

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching in Practice: A Case Study of a Fourth-Grade Mainstream Classroom Teacher

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ABSTRACT

As a result of increases in immigration, more students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are entering K–12 classrooms in the United States. Thus, the need to study the education of diverse learners is intensified. Drawing upon semi-structured interviews, observations, and informal conversations, this case study examined how a fourth-grade mainstream teacher at an urban public school put culturally and linguistically responsive instruction into practice. The data analysis was informed by a framework that focused on three levels: instructional, institutional, and societal. Directions for future research are discussed.

An increase in immigration has resulted in a greater number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in K–12 mainstream classrooms. It has been estimated that CLD students account for approximately one of three students in schools in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Within this group, English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest-growing sector of the student population (Fránquiz & Salinas, 2011). While English is the language of schooling, Spanish is the home language of the majority of the CLD students, with over 350 other languages also represented (García, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010). Along with increasing linguistic diversity, CLD learners also bring into classrooms home cultures that can enrich the educational experience of their classmates.

However, educational policies in recent decades have marginalized many CLD learners. At the federal level, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] (2002) has increasingly challenged bilingual students and eventually left them behind (Menken, 2008). NCLB requires that from their third year in the United States ELLs must take the same standardized tests and meet the same annual standards as their native-English speaking counterparts. In response, schools often prioritize CLD students' English language learning over acquisition of content-area knowledge (Evans & Hornberger, 2005), putting their overall academic development at risk. In addition, CLD children's heritage language development may be neglected (Crawford, 2004) as a result of state-level policies such as Arizona's Proposition 203 (2000), Colorado's Amendment 31 (2002), and Massachusetts's Question 2 (2003) that advocate English-only with the possible effect of losing a family heritage language within two generations (Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

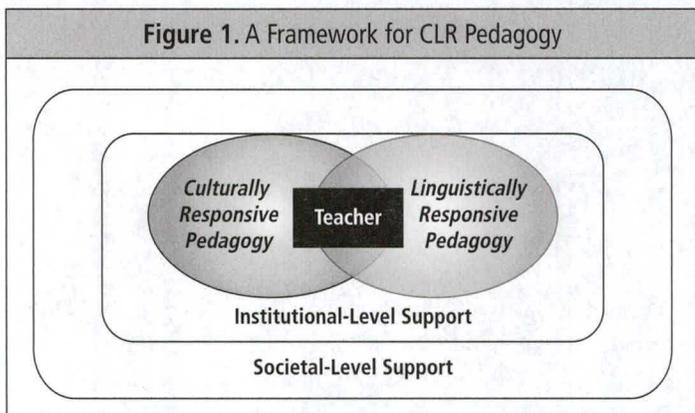
In response to the challenges posed by the growing CLD student population, culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) pedagogy has been developed and implemented (Banks & Banks, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). CLR pedagogy, also known as *culturally relevant teaching* or *culturally congruent teaching*, is a combination of culturally responsive and linguistically responsive teaching. CRT addresses the educational inequity faced by many CLD students by providing instruction that reflects and connects closely with learners' cultures (Gay, 2010; Vavrus, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Within this pedagogy, linguistically responsive teaching is a direct effort to support CLD learners by helping teachers to understand and apply second language learning principles to teaching ELLs (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).

Given the complexity of educating CLD learners, this case study, part of a larger longitudinal study, was designed to answer the following questions: (a) *How does the focal teacher perceive diversity and CLR pedagogy?* (b) *How are CLR elements infused into classroom instruction?* (c) *How do the larger institutional and community contexts impact the teacher's CLR practices?* To answer these questions, this case study focused on a fourth-grade mainstream teacher in an urban public school who put CLR teaching into practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To describe culturally responsive teaching, Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) developed a three-dimensional (institutional, personal, and instructional) framework that focuses on teachers and schools. For this study, the framework (see Figure 1) was adapted in three ways. First, while the institutional dimension is the school, and the personal dimension is the teacher (beliefs, practices), the instructional dimension is CLR pedagogy, as it is widely accepted that culture and language are interconnected and interdependent (Hinkel, 1999; Street, 1993). Second, to account for the larger context, institutional support (coworkers, principal) and societal support (research university) were added to include factors that influence schools and practitioners. Finally, with support at both institutional and societal levels, the teacher is placed at the center of the framework; it is the teacher who must develop sociocultural and sociolinguistic awareness and hone practice to meet the needs of diverse students (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The teacher must also attend to the larger institutional and societal contexts (Bailey, Curtis, Nunan, & Fan, 2001) that influence practice.

