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Integrating Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies: Professional Development for Elementary Classroom Teachers

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INTEGRATING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING STRATEGIES:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

As an English Language Development (ELD) teacher, I work to bring rigorous academic learning and consistent, practical instruction to the English learners I work with each day. One of my primary goals is to work together with my mainstream colleagues and other school staff to incorporate best practices for our English learners (ELs) in a clear, consistent, and effective way while promoting equity and improving learning outcomes for all students.

More and more schools are turning to culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as a powerful tool for teaching diverse populations and improving academic outcomes for diverse learners. Research supports the benefits of culturally responsive teaching, which include increased academic achievement and persistence, improved attendance, and greater interest in school, among other outcomes (Byrd, 2016; Aronson & Laughter, 2018). We know that CRT is an important resource for engaging learners and empowering teachers, but how can we assist teachers in enacting these culturally relevant approaches? This has led me to my capstone research question: *How can culturally relevant teaching strategies be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners?*

In this chapter, I provide a rationale for using culturally responsive pedagogy and CRT as resources for educators to promote learning, equity, and academic achievement in

their school environments. Additionally, I explain my personal and professional journey to culturally responsive teaching and why I find it so important.

Rationale

English learners are among the fastest-growing populations in our nation's schools. ELs make up almost ten percent of the student population nationwide.   About one out of every ten public school students in the United States is an English language learner (OELA, 2015). In Minnesota, over the past 20 years, the number of students who are English learners has increased by 300%, making ELs the fastest-growing student population.   Further, English learners currently comprise approximately 7% of students in the Minnesota K-12 system (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2018). Given these significant numbers, culturally responsive pedagogy is an evidence based approach that can be implemented to support culturally and linguistically diverse students and provide equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a student-centered approach to teaching that recognizes the importance of including the students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). CRP makes meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their home cultures, languages, and life experiences. These critical connections help students access rigorous curriculum, develop higher-level academic skills, and bridge the gap between what they are learning at school and their own lives. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2010). Scholars promote CRT as an asset-based approach and an important alternative to the common deficit- oriented

teaching methods present in many schools today. When Ladson-Billings (1994) introduced the concept of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), she saw it as a way of maximizing students' academic achievement by integrating their cultural references in the classroom. Since then, a broad field of research has developed around CRT, including significant work by leaders like Gay (2000, 2010) and Nieto (2004).

Although proponents of the culturally responsive approach maintain that CRT can improve students' achievement and provide more equitable educational opportunities, there is limited research on the preparation of teaching staff in the instruction of diverse student populations.   Public schools across the country struggle to develop trainings and techniques that ensure teachers are aware of the cultural differences in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2012). While many mainstream teachers are well-versed in using best practices, they are less familiar with how to integrate culturally responsive teaching into daily instruction. Educating teacher staff to be confident in incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy and practice to effectively engage learners from all cultural backgrounds is a challenge school districts and teacher education programs must address in order to close the achievement gap and bring more equitable learning outcomes to all learners.

Demographic change creates both opportunities and challenges for our school communities and educators. More and more schools are turning to CRT as best practice for teaching diverse students and improving academic outcomes for all learners. However, preparing educators to teach students of different racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds continues to be a pressing issue in educational settings today.

Context

The setting of this capstone is the grade 3-6 elementary school in rural Minnesota where I currently teach. The demographic changes in our district are reflective of the demographic shifts across the country, and the numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students continue to increase.   Through our own data analysis and by examining the data provided to us by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), we are struggling to meet the challenges of our changing student population. The percentage of EL students on track for success, based on the Reading MCA III and Math MCA III scores, has been declining at our school since 2013 (MDE, 2019). Based on these scores, our school is prioritized for targeted support by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) with a focus on English learners. Through the process of engaging in a comprehensive needs assessment and developing a school improvement plan that focuses on continuous improvement for our ELs and other diverse learners, we now recognize that many of our school policies and school practices are contributing to the low performance and academic struggles of our diverse students.

Professionally, in my role as an English Language Development teacher, it is my job to support English learner language development, to provide direct English Language Development instruction in the classroom, and to assist my general education colleagues with the development of appropriate strategies to meet the unique needs of English learners. As the demographics of our school student body changes and issues related to the achievement gap have increased, I have found myself in the middle of a debate regarding how to best support English learners and other culturally diverse students in

our school and across our district. Many of my colleagues recognize the need for change and truly want the best for our students, however, there are some teachers, administrators, and parents who view this increasing diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity. Staff members are sometimes unaware of the methodologies and teaching strategies that can offer culturally and linguistically diverse students the opportunity to better access knowledge and skills in the classroom. Additionally, there can be resistance from teachers to make changes to their current teaching practice. As a school community, we have been slow to acknowledge that our deficit-based attitudes and understandings of our diverse students have contributed to many of the issues they are experiencing in our classrooms.

My personal journey around the importance of culture and its impact on learning began about five years ago. Around this time, our school data began to highlight the struggle our English learners were having making consistent academic gains. My students' lack of achievement is what initially challenged me to begin searching for answers. What new ideas, relevant teaching practices, or paradigm shifts might help my students and improve their academic outcomes? I eventually came to understand that I needed to increase my awareness of the cultural identities of my students and how their cultures affected their learning behaviors and even their brain chemistry (Hammond, 2015). I needed to adjust my cultural lens, classroom interactions, and instructional practices to embrace these differences and build upon the strengths of my students.

Over time I realized that this journey I had taken to 'fix' my students was a very personal one, and it had allowed me the opportunity to examine my ideas about race, culture, and equity issues. Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching &*

the Brain (2015), helped me build awareness about the socio-political context of race and language. I began to recognize the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that negatively impacted my teaching and the learning outcomes of my students. Through this process of self- reflection, I understood more about how my own positionality influenced my students in a positive or negative way. Focusing on these issues encouraged me to examine my own cultural framework while also learning about the culture of my students and their families. By focusing on culture as a foundation for learning, I was able to build more meaningful relationships with my students and create more effective opportunities for meaningful learning.

As we develop a greater understanding of culture and the individual needs of diverse student populations, we can address inequitable outcomes and develop culturally proficient practices that support all learners. I want to share what I have learned with my colleagues by providing professional development for mainstream teachers in enacting and integrating CRT approaches into our pedagogy and practice. Together we can build awareness and create environments for our students that raise academic rigor and send the message that we value the culture, language, and life experiences of all our students.

