Enhancing Cultural Competence Among Teachers of African American Children Using Mediated Lesson Study

Cirecie A. West-Olatunji; Linda Behar-Horenstein; Jeffrey Rant; Lakechia N. Cohen-Phillips

University of Florida; University of Florida; University of Florida; Gulf Coast Community Services Center-Houston

Researchers investigated if early childhood teachers could become reflective practitioners when they studied culturally specific constructs within a digital collegial environment. Three female African American early childhood teachers within three different settings (a faith-based primary school, a home school, and a government-funded pre-school agency) developed mini-research projects using a mediated form of Lesson Study. Data consisted of teachers’ electronic mail, application artifacts, synchronous and asynchronous online activities via Blackboard, and videotaped exit interviews. Findings showed that even when there is ethnic congruence, teachers are inclined to teach in ways that propagate the Eurocentric curriculum model. The teachers’ use of a culturally-specific reflective teaching model resulted in culturally responsive teaching practices within their individual classrooms.

As early as third grade, African American students demonstrate significantly lower performance in reading, mathematics, and science as compared to their White, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander peers (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2002). Furthermore, this achievement gap, between African American students and their more affluent White counterparts, continues to widen over time (West-Olatunji, 2005). A major problem faced by many culturally diverse students is the centrality of Western values in the educational system (Banks, 2006; Grant, 2006). This ethnocentric monoculturalism in school environments is characterized by a lack of sensitivity in which teachers typically do not use culturally responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 2005), the material used often does not represent individuals from diverse cultures (Gay, 2000), and racial segregation among students exists (Grant, 2006; Kozol, 2005). Some of the consequences of cultural marginalization include low-end tracking (Broaded, 1997), low teacher expectations (Garrahy, 2001; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002), and an increase in punitive actions (Brooks, West-Olatunji & Baker, 2005; Townsend, 2000; West-Olatunji, Baker & Brooks, 2006).

Polite (1994) offered the use of chaos theory to explain the academic challenges experienced by African American youth. Chaos theory proposed that the continuous occurrence of multiple minor events can have significant and cumulative effects. Other scholars (Grant, 2006; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995b) have focused on the prevailing sociopolitical conditions that predispose teacher attitudes and expectations about students. These scholars theorized that societal conditions allow some educators to take advantage of their position, power, and prestige to negatively impact the educational experiences of African American and other marginalized students (Calabrese & Underwood, 1994). Perhaps, the achievement gap is best understood from the lens of culturally appropriate pedagogy. This framework theorized that African American students arrive in the school environment with a set of unique and legitimate ways of being that are cognitively, linguistically, and behaviorally different from White middle-class norms (Phillips, 1993). From this viewpoint, school failure can be attributed to the cultural incompatibility of the
school environment, such as structure, content, curriculum, teaching practices, materials, and organization (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

The primary purpose of this research project was to investigate the role of culture in collaborative researcher and practitioner inquiry, communication, and mentoring. The researchers asked the question, "Is there instructional benefit from early childhood practitioners’ study of culturally specific constructs within a collegial circle of learners?" Through mediated lesson study (inquiry and action)—focused primarily, but not exclusively, on African American students’ learning—teachers constructed a shared knowledge base about teaching and teacher-research, culture, students, and learning.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PEDAGOGY

African American students often have a multi-layered set of obstacles to overcome in order to succeed in the school environment (West-Olatunji, 2000). Firstly, sociopolitical conditions may dictate the accessibility to educational materials, and resources as well as the aesthetics of the learning environment. Secondly, there are often conflicts between the students’ socially constructed knowledge and that of the school (Gordon, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Riojas-Cortez, 2001). The belief that education and knowledge are non-neutral terrains (King, 1997) is a focal point for debate among educators who theorize about the usefulness of multiculturalism in education. Banks (1998) and Grant (2006) have long challenged traditional thought about the cultural hegemony that predominate the American curriculum.

