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# Using Culturally Responsive Teaching to Educate English Language Learners in the Elementary Literacy Classroom

Mitchell Lalik
mlali1@brockport.edu

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Mitchell J. Lalik
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# Contents

# Abstract

English Language Learners in the United States are struggling to access grade-level content due to limited language proficiency. In non-responsive classrooms students' learning styles are not activated, prior knowledge is overlooked, and meaningful cultural connections are not made. However, through the educational approach of Culturally Responsive Teaching, teachers can assist these culturally and linguistically diverse learners to access the same, grade-level content in meaningful ways. Additionally, teachers can also use Culturally Responsive Teaching in the classroom to meet the social emotional needs of English Language Learners and improve assessment outcomes. Specifically, I will focus on how Culturally Responsive Teaching can benefit elementary English Language Learners in the literacy classroom. Practices such as creating authentic lessons and activities, formative assessment, and using visuals to increase student comprehension are examined to boost achievement of English Language Learners. Through PD, teachers will learn about the benefits Culturally Responsive Teaching has on their students and will learn skills to build prior knowledge to engage English Language Learners in grade-level content. Teachers will create their own self-assessment and modify their own lessons and activities to practice the skills learned in the PD.

*Keywords:* English Language Learners, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Elementary Literacy, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

## Chapter 1: Introduction

**Problem**

English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States significantly struggle to achieve academically at the same level as their native English-speaking classmates, and have for far too many years. As of this academic year, the current population of ELLs in classrooms across America exceeds five million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This number of students equates to approximately 10% of the total population of students enrolled grades K-12 in public schools of the United States (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2019). Despite changing technology and new findings in educational theory, there is one constant that remains imperative to engage students of all ages, languages, and backgrounds. This constant is that of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT); the ability of educators to implement cultural lessons and examples into the classroom for their students (Nieto, 2013).

In my personal experiences as a teacher, observer, and student, it is evident that students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are less represented in the curriculum in schools. Due to this marginalization, students of other languages often disengage in classroom activities and struggle with bringing background information to new lessons. As I continue to develop as a teacher, I analyze how I can develop my instruction to relate more to the personal experiences my students bring to the classroom. Nieto (2013) describes that what you teach is no more important than whom you teach, insisting on the need for reaching students' identities.

The question that remains, is how can teachers implement CRT in order to positively engage and inspire elementary ELLs and mainstream students? It is important to note that CRT is not a specific group of strategies, but instead the mindset that the experiences, abilities, and

identities of our students must be represented in the curriculum (Nieto, 2013). Although all

elementary educators may be teachers of ELLs, many are still underprepared to tailor their

content to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students.

**Significance of the Problem**

ELLs who are not instructed through CRT and socially just practices are unable to access the

material as easily as students of the dominant culture. According to Klein (2016) the graduation

rate of ELLs in the U.S. is just over 60 percent for ELLs, while the national rate for American

students is over 80 percent. States with higher ELL population such as California and New York

have significantly lower graduation rates, which recognizes the great need for teachers to be able

to communicate and relate to these students. ELLs already face a combination of challenges

socially in the U.S., including prejudices, stereotyping, and racism (Gay, 2018). These obstacles

impact student self-esteem and mental stability, which have a considerable effect on academic

achievement.

ELLs academic shortfalls are also apparent in elementary education in terms of language

proficiency. Dávila (2015) claims that "language learning is mediated through prior experience,

physical and social contexts, and dynamics of interpersonal communication that are inevitably

influenced by factors such as race, social class, gender, and immigration status" (p. 3). When

educators disregard the backgrounds of their students in planning and instruction, an increase in

the divide in educational achievement will occur. CRT is crucial in order to engage our students

of diverse backgrounds so that they feel they can participate throughout instruction even if they

have limited reading, writing, or speaking proficiency.

In order for ELLs to access the curriculum, educators must find a way to appeal to both the

content and the students. "Culture provides the tools to pursue the search for meaning and to

convey our understanding to others and thereby has strong shaping influences on the communication styles prominent among different ethnic groups and their children" (Gay, 2018, p. 89). Understanding the cultural norms of students helps educators decide how to motivate learners who have educational experiences much different than traditional American students. ELLs may even have significantly limited academic skills in English, but can still build on their literacy if their prior knowledge is being activated (Dávila, 2015). When students have a general understanding of the course content, they are more likely to take risks by participating in class discussions and enhance their proficiency. Therefore, it is pivotal that assessments for ELLs are also culturally responsive, to ensure that a language barrier does not play a major role in the student's ability to display their knowledge of the content.

Social emotional conditions are improved for ELLs when CRT is used effectively by teachers. Teaching students about the backgrounds and practices of their peers creates a learning environment that allows all students to learn from one another. Artifacts or pictures about student backgrounds validates an ELL's culture which promotes student confidence and engagement (Haynes, 2013). The visualization and study of various cultures also promotes a climate of understanding among all students from different backgrounds, allowing students to feel accepted and welcome in a new environment (Gay, 2018). CRT also advises teachers to communicate with families of ELLs in order to get parents involved both inside and outside of the curriculum to promote student academic and emotional success (Nieto, 2013). CRT causes social emotional conditions to improve and impacts student confidence, peer to peer morale, and validation in one's culture.

A final area of education for ELLs that is enhanced under CRT is student assessment. Although certain assessments such as standardized testing cannot be modified by the teachers of

ELLs, a community of high-expectations and motivation can help reduce the achievement gap between ELLs and their mainstream peers (Nieto, 2013). Instead of watering down curriculum to slow the pace for ELLs, teachers are encouraged to enrich their time in the classroom with assigning activities that allow for students to hone in on prior experiences and skills (DelliCarpini, 2009). In teacher-created assessments, educators are advised to create authentic questions that allow students to showcase their understanding in a variety of ways (Gay, 2018). By allowing ELLs to demonstrate literacy skills instead of the recall of facts, teachers are able to gain more insight to what a student is capable of producing and achieving. Proponents of CRT argue for fair and authentic assessments for ELLs which allows for these students to display content knowledge in a meaningful way.

