

The Benefits of Teaching Socio-Emotional Learning to English as a Second Language Students

Mary Stieveling

Touro College

EDPN 671 Theory and Practice of Bilingual and Multicultural Education

Dr. Patrick Finn

April 14, 2023

Culturally Responsive Teaching Project Paper

Introduction

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a practical instructional approach that supports students with disabilities and those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). The school that one teaches at contains this population. CRT embraces learners' cultures and languages, incorporating them into the lesson plans. Since returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, English as a second language learners (ESLs) have faced a challenging time adjusting to their return. According to Vissering (2022), ESLs have suffered the most academically, socially, and emotionally. Some ESLs did not have access to the Internet or exposure to computer-based learning before the pandemic. This created a gap in academics. The students had lost time interacting with their English-speaking peers, which has hindered their ability to communicate socially and academically (Vissering, 2022). Utilizing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) that incorporates the cultures of English Language Learners (ELLs) helps learners develop a positive self-image. This type of teaching also helps the ESLs learn how to verbalize their emotions and social indicators (Castro-Olivo, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ESLs' academic studies and language acquisition skills. The students did not have social interactions with their peers. Online learning placed an overwhelming burden on educators who had to interact with the learners on an individual basis. It also affected them socio-economically since they did not have access to the Internet or a personal computer.

This paper will examine the effectiveness of SEL boxes on ESL students within the early childhood school where a special education teacher is employed. One was injured and not working for a year and a half. After returning to work, one noticed that the learners had difficulties with their social skills. The students attending the school are referred to as "Covid babies" because the IEP learners did not have exposure to early intervention, and the typical

learners did not experience daycare; instead, they were cared for by a trusted adult while their parents returned to work.

To support ESL students, students with IEPs, and English-speaking learners, the Early Childhood Learning Center implemented a class-wide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) session led by social workers. This session aimed to help learners develop social interaction skills and effective communication strategies. This is more challenging for ESLs since English is not their first language, and they have been cared for by a trusted adult who may have spoken to the child in their native language. The learner may not have had exposure to interacting with English-speaking learners in a daycare or early intervention center. SEL incorporates culturally responsive teaching by differentiating the lessons to accommodate the learners. There is a bilingual social worker who works directly with the ESL learners and incorporates their native language when interacting with them.

To effectively incorporate CRT teaching into the classroom, teachers, special education teachers, and related service providers must collaborate to discuss best practices for serving these individuals (Chu, 2020). When implementing best practices, a disconnect often arises between the learner's home culture and the school's culture. What may be considered acceptable at home may not be regarded as acceptable at school. Chu (2020) stated that utilizing evidence-based intervention methods that incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and English language learners with disabilities become more engaged during the learning process. When students are engaged, they become active participants in their learning (Chu, 2020; Green & Stormont, 2018). When learners are engaged, they act out less, and they retain what they have learned.

History and Background of Culturally Responsive Teaching

The history of culturally responsive teaching began with Gloria Ladson-Billings, who introduced the terminology "culturally relevant pedagogy" to represent a teaching philosophy that engages students whose cultures and learning styles are not defined in the classroom

curriculum (Muñiz, 2019). Gloria Ladson-Billings researched effective educators who worked with African American students. All of these teachers incorporated three goals into their pedagogy (academic success, ethical and cultural identities, and recognizing social and economic equality. When these three components are integrated into the curriculum, the classes become student-centered. The lessons become culturally relevant, enabling learners to take pride in their cultures and themselves.

Geneva Gay developed a plan centered on building a teaching pedagogy that incorporates best practices. Gay conceived the term "culturally responsive teaching" (Muñiz, 2019). Educators create a classroom that embraces students' cultures and fosters a warm, welcoming environment. Django Pares built on this form of teaching practice. The learners build on their cultural identities and preserve them for future generations (Muñiz, 2019). Supporting the multicultural diversity of the learners creates an atmosphere that constructs an affirmative cultural identity while teaching multiple disciplines (Muñiz, 2019).

SEL boxes that reflect the learners' culture help them connect to the lesson. SEL intervention helps decrease inappropriate behavior by teaching the learners alternatives to social situations that they may find challenging (Caatro-Olivio, 2014). This form of teaching incorporates students' cultures, which fosters connections between learners and teachers.

