates all aspects and arms of this research study. Should you wish to reactivate this study, you will need to submit a new IRB application.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix E

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. How has your cultural background and experiences prepared you for teaching infants, toddlers, and twos in Head Start?
2. What does it mean to be culturally responsive in your classroom (and society)? How would you describe your cultural responsiveness in your classroom? How would you describe your cultural responsiveness during your large group Connect sessions with children? (*Describe specific activities have you implemented to address cultural diversity issues.*)
3. Describe how you collaborate with parents to implement culturally responsive practices? (How do you involve parents when planning activities?)
4. What information and resources have you used in the past two years to better explore and/or implement diversity in your classroom?
5. Describe the successes you have encountered while implementing culturally responsive activities in your classroom.
6. Describe the challenges or barriers you have encountered while implementing culturally responsive activities in your classroom.

Appendix F

Parent Engagement Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe your and your child's experiences and engagement in the classroom? Describe how you work with teachers to implement your family's cultural values in classroom experiences.
2. What information do you think you need to share with your child's teacher that would be helpful for them to understand your cultural beliefs and values?
3. How has your child's teacher incorporated/implemented your cultural values and beliefs during your child's day in the classroom setting?
4. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your relationship with your child's teacher?

Appendix G: Sample Measure

5. How often does your childcare provider or teacher:

[MARK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW.]

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often
a. Ask about your family?	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Work with you to develop strategies you can use at home to support your child's learning and development?	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Listen to your ideas about ways to change or improve the care and education your child receives?	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Offer you ideas or suggestions about parenting?	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Provide you with opportunities to make decisions about your child's education and care?	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Provide you with opportunities to give feedback on his or her performance?	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Remember personal details about your family when speaking with you?	☐	☐	☐	☐
h. Contradict you in front of your child?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix H: Sample Measure



Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Infants Record Form (1 month up to 18 months)

Mary Mackrain, Paul LeBuffe and Gregg Powell

Infant's Name _____ Gender _____ DOB _____ Age _____
 Person Completing this Form _____ Relationship to Infant _____ (In Months)
 Date of Rating _____ Site/Program _____ Room _____

This form describes a number of behaviors seen in some infants. Read the statements that follow the phrase: *During the past 4 weeks, how often did the infant...* and place a check mark in the box underneath the word that tells how often you saw the behavior. Answer each question carefully. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer every item. If you wish to change your answer, put an X through it and fill in your new choice as shown to the right.

Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
☒	☒	☐	☐	☐

Item # During the past 4 weeks, how often did the infant...

Item #	During the past 4 weeks, how often did the infant...	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
1	try to do new things?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	respond when spoken to?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	imitate actions of others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	enjoy interacting with others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	keep trying when unsuccessful?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	enjoy being cuddled?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	show interest in what others were doing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	show affection for a familiar adult?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	notice changes in surroundings?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	seek comfort from familiar adults?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	adjust her/his energy level to the type of play?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	act in a good mood?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	act happy when praised?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	make eye contact with others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	explore surroundings?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix I: Sample Measure

- (1) A positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students.
- (2) Incorporating a variety of teaching methods will help my students to be successful.
- (3) Students will be successful when instruction is adapted to meet their needs.
- (4) Developing a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse cultural backgrounds will promote positive interactions between students.
- (5) Acknowledging the ways that the school culture is different from my students' home culture will minimize the likelihood of discipline problems.
- (6) Understanding the communication preferences of my students will decrease the likelihood of student-teacher communication problems.
- (7) Connecting my students' prior knowledge with new incoming information will lead to deeper learning.
- (8) Matching instruction to the students' learning preferences will enhance their learning.
- (9) Revising instructional material to include a better representation of the students' cultural group will foster positive self-images.
- (10) Providing English Language Learners with visual aids will enhance their understanding of assignments.
- (11) Students will develop an appreciation for their culture when they are taught about the contributions their culture has made over time.
- (12) Conveying the message that parents are an important part of the classroom will increase parent participation.
- (13) The likelihood of student-teacher misunderstandings decreases when my students' cultural background is understood.
- (14) Changing the structure of the classroom so that it is compatible with my students' home culture will increase their motivation to come to class.
- (15) Establishing positive home-school relations will increase parental involvement.
- (16) Student attendance will increase when a personal relationship between the teacher and students has been developed.
- (17) Assessing student learning using a variety of assessment procedures will provide a better picture of what they have learned.
- (18) Using my students' interests when designing instruction will increase their motivation.

Appendix J: Consent

Signed Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Tonya Thomas from the Early Childhood Education Department, and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Culturally Responsive Practices in Early Head Start Classrooms. This research is being conducted at early childhood centers in Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher or parent/guardian of an infant or toddler. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to examine the cultural beliefs and perceptions of teachers and parents/guardians of infant and toddlers in early childhood settings. Also, this study will explore the impact of culturally responsive practices on family engagement and young children's social-emotional outcomes in early childhood classrooms.

How many participants will be in this research? About **120 people** will be recruited to participate in the research:

- **Stage 1: 60 teachers and 60 parents/guardians** of infants and toddlers to complete the questionnaires
- **Stage 2: 10 teachers and 10 parents/guardians** of infants and toddlers to participant in the interviews (*selected interview participants are chosen after completing the survey*)

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will

- **If you are a teacher of infants, toddlers, and twos:** asked to complete 1 questionnaire/survey and later, if selected, will participate in a one-time individual interview
- **If you are a parent/guardian of infants, toddlers, and twos:** asked to complete 2 questionnaires/surveys and later, if selected, will participate in a one-time individual interview

How long will this take? Your participation will take: IRB NUMBER: 1302IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/1



- To complete the questionnaires: **For teachers**, the one survey will take 10 minutes. **For parents/guardians**, the 2 surveys will take 15 minutes.
- To complete the interviews: **For teachers**, the interview will take 30 minutes. **For parents/guardians**, the interview will take 30 minutes.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? “There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.”

Will I be compensated for participating? You may be compensated for your participation in this research.



IRB NUMBER: 1302IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/1

Teachers who participate and complete the questionnaire will be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card. **Parents/guardians** who participate and complete the questionnaires will be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card.

Teachers and parents/guardians who participate in the interviews will receive a \$25 gift card upon completion of their participation.

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you without your permission). Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree for data records to include my identifiable information. ____Yes ____No

I agree to being quoted directly.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material. ☐ Yes ☐ No I agree
for the researcher to use my identifiable data in future studies. ☐ Yes ☐ No

What will happen to my data in the future?

After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers and the dissertation committee.

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, (interviews) may be recorded on an audio recording device. If you complete an interview in Zoom, your interview session will be recorded. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher might like to contact you to gather additional data or recruit you into new research.

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at:

Tonya Thomas, 918-935-4818 or at tonya.l.thomas-1@ou.edu

- **My University of Oklahoma's advisor's name is Dr. Kwon and she can be reached at 770-905-9506 or at kkwon@ou.edu.**

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date



IRB NUMBER: 1302IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/1