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CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: TEACHER EXPERIENCES AND
IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

by
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2018

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: TEACHER
EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

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Abstract

Growing public concern about the educational experiences of English language learners (ELL) has placed pressure on teachers and schools to provide equitable learning opportunities for this group of students. Currently, federal and state mandates promise to hold all students to the same high expectations, but ELLs consistently underperform academically. Such research suggests that culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), specifically the inclusion of culture in the classroom, as well as the integration of students' lived experiences can influence students' learning opportunities.

This study was guided by existing theories of culturally relevant pedagogy, "funds of knowledge," social maturity and cognitive development theories as well as ecological systems theory to examine the factors that foster or impede teachers' implementation of CRP. Three research questions guided this investigation: (a) How do public school teachers define and implement CRP?; (b) How does CRP impact the educational experiences of ELL students?; (c) What factors influence public school teacher's implementation of CRP?

A qualitative case study/cross-case analysis design was employed to study classroom teachers' implementation of CRP at six elementary schools in San Diego County. Interviews, classroom observations, and documents were used to compare and contrast findings within and across cases. The findings suggest that although the teachers in this study did not specifically define their practice as CRP, their practice followed the principles of CRP in the following ways: (a) Teachers established relationships with students and students' families to build a bridge between home and school; (b) Teachers cultivated critical consciousness in their students; (c) Teachers created inclusive learning

environments and (d) Teachers supported English language learners' long-term academic growth and social-emotional development.

This study examines the factors inside and outside of school that influence teachers' implementation of CRP and reframes public debate about teaching diverse and traditionally underserved student populations. Culturally relevant teachers must continuously adapt their teaching practices and styles to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students.

The findings from this study have the potential of impacting state and local district decision-making within K-12 public educational institutions regarding English language learners.

DEDICATION

To the memory of Dwain Hawkins, my father.

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I would like to thank the faculty at the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego for always challenging me and providing ample opportunities to grow.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

English Language Learners

The educational opportunities and academic achievement outcomes of English language learners (ELLs)¹ is not a new area of focus. In fact, much research has been done on this topic for several decades (August and Hakuta, 1998; Baker and Kanter, 1981; Burnham-Massey, 1990; Carlisle, 1989; Crawford, 1992). Concerned about the lack of support students with limited English proficiency were receiving in classrooms, past research suggests both state and federal legislation have attempted to address the educational inequities ELLs face (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006; Galey, 2015; Reichbach, 2004). Additional research has explored the relationship between California English language development programs/curriculum and ELL learning outcomes (Hillner and Vance, 2006; Hill, 2012; Valdés, 2005). Even though research shows that there are a number of factors impacting ELLs' educational experiences, there are limited studies that have conducted a micro analysis of the relationship between pedagogy and ELL students' educational experiences from the perspective of the classroom teacher. Furthermore, few studies have considered the interconnectedness between various factors that impact this relationship. As a result, ways in which educators use pedagogy to teach children from homes in which a language other than English is the primary language remains a topic in need of further exploration.

¹ For the purposes of this study the term English language learners refers to students whose parent/legal guardian has identified a language other than English as the language spoken at home.

English Language Learner Policies

In 1964, federal authority required districts to address the academic needs of English language learners as outlined in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The federal law required English language learners to receive an education that was: based on sound educational research, sufficiently supported with adequate and competent staff and resources, and periodically evaluated (US Department of Education, 2015). Concerned about the lack of support students with limited English proficiency were receiving in classrooms, in 1970, the Federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a memo regarding school districts' responsibility under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide an equal educational opportunity to English language learners (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006). The 1970 memorandum stated, in part:

Where the inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by school districts, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language sufficiency to open its instructional program to the students.

In essence, the memorandum affirmed the provision demanding equitable learning opportunities; districts needed to modify pedagogical practices, so ELLs could participate during classroom instruction. Such modifications were required to ensure the effective participation and linguistic inclusion of all students (especially language minority students) in academic settings.

Unfortunately, in 1974, districts were still excluding language minority students from effective classroom participation. As a result, in its 1974 decision in *Lau v. Nichols*,

the US Supreme Court reinforced the OCR's memo. The Supreme Court's ruling was as follows, "there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (U. S. Supreme Court, 414 U. S. 563). In *Lau v. Nichols*, the US Supreme Court affirmed the department of education's memorandum of May 25, 1970, which directed school districts to take steps towards helping English language learners overcome language barriers and ensure they could participate meaningfully in district educational programs (US Department of Education, 2015). Equally as important, the Supreme Court ruling made it clear that merely placing non-native English speakers and native English speakers in the same academic facilities did not constitute an equal education because students who did not speak English would not have access to educational content. The court ruling thereby placed responsibility on individual districts and schools to provide instructional support to meet the academic needs of ELL students.

English Language Learner Learning Outcomes

Some of the greatest challenges currently facing urban schools are the specific school policies and practices that fail to adequately address students' needs, impeding them from achieving academic proficiency. Of all the minority groups, English language learners are often most impacted by less than adequate policies and pedagogical practices. In 2016, for example, there were approximately 1.374 million students in California's public-school system with limited English language proficiency that negatively affected their ability to participate successfully in educational settings (California Department of Education, 2016). Research suggests that such negative

effects include both non-academic and academic outcomes. For instance, some of the non-academic outcomes ELL students face are lowered self-esteem, decreased aspirations, increased delinquency, and misbehavior (Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Heyns, 1974; Alexander, Cook, and McDill, 1978; Rosenbaum, 1976). Furthermore, the 2015 assessment results from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP) highlight the academic challenges faced by English language learners. In 2015 only 11% of ELLs met or exceeded the English language arts and mathematics standards (California Department of Education, 2016). In contrast, 51% of native English-speaking students met or exceeded the English language arts standards, and 39 % met or exceeded mathematics standards (California Department of Education, 2016). The most recent assessment results show the percentage of ELL students met or exceed ELA standards increased from 11% to 13%. While the percentage of native English-speaking students who met or exceeded ELA standards rose from 51% to 55%. Similarly, the proportion of native English-speaking students who met or exceeded mathematics standards increased from 39% to 42%, while the percentage of ELL students who met or exceeded mathematics standards increased from 11% to 12%. It is important to acknowledge, the proportion of both native English speaking and ELL students who scored proficient or above rose from 2015 to 2016. However, according to these standardized test results, the achievement outcomes for English language learners remain less than adequate and far below that of their native English-speaking peers.

Granted, the results of academic assessments are not the sole determining factor when it comes to student success. However, the results of these assessments are of significant importance when considering the educational experiences of English language

learners. Sometimes, the results of these standardized assessments are used to place ELL students in special education or remedial courses and ultimately hinder their access to higher track courses or Gifted and Talented programs (US Department of Education, 2015). As a result of being placed in special education classes, ELL students spend most of their day in separate academic tracks which focus primarily on linguistic remediation as opposed to learning grade level academic content (Shapiro,2014). Valdes (2001), refers to this academic separation as “linguistic isolation (p. 125).” In an empirical study conducted by Callahan (2005) concerns from parents of ELL students regarding the ramifications of linguistic isolation were documented. Some parents from Callahan's (2005) study felt as though district ELD policies were placing their students into "dummy classes" that were not adequately preparing them for college. From the same study, one mother stated, "My daughter is not able to take a full range of courses and is not gaining a full education." The linguistic isolation experienced by the students in Callahan's (2005) study led to their inequitable learning opportunities.

No Child Left Behind

In response to growing concerns about equitable educational opportunities, one of the more recent federal policies impacting ELL's is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. In practice, the implementation of No Child Left Behind reinforced inequality and language segregation among students because the mandated assessments carried significant consequences for ELLs. For example, assessment outcomes determined what services would be available to ELL students (*English Language Learner*, 2008). The act discouraged bilingual programs and forced students who were not proficient in English into English-only classrooms. Since NCLB also provided for the creation of assessments

of ELLs (Bunch, 2011), NCLB ultimately segregated ELL students from English-only students for a portion of the day. During this part of the day, ELLs' English proficiency levels were used to place them in an English language development (ELD) classroom. The expressed goal of these segregated ELD classes was to help non-native English speakers develop proficiency in English (Bilingual Education Act, 1994). Hillner and Vance (2006) argue, segregating ELL students from their native English-speaking peers for a portion of the day (while argued by some as a way to provide them with language support). "constituted de facto discrimination," because it "effectively drew race-based lines and jeopardized access to education based on those distinctions (p. 17)." According to Hillner and Vance (2006), these restrictions were based primarily on race and language, and create barriers to the acquisition of core content material, thereby, creating inequitable opportunities for ELL students to access a quality education.

NCLB also caused federal policy for English language learners to change dramatically because NCLB put ELL students in the spotlight and held teachers as well as schools accountable for their academic success. In fact, states expected all educators to hold ELL students to high academic content standards while simultaneously assessing ELL students for content knowledge in a language they were still learning (Bailey & Carroll, 2015). Since English language learners were entering public schools with limited or no knowledge of English vocabulary and/or sentence structure, it was assumed, English language learners needed to "catch up" with their native English-speaking peers due to their limited English language proficiency (*English-Language Development Standards for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, 2002). For example, many ELL students were unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet, and those

who knew the alphabet often had to acquire new sounds for many of the letters (*English-Language Development Standards for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, 2002).

Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama in December of 2015 and is an updated version of the 2002 NCLB Act (California Department of Education, n. d). Unlike the NCLB Act, the ESSA strives to improve equitable learning opportunities by requiring all students be taught to reach high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in higher education and post-secondary careers. At present, there is scarce data to support the ESSA's impact on the educational experiences of English language learners. However, since the ESSA strives to advance equitable opportunities for America's disadvantaged and high-need students (e. g., English language learners), the California Department of Education believes these provisions will help ensure the success of all students (California Department of Education, n. d).

Statement of the Problem

As previously mentioned, the academic under-achievement faced by ELLs has not gone unnoticed by the US Education Department. In fact, in response to this educational disparity, on January 7, 2015, the US Education Department's Secretary for Civil Rights and Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights released the following statement, "In the face of serious compliance concerns around the country, it is crucial to the future of our nation that these students (English language learners), and all students, have equal access to high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. "

(US Department of Education, 2015). At present, ELLs continue to suffer repeated failure in the classroom as a result of inadequate services to overcome language barriers (US Department of Education, 2015). Often such repeated failure leads to falling behind in grade levels and worst-case scenarios dropping out of school entirely. Therefore, graduating more and better-prepared students, including ELL students, is an issue of tremendous importance for the nation's future.

The combination of the findings from Moll et al. (1992), Ladson – Billings (1995) and Bronfenbrenner (1990) suggest ways to resolve this issue. Moll et al. (1992) believed existing pedagogical practices not only underestimate but also constrain the intellectual capabilities of language minority children. Consequently, Moll et al. (1992) contend, the key to academic instruction is for schools to tap into the cultural resources of individual students. Moll et al. (1992) defined these cultural resources as “funds of knowledge. " Along with the notion of cultural resources, Ladson-Billings (1992) proclaims educators must attend to students' academic needs while at the same time allowing students to maintain cultural integrity. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) achieves this goal by utilizing students’ culture as a medium for learning. In congruence with culturally relevant pedagogy, Bronfenbrenner's (1990) theory of ecological systems argues attention must be paid to children’s primary environment (family and community) and larger environmental factors to account for their influence on learning. More precisely, Bronfenbrenner (1990) argues educators and schools must strive to work with each student’s primary environment to help students experience academic success. Building on this research that suggests the essential role that pedagogy can play in improving the academic experiences of ELL students, this study emphasizes the

prominence of how various factors impact the implementation of CRP and the educational experiences of ELL students.

Purpose of the Study

This study proposes to identify six California public school teachers who have implemented CRP while at the same time investigating larger contextual factors that influence the educational experiences of ELL students. Illumination of this topic is crucial so that evidence-based research is available to support ELL academic learning and provide educators with insight into their efforts to provide equitable learning opportunities for English-language learners. This study is part of a longer-term research agenda focused on how policies and instructional practices currently construct the educational system for English language learners and their teachers, as well as how policies can be modified to promote the use of more effective instructional practices. As the first step in establishing a solid foundation for a longitudinal study (which would be ideal to most effectively assess the value of CRP), this study begins the research journey by focusing on the educational experiences of ELL students, paying attention to culture, pedagogy, and sociocultural contexts. This qualitative study will focus on six elementary school teachers' experiences utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy and provide an examination of its influence on the education of ELL students.

The purpose of the study is to examine and better understand the relationship between CRP and the educational experiences of ELLs in addition to investigating the systematic factors that affect the implementation of CRP and ELL learning experiences.

Research Questions

To explore the relationship between CRP and ELLs' educational experiences from the perspective of the classroom teacher, this qualitative study will use a purposeful sample of six California public school teachers who claim to implement CRP with their students. To gain the teacher's perspective on CRP, ELL's educational experiences, and the factors influencing the implementation of CRP in addition to ELL learning experiences, the following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do public school teachers define and implement CRP?
2. How does CRP impact the educational experiences of ELL students?
3. What factors influence public school teachers' implementation of CRP?

CHAPTER TWO:
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This section will present research on policies, state standards, programs and theories used to address and study the learning experiences of ELL students. The complexities of the learning experiences of ELL students necessitates a review and re-examination of the most current policies, curriculum, and theories about the academic learning opportunities made available to ELL students.

California's English Language Policies

Proposition 227

As mentioned in chapter one, federal policies (e. g., Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and *Lau v. Nichols*) attempted to address the growing concern over the educational opportunities available to ELLs. California Proposition 227, also called the English Language in Public Schools Statute, was on June 2, 1998's state wide primary ballot in California. As a result of its approval, Proposition 227 changed how California public schools taught English language learners by requiring English language learners be taught overwhelmingly in English (Lillian Mongeau, 2016). Granted the law did not outlaw learning in foreign languages, however, it made instruction in a language other than English much harder and resulted in most schools doing away with their long-term bilingual programs (Mongeau, 2016). For example, according to a five-year evaluation conducted by The American Institute for Research and WestEd (2006), "succeeding the passage of Prop 227, the proportion of ELLs receiving primary language instruction with English language development (bilingual education) dropped significantly from 30% to

8%". As a result, one of the growing concerns with Prop 227 was that it over emphasized an English-only philosophy, considerably restricted the use of primary language instruction and diminished the focus on student cultural heritage ("Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K–12", 2006). In contrast, Proposition 227 placed an overwhelming emphasis on ELL students' acquisition of the English language. More recent studies (Callahan, 2005) show, Prop 227 contributed to the social segregation of ELL students. For instance, in 2001, some school districts claimed, as a result of Proposition 227, students from different language groups were often socially segregated both inside and outside of the classroom (Callahan, 2005). As a result, the social segregation of students, based primarily on language, was increased by proposition 227 (Callahan, 2005).

Proposition 58

On November 8, 2016, California voters approved Proposition 58. Proposition 58 supports repealing Proposition 227 and allows educators to use non-English languages in public educational institutions to adequately instruct ELL students. As a result, Proposition 58 allows for California public schools to utilize multiple programs, including bilingual education to help students learn from teachers to speak both their native language and English. Additionally, the proposition maintains English proficiency is a necessity by requiring public schools ensure students become proficient in English. At present, there is limited research to support Proposition 58's impact on the educational experiences of English language learners. However, the approval of the proposition marks a transformation in California's public-school system by promoting the use of multiple languages in public learning institutions.

Common Core State Standards

To rectify inequitable learning opportunities created by NCLB (as detailed in earlier sections), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed. The Common Core State Standards were not only an attempt to remedy the damage caused by No Child Left Behind but also an effort to provide non-native English speakers with so-called equal educational opportunities not previously provided by NCLB. Take the following excerpt for instance, "...public schools have a responsibility to provide English language learners with equal educational opportunities and are required to take positive steps towards filling in language deficiency gaps in order to make academic learning more readily available for English language learners" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). This statement gives the impression that the authors of the standards firmly believed all students should be held to the same high expectations as outlined in the CCSS. This includes students who are non-native English speakers. To provide equal educational opportunities, the authors of the Common Core State Standards mandated the implementation of particular English language development (ELD) programs and specialized ELD standards.

California English Language Development Standards and Programs

Research on California's ELD standards (Callahan, 2005) are based on the belief that proficiency in English is the foundational requirement for academic success. Valdés (2005) argues, due to the complexities of academic English, English should not be taught in isolation as California's ELD standards suggests. Granted, English is necessary for academic success in California's public schools. Focusing primarily on the acquisition of the English language diminishes the importance of a strong base in content area

academics (Callahan, 2005). Focusing on English proficiency as a primary requirement for academic success has led to separating ELL students from native English speakers, assigning English language learners simplified (remedial) curriculum, and limiting ELL students' exposure to a rigorous academic material (Callahan, 2005). As a result, placing ELL students in ELD programs has been identified as a form of tracking because it assigns English language learner students to simplified, differentiated coursework (Callahan, 2005).