History and Background of School/Location

The teacher works as a permanent special education teacher at Just Kids Early Childhood Learning Center in Lindenhurst, NY. It is an early childhood education school that works with students with special needs. The school is privately owned and is its largest site. There are twenty-nine classrooms. There are multiple settings inside the school, 6:1:3 (six students with autism, one certified special education teacher, and three teacher assistants), 9:1:2 (six students with autism, one certified special education teacher, and two teacher assistants), 12:1:2 (self-contained classroom: twelve students with special needs, one certified special education teacher, and two teacher assistants), 12:1:2 (inclusion: six students with

special needs, six general education students, one dual certified early childhood and students with disabilities teacher, and two teacher assistants), and 18:2:1 (inclusion classroom: nine students with special needs, nine typical students, one certified early childhood teacher, one certified special education teacher, and one teacher assistant). The school serves students with special needs and those in the general education program. The program offers classrooms for three-year-olds and a four-year-old Universal Pre-k program (UPK). The staff's children, who are of the appropriate age, are also welcome to attend.

Some learners with special needs are also English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and some typical students are also ESLs students. The school does not have an English as a New Language (ENL) program. There is one social worker who assists ESL students and their families, but she primarily works with students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Typical ESLs often lack support and struggle to adjust to a school setting.

Many learners have not had access to daycare or early intervention services since the COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures. The ESLs have had a challenging time adjusting to coming back to school. According to Li & Sun (2023), ESL educators found it difficult to connect with the teachers they worked with during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because they missed the social interaction with their peers that they would have learned if they had attended a daycare center or an early childhood learning center.

The school has implemented a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program to help learners adapt to the numerous sociocultural challenges they face. Most of the ESLs are Spanish-speaking and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). These students are learning English while also adjusting to their school setting.

The Action Plan

The method used for this culturally responsive action plan was to conduct interviews with the social workers at the teacher's early childhood school. The teacher had been out of work for

a year and a half due to a work-related injury. When the teacher returned, the educator noticed that the learners were having a challenging time interacting with their peers. The teacher spoke with their colleagues, and they stated that the learners did not have access to early intervention and daycare due to the COVID-19 pandemic-related closures. They noted that the learners did not learn how to appropriately play and interact with their peers since returning to school. This was more challenging for the ESLs, as they were learning English while adapting to interacting with their peers. Since there was a language barrier, the ESLs acted out due to frustration at not being able to advocate for themselves verbally. The learners would grab toys from their peers or cry when a toy was taken from them. To help these learners comprehend the social cues and social atmosphere of the school, they must learn how to read the social cues of their peers. By understanding the social climate of the school, they can develop the tools necessary for success in both school and elementary school. An action plan is needed.

Since one's school does not have an ESL program, the ESLs have a challenging time adapting to the preschool setting. Teachers need ongoing professional development to learn multiple methods for incorporating culturally responsive teaching into the classroom. Three key points for ongoing professional development are: addressing the perspective of an ESL student learning English as a second language, particularly when it is their first time away from their parents; incorporating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) boxes into the classroom curriculum; and inviting learners' parents to be active participants in the school setting.

Addressing the point of view of ESLs learning English as a second language, and it's their first time away from their parents:

The learners within the school did not have access to early intervention or daycare centers, as schools were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. After schools reopened, it was challenging for learners to adjust to returning to a school setting. This was more challenging for ESLs, as they lacked exposure to English and did not interact with English-speaking learners. There are teachers and teacher assistants who have immigrated to the United States from

another country to become American citizens. The staff can be divided into small groups, and the ESL adults can lead the groups and discuss effective teaching methods. This activity would help the teachers gain perspective from their peers' points of view. The groups can develop an action plan that they can use within their classroom. The groups would share their action plan with their peers. The staff could collaborate and write up their action plan and post it inside the school. By posting their action plan, the staff has a visual reminder of how to be more mindful of their culturally diverse students. The support staff has a visual account of how to support these learners best.

The bilingual staff members can offer valuable insights into how to be more culturally sensitive to their learners. They could speak to the learners in their native language to help the learners feel more at ease. The learners could express their feelings to the bilingual staff member, which helped them learn how to communicate with their peers.