Culturally appropriate pedagogy is informed by the disparity in achievement of many children from non-traditional ethnocultural groups within the schooling process. Often termed as culturally relevant (Derman-Sparks, Cronin, Henry, Olatunji & York, 1998), culturally congruent (Au & Blake, 2003), culturally responsive (Gay, 2000), or culture-centered (King, 1997), this particular framework suggests that culturally diverse children are often marginalized in educational systems that are based on cultural and educational hegemony. Culturally appropriate pedagogy suggests that there are positive outcomes when teachers acknowledge and affirm the cultural values and beliefs of culturally and economically diverse students (Gay, 2000; Gordon, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2000). Based on her study of excellent teachers in California schools that served an African American community, Ladson-Billings (1995a) asserted that teachers must ensure that African American students experience academic success, develop and maintain their cultural competence, that their culture serve "...as a vehicle for learning", and that teachers help students develop a critical consciousness so that they can challenge the status quo (p. 160). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings suggested that students "develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique social norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" but challenge them as well (p. 162). Gay (2000) recommended that teachers use ethnically diverse students’ cultural frames of references and knowledge so that learning experiences are more relevant and effective for them. This study furthered the investigation of the usefulness of culturally appropriate pedagogy by incorporating collaborative inquiry using a mediated form of lesson study.

LESSON STUDY

Lesson study is an approach to reflective teaching that uses collaborative dialogue to engage teachers in a collective examination of their classroom practices. Borrowing from this Japanese traditional method of practitioner-driven inquiry, educators in the U.S. are increasingly interested in lesson study because of its inherent focus on teachers as researchers (Lewis, Perry & Murata, 2006). The term, “lesson study” translates from the Japanese word, jugyookenkyu, in which the word, jugyo (lesson), is combined with the word, kenkyu (study or research). Primarily used in elementary and middle schools with a focus on mathematics and science, lesson study use by Japanese educators can be traced back to the early 1900s (Fernandez, 2002).
Lesson study is a process that facilitates reflection, collaboration, and collegiality among teachers as they design and evaluate their lessons (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998). As a team, teachers generate a research question and create a detailed lesson plan for a particular subject that they have chosen to investigate at the onset of the project. Next, the team observes the lesson as it is taught, then re-evaluates the plan and makes changes. Teachers repeat this cycle as often as it is needed throughout the period of inquiry. Based on the results of their study, teachers develop a report on lessons learned, and then disseminate it to the school community. The focus of the inquiry can be dispositions (i.e., intervening with a child who is socially isolated) or skills (e.g., a student may be lacking basic math skills or knowledge of the scientific method). It can target all the students in a school, a particular grade level, or content area. The number of teachers on a lesson study team is not a set number and the focus of the group’s interaction may be a classroom, a particular school, or the focus may be regional or statewide in scope (Fernandez, 2002).

While the practice of lesson study originated in Japan, it has gained in popularity in the United States as a professional development tool (Lewis, 2000). Most of the work involved the use of lesson study in the area of mathematics education (Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003). From these endeavors, several challenges are highlighted when considering the use of lesson study with U.S. teachers. The most salient challenge to the use of lesson study in the U.S. has been the development of research skills, such as posing sound research questions, conceptualizing a classroom experiment, and articulating what artifacts might serve as evidence. The systematic approach to lesson study in Japan allows for the development of supportive networks within the school community in which teachers are given flexible schedules during the school day so that they can participate in group meetings. This leads to the development of a cultural climate of collaboration and a group orientation. This work environment contrasted with the independence and isolation that many U.S. teachers’ experience (Gonzales, 2004) and their “impoverished understanding of one another’s abilities and activities” (Lortie, 1975, p. 89). The use of a mediated form of lesson study served as a mechanism for making collaborative inquiry about the usefulness of culturally appropriate pedagogy.

**Collaborative Learning**

Widely used in educational settings and in different classrooms throughout the world (Tsaparlis & Gorezi, 2005), collaborative learning has been applied to nearly every subject, ranging from statistics to chemistry (Davis & Blanchard, 2004) to progress reports for special education students (Webre, 2005). Collaborative learning is effective for work with teachers and students (Webre, 2005), among preservice teachers (Seifert, 2005), and with parents, special educators, tutors, and school administrators (Spencer, 2005).

Contemporary research has shown that collaborative learning leads to improved problem-solving abilities (Fawcett & Garton, 2005). It has also been shown that collaboration: helps groups improve their problem-solving abilities, enhances student motivation (Shindler, 2004), facilitates conflict resolution (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberle & Wahl, 2000), and aids teacher-student understanding and rapport-building (Davis & Blanchard, 2004; Weibre, 2005). Some of the research on collaboration has focused on: ways to counteract teacher autonomy and insularity (McDonald & Klein, 2003), collegiality (Grunberg & Armellini, 2004), theorizing and reflection (Rust & Meyers, 2006), and burnout prevention (Allen & Miller, 1990).