According to Oakes (1982), tracking has been widely accepted because it is believed to reduce the instructional difficulties teachers face when educating diverse groups of students. However, there is limited empirical evidence to support the notion that school tracking improves student achievement data or promotes academic learning. In contrast, there is empirical evidence to support the negative academic and non-academic outcomes associated with tracking (Oakes, 1982). Such results include lowered self-esteem, aspirations, increased delinquency, and misbehavior (Schafer and Olexa, 1971; Heyns, 1974; Alexander, Cook, and McDill, 1978; Rosenbaum, 1976, 1980). Similarly, strong correlations with academic achievement are apparent when race and socioeconomic status are also taken into consideration. For example, one out of 12 White students can competently read nonfiction texts while only one out of 50 Latino students can comprehend informational text ("Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap: The Promise of Student Potential," n. d.). Also, one in 30 Latino students can complete multi step elementary algebra problems in comparison to one out of 10 white students ("Race, Class, and the Achievement Gap: The Promise of Student Potential," n. d.). These outcomes point to the educational inequities referenced by Oakes (1982) and the

negative educational outcomes promoted by separating students into academic tracks (e.g., ELD programs and remedial English courses).

Darling-Hammond (2010) also references ELD programs as form a tracking. More precisely she describes classes that serve non-native English speakers as "ELL ghettos." She further explicates how such programs reduce a student's access to knowledge because ELD classes keep ELLs together for multiple years in tracks that do not promote critical thinking skills (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To the further detriment of their schooling, Callahan (2005) argues, English language learner high school students are sometimes guided into early employment. Rather than encouraging ELL students to take AP classes to get ahead, they are invited to begin working early instead (Callahan, 2005). ELL students who wish to continue their education as opposed to beginning work early will nevertheless face challenges if they are not labeled proficient by ninth grade. ELL students who are not labeled proficient in English by 9th grade will not graduate with the required courses to be eligible for enrollment in a California State University or a University of California campus (CDE, 2012). This lack of credits creates new problems when students discover upon graduating that all their ELD and remedial English classes have failed to qualify them for publicly funded California universities (Darling – Hammond, 2010).

Best Instructional Practices for English Language Learners

In an attempt to provide ELL students with adequate learning opportunities and the appropriate credits to enter publically funded universities, August and Hakuta (1997) identified seven research based instructional practices for ELLs. In these studies, teachers provided explicit skill instruction, student-directed activities, instructional

strategies that enhanced understanding, opportunities to practice new learning, as well as formal and informal student assessments. Often these practices were integrated to enhance student learning. Evidence from August and Hakuta's (1997) study suggests, ELL students understanding of academic concepts may be enhanced when teachers utilize practices that enforce routine, repetition, and explicit use of English vocabulary. Graves, Gersten, & Haager's, (2004) more recent study also suggests, incorporating teaching practices that support ELL students' acquisition of the English vocabulary, phonics, and fluency (speaking and reading). In both the above-mentioned studies, the most effective teachers were identified as those whose students had the highest academic outcomes. These effective teachers used instructional practices such as explicit teaching (making learning objectives clear and concise), monitoring students for progress (formal and informal assessments), and ample opportunities to practice newly learned vocabulary. Each of these instructional practices will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Explicit Instruction and Opportunities for Practice

Literature notes, (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1996; Edelsky et al., 1993; Hernandez, 1991; Muniz-Swicegood, 1994; Saunders et al., 1996), effective teachers use explicit instruction with ELL students. Such literature suggests, explicit instruction is task-specific, teacher-led, and incorporates modeling how to complete academic tasks independently. This type of instruction has been shown to be effective with ELLs who are in the early stages of learning how to read English texts. This practice is considered effective because it encourages ELLs to use word features, word patterns, or similarities to other known words as an aid in decoding unknown words (Au,

1993). Literature also notes (Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002; Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Schuster, 2000), when given explicit instruction, ELLs may acquire early reading skills (i. e. : decoding and phonemic awareness) at the same rate as their native English-speaking peers. In addition, evidence from these studies suggests, ELL students have the cognitive capacity to acquire reading skills at the same pace as EO students through explicit instruction and ample opportunities for practice.

According to literature (Grabe, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987), English language learners need a variety of opportunities to practice newly acquired academic skills such as decoding with assistance from teachers. In addition to practice with support from teachers, ELLs need ample opportunities to practice new skills independently. Continuous practice both independently and with guidance gives ELL students a chance to use new skills and receive feedback tailored towards their academic needs (Grabe, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987). Furthermore, Calderon et al., (1996) and Muniz-Swicegood, (1994) state, ELL students who receive sufficient opportunities for practice independently and with assistance, will develop the skills needed to participate in student-directed activities.

Granted, the research regarding best practices for ELL students supports the academic learning ELLs need to demonstrate academic proficiency on formal and informal assessments. In addition, Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley (2002) provide evidence that when given explicit instruction ELL students acquire phonemic and decoding skills at the same rate as native English-speaking students. While this research does show evidence that instructional practices such as explicit instruction may lead to stronger academic outcomes for ELLs, the research also considers the academic needs of

ELL students from a deficit perspective. All 33 of the research studies August and Hakuta (1997) reviewed sought to identify instructional practices associated with positive student outcomes by focusing on what students' lack (i.e.: English vocabulary, phonemic awareness and decoding).

Deficit Discourse in Education

The emphasis on ELD policies/procedures and the push to help students master the English language fall within what Dooley (2012) refers to as a broader deficit discourse in education. According to Dooley (2012) deficit refers to any language that is used to refer to what a student lacks. Unfortunately, the social majority does not perceive language minorities' deficiencies as outcomes of institutional language discrimination. Instead, they choose to blame the deprivations on inherent characteristics of language minority groups, essentially, blaming their lack of academic success on their lack of English proficiency. The overemphasis on the acquisition of the English language has had significant impacts on ELL academic success (Shapiro, 2014). Since English proficiency is still required as a prerequisite for accessing rigorous academic content, ELL students are spending most of their day in separate educational tracks (e. g., ELD classes) which focus primarily on linguistic remediation as opposed to learning grade level academic content (Shapiro,2014). Since ELL students are perceived as "lacking" English proficiency, they remain in linguistic isolation and are denied access to more comprehensive and challenging curriculum. This deficit mentality has led many ELL students to stagnate academically (Callahan, 2005).

Deficit discourse has also been closely tied to standardized testing since student achievement results are used as indicators of language and literacy skills (Shapiro, 2014).

As a result of standardized tests' limited characterization of what it means to be *proficient*, they tend to highlight ELL deficits. Consequently, policy and program decisions made primarily based on standardized test results tend to perpetuate deficit thinking about English language learners (Shapiro, 2014).

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Freire (1970), describes a school system more similar to the one experienced by low-socioeconomic, minority and English language learner students today. He described a school system that is characterized by the following attributes:

- a) The teacher teaches the students
- b) The teacher knows everything
- c) Students know nothing
- d) The teacher talks, and students are expected to listen
- e) Students are expected to comply
- f) The teacher chooses content to be taught

The characteristics mentioned above are arguably much less supportive than strategies implemented in classrooms serving middle and upper middle-class students. However, the attributes Freire (1970) mentions are most relevant to the educational experiences of students who have been traditionally underserved by California's public-school system (i. e.: ELLs).

He further details the relationship between a teacher and student as an act of "depositing," where the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. More precisely, he describes the relationship as one that requires students to receive, memorize, and repeat information. As articulated in previous sections, the same

expectations have been set for present-day English language learners. ELD standards support rote memorization and repetition and suppresses students' opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Freire (1970), discusses the importance of students acquiring the ability to think critically when he asserts students are not provided with opportunities to perceive the significance of the information they are memorizing. For example, a student may know Lima is the capital of Peru, yet, they have limited to no understanding of Lima's significance to the country of Peru.

Freire's (1970) work encourages educators to begin thinking differently about students access to knowledge. Oppressed groups such as English language learners, minority and low socioeconomic student populations are not necessarily limited to their access to knowledge rather there are opportunities to develop a critical consciousness have been limited. As a result, oppressed student populations remain in a recurring cycle of poor academic performance, increased delinquency and lowered self-esteem. Thus, a shift in the way students are educated is a necessity to improving the educational experiences of ELL students. Such a shift would include opportunities for students to critique information in relationship to the society in which they live.

A Shift in Discourse

A further review of literature reveals three additional approaches to fostering equitable learning opportunities for ELL students that help students develop the critical consciousness that Freire (1970) advocated for. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will discuss three additional approaches towards more equitable learning experiences for ELL students: culturally relevant pedagogy, "funds of knowledge", and the

interconnectedness between a student's life experiences and their experiences in the classroom.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Funds of Knowledge

During an era when standardized testing has become a dominant indicator of student success, it has become increasingly difficult to locate teachers who create equitable learning opportunities for English language learners. Due to the complexities associated with serving students from various backgrounds and experiences, educators tend to direct their attention towards what students lack (deficit) as opposed to reevaluating their teaching practices. Freire's (1970) work in Brazil was not radically different the work Moll et al. (1992) endorsed. Moll et al. (1992) believed existing pedagogical practices not only underestimate but also constrain what language minority children are intellectually capable of. Consequently, Moll et al. (1992) contended, the key to academic instruction was for educators to tap into the cultural resources of individual students. Ladson-Billings (1995) explicates this practice of incorporating culture with the following example: Native Hawaiian children were permitted to use *talk story*, a language interaction style commonly used among Native Hawaiians, to help the students achieve high scores on standardized reading tests. This example illuminates two of the criteria in which culturally relevant pedagogy rests: (a) students experienced academic success and (b) students maintained cultural competence. However, there is a third criterion defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) not illustrated by the previous example: allowing students the opportunity to develop acritical consciousness to challenge the status quo. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) describes a teacher who uses outdated textbooks to teach academic standards then challenges the students to question why they

received outdated textbooks while students in wealthier neighborhoods were receiving the latest edition. In another study, middle school students discussed bias in relation to scientific practices and connected these bias to larger society (Laughter & Adams, 2012). In a study conducted by Dimick (2012), students analyzed pollution of a local river and developed ways to become politically active in their communities.

Viewing a students' culture as strong, valuable and praiseworthy is one of the key reasons why culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is arguably the most central element in the academic success of children who have not been well served by California's public schools (Ladson – Billings, 1995). CRP's sole purpose is to impart knowledge through culture (Ladson – Billings, 1995). According to Davidson (2010), pedagogical practices and policies that impart knowledge using culture would not only respect but draw on students' varying cultural/social experiences to foster educational equity. Moll et al. (1992) tested this hypothesis by researching the lives of working class Mexican American students. In addition to education, the research model for the study combined approaches from anthropology, psychology, and linguistics. The results of this study revealed, the families of many students fostered a wealth of knowledge that could be used to teach academic skills. The study also suggested, when teachers embark on a quest to grasp and value the lives of their students, the teacher has placed herself in the position of a learner. From this perspective, educators can begin to see both families and communities as resources and assets capable of providing "funds of knowledge. " Moll et al. (1992) make the argument that capitalizing on these funds of knowledge can lead to the restructuring of classrooms to far exceed rote memorization instruction (e. g., ELD instruction and ELD standards) and generate equitable educational experiences.

Furthermore, a "funds of knowledge" framework looks at a student's experiences as assets rather than deficits. Additionally, utilizing funds of knowledge in a way that connects a students' life experiences with their classroom experiences creates a more inclusive environment.

The Bigger Picture

Granted, a better understanding of a students' culture is both honorable and noteworthy, if we constrain our understanding of students' educational experiences to culture alone, we miss all sorts of other important dynamics that are less about culture and more about "the bigger picture" (Gorski and Pothini, 2014). Gorski and Pothini (2014) argue, looking at the bigger picture forces educators to examine how institutional decisions and students' life experiences outside of the classroom affect learning. Consequently, Gorski and Pothini (2014) state educators have the power to understand how students' lives outside of school informs the way in which they experience school, and therefore, a better understanding of how to strengthen these abilities may lead to equitable learning environments. Viewing the educational experiences of English language learners from this perspective challenges educators to examine broader societal and cultural conditions in varying contexts.

Smith (1968) explored this relationship between a student's lived experiences outside of the classroom and its impact on student learning. More precisely Smith (1968) examine the relationship between family (home life) and school. Through an experimental intervention designed to improve the academic performance of low-income minority students, Smith (1968) introduced changes to the relationship between family and school. One of the most significant modifications was to bring together "the child's

significant others (e. g., the parents and the teacher) as partners in the child's learning process" (p. 90). Based on the belief that, neither the parent nor the teacher could do their job in opposition or isolation, the intervention stimulated parent participation both at home and at school. Equally as important, Smith's (1968) experiment involved essentially all interconnections within the student's mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and 90% of all adult participants said their participation in the program was favorable. Smith's (1968) experimental interventions offer some insight into ways of creating research designs that increase "outside" participation, so the school is not educating students in isolation. This insight is of particular importance when considering Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical model which implies the separation of schools (breakdown of the interconnections between the various context of a child's life) underlies the academic underachievement and inequitable learning opportunities at elementary and secondary schools.

Bronfenbrenner (1996) states, "a key to the enhanced effectiveness of public education lies not within the school itself but in its interconnections with other settings in society" (p. 226). His theory (1979) suggests, the interactions between a child's experiences at school and their environment(s) outside of school influence their learning over time. As a result, a student finds him/herself simultaneously embedded in different ecosystems (contexts), from the home system to the school system as well as societal and cultural systems. According to Bronfenbrenner each of these contexts inevitably interacts with and influences every aspect of a child's life. Bronfenbrenner's theory has significant implications for the practice of teaching. For example, his theory could be used to approach the following question: if an educator actively gains knowledge about the

various contexts that influence a student's development (e. g., home life and culture), is it possible for the teacher to alter pedagogical practices to best impact student learning? Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory provides educators with an important framework for helping understand the complexities that relate directly to the impact of cultural and environmental domains of a child's development that impact learning.

The Current State of Affairs

The English-only ideology had a dramatic impact on nonnative English-speaking students (Lu, 1998) and the emergence of the English-only movement further perpetuated the superiority complex held by many native English speakers (Tollefson, 2000). Furthermore, the English-only movement had significant consequences for the language minority population (Lu, 1998). For example, limiting a student's opportunities to use their native language impacts educational development (Ollia & Mayfield, 1992; Lu, 1998). When students are not able to use the skills they have developed in their first language they are unable to bridge those skills with the learning of English (Ollia & Mayfield, 1992). The inability to merge these skills places an opportunity gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers. Also, when an English language learner is placed in an English-only situation, they are expected to learn new content in an unfamiliar language. Without essential resources, such as their native language, their chances of achieving academic success are lessened (Lu, 1998). Proposition 58 has proposed measures to allow the use of a student's native language in California public schools to improve the learning experiences of English language learners. Proposition 58 also solicits feedback from parents regarding the learning experiences of their English language learner students. The latter requirement encourages communication between

schools and the homes of students which is the primary foundation on which Moll et al. (1992) "funds of knowledge" rests. Perhaps, this shift in policy toward more inclusive education will influence a change in pedagogical practices such as CRP and a better understanding of various factors impacting the educational experiences of English-language learners.

Moving Forward

Bomer, et al. (2008) argue, "Educators should have accurate, evidenced based pictures of what their students' lives are like, what competencies and understandings they might bring to school and what social and cultural contexts have a bearing upon their experiences in the classroom" (p. 2500). This research is designed to gain a better understanding of how (if at all) a small group of elementary school teachers (during their everyday practice) consider the relationship between culture, students' lived experiences outside of the classroom and pedagogy to build academic success among ELL students. Using the principles of "funds of knowledge" and culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical frame, this study examines the ways this group of teachers infuse students' language, values, beliefs, and traditions into academic content, build on student strengths, rather than perpetuating deficits, and empower English language learners.

Although much has been written about ELLs and the current inequities they face, the topic requires further investigation. Educators and researchers need to know more about the practices of ELL teachers, and the extent to which they utilize funds of knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy to promote equitable learning opportunities for all students. Research to date is limited in providing a clear definition of culturally relevant pedagogy, how does put into practice by California public school teachers

particularly, in the service of the ELL students. The perceived challenges that influence successful implementation of CRP and the factors affecting ELLs learning experiences also require further exploration. Consequently, this study is designed to gain a deeper understanding of CRP, explore the multiple factors that impact teacher's implementation of CRP and the educational experiences that result among English language learners.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to better understand how culturally relevant pedagogy was defined and implemented by elementary school teachers working in California to improve the educational experiences of English-language learners. Moreover, this study was designed to explore the factors that influence teachers' implementation of CRP and ELL's educational experiences. According to Geertz (1973), qualitative research emphasizes "thick" descriptions and interpretations that incorporate the insider's perspectives. Patton (2002) further characterizes qualitative research by its aim of understanding some aspect of social life (e. g., school) and utilizes methods that generate words (rather than numbers) as data for analysis. As the purpose of this study was to explore CRP's potential impact on the educational experiences of English language learners (from the teacher's perspective), qualitative research methods were used to identify opinions and beliefs about English language learners' educational experiences, culturally relevant pedagogy and some of the more fundamental challenges educators face while implementing CRP. To explore CRP and its potential impact on ELL students, the primary research questions that guided the study were: How do public school teachers define and implement CRP? How does CRP influence the educational experiences of ELL students? What factors influence public school teachers' implementation of CRP?

Introduction

The following sections discuss the methodology that was used in this qualitative study. This chapter begins with the researcher's positionality followed by a rationale for

case study as the appropriate research method to be used in this study. A profile of the school sites and research participants will be described. The subsequent sections outline data collection procedures and analysis. The final sections address the limitations and significance of the study.