**Purpose**

In order to mitigate ELLs' disengagement in the classroom, CRT is a necessary mindset that elementary school teachers need to have to promote success for their students. To educate current elementary teachers about the benefits of CRT, I will be creating a professional development (PD) on how to enhance lessons to be more student-centered for students of diverse backgrounds. Teachers will begin in whole-group instruction, to enhance understanding of CRT and to expand their knowledge. Station activities will help facilitate different pieces of the CRT lesson development process, including making modifications, identifying student needs, and lesson development. Educators will consider student interests, identities, and life experiences in order to create a classroom that is more welcoming towards all cultures. The goal of this PD is to help ELLs feel better represented in the curriculum by teaching to these students' personal experiences. By increasing the amount of CRT in the classroom, teachers will be able to improve learning, social emotional conditions, and assessment for ELLs. The objective will be met by

having educators demonstrate their ability to plan culturally responsive lessons for first or second grade students in small groups and independently.

**Conclusion**

CRT is a successful, but often underutilized approach in education. Teachers are encouraged to have the experiences of students at the forefront of their classrooms along with curriculum expectations. As the population of ELLs in the United States continues to increase, it is evident that PD for educators in the area of CRT would help improve the understandings of how to reach ELLs as well as other culturally diverse learners. With proper implementation of CRT practices, elementary ELLs can be positively engaged in a variety of subject areas by using their prior experiences and home language.

In Chapter 2, research from a variety of experts in the field of TESOL will help explain the benefits of CRT and the impact on language proficiency. Chapter 3 will provide the PD that will enhance educators' abilities to plan effective lessons and activities with students' experiences in mind. The handouts and station activities to be given to the participants will appear in the Appendix. Chapter 4 will conclude these findings and will be followed by the references that enhanced this research.

## Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

**Introduction to CRT Approach**

CRT, as a pedagogy, aims to improve learning, social emotional conditions, and assessment for ELLs. Gay (2018) notes that "instructional reforms are needed that are grounded in positive beliefs about the cultural heritages and academic potentialities of [ELLs]" (p. 29). As a result, teachers need to be consistently monitoring their own ability to connect with all of their students, as well as finding meaningful ways to incorporate the prior experiences of their students to create effective and enriching leaning experiences. Lew and Nelson (2016) note that CRT "builds on students' personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and prior accomplishments" (p. 7). ELLs significantly struggle without CRT in the classroom because their learning is not grounded on or expanding on previous knowledge. In the United States now more than ever, teachers are expected to modify lessons and activities to be more reflective of the students that are being instructed. By incorporating student backgrounds, family heritage, and learning styles, a shift in achievement should begin to occur.

When using CRT, it is important to note what the expectations of teachers are in order for this approach to be meaningful and effective. Shade et al. (1997) list the following seven principles as the tenets of CRT:

1. Students are affirmed in their cultural connections

2. Teachers are personally inviting

3. Learning environments are physically and culturally inviting

4. Students are reinforced for academic development

5. Instructional changes are made to accommodate differences in learners

6. Classroom is managed with firm, consistent, loving control

7.  Interactions stress collectivity as well as individuality

**Evidence and Application**

In order to engage ELLs in a new topic of literacy, CRT suggests the need to incorporate background knowledge. Dávila (2015) assures that eliciting background knowledge goes beyond student questioning. Teachers must encourage self-reflection and self-monitoring throughout the stages of literacy such as pre-reading and post-reading in order to check for understanding. CRT can easily be weaved in the content area of literacy because the skills learned are utilized in nearly every other course ELLs will take throughout their K-12 experience. The difference in proficiency between ELLs and mainstream students is evident. According to Albers and Martinez (2015), "in 2012, only 7% of fourth-- grade ELLs and 3% of eighth-- grade ELLs read at or above proficient level in English reading achievement (compared to 35% and 33%, respectively, for non-ELLs)" (p. 9). In order to help ELLs access literature like their mainstream peers, teachers must provide grade level work at a lower vocabulary level. Effective teachers also recommend that ELLs are given various opportunities to work with peers to enhance their English skills (Haynes, 2013). These scaffolds put in place by educators not only help students achieve higher academically, but also promote student integration in the classroom by making the ELLs feel represented as part of the community.

*CRT in Literacy*

CRT is a method of planning instruction and can efficiently be used in literacy. Applying literacy skills is easier when the content/comprehension is accessible and familiar to the student. ELLs need to be able to both understand new vocabulary in the target language, while also receiving new instruction at an appropriate rate. Since many ELLs lack a robust vocabulary in English, teachers can provide visuals that help students get a better understanding of the culture

they are learning about, and may even choose to provide a translation to a student's native

language (Haynes, 2013). Vocabulary is essential for ELLs because "ELLs must not only learn

communicative (i.e., social) English but they also must become proficient in English academic

language" (Albers & Martinez, 2015, p. 2). Teachers may choose to emphasize essential

vocabulary for students to learn for the specific literacy activity. Pre-teaching of this vocabulary

along with visuals and connections to prior knowledge helps ensure that all students are at a

more level playing field for accessing this vocabulary independently (Haynes, 2013). By pairing

necessary literacy scaffolds with the mindset of CRT, teachers can ensure that ELLs are

receiving easier access to classroom materials.