Collaborative learning involves the creation of a small group of teacher-researchers who jointly problem solve and accomplish shared goals (Capobianco, Lincoln, Canel-Brown, & Trimarchi, 2006). This process helps teachers regain their personal empowerment to effectively address classroom or student problems (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991; Slavin, 1990).

There is no on-line context for collegial inquiry and learning that focuses on the African American culture as a resource. The Commission on Research in Black Education (CORIBE), an American Educational Research Association initiative (King, 2005), has produced a wealth of knowledge and resources. For example, state-of-the-art research papers on best practices in Black
education, on-line multimedia Songhay language and culture lessons, and an interactive database on research in cultural transmission in the African Diaspora have been included. These resources are available on the CORIBE web site (www.coribe.org) that hosted the on-line collegial learning circle in this study.

The goal of this research study was multifaceted. Firstly, teachers were introduced to the basic concepts of lesson study. Secondly, teachers were supported in the development and implementation of a research project that aimed at enhancing culturally appropriate pedagogy. Finally, the benefits of providing a context for practitioner-researchers to engage in a rigorous collaborative investigation about the role of culture in student and teacher learning and growth were assessed.

**METHODS**

**Participants**

The teachers in this study included three teacher-collaborators and a master teacher—all African American females. The master teacher was a retired early childhood educator with more than twenty-five years of teaching experience at the pre-kindergarten through third grade levels. The educational experiences of the teachers were a board certified teacher with a master’s degree in teaching employed at a faith-based school, a stay-at-home mother with a law degree operating a home school, and a childcare provider with a high school diploma. The classrooms in which the students were taught included: a faith-based primary school, a home school, and a federally funded pre-school program. The faith-based primary school teacher taught ten children who were ages five through seven, while the home school teacher taught three children with ages seven and eight and the childcare provider taught 26 children at the ages of four and five. In this study, the authors began by assessing the teacher-collaborators’ knowledge of cultural strategies. Next, they trained the participants in use of a mediated form of lesson study as a means of assuring competence in the use of it. A mediated form of lesson study was used to accommodate the multiple settings in which the studies and collaborative inquiries occurred. Teacher-collaborators selected a research problem and, then, implemented lesson activities that were directed at providing evidence.

**Tasks**

Each of the three teacher’s research questions and corresponding teaching methods addressed the issue of culture in teaching. The study participants were introduced to the concepts of culturally appropriate pedagogy, lesson study as a reflective teaching tool, and collaborative learning. Weekly meetings with one of the researchers, the master teacher, and the study participants permitted the analysis of the lesson plan and identification of the gaps between curriculum implementation and the research goals. When problems with implementation were revealed, the group process led the participants to ask, “What are we not doing?” “What do we need to do instead?” Group members offered alternative methods that would assist the teacher in reaching the research goal. The lesson plan approach focused the group’s analysis on review of teacher practice in light of existing objectives and reported outcomes. Following group feedback, the teacher-collaborator implemented the revised lesson and recorded the outcomes.

Monthly learning circle seminars were convened using Blackboard, an on-line course management system environment (For additional information, go to www.blackboard.com/products/academic_suite/learning_system/index). Seminar topics, such as, “The State of Knowledge about the Education of African Americans” and “Black Populations Globally: The Costs of the Underutilization of Blacks in Education” were presented by research mentors as part of the on-line workshops.

The authors facilitated mediated lesson study discussions to assist teachers with research skill development, such as research design, data collection, and analysis. Mentors provided live and on-line discussions and consultations for research, pedagogical and technological assistance. The
master teacher was contracted to provide assistance with instructional and pedagogical challenges in which technology consultants supplied by the partnering university helped teachers to become skillful while navigating Blackboard, using software, and managing the data. Teacher knowledge and growth were evaluated using performance-based assessments including lesson presentations and portfolios. Rubrics were developed to assess lesson presentations and multimedia portfolios. Teachers demonstrated reflective practice within a collegial circle, application of socio-cultural knowledge, and a deeper understanding of culture, students, and learning (see Table 1).

All of the participants, teacher-collaborators, the master teacher and the authors wrote and shared their cultural biographies. This process helped to illuminate how personal historiography shaped instructional strategies and cultural awareness (Henry, 2006). A post-intervention interview was administered to assess how the mediated lesson study process might have transformed teacher awareness of the influence of culture in effective teaching.