Positionality

As a black female working in a public California elementary school, I was intrigued by the discrepancies between the learning opportunities available to English language learners and their native English-speaking peers. Even a term such as “English language learner” often reflects the deficit mentalities present within California’s public-school system. During the earliest days of my career as an elementary school teacher, I often used deficit discourse to rationalize the underachievement of students in my classroom (ELLs included). The oversimplified explanations for English language learners under performance on state and district assessments soon became something I was unwilling to accept.

According to, Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant teachers must do three things: believe in the academic success of all students, utilize culture to impart knowledge, and help students develop a critical consciousness. My work as a culturally relevant teacher began after studying literary work and research on culturally relevant pedagogy conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995). I designed and piloted lessons that utilized culture as a medium for learning. I encouraged parent participation by inviting parents into my classroom to share their gifts and knowledge on topics of their choosing. I also challenged my students to critique societal norms and practices. During this time, I developed a partial knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy through research and

practice, yet, my curiosities were not fully satisfied. Hence, my present desire to further explore CRP, how teachers define and implement CRP, and how this pedagogy influences the educational experiences of ELLs.

My experiences working with diverse students and their communities ultimately influenced my interest in conducting qualitative research to learn more about the academic challenges English language learners currently face. Through conversations with colleagues, I have heard stories about and frustrations regarding ELLs low-performance test scores, limited parent involvement, high remediation rates, and perceived lack of classroom engagement. As a result, I entered into this research project in hopes of identifying some of the factors that affect ELL student learning.

My positionality enabled me to see things in ways others may not. For example, my personal experiences implementing CRP enhanced my ability to conduct classroom observations and interviews in a manner that paid particular attention to the ways teachers used CRP to meet the needs of ELL students. Having taught in the classroom for many years has alerted me to the importance of conducting observations that do not interrupt the classroom environment. This awareness enhanced the quality of the observations conducted throughout this research by enabling me to observe in a manner that did not disrupt the classroom setting. Furthermore, qualitative research requires rapport and empathetic listening (Manning, 1992). My positionality as an educator working in an urban setting allowed me to build trust with the teachers in this study that inspired participants to share their authentic experiences implementing CRP with a

student population that has traditionally been underserved by California's public-school system.

To keep the lines of communication honest and authentic, before each participant interview I disclosed my experiences employing CRP. I recognized my experiences with CRP have made me biased in the sense that I see value in honoring and encouraging the use of culture classrooms. As a result, jotting down my thoughts and opinions throughout the process allowed me to keep my bias in check. I was able to question my own thinking and share my initial thoughts with colleagues to receive their critiques as well. As an additional precaution, my research findings were discussed with colleagues during analysis to ensure I was interpreting the data for what it is and not what I wanted it to be.

Case Study as a Research Method

Case study research allows for the exploration and understanding of complex issues (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006) and the detailed descriptions produced in case studies help describe the data within its real-life environment (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). Additionally, case studies allow for investigation of complex topics through contextual analysis of events and their relationships (e. g., ELL's educational experiences and their relationship to teachers' implementation of CRP). Gulsecen & Kubat (2006), further state that the role of case studies is significant when exploring issues related to education. Since this study sought to explore and better understand teachers' implementation of CRP, case study as a research method was deemed appropriate.

Yin (1994) argues, there are multiple advantages in using case study as a research method and identifies three categories of case studies: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. This study was: of interest because it, described a natural phenomenon, and

explained the phenomenon both on the surface and deeper level. This study was exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Yin, 1994). It is important to note, the design of case studies is of significant importance in qualitative research. As a result, triangulation was used, so multiple perspectives within the case were gathered to cast light upon teacher's implementation of CRP, its potential impact on ELLs' educational experiences, and the factors influencing its implementation. These perspectives were examined in documents retrieved from district websites, open ended interviews, classroom observations, analysis of student work and reading assessments.

Participants and Research Site

Participant Selection

Helping students reach proficiency on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP). by meeting the CCSS is an essential element of CRP. According to Ladson-Billings, this would fall under the first criterion of CRP, helping students meet state standards by achieving academic success. However, CRP encompasses more than just meeting standards because it also implores students to critique societal norms. Consequently, culturally relevant educators must also challenge students to think critically about the standards they are learning. For example, students must ask questions like: Who wrote these criteria and why are we being required to learn this material? How do I prove mastery of such standards and what does proficiency look like? In order to identify culturally relevant teachers who fostered this type of thinking, the following criterion was followed.

The selection of teachers who participated in this qualitative study was purposeful because I recruited teachers who declared that they had experiences with CRP and were

willing to articulate those experiences (Creswell, 2005; Laverly, 2003). With this in mind, I adhered to a sampling procedure with the following criteria: (a) Participants were employed as full-time teachers. The reason for this was that a full-time teacher, generally, does not share classroom responsibilities with other adults and is held solely responsible for helping students meet the CCSS; (b) Participants claimed to hold all students to the same high academic expectations. In addition, they claimed to help all students reach academic success, maintain cultural integrity and challenge the status quo; (c) Participants taught at a California elementary public school. As teachers working in the California public-school system, the teachers were responsible for meeting the same state standards (CCSS). Likewise, all California public schools are held accountable for helping students master CCSS and score proficiently on the annual CASPP. Exploring how the six participants in this study met and challenged these state standards helped describe their implementation of CRP and the outcomes for students.

Once approval had been received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I indicated to friends and colleagues the general idea of my research study and asked for referrals to teachers who they believed were implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. I received several referrals and reached out to teachers directly via email (See Appendix A). None of the teachers responded to my initial email and as a result follow up emails were sent. No responses were received after the follow-up email and I once more contacted colleagues for an additional set of referrals. This time, instead of asking for participants who implemented CRP, I requested participants who implemented Ladson-Billing three criteria of CRP in their classrooms. The three criteria that were specified in my email:

“I am seeking teachers who: believe all of their students are capable of obtaining academic success, challenge students to think critically about societal norms and values and use culture to impart knowledge.”

Making the participant requirements more specific resulted in me obtaining six California public school teachers as participants. After six participants had been identified, I met with each participant to explain the purpose of the study and all it entailed (one initial 60 to 90-minute interview, a minimum of an hour-long classroom observation, and potentially a post observation interview).

Participants in this study included six elementary public-school teachers employed as full-time teachers in the state of California. Participants included two males and four females between the ages of 30 and 50. Since the study explored culturally relevant pedagogy’s potential impact on English-language learners, it was also important to note that three of the six participants spoke Spanish fluently and one participant spoke Spanish conversationally. The participants were from varied cultural and educational backgrounds. The teachers represented different grade levels as well as diverse years of teaching experience. The diversity of the teacher participants was beneficial because it allowed for teacher variation and provided a more authentic picture of various teachers’ experiences implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. The table below provides more detail about each participant.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Teacher	Grade Level Taught	Cumulative Years Spent Teaching	# of ELL students taught	Fluent Spanish Speaker
Ms. Amy	4th	15	25 out of 30	YES
Mr. Andrew	6th	7	25 out of 33	YES
Mr. Corey	5th	28	22 out of 33	YES
Ms. Jasmine	TK	10	8 out 24	NO
Ms. Laura	3rd	6	16 out of 22	NO (spoke Spanish conversationally)
Ms. Mary	Kinder	20	13 out of 13	NO

School Sites

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select each school site. The six school sites chosen for this study provided variation in: physical location, school culture, school site policies and practices. These differences allowed for an examination of multiple factors that influence the educational experiences of English language learners and teachers' implementation of CRP. As a result, the differences between each site produced a wider range of culturally relevant strategies used by each teacher.

The following criteria were used in the selection of each site: (a) The school sites were located in low socioeconomic communities. This requirement was based on Ladson-Billings' (1992) belief that CRP is particularly beneficial for students who are continuously underserved by public school systems. As articulated in the review of literature, students from low socioeconomic communities have been underserved by California's public-school system; (b) The school sites were located in California. Ensuring that each school site was located in California confirmed that each site needed to adhere to the CCSS and operated under the same California ELL policies/practices; (c)

The English language learner student population from each site needed to be 50% or higher. This study sought to explore CRP's potential impact on the educational experiences of English language learners. As a result, school sites with an ELL student population of 50% or higher were selected.

Six different elementary schools in the San Diego County were used in the study. San Diego County is an extremely diverse area in California with a large population of English language learners, students coming from diverse backgrounds, and students from different socioeconomic status. The English language learner student population for each school site ranged from a 52% to 76%. The percentage of students at each school site identified as *socioeconomically disadvantaged* ranged from 72% to 95%. Four of the six schools chosen for the study were from different school districts and the remaining two schools were from the same school district. For these two schools, similar kinds of supports and overall district accountability was held constant.

Data Collection

Mathison (1988) described the importance of using multiple data sources and methods as a means of "triangulating" findings, therefore, increasing validity. Similarly, Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified methods triangulation as a way of checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. To improve the validity of this study, data was collected from several sources: document analysis, interviews, classroom observations, student work samples and reading assessment results. Each of these components will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

Document Analysis

Document analysis served as a complement to the standardized open-ended interviews. All documents pertaining to: the school sites' expressed goals for the 2017 – 2018 school year in general and specifically as it related to ELL students, Mission statement, educational action plans, teaching curriculum, parent and student services, Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) were analyzed. Each document received an initial pass-through (a quick skim) later followed by multiple thorough readings before interviews. These documents provided data on the context within which the interview participants operated. Furthermore, the information from the documents were used to generate questions to be asked during the participant interviews and later compared with the interviews for consistency and differences in content and perspective. According to Bowen (2009), use of the documents in this way ensured the research was both critical and comprehensive.

Additionally, student work samples (i. e.: reading assessments) were analyzed to examine academic growth over time. A requirement of culturally relevant pedagogy is that students experience academic success, therefore, evidence of student growth/progress was needed. Student work samples also served as data to help describe ELL's learning experiences. The work samples provided evidence to support both student strengths and areas in need of additional support. Student work samples were also compared with interview transcripts to check for consistencies and dissimilarities.

The documents collected and analyzed in this study also provided information about the types of data teachers were using to assess students' academic learning. Documents included formal assessment results such as reading assessments as well as

informal assessments such as classroom assignments and teacher records. In some cases, teachers voluntarily provided these documents and in some instances these documents were requested during interviews and classroom observations.

Standardized Open-Ended Interviews

Participants were interviewed after document analysis. Woods and Trexler (2001) state, data obtained from interviews can be “highly reflective of the interviewee’s perceptions and biases” (p. 74). Additionally, interviews allowed the researcher to access information unavailable in other forms of data collection such as observations and document analysis (Woods and Trexler, 2001). Interviews lasted no longer than 2 ½ hours and were conducted at the school sites. Interview protocol guides (See Appendix B) were developed prior to the interviews and the questions were intended to generate information that would be useful in answering each research question. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

To provide each participant an equal opportunity to answer each interview question in a conversational manner, a semi structured approach was followed using a protocol guide to ensure the same basic lines of inquiry for each participant (Kvale, 1996). According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research interviews attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ perspective and unfold the meanings of their daily experiences. Thus, a semi-structured approach provided each participant with an opportunity to share their opinions and encourage their voice to come through in the data. For example, teacher interviewees had an opportunity to share their personal experiences teaching English language learners, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, establishing relationships with students and their families. To unfold educators'

perspectives and daily experiences implementing CRP, they were also asked to describe lessons they previously taught that challenged students to think critically about societal norms and values and used culture to impart knowledge.

A formal appointment was scheduled with each participant to conduct the official interviews at a pre-specified date and time. Based on Patton's (2002) description of a general guide approach, a script addressing previously established key issues was used to guide questions asked during the interview process and all six interviews were recorded (audio only) then later transcribed. As a precaution, notes were also taken during the participant interviews whenever possible. It is important to note, when new questions and/or themes emerged during the data analysis process follow-up questions were asked during classroom observations.

At the end of the study, participants were offered an opportunity to participate in a final interview. The purpose of these final interviews was to share data with participants and provide them an opportunity to share any additional insights. These final interviews were scheduled for a pre-specified date/time and were very informal in nature. The information gathered during these final interviews helped insure the data analysis and ultimate findings were authentic.

Classroom Observations

As Ladson-Billings (1995) states, "...the best place to find out about classroom practices is the naturalistic setting of the classroom" (p. 163). Building on this notion, this qualitative study included classroom observations. These observations provided a context to the data collected during interviews and provided greater insight into pedagogical practices as they related to the research questions. Also, the classroom

observations provided a check against the data collected during participant interviews. Equally as important, the classroom observations allowed me to form a deeper understanding of how teachers implement CRP and how ELLs responded to culturally relevant teaching.

Classroom observations took place between December 2017 and February 2018. Dates and times for the classroom observations were agreed-upon by the participants and myself. During each classroom visit, a classroom observation protocol guide was used to help ensure the data collected during observations focused on the research questions.

Ladson-Billings (1992) emphasizes CRP attends to students' academic needs while at the same time allowing students to maintain cultural integrity. In more simplistic terms, culturally relevant pedagogy helps students reach proficiency by viewing culture as an asset rather than a deficit. As a result, students experience academic success while at the same time recognizing that their culture played a vital role in their success. To understand fully the complexities of maintaining cultural integrity while attending to ELLs academic needs, direct observation of how teachers achieved this goal by utilizing students' culture as a medium for learning was essential. According to Patton (2002), the data collected during these observations must explicitly describe what happened and how it happened. Consequently, during classroom observations, I was particularly interested in knowing how the teachers: created an environment that welcomed, nurtured, and utilized cultural differences, and encouraged students to learn collaboratively. During each of the classroom observations, I attended to how teachers (and students) utilized culture as a medium for learning through the use of language, resources, physical classroom environment (e. g., walls, windows, the position of tables

and chairs) and learning objectives. Building on Ladson-Billings' (1992) criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy, during teacher-student interactions I observed how the teacher: linked the student's individual culture to the learning taking place in the classroom, helped students develop critical consciousness and encouraged students to challenge societal norms. More precisely, building on Ladson-Billings (1995) research, I attended to how each teacher: maintained high academic expectations (for all students), explicitly demonstrated value for students' cultures, maintained open and equitable relationships with students, and encouraged students to critically analyze societal norms and values.

With regards to an observation protocol, I wrote descriptive notes (Cresswell, 2009) during each of the six (one per teacher participant) hour long observations. Descriptive notes included information about participants, classroom environment and classroom events (Cresswell, 2009). Recognizing that even the most skilled observer may not capture every detail during an observation, each observation was audio recorded. An audio record of classroom discourse, in addition to observation notes, enabled me to increase the chances of capturing more relevant data.

Data Analysis

Analytical Memos

As part of the ongoing analysis process, analytical memos were used to examine the data as it was still being collected. Each analytical memo included the date and short quotes or phrases from the raw data. These analytical memos served as a guide during the early analysis process. Immediately following interviews and observations, I walked

back to my car and began recording initial reactions and questions that emerged which later pointed towards additional ways of considering the data.

Lingering questions and connections between participants, their teaching styles, and factors influencing their implementation of CRP were also included in each analytical memo. Additionally, analytical memos included summaries of observations and interviews as well as potential themes that were beginning to emerge. The analytical memos provided an ongoing developmental dialogue during the data collection process to capture my thoughts and how I was trying to make sense of new information. The recording of analytical memos began with document analysis and continued throughout the data analysis process. At the conclusion of data collection, I wrote an analytical summary based on the ongoing analytical memos to decipher where the commentary had led. It is important to note, this integration of analytical memos into an analytical summary proved useful during the coding process as a way to make comparisons and connections between memos.

Diagrams

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), conceptual frameworks are visual products that graphically explain key factors, concepts or variables and the pursued relationship among them. Accordingly, to assist in the early analysis process and generate initial concepts, simple diagrams (see Appendix C) were created. The purpose of these diagrams was to stimulate and document analytical thought as well as provide direction for later data analysis. Additionally, the diagrams identified relationships between clearly defined constructs and key factors that influenced their relationship.

More precisely, the diagrams were used to help explain the multiple factors influencing teachers' implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Key Terms

As Patton (2002) suggests, the analysis process involved defining key phrases, terms, and practices that were unique to each school site (see Appendix). The definitions primarily emerged from information provided during the standard open-ended interviews.

Transcription and Coding of Interviews

All interviews were transcribed and coded in order to identify themes and patterns, first within each case and then across cases. Since data collection took place over the course of four months, themes and patterns emerged over time and a potential list of codes were developed as these themes took shape.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and later transcripts were coded to identify “in vivo” codes (Saldana, 2011). To ensure the use of the respondents' authentic language and provide precise in vivo codes, I highlighted words, phrases, and sentences in the interview transcripts. Once the codes had been established, each coding category was assigned a word or phrase. I then studied all the raw data in search of patterns, concepts and themes to be coded and placed into categories. To explore connections between the categories, diagrams were again used to organize emerging connections (see Appendix). As a supplemental step, coding notes were taken during the coding process.

Analysis of Classroom Observation Notes

In order to generate a deeper understanding of teachers' responses during interviews as well as their teaching practices that showed evidence of culturally relevant pedagogy the following protocol was followed. During each classroom observation notes

were taken in a journal. Observation notes provided information about the relationships between participants and their students, participants' teaching style and practices, classroom culture and CRP's potential impact on student learning. The data from these observations was analyzed using the same codes and themes used to code interviews. The observation notes were then sorted according to themes and analyzed with the data from interviews. In the event data from the observations did not correlate with data from the interviews, new themes and codes were generated based on the review of literature.