Figure 1. A Framework for CLR Pedagogy



LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers at the Center of CLR Pedagogy

As the implementer of CLR pedagogy, the teacher takes the central role in the entire process. “Although the curriculum may be dictated by the school system, teachers teach it. Where the curriculum falls short in addressing the needs of all students, teachers must provide a bridge . . .” (Richards et al., 2007, p. 68). To provide quality education that is responsive to students’ cultural and linguistic needs, it is important for teachers to adopt a CLR ideology that values diverse cultures and languages as resources (Hollie, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers’ unfavorable ideologies toward multiculturalism and multilingualism can negatively impact CLD learners’ attitudes toward their home language and culture (Fillmore & Snow, 2000) and result in limited learning outcomes that eventually lead to teachers’ reluctance to welcome ELLs into their classrooms (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). In contrast, when educators realize, interrogate, and adjust their ideologies toward diversity, their potential to use CLR to benefit students is promising. Lucas and Villegas (2013) argue that teachers’ positive attitudes toward diversity can not only strengthen the trust between students and teachers but also heighten expectations for learners, which could lead to higher learning outcomes.

To practice CLR pedagogy in mainstream classrooms, teachers need to pay attention to their instruction from the perspectives of both culture and language. In order to be culturally responsive, teachers must develop a deep understanding of race, adopt welcoming attitudes toward students from diverse cultural backgrounds, commit themselves to being change agents, and refine their knowledge and skills to address students’ sociocultural backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To be responsive to linguistic diversity, as well, teachers need to realize the value of multilingualism; understand the interrelationships among language, identity, and culture; and feel obliged to advocate for CLD students (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Bailey and colleagues (2001) point out that teachers’ professional development (PD) is an ongoing process, which involves constant self-reflection and self-learning. Teachers who devote themselves to CLR education must be driven and courageous enough to not only advocate for CLD students, but also be committed to improving students’ content knowledge and their own

instructional skills. In supporting ELLs and promoting CLR pedagogy, teachers often demonstrate an ethic of caring, actively “attend[ing] to the needs, motivations, and perspectives” of their students (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012, p. 100) regardless of where they come from, the language they speak, or the color of their skin. Such an ethic of caring, which supports students and puts their needs at the center, can potentially foster the educational achievement of all learners (Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004) and in turn motivate teachers to further develop their skills as CLR practitioners (Skerrett, 2011).

While it is crucial for teachers to actively seek PD that enables self-reflection and self-development of sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge, it is also beneficial to collaborate and to gain community- and institutional-level support. Lortie (1975) described teaching as an egg-carton job, suggesting that once the class starts, teachers tend to shut themselves off from the outside world. Putting CLR pedagogy into practice, however, is a daunting task; it often takes practitioners years to develop the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of CLD learners (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Rather than working in isolation, the goal can be achieved by moving beyond the classroom and building networks with colleagues, school leaders, and the larger social context (Bailey et al., 2001). A supportive school context has been found to be one of the major factors that facilitates the effective implementation of CLR pedagogy; trust, guidance, and agency provided by school leaders can substantially impact mainstream teachers’ motivation, confidence, and determination in developing their CLR instructional knowledge and skills (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Richards et al., 2007).

CLR Pedagogy for All Learners

CLR pedagogy is an educational approach that takes CLD learners’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds into consideration in order to provide instruction that is responsive to the needs of students (Gay, 2010; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Scholars have examined CLR teaching through the lens of culturally responsive or culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Richards et al., 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), linguistically responsive pedagogy (e.g., Heineke, Coleman, Ferrell, & Kersemeier, 2012; Lucas & Villegas, 2010, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008), and an integration of both types of responsive pedagogy (Cloud, 2002; Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010; Klingner & Soltero-González, 2009).