**Research Design**

In this study the authors used confirmatory analysis to examine the results. Confirmatory analysis or audit review evaluation is a method of comparing the findings to what has actually been reported in the literature (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). An audit was used to compare what educational researchers have already found to the findings that were revealed in this study.

The researchers followed the intentions of a case study in order to go beyond the descriptive questions, such as who, what, when, how much, and how many, to answer the questions of how and why (Yin, 1993, 1994). This method provided an ideal research tool to explore the how’s and why’s of the participant’s worldview. Case study research encouraged researchers to focus on the context and be receptive to multiple, interacting influences (Rubai, 2002). Designed to investigate the rich complexities of social phenomena and the social environments in which they are situated, case study is conceptualized as a useful research strategy (MacPherson, Brooker, & Ainsworth, 2000). Furthermore, the use of this heuristic methodological approach allowed the researchers to deepen the reader’s understanding of the participant’s phenomenology in a manner that extends the reader’s own experience (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected from participants’ electronic mail, documents from the application process, synchronous and asynchronous on-line activities via Blackboard (discussion threads, bulletin board postings, and virtual classroom interactions), completed lesson study forms, multimedia portfolios, and videotaped exit interviews. The steps taken in the data analyses were

- reading through the transcripts of electronic mail, application documents, on-line activities, completed lesson study forms, and multimedia portfolios several times while highlighting comments or phrases that were representative of the participants’ teaching experiences,
- listening to the videotapes of each teacher’s exit interview session,
- listening to the videotapes while reading through the transcript of the interview (to assess for accuracy),
- clustering highlighted statements into summary statements on the right margin of the transcript, and
- creating domains of meanings from the clustered summary statements.

Using the steps described, the authors analyzed the participant data. The domains of meaning that emerged from the data were summarized along with actual quotes associated with each of the categories. Commonalities and highlights were subsequently examined. As the themes emerged, they were given names. However, no *a priori* themes were developed before the analysis. Researchers asked the question: "Is there instructional benefit from early childhood practitioners studying culturally specific constructs within a collegial circle of learners?"
Table 1

Mediated Lesson Study Rubrics for Assessing Teacher Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediated Lesson Study Rubrics</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Community: The classroom community reflects a cultural awareness, taking into account that group concerns transcend individual strivings, encouraging group interaction rather than individualism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Centering: There is a connection between the subject matter and the student's cultural background. The subject matter incorporates a perspective that integrates culturally diverse resources, including those from the student's family and community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Expectations: The lesson(s) exemplify a belief in the student's ability to perform higher-order thinking skills: engage students in problem-solving, analysis, and critical thinking, promoting academic achievement in ways that emphasize both personal and academic engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ethical Considerations: The lesson demonstrates sensitivity to ethical considerations. Dignity, respect, integrity, and concern for the student's welfare should be reflected in the lesson(s) at all times.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Authentic Assessment: Assessment is authentic, age-appropriate and addresses a variety of developmental needs, conceptual abilities, and curriculum outcomes.</td>
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RESULTS

It was assumed that the teachers would attempt to infuse culturally relevant lessons and activities into their teaching and that the collegial circle would help to generate new ideas. Also the authors expected that the teachers would reflect on these three items: (a) use of culturally appropriate pedagogy, (b) mediated lesson study, and (c) collaborative learning and its impact on their teaching and their students' learning. It was thought that the teachers would form some opinions about these concepts.

Although all three teachers began with research questions about culture, only one teacher, the faith-based schoolteacher, was able to tie her research question directly to her practice. In the faith-based schoolteacher's lesson plans and activities, there was evidence of an understanding of culture-centered instruction while the other two teachers—the home-based teacher and childcare provider—only had a cursory view of how to incorporate culture in their instruction. However, by being involved in the project, all three teachers were able to evidence new knowledge regarding multicultural teaching practices.