Pseudonyms in Findings

Efforts to hide the identities of participants, their students, and school sites have been taken in order to protect the participants as much as possible when writing the subsequent chapters. Pseudonyms have been assigned for the names of schools, participants and their students to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, all revealing information has been purposely left out of teacher quotes and descriptions in order to keep the identities of the participants and their students as anonymous as possible.

Limitations

This collective case study deals with only six school sites and six teacher participants, thus, it cannot be said for certain that the conclusions drawn from this study apply elsewhere. As a result, I cannot guarantee the sample of six California public school teachers from this study is representative of all teachers. In addition to purposeful sampling, convenient sampling was used as a final step in the sampling process which, according to Patton (2001), is neither purposeful nor strategic.

Furthermore, there were date and time constraints that limited my ability to collect additional data from classroom observations. As a full-time teacher, conducting classroom observations was limited to my ability to travel on certain days during specified times. For instance, I was not able to conduct classroom observations on Thursdays between the hours of 8 AM and 10:30 AM due to my weekly grade level meetings. Participants' schedules impacted my ability to conduct classroom observations as well. For example, many of the participants were administering the 2018 English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC), as a result, I was unable to conduct observations for several weeks. Thus, data collection was limited to the dates and times that were arranged in advance.

My positionality as a classroom teacher can also be seen as a limitation to the study. Although my career as a classroom teacher was beneficial in terms of access and participant relationships, it may have also limited my perspective as a researcher and affected interview responses. My prior experiences with some of the school sites and districts may have also influenced classroom observations and the way I interpreted and analyzed data.

Research notes, there are multiple factors and perspectives relevant to the educational experiences of students. However, this study focuses primarily on the perspective of the classroom teacher. Consequently, all perspectives and factors contributing to the educational experiences of English language learners and teachers' implementation of CRP were not considered in this study. However, according to Donmoyer (1990), the value of a case study is that the knowledge gained from one case

can help make knowledge accessible to others. Thus, gaining a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants in this study may help make sense of others' experiences.

Significance of the Study

Though the sample size in this study is particularly small, Donmoyer (1990) suggests, that it is no longer useful to think about generalizability only in terms of large samples and statistical procedures. In fact, in applied fields, like education, research should suggest possibilities rather than explicitly dictating action. This qualitative study sought to do just that, to create new ways of viewing teachers' implementation of pedagogical practices at the micro and macro level. A richer understanding of their implementation and its potential impact on ELL students may better prepare educators to serve ELL students using methods that lead to better academic and personal outcomes (e. g. , higher self-esteem, cultural integrity, appreciation for diversity). Perhaps new ways of viewing the educational experiences of ELL students will no longer support a deficit mentality and begin to see students' rich cultural biographies as an asset. Seeing cultural diversity as an asset may prompt educators to promote symmetry between school and a student's lived experiences outside of the classroom.

This study sought to help educators better understand how educators define and implement culturally relevant pedagogy in addition to gaining a better understanding of its potential impact on English-language learners. A better understanding will hopefully help gain insight into the relationship between pedagogy, student learning, and students lived experiences outside of the classroom. Findings from this study may help inform K-

12 teachers' decision-making regarding instructional practices that best support equitable learning opportunities. Furthermore, this study added knowledge to the growing field of educational research on English language learners, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the interconnectedness between various factors influencing teachers' implementation of pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings for this study are organized around each of the research questions. I will begin by describing participants' teaching practices and defining their teaching styles. I will follow this description with an analysis of findings regarding how participants defined CRP. I will then discuss Ladson-Billings (1995) definition of CRP and how it relates to the data collected in this study. Factors influencing participants' implementation of CRP and its potential impact on ELL student learning will also be discussed. Although each question was analyzed separately, they are very much interrelated and the connections among each question will be described in more detail in Chapter 5.

Teaching Practices and Teaching Styles

The purpose of this section is to provide a clearer understanding of each participant's teaching practices and teaching style. Evidence gathered from interviews and observations suggest each participant utilized particular teaching practices and a unique teaching style to engage students in academic learning. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), it is essential to engage students in the learning process in order for them to experience academic success. Consequently, educators must select a teaching style and practices that addresses the diverse needs of their student population. The intention of this section is to examine each participants' teaching style and practices and then provide an analysis of how teachers in this study displayed instructional attitudes and practices that showed evidence of culturally relevant pedagogy. In the final chapter, I will discuss the implications of their practices for creating a CRP classroom.

Ms. Jasmine

Ms. Jasmine has received numerous early childhood development certificates and degrees. As a result, her teaching practices foster both social maturity and cognitive development rather than academic learning per se. During her interview, she referenced theorists such as Piaget, Erick Erickson, and Bronfenbrenner and related their theories to her current classroom practices. Take her following quote for example.

... up to age 6, they're in what's called, pre-operational phase... I mean, there is a psychology, Erick Erickson. Um, so their view is very limited and so my job is to make them other aware. Like I feel that is so great like because obviously that is like when you have a room of four and five-year-old like you could have a child dying on the floor bleeding and another child would come up to you and go, "Ms. Jasmine, I went to Disneyland yesterday." And I'm like, "whoa, whoa, like, like he needs help. Let's wait on Disneyland, okay?" So that's all I do all day is constantly making them realize that you're not the only person in the world... so that's to me real world right there. . . because you can't just have anybody in a room of four-year-old. You know, you need to understand how they learn, how they develop... how they communicate... all of that stuff.

This quote is merely one example of Ms. Jasmine's understanding that the students in her classroom are in what Piaget (1963) refers to as the "preoperational stage." Her belief that her students were egocentric and struggled to see things from the perspective of others impacted not only her teaching style but her teaching practices.

For example, Ms. Jasmine understood her students need to take an active role in the learning process. She showed evidence of this by providing her students with opportunities to act like little scientists as they made observations and interacted with the world around them. To help students make sense of the world around them, Ms. Jasmine created opportunities for students to experience concrete physical situations through group play. For example, she designated a 45-minute block of time for students

to explore and experiment through play. There were various stations set up throughout the classroom and each station was designed to encourage students to explore and use their imagination. In order to provide a clearer picture of each center and its designated purpose, they are listed as follows:

- Art
- Dominoes
- iPad
- Toy Cars and Building Blocks
- Imagination Station (Dress Up)
- Playdough

Each of these stations were designed to use physical experiences to help students begin to think abstractly and critically. During this time, Ms. Jasmine gave the students the space they needed to make decisions independently. For example, at the toy car and building blocks station, three boys were working together to first build a parking structure and race track then take turns “racing” down the track. This particular station involved critical thinking as the boys could be seen testing out different blocks to build their parking structure. When the blocks on top were too heavy, the structure would topple down. The boys would test out different blocks until they found the correct combination and the structure could support the weight of a car in the event it needed to park on top.

Ms. Jasmine believed her role during experimental play was an observer and occasional moderator. Rather than tell the students what they could or should do, she continuously moved from station to station checking in with students. On one particular

occasion, students began screaming and throwing dominoes at the dominoes station. Ms. Jasmine calmly walked over and seated herself among students. “Tell me about your game,” she said to the group of students. They immediately lowered their voices and began eagerly explaining to her the game they were playing. She never reprimanded the students for throwing dominoes or screaming in the classroom. Nor did she speak to them about safety and respecting the classroom space. Instead, she chose to ask them a question that would get them to clarify their rules and make the necessary adjustments to ensure all the students were following the rules of the game. After the students explained the game, all screaming and domino throwing ceased. Rather than throwing the dominos across the classroom, the students began holding the dominoes while making them “fly” through the air. According to Piaget (1963), children at the preoperational stage learn through pretend play but still struggle with logic and taking the point of view of other people. Having studied Piaget’s work, Ms. Jasmine’s response to the group of students playing dominoes was her attempt to bring some consensus to the group.

In summary, it was evident Ms. Jasmine’s teaching practices promoted social and cognitive development. Her teaching style was that of a facilitator. She facilitated and promoted self-learning by helping her students develop critical thinking skills and acquire knowledge that led to students becoming “other aware.”

Mr. Andrew

Mr. Andrew encouraged self-learning in the classroom through peer-teacher and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. He challenged his fifth-grade students to go beyond just giving him the correct answer by questioning and articulating their own thinking. As a result, many of his academic lessons supported problem-solving skills which he hoped

would lead to students developing a deeper understanding of topics. Ladson-Billings (1995), asserts in order for a teacher to be considered culturally relevant they must believe all students are capable of academic success and use culture to impart knowledge. Mr. Andrew's integrated approach allowed him to blend his own personality with the interests of the students and the curriculum. This blended approach enabled him to tailor his teaching style to meet students' needs and include culture in learning experiences. For instance, Mr. Andrew knew "roasting," telling jokes about each other, was something many of his students did at home. As a result, he made this an integral piece of the classroom environment. He would use jokes to gain his students attention and sarcasm to challenge their thinking in a playful manner.

Ms. Amy

Ladson Billings (1995) argues educators must address the academic needs of students in order to be considered to culturally relevant. Ms. Amy attempted to address the needs of her fourth-grade students through modeling and coaching. She imparted information to students via lectures, audio/visual presentations, and demonstrations. The students in her classroom acquired academic knowledge primarily by listening, taking notes, and practicing what they were instructed to do.

Ms. Amy also considered herself an expert who needed to share knowledge, demonstrate her expertise, advise students, and provide feedback to improve their understanding and promote learning. She also incorporated a more traditional lecture format. She regularly sat or stood in the front of the classroom and students were expected to watch and listen to her examples prior to beginning their own work. For example, when I walked into the classroom, Ms. Amy's students were swiftly gathering

notebooks and pencils from their desks then quickly moving to the front carpet. Ms. Amy sat upfront in a chair holding her own journal and pencil. Once all of the students were seated on the front carpet, Ms. Amy made some seating adjustments by requesting some students sit directly in front of her while others were told to move to spots where they might be less distracted. She then surveyed the group of students to ensure she was pleased with the most current seating arrangement while the students watched her intently.

During her interview and her observation, there was evidence to support how Ms. Amy viewed her role as a teacher. She was the leader and the students were encouraged to follow her examples. She continuously shared personal stories about her life with her students and began each lesson by modeling what she expected from the students. When it was her turn to speak, she waited for the students' eyes to focus on her and if a student spoke while she was talking, she silenced them with a hand gesture. In essence, she promoted learning through listening and following directions. She often told the students what to do, how to do it, and when it needed to be done. In order to help all her fourth grade students achieve academic success, Ms. Amy set clear goals and specific deadlines to help students know exactly what they must do to succeed.

Ms. Laura

Prior to becoming a teacher, Ms. Laura worked in politics. Her years spent working as a political intern in the city of Chicago led her to her present-day belief that meaningful change occurs in the classroom. Take her following statement for example,

And I started to see that there were just huge issues within that city of racism, segregation, social injustices, and I always just come kept coming back to, uh, the education. So I then decided that, um, I needed to figure something else out. I knew I didn't want to be in politics. I couldn't bear

to watch the manipulation of humans... I just felt like embedded within politics is this idea that you stand for your constit . . . your constituency. And that you need to advocate for your people. But I just felt like there just wasn't enough listening and advocacy, and just even being a community organizer and working with nonprofit organizations was such a niche, and those people who were there wanted to be there, and I felt like there was so many things within the system of education, particularly Chicago public schools that could be shifted on a political level. And I felt like a better access point than just being a talking head was to get into the grassroots and see if I could work my way through it.

Ms. Laura's work as a community organizer and desire to not become a "talking head" has influenced her teaching style. She promoted learning through empowerment and often assigned tasks that her third grade students were expected to work on independently or in groups. Rather than presenting herself as an expert, Ms. Laura organized students in groups and provided them with ample learning experiences. During these learning opportunities, Ms. Laura would observe, provide consultation, and promote continuous interaction between students to achieve learning objectives.

During her observation, there was further evidence to suggest Ms. Laura took on the role of an observer to promote collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. This is particularly important because as Moll et al. (1992) suggests, it is imperative for teachers to take on the role of an observer to address the academic needs of students more efficiently. Ms. Laura was an observer from about 7:30 AM to 8 AM when her students gathered together on the front carpet in a circle. This portion of the day was referred to as a "Trust Circle." Ms. Laura chose to sit in the circle with the students as opposed to standing in the front of the classroom or sitting in a chair. She quite literally sat and engaged at the students' level. She also fully participated in the trust circle and shared her

thoughts and opinions as well. As opposed to leading the discussion, Ms. Laura elected a volunteer to start the discussion. The discourse within the circle was carried on like a conversation. Students chimed in with questions and opinions as other students were talking. As the discourse within the circle continued, Ms. Laura observed students and occasionally provided feedback. Her teaching style promoted students critical thinking skills by engaging in activities that developed problem-solving skills and eventually led to a deeper understanding of curriculum.

Ms. Mary

In an attempt to help her kindergarten students reach academic success, Ms. Mary used her psychology background to adjust her teaching practices to meet the developmental needs of her students. While working with her kindergarten students, she assumed the role of an expert that shared knowledge with her students while simultaneously promoting student interaction. Rather than relying solely on verbal lectures, she included digital presentations, songs, and classroom activities to help students fully understand topics (i. e.: attributes of shapes, sea turtles, and irregular verbs). For example, during her classroom observation students were observed singing, chanting, and dancing every 3 to 5 minutes. Each academic concept or academic vocabulary Ms. Mary taught was accompanied by a song, chant, and/or dance. Ms. Mary referred to this as “jamming out.” When it was time to “jam out” students could be heard shouting, “YAYYYYYY,” and rocking their heads back and forth while smiling. Even if a student had not memorized the song/chant, they were moving their bodies along with the rest of the group trying their best to sing-along.

The information and knowledge given to students came directly from Ms. Mary and students learned through observing and copying. For instance, Ms. Mary was the expert on shapes attributes (which was the objective of the math lesson being taught on the day of her observation) and the students were expected to repeat her knowledge. Her teaching style promoted limited interactions between students and limited opportunities for students to demonstrate their own expertise, although there was some evidence that all students had access to the academic content being taught and, importantly, students who needed additional support were given small group instruction.

Mr. Corey

Mr. Corey's teaching style is best described as a combination of multiple teaching styles. In some instances, he was an expert sharing his own thoughts and opinions while at other times he followed a more traditional lecture format. For example, before releasing students to work independently or in groups he would gather them on the front carpet to talk to students about a new learning objective. There were also occasions when Mr. Corey facilitated and managed classroom activities while offering feedback to encourage critical thinking. While Mr. Corey did not describe his teaching style as a combination of multiple styles, but instead, he explained that he used an adaptive teaching style that was responsive to students who seemed to need more time to learn how to improve their reading. Take his following statement for example.

I see this dichotomy, this huge, big differences between kids when they, when they come, come together, they're coming together from very different places. I definitely modify it. I spend, I find myself this year, spending more, I think if I don't spend more time with certain students, um, even though I may not be, if I'm spending more time with one student, and I don't spend enough time with another student, if I have, if I don't invest certain, um, a certain amount of energy with a kid, he's gonna make us pay. Or she's gonna make us pay. So, um, it's like an investment. I

need to spend time here. And get out of the, get out of the, his way, or get out of her way, so that she can read, he can read, or do, work on math problems, and uh, um, and give this student a little bit more time. I don't know if that's, the, if I have struck the right balance. But I'm trying.

In his above statement, Mr. Corey explained how he continuously modified his teaching style and practices in order to address the needs of his sixth-grade students. His ability to pay attention to what his students needed and how they responded to his practices are examples of his attempt to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of his students. He recognized that the practices he implemented one day may not work the next day and as a result he must adapt his practices to fit the needs of his students. For example, he knew when a student might need additional emotional support and less academic rigor. At the same time, he recognized when a student needed to produce outcomes that displayed academic rigor. That often meant adjusting his teaching to allow less time talking about social issues. Furthermore, he was aware that how he responded to students individually impacted the class as a whole. For instance, if he did not address the individual needs of students immediately, he risked the chance of that student acting out later on and disrupting the learning opportunities of other students. Examples such as this suggest that Mr. Corey's blended teaching style and adaptive practices were crafted to address the diverse needs of his student population.

Summary of Teaching Styles and Practices

Literature notes (Turner, 1979; Saravia-Shore, 2008), teachers of traditionally underserved students (i. e.: low socio-economic, ELL, and minority students) must vary their instructional styles and strategies in order to respond to the needs of all students. Evidence from this study suggests that while each participant had an individual teaching

style, they varied their practices to engage all students in the learning process to help them succeed academically.

Evidence of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

One of the primary purposes of this study was to understand how teachers defined CRP, yet, when asked about CRP, participants did not know what it was and were unable to provide a definition. One participant was certain they just learned about CRP in one of their night classes and another participant mentioned possibly hearing the phrase throughout his teaching career. The remaining four said they were not familiar with CRP's definition. In addition, all six participants mentioned being bombarded with numerous different pedagogies throughout their teaching career and they no longer showed interest in remembering acronyms, theories, or pedagogies.

Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Research is fairly consistent on the qualities of culturally relevant teachers (Dickson, Chun, & Fernandez, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). Culturally relevant teaching centers students' culture in teaching practice through three primary approaches: maintaining high academic standards for all students, cultivating cultural competency, and a critical consciousness. Even though participants could not define CRP, many of their practices showed evidence of these three primary approaches. Participants' teaching styles and practices (as described above) seemed to indicate that teachers were proactive in responding to what they perceived to be the needs of their students, thus, they filled a primary goal of CRP—empowering students academically. They set high expectations with a commitment to every student success.