Due to its emphasis on academic language instruction and scaffolding, CLR has been found to benefit ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008). In addition, CLR pedagogy in mainstream classrooms is beneficial to native English speakers due to the fact that the language of schooling is significantly different from daily conversation (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017; Schleppegrell, 2004). Technical terms, comparatives, complex noun groups, and passive voice are all common in academic language in mainstream math, science, and language arts classes, but are rarely encountered in daily life (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017). Regardless of their status as native or non-native speakers, students may not have previous

experiences with the language of schooling (Valdés, Bunch, Snow, Lee, & Matos, 2005). While their needs differ depending on the degree of academic language exposure, all learners require guidance and support in the language of schooling (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017). As a result, academic language instruction and scaffolding, as part of the initiatives of CLR pedagogy, should be given adequate attention in mainstream classrooms.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

In recent years the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has provided a theoretical foundation for researchers (Schleppegrell, 2012) and informed literacy educators' work with CLD learners (Brisk, 2011, 2012, 2015). A SFL approach analyzes language through a semiotic system (Halliday, 1976, 1994) that focuses on the particular context in which the discourse occurs as language choices are based on context. For example, a formal written report requires language that is different from small talk between close friends; the language of natural science tends to be distinct from that of social science. In addition, SFL's focus on register (grammatical and lexical choices) and genre (form of language production) enables "analyses of differences in language use in different genres, across developmental levels, and among children with different social positioning" (Schleppegrell, 2012, p. 414).

A SFL approach simultaneously takes into consideration the three main variables that impact language usage (i.e., the content of the conversation, the relationship between interlocutors, and the role of language in a particular context). The approach "consider[s] context as the starting point, taking into account the three variables in a context of a situation when making a decision on the linguistic resources that should be introduced and explored for development of literacy skills" (Berg & Huang, 2015, p. 3). As all language usage is contextualized, based on SFL theory, researchers propose the integration of language and content while teaching discipline-area knowledge (Christie, 2012; Huang & Mohan, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2009). Thus, every content teacher is also a language teacher, helping students to comprehend and engage with disciplinary knowledge through linguistic scaffolding at the discourse, sentence, and word levels (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017).

Because SFL contextualizes language teaching and learning, the theory has been featured in PD as a helpful way to enhance CLR pedagogy. By introducing an SFL-informed PD intervention, Berg and Huang (2015) identified statistically significant improvement in linguistic sensitivity among samples of teachers from urban and rural areas alike. Brisk and Zisselsberger (2011) focused on the implementation of SFL-informed PD with 12 elementary school instructors and found that the PD supported the integration of SFL approaches. Similarly, in an 18-month mixed-methods study documenting the progress and changes as a result of PD in SFL, Huang, Berg, Romero, and Walker (2016) found that the PD benefitted the practitioners by enhancing their linguistic knowledge and facilitated learners' performance in CLD classrooms. Huang and colleagues emphasized the significance of an SFL approach and argued that linguistic knowledge should be incorporated into "all teacher PD programs" (p. 93).

METHODS

Setting

The study was situated in an urban K–5 public school on the east coast of the United States. Students of color represented approximately 98% of the learners; the majority were Hispanic children of immigrants (52%) and African American students (30%) from working-class families. Beginning seven years ago, a research team from a local university regularly visited the school to provide guidance and support for CLR pedagogy through the application of SFL in classroom instruction. All teachers participated in this university researcher-led PD once per month during the school year and for several weeks during the summer. The principal was highly supportive of the PD. Valuing diversity, she attended all the PD sessions along with the teachers and adopted supporting CLD learners as a mission of the school.

Participants

To examine the practice of CLR pedagogy, this study focused on Ms. B, a fourth-grade classroom teacher with 25 students; over 70% spoke Spanish as their home language. Ms. B was a Black woman in her early 40s and the only Black teacher in the school. She was monolingual in English, a native of the Caribbean, and had been teaching in the United States for over 10 years. Ms. B was chosen as the focal teacher because of her extensive knowledge of CLR pedagogy and SFL theory. She had been actively participating in the university researcher-led PD for more than four years. By focusing on the instructional practice, beliefs, and contextual support of this particular teacher, this study was intended to inform effective application of CLR pedagogy in a mainstream classroom.