Summary

This chapter told of my personal and professional journey to my research question, explained the context and rationale for this project. These experiences have been the foundation of my research and the reason behind developing a series of professional development sessions for mainstream elementary teachers of ELs. In my research, I hope to answer the question: *How can culturally relevant teaching strategies be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream*

classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners? Understanding the important role of culturally relevant teaching in mainstream classrooms will provide educators with a powerful tool to plan instruction more effectively, raise expectations, help diverse students feel valued and empowered, and build cultural competence.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature related to culturally responsive methodologies and implementation strategies for the classroom. Key terms are outlined, and background is provided on the important role of culturally responsive pedagogy and CRT to the academic success of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Research-based strategies to incorporate critical reflection and culturally responsive teaching strategies are presented as a foundation for moving forward toward cultural competence and improving academic outcomes for English learners. Chapter three includes a project overview on the PD series I created for my school. There is rationale for the project, reasoning for the design, description of the context and an explanation of project components. In Chapter Four, I conclude with a reflection of my project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this capstone is to investigate how culturally relevant teaching strategies can be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners. Based on a review of the literature, a resource will be created that will describe the best practices which can be utilized by educators to implement culturally responsive instructional practices.

Overview.

This chapter will provide a review of the literature on English learners (ELs) in the United States, culturally relevant methodologies as an approach to support diverse learners, along with meaningful ways teachers can integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies into their mainstream classrooms to build cultural competence and improve educational outcomes for all students.

This chapter includes three major sections: English learners, culturally responsive methodologies and culturally responsive practice. The section on English learners offers a clear definition of ELs, their demographics, their academic performance in schools both locally and nationally, and identifies some reasons as to why ELs are facing challenges in our schools today.

The following section will explore current literature on the principles of culturally relevant methodologies and some common challenges that educators face when implementing these ideas in the classroom as well as evidence that supports their effectiveness in classrooms.   Key terms are outlined, and a framework is provided to

better understand the important role of the culturally responsive approach for educating students of diverse backgrounds and providing equitable schools and academic achievement for students who have been historically marginalized.

The last section presents relevant research regarding practical ways that teachers can integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies into their classroom practice. Critical reflection and a framework for implementing CRT strategies are presented as key ideas for synthesizing and operationalizing culturally responsive strategies and concepts in the classroom.

English Learners

This section provides an overview of the needs and academic achievement of English learners and data available on English learners (ELs) both at the national level and at the state level. Many studies have been conducted on the demographics of ELs in relation to their performance in our educational system and the persistent issue of the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs. However, to participate fully in the discussion of ELs, it is important to have a complete and clear definition of the term English learner.

Definition. How we define English learners and the labels we assign to their diversity can be confusing. Several terms are used in the literature to describe U.S. schoolchildren whose native language is a language other than English. One commonly used term is language minority. Other common terms are English language learners (ELL) (or shorter, English learner (EL)), limited English proficient (LEP), dual-language learners (DLL) and emerging multilinguals. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably and refer to students who speak a language(s) other than English at home

and who face the challenge of acquiring content knowledge in English at the same time they acquire English as an additional language. National and state laws also play an important role in defining English learners. The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, provides a definition for the term English learner (EL). In ESSA, the term "English learner" (EL) replaced the previous term "Limited English Proficient (LEP)" used in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). According to ESSA, an English learner (EL) is defined as:

> . . . an individual— (A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant, and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual— (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (ESSA, 2015, Section 8101(20))

In Minnesota, the term "English learner" is also preferred by state legislation and is defined under the 2018 Minnesota Statutes, Section 124D. 59, subdivision two as:

. . . a pupil in kindergarten through grade 12 or a prekindergarten student . . . who

meets . . . the following requirements: (1) the pupil, as declared by a parent or

guardian first learned a language other than English, and (2) the pupil is

determined by a valid assessment measuring the pupil's English language

proficiency and by developmentally appropriate measures, which might include

observations, teacher judgment, parent recommendations, or developmentally

appropriate assessment instruments to lack the necessary English skills to

participate fully in academic classes taught in English.

Although these definitions are important, they do not provide a clear picture of the

complexities of U.S. English learners both in terms of ethnic backgrounds and languages

spoken.   In the following section, it will become apparent that ELs are an extremely

diverse group of students in the United States. The literature clearly indicates that current

demographic trends present a challenge for classrooms nationwide.

Demographics. Many areas of the United States today have experienced a

significant shift in the racial and ethnic makeup of their populations in the last decades.

As a result, the demographics of our schools and classrooms have also undergone

significant changes. This demographic change creates both opportunities and challenges

for our school communities and educators.   Meeting the diverse needs of students with

differing economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds has become a top priority for

many practitioners in the field of education.

In the last several decades, ELs have been among the fastest-growing populations

in our nation's schools. ELs make up almost ten percent of the student population

nationwide.   About one out of every ten public school students in the United States is an

English language learner. The vast majority, 3.8 million, speak Spanish. In fact, Hispanic or Latino students represented more than three times the share of ELs compared to all students (OELA, 2015). But there are many other languages spoken in public schools as well, including Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Arabic, Vietnamese and Hmong, to name a few. Most English learners were born in the United States and are citizens.

In Minnesota, over the past 20 years, the number of students who are English learners has increased by 300% making ELs the fastest-growing student population. Further, English learners comprise approximately 7% of students in the Minnesota K-12 system (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2018). There is a great diversity of ethnic backgrounds and languages of English learners in Minnesota. The Latino/Hispanic population in Minnesota grew faster than any other subgroup in the state from 2000 to 2010. Forty percent of ELs in Minnesota are Latino/Hispanic, making English learning policies and practices critical to the academic success of this student population. (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2012)

School performance. Research provides many examples of documented injustices and inequalities that diverse students face in our educational system. Policies, institutional practices, cultural representation, distribution of resources, and other norms work together to perpetuate racial group inequity in our schools. This inequity directly impacts the school performance of culturally and linguistically diverse students and is evidenced by the persistent achievement gap. The achievement gap is a term that refers to the ongoing disparity in academic performance between different groups of students. Achievement gaps occur when a group of students (such as students grouped by

race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group, and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant.

The achievement gap has been a growing problem since the nationwide school integration of *Brown vs. the Board of Education in 1954* (Gay, 2004) put our racial inequalities in education into the national spotlight. The difference in achievement levels between schools with high concentrations of low-income families, families who speak little or no English, and children of color and schools in mostly affluent, white neighborhoods is well documented. Despite some positive trends in education statistics, minority students lag behind their middle and upper-class white peers in the areas of academic achievement and graduation rate. In addition, poor and minority students dropout of school at a higher rate than their middle and upper-class majority peers (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009).

Although scholars point to many factors that contribute to the differences in achievement including personal and institutional racism (discrimination), inadequate healthcare, housing, unprepared teachers, and differences in the distribution of qualified teachers (Gordon, 2010), data also suggests one other significant contribution to this difference in achievement is the difference between the culture of school and the culture of home and community of many minority students.