In order to more fully discuss the relationship between teachers' practices and CRP, data will be divided in sections following Ladson-Billings' (1995) criterion for culturally relevant pedagogy: academic success for all students, developing a critical consciousness, and maintaining cultural integrity.

Academic Success

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP is arguably the most central element in supporting the academic success of children who have not been well served by public schools. One of the reasons why CRP is central to the academic success of all students is because in order to be culturally relevant, teachers must believe all of their students are capable of experiencing academic success. Furthermore, teachers must teach in a manner that is accessible to all students. The participants in this study displayed evidence that academic learning was valued and expected from all of their students. Teachers taught to the needs of each individual student and attempted to provide support for students who were not yet "at grade level." Evidence of this pedagogy was seen, as teachers worked in small groups with students in order to reteach standards or stayed after school to provide free tutoring for students who wanted additional support. A particular group of Mr. Andrew's fifth grade students were struggling with third and fourth grade mathematics standards (i. e.: multiplying a single digit and a double-digit number). Mr. Andrew, a fifth-grade teacher, assisted this small group of his students after his contract hours had ended. Ms. Amy also showed evidence of fostering academic proficiency by volunteering to tutor students during fall, winter, and spring break. Prior to tutoring these students, she reviewed their most recent assessment data and had identified areas where the students needed supplementary support. During each break, she met with small

groups of students in her classroom and helped enhance students' understanding of various English language arts and mathematics standards.

During classroom observations, all of the participants showed evidence that they wanted *every* student in their class to reach academic proficiency. Each student was held to the same academic standards and support was provided when students needed assistance. When students had difficulty solving math problems or writing a sentence in English, the teacher required them to at very least, try their best. Once the student had attempted to complete the task to the best of their ability, the teacher would assess the work and then provide the student with extra support either in a small group or one-on-one.

Developing a Critical Consciousness

Freire (1970) introduced the notion of "conscienti- zation," which is "a process that invites learners to engage the world and others critically" (McLaren, 1989, p. 195). Freire's (1970) work in Brazil is not radically different from the work Ladson-Billings (1995) expectations for culturally relevant teachers who work with disenfranchised student populations such as English language learners, low socioeconomic and minority students (i. e.: the student population in this study). Ladson-Billings (1995) states, in the classrooms of culturally relevant teachers' students are expected to engage the world and others critically. In order to support students engaging the world and others critically, the participants in this study needed to show evidence of providing students opportunities to develop a critical consciousness and challenge the status quo. The ways in which the teachers helped students developed the ability to critique cultural norms, values, traditions, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities was examined.

While each participant showed evidence of helping students develop critical consciousness to challenge the status quo, their attempts were highly dependent upon their students' ages. More precisely, teachers developed ways to make students aware of norms and ideas that control social institutions (i. e.: schools), politics and the economy. In addition, they geared their strategies towards the age specific needs of students. These strategies varied considerably within each teacher's classroom and across the teachers in this study.

Participants suggested learning was more meaningful when students studied concepts rooted in cultural experiences. Teachers sought instructional methods that connected students' personal lives to academic content. For example, upper grade students (4th, 5th, and 6th) were observed discussing topics such as: poverty, homelessness, abandonment, death, racism, classism, and stereotypes. Participants referred to these topics as "social issues" that their students could relate to and used these topics to make learning more relevant. These participants raised student's critical consciousness by addressing issues of social justice and racial inequality. They acknowledged examples of societal oppression (i. e.: homeless and poverty) and encouraged students to notice how those topics were related to their everyday lives. The purpose of discussing such topics was to equip students with knowledge that would prepare them to identify problems (i. e.: poverty) and conflicts in their life and take action to improve their current situations. For example, Mr. Andrew spoke to his students about the importance of learning how to add and subtract decimals. He did this by making a connection between decimals and money. He knew that many of his students lived in poverty and that many people hold stereotypes of people living in poverty in the United States. He explained to his students

that due to this stereotype people in society might try to take advantage of them financially. They would assume they (his students) could not adequately add or subtract let alone balance a checkbook thus, it was important that they prove them wrong. Mr. Andrew believed it was important for his students to refrain from becoming a stereotype and instead learn how to handle their own finances by learning the foundational mathematical skills he was teaching that day. The discussion Mr. Andrew had with his students incited a desire in them to challenge the accepted social myths they may encounter later in life. His teaching demonstrated culturally relevant pedagogy. He challenged students to refrain from becoming “another stereotype” and provided them with the tools and knowledge they needed to break the mold.

Ms. Amy and Mr. Corey were observed teaching the socially relevant social components embedded in their Reading Workshop lessons. During this portion of the day, the students were observed reading literature associated with issues about poverty, homelessness, abandonment, and death. Both teachers displayed a commitment to helping students understand their social responsibilities. They did this by having discussions about character traits and connecting those traits to larger societal issues. For example, Mr. Corey was observed talking to students about some people’s tendency to lie to impress other people. During this discussion, students were quite passionate about the subject and students had the freedom and encouragement to challenge the opinions of their peers. Students discussed personal examples of lying to avoid embarrassment. For example, lying about their financial status because they were too embarrassed for people to find out their family was struggling financially. In this example, the sixth-grade

students in Mr. Corey's classroom were utilizing their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to contribute to conversations about social issues.

The freedom and encouragement provided to students was Mr. Corey's attempt to awaken the passion of his students and teach the knowledge and skills needed to understand societal norms. More precisely, Mr. Corey was teaching his students how to critically assess the actions of others, and develop the skills needed to challenge the status quo while maintaining integrity. To further develop students critical thinking skills and encourage exploration, Mr. Corey provided opportunities for students to research social issues (i. e.: immigration), develop an opinion based on research and debate their opinions in class.

Mr. Andrew, Mr. Corey, and Ms. Amy each attempted to help students develop a critical consciousness and challenge the status quo through open discourse, opinion writings and classroom debates. However, participants who worked with students in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and third grade offered a somewhat different perspective.

As a transitional kindergarten (TK) teacher, Ms. Jasmine defined the term "societal norm" in a way that her very young students could relate to. She believed at the ages of 4 and 5, her students existed in a world of their own and that world was their reality, it was their norm. As a result, she believed her students needed to first understand how to interact with others and explore their interpersonal skills before they could begin to critique the world around them. Take her following statement for example:

...their view is very limited and so my job is to make them other aware. Like I feel that is so great like because obviously that is like when you

have a room of four and five-year-olds like you could have a child dying on the floor bleeding and another child would come up to you and go, “Ms. Jasmine, I went to Disneyland yesterday.” And I’m like, “whoa, whoa, like, like he needs help. Let’s wait on Disneyland, okay?” So that’s all I do all day is constantly making them realize that you’re not the only person in the world... so that’s to me real world right there.

The connection between Ms. Amy’s beliefs and CRP more specifically, was related to Kegan’s (1982) social maturity stages with particular attention to the imperial and interpersonal stages. According to Kegan (1982), the imperial stage marks a period of self-centeredness while the interpersonal stage emphasizes empathy, compassion, and the awareness that other people have needs that should be taken into account. Ms. Amy believed most of her students entered transitional kindergarten in the imperial stage because they were motivated solely by their own desires. Accordingly, she felt it was important to help her students become other aware in order to develop the critical consciousness that CRP requires. In order for her students to develop a critical consciousness, she believed it was essential to first help TK students develop social-emotional skills such as empathy, compassion and mindfulness. Thus, Ms. Jasmine provided students with opportunities to develop these skills during classroom learning experiences like the 45 minutes of exploratory play described previously.

Ms. Mary’s attempts to help her kindergarten students develop critical consciousness and challenge the status quo was fueled by her understanding of culture. As a Black history and psychology major, she believed in the importance of knowing one’s own culture and the cultural beliefs maintained by mainstream media. Ms. Mary’s experiences as an African-American woman and Black Studies major not only influenced her understanding of culture but the way she incorporated it into her classroom.

When I walked into her classroom, I was immediately greeted by a 20 x 30 poster of Martin Luther King Junior with the words “Peace, Love, and Brotherhood” written in gold yellow letters underneath. During her interview she referenced this poster and stated it was her responsibility to teach all of her students about the past and its relationship to present day society. To further elaborate on this point, Ms. Mary described a recent incident she experienced during the holidays as a result of a recent influx of Muslim students. She stated,

So then they (superintendent and assistant super intendent) were coming at me with the (statement) “Muslim children, if they were in my classroom they wouldn't feel comfortable.” ... and it goes back to my whole thing, um, I think, especially Muslim children who have our skin color (brown), they need to know what's going on in this world. They need to know the game. . . It's sad, but they need to know how to play the game. It's exposure, that's all I'm trying to do is expose them because they have to live in this world and like oh my gosh not only are you black, you're Muslim too... So, you know, if anything, I just want to teach them like, you know, know your stuff, yeah. I'm not saying you know, I'm not saying um, celebrate it (Christmas) or embrace it, but just know. Just know what's going on in this country and know your history.

Granted, this one example speaks specifically about Muslim students, however, Ms. Mary held a fervent belief that the students in her classroom needed to learn about what was taking place in society. She further believed in order for her students to develop a critical consciousness they first needed to acquire knowledge about United States history. She believed this was especially true for minority students who needed to not only learn about their own history, but the historical myths perpetuated about minorities in society today. She was a firm believer that knowledge was key and after students acquired knowledge they could then develop the skills needed to challenge the status quo. She understood the stereotypes about minorities and Muslims are historically and systemically embedded in our current day society and in order for her students to

critique those stereotypes, they first needed to acquire historical knowledge. As a first step to acquiring a deeper historical understanding, she made an attempt to expose her students to a wide variety of domestic and international beliefs and traditions. She believed this was a critical component to her commitment to, not merely individual, but the collective empowerment of her kindergarten students.

Summary of Developing a Critical Consciousness

All the teachers made efforts to help students develop a critical consciousness by recognizing, understanding, and, in varying capacities, think critically about the world around them. However, Ladson-Billings (2006) framework for culturally relevant pedagogy requires teachers to also view the classroom as a site for social change. More precisely, Ladson-Billings (2006) implores teachers to push their students out into their communities to affect change. The data from this study showed no evidence of teachers providing opportunities for students to go out into their communities and fight against social inequities. In fact, the data from this study showed no evidence of teachers encouraging students to take action or make their societal critiques known on a larger scale. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teachers must critique societal norms in the classroom but also actively encourage students to pursue social justice for all members of society. The participants in the study failed to provide students with opportunities to take an active role by voicing their critiques on a larger scale. For example, students did not have an opportunity to share their critiques to people outside of their classroom. The upper grade teachers (fourth, fifth, and sixth grade) explained, providing students with opportunities to advocate for social justice within their local communities was something the teachers had never considered. The teachers in a

transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and third grade failed to take an active role in providing students with opportunities to advocate for social justice within their communities presumably due to their students young ages.

Using Culture to Impart Knowledge and Maintaining Cultural Integrity

The final criterion of CRP, according to Ladson-Billings (1995), is for teachers to attend to students' academic needs while at the same time allowing students to maintain cultural integrity. More simplistically, culturally relevant teachers must use student culture to help them learn academic content. This encourages teachers to view a students' culture as strong, valuable and praiseworthy which is one of the key reasons why culturally relevant pedagogy is arguably the central element in the academic success of children who have not been well served by public schools (Ladson – Billings, 1995). Similarly, Moll et al. (1992) in their description of “funds of knowledge” contend that, the key to academic instruction is for educators to tap into the cultural resources of individual students. Participants in the study chose to acknowledge the context, culture, histories and meanings their students brought to the classroom daily. They believed in order to help students reach academic success, they first had to discover their students' talents, interests, and cultural assets. In order to discover students' talents, interest, and cultural assets, the teachers in this study did three things: (1) they established a culture of care; (2) they generated personal relationships with students and their families and (3) they used information they learned from students to address their social-emotional and academic needs.

Culture of Care. Prior to utilizing culture to impart knowledge and help students maintain cultural integrity, participants first established a culture of care

within their classrooms. Participants created class environments that were respectful and inclusive. During interviews, participants stressed the importance of cultivating a classroom environment that was built on trust and acceptance, so students felt comfortable and empowered. For instance, note the following statement from Ms. Amy.

...like if I, if they want to say something in English and they don't say it right it's okay to, to trust and to try and to take risks, and, and, and sometimes I even let them know like, "Did you see? I didn't even pronounce (laughing) that correctly," like, and, and, and they're like, "Oh okay. " And um, I think um, more than anything, it helps them to take those risks um, in their writing, in their reading.

Ms. Amy spent a great deal of time encouraging risk taking and assuring students that the classroom was a safe place to make mistakes. In order to encourage students to take risks, she often referenced her own mistakes as examples.

Similar to Ms. Amy, Mr. Corey and Ms. Laura established a culture of care by encouraging risk-taking and developing students' self-confidence. They believed generating a safe space for students was imperative to developing their confidence and a growth mindset. During her interview, Ms. Laura states, "If we can build a safe space for them, if we can show them that they can succeed if we can build that within them... then it will carry with them out into the world. . ."

Ms. Laura was quite confident in her belief that building a safe space for students was key to addressing two aspects of CRP: helping her third-grade students succeed academically and encouraging them to challenge the status quo.

Mr. Andrew also discussed the importance of establishing a culture of care as a primary goal. He states,

I want my kids to feel safe. And I feel like, and my kids come in here and they don't feel that they're not gonna learn. Learning is secondary, because they're in flight mode, most of the time I've got kids who've just been dealing with parents fighting, or someone got shot, or someone just went in jail, or deported or whatever. So I want my kids to know, when they come in here, this is a safe space.

It was evident from the classroom observation that Mr. Andrew's sixth grade students felt safe in the classroom because he had cultivated a classroom environment of trust and respect. Students raised their hands to answer questions and voiced concerns freely. Before I even entered Mr. Andrew's classroom for his morning observation, I could hear his voice and laughter booming from the quad. His classroom was located in the middle of the second floor and the door was wide open. Students were transitioning from their morning reading groups back to their homeroom classes. I could hear Mr. Andrew as I walked up the stairs asking students how their morning had been and exchanging jokes with students. I could also hear him asking students, "How's your family doing?" For some students, he checked in with them to see how their morning reading group went. I later discovered, these students were the ones that were traditionally kicked out of their morning reading classes for "poor behavior." Mr. Andrew was standing right outside of his door shaking hands with students, smiling and laughing as I approached the doorway. Upon entering the classroom, students were standing in clusters having conversations and laughter continued to flow throughout the space. Even though Mr. Andrew remained firm and direct with his students, the classroom environment was one of joy and respect. The laughter and joking did not end when the math lesson began. Nearly 40 minutes into the math lesson a student raised his hand. He said in a calm matter of fact tone, "Mr.

Andrew, I wanted to alert you that you have a bald spot in the middle of your hair,” as a sly grin began to creep across his face. Mr. Andrew looked up from his document camera and asked, “Oh, you mean like the one in the front of your hair?” The entire classroom erupted into laughter. This banter between Mr. Andrew and his students indicated to students that the teacher cared about more than just academics. He cared about them personally and wanted them to enjoy school.

Relationships. A more in-depth analysis of the relationships participants formed with students and their families will take place in a following section. For now, it is important to mention all of the participants formed relationships with their students and families as a primary step to learning about students’ personal biographies. Participants took the time to get to know their students and their students’ families, then utilized information they learned about their students to help generate personalized learning experiences for each student. In addition, the relationships teachers cultivated served to foster cultural integrity.

Even though parent-teacher relationships varied from classroom to classroom, each participant made establishing relationships and allowing parents an opportunity to be involved in their student’s education a top priority. Each participant articulated their desire to welcome parents into their classroom as often as possible. In addition, each participant spoke about parents as the most essential factor in their students’ education. Participants felt as though parents were responsible for articulating their goals and desires for their student’s education and it was the responsibility of the teacher to work with parents to make those goals a reality.

Mr. Andrew for instance, conducted home visits to establish relationships with parents and promote family involvement. He understood which students came from families that were, for various reasons, unable to be physically present and he made sacrifices to make sure those families still had a voice. For example, he encouraged families to reach out to him via his personal cell phone at any time of the day if they had a concern. My interview with Mr. Andrew extended beyond the afternoon into the earlier portion of the evening (around 5:30) and his students' families were texting/calling him during our interview. After the interview ended, Mr. Andrew stayed in his classroom to return those text messages and phone calls. He felt it was essential to answer parents' questions and support them in as many ways as possible.

Not all of the participants were as comfortable as Mr. Corey and Mr. Andrew when it came to giving out their personal cell phone numbers. As a result, the remaining four participants established relationships with families in different ways. Ms. Amy called parents before the school year began to introduce herself and get to know each student's family better. She set goals for herself to reach out to each family a certain number of times every week. She did this to ensure she kept regular ongoing communication with families. Ms. Jasmine kept constant communication with families by sending home weekly newsletters while Ms. Lindsey and Ms. Mary communicated through a classroom app called "Class Dojo," an app that connects teachers with students and parents to help build classroom communities. In addition, Ms. Jasmine had an open-door policy where students' families were welcome to volunteer in her classroom whenever they were free.

The ways in which participants established and encouraged ongoing relationships with students and their families was how they learned about their students' various cultures. With this knowledge they were also able to modify their teaching practices in ways that utilized this cultural knowledge and it had the added benefit of showing students that they valued their culture.