Data Collection

A case study approach was chosen due to the exploratory nature of the research questions (Yin, 2003). The study was part of a larger ongoing longitudinal project that began seven years earlier at the beginning of the university collaboration. Adopting a participatory observation approach, the researcher was embedded in the school setting by observing in Ms. B's classroom for at least one day per week based on the teacher's schedule from Fall 2015 to Spring 2016. She also interacted with students during instruction, debriefed with the teacher, and had informal conversations with students after class. Additionally, the researcher conducted two 30-minute interviews with the teacher concerning her beliefs and practices in relation to CLR pedagogy. All classroom observations and interactions were video-recorded and later transcribed. All after-class debriefing sessions as well as interviews with the teacher and informal conversations with students were documented in memos.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data involved a combination of deductive and inductive methods. A deductive method represents a top-down approach, coding and organizing data based on the theoretical

framework (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), while an inductive method represents a bottom-up approach depending on data to drive the emergent themes (Boyatzis, 1998). A combination of both approaches enhanced the rigor of the study by keeping the theoretical framework in mind while leaving room for potential new themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Consistent with the theoretical framework, the three themes were individual efforts (teacher beliefs, practices), institutional support (coworkers, principal), and societal support (research university PD). After breaking the transcripts and observation field notes into chunks, codes under each theme were assigned to organize data and interpret the findings. After this process had been completed, the researcher adopted an inductive approach, putting aside the existing theoretical framework and conducting open coding to examine data from interviews, observation field notes, and transcripts of recordings to compare data-driven themes with theory-derived themes. The initial open coding yielded 27 codes, including CLD students, diversity, inequity, caring, sensitivity, language, agency, and support, which were then categorized into 5 axial codes (teacher ideology, teacher action, support from other teachers, support from the principal, and university intervention). Constant comparison (Strauss, 2003) was applied throughout data analyses, allowing the researcher to constantly move between the raw data and the codes to check the match. The axial codes echoed and confirmed the theoretical framework: teacher factors, institutional influence, and societal support. In the following section, findings are reported within these categories to answer the research questions.

FINDINGS

Individual Level

Research Question 1: How does the focal teacher perceive diversity and CLR pedagogy?

Ms. B was the only Black teacher and woman of color teaching a class of students of color in the school. During an interview in the early months of the study, Ms. B. recalled an incident that focused directly on critical issues of race, ethnicity, and color. She remembered:

When I was traveling in Philadelphia, a boutique shop shut the door in front of me and told me they were closed. However, when several White people came afterwards, they opened the gate and smiled . . . Skin color makes a difference . . .

In the same interview, Ms. B concluded that diversity-related inequity was “probably here to stay,” yet as “a proud teacher of color” she was determined to see herself as a role model and advocate for her CLD students through more student-centered CLR pedagogy (Interview 1, 11/13/15).

Colleagues described Ms. B as a “smart, confident, and elegant lady” (Informal Conversation Note 2, 10/23/15). As a role model, she tried to empower her students even in small details,

I dress up colorfully and put on makeup every day. Partially, it is my family culture . . . But more importantly, I want to show my kids that despite their diverse backgrounds and inequality challenges in this society, they should always learn to present themselves confidently and elegantly . . . (Interview 1, 11/13/15)

Ms. B mentioned during the second interview that she perceived diversity as “something beautiful and positive” and CLD pedagogy as “a critical way to address diversity issues and empower students” (Interview 2, 12/4/15).

Research Question 2: How are CLR elements infused into daily instruction?

In her daily teaching practices, Ms. B infused CLR elements through her ethic of caring, sensitivity to inequity, language scaffolding, and encouraging students to develop their own voices.