School culture and the culture divide. School culture refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share. Schools, as well as most other social systems, are institutions that reflect the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. Most professionals in education in the United States are white, middle-class, monolingual-English speakers. Increasingly, this same

profile does not hold true for our students. As the cultural and experience differences

between an increasingly diverse student population and predominantly white, female

educators widen, schools continue to rely heavily on the pedagogies, curricula,

assessments, and interventions that more effectively served a homogeneous group of

educators than they do a heterogeneous student population (Peters, 2016). Many in the

field of education consider this disconnect between the cultures of students and the

educational institutions that serve them as one of the root causes of the achievement gap.

Some scholars refer to this disconnect between the cultures of school staff and the

students they serve as the culture divide.

The literature shows that communication barriers, conflicting expectations, and

access to resources all contribute to the culture divide (Anton, 1999). One of every three

students enrolled in either elementary or secondary school is of racial or ethnic minority

backgrounds, while nearly 87% of the teachers are White and female (Cross, 2003).   The

lack of student-teacher connections that results from this cultural disconnect can lead to

devastating learning experiences for students (Anton, 1999). The culture divide presents

various barriers to diverse students in adapting to school processes and expectations and

impedes positive learning outcomes for these students.

The literature review on English learners and the cultural and academic

challenges they face in the United States found a significant amount of statistical data

documenting the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs (Garcia & Frede, 2010;

OELA, 2015).   In order to truly understand and address the educational risk for

culturally and linguistically diverse students in the U.S. educational system today, it is

important to consider the many social and economic characteristics that may account for

their low achievement when compared to their native English-speaking peers. The next section will explore culturally responsive methodologies as one important resource scholars have suggested in addressing some of the educational issues plaguing our ELs and other diverse learners today.

Culturally Responsive Methodologies and Framework

Culture is the center of learning. It plays a foundational role in communicating and receiving information and in shaping the thinking processes of different groups and individuals. The first part of this section clarifies and defines culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and gives a brief explanation of their development. The second part suggests a foundational framework for CRT, as outlined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). The last section will address the current research related culturally responsive teaching, evidence that supports its implementation in the classroom, and some common challenges teachers face when implementing culturally responsive practice in their classrooms.

Summarizing the entire history and broad base of scholarship on CRT is not in scope in this document as there are decades of research and analysis. However, outlining the foundational work of scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay is an important starting point.

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Over twenty years ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings defined culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) as an approach to teaching that centers on students' cultural knowledge and backgrounds, affirming their cultural identity while also assisting them in developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities in schools and other institutions. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It is an approach to

education that recognizes the importance of cultural references in all aspects of learning and calls for engaging learners whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded from mainstream settings.

CRP maintains that teachers who are non-judgemental and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students are more effective facilitators of learning in the classroom. Ladson-Billings proposed three goals on which to ground culturally relevant teaching practices. First, teaching must produce positive academic outcomes. Second, teaching must help students create positive ethnic and cultural identities while helping them achieve academically. Finally, teaching must support students' ability to recognize and critique social inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally responsive teaching. Building on the important work of Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay worked to create a framework with a more focused approach on teaching strategies and practices. Although it is called by various names, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, reflective, and responsive, the key idea of culturally responsive teaching is about making classrooms and classroom instruction more congruent with the cultural orientations of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy trains educators to provide instruction for diverse learners by recognizing, acknowledging, and building upon the cultural strengths, sociocultural realities, histories, and languages of students in their classrooms.

Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as an approach that "uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames for reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students and is culturally validating and

affirming" (Gay, 2000, p. 29).   She goes on to describe the essential characteristics of CRT:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.

- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.

- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages

- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

    (Gay, 2002, p. 29)

    Both aspects of culturally relevant practice, culturally relevant pedagogy from Ladson-Billings and culturally responsive teaching from Gay, maintain that curriculum, content and teaching strategies for students of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds offer students opportunity and access to gain significant knowledge and skills in the classroom while supporting the unique and important cultural ways that students learn, communicate and interact. More recently, Django Paris' work in culturally sustaining pedagogy, has continued to offer insights into the questions of identity and culture while working to support students in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities (Paris, 2012).

Culturally responsive framework. In order to fulfill the characteristics of CRT, as described above by Gay (2010), educators must seek out tools, strategies, and curricula to implement what will meet the needs of their students and help to bridge the culture gap. Ladson-Billings explains that teachers "must learn the strategies and hold the beliefs necessary to not only understand students' cultures but also integrate and anticipate connections to other cultures throughout the teaching and learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 479). However, a common misconception, when engaging with culturally relevant practice, is believing that successful teaching is primarily about what to do. CRT is more about a way of being or thinking that manifests itself into ways of doing. This section will provide a framework for culturally responsive teaching by looking at its three foundation principles, high expectations, cultural competence, and critical competence, as laid out by Gloria Ladson Billings (1995).

High academic expectations. Research suggests that culturally responsive teachers demonstrate high expectations for student achievement through the use of challenging academic materials (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Marzano, 2007). Academic achievement includes both student learning and academic rigor. Culturally relevant teachers take the time to explain what achievement means and how students can obtain it. They believe all students are capable of learning and achieving academic success. Additionally, culturally relevant educators understand the importance of making their expectations clear for the benefit of all students. Culturally relevant teachers can offer support in this area by modeling, scaffolding, investing personally in the success of students, and creating nurturing, cooperative environments.

Cultural competence. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests that it is not the goal of CRT to have students achieve and acquire the norms of the dominant culture. Students need not give up their cultural identity to achieve academically. Cultural competence refers to the ability to learn from and respectfully relate to other cultural backgrounds, heritages, and traditions. It comes from acknowledging and understanding one's own culture and values while respecting those of others. Culturally relevant teachers affirm and accept students' cultural backgrounds as assets. They build on knowledge students possess to assist them in learning new concepts while supporting their academic identities. Cultural competence also requires that teachers understand their own cultural backgrounds and actively learn about those of their students. Student learning opportunities should reflect cultural competence and build on the cultural knowledge and experiences that they and their families bring to school.

Critical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness encourages teachers to educate themselves and their students on the personal and sociopolitical issues that impact them—and incorporate this into their teaching. This means teachers encourage students to think about why things are the way they are and help strengthen their students' mindset and belief that they can be agents of social change. Culturally relevant teachers work to support the sociopolitical consciousness of their students, which empowers students to think and act in ways that challenge the inequitable status quo among people, within communities and in society at large.

Challenges. Unfortunately, there are challenges facing the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in classrooms. The literature indicates there are various barriers that educators commonly face as they work to implement CRT into their teaching

practice. Below are two that are prevalent in the literature. One is teacher resistance that comes from a limited understanding of a belief in the efficacy of CRT, and the other is a lack of know-how needed to execute it. (Neri, Lozano, & Gomez, 2019).