Student learning, in literacy, can be enhanced by teaching beyond typical expectations of

what literacy looks like such as books or short stories. Gay (2018) notes that articles, films,

music, audio recordings, and internet resources allow for additional ways for ELLs to engage in

the literacy classroom in a way that is culturally responsive. Pappamihiel and Knight (2016)

describe that school field trips are a great way to engage ELLs in literacy due to the many ways

literacy can be challenged beyond traditional methods. In the authors' study of an elementary

museum trip, the students were able to experience literacy by reading short texts and headlines

and deciding how they could incorporate the pictures they took to tell a story about what was

learned. Pappamihiel and Knight (2016) defended the use of Digital Storytelling (DST) by

claiming "DST projects allow the scaffolding of language with pictures, enhancing [a student's]

ability to not only interpret but also express a complex message" (p. 277). The teacher in this

study paired students in groups of four which resulted in peer to peer communication in the

target language in order to achieve a common goal. Students were responsible for different roles

which helps establish a purpose when creating a project. Small group work is beneficial for

developing ELLs because their peers give them are often nonjudgmental and immediate

(Haynes, 2013). These peer to peer Field trips such as museum visits are particularly effective

for ELLs because students are able to exhibit the experiences of many types of people, which

might not happen in the traditional curriculum. CRT can be almost effortlessly exhibited through

field trips for elementary students since they are engaging in multiple literacies to practice their

English proficiency.

### *CRT and Sociocultural Challenges*

CRT can improve the social emotional conditions for ELLs at the elementary level in the

classroom. ELLs are unlikely to see their unique culture and prior experiences represented in the

classroom without a teacher who is willing to modify the curriculum to meet their needs. This

process is crucial for ELLs beyond using prior knowledge to make learning easier. Incorporating

student experience and culture into the classroom through CRT validates and affirms a students'

home culture which allows the ELL to learn more about and praise their own cultural heritage

(Gay, 2018). When ELLs are given the opportunity to build off their experiences in the

classroom, they are able to enrich the experiences of their peers of different cultures as well to

promote a greater understanding of the world. A teacher can weave in this facet of CRT by

introducing books about a particular culture by an author who also belongs to that culture, and

following up the activity with a video to visualize what the students are learning about (Gay,

2018). Including references of cultures of all students in the classroom fosters growth for

students both emotionally and academically.

Teachers can continue to enhance social emotional conditions in the classroom for ELLs

by making sure their classroom is representative of all of the students in the room. One way a

teacher can promote these conditions is by what is heard throughout the classroom. Teachers

must understand the names of their students and pronouncing the names correctly. As a role

model of the classroom, teachers need to not Americanize the student's name and insist that the

students follow suit, as this instills pride in the student's heritage and background (Haynes,

2013). Another way Haynes suggests a way to improve classroom climate is to hang pictures and

artifacts that are important to students throughout the classroom. This practice will help students

get a better understanding of the backgrounds of their peers, while also seeing their own interests

and experiences represented (Gay, 2018). Based on this information, it is imperative that teachers

change and reflect on their classroom and practices each year to represent the students who are a

part of the learning community.

Outside of the classroom, teachers can continue to use CRT to make meaningful

conversations and connections with ELLs and their families. Nieto (2013) states "family means

many things to culturally responsive teachers: it means regularly communicating with the

families of their students, respecting them, and learning from them" (p. 143). Teachers often

experience challenges and anxieties communicating with families of their ELLs due to language

barriers. However, Gay (2018) describes this type of advocacy and caring as a reciprocal

relationship that will inspire a higher level of student and parental involvement in academics.

Schools can hold a variety of activities after school for all students and families to learn more

about the cultures in their district. Bilingual clubs can be held after school to promote both

language proficiency and a sense of community. Haynes (2013) also notes that larger events such

as festivals and international celebrations are valuable measures to educate others in the

community. Simpkins et al. (2017) insist that co-constructing relevant cultural activities with

staff is a necessary partnership to ensure youth voices and opinions are heard. This collaboration

helps ensure that the activities are respectful and accurate representations of the culture. After-

school activities and programs are great ways for educators to promote the social emotional

conditionals for ELLs, which in turn will encourage students to be more involved learners in the

classroom.

### *CRT in Assessments/Evaluations*

Assessment outcomes can be improved for ELLs by the inclusion of CRT in elementary

classrooms. The inclusion of standardized tests in the K-12 curriculum in the United States often

displays an achievement gap between ELLs and mainstream students (DelliCarpini, 2009). ELLs

are challenged on these tests as they are expected to have both content knowledge as well as

significant skills in English in order to display their understanding. These types of summative

assessments pose a challenge for teachers and ELLs because those evaluating do not have a

direct hand in teaching these students, and teachers do not know exactly what will appear on the

assessments (Pipková, 2018). Therefore, it is critical to use CRT to mitigate the disproportionate

achievement between student groups. Standardized test results are important to students,

teachers, and schools, because the results determine the funding and resources allocated to the

district (Gay, 2018). The practices of CRT insist on the need of high-quality work from students,

regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. The mindset in inclusive classrooms cannot

be that the curriculum should be slowed down or reduced. Instead, Nieto (2013) describes that

highly-effective teachers who use CRT are "structured, intense (instruction was always going

on), and traditional" (p. 142). By holding students accountable in the classroom and maintaining

high expectations, students are promoted to have confidence and achieve on assessments while

still having their social and emotional needs met because of how much experience they are

getting in the classroom (Nieto, 2013). Although standardized tests are not yet equal for ELLs,

the steps teachers take in scaffolding and preparation in the classroom can better prepare students

to achieve at a high level.

Another way to improve assessment outcomes for ELLs using CRT is by creating authentic,

open assessments that allow for positive performances for all students. Authentic assessments

ensure that background knowledge and student experience are taken into account when

developing a test (DelliCarpini, 2009). CRT-driven assessments also pay close attention to the

type of vocabulary used in the questions and answers. If an assessment relies on a student

knowing a single term to find an answer, an ELL is can be at a significant risk of

misunderstanding the question due to their unfamiliarity with the specific term (DelliCarpini,

2009). Authentic assessments should instead reduce the amount of complex vocabulary needed

to understand the test, and be more focused on what the student can produce in the target

language. Gay (2018) argues that teachers must "use varied modes of communication in teaching

and performance assessment to capitalize on different students' strengths, including written,

verbal, visual, tactile, and kinetic modalities" (p. 141). Teachers are being challenged as

assessment creators to be more mindful to the needs of their students in order to help all students

convey their content knowledge by providing multiple pathways and opportunities within the

assessment.