Each of the teachers reported that they believed that using culturally relevant lessons helped their students learn. However, it was interesting that even though they were of the same ethnicity as their students, the teachers did not see themselves as cultural beings. The teachers taught in a manner that did not consider their own culture. Instead, their teaching methods reflected how they had been taught—in a Eurocentric curriculum. The teachers did not understand the impact that culturally appropriate pedagogy can have. The faith-based school teacher stated: "In my own educational experiences, I didn't notice that my cultural identity was a factor in my ability to obtain knowledge."
The domains of meaning that emerged from the data were written up along with actual quotes associated with each of the categories. Commonalities and highlights were examined. Based on the design of the study, it was expected that three major themes would be present: (a) personal growth, (b) cultural competence, and (c) reflectivity. The theme of cultural competence and an associated sub-theme of culturally aware were most salient. Under the theme of personal growth, the issue of empowerment presented significantly. The theme of reflectivity essentially became a sub-theme of cultural competence because the teachers were mostly reflective of how culture influences their teaching. The teachers did little reflecting in areas other than cultural competence and awareness of how culture influences teaching and learning. In the following section, the three major themes of cultural awareness, reflectivity, and empowerment will be discussed.

**Cultural Awareness**

Teachers displayed cultural awareness in their research questions, lessons, and activities, and reflections on their lessons and activities. The results show that the teachers considered the role of culture when formulating their class lessons. The collaborative nature of the collegial circle and the ideas that were generated within it influenced the development of teachers’ lessons. The home-based teacher stated,

> As African Americans, we have a rich heritage; therefore, I must present them with a rich curriculum. As W. E. B. Du Bois describes, ‘the Black person in America has two “warring souls.” On one hand, Black people are products of their Afro-American heritage and culture. On the other hand, they are shaped by the demands of the Anglo-American culture.’ I find it necessary to bring in lots of literature that contains pictures of faces that look like my children. So often, in their textbooks, the faces that they see are those with whom they are unfamiliar. Children are marginalized in classrooms that do not acknowledge and affirm their cultural values and beliefs (Gay, 2000; Gordon, 1997).

Teachers addressed this issue by considering the culture of their students in the design of culturally congruent lessons. They reported that teaching using culturally relevant activities increased their students’ learning. The faith-based teacher reported,

> The lesson study templates have assisted me by causing me to infuse more culturally appropriate materials into the curriculum. ... Many of these findings need to be shared with the public schools system because their curriculums offer little to no culturally appropriate materials.

**Reflectivity**

Participant’s reflectivity was a prominent sub-theme of cultural awareness. The teachers had to be culturally present to develop creative lessons that were culturally relevant for their students. The faith-based school teacher expressed that “I find it an obligation to present my children (students) with materials that are culturally rich and materials that they can relate to.” As they reflected on the lessons and evaluated their effectiveness, one teacher posed new questions related to their classes and how culture affects student learning. The home-based teacher asked: “Do culturally diverse learners show an increase in [learning] materials and information that contain members of their culture?” The faith-based school teacher stated, “The goal of this lesson is to increase self-awareness and self-esteem through the use of materials that contain images that reflect themselves.”

The three participating teachers were of the same ethnicity as their students. It is a common assumption that they would understand the impact of culture and use it in their teaching. However, prior to their involvement in this study, the teachers were not aware of how culture could impact teaching and learning. The home-based teacher stated, “When I initially embarked on this assignment, cultural identity was simply not part of the equation. I simply thought that anyone could teach any child basic academic skills.” The childcare provider said,
As a Black American, there are a lot of things about our culture that I don’t know and it wasn’t until I took part in the research project that I began to realize this. I guess it goes back to, ‘How can I teach my children or my students about their African culture when there are things that I don’t even know?’

**Empowerment**

The teachers reported being empowered by the mediated lesson study method and by the use of culturally relevant teaching methods to educate their students. Observing increased achievement among their students resulted in the teachers being more self-efficacious. One participant, the childcare provider, reported that before the study, she might not have been able to teach students of a different culture. After the study, she felt she could design lessons to effectively teach students of a different culture than her own.

I have tremendously enjoyed this project. I believe that as a result, I have become a better facilitator of my students’ learning and that they have also gained an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence which will ultimately increase their chances of becoming successful adults.

The collaborative nature of the study and the on-line collegial circle and the participating teachers informed one another’s teaching. However, teachers did not address the specific nature of their collaborative lesson planning nor did the authors especially assess just how the collegial circle influenced the teachers regarding the specific lessons they presented. As stated earlier, the faith-based schoolteacher linked her lesson activities directly to her research question more so than the home-based teacher and the childcare provider. They reported being culturally aware and using culturally relevant activities, but they did not describe how or why they did so. The teacher who directly tied her lessons to her research question and used more culturally appropriate pedagogy had more teaching experience and professional training in education than the other two teachers.