Most assume that teachers want to do a good job and want their students to learn. However, the practice of teaching is anything but straightforward or simple. Teachers have a responsibility to make sense of a long list of often short-lived and conflicting interventions, prioritizing those that improve teaching and learning, and resisting those that do not. Many teachers begin asking questions like: Is this my responsibility? Is this important enough to spend my time on? Is this a priority? Teachers sometimes doubt the validity and efficacy of CRT and often do not see it as valuable for academic success or rigorous student learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Teachers can experience difficulty when balancing implementing content standards and enacting CRT at the same time. They find it challenging to both teach the rigorous content curriculum and make it culturally relevant. When teachers doubt the value of CRT for rigorous academic learning, issues of race, culture, and language are often pushed to the background and only addressed if time permits.

Additionally, other studies have discussed the difficulties that educators have in implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classroom pedagogy (Young, 2010). The question that surfaces most often in research related to CRT is "how?" Young (2010) states again, "The void in scholarly research is not in the knowledge of theories but in the knowledge of how to implement them, particularly in a way that has a wide-reaching and sustainable impact on teacher education" (p. 259). Becoming a culturally responsive practitioner is not simply a matter of applying instructional

techniques or tailoring instruction to incorporate traits and customs of individual cultural groups. Culturally responsive teachers hold a high degree of sociocultural consciousness that affirms views of students of diverse backgrounds. They see themselves as agents of change and know the students in their classes. It is the combination of all this knowledge and skill that enables them to implement and design instruction that is meaningful and beneficial for all learners.

CRT is an enormous task that involves hard, personal reflections; a shift of beliefs; a recognition of the inequities facing students today and a change in teaching practice. In response to these challenges, Zaretta Hammond (2015) offers this insight in Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain "As you begin refining your teaching practice, be prepared to embrace your conscious incompetence, that awareness and awkwardness that comes with trying something new. Any innovation worth its salt calls on people to go through this process." (p. 153).

Evidence. Since the 1990s, culturally relevant instruction has been taught in teacher education programs and has been promoted by practitioners and scholars as an effective tool to work with students of diverse backgrounds, but is it evidence-based? There is a growing urgency for schools to reform their policies and practices to align with culturally responsive practices in order to further better outcomes for students. This is important considering the long-standing opportunity gap, and achievement gap diverse students in our educational system currently face.

Some studies show that empirical research on the effectiveness of culturally responsive interventions in schools is lacking. Challenges to the success of CRT in school settings include operationalizing and measuring CRT, measuring outcomes at

multiple levels for teachers and students, and working within the parameters of schools' changing priorities and bureaucratic structures. (Bottani, Larson, Debnam, Bischoff & Bradshaw, 2018). However, a large body of literature also supports the fact that culturally responsive instruction has had a positive impact on the academic outcomes of minority and diverse students. There is evidence that CRT promotes academic achievement and engagement. Teaching methods that connect with students' real lives and interests and promote understanding of other cultures are associated with better academic outcomes (Byrd, 2016). Additionally, encouraging students' understanding of their own culture and raising awareness about racism and discrimination is related to students' ethnic-racial identity development. Instructional materials, assignments, and texts that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences are critical to engagement and deep, meaningful learning. A smaller yet promising group of studies evaluates the effectiveness of CRT interventions and links it to a broad range of positive outcomes such as academic achievement and persistence, improved attendance, and greater interest in school (Dee & Penner, 2017).

As discussed in this section, culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching have the potential to promote equity and excellence for students and bridge the divide between our schools and the communities they serve. Research supports CRT as an important method for promoting achievement and positive identity for English learners and other diverse populations. The next section discusses implementation strategies that can be used to incorporate CRT into classroom practice.

CRT in Practice

As highlighted in this chapter, culturally responsive teaching practices cannot be narrowed down into a specific set of strategies, a checklist for lesson planning, or specific curriculum because all of these must be directly connected to a teacher's specific set of students, their needs, their communities, and their context. However, in order to close the achievement gap and build on the strengths of diverse learners and specifically English learners, education must provide teachers who have additional skills and abilities to meet the challenges of culturally diverse classrooms. (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). In this way, culturally responsive teaching will help build culturally competent schools and increase equitable outcomes for all.   This section emphasizes the importance of teacher critical reflection as a foundation for moving forward toward cultural competence and offers some practical ways teachers can begin implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms.

Critical reflection. Critical reflection is the idea that reflection gives attention to one's own experiences and behaviors and that meanings are made and interpreted from them to inform future decision making (Sparkes, 1991). The term critical reflection attempts to look at reflection within moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching. Issues related to equity, access, and social justice are typically attributed to critical reflection (Calderhead, 1989). This type of processing is essential in culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either a positive or negative way. Howard (2003) in *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Ingredients for Critical Teacher Reflection* states that "critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class

shape students' thinking, learning, and various understanding so the world" (p. 197).

There are three areas of critical reflection that are important when considering culturally relevant teaching preparation. First, acknowledging how deficit-based understandings of students permeate traditional school thinking. Second, CRP recognizes the implicit connection between culture and learning and sees cultural diversity as an asset to school success. Finally, culturally relevant teachers are mindful of how traditional teaching practices often reflect European American values and ways of thinking.

Integration of CRT strategies. Many teacher educators understand that the construct of culture plays a significant role in school achievement and learning. However, teachers often lack the ability to translate culturally relevant approaches to classroom practice.

The studies examined outlined some key ideas for synthesizing and operationalizing culturally responsive strategies and concepts in the classroom. These strategies are organized in this section using Ladson-Billings (1995) theoretical framework because of simplicity and accessibility for teachers at all levels of competence.   First, culturally relevant teaching emphasizes academic success for all students (High Expectations). Second, culturally relevant teaching supports students in the formation of a positive cultural identity (Cultural Competence). Third, culturally relevant teaching guides help students develop a critical consciousness that they can use to critique and take action against social inequities. There are three implementation ideas listed under each culturally responsive strategy.

High expectations. Culturally relevant teachers emphasize high expectations for student achievement.   However, providing challenging curricula does not ensure that

culturally relevant pedagogy is occurring. Research suggests at least three categories of support that culturally relevant teachers can use to assist their students.

Modeling, scaffolding, and clarification. Important ideas in this first category of support include modeling "unseen" metacognitive activities by thinking aloud, encouraging collaboration, and clearly outlining expectations (Conrad, Gong, Sipp, & Wright, 2002). Students are encouraged to collaborate with and model for each other (Stuart & Volk, 2002), and expectations are clearly outlined. Teachers closely monitor student learning.

Investing in students. The second-way teachers supported students in meeting high expectations was by investing in and taking personal responsibility for student success. This involves going above and beyond the required classroom interactions and duties. Often these teachers make themselves available to students before and after school, on weekends, and even during evening hours (Gutierrez, 2000). Teachers explicitly communicate to students their determination to help them succeed and celebrate their successes. Students know that the teacher is invested and willing to extend significant effort to enable them to succeed.