Throughout developing assessments, teachers of elementary students need to be mindful

of learning styles. A learning style is the preferred way a student is likely to process, understand,

and produce content knowledge (Haynes, 2013). Learning styles are present for all students, not

only ELLs. However ELLs may have significant preference to a specific learning style due to

their prior learning experiences that may differ from the dominant culture. Gay (2018) also notes

that visualization alongside verbal or written text can help ensure that students are able to engage

regardless of their learning style or preference because at least one should be met. Younger ELLs however may need additional attention to specific learning styles. Haynes (2013) indicates that "when newcomers are at the preproduction and early production levels of learning English, they are usually tactile and kinesthetic learners" (p. 35). In order to successfully educate ELLs with limited proficiency, teachers must pay close attention to their learning style, which should impact the way in which these educators are designing assessments for these students. Criterion-referenced assessments measure student performance on a set of skills without comparing the students' results to others (DelliCarpini, 2009). These assessments ensure that any student that meets the criterion can be successful, so that ELLs are not being compared to students who may have significant more language experience in English than they currently do. By focusing on access to assessment questions and learning styles, ELLs are being assessed appropriately under CRT.

Assessment in elementary classrooms do not always need to be given in a structured, traditional format. In fact, there are many different types of assessments that teachers can do under CRT that help display student ability and understanding. Gay (2018) noted that "there is no *one right*… assessment procedure for all students" and that instead it is imperative that teachers identify "assessment procedures that are responsive to [student] cultural heritages and personal experiences" (p. 160). In order to develop relevant and fair assessments, teachers need to evaluate their students beyond standardized tests.

Formative assessments are given by teachers in order to gain insight to what a student is able to produce (Pipková, 2018). Teachers often use this type of assessment daily to better understand a student's mastery of skills, and the teachers use this data to modify future instruction. Words that are unfamiliar to students as well as non-verbal nuances that occur in the

literacy classroom are important occurrences to take record of (Gay, 2018). Formative

assessments are immediate, frequent, and are seldom graded by the teacher (Pipková, 2018).

Instead, formative assessments give teacher immediate feedback about student ability and

understanding.

Student feedback has become an important field of research in the past five years and

encourages students to repair or correct their speech (Albers & Martinez, 2015). However,

frequent teacher feedback can also notion negative attitudes to an ELL that may lead to

frustration and a decrease in confidence. In order to provide effective feedback in a culturally

responsive manner, Albers and Martinez (2015) note that a teacher needs to follow three

teaching strategies in order to create a positive and safe environment for these learners. First,

corrective feedback can negatively impact student tenacity if it is not delivered correctly. Next, a

student's native language should be valued and allowed in order to make meaning or explain a

rationale, especially if the student is at a lower level of language proficiency. A third strategy is

to use positive or endearing terms to refer to the students when working with them to establish an

environment that feels safe, appropriate, and caring. Lew and Nelson (2016) also warn that

students may have different socialization expectations and experiences and may cause the

students to react differently to receiving feedback. Formative assessment is a necessary and

effective component of CRT that must be done with respect to the needs of students.

### *Discussion and Challenges When Implementing CRT*

Although CRT is an effective method in improving learning, social emotional conditions,

and assessment for ELLs, it is quite possible to implement this strategy incorrectly. Superficial

application is a direct example of misinterpretation of CRT. The process of superficial

application occurs when trivial pieces of student cultures are taught, which are often stereotypes

of those cultures (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) describe student culture as an iceberg, where most aspects are not noticeable based on student appearance or prior conceptions of that culture. Superficial or "surface culture" examples may include food, dress, music, or dance. However, unspoken or unconscious rules of student culture are often dismissed due to little true understanding of the culture. Lew and Nelson (2016) argue that "oversimplified and distorted conceptions of CRT among teachers led them to reject this concept and consequently student learning did not improve" (p. 7). Therefore, frivolous utilization of student culture cannot positively impact student learning or social emotional conditions.

Another pitfall stemming from superficial application that may interfere with correct implementation of CRT is the lack of teachers' knowledge about student backgrounds. An increase in the population of ELLs in the United States has resulted in distinctive cultures, languages, and practices that many teachers may be unfamiliar with (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Socialization impacts the way ELLs behave in their classrooms based on what is acceptable in their culture and experiences (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Day (2002) defines socialization as "a process which results in the acquisition of linguistic and social knowledge and skills through language practices and through interaction with more expert or more knowledgeable others in order to become competent members of a social group" (p. 14). Consequently, the deepest parts of student culture are often the least visible, and contain the highest emotional load. "Unconscious rules" are routine for students, and impact how they act towards their teachers, peers, and self (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 37). A diagram from the works of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) will be provided to teachers to help visualize the "iceberg" of cultural rules and norms and facilitate meaningful discussion. ELLs may use different body language, tone of voice, eye contact, or facial expressions that differ from the dominant culture in the classroom

(Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Elementary students are specifically likely to exhibit these behaviors due to their recent internalization of these cultural expectations and limited interactions yet with students and teachers of a new culture (Day, 2002). In response, teachers may often overreact to these nonverbal cues without understanding the cultural rules in which the cues stem from, determining the interactions as rude or disinterested (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Instead of forcing students into similar expectations or rules, teachers must first understand the cultural context the behaviors are rooted in. By educating themselves on student culture and socialization, teachers of elementary students can better understand student behavior to positively impact social emotional needs of ELLs.