Ethic of caring. Ms. B demonstrated her strong ethic of caring in her interactions with students. “As an educator, you can never take little things for granted” (Informal Conversation Note 1, 10/16/15). During one writing lesson, Ms. B was talking about animals and zoos. While the majority of the students were excitedly sharing their own experiences with zoos, one newly arrived Latino student remained quiet and did not seem to pay much attention to the topic. Rather than calling on him in front of the class, Ms. B quietly went to him during students’ group work and asked: “Hey how do you like the topic?” The student kept silent while staring at her nervously. Ms. B paused a bit and whispered, “Do you know what a zoo is?” The boy shook his head. Ms. B smiled, sat down next to him, and described what a zoo is and how it looks (Observation 4, 11/13/15). Later, when debriefing the lesson together, Mrs. B commented,

A zoo is common to a kid from here, but could mean something very unusual for an immigrant child . . . It is always important to think from the students’ perspectives . . . They may come from different cultures, so their experience might be different from what we predicted. (Informal Conversation Note 5, 11/20/15)

Sensitivity to inequity. This quality was reflected throughout Ms. B’s instruction, especially with regard to the use of technology.

I always try to integrate technology usage in the classroom and encourage students to look for information on the Internet . . . Different from those middle-class children who are exposed to electronic device with parental guidance very early at home, many of my students have working-class parents who work for long, long hours and don’t have time and knowledge to supervise them on technology. In this sense, preparing them with basic technology skills should be seen as an act promoting for educational equity. (Interview 2, 12/4/15)

During classroom observations, Mrs. B frequently encouraged students to work in groups and use her mobile devices and personal

laptop for mini research projects on topics of interest. She supported students to take the initiative to explore information using the Internet. During group work, she often moved from group to group to offer customized help with technology.

Despite her frequent use of technology Ms. B emphasized, "We should always be careful about technology" (Informal Conversation Note 4, 11/6/15). When she assigned students tasks that involved using search engines online to look for information, Ms. B always reminded students to type "child language" along with the search term so students could get results that were child-friendly in language and content. While students searched the Internet individually, Ms. B always walked around and observed. When she recognized that one student's search term could potentially bring information that was inappropriate for children, she screened out irrelevant pictures, leaving the student with child-friendly pages that facilitated learning.

Language scaffolding. With many students from different linguistic backgrounds, Ms. B paid great attention to language scaffolding during instruction. Although monolingual in English, she drew upon Spanish, the home language of the majority of her students, to facilitate understanding. For example, she wrote a cognate in a sentence and asked students to guess the meaning of the new word based on the spelling and context. Students appeared to be excited and engaged whenever Ms. B used this approach. They shouted similar Spanish words they knew or guessed the meaning of the entire sentence (Observation 3, 11/6/15; Observation 4, 11/13/15; Observation 6, 12/4/15).

Additionally, Ms. B valued the prior knowledge of every student in teaching and learning new vocabulary. Instead of providing the dictionary definitions of the new words, she encouraged students to build upon what they had already learned to predict the meanings. For example, during a group reading activity, one student raised his hand and said that he did not know the meaning of the word "necessity." Ms. B acknowledged that this was a good question, but rather than answering herself, she asked the whole class to think together about words they had learned that looked similar to "necessity." Students shouted "need" and "necessary." Then Ms. B gave students the hint that "these words look similar because they share the same root," and asked learners to work together to define "necessity" based on the context of the paragraph (Observation 5, 11/20/15).

Developing voice. In addition to inviting CLD learners' home language into the mainstream classroom and including all students' prior knowledge, Ms. B empowered students by adapting learning materials to their lives and helping them to develop their own voice when presenting persuasive arguments. When teaching students to write argument essays, Ms. B paid attention to the relevance of the writing prompts to students' lives. "If mastering the skill of persuasive opinion presentation is the goal, it was truly unfair to double-burden learners with both picking up argument writing and unfamiliar learning style" (Interview 2, 12/4/15). Therefore, rather than following the textbook and adopting abstract topics

such as garbage recycling or assuming positions on unfamiliar and irrelevant topics like school uniforms, Ms. B invited students to think about controversial topics that they were passionate about and vote as a group for the most popular topic. In this instance, they decided on "whether or not fourth graders should be allowed to watch TV at home every day." Since this scenario was directly related to students' lives, the prompt provided a ready context for CLD students to learn to write arguments. Moreover, since students were given the agency to select the topic, they were more motivated to learn about the topic and had more opinions to share. "We find it cool, cuz we are arguing about something that we are interested in. I like it a lot . . ." (Student A, Informal Conversation Note 6, 12/4/15). Consequently, higher motivation resulted in active participation and thus improved learning outcomes. "I don't usually like writing . . . you know . . . but this is fun, and I want to learn (Student B, Informal Conversation Note 6, 12/4/15).

