

PROGRAM DESIGN: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CREATING EL PROGRAMS
WITH A FOCUS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Central Question and Rationale

The research question of my capstone project is, *How can EL (English Language) teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs (English Learners)*. As a first-year teacher, I taught English as a Second Language (ESL) in a middle charter school that serves mostly recently arrived immigrants from Somalia in a larger suburban area. As a teacher, I struggled with classroom management in terms of engagement and behavior, and I witnessed my colleagues having the same experience. My motivation for this project stems from my desire to create a learning environment that improves students' disposition towards attitude and engagement in the ESL classes. My goal is to reframe what works in ESL education and to modify the curriculum to best address the social-emotional needs of English Learners in the second language classroom to enhance their language acquisition experience.

Literature Review

Initially, I was hoping to find research articles on programs that address the social-emotional needs of English Learners. I found an abundance of research articles on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs; however, there were not many publications on social-emotional learning specifically taking into context the variability of English Learners' needs. Therefore, I adapted a socio-cultural lens through which I was conducting my research on SEL programs that best serve a culturally, linguistically and racially diverse group of ELs. As a starting point, I heavily relied on Vygotsky's

sociocultural theory (1987), which proposed that cognitive development stems from social interactions between members of society (Woolfolk, 2012).

I factored in certain barriers that may hinder second language acquisition. These invisible barriers include, but are not limited to students' marginal positions, cultural, racial and linguistic differences. Several research articles concluded that when the curriculum and instruction are not modified to meet the needs of the student population, students' achievements are hindered. Therefore, it is crucial to make improvements to the curriculum to address these barriers.

My capstone has the following three themes (1) social-emotional learning, (2) identity and investment in second language learning, (3) and culturally responsive pedagogy. These themes are carefully selected to address both the importance of social-emotional development for the general student population and the invisible socio-cultural factors that can adversely affect second language acquisition for minority students.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

It was critical to find the right platform to share my findings. In my opinion, teaching is a profession where resources can really impact the outcome of lessons. As a teacher myself, I am always eager to share the resources that have worked for me and to seek out more resources. I decided that a website, which is accessible at all times, would be the best platform to share my research findings and to provide practical resources for secondary EL teachers.

Project Framework

In terms of project framework, I utilized a website design framework created by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010). The research-based framework provides an easy-to-follow document that guides developers in website design. The dimensions of the evaluation criteria are the following: content, design, organization and user-friendly quality.

Regarding the project, I aimed to meet most of the criteria proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010). I focused on high-quality content which portrays information in a professional manner and is free from spelling mistakes. The design of the website presents information in an attractive way as the text is readable due to the contrast between the text and the background color. Also, the content is well-organized as my posts are all organized under specific categories. Finally, the website is also user-friendly as it loads quickly, displays no ads and features a content search button.

Project Platform

My website is hosted by Wordpress, which is a website builder and hosting site. I chose this web service, because it offers easy-to-customize templates and technical help with web design questions. I decided to use the Dara theme template available on the website as it offers a bright and professional look. To customize the template, I only needed to use a few lines of code as the template already had a finished appearance.

Audience

The website is primarily designed for secondary EL teachers within the United States. However, content and elementary EL teachers might also find certain resources available on webpage valuable. In my opinion, the resources available on the website could be well utilized regardless of the type of secondary school or location within the United States.

THE PROJECT

Link

<http://selearningforells.home.blog>

Description of Features

The website URL is <http://selearningforells.home.blog>. I chose this URL as it is easy to remember. The website has a professional look, feel and content. It loads quickly, features no pop-ups and is compatible on different browsers and devices.

Description of Pages and Articles

As regards to pages, the website features a homepage displaying the purpose of the website and lists the categories of articles on the site. I organized the resources under four main categories: *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, *Social-Emotional Content*, *The Affective Filter* and *Differentiation*. I also have an additional category “*Others*” where I have a short Q&A and the references I used to create the website.

Example 1: Homepage

Figure 1 below shows a screenshot of the homepage. The design of the webpage is straightforward. It features a header picture, a horizontal-spanning main menu in green, and a short explanation of the purpose followed by an index of all the articles of the website. I chose the screenshot Figure 1 to give the reader a glimpse of the website design and organization quality.