A final challenge of CRT is the belief that only students in diverse and urban schools are in need of multicultural education. Although students in certain school districts may appear to have a similar culture due to a lack of diversity, these students may have significantly different experiences and abilities (Willox & Brant, 2018). Conversations regarding race and culture promote self-awareness as well as a greater understanding and respect to students who differ from them (Nieto, 2013). CRT is able to address both student culture and student ability in a meaningful way. Conversations regarding race, power, and privilege are seldom led by teachers in elementary classrooms, yet, engaging in these discussions pose significant benefits for both students and teachers to engage in. The awareness of racist exclusion and violence in the history of the United States are necessary for teachers to understand because of the rights and privileges it provides to certain students (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). These privileges are represented by what authors and stories are recommended for elementary literacy curriculum in modern education. Using CRT, educators can still meet Common Core standards while also addressing a

wide variety of cultures and experiences to expand student understandings of race, power, and privilege.

**Conclusion**

CRT is a way of teaching, thinking, and reflecting as a human and educator that is beneficial for ELLs. In the area of literacy, CRT allows for ELLs to access grade-level content while receiving instruction and materials in appropriate vocabulary. Furthermore, social emotional conditions and literacy are enriched for students as their backgrounds and experiences are weaved into the curriculum to affirm cultural identity and to build background knowledge. Moreover, families of ELLs are invited to be members of the classroom and community to promote ELL inclusion in schools both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, assessment outcomes are enhanced under CRT as teachers make the tests authentic and approachable for students of all backgrounds and language abilities. Accommodations in academics, social emotional considerations, and assessments/evaluations are necessary to ensure positive growth for all ELLs.

In Chapter 3 I will describe the components of my Professional Development (PD) project. I will also include a written rationale for the handouts and materials I plan on providing in the Appendix section of this capstone.

**Chapter 3: Professional Development Project**

**Introduction**

The professional development (PD) is focused on engaging teachers of elementary

students in a way that is meaningful, personal, and hands-on. The goal of the PD is for teachers

to promote the academic, social emotional, and assessment development of their students

through the implementation of CRT in literacy lessons and activities. Teachers will be

encouraged to use a critical lens to scaffold instruction for ELLs. The audience of this PD will be

both general education and TESOL teachers at the elementary level, which will include teachers

from grades K-5. The teachers will be introduced to the praxis of CRT, and will learn how CRT

impacts students academically, social emotionally, and through assessment outcomes. The PD is

a half-day presentation that will take place the middle of the school year to give teachers the

opportunity to get to know their students. Teachers will be encouraged to develop and bring, to

the session, a tool they used to get to know students in their classes. Teachers will attend on a PD

day during the school year between December and February. I also anticipate the timing of the

PD would keep the educational approach of CRT fresh in the minds of these teachers for

designing future lessons for the following academic year. I believe this is effective as a yearly

type of PD, but with different goals each time so that the content is not too repetitive from year

to year.

I will conduct the PD in one large classroom in order to create a personal environment

that encourages dialogue and questioning. This space ensures that attendees are able to have a

whole-group discussion, and also enough space to set stations within the same classroom. All

participants will be in the same room during the stations allowing the presenter the opportunity

to float between groups, informally record questions or comments, and ask or answer to deepen

understanding. Teachers will bring two to three of their own literacy lessons or activities to

enhance. Throughout the PD, teachers will be creating, analyzing, and discussing literacy lessons

and activities in order to demonstrate their understandings of CRT in various ways. Feedback

will be collected from those teachers who attend the PD in order to understand their takeaways

and develop future PD.

**Description and Rationale of the PD**

The PD will begin in a whole-group setting in a large classroom where all teachers will be

seated in view of a PowerPoint presentation. The PD will begin by identifying the goals of the

day so that all teachers are aware of what they will be trying to achieve. Each teacher will

receive an agenda for the day (see Appendix, Figure 1). After the goals are established, teachers

will be introduced to the theoretical framework of CRT. Teachers will spend some time writing

their own definition of what CRT is and then will complete a turn and share with another teacher

near them. Teachers will record their response on the worksheet (see Appendix, Figure 2). All

teachers will write down their answers to ensure that each professional is engaged in the topic.

Since background knowledge is an important skill to engage students, I also use it throughout the

PD to engage teachers. I chose to have teachers define CRT because it not only tells me what the

teachers know about the pedagogy, it also allows the teachers to be reflective of their own

knowledge and abilities (Dávila 2015). I activate background knowledge of the educators various

times throughout the whole-group presentation in order for the teachers to critically examine

their own understandings of student culture and needs. I will ask one or two teachers to share

their definitions of CRT and then I will share two CRT definitions from Nieto (2013) and Lew

and Nelson (2016). Teachers will edit their definition of CRT later on in the presentation when

they complete the exit ticket so they can reflect on the PD. I believe this activity will allow

teachers to self-assess their own understanding of CRT which will lead to meaningful dialogue.

    Following the introduction of the presentation, I will begin to instruct the educators just how

CRT impacts student learning, social emotional needs, and assessment outcomes. I will achieve

this by showing a video to help redefine what CRT means as we enter a more technological

classroom. Teachers again will record their thoughts and responses to the questions found in the

presentation using their worksheet (see Appendix, Figure 2). The inclusion of a video also helps

support those of various learning styles, which is a teachable moment that can be related back to

ELLs. Videos are tools to be used in literacy instruction and allow students such as ELLs to

receive additional support to aide their comprehension (Haynes, 2013). The tenets of CRT

written by Shade et al. (1997) will be shared so that the teachers will understand what CRT looks

like throughout the elementary classroom. These tenets will be revisited later on in the lesson in

order for teachers to utilize when assessing the responsiveness of a lesson or activity (see

Appendix, Figure 3).

    In order for teachers to get a better understanding of cultural differences, teachers will

receive a copy of the iceberg diagram presented by Nieto (2013) that discusses the difference

between surface culture and deep culture. Before looking over the diagram, I will explain what

the types of culture represent in education, and ask if any teacher has any guesses on what can be

found at either level of culture. Following this share-out, teachers will then read over the diagram

as I go through and explain various factors that affect a student's culture. This framework will

allow for teachers to think more critically when working with ELLs. Another outcome of this

share-out is to encourage teachers to learn more about the many facets of the cultures of their

students. The teachers will then be challenged to consider any other groups of students that are

also underrepresented in the curriculum, to prove that CRT exists beyond the field of ELLs. Responses to this question will be recorded using the whole-group response worksheet for question 3 (see Appendix, Figure 2). These worksheets will be collected, by me, in order to better understand the experiences of teachers who are not as comfortable sharing with the whole group.