In summary, culturally relevant teaching requires all students maintain cultural integrity as well as academic learning. The teacher participants in this study demonstrated many efforts to cultivate a culture of care and establish relationships with students and their families as a vital first step in creating classrooms that could be characterized as culturally responsive environments.

Cultural Competence. For years, researchers have looked at ways to link students' culture and educational experiences at school. Such research has given the link between culture and school a variety of names including "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan, 1981), "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), "culturally responsive" (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). Building on these theories, Hollins (1994) and King (1994) suggests school remains an alien and sometimes hostile place for students whose culture is not accepted, and they are not allowed to "be themselves." Culturally relevant teachers create an environment that welcomes diversity and utilizes culture as a vehicle for learning. Furthermore, culturally relevant teachers focus on cultural competence by helping students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the larger society's culture (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The participants in this study fostered trusting classroom environments and

relationships to develop their own cultural competence by understanding their students, students' communities and home lives. Consequently, their classroom environment and relationships allowed them to encourage students to be themselves in a variety of ways and their instructional practices showed evidence of merging cultural competency and academic achievement.

Mr. Andrew for example, allowed his students to wear hats in the classroom, even though wearing hats in the classroom was against school policy. He offered his fifth-grade students the choice to wear their hat in the classroom. He understood that for some of his students, hats were a form of cultural representation because their hats had been given to them by family members and therefore were more than just a clothing choice. If a student wore a hat to school representing a specific athletic team, Mr. Andrew would engage in playful banter with the student and debate "whose team was better." Mr. Andrew's decision to allow students to wear hats in the classroom was evidence of him attempting to welcome students' culture into the classroom. His ability to then link that culture to academic learning showed further evidence of culturally relevant teaching. For instance, Mr. Andrew utilized students' culture as vehicle for learning when he allowed students to bring in samples of lyrics from their favorite songs. As a class, they discussed literal and figurative meanings as well as technical aspects of music such as rhyme scheme. They then spent several weeks co-writing their own songs to different beats Mr. Andrew provided. This example shows evidence of how Mr. Andrew, created a bridge from students' home knowledge to classroom content as a way to affirm student values. More precisely, he brought the outside world into the classroom and used it as an asset in the classroom.

Culturally relevant teachers also understand that students must learn to navigate between their home lives and school. Thus, teachers must find ways to equip students with the knowledge needed to succeed in a school system that has traditionally oppressed them (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As noted in the review of literature, ELL students have been traditionally oppressed by the public-school system and must acquire the English language in order to experience academic success. In an attempt to connect students' experiences at home with the cultural capital (the English language) needed to succeed in school, some of the participants spoke to their students in Spanish. Three of the six participants spoke Spanish as their first language and viewed language as an important part of culture. More precisely, they viewed language as a cultural representation of their individuality and heritage. They also believed the same was true for all of their English language learner student population, therefore, they incorporated Spanish into the classroom to help students experience academic success.

For example, Ms. Laura, Ms. Amy, Mr. Corey, and Mr. Andrew encouraged their ELL students to speak and write in the language they felt most knowledgeable and comfortable. Since all of the ELL student population in this study spoke Spanish as their first language, Spanish was often the language these students chose to use. However, these four participants also understood, in order for their students to reach academic success they needed to effectively utilize the English language as well. As a result, the teachers allowed students to speak and write in Spanish, then required students to translate (verbally or in writing) their ideas into English. The goal was to honor and respect the Spanish language thereby helping ELL students maintain cultural competency and integrity and to achieve academic success.

Summary of Implementing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In summary, participants showed evidence of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in the following ways:

- Participants validated students' culture by creating caring, respectful, and inclusive classroom environments.
- Participants forged relationships with students and students' families to socially, emotionally and academically empower students
- Participants set high academic expectations with a commitment to every students' success.
- Participants utilized students' cultural knowledge and experiences to bridge the gap between school and home.
- Participants used students' existing strengths (i. e.: knowledge of music and Spanish) to drive academic instruction.
- Participants provided age appropriate opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness.

While participants did show evidence of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in the above-mentioned ways, participants' attempts to help students develop a critical consciousness was limited to the classroom. Thus, participants failed to provide students with opportunities to evoke change in their communities and advocate for social justice. The impact of participants' teaching strategies that showed evidence of CRP on their English language learner student population will be discussed in the following section.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy's Impact on English Language Learners

CRP requires students demonstrate academic competence. Thus, the final research question for this study explored CRP's potential impact on the English language learner student population. The six teachers who participated in this study believed all of their students were capable of succeeding academically and attempted to give that clear message every day. All of the participants required, reinforced and produced academic growth in their students. Since culturally relevant teaching requires that educators attend to student's academic needs, it was important to have participants elaborate on CRP's impact on ELL students' educational experiences.

Participants believed their teaching practices showed evidence that CRP impacted their English language learner population in the same ways it impacted their native English-speaking student population. For example, participants believed CRP helped develop ELL student's confidence and desire to learn. Additionally, participants felt as though their English language learners were held to high academic expectations, their culture was valued and that they experienced opportunities to think critically about stereotypes pertaining to them. For example, Ms. Amy gave her students a brief opportunity to engage in dialogue about the treatment of Mexican-American field workers during the 1940s. She intentionally selected this topic knowing many of her students were Mexican-American emigrants and some of their family members had jobs working in fields. Providing students with an opportunity to discuss this topic: (a) connected students' culture to academic learning; (b) helped them critically assess the treatment of Mexican-Americans in California; (c) helped the students value and understand the culture of their peers.

Culturally relevant teachers also think in terms of *long-term academic achievement* and not merely end of the year test results (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Teachers showed evidence of this type of thinking when they stated, the academic successes of their ELL students were not always immediately evident. In most cases, ELL students who were in these teachers' classes in prior years would reach out to the participants the next academic school year or many years down the line to share their successes. ELL students would talk about the college they planned on attending or career path they wanted to follow. Additionally, ELL students would thank the participants for preparing them for the academic rigor they were currently experiencing. Mr. Andrew provided an example of an ELL student who recently sent him a text message about the homework she was required to complete in her eighth-grade course. In her text message, she told Mr. Andrew that the work was "easy" and she remembered him teaching her how to solve similar problems three years prior.

When discussing CRP's potential impact on English language learners' educational experiences, it was also important to question how participants defined academic success. These teachers defined academic success as growth over time. In addition, participants looked for signs that their ELL students were developing socially and emotionally prior to checking for academic growth. Traits such as empathy, integrity, confidence and honesty were key indicators that ELL students were experiencing success in the classroom. Furthermore, participants believed academic success could not be assessed in isolation and must instead consider all of the factors impacting ELL students' educational experiences. Such factors included but were not limited to: ELL students' previous experiences in school, ELL students' life at home, and

parent involvement. Take the following quote from Mr. Corey, a sixth-grade teacher for an example of how he defined academic success for his ELL students.

I also measure success by the, the, out- the output of their work. Um, um, by their, by looking at how they've progressed in reading, um, and I have been dealing more and more with students that have decided, at some point in their life they have decided that they're not readers, and so, um, helping them turn around that mindset, that instead of them thinking, um, I'm just not a reader, I'm not good at math, or whatever that mindset is, and helping them understand that this is not where you, this may be where you are struggling, and we should not ignore that you are struggling in reading, or that you're struggling in math, but it's like a muscle. Like your, your brain is like a muscle and you can work on it. You can develop this, and it's not, this may be, this may be a point where you're at right now, but this is not, this is not what defines you. And so, helping them change around, turn around their, the mindset that this is, that this is where we are, this is not where you are going to stay.

Mr. Corey's statement that the brain is like a muscle which needs to be developed and exercised is an example of how the teachers in this study thought of academic success in terms of long-term academic achievement. Rather than equating ELL student academic achievement solely with standardized test scores or informal assessment results, participants assessed ELL student learning in terms of academic growth overtime. Viewing academic success from this lens, encouraged the English language learner student population to develop their academic aptitudes through continuous practice.

Ms. Amy was also a firm believer that ELL students must develop their academic skills. She also believed all of the students in her class needed literacy, mathematical, and social skills to succeed academically. Ms. Amy provided an example of how her teaching practices influenced English language learners' academic learning in her classroom in her following statement.

I was just astonished, two years ago, she's in, she's a sixth grader now. She arrived here, it was her first year in my, in my class, and zero English, but she, her primary language was solid. She was like a third-grade level... reading in Spanish. And I told the parents, you know, "We're gonna work hard, we're gonna," you know, "Do as much as we can." I, I think what also helped her was the motivation. She had that self-motivation and she really wanted to learn, and I worked with her you know, one-on-one, small group, whole group, and, and, you know, and then that transference you know, from Spanish to English. Um, when she left my classroom she was reading already at a second grade (reading) level in English- with 80 to 90% comprehension.

The student Ms. Amy described entered the classroom unable to read in English. After much hard work and perseverance, the student was able to leave Ms. Amy's fourth grade class reading and comprehending at a second-grade level. More precisely, the student made three years' worth (kindergarten through second grade) of progress in one academic school year. The student's progress was a great success for her and her family. Ms. Amy went on to mention the student is still performing well academically now that she is in 6th grade.

Ms. Mary and Ms. Jasmine both treated all the students in their classrooms as ELL students. They each made the argument that students in the grade levels they taught (Kindergarten and TK, respectively) all needed language supports. They made no clear distinctions between ELL students and students classified as English only. The same language supports their EO students received were the same supports made available to their ELL students. As a result of Ms. Mary and Ms. Jasmine viewing all of their students as ELLs, they alleged all of their students benefited from their culturally relevant teaching practices in the same manner. For instance, speaking in complete sentences and using correct grammatical forms was something Ms. Mary and Ms. Jasmine emphasized in

their classrooms. They believed acquiring these skills would enable ELL students to fully engage in learning opportunities and adequately express themselves verbally and in writing. Both teachers understood the importance of effectively using the English language to acquire academic learning, therefore, they placed an extreme importance on all of their students learning how to effectively use the English language. Thus, they believed all students gained the language support needed to succeed academically.

All of the participants strived to do more than just attend to the academic needs of their ELL students. The participants attempted to utilize culturally relevant teaching to get ELL students to choose academic excellence. Yes, participants made academic success a requirement for their ELL students, yet they also inspired ELL students to want academic excellence by encouraging self-confidence and perseverance. This was one of the trickier aspects of culturally relevant teaching as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) who states, “the trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to choose academic excellence (p. 160).” Teachers believed their English language learner student population desired academic excellence as a result of implementing teaching practices that showed evidence of culturally relevant teaching.

The data analysis presented here pertains to teachers’ implementation of practices that showed evidence of culturally relevant teaching, but they have only been interpreted and analyzed data at the micro level. Villegas (1988) argues, many studies fail to adequately examine both micro and macro social contexts in which is student learning takes place. As a result of arguments like Villegas’ (1988), this research study sought to explore the various ecological systems impacting teachers’ implementation of CRP using

Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems as a framework. I present this analysis in the next section.

Factors Impacting the Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The relationship between CRP and Bronfenbrenner's (1990) theory of ecological systems is best articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1996) when he argues, "a key to the enhanced effectiveness of public education lies not within the school itself but in its interconnections with other settings in society (p. 226)." His statement suggests, the interactions between a child's experiences at school and their environment(s) outside of school influence their learning over time. As a result, this study sought to explore the various ecosystems (contexts), from students' home system to larger societal and cultural systems influencing teacher's implementation of CRP.

The findings from this study show, there were several factors impacting teachers' implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Some of the factors found in this study have been mentioned in preceding sections such as: teaching style, social maturity, classroom environment, religion, parent-teacher and student-teacher relationships. Below you will find a more complete list of the many other factors impacting the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy that were revealed in this study.

- Teachers' Personal Background and Experiences
- Students' Experiences at Home
- Classroom Environment
- Teacher-Student Relationships
- Family Involvement
- Parent-Teacher Relationships

- School Policies
- District Policies
- School Site Administration (i. e.: principals)
- Neighboring Community
- Students' Cognitive Development and Social Maturity
- School Culture
- State Policies (i. e.: State Testing and Class Size)
- Religion

To analyze and understand how all of the factors influence ELL students' educational experiences and teachers' implementation of CRP I have created the following diagram.

Figure 1. Factors Impacting Teachers' Implementation of CRP

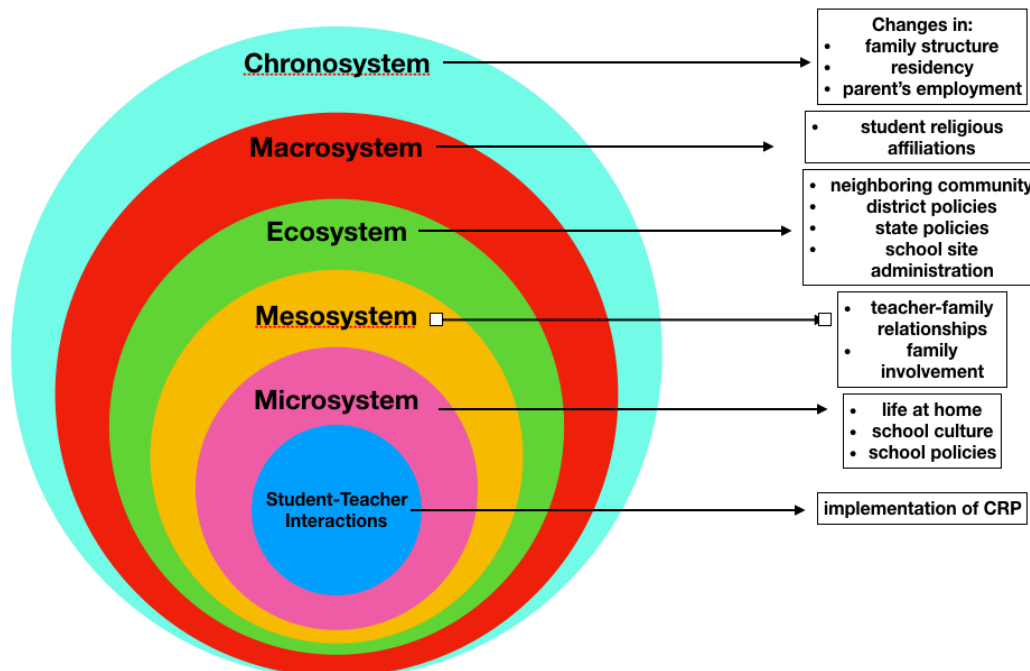


Figure 1. A visual representation of factors impacting teachers' implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

At the core of the diagram is the relationship between teacher's implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and students' individual educational experiences. More precisely, at the core of the diagram is the reciprocal relationship between a teacher implementing CRP and the student's response(s) to the implementation. In this study, this relationship was influenced by what Bronfenbrenner (1990) refers to as: microsystems, mesosystems, ecosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems and these systems can be seen surrounding the core relationship. On the right of the diagram, is a list of specific examples discovered in this study influencing teachers' implementation of CRP. The interconnectedness between some of these systems and their relationships are further detailed in the succeeding sections.

School and District Policies

Culturally relevant teaching is committed to the academic success and empowerment of all students. For the teachers in this study, this meant providing English language learner students with adequate learning experiences and opportunities. Teachers complained that school and district ELL policies influenced their ability to ensure the academic success of their ELL student population.

Ms. Amy, Ms. Mary, and Mr. Corey articulated, with confidence, that their district requires them to use a curriculum called *Systematic ELD* four times per week for 40 minutes or five times per week for 30 minutes. These three participants taught in the same school district. Ms. Laura and Mr. Andrew were able to identify the curriculum their school required them to use for ELL students but were not certain as to any other specific policies. The sixth participant, Ms. Jasmine, was unable to identify any of her schools or districts ELL policies.

Participants expressed a desire for a clearer understanding of ELL state, school and district policies. They were not confident that ELL students were receiving the appropriate academic supports due to their confusion and uncertainty with the curriculum and policies related to ELL instruction. Two of the participants who were using *Systematic ELD*, felt the program was not systematic at all and one participant referred to it as “a joke.” As a result, they stopped referring to the *Systematic ELD* teaching manual and began teaching based solely on their perspectives of ELL students’ specific needs. For example, Ms. Mary played musical instruments, sang and practiced using complete sentences with her group of 13 ELL kindergarten students. During my classroom observations, I noticed Ms. Mary did not use the *Systematic ELD* teaching manual at all. Mr. Corey on the other hand did reference using the teaching manual yet made significant modifications in order to meet the needs of his ELL students. During his interview he mentioned the students needed more practice using the English language in context as opposed to repetition in isolation. Consequently, he focused on themes like “healthy living” and gave ELL students an opportunity to practice using sentence structures that allowed them to express their opinions on a topic of interest.

School Site Administration and School Culture

Organizational theorists have suggested paying attention to school culture in order to improve the educational experiences of all students is important. Educational theorists have likewise asserted that a principal’s impact on learning is mediated through school culture (Hallinger and Heck 1998). Consequently, if the schools’ culture is not hospitable to learning students’ academic achievement may be hindered. According to Resnick (2001), school principals are therefore responsible for establishing a culture of

teaching and learning in schools. I took a closer look at the relationship between school site administration, school culture and student learning in the classrooms in this study.

