ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed-methods action research study was to explore how expanding curriculum in a gifted and talented English/Language Arts (ELA) class to include a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy might broaden access to gifted programming for high-achieving children of Hispanic descent. The identified problem of practice is that the population of students from Hispanic families at Little Tree Elementary School (a pseudonym) continues to rise, yet Hispanic students are largely underrepresented in the school’s gifted program. This action research was carried out with a fourth-grade gifted ELA class in a Title I South Carolina elementary school. The class was comprised of both identified gifted students and high-achieving students participating in the class via trial placement. The teacher-researcher planned a specific unit introducing student-led “book clubs” based on the structure of reciprocal teaching, a recognized culturally and linguistically responsive strategy. Adding reciprocal teaching book clubs to the class curriculum provided students the opportunity to work collaboratively to construct meaning from texts, and provided scaffolding and support for close reading, literary analysis, and critical thinking for the trial placement students from diverse backgrounds—broadening their experience with such tasks. Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and through semi-structured interviews, the study of student work, reflection journals and self-assessments, and through pre- and post-study student attitude surveys. Quantitative data from this study included measures of student success in reading comprehension and literary analysis through pre- and post-
study standardized and classroom assessments. The goal of the study was to see how making an overt place in the curriculum for a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy might impact the students as a whole, and the achievement and confidence of the Hispanic students more specifically. Analysis of the data indicated that all students responded positively to the inclusion of the reciprocal teaching strategy, as the class continued to make academic growth as they used the strategy. Data also indicated that the Hispanic students in particular felt a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion in the class, and also felt empowered in terms of clarifying the meaning of words and figurative language in texts, having a “voice” in group and class discussions, and growing academically. Based upon these results, the teacher-researcher worked with members of the school’s leadership team and the district gifted coordinator to explore creation of an Action Plan to encourage other teachers to plan and implement similar interventions for the purpose of extending the effects of this study with other students from marginalized populations.