The PD will enhance the teachers' understanding of how CRT impacts students' academics, social emotional needs, and assessment outcomes. While explaining the factors that can be improved under CRT, I will also provide examples of successful implementation into the classroom. For example, I can give an example of how pre-teaching vocabulary through picture flashcards can enhance an ELL's ability to comprehend a short story (Pappamihiel & Knight, 2016). By explaining how academic scaffolds of CRT can positively impact an ELL by including an example for each, teachers can better envision how to incorporate the strategy in their classroom. I also can encourage teachers to share if they have ever used one of the scaffolds successfully with a student or unit. Although a purpose of my PD is to educate these teachers about CRT, I want the remainder of the PD to be discussion-based and hands-on.

In order to show how CRT translates over to lesson and activity design, I created an example of a responsive literacy activity for elementary students that I will describe using a PowerPoint presentation. I also will have teachers refer to the rubric I developed for critiquing a culturally responsive lesson or activity, to help the teachers analyze how my activity satisfies each area of CRT (see Appendix, Figure 3). I modified the tenets of CRT described by Shade et al. (1997) in order to create a rubric to assess the responsiveness of a lesson or activity to student culture and background. I did not incorporate all seven tenets because certain tenets refer more to the classroom environment instead of the lesson delivery. The five tenets I kept help teachers

identify the goals of a CRT lesson or activity. In order for the work to be considered responsive, teachers must be able to decide that the CRT tenet is met or even exceeds expectations. I will go through the example activity I created with the teachers and ask them to assess the lesson in terms of CRT using the rubric. Afterwards, I will lead the teachers in a discussion reviewing the effectiveness of the activity before we head into our first break of the PD.

In order to teach to individual teacher learning styles, I incorporate tasks and content that are approachable for reading and writing, social, and visual learners. By incorporating multiple learning styles, it is likely that all educators will be able to engage because at least one of their learning needs will be met (Gay, 2018). Throughout the PD the educators will be reading the materials given on paper while also writing down their rationales and ideas, which will aid those who learn best through reading and writing. Social learners are supported by the time I allot for discussing questions and lesson accommodations and modifications with one another. I supported my PD presentation with videos and pictures in order to engage visual learners. These learning styles are likely to best suited for adults, as styles such as tactile and kinesthetic are more prominent at younger ages (Haynes, 2013). By considering various learning styles, I can ensure that all of the professionals are able to interact with the content of the PD.

Once teachers return, they will be placed into three different stations by the presenter. Each station will last 20 minutes and teachers will rotate to the next numerical station to continue their practice with CRT. Station work can be either independent or completed with a partner depending on the judgement of the educator. I will announce what is to be expected at each station so that transitioning can happen quickly and will also have a station leader for each station that can explain the directions and lead the station as needed.

**Session 1: Critiquing a NYS Module**

At the first station, teachers will be given a choice of different NYS modules for ELA grades K-5. I will recommend that the teachers choose a grade level that is in their teaching area because the teacher will be familiar with the content and standards. Using the Rubric for CRT Lesson / Activity Design, teachers will review the module's cultural responsiveness for ELLs (see Appendix, Figure 3). Teachers will also be encouraged to note how the module could be improved to needs of CRT using the Station 1: Enhancing a Lesson Worksheet (see Appendix, Figure 4). The goal of this station is for teachers to consider modifications to put in place for ELLs to be able to bring their background knowledge and abilities to the module. I will have the station leader collect the rubrics from this station in order to see how well the teachers are able to assess lessons or activities designed by other educators. Teachers will be asked to compare their decisions with those who used the same module if they have time to do so in order to receive feedback.

**Session 2: Creating a Self-Assessment**

In station two, teachers will be creating a self-assessments for students to display their background knowledge on a certain topic. It is imperative that teachers help ELLs activate their background knowledge as teachers can understand a student's abilities and increase student participation (Dávila 2015). I provide a template of a self-assessment that a teacher may give to students before reading a new book (see Appendix, Figure 5). Teachers can differentiate the self-assessment to meet their specific grade level. I include a template for teachers to follow, to provide structure for completing the station (see Appendix, Figure 6). I will always begin each 20 minute time slot with station two in order to model how to create a self-assessment and what factors to consider including in the assessment. This structure allows me to introduce the

teachers to the strategy of building background knowledge and to give purpose. I will explain

how I will review the self-assessments with the students after the reading to see if the students'

predictions were correct. After modeling and explaining, I will ask the teachers to create their

own self-assessment, keeping in mind the goals of the scaffold. Teachers will keep the self-

assessment they created at this station in order to use it for future planning purposes.

**Session 3: Modifying Personal Literacy Lessons**

For the third station, teachers will be bringing two to three literacy lessons they have used in

the past and would like to enhance. Using what was learned throughout the day, teachers will

modify different activities throughout the lesson in order for the lesson to be more reflective of

and responsive to the various student cultures in the room. Teachers will be asked to use a lens of

CRT that is specific towards supporting learning needs of ELLs. These educators should be

mindful of the tenets of CRT and will use the skills learned throughout the PD to improve their

lessons. I will have the station leader encourage the educators at this station to speak with one

another about the modifications they are making and provide suggestions to those that are

struggling with making changes. Teachers can register the changes made to their literacy lesson

or activity by using the CRT Rubric for Lesson and Activity Design (see Appendix, Figure 3).

Once all three stations are complete, teachers will be given one final break before returning to

the final activity.

To conclude the PD, teachers will be given an additional 10 minutes to develop their

literacy lessons independently. I chose to add additional time as teachers may have learned

additional information from other stations that they would like to incorporate into their lessons.