Ms. B further encouraged students to bring their voice to writing by differentiating instructional materials to meet learners' needs.

Lots of my students are afraid to bring in their own voice in argument writing. Being nonnative speaking minorities in this English-dominant society, they are too often used to obedience to the norm and forgetting how to voice their own opinions. I need to help them to get their "self" out. I have to tweak the textbook, otherwise they won't really engage themselves in writing . . . (Interview 2, 12/4/15)

In initial writing exercises, Ms. B found many students mimicking the textbook example she wrote on the white board and beginning their arguments in an identical monotonous way ("I agree/disagree with . . . because . . ."). To help students add their own feelings and voices, Ms. B replaced the textbook adult-written argument examples with more vivid children's writing from online blogs.

Ms. B noted that when learners were presented with these new mentor texts they seemed amazed. As one commented, "This is really cool . . . we get to say what we wanna say, just like . . . in a way we always do in everyday life" (Student C, Informal Conversation Note 5, 11/20/15). At the end of the class, Ms. B invited students to present their thesis statements. Unlike the previous monotonous openings, students brought their voices and creativity into their writing: "No TV for 4th graders at home? That's crazy . . ." "4th graders should watch TV every day? I don't think so . . ." "4th graders, go to your bedroom and turn on that TV NOW!" (Observation 4, 11/13/15).

Institutional and Societal Levels

Research Question 3: How do the larger institutional and community contexts impact the teacher's CLR practices?

Ms. B's CLR practices were made possible by joint support from the principal and her colleagues, as well as guidance from the university research team with a strong commitment to promoting educational equity and social justice (Interview 2, 12/4/15). The elementary school where this study took place was located in an area with a great influx of immigrant CLD students. The

school had been among the lowest in standardized test scores in the district. As has been noted, the research team visited the school each week and provided PD and guidance in linguistic theory and on ways to instruct bilingual learners through the application of SFL. Ms. B found this support helpful: “When I face difficulty in applying the SFL theory into teaching, or simply have problems explaining a certain linguistic concept, I can always refer to the PD PowerPoint . . . or I will just email Prof. Xxx for advice” (Informal Conversation Note 4, 11/6/15). While the team provided theoretical guidance and consultation, teachers determined what to teach. For example, at the end of a writing instruction PD session, the team asked teachers to collaboratively think about what genre they were interested in teaching next month, and based on teachers’ choice, they prepared the next PD (Observation 2, 10/30/15). In addition to theoretical and pedagogical support, the team also assisted teachers to critically evaluate their students’ work to trace their development over time. Debriefing meetings on learners’ development occurred twice per year, at the end of each semester.

As has been noted, the school principal was very supportive of this project. Ms. B reported that, in addition to offering administrative assistance to the team, she voluntarily participated in all meetings and PD sessions (Informal Conversation Note 3, 10/30/15). With ample knowledge regarding SFL and CLR pedagogy, the principal urged teachers to put emphasis on supporting CLD students and improve their quality of instruction to effectively address diversity. The principal also reached out to immigrant parents and invited their involvement in their children’s education through various school events. She encouraged Ms. B and her colleagues to collaborate in lesson planning and debriefing after teaching. As Ms. B noted, “We (teachers) supported each other throughout every stage of understanding and applying CLR pedagogy” (Interview 1, 11/13/15). They digested theories from the PD as a group and communicated regularly about their strategies and challenges in putting theories into practice.