I found evidence of the order and discipline imposed by the principal at Ms. Amy's school and the impact it had on ELL student's learning experiences. When I passed, her principal was pacing alongside a line of students and eyeing their behavior. At that moment, I realized Ms. Amy paced back and forth in her classroom eyeing students work just as her principal was doing. She also spoke about how he believed in order and structure. During my observation of Ms. Amy's classroom, I discovered that she ran a very tight ship as well. She set a timer during all transitions, she repeatedly said things like "move quickly," "you should already know where your journal is," and "let's go, we are waiting." It was apparent that students were expected to move quickly and be prepared at all times and that clear structures and expectations had been set early on. From the playground to the classroom the school's culture was evident: rules, structure and order were essential.

Ms. Amy believed the rules, structure, and expectations set forth by the principal made learning expectations clear for ELL students. Her fourth grade ELL students knew what was expected of them and challenged themselves to meet those expectations. Establishing rules, structure, and clear expectations also helped ELL students understand what they were expected to learn thereby increasing their chances of taking responsibility for their own learning.

Standardized Tests and Curriculum

Granted, the participants in this study agreed no test/assessment was good enough to serve as the sole basis for assessing student academic success, however, it was evident

that mandated assessments and state testing impacted participants' ability to adhere to this philosophy. Teachers stated, they had less time to research and develop curriculum that ELL students could relate to and curriculum (not found on high stakes tests) often disappeared under the pressure to raise test scores. At Ms. Laura's school site, she was specifically advised by administration to "stop wasting her time" attending to the needs of some of ELL students, because their assessment data "did not matter." Instead, she was encouraged to spend her time attending to the needs of students who needed more "drill and kill" instruction. Ms. Laura felt differently. She believed the classroom was a sight for social change and her third-grade students should have ample opportunities to examine the oppressive educational practices and ideologies constructing public school systems, yet student assessment results were the driving instructional factor at her school site. She made the following statement, "Here within this program, they... you know, it's all about the academics and it is very data driven. Um, there isn't as much room for organic teaching." There was evidence to support Ms. Laura's claim during her classroom observation. Over 50% of her daily agenda was composed of some form of test prep or assessment. In addition, each week the students in her class took *Accelerated Reading*, *Scout Pad*, and *Achieve* quizzes. On Scout Pad, students are required to solve 20 math related problems with an average score of 90% or higher and on their Achieve quizzes. They had to read two articles and score 75% or higher. At the end of the week, progress reports were sent home for parents to sign and students to return. This heavy emphasis on test taking and test preparation did not match Ms. Laura's teaching style. She preferred to spend all of her instructional minutes teaching in a manner that was more culturally relevant. For instance, she preferred to construct lessons that took

students' culture into account in order to help them reach academic proficiency. She desired to do this in an organic manner so students, not standardized exams, were leading the direction of her teaching. She provided some vivid examples of her experiences working at a previous school where test prep was not a requirement. She made the following statement.

But when I was building my own curriculum we were doing particular projects that were project based understanding some of these issues (i. e.: poverty, racism, classism...). And so what we did, for example, one of the lessons was we started talking about building houses. And we started talking about what like the area and the perimeter of some of these lots of land are. And then we talked about why we thought some of the land was going to be costing less, so we looked it up, how much does this cost. So we looked it up. When you look it up in real estate, sometimes you'll look up a house and it'll say this is how much it costs per square foot. This is how much, and then that opened up to a conversation of why do we think that's different. And they talked a lot about like well nobody wants to live down here. I said, "Why do you think that is?"

Through creativity and real-world application Ms. Laura was able to provide her previous ELL students more culturally relevant lessons. However, at her current site, high stakes testing too often was driving her instructional decisions. Her implementation of CRP, especially her ability to provide ELL students opportunities to engage in in-depth conversations about social norms, was drastically limited by her schools focus on test prep.

Culturally relevant teaching requires more than just "drill and kill" instruction. Yet, participants felt there was an over emphasis on testing and they felt enormous pressure to ensure that ELL students' test scores showed evidence of academic proficiency. As a result, they felt compelled to teach academic content that was likely to be on standardized exams in ways that were not culturally relevant. Due to these external

policies, participants felt limited in their ability to use culture to impart knowledge and help ELL students develop a critical consciousness. The ELL student population was further impacted by these external policies because they were limited in their ability to utilize the Spanish language to help them perform well academically. Additionally, all of the teachers noticed their English language learner student population's ability to demonstrate academic competence has been significantly impacted by an over emphasis on test prep. Each participant noted, ELL students' test results have continued to decline as the pressure to perform well on academic assessments increases.

In summary, teachers felt pressured toward standardization rather than responsiveness to the diverse needs of their ELL students. The standardization of curriculum and testing made it difficult for participants to navigate the pressures of ensuring ELL students scored proficiently on high stake exams while teaching in ways that were culturally relevant.

Summary of Findings and Analysis

Participants showed evidence of Ladson-Billings (1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy criteria. Participants held high academic expectations and offered appropriate supports for students such as small group instruction. Five out of six participants reshaped curriculum to make it more culturally relevant and develop students' cultural competence. All participants built on students' funds of knowledge and established relationships with students and their families in order to foster cultural integrity. Furthermore, participants working with students in grades 4-6 cultivated students' critical conscious by engaging students in topics relating to: stereotypes, poverty, immigration and Mexican American field workers. Participants working with students in grades

transitional kindergarten, kindergarten and third helped students cultivate a critical consciousness by developing social maturity which would later enable students to actively participate in the discourse taking place in the grades four through six.

Under the pressure from the larger macro contexts such as the district's pressure to raise test scores and the standardization of curriculum, participants sometimes moved away from being fully responsive to the diverse needs of students, especially English language learners. However, participants attempted to maintain high academic expectations for all students, use culture to impart knowledge and help students develop a critical consciousness and their efforts are impacting English language learners' educational experiences. Participants believe their English language learners student population has experienced increased self-confidence, long term orientation toward the importance of academic achievement, and sustained cultural integrity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation will summarize the review of literature, methodology, key findings, discuss implications for practice and policymaking, along with potential implications for future research. The chapter will be divided into the following sections: central findings, CRP for all students, reframing public debate regarding the educational experiences of ELLs, and implications for educators and policy makers. In the final section of the discussion, I will articulate how this study has influenced my future research agenda and potentially the research agendas of others who are interested in studying CRP.

Summary of Statement of Problem and Literature Review

At present, ELLs continue to suffer repeated failure in the classroom as a result of inadequate services to overcome language barriers (US Department of Education, 2015). Often such repeated failure leads to falling behind in grade levels and worst-case scenarios dropping out of school entirely. Therefore, graduating more and better-prepared students, including English language learners, is an issue of tremendous importance for the nation's future.

The combination of findings from Moll et al. (1992), Ladson – Billings (1995) and Bronfenbrenner (1990) suggest ways to understand and resolve this issue. Moll et al. (1992) believed existing pedagogical practices not only underestimate but also constrain the intellectual capabilities of language minority children. Consequently, Moll et al. (1992) contend, the key to academic instruction is for schools to tap into the cultural resources of individual students. Moll et al. (1992) defined these cultural resources as

“funds of knowledge. ” Along with this notion of cultural resources, Ladson-Billings (1992) proclaims educators must attend to students' academic needs while at the same time allowing students to maintain cultural integrity. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) achieves this goal by utilizing students’ culture as a medium for learning. In congruence with culturally relevant pedagogy, Bronfenbrenner's (1990) theory of ecological systems draws attention to children’s primary environment (family and community) and larger environmental factors to account for their influence on learning.

During an era where standardized testing has become a dominant indicator of student success, it has become increasingly difficult to locate teachers who create equitable learning opportunities for English language learners. Due to the complexities associated with serving students from various backgrounds and experiences, Moll et al. (1992) believed existing pedagogical practices not only underestimate but also constrain what language minority children are intellectually capable of. Consequently, Moll et al. (1992) contended, the key to academic instruction is for educators to tap into the cultural resources of individual students. Viewing a students’ culture as strong, valuable and praiseworthy is one of the key reasons why culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is arguably the most central element in the academic success of children who have not been well served by California’s public schools (Ladson – Billings, 1995). According to Davidson (2010), pedagogical practices and policies that impart knowledge using culture would not only respect but draw on students’ varying cultural/social experiences to foster educational equity for traditionally underserved students (i. e.: ELLs).

Summary of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of how public-school teachers define and implement CRP. Thus, this study used a qualitative case study/cross-case analysis design to examine how teachers from six elementary schools in San Diego County defined and implemented CRP. An additional purpose of this study was to explore CRP's potential impact on the educational experiences of English language learners (from the teacher's perspective). Qualitative research methods were used to identify opinions and beliefs about English language learners' educational experiences, culturally relevant pedagogy and some of the more fundamental challenges educators face while implementing CRP. Documents (i. e.: assessment data) were analyzed, in addition, interviews and classroom observations were conducted. The participants in this study included six elementary public-school teachers from six different schools. Pseudonyms and additional efforts to hide the identities of the schools, participants, and their students were taken.

Summary of Central Findings

Most of the previous research to date has not captured teachers' views as to how they define their instructional practices in relationship to CRP and the various factors that impact their implementation of CRP. The limited research addressing this multifaceted process have been focused primarily on defining CRP. Given the recent shift in curriculum, accountability measures, and the desire to foster equitable learning experiences for all students, the implementation of CRP and its implications was important to study.

Three research questions guided this study: 1) How do teachers define and implement CRP; 2) What factors influence public school teachers' implementation of CRP; 3) how does CRP influence the educational experiences of ELLs? The central findings that emerged from this study will be discussed in the following sections.

Defining Culture and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Nieto (1999) work in addition to evidence from this study suggests, culture is complex and intricate therefore it cannot be reduced to holidays, food, and/or language. Nieto (1999) writes, "culture can be problematic because it means different things to different people in different contexts (p. 128)." In the field of education, culture is most often used to describe a student's race, ethnicity, and/or gender. Nieto (1999) also states, culture is used to describe one's social status and is frequently used interchangeably with ethnicity.

Evidence from this study suggests, culturally relevant teachers use the term "culture" broadly. They understand culture to be more than something passed down from one generation to the next, traditions within one's family, holidays and/or food. Instead, the teachers understood that culture was multifaceted, influenced by social, economic, and political factors. When describing their students' culture, they spoke about what their students valued in addition to the way they looked at and interacted with the world around them. These perceptions of culture informed and shaped their teaching.

While the teachers seemed to have a broad and complex understanding of culture, they could not define CRP and verbalized their disinterest in learning the titles and definitions of new pedagogies. Instead, participants chose to focus on implementing practices and utilizing teaching styles they believed would benefit all their students. This

finding is particularly important because it encourages educators and researchers to revisit how CRP is defined by teachers and the implications when teachers have an expanded definition of CRP.

Evidence of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although participants did not define their teaching practices and styles as CRP, their instructional practices showed evidence of CRP. The instructional practices in evidence by the six teachers in this study showed that they all supported what Ladson-Billings (2006) referred to as valuing long-term academic achievement and not just end-of-the-year test results. Teachers set high academic expectations for all students, helped students develop a critical consciousness, and utilized culture to impart academic knowledge.

Teachers established relationships with students and their students' families to incorporate culture in the classroom and selected teaching practices that would best address the needs of each student. Participants forged relationships with students and students' families to socially, emotionally and academically empower students. Participants such as Ms. Amy contacted parents weekly to engage them in their student's learning process. Ms. Jasmine had an open-door policy to welcome students' families into the classroom as volunteers. She also sent out weekly newsletters to keep families informed about the learning taking place in her transitional kindergarten classroom. All of the participants utilized technology to maintain consistent communication with students and students' families. For example, Ms. Mary used an app called Class Dojo to stay in contact with families while Mr. Corey and Mr. Andrew provided students' families with their cell phone numbers. Students and their families were welcome to

contact Mr. Corey and Mr. Andrew any day at any time. All the participants believed maintaining regular contact with students' families allowed them to establish mutual relationships of trust and respect.

In addition to establishing relationships with the students and students' families, the teachers in the study set high academic expectations with the commitment to every students' success. The participants' commitment to every student success was evidenced in their teaching practices. For example, Ms. Mary set the expectation that all of her students would leave kindergarten grade reading at a level E (a first-grade reading level). She did not lower her expectations when a student made limited progress early in the school year. Instead, she worked closely with the student and their family to make learning more accessible. She kept modifying and refining her practices to ensure each student made long term academic improvement.

In order to help students obtain long term academic achievement, participants felt it was necessary to use students' existing strengths and cultural knowledge to bridge the gap between school and home. For instance, three of the six participants spoke Spanish as their first language and viewed language as an important part of culture. More precisely, they viewed language as a cultural representation of their individuality and heritage. They also believed the same was true for all of their English language learner student population, therefore, they incorporated Spanish into the classroom to help students experience academic success. Mr. Andrew utilized students' interests and understanding of music to discuss literacy standards (i. e.: rhyme scheme, stanza, author's message). Providing students with opportunities to produce their own songs helped connect the academic content they were learning in class with their everyday experiences.

Mr. Andrew believed his ability to bridge academic content with the passions and interests of his students created opportunities for his students to develop a passion for learning.

Mr. Andrew was not the only participant who utilized culturally relevant teaching to generate a passion for learning. All the participants strived to get ELL students to choose academic excellence. Yes, participants made academic success a requirement for their ELL students, yet they also inspired ELL students to seek academic excellence by encouraging self-confidence and perseverance. This was one of the trickier aspects of culturally relevant teaching as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) who stated, “the trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to choose academic excellence (p. 160).” Teachers believed their English language learner student population desired academic excellence as a result of implementing teaching practices that showed evidence of culturally relevant teaching. For example, all of the participants believed creating a caring, respectful and inclusive classroom environment played a vital role in sustaining students’ appetite for learning.

Creating an inclusive classroom environment showed students their teachers cared about more than just academic learning and wanted students to feel safe and respected. One of the ways participants fostered inclusive classroom environments was through morning meetings (i. e.: trust circles and class meetings). Ms. Laura for example used this time to reinforce social expectations such as empathy and respect with her third-grade students. This was also a time for students to voice their concerns and engage in discussions with their peers. Mr. Andrew created a culture of respect in his classroom by letting students know he cared about more than just academic learning by letting students

wear hats in the classroom and engaging in playful banter. Even though wearing hats in the classroom was against school policy, Mr. Andrew offered students the choice to wear their hat in the classroom. He understood that for some of his students, hats were a form of cultural representation and were therefore more than just a clothing choice.

Participants held high academic expectations and offered appropriate supports for students such as small group instruction. Five out of six participants reshaped curriculum to make it more culturally relevant and develop students' cultural competence. All participants built on students' funds of knowledge and established relationships with students and their families in order to foster cultural integrity. Furthermore, participants working with students in grades four through six cultivated students' critical consciousness by engaging students in topics relating to: stereotypes, poverty, immigration and Mexican American field workers. Participants working with students in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten and third grade helped students cultivate a critical consciousness by developing social maturity which would later enable students to actively participate in the discourse taking place in grades four through six.

One omission from teachers' practices that is embedded in Ladson-Billings' (1995) definition of CRP is that participants did not provide students opportunities to advocate for social justice in their communities – suggesting a significant limitation to the implementation of a more comprehensive CRP. These elementary school students' opportunities to voice their opinions were limited to classroom discussions, debates, and opinion writings. Ladson-Billings (1995) states this is one of the more crucial elements of implementing CRP when she writes, “pedagogy of opposition (i.e.: CRP) is committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment (p. 160).” The participants in this

study did show evidence of empowering students *individually*, yet they did not show evidence of empowering students collectively which is imperative according to Ladson-Billings who has written most extensively on the subject. Ways to support educators in their attempts to empower students to advocate for social justice in broader capacities will be discussed in later sections.

Factors Impacting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Their Impact on Student Learning

There were several factors influencing teachers' implementation of CRP such as school policies, teachers' background and educational history, and family involvement. Factors challenging the implementation of CRP included mandated state testing and district assessments, accountability measures that demanded instruction that was more rote memorization rather than dialogic and culturally responsive. Participants stated these mandated tests did not provide ELL students with the appropriate academic supports to demonstrate their knowledge of content. Additionally, "drill and kill" instruction enforced at school sites did not foster opportunities for ELL students to develop critical thinking skills or cultural integrity. Participants also expressed frustrations about curriculum not supporting their efforts to instruct their ELL student population in culturally relevant ways and, as a result, believed their ELL student population was receiving less than adequate learning opportunities. Teachers' perceptions of how factors impeded their ability to implement culturally relevant strategies supports the findings from the research reviewed in chapter 2. For example, participants stated state mandated testing limited ELL students' opportunities to demonstrate learning.

Despite the accountability pressures, participants resisted teaching to the test. Instead, they believed culturally relevant practices impacted ELL students' academic development gradually overtime and eventually increased ELL students' self-esteem, academic aptitudes, and desire to learn. Additionally, CRP helped ELL students feel as though their culture was valued and they were able to have opportunities to think critically about stereotypes pertaining to them and others.

Culturally Relevant Teaching for All

While the research questions guiding this study focused mostly on the English language learner student population, it was evident that CRP impacted ELL students and native English-speaking students similarly. In fact, Ms. Mary and Ms. Jasmine considered all of the students in their classroom to be ELLs. They believed all students benefited from language supports and culturally relevant teaching practices. The teachers in this study also claimed that both student populations benefited from teaching that explicitly valued all cultures, dismantled stereotypes and raised social consciousness. Consequently, the data from this study encourages educators to consider a very important question, if the participants' implementation of CRP fostered long term academic achievement, critical thinking skills and culturally integrity for all students, why do we not see these practices in **every** classroom?