Cooperative and nurturing environments. The third way in which teachers can support students in meeting high expectations is by creating cooperative environments where students feel safe and motivated to work hard. Classrooms are nurturing and psychologically safe environments where teachers discouraged and intervened when inequities occurred and instead encouraged peer support (Arce, 2004; Brown, 2003). Many of the diverse cultures represented in our schools lean more toward a culture that is oriented toward the world view of collectivism rather than individualism or competition

versus cooperation.   This can play a significant role in classrooms and creating a balance

between the two is important (Au, 2009). Encouraging activities that reflect this

orientation toward group learning, relationships, and cooperation creates a sense of

belonging and will allow students to put more energy in their academic work and less on

trying to protect themselves from perceived danger from emotional and psychological

assaults.

   Cultural competence. The second key component in CRT is cultural

competence. As stated previously, cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach

students who come from a culture other than our own. It also involves building cultural

self-awareness and the value of diversity. The connection between language, culture, and

identity is foundational for culturally and linguistically diverse students.   Teachers can

encourage cultural competence in a variety of ways, including reshaping the curriculum,

building on students' funds of knowledge, and establishing relationships between home

and school.

   Reshaping the curriculum.   School learning must be connected to students'

identities in order to make learning relevant (Banks, 2006).   School learning must be

connected to student identities in order to make learning relevant to them.

Implementation ideas in this area include bringing in additional material by authors of

color or creating additional materials to teach about aspects of the subject not included in

the curriculum but reflective of the student diversity in the classroom (Hollie, 2001;

Christal, 2003). Families can also share materials and resources. Individuals from the

community can be invited to share and serve as teaching resources.

Building on students' funds of knowledge. The idea that school learning must be connected to children's prior knowledge and background experiences is foundational to culturally relevant teaching. Teachers make connections to children's cultural experiences using the content and practices of the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).   This involves getting to know students and developing personal relationships that give teachers insights about students' lives.   Funds of knowledge refer to a broad range of connections to a student's life, including family experiences, events, feelings, languages, and identities (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez; 1992).

Teachers need to take time to learn about elements of students' culture through their own research and by developing relationships with the students. Brown's (2004) study found that many culturally responsive teachers "take time out of each day to communicate individually with many students on non-academic matters" (p. 275). Once a teacher has an understanding of a students' experiences, they can work to build bridges from the students' funds of knowledge to the curriculum and other learning in the classroom.   This can be done in many ways. One example is through the choice of teaching materials that reflect students' lives and cultures. Other ideas for building bridges include activating prior knowledge by using examples from the children's lives. (Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Christal, 2003). Another idea is teaching math using a garden theme to tie into a family's experience and cultural background with gardening (Civil & Khan, 2001) or using counting methods from the home culture.

Language is a very important component of building on students' funds of knowledge. Culturally relevant teachers make the connection between students' home discourse and the patterns of interacting at school and take action to honor the home

languages in the classroom (Cahnmann &Remillard, 2002; Pierce, 2005).   Many teachers

recognize that a child's identity is closely connected to home literacy and language

practices and use these languages themselves when possible. The purposes for doing this

ranges from translation to helping students grasp English concepts better and modeling

different ways to code-switch. The research also supports teachers allowing students to

use their home languages as a means of expression and a tool for learning (Hollie, 2001;

Stuart & Volk, 2002).

Discourse and interaction patterns are also key to building bridges between

students' home discourse and interaction patterns and academic learning.   Culturally

responsive teachers are careful to foster interactions that are reminiscent of the students'

home cultures (Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Hollie, 2001). Some research suggests a

connection between a cultural groups' interaction practices with specific learning styles.

Some cultures may have a more cooperative and less competitive approach toward one

another. Researchers hypothesize that students in more cooperative-valuing cultures will

succeed better when group work is emphasized over competition (Chamberlain, 2005).

The studies suggest that focusing on students' learning styles is a means of building on

students' funds of knowledge and enhance academic success while fostering cultural

competence.

Relationships between school and community.   Inviting communities and families

to participate in the daily activities of the school is a powerful way to build relationships

between school and home. Many teachers reviewed in the studies made home visits

(Hyland, 2005; Sheets, 1995). Teachers used these visits to build relationships and gain

knowledge about the students' home cultures to help make meaningful connections to

curriculum and academic learning. Many educators also intentionally invited family

members to events at school. Families were also invited to attend field trips, school

events, academic achievement assemblies, and other activities at school are important.

The schools and families in the studies also made conscious efforts to involve

communities and families in the day-to-day decisions of the school and invited input on

curricular decisions (Civil & Kahn, 2001; Stuart & Volk, 2002).

Teachers and schools in the reviewed studies offered concrete examples of what

teachers and schools can do to help promote cultural competence. All the actions

illustrated different ways to make the school and classroom environment more relevant to

students' cultural experiences.

Critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (1995) states, "not only must teachers

encourage academic success and cultural competence; they must help students to

recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (p. 476).   Cultivating

critical consciousness was referred to in several studies. Students in some studies were

encouraged to examine power relations between writers and readers (Luke, 2000). At

other times the focus was on the cultivation of students' critical consciousness through

acting upon issues of social justice.

Critical literacy. Many teachers employed a critical stance toward the content of

their literacy instruction and encouraged students to develop a similar perspective. Ideas

include selecting texts with critical perspectives, allowing students to discuss

controversial topics, and asking students to take a critical view of texts (Feger, 2006).

Teachers provided various sources of material to provide reflection, and alternative views

that allow for critique and open classroom discussion, including critical thinking prompts

before reading (Duran, 1998; Newell & Sweet, 1999). Teachers used guided open-ended questions and to scaffold their students' developing critical literacy skills.

Engaging students in social justice work. Although the pedagogy of many culturally relevant teachers involved critical literacy stances, some teachers used a version of critical literacy that was more focused on social action. Studies show that one-way students were engaged in social justice work was by providing real services to the community. One example of this was the creation of digital photograph files, along with labels and essays that serve as cultural artifacts in local museums, school libraries, or community centers (Christal, 2003). Sometimes this community-service focus engaged students in the valuing and caring of other human beings (Jacobs, 1995; Lynn et al., 1999). Parson's (2005) study describes how one culturally relevant teacher confirmed each child's best qualities and encouraged her students to do the same for each other. This teacher modeled the attitudes of equity and compassion toward others in the classroom by recognizing interactions that privileged more dominant children and silenced the culturally and linguistically diverse students in her classroom. This teacher was modeling for students' attitudes of equity and compassion toward others, which are vital aspects of a social justice mindset.

Teachers who are educated in the pedagogical principles and implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies have the potential to promote equity and excellence for their students and at the same time, help bridge the divide between our schools and the communities they serve.

Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to answer the question: *How can culturally responsive teaching be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices of mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners?* The research found in this literature review has provided key understandings about the demographic and school performance challenges of ELs, culturally responsive methodologies to address these challenges, and the integration of culturally responsive strategies into classroom practice as a means to build cultural competence and improve outcomes for diverse students.

Summary

Classrooms today are complex communities in which teachers need to be prepared to negotiate relationships, languages, cultures, content, and behaviors. As discussed in this chapter, the classroom methodologies that include culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching are interrelated and complex, but provide a solid framework for success for culturally and linguistically diverse students.   The specific teacher practices outlined are based on sociocultural consciousness developed through critical reflection and a deep and holistic caring for all students. Developing the foundation for culturally relevant practice and enacting culturally relevant teaching strategies is not an easy task for teachers but is a task that teachers need to undertake to fulfill our society's ideals for equitable education for all.

This information will provide vital information as I continue with my capstone project which proposes to develop professional development for mainstream teachers in integrating culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching strategies in mainstream classrooms. In Chapter 3, I will provide rationale for my project and

describe the setting and intended participants. I will also discuss the framework I used to guide its completion as well as the informal and formal assessments I will be using to determine the effectiveness of my project.

CHAPTER 3

Project Description

Introduction and Rationale

As an English Language Development teacher, one of the most important aspects of my job is working together with mainstream colleagues and other staff members to implement best practices in classrooms and improve learning outcomes for our English learners. As outlined in Chapter Two, research shows that one of the most effective ways we can support our diverse learners is through the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) strategies are essential tools in planning instruction, raising expectations, and helping diverse students feel valued and empowered. In my literature review, my goal was to understand better the different aspects of culturally relevant teaching and effective ways to implement CRT in the classroom. The following chapter details the project I will create in order to answer the question: *How can culturally relevant teaching strategies be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners?*

As reviewed in Chapter One, the demographic changes in the district where I teach are reflective of the demographic shifts occurring across the country. While the numbers of diverse students in our district have increased, our continued focus on traditional instructional practices in our classrooms has contributed to an achievement disparity between our white students and our English learners and other diverse populations. The percentage of ELs in our building on track for success, based on the

Reading MCA III and Math MCA III scores, has been declining in our district since 2013, while the overall scores of white, monolingual students have remained the same or increased. Through the process of engaging in a comprehensive needs assessment and developing a school improvement plan that focuses on continuous improvement for our ELs, we now recognize that significant changes are needed to bring equitable learning opportunities to all students in our school and across the district.

Culturally responsive teaching is a powerful tool that can improve student achievement and provide more equitable educational opportunities for all students.   As summarized in Chapter Two, work by key researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, Zaretta Hammond, and many others support CRT as a meaningful way to increase student engagement and achievement, as well as provide an equitable education to marginalized students.   Schools that engage in CRT are able to build bridges of meaning between home and school experiences and between academics and students' socio cultural realities (Griner & Stewart, 2013). However, evidence suggests that while many teachers may have knowledge of multicultural education, many do not display the characteristics needed to fully apply and sustain culturally responsive pedagogical practices that are focused on helping students from diverse backgrounds learn more effectively (May & Sleeter, 2012). Researchers are calling for a more deliberate and concerted approach to teaching that will help educators develop and sustain culturally responsive practices essential to advancing student and teacher success in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Educators who understand and can integrate culturally relevant teaching strategies into the development of pedagogy and teaching practice promote educational equity and excellence, create community in their

classrooms, and develop and empower students. However, shifting culturally responsive teaching practices from theory into practice is not always easy, which has led me to the focus of my capstone project.

The purpose of this capstone project is to provide a resource for mainstream teachers, which describes CRT best practices and outlines ways that educators can more effectively implement culturally responsive instructional strategies into their daily practice. The content I will include in my project includes secondary data obtained through a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative studies summarized in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I will describe the setting and participants of my project, present a project overview, propose a timeline for project completion, and finally present the framework for my project with the research theories that support it.

Project Setting and Participants

This project will take place in a rural elementary school in southwestern Minnesota, where I currently teach. We are an upper elementary school site that serves about 460 students in grades 3-6. Although our school student body is predominantly white, 23% are Hispanic, and 10% of our students are English learners. Of our 460 students, about 40% qualify for free and reduced lunch.   Teacher backgrounds are predominantly white and middle class, with an average of eight years or more of experience teaching. Although our mainstream staff has some previous experience working with diverse student populations, most have little or no experience incorporating culturally responsive strategies into their classrooms. As a result, our students receive instruction from content area teachers and aides who have not had sufficient teacher preparation or professional development in the area of improving instruction for diverse

learners. While many of our educators are well-versed in using best practices, they are less familiar with how to incorporate CRT into their daily practice.

The intended participants of my project are the mainstream teachers at my school site. Students spend most of their learning day with these teachers, which makes them ideally positioned to apply the learning principles and strategies presented in this project. Although the basis of my work is intended for classroom teachers, I hope that all staff members who work with English learners and other diverse students will benefit from the ideas and resources presented in this capstone project. This would include grade-level teachers, EL teachers, teachers' assistants or paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and administrators. The following section provides an overview of my project, including why I have chosen to focus on CRT, how this project will address the current needs of teaching staff in my building, and the timeline for implementation.

Project Overview

We began our culturally responsive journey this year by participating in a staff-wide book study on Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching, and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015). Throughout the year, using focus groups and professional learning communities (PLCs), we spent time building awareness around the different aspects of culture and its powerful impact on learning. Through self -reflection, we began to realize that our deficit-based mindsets and negative perceptions of our students and their cultures were reflected in our traditional ways of teaching and thinking. Using the book study as a guide, we examined our cultural archetypes, reimagined student and teacher relationships as partnerships, and deepened our understanding of information processing in the brain. Although teachers now have a better understanding of the

significant role that culture plays in student learning and school achievement, mainstream staff still feel they lack the skills necessary to take the next step and implement culturally responsive practices effectively in the classroom.

To continue moving forward on our culturally responsive journey, I am creating a series of professional development (PD) sessions that will provide the next steps and ongoing support to teachers in the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. A study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) revealed that well-designed professional development could positively impact teacher practice and student performance. This includes professional development that is: (a) intensive, ongoing and connected to practice, (b) focused on student learning and addresses specific curriculum content, (c) aligns with school improvement priorities and goals, and (d) builds strong working relationships among teachers. Keeping these guidelines in mind, I will be designing my professional development series to be ongoing over one year and focused on providing practical strategies for classroom teachers to implement CRT in the classroom. It will be aligned with our school improvement plan and goals and will encourage strong working relationships among teachers through PLC support, collaboration, coaching tools, and other resources.