DISCUSSION

Ms. B’s teaching practices have been presented as examples of putting CLR pedagogy into action. At the individual level, there was consistent attention to and accommodation for CLD learners. For example, Ms. B’s support of the new student who was not familiar with zoos demonstrated the importance of considering the unique background of CLD learners. For a typical fourth-grade American student, knowledge of zoos and experience with them may be commonplace, but this may not be the case for CLD learners from different cultures and family backgrounds. With her sensitivity to diversity and inequity, Ms. B avoided making an error regarding the student’s lack of response and instead offered an explanation that enabled him to add to his understanding. Awareness of and accommodation to the learner’s cultural background has been shown to increase engagement, and subsequently, learning outcomes (Gay, 2010; Vavrus, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

With regard to instructional support, Spanish, the home language of the majority of Ms. B’s students, was regarded as a beneficial resource and a tool to facilitate learning. For example, when she invited the class to guess the meaning of an unknown word based on cognates and context, Ms. B provided a scaffold for CLD students without marginalizing those whose home language was English. Guessing the meaning of a new word through the context and verifying the meaning is a skill that can facilitate students’ understanding of many types of texts. This example reflects a fundamental principle of CLR pedagogy that is consistent with research conducted by Brisk and Zhang-Wu (2017) and Schleppegrell (2004).

Another example was Ms. B’s endeavor to bring learners’ voices and agency into their writing. Previous research has found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more context-dependent and more comfortable when problems are presented within a concrete context (Heath, 1982). By inviting students to vote for a relevant topic for argument writing and placing the topic within a familiar context, Ms. B successfully created a learner-friendly opportunity for her students to exercise their voice and agency.

At the institutional and societal levels, Ms. B’s own statements show that support from the school and the research community was crucial. With a group of collaborative colleagues who were also committed to realizing CLR education through PD, Ms. B was able to continue to improve her instructional practices. With a principal who was actively involved in every stage of CLR PD, Ms. B was able to continue her pursuit, assured of institutional support. Finally, with a university research team that disseminated theories and pedagogical knowledge to guide teachers’ practices, Ms. B was equipped with strong guidance that informed her practice. Her reference to sending an email to a member of the research team when she had a question is indicative of the value of that support. Ms. B’s collaborative efforts with her colleagues, supported by her principal and the university research team, afforded her the opportunity to implement CLR.

By providing snapshots of one teacher’s CLR instruction, this case study presented a variety of ways to implement CLR pedagogy. By accommodating the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners at the individual, instructional, and societal levels, this CLR educator continued to adjust her teaching based on new situations in response to students’ needs. While Ms. B’s teaching approaches were altered as needed, her core belief in supporting students with diverse backgrounds and her cultural/linguistic sensitivity remained unchanged.

This case study also revealed challenges within and beyond the classroom. Two are particularly evident. First, the increasing need for students to be technologically competent in this global age (Leu, 2000) has been a particular challenge to school districts with large numbers of CLD students that are often faced with a shortage of resources. In this case, although Ms. B tried to introduce technology into the classroom to familiarize CLD learners with these devices, given the lack of in-class computers, groups of students worked together using Ms. B’s own devices.

A second challenge is the provision of long-term, sustained opportunities for professional development when implementing a new pedagogy. In this case, Ms. B and her colleagues were educated about CLR pedagogy and guided in its implementation by a university research team. Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of this level of PD as integral to adopting new instructional practices (Berg & Huang, 2015; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2011).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Focusing on one teacher for an entire academic year, this case study has contributed to the literature on the implementation of CLR pedagogy by adopting a three-level framework that guided the data collection and analysis. Given the potential of the framework, future research could adopt it to inform a multiple-case study that would allow a cross-case analysis of the ways teachers put CLR pedagogy into practice. Research questions might include the following: What are the essential interventions at each level of support? What instructional practices contribute to the success of CDL learners at various stages of development?

Finally, Norton (2001) states that while learners engage in classroom practices, “the realm of their community extend[ed] beyond the four walls of the classroom” (p. 165). Another useful line of inquiry would be to take a lesson from Ms. B’s principal and study the effects of involving families as essential members of the societal community thereby extending the potential of CLR pedagogy to serve CLD learners.

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