After the 10 minutes of editing, educators will be given 10-15 minutes to work with one to two

other colleagues in the room and share at least one lesson with the modifications that were made

to their lesson and why they believe they will be more culturally responsive than they were prior

to the PD. These colleagues may also give additional suggestions to enhance the lesson to better

assist ELLs. Teachers will not turn in these lessons but will instead keep them to use for future

instruction.

    To close the half-day sessions, teachers will be given an exit ticket where they will provide

feedback about the PD (see Appendix, Figure 7). The exit ticket challenges the educators to self-

assess their understandings of the learning outcomes that were established at the beginning of the

presentation. The exit ticket should take only five to ten minutes and has simple, easy prompts

for the learners to respond to (Fowler et al., 2019). Teachers also will respond to short answer

questions to describe what features of the PD were enjoyable and useful for their future. The

feedback provided will allow me to decide what further PD may be needed in order to promote

CRT in elementary literacy classrooms and what learning outcomes were the most difficult to

meet during the sessions. I will keep the exit tickets and review them before creating additional

PDs. The exit ticket was created in order for me to establish if the intended goals of the PD were

met. This was a necessary activity to include in the PD because I likely will not be able to hear

from or interact with every individual educator in the room. Therefore, an exit ticket allows me

to track the thinking of others and show that their work is valued (Fowler et al., 2019).

    I believe this PD identifies the lack of CRT in classrooms and encourages teachers to use the

praxis to benefit students. Educators will be able to see that CRT can be easily implemented in

daily literacy lessons and activities. Teachers are given meaningful stations in which they modify

and create lessons and activities using CRT. The hands-on nature of the PD ensures that all

teachers get the chance to develop literacy materials so that they better understand how to teach

to ELLs' cultures responsively. By collecting data throughout the PD to assess the abilities and

understandings of the teachers, I will be able to decide if my PD was successful and what is necessary for these educators moving forward.

**Intended Outcome**

There are many goals that the teachers are anticipated to meet by the end of this PD. First, teachers must be able to define CRT and explain how it affects the academic development, social emotional needs, and assessment outcomes of their students, with specific attention towards ELLs. An additional outcome for the teachers attending the PD is to be able to modify literacy lessons and activities to engage all students using CRT. Looking specifically at ELLs, another goal of the PD is to design experiences to engage ELLs using their backgrounds and abilities. One way teachers will achieve this goal is through creating a self-assessment to spark background knowledge of a topic for students. These seven learning outcomes will be assessed using the exit ticket at the end of the PD.

An implicit outcome of this PD is that teachers will build on the experiences and knowledge of their own colleagues in order to enhance their understanding of CRT. Although all teachers are truly teachers of ELLs, teachers will have various levels of exposure to working with and creating lessons for ELLs. Teachers with many years of teaching experience can help younger teachers by explaining to them different scaffolds to implement into lessons to make them more culturally responsive. New teachers will benefit from interacting with experienced teachers because their colleague may have worked with the ELL in their current class or have worked with a student with similar a similar background and learning need(s). Younger teachers bring in knowledge of current research and trends in literacy, technology, and student population from their post-secondary studies. By discussing strategies younger teachers learned recently in school, these teachers are able to educate veteran teachers on new approaches to working with

ELLs. Both sets of teachers are able to positively impact and critique one another in order for all

participants to act as teachers and leaders throughout the PD.

**Chapter 4: Conclusion**

**Introduction**

This capstone aims to encourage elementary educators to use CRT as an educational approach to allow ELLs to be more successful in the literacy classroom. Implementation of CRT leads to improved academic performance, social emotional awareness, and assessment outcomes for ELLs. Due to strict standards and practices in modern education in the United States, many teachers may overlook the ways to engage their culturally and linguistically diverse students in fear that they will never meet grade-level standards. Other educators may believe that differentiation and scaffolding is the job of an ESOL teacher and not their own responsibility. However, through the PD, teachers will learn meaningful ways to include the backgrounds and prior knowledge of these students to promote inclusion in the classroom instruction and atmosphere. Through effective implementation of CRT, ELLs can be more visible in the curriculum and succeed academically.

**Conclusions**

Through writing the capstone and by conducting academic research, I was able to create a PD that will benefit both elementary literacy teachers and teachers of ELLs. This PD looks specifically at planning and self-assessment to provide authentic and positive learning experience for ELLs. The PD I created also allows elementary educators to learn more about the praxis of CRT and how this approach impacts students beyond academics. I am passionate about CRT as a pedagogy because it is evident that ELLs are less likely to see their stories and backgrounds in the K-12 curriculum. Through my experiences abroad and as a language teacher, I have become more and more self-aware of personal experience as a way to enhance language acquisition. Through my research I learned how significant the process of activating background knowledge

can be to the success of students who struggle and to think critically about creating experiences and discussions that will engage all students. I will use this in my continued practice as a high school Spanish teacher as I promote the language proficiency of my own students through student-driven instruction.

**Implications for Student Learning**

Students will benefit from CRT in a variety of different ways. Academically, students are more engaged under CRT as they are receiving instruction that is personal and meaningful to them. Students also receive targeted instruction under CRT that accesses their specific learning style, which presents the material in a way that is easily understandable for the student. By monitoring the social emotional needs of ELLs, teachers can create experiences that build communication and trust within the classroom. When ELLs' families and cultures are incorporated into the classroom, the experience of all members are enriched and creates a climate of understanding and respect of others' cultures. The inclusion of ELLs' families through CRT also allows increased access for parents to monitor student success. In terms of assessment, ELLs are given more realistic tasks that are reflective of skills they will need beyond graduation. Assessment under CRT allows students to demonstrate their understanding in various ways and uses appropriate vocabulary to ensure all students can interact. The benefits of CRT for students are extensive and create a more level playing field for all.