I will divide my project into three professional development sessions.   Each session will focus on one of the three fundamental principles within the culturally responsive framework as outlined by Geneva Gay (2000): (a) high expectations, academic success for all students (b) cultural competence, assisting students in the formation of a positive cultural identity, and (c) critical consciousness, preparing students

for success in a global society. The focus of each training will be to build background knowledge and understanding around one of each of these three critical principles, including implementation strategies that can be used to integrate them successfully into daily teaching practice. I will also be creating a professional learning community (PLC) resource that will provide continued support in the practice of these CRT principles through ongoing collaboration, collective problem solving, shared expertise, and exploration.

The timeline of my project will take place over the academic 2020-2021 school year. One key principle will be presented to the entire 3-6 staff each trimester during our one-hour PLC time.

September: High Academic Expectations

January: Cultural Competence

March: Critical Consciousness

A resource will also be provided for follow-up support and collaboration during the intervening months to be used in our grade level professional learning communities. Teachers can use this resource to discuss ways they have applied new practices, review student data, and offer each other feedback. The next section describes my choice of method and why I have chosen professional development and professional learning community support as appropriate tools to present my capstone project.

Project Framework

The current standard to which educators are held is more rigorous and demanding than it has ever been. Darling-Hammond (as cited in Presseisen, 2008) states, "in response to an increasingly complex society and a rapidly changing, technology-based

economy, schools are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before" (p. 91). Professional development is a driving force for the improvement of instruction and student achievement.

One of the main objectives of professional development is to increase teachers' growth and development to meet the needs of all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students. Some research indicates that PD initiatives can be ineffective in supporting changes in teacher practice and student learning. However, there is a growing consensus that well-designed PD can, when effectively implemented, lead to desirable changes in teacher practice and student outcomes.

Darling-Hammond (2017) describes effective professional development as "structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. 2). She posits that the key components of high-quality professional learning for teachers include a robust content focus, features active learning, is collaborative and aligned with relevant curricula and policies, and provides sufficient learning time for participants. Knowles et al. (2005) suggest that, like children, adults learn best when they are engaged in active learning, when learning relates to current situations, when enough time is provided to assimilate learning, and when participants are allowed to engage in collegial conversations. One strategy that will allow for extended learning time for teachers while also promoting learning that is collaborative and reflective is to engage teachers in multiple PD sessions over a semester or school year. This provides the opportunity for teachers to apply the teaching strategies presented to them in each PD session. Further support can be offered through professional learning communities, which presents educators with the

opportunity to apply and discuss new concepts, share expertise and insights, and engage

in collective problem-solving. PLCs offer ongoing, job-embedded learning that is

relevant to our teaching context, sustained over time, and interactive. Professional

learning opportunities that are well designed and effectively implemented are an essential

strategy to ensure that educators are equipped to support deep and complex student

learning in their classrooms.

Relevant instruction and culturally responsive pedagogical practice call for

teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and predispositions to teach children from

diverse racial, ethnic, language and social backgrounds (Gay, 2000). It is vitally

important to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students that effective

teacher professional development opportunities be provided so that teachers can continue

the process of becoming more culturally competent teachers. Developing the capacity to

motivate all students to want to learn, as well as creating a school environment that is

conducive to effective teaching and equitable learning experiences, is paramount in this

process.

Assessment

I will determine the effectiveness of my project in several ways. The first

indicator will be by informal observation in our professional learning communities.

During PLCs, teachers will have the opportunity to share, collaborate, and problem-solve

with colleagues. Teacher feedback during this time will give me a general idea of how

things are going. Are teachers able to implement the strategies, and what additional

support is needed? Based on this information, I will determine what adjustments need to

be made to the following professional development sessions and whether the initial

session met its objectives. I will be checking in with the PLCs throughout the year.

Teachers will also provide feedback using a brief survey that I will include in the

PLC resource. The survey will ask about which part of the PD teachers found most

helpful and what further questions they might have. This data will allow me to evaluate

the success of the PD as well as plan for follow up support with teachers as necessary.

A formal assessment of my project will occur after we have spring 2021 MCA

data. Once the MCA data is received, I will have the opportunity to evaluate the

academic growth of our students and determine if my project helped improve educational

outcomes for our English learners. I acknowledge there are limitations to using MCA

data to determine the success of my project as many measures of learning are necessary

to fully understand a student's academic growth. However, because my school is

currently targeted in the areas of academic progress and academic achievement on the

MCAs this data will be a relevant component in determining the efficacy of my project.

Summary

The goal of my capstone project is to provide culturally relevant teaching

strategies and resources for teachers that can be integrated into the development of

pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural

competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners.   A few

examples of the strategies I will include are modeling and scaffolding challenging

curriculum, creating cooperative and nurturing learning environments, and building on

students' funds of knowledge, among others. Through effective professional

development and ongoing collaboration with PLC teams, my capstone project will

provide meaningful ways that teachers can integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies into their mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence and improve educational outcomes for all students.

These CRT strategies will be shared with mainstream staff using professional development sessions, and professional learning community supports that are supported by research in quality adult learning experiences. My project will be presented over the 2020 – 2021 school year and will include all mainstream teachers in my building.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on my project's journey. I will revisit the literature review, state possible implications, evaluate limitations, and consider future projects.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The goal of my project was to answer the question: *How can culturally relevant teaching strategies be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners?* This question was answered through the literature review in Chapter Two and the research project described in Chapter Three. This final chapter serves as a personal analysis and reflection of the work I have done.

I begin this chapter by reviewing the research presented in the literature review and how the published research impacted my research and project. Next, I reflect on my personal learning and professional growth throughout the capstone project. I examine the potential implications and known limitations of this project, followed by the benefits to the educational community. Finally, I propose my next steps, which will conclude this chapter.

Literature Review Revisited

Over twenty years ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the term culturally relevant pedagogy to describe a teaching style that engages learners whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded from mainstream settings (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Since then, scholars have promoted culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as an essential alternative to conventional deficit-oriented teaching methods, which place students' languages, cultures, and identities as barriers to learning. The purpose of my research in Chapter Two was to better understand the different aspects of culturally relevant teaching

as well as to investigate practical ways CRT can be integrated into the pedagogy and teaching practices of mainstream classrooms. Presenting the history and broad base of scholarship around the many different culturally responsive approaches was not possible in my project as it includes decades of research and analysis. I chose to focus on the seminal work of key scholars and teacher educators Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay.

The most influential part of my literature review was discovering Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework for the development of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings, teaching must yield academic success, help students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities, and support students' ability "to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995 p.476). Geneva Gay (2000) further defined these principles as (a) high expectations, academic success for all students (b) cultural competence, assisting students in the formation of a positive cultural identity, and (c) critical consciousness, preparing students for success in a global society. I used these foundational principles to develop, design, and organize my capstone project.