**DISCUSSION**

All teachers in the study deepened their understanding of culture as a resource for improving their teaching practices through the use of teacher-driven research. Teachers stated that they were more empowered and experienced personal growth. The board-certified teacher at the faith-based school was able to translate her cultural awareness and knowledge into her classroom practices. However, it is also important to recognize the limitations of this study. The findings are based solely on the experiences of three teachers. The use of a convenience sample may raise concerns about the validity of data and to the representation of the larger population from which the sample was taken. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized beyond the context in which this study occurred. Replication of the study methods with additional teachers is needed to discern if the findings in this study are similar to other the experiences of other early childhood teachers.

The results of this study are relevant to teacher educators who seek to enhance candidates’ critical thinking skills, understanding of multiple realities, use of collaborative learning approaches, and reflective teaching skills. For early childhood practitioners, this study has implications for teacher empowerment issues. The findings suggested that teachers benefit from professional development training when allowed to creatively construct curricula that is evidence-based and localized to meet the needs of culturally diverse children.

Moreover, given the high turnover rates of childcare staff, frequency of conflicts among staff related to diverse childcare practices, and the imperative to provide a clear connection between home- and school-child development, the results of this research have significance for pre-school center directors. Additionally, policy makers may wish to re-think the minimum job requirements for teachers, especially within communities of color, given the significance of the early childhood years to educational attainment and the need for American children to compete globally. As such, children of color, particularly African American and Latino/a children, are an underutilized resource in the U.S. (Freeman, 2005). Finally, educational researchers need to further investigate
the role of cultural identity in the development of both young children, as well as, early childhood teachers and the use of collegial circles to enhance the teaching/learning environment.

In the current climate of outcomes-only assessment, teachers are being pressured to teach in ways that do not foster creativity for the teacher or the student, or critical thinking skills. It is clear that developing activities to accommodate students’ diverse learning needs is not vital to the mission of outcomes-only assessment (West-Olatunji, 2005). As a consequence, countless young students, particularly African Americans and Latino/a, are lost prematurely during their formative school years.

While all children are affected by contemporary trends in education and the prominence of standardized assessment, ethnic minority children, especially those from low-income families, experience multiple challenges. Multicultural teacher education pedagogy offered higher education faculty an opportunity to infuse these concepts into the teacher education curriculum (Au & Blake, 2003; Derman-Sparks, Cronin, Henry, Olatunji, & York, 1998; Gordon, 1997; King, 1997).

Research suggests that teachers in collaborative learning perform significantly better on the problem-solving tasks than those who study individually (Capobianco, Lincoln, Canuel-Browne, & Trimarchi, 2006; Fawcett & Garton, 2005; Gokhale, 1995). Moreover, individuals are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative situations rather than individually. Shared knowledge and experience contribute positively to the learning process. When learners apply information in meaningful ways, such as solving problems, resolving issues, or constructing new knowledge, the outcomes are significantly higher (Watson & Michaelsen, 1988).

Lesson study is one approach to professional development that allows teachers to engage in collegial inquiry in order to systematically and efficiently investigate their practices (Fernandez & Chokshi, 2002; Hiebert & Stigler, 2000). Although interest in lesson study among U.S. educators has dramatically increased over the past four years, more research needs to be conducted that investigates the benefit of lesson study methods on teacher professional development (Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2006). Current investigations into the usefulness of lesson study for U.S. teachers indicate that the success of lesson study in Japan may be, in part, due to culturally embedded characteristics of the method (Fernandez, 2002; Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003; Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2006). These investigations suggest that, even in a mediated form, lesson study is a culturally centered professional development tool that emphasizes group learning, process, and results rather than individualistic goals and outcomes. As such, teacher educators need to consider using reflective teaching tools that may have inherent cultural characteristics consistent with that of the communities in which teacher education candidates eventually work.

REFERENCES


AUTHORS
CIRECIE A. WEST-OLATUNJI is Assistant Professor, Department of Counselor Education, the University of Florida, in Gainesville.
LINDA BEHAR-HORENSTEIN is Distinguished Teaching Scholar and Professor, Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Florida.
JEFFREY RANT is a doctoral student, Department of Counselor Education, the University of Florida, Gainesville.
LAKECHIA N. COHEN-PHILLIPS is a licensed professional counselor for the Head Start Program at the Gulf Coast Community Services Center-Houston, Texas.

All comments and queries regarding this article should be sent to cwestolatunji@coe.ufl.edu