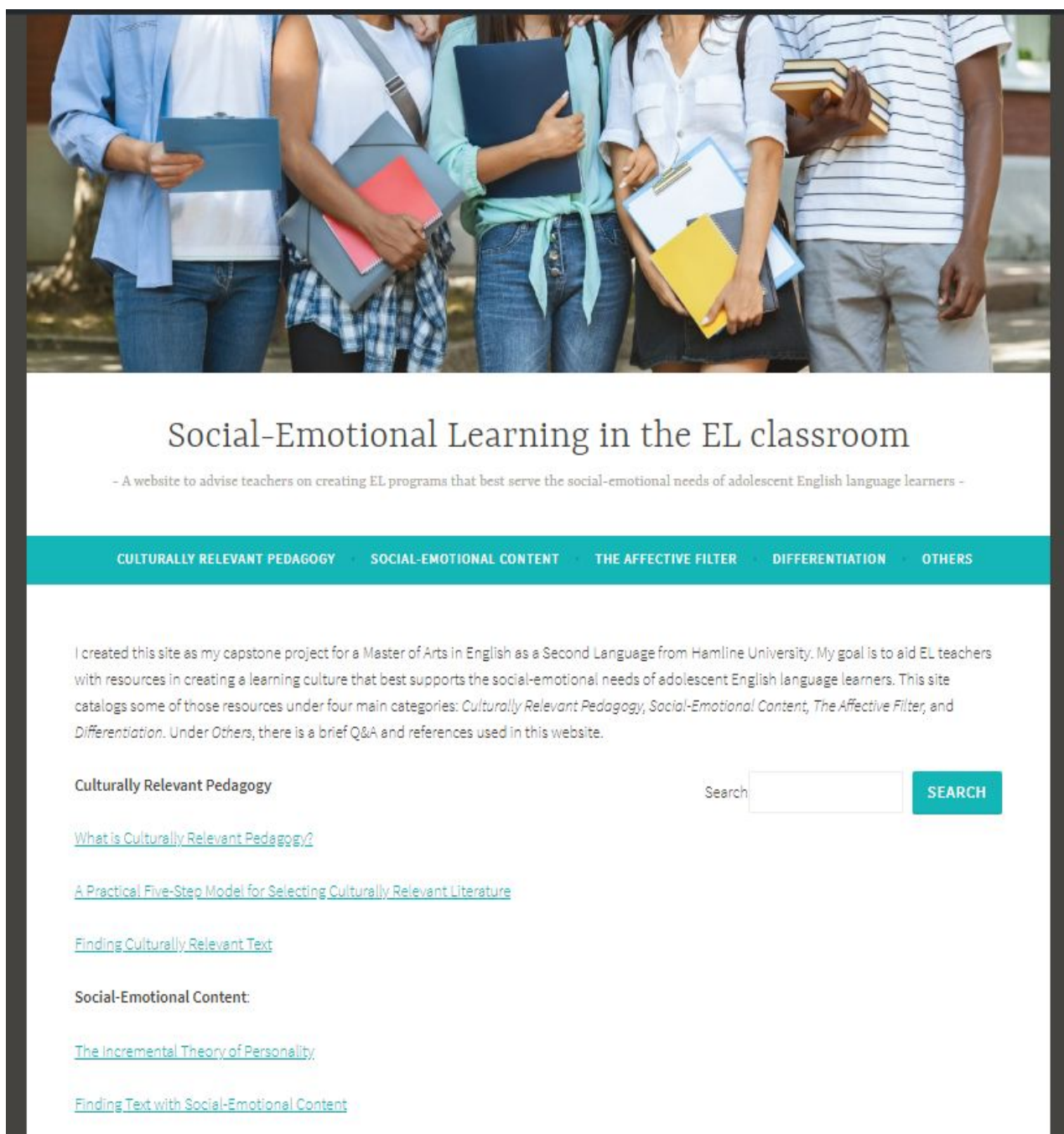



Figure 1. Homepage Screenshot.

Example 2: A Practical Five-Step Model for Selecting Culturally Relevant Text

Figure 2 through Figure 4 below are from an article I wrote about integrating culturally relevant text into the curriculum. I chose these screenshots because they demonstrate the kind of resource that I am providing on the website –a balanced approach between written explanation and practical support such as the checklist to choose culturally relevant text and the All About Me Board.



Social-Emotional Learning in the EL classroom


– A website to advise teachers on creating EL programs that best serve the social-emotional needs of adolescent English language learners –

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY · SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONTENT · THE AFFECTIVE FILTER · DIFFERENTIATION · OTHERS

A Practical Five-Step Model for Selecting Culturally Relevant Literature

March 5, 2020
Capstonecronin
Edit

As a teacher, I am all for practical guidelines that are simple to follow. During my capstone research, I came across an easy-to-understand model toward integrating culturally relevant literature into the curriculum. The model was developed by Sharma & Christ (2017) and had the following practical five steps, shown in the figure below.