As evidenced by the data and analysis in this study, culturally relevant teaching requires educators ascertain the individual cultural assets of their student population. Although, there can be value in students seeing their own culture reflected in classroom libraries, decor and multicultural celebrations, unless those things are directly tied back to advancing students' academic aptitudes such practices will not suffice. Rather than

viewing students as homogeneous groups and “celebrating” culture as an inclusive practice, culturally relevant teaching implores educators to use students’ **individual** cultures to make learning more personalized, accessible and truly inclusive (Gay, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Results from this study show, CRP pays attention the individual assets of students and extends far beyond race, gender and ethnicity. In fact, the teachers in this study placed greater emphasis on students’ everyday experiences, beliefs, and values than ethnicity and gender to help students acquire academic learning. It is important to note, this includes students whose culture is already represented in mainstream curriculum because CRP urges educators to identify the within group variances of all student populations. Recent projections from the Census Bureau show that minority students will account for more than half of all students in US public schools by 2020. Recent projections also show, one out of every five students will speak a language other than English as their native language. With public school classrooms growing more diverse every year, educators should be more interested in how they can best teach students from different backgrounds, especially students of color, English language learners, and immigrant students.

So how do we use the data from this study to help educators build classrooms that are more culturally relevant and better address the needs of diverse student populations? Evidence from this study suggests, educators and policymakers need to reassess how they are defining academic success, additionally, educators need to focus more attention and effort on establishing healthy relationships with students and their families. Equally as important, Shapiro, 2014 suggests we need to re-frame public debate about teaching

diverse and traditionally underserved student populations to include discussions about CRP.

Reframing Public Debate

As evidenced in the review of literature, most literature pertaining to the educational experiences of traditionally underserved student populations places emphasis on the laws, policies and teaching practices fostering inequitable learning opportunities. However, the data from this study suggests, we reframe conversations in ways that illuminate what can be done to make learning opportunities more equitable. Culturally relevant pedagogy is considered a pedagogy of opposition because it is committed to the collective empowerment and social justice of all students (Aronson & Laughter, 2015). As such, culturally relevant pedagogy represents hope against the current focus on the deficit mentalities maintained by public school systems. Furthermore, culturally relevant pedagogy has the potential to push back against policies that standardize curriculum and privilege test taking. CRP has the potential to dismantle deficit thinking and instead emphasize students' personal and cultural strengths to develop their academic aptitudes (Gay, 2012). Thus, if culturally relevant pedagogy is to be included in public discourse pertaining to the educational experiences and opportunities available to all students, it is helpful to clarify what culturally responsive pedagogy means.

CRP is a fluid ever-changing pedagogy. CRP is influenced by a list of varying factors and therefore CRP must continuously adapt to meet the needs of students. Defining CRP becomes increasingly challenging when considering that each teacher implemented CRP differently and in a variety of ways. Consequently, evidence from this study suggests that, the implementation of CRP is adaptively responsive to the needs of

students. Ladson-Billings (2014) attempts to articulate this sentiment when she states, “pedagogy should be a revolving to meet the needs of students (p. 82).” In essence, CRP is constantly evolving because it is defined by lived experiences and relationships between educators and their students. Given CRP’s fluidity, it essential to provide a more concrete definition of CRP to avoid educators mistaking it for any and everything. Data from this study suggests CRP: acknowledges students’ individual assets and needs, generates inclusive classroom environments, provides ample opportunities for all students to experience long term academic growth, and establishes mutual relationship of trust and respect between teachers, students, and their families. Defining CRP as such will allow educators to more adequately adjust their teaching styles and practices to bridge CRP with academic content such as STEM, ELA, and mathematics.

Data from this study indicated, teachers used a variety of pedagogical practices to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in ways that were most impactful for their student population. Culturally relevant pedagogy varied from classroom to classroom because teachers were working with different student populations. Teachers were modifying their pedagogical practices in response to the students in their classroom.

Articulating the various ways CRP can look and sound may prove useful to educators as opposed to trying to fit teacher practices into one frame. This is not to suggest that anything and everything is CRP. Allowing CRP to exist as a list of principles may be more helpful and supportive of what the educational community needs in order to begin providing equitable learning opportunities for all students. The list of criteria could include:

- Holding high academic expectations for all students

- Offering appropriate supports to foster students' academic development
- Fostering cultural integrity and competence
- Utilizing culture to impart knowledge
- Establishing relationships with students and their families
- Cultivating students' critical consciousness

All of the above-mentioned criteria were in evidence from instructional practices of the teachers in the study. The data analyzed in the proceeding chapter suggested English language learner, immigrant and low socioeconomic students come to school daily with cultural skills and ways of thinking that can be used as assets during the academic learning process. The extent that educators build on these assets and construct inclusive culturally responsive classrooms will ultimately impact students' academic, social and emotional success.

How Do Educators and Policy Makers Foster Culturally Relevant Teaching?

Participants in this study utilized students' culture to help students reach academic success. In order to utilize student culture, teachers empowered students socially and academically. In addition, they were responsive to the social, emotional and academic needs of all students. More precisely, in order for educators to build on students' cultural assets they needed to educate the whole child (Gay, 2012). Thus, policymakers and educators need to examine current curriculum, instruction, and assessments to ensure they capitalize on students' strengths and foster the development of the whole child. More simplistically, state mandated assessments, curriculum, and instructional practices need to engage students' cultural knowledge, experiences and perspectives to ensure social-emotional and academic development. For example, educators could begin by

investigating their current curriculum and textbooks to determine if the way academic knowledge is presented supports the needs of their diverse student population.

Furthermore, educators and policy makers must begin thinking of academic success in terms of long-term academic achievement rather than merely the result of state mandated student achievement data (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Rather than equating culturally relevant pedagogy's impact on student learning to standardized test scores, we must begin to look specifically at what students know and are able to demonstrate as a result of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

At present, educational policies and mandates emphasize standardized test scores and data-driven accountability. For example, Obama's "Race to The Top" initiative rewarded grants to states whose goal was to use student achievement data to drive instruction. As detailed in the review of literature, such initiatives have historically failed marginalized student populations such as English language learners. In order to move beyond the questionable validity of current standardized tests, policymakers need to support culturally relevant teaching by enforcing the development of assessments that are more authentic and accurately reflect what students know and can demonstrate. Presently, standardized tests often serve to highlight deficits, are used in an evaluative manner, rather than formatively, and serve to shape teacher expectations of student abilities.

Evidence from this study suggests, in order to fully support culturally relevant teaching, educators and policymakers must also replace deficit perspectives of students and communities. Focusing solely on what students lack, ignores the laws and policies impeding students' educational opportunities, and the other various factors creating inequitable learning experiences for underserved student populations. In order to

empower students intellectually, socially and politically attention needs to be shifted towards ways of fostering students' cultural competence. Students need to recognize and honor their own culture while acquiring access to larger society's cultural values and beliefs. Such values and beliefs include the ways in which the public-school system oppresses specific student populations. Therefore, it is the responsibility of educators to find ways to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a school system that oppresses them (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The results of this study showed, the impact educational policies (i.e.: mandated testing) had on teachers' ability to respond to the needs of their ELL student population, therefore, impeding on their opportunities for success. The importance of cultural knowledge and skills must be supported by policymakers who are in a position to craft policies that would support this goal.

The analysis of the instructional practices of the teachers in the study indicated that while teachers help students to develop long-term academic success, and increased self-esteem, perseverance, and a passion for learning, they were less effective in fulfilling their obligation to develop students' critical consciousness. Once educators have fulfilled their obligation to develop student's critical consciousness, students will begin to recognize issues of race, class, and citizenship, then take action to ensure their voices are heard in the larger community. This means the policies that construct the public-school system will be challenged by the very students populating its system. This is a crucial element of culturally relevant teaching because culturally relevant educators encourage students to actively pursue social justice for all members of society. Thus, educators need to provide opportunities for students to share their voice in public forums.

Lastly, there is a need to educate parents, teachers, and educational leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom. Future educators and current educators should have an understanding of what CRP is and how it looks in order to reap its full benefits. Although we cannot always see the immediate results of CRP, evidence from this study suggests, the long term academic achievement of students is evident. CRP generates students who are problem solvers, desire academic learning, and demonstrate a growth mindset. Although additional literature (Ladson-Billings, 1995) provides useful descriptions of culturally relevant teaching. In today's technologically driven society, videos of culturally relevant teaching would be very useful with all of its variation. Educators and researchers working together to create such videos to generate an online resource for teaching about cultural relevant pedagogy would be beneficial. Such resources would also be helpful for guiding educators, parents and other members of the educational community towards more concrete conceptions of what culturally relevant teaching embodies (the key principles noted earlier in this chapter).

Contributions to the Literature

Federal states and policies require educators utilize teaching styles and practices to educate diverse student populations. Results from this study show, CRP has the potential to help educators meet this goal because CRP is a pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1970). CRP's sole purpose is to help underserved students (i.e. ELLs) reach academic success by equipping such students with the skills and knowledge needed to excel. In addition to providing opportunities for underserved students to experience academic success, when implemented effectively, CRP equips underserved student

populations with the skills and knowledge needed to challenge inequities. For example, the ELL student population from this study benefited from the inclusive classroom environment CRP fostered. The ELL student population were encouraged to take pride in their cultures (as defined previously) and took comfort in knowing knowledge and skills are perfected over time. Furthermore, the ELL student population benefited from CRP by developing increased confidence, acquiring academic knowledge and demonstrating proficiency on reading assessments.

In addition to the ways CRP is beneficial for ELLs, this study provides information pertaining to how teaching practices can be used as tools to implement CRP in ways that support *all* students in learning academic content. Each teacher illustrated unique practices catered to their students' needs and different way to link school and home. All teachers provided a more inclusive classroom respecting the culture of their students. Additionally, this study offered insight into the challenges educators face as they attempt to respond to various factors impacting student learning and teachers' implementation of CRP.

Limitations

This study sought out six California elementary public-school teachers who, although they could not clearly define CRP, were found to implement Ladson-Billings (1995) criteria for CRP in their classrooms. The limited number of participants in this study suggests that the full range of teacher perspectives on culturally relevant pedagogy is not accounted for. Furthermore, those who were chosen to participate in the study may have been naturally more comfortable talking about CRP than those who opted not to participate. Additionally, given I am also a California elementary public-school teacher,

this may have altered participant responses. For example, participants may have portrayed some of their experiences as overly positive or negative. They may have also limited their responses under the assumption that I, as a teacher, would naturally understand what it was they were trying to articulate.

Furthermore, I relied heavily on Ladson-Billing's (1995) definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2012) and Ladson-Billings (1995) are the authors most cited in research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2012) focuses primarily on what teachers should be doing in the classroom. On the other hand, Ladson-Billings' (1995) research, describes the attitude and disposition a teacher must adopt in order to be considered culturally relevant. While consideration was given to Gay's (2010) definition, Ladson-Billing's (1995) definition embraced classrooms as a site for social change. Thus, this research study relied heavily on Ladson-Billing's (1995) definition due to its commitment to influencing attitudes and dispositions, student empowerment and social justice.

Considerations for Future Research

The findings from this research study suggest several important areas for future research. First, there is a clear need for evidence-based research that explores the connection between CRP and student outcomes. Such research needs to include parents, teachers and students to gain multiple perspectives on the relationship between CRP and student outcomes. Such research could be used to adequately educate parents, teachers and policymakers about CRP's potential impact on all students' learning. Such research would also need to focus on CRP's potential impact on White students since this student population also brings individually unique personal experiences to the classroom.

Currently, a vast majority of research on CRP focuses on the experiences of minority, low socioeconomic, and English language learner students. Evidence to support culturally relevant pedagogy's impact on White students would contribute to the growing literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and help educators understand how CRP can be beneficial for all student populations.

If we truly seek to educate diverse student populations effectively, we must also invest in quality teacher preparation and equip them more fully to implement culturally relevant teaching in the midst of educational reforms that place an over emphasis on mandated assessments. We must invest in developing quality educators that are culturally responsive to developing the academic aptitudes of diverse student populations. Consequently, research remains to be done on how to develop and further support educators wishing to utilize cultural pedagogy in their classrooms. We are aware that providing students with classroom environments that are academically supportive, culturally inclusive, and supports them to think critically are essential elements of culturally relevant pedagogy. However, more research that explores how to adequately support educators seeking to cultivate such a classroom environment is needed.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Email

Hello, _____

Below you will find some additional information about my study and its requirements.

The purpose of my study is to capture the experiences of various public-school teachers and learn more about some of the challenges they face. My research focuses solely on teacher experiences and perspectives in hopes of giving public school teachers a voice in the field of educational research.

I would like to interview teachers who I am seeking teachers who: believe all of their students are capable of obtaining academic success, challenge students to think critically about societal norms and values and use culture to impart knowledge.” Participation in my study would require an initial interview as well as a classroom observation. In the event questions arise after the interview, a follow-up interview would be scheduled.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Jessica Denton

Jess-09@sandiego.edu

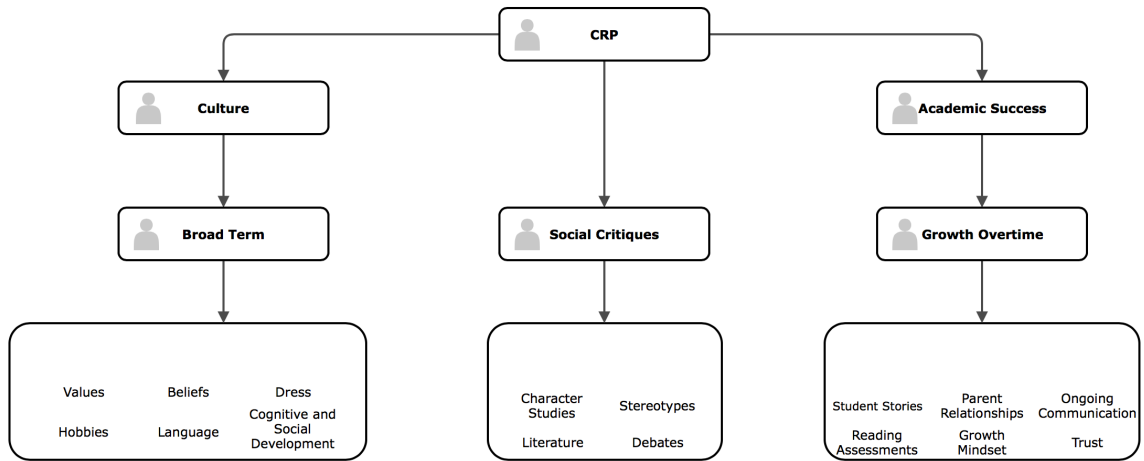
Appendix B
Interview Protocol Guide

Interview Protocol Guide

- Demographics
 - Tell me a little about your journey to become a teacher.
 - What grade(s) do you teach?
 - How long have you been teaching?
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
 - What influenced your decision to start implementing CRP?
 - How long have you been implementing CRP?
 - How do you define CRP?
 - How do you get to know your students?
 - Tell me about a lesson you taught that implemented CRP.
 - How did the ELLs in your class respond to that lesson?
 - Tell me more about your planning process. (How do you create lessons that are culturally relevant?)
 - How do you use culture to help students learn?
 - How do you challenge students to critique social norms?
 - How has CRP affected the ELL students in your class?
 - Can you give me some examples?
- Factors Influencing Implementation of CRP
 - Tell me about some of the challenges you've encountered while implementing CRP?
 - What role do other factors play in your implementation of CRP? (parent's work schedule, student's schedule outside of school...)
 - School/district policies?
 - Societal norms/values (for example: eye contact is a norm in the USA how would that influence your CRP lesson if...)
- Factors Influencing ELL Students Educational Experiences
 - What are some of the factors you feel impact ELLs learning experiences?
 - Tell me about your school's ELD policies and procedures.
 - Tell me about some of the policies at this school you feel impact ELL students the most.
 - Can you give me some examples?
 - Tell me about some of the ways an ELLs lived experiences outside of school impact their learning.
 - Can you give me some examples?
 - How has California's public-school system (at a broader more systemic level) affected the ELLs in your classroom?
 - Can you give me some examples?

Appendix C
Simple Diagram

Simple Diagram



Appendix D

Consent Form

For the research study entitled:

Teachers Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Its Potential Impact on English
Language Learners

I. Purpose of the research study

Jessica Denton is a doctoral student in the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is: explore English language development programs and interventions at a single elementary school site.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in one 60 to 90-minute interview. During the interview, you will be asked multiple open-ended questions. Additionally, you will be audiotaped during the interview.

You will be asked to allow the researcher to observe a minimum of one hour of instructional time.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

- a) This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life.**
- b) Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339**

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, an indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand how policies, procedures, and teaching strategies affect English language learners.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

VI. Compensation

a) You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will not affect any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Jessica Denton

Email: jess-09@san Diego.edu

Phone: 714-757-xxxx

I have read and understood this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date

Date: 4-26-2018

IRB #: IRB-2018-175

Title: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Teacher Experiences and Impact on Student Learning

Creation Date: 12-5-2017

End Date: 12-7-2018

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Jessica Denton

Review Board: USD IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial

Review Type Expedited

Decision **Approved**