Ultimately, it was not my goal to define or justify the different culturally responsive approaches but to find concrete and illustrative examples of culturally responsive teaching that educators could operationalize in mainstream classrooms. While information was gathered from many resources, research by Morrison, Robbins & Rose (2008) was most helpful as it presented a wide range of strategies within Ladson-Billings' (1995) foundational framework that I could use to build my capstone project.

In addition to these resources, research by Linda Darling-Hammond (2017) and Malcolm Knowles (2005) provided models for well-designed professional development, which I incorporated into my project. Using their models as a guideline, I designed my professional development to be ongoing, connected to practice, aligned with our school improvement plan's priorities and goals, and focused on building strong working relationships among teachers.

Reflection on capstone as a learning process

When I began my research over six months ago, I thought I knew quite a bit about culturally responsive teaching and how culturally responsive strategies should be integrated into classroom pedagogy and practice. I couldn't wait to find the checklist of items that teachers could use to successfully and quickly integrate these strategies into their classrooms. I soon realized that this magical checklist does not exist. I also learned that this 'tricks of the trade' approach should be avoided because of the complexity of culturally responsive education and because of the enormous variety of individual needs, motivations, and experiences of children of color (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Over time I came to understand that CRT is not a prescribed set of instructional moves, and research does not support a one size fits all approach to 'become culturally responsive.' Instead, culturally responsive teaching is a dynamic process where teachers work to create classroom environments where students' cultural and linguistic resources are valued. CRT uses students' personal experiences and interests for instructional connections to facilitate student learning and development.

As I continued my research, the sheer volume of literature available on culturally responsive education became challenging for me to sort through and even more difficult

to organize in a way that would be meaningful and coherent. I needed a way to synthesize the information I had found and present it to teachers in a manner that was understandable, effective, and transformative.

Fortunately, some similarities in the research began to emerge as I continued my exploration and Ladson-Billings provided the theoretical grounding I needed to organize my findings. Using her pedagogical framework with its three fundamental pillars – academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness, I created a professional development series that will present concrete and illustrative examples of the culturally responsive approach. It will assist educators in the implementation of CRT while also acknowledging that classrooms are complex communities where teachers regularly negotiate relationships, content, and behaviors.

Culturally responsive teaching, like so many other aspects of education, is multifaceted and complex. Zaretta Hammond (2015) reminds us that CRT is not the goal but the vehicle to elevate the learning capacity of students who have traditionally been marginalized in our educational system.

Implications of Project

Addressing the unique needs of students from diverse backgrounds is one of the most significant challenges facing public education today because many teachers are inadequately prepared with the relevant content knowledge, experience, and training (Au, 2009). We know that culturally responsive teaching creates environments where students' diversity, identities, and life experiences are validated and reflected in their classroom communities and in their learning opportunities. My capstone project offers ongoing professional development and PLC support to teachers in the implementation of

CRT strategies. It is my intention that by integrating the tools and resources presented in this project, my colleagues will be better prepared to assist students in making meaningful connections between what they learn in school and their languages, cultures, and life experiences. These connections will help our students access challenging curriculum, develop higher-level academic skills, and understand the relationship between what they learn at school and their lives outside of school. I hope my project builds cultural competence in our teaching staff, creates rigorous learning environments for our English learners, and sends the message that we value the culture, language, and life experiences of all our students.

Limitations of Project

There are some possible limitations of this project. The success of my professional development is ultimately dependent on whether it will lead to change in pedagogical practice and whether the new learning and understandings are sustainable over time. I anticipate there may be some push back from staff as the implementation of anything new requires work, and some teachers can be resistant to making changes to their current teaching methods. I hope that teachers will notice a positive difference in their classrooms as a result of implementing these strategies and that this will motivate them to continue to apply their new understanding in their learning communities.

Another possible shortcoming is that PD initiatives can be ineffective in supporting long term change in teacher practice and student learning. However, by focusing on design principles that underpin effective professional development as outlined in the research by Darling-Hammond (2017) and Knowles (2005), I am hopeful

that my PD will lead to a desirable change in teacher practice and student achievement outcomes.

Finally, the broad scope of culturally responsive education and all the methodologies and approaches associated with it is a limitation to my project. To make my project manageable, I narrowed down which of the frameworks made the most sense for my school environment and then determined which of the many resources to present within that framework. This meant that I could not address all the ideas presented in my research. Fortunately, there will be many opportunities to dig deeper and incorporate additional resources as we move forward in our culturally responsive journey in the years to come.

Benefits to the educational community

As I researched and created my capstone project, one key issue mentioned in the literature was the absence of adequate training for teachers in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. A growing body of evidence suggests that while many teachers know about multicultural education, many do not display the characteristics needed to fully implement and sustain culturally responsive pedagogical practices aimed at helping students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds learn more effectively (May & Sleeter, 2012).

Gay (2013) stresses that teachers who want to meet the needs of diverse students should be knowledgeable of and use culturally responsive teaching practices. My work benefits the educational community because it presents practical methods for teachers to incorporate CRT into their daily teaching. This PD gives teachers the tools they need to begin operationalizing culturally relevant pedagogy and enacting culturally relevant

approaches in their classrooms. My project and PLC resources are easily accessible and available for all staff members within our district and others in the community. Both the professional development and the PLC resource can be shared and utilized throughout our district and hopefully beyond.

Next Steps

I am looking forward to the 2020-2021 school year to begin. I will be stretched professionally as I present my project and guide teachers through a year of pedagogical adjustment and change. I know that some of the strategies I have presented will ask teachers to step out of their comfort zones, but I hope they are willing to persevere for the benefit of our English learners and other diverse students.

My long-term plans are to continue to update and build on my professional development and PLC resource. In years to come we will hone our skills, make changes as necessary, and continue our journey towards cultural competence and educational equity for all our students.

Summary

In summary, my capstone project began the challenging work of answering the question: *How can culturally relevant teaching strategies be integrated into the development of pedagogy and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms in order to build cultural competence in teachers and improve educational outcomes for English learners?* Building upon the theoretical framework of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and Geneva Gay (2000) to organize my findings, I created a professional development resource for mainstream teachers. It describes CRT best practices and outlines ways that educators can more effectively integrate culturally responsive instructional strategies into

their daily practice. Mainstream educators can use these strategies to plan instruction, raise expectations, and help diverse students feel valued and empowered.

I feel passionate about creating meaningful educational experiences for English learners and other diverse students in my school community. Culturally responsive teaching offers our students the opportunity to meet learning challenges with the strength and relevance of their own cultural frame of reference. Teachers must be given the opportunity to understand how culture affects student learning behaviors; and how they can change classroom interactions and instruction to embrace these cultural differences. I hope this project provides a springboard for ongoing dialogue about the skills, knowledge, and mindsets all teachers need to work effectively with today's learners.

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