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graph LR
    S1[Step 1  
Recognizing  
the Need for  
Culturally  
Responsive  
Instruction] --> S2[Step 2  
Get to Know  
More About  
Your Students'  
Lives]
    S2 --> S3[Step 3  
Search for  
Culturally  
Relevant Text]
    S3 --> S4[Step 4  
Select  
Culturally  
Relevant Text  
for Instruction]
    S4 --> S5[Step 5  
Identify  
Critical and  
Personal  
Response  
Opportunities]
  
```

A Practical Five-Step Model for Selecting Culturally Relevant Literature by Sharma & Christ (2017)

Figure 2. Content Webpage Screenshot.

STEP 1: Recognizing the Need for Culturally Responsive Instruction

The first step is recognizing the need for culturally relevant texts when you have a diverse student population. It sounds easy, but I saw it firsthand that well-known educational publishers failed to recognize such need. That dribbles down into the lesson plans of EL and content area teacher, and there is no wonder why so many kids are struggling to pay attention. When you have a diverse group of students, which you sure have as an EL teacher, it's important to take a deeper look at the teaching material.

STEP 2: Get to Know More About Your Students' Lives

The second step is getting to know the students in your classroom. This step is essential, and without it, it is tough to know which text accurately reflects students' home culture. As a first-year teacher, I taught English to students mainly from Somalia, yet I was struggling to decipher the essence of their customs. As Ramadan began, I became clear how much I wasn't aware of certain nuances of my students' lives, such as the forbiddance of singing and dancing during the holy month.

There are several ways to get to know your students, and the first week could be an ideal time for that. If your students feel comfortable, you could ask them to create a personal story project and share some facts about their cultural heritage. There are some apps, such as iMovie, Little Bird Tales, Explain Everything, or Doodle Cast Pro, that they could be using to do their project. If your students don't have access to technology, you could also create an All About Me Board like the one below and have students fill it in. When you have a good sense of your students' background, collect the information, and utilize it to select text. Of course, it takes time to discern who the students are in your classroom – so don't hesitate to ask your students to find a text they can relate to, if you are just unsure what to pick.

My family	Where I live	Favorite Place
Most Important Thing I Do Each Week	My Hobbies	My Favorite Kinds of Books
My Dreams	Best Vacation	My favorite Music, Movies & Games

All About Me Board

STEP 3: Search for Culturally Relevant Text

One of the challenges of including culturally relevant texts in the curriculum is to find appropriate resources. Unfortunately, the 171 texts recommended by the Common Core Standards are mostly written by white authors. Only 18 of them were written by non-white authors, which clearly does not equally represent the student population in the USA. Therefore, it is a good idea to look further than the Common Core for multicultural texts. In [this post](#), you can explore more about culturally relevant text.

Figure 3. Content Webpage Screenshot (2).

STEP 4: Select Culturally Relevant Text for Instruction

The fourth step is selecting culturally relevant text for instruction. Sharma & Christ (2017) recommend using a rubric (Table 1) to make sure that a text is culturally relevant. The rubric has seven dimensions assessing the extent to which a text may be culturally relevant. Aim to select texts that score closer 0 on the rubric below.

Book title and author:	Points	0	1
How the book portrays culture		Culturally conscious books validate a culture through accurately portraying language and experiences in their illustrations and words.	Socially conscious books perpetuate stereotypes.
		The author or illustrator are of the background being portrayed in the book.	The author or illustrator are not of the background being portrayed in the book.
Analyzing cultural relevance		The main characters are the same race/ ethnicity/religion as the reader. (Characters' cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are not the same race/ethnicity/religion (or other cultural marker) as the reader.
		The main characters are the same age/gender as the reader. (Characters' cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are not the same age/gender as the reader.
		The main characters talk like the reader. (Characters' cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters do not talk like the reader.
		The reader has probably lived in or visited places like those in the story (relevant place), and the story could take place this year (relevant time period). (Settings are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably not lived or visited places like those in the story, or the story could not take place this year.
		The reader has probably had an experience similar to one in the story. (Events are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably not had an experience similar to one in the story.

Table 1

STEP 5: Identify Critical and Personal Response Opportunities for Students

The final step is identifying critical and personal response opportunities for instruction. Aim to ask critical questions that require higher-order thinking about connecting students' own life experiences to the text. If you have ELLs with lower level English proficiency, you could create comprehension questions based on [these suggestions](#).

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Related

[Where to find culturally relevant text?](#)
in "Choosing Culturally-Relevant Literature"

[What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?](#)
in "Choosing Culturally-Relevant Literature"

[Q & A](#)
in "Others"

Figure 4. Content Webpage Screenshot (3).

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