**Implications for Teaching**

As a teacher, CRT inspires us to think more critically about why and how we teach what we do. CRT asks teachers to examine their delivery and content of lessons to be more reflective of the students who will be engaging with them. As a result, successful implementation of CRT allows ELLs to access grade-level content in the literacy classroom and expand their proficiency

in English. Beyond planning, teachers are also motivated to make meaningful connections with parents of ELLs and be able to create a dynamic that is responsive and positive, even if communication may be difficult at times. Teachers can see heightened engagement from their ELLs as their students will know that their teacher respects their culture and prior experiences. Additionally, teachers must modify their assessment in order to create fair opportunities for all students. Teachers can use formative assessment through CRT to more easily understand the ability of their students, and will assess in various ways to get a more well-rounded understanding of the skill sets of their students.

As a result of the PD, teachers will be more connected to other practitioners in the school building because of the interactions during the half-day. Since all elementary teachers will be in the room, teachers may meet other attendees that they have not worked with before. Teachers may meet a grade-level colleague or ESOL teacher that they would like to co-plan a lesson with using CRT. Other educators might have enjoyed a lesson shared by a colleague and try to teach a similar one in the future. Some teachers may have just enjoyed the content of the PD and decide to do additional research to learn about other aspects of CRT not noted in the presentation. By allowing the educators meaningful ways to communicate with one another, we create opportunities that inspire further learning and conversations.

**Recommendations and Final Thoughts**

In the future, I would like to see future work completed by the state of New York to create more authentic standardized tests that are reflective of the practices that are beginning to happen in schools. I believe many educators are reluctant to teach using CRT because of the rigorous curriculum and standards that must be met throughout the year to perform well on state assessments. State assessment in the area of English Language Arts does not currently allow for

much differentiation for students. I would like to see more options available for students to demonstrate their understandings. Through my research and writing, I now have a greater appreciation for CRT and the need for all students to be represented in the curriculum. Moving forward, I will continue to assess my own practices to ensure I am creating meaningful experiences for all students, not just those in the majority.

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**Appendix**

**Figure 1**

*Agenda for the PD*

# PD Agenda:

Here is the plan for today's PD on Culturally Responsive Teaching!

      1. Whole-Group Presentation (45 minutes)

      2. Break (10 minutes)

      3. First Station (20 minutes)

      4. Second Station (20 minutes)

      5. Third Station (20 minutes)

      6. Break (10 minutes)

      7. Literacy Lesson Development (20-25 minutes)

      8. Exit Ticket (10 minutes)

**Figure 2**

*Handout for Whole-Group Presentation Notes*

## Presentation Handout

Directions: During the presentation, fill out the following boxes to track your thinking regarding Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) when prompted.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |

**Figure 3**

*CRT Rubric for Lesson and Activity Design for Whole-Group Presentation and Station 1*

Name: _____

Station #: _____

## Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric for Lesson / Activity Design

| 1: Is the student affirmed in their cultural connection? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Does not meet standard | Meets Standard | Executes standard very well |

| 2. Is the activity personally inviting to each student? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Does not meet standard | Meets Standard | Executes standard very well |

| 3. Are students reinforced for their academic development? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Does not meet standard | Meets Standard | Executes standard very well |

| 4. Are there accommodations in place for student differences? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Does not meet standard | Meets Standard | Executes standard very well |

| 5: Does the lesson / activity stress both collectivity and individuality? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Does not meet standard | Meets Standard | Executes standard very well |

**Figure 4**

*Enhancing a Lesson Worksheet for Station 1*

Name: _____

Grade Level Module: _____

## Station 1: Enhancing a Lesson

Directions: Using your feedback from the CRT Lesson Rubric, fill out how you might change this lesson in order to be more culturally responsive based on the module you studied.

| | |
|---|---|
| **3**<br>Improvements I would make to the lesson in terms of CRT | 1.<br><br>2.<br><br>3. |
| **2**<br>Things I enjoyed about the lesson | 1.<br><br>2. |
| **1**<br>Way I could implement this into my classroom | 1. |

**Figure 5**

*Activating Prior Knowledge Template for Station 2*

Name: _____    Grade Level / Theme: _____

# Station 2: Activating Prior Knowledge (Template)

Directions: You will be creating a self-assessments for your students to complete as they approach a new unit. See what skills or knowledge your students have by asking questions.

| Question | Rating | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |
| | Yes | No | Maybe |

Short Answer Question #1:

_____
_____
_____

Short Answer Question #2:

_____
_____
_____

**Figure 6**

*Activating Prior Knowledge Example for Station 2*

Name: _____          Grade Level / Theme: _____

# Station 2: Activating Prior Knowledge (Example)

Directions: We are going to read the book *Jin Woo*. Before reading, decide if you think these statements are true, false, or maybe true. Circle the answer that represents your choice.

| Question | Rating | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The boy in the story is happy about this newborn baby. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| The setting of the story will be at a train station. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| A baby can communicate to their brother or sister. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| When a baby cries, they are sad. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| When an older kid cries, they are sad. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| Having a new baby makes everyone in the house happy. | Yes | No | Maybe |
| The theme of the story is sad. | Yes | No | Maybe |

Do you have brothers or sisters? Do you get along with them?

_____

_____

_____

If you do not have a brother or sister, do you wish you did? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

**Figure 7**

*Exit Ticket*

Name: _____     Grade Level and Position: _____

# Exit Ticket:

Directions: Following the PD on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), rate how well you have met each learning outcome by circling yes, no, or somewhat.

| Learning Objective / Outcome | Rating |
|---|---|
| I can define what CRT is. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can describe how CRT impacts student academic performance. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can describe how CRT impacts a student's emotions. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can describe how CRT impacts assessment outcomes for students. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can enhance my own lessons to be more responsive to all of my students. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can create a self-assessment to activate the prior knowledge of my students. | Yes    No    Somewhat |
| I can develop experiences to engage my students who are English Language Learners (ELLs). | Yes    No    Somewhat |

What went well in the PD?

_____
_____

What could make this PD even better? What would you like to learn more about CRT?

_____
_____

After today's PD, what is your new, working definition of CRT?

_____
_____