Incorporating SEL boxes into the classroom curriculum:

The social workers can run this training. They create these boxes to build on the learner's social skills. The SEL boxes are used to give the teacher their prep time. The teachers do not see how these boxes are differentiated to help the learners. The staff is permitted to sign out the boxes and use them to help their learners problem-solve in social situations. There are multiple pre-packed boxes labeled to address specific behaviors or social issues that need to be focused on. The SEL boxes cater to students' needs by teaching learners how to adapt to social situations they may encounter in school.

Social workers could create a slideshow demonstrating why this is an effective teaching method to support learners. Each box could have an individual slide with bullet points explaining the contents of the boxes and how to utilize them inside the classroom. The boxes are culturally appropriate and are scaffolded to address the levels of the student's learning and language acquisition skills. Best practices are employed to ensure that research-based interventions are utilized to help learners adapt to their new setting.

The teachers and support staff could be divided into their respective classrooms. The teacher and the support staff could discuss what areas the learners need help with. An example could be sharing. Sharing with three- and four-year-olds can be challenging, especially for learners with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and those who are English as a Second Language (ESL). Verbal expression can be complex, and when a child does not speak the language, it can become overwhelming. The learners act out because they lack the skill set to state, "I want a turn, or I had that first." The SEL boxes feature interactive stories and activities designed to help students learn this skill. The teacher can use the box as a resource to remind the learners how to share. Once students learn how to communicate with each other appropriately, they become less frustrated. This leads to fewer inappropriate interactions with their peers.

Inviting the parents to be active participants in the school setting

The school had a PTA (Parent Teacher Association), but it was disbanded. The PTA is a wonderful organization that helps to set up age-appropriate activities for learners. They raised money for both new playgrounds. They would set up pictures with Santa and would have a holiday gift shop for the learners to pick out gifts for their families. They set up a spring and fall fair for the children to play in different activities. The classrooms were asked to create a poster for the celebrations, and they would be displayed inside the gym.

One would create a workshop on the importance of parent involvement. When parents are involved in their child's learning, their child becomes more invested in school. The teachers are motivated to interact with the parents instead of writing a letter or an email. Parent involvement makes the school feel more like a community, incorporating multiple cultures. Social workers could help parents who do not drive by creating a ride-sharing service. There could be bilingual staff to help non-English-speaking parents feel more at ease and welcome at the school. The parents would feel more comfortable speaking with the teachers, and a bond could be created.

The parents could create events that embrace multiple cultures throughout the year. For Spanish History Month, students could organize a festival and dress in traditional attire. Latin music could be broadcast throughout the school. The learners could try traditional foods. For Black History Month, parents could create an art show. The classrooms could be given pictures of artwork from famous artists, and learners could make their interpretations of the art. Their work could be displayed inside the gym, and they could listen to a book that celebrates black history. The learners could bring traditional dishes for everyone to share. Every month, a different culture is celebrated. The learners can discover and embrace these cultures every month. The PTA is a valuable resource that helps build a strong school community, supporting students, parents, and teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ESLs and ESLs with special needs benefit from CRT. When best practices incorporate the learners' culture into the school atmosphere, the learners connect to the school community. Using parents as a resource is vital for the learner's success. The parents bring their culture with them, helping learners become more invested in their learning. CRT helps learners take pride in their education. It teaches learners to recognize social inequalities and how to address them, develop empathy for diverse cultures, and take pride in themselves.

Incorporating SEL boxes that reflect the learner's culture and are scaffolded to be developmentally appropriate provides learners with the skills necessary for success. They learn how to recognize social cues and how to respond appropriately to inappropriate behavior from their peers.

More research should be invested in investigating the effectiveness of SEL boxes when CRT is in a preschool setting. The learners have not had access to services as their peers had before the COVID-19 pandemic. After reopening the schools, it would be interesting to see how these interventions have benefited these learners as they progress to elementary and beyond.

References:

- Castro-Olivo, S. (2014). Promoting Social-Emotional Learning in Adolescent Latino ELLs: A Study of the Culturally Adapted *Strong Teens* Program. *School Philosophy Quarterly*, 29(4), 567-577.
<https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=86581d16-8a55-494c-a942-8ec5bdde57fd%40redis>
- Chu, S. (2022). Culturally responsive teaching efficacy in inclusive education at Taiwanese preschools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(1), 97-114.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2021.1880547>
<https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=d2969230-9980-45a8-95dc-35868d01d901%40redis>
- Li, G., Sun, “COVID has Brought Us Closer”: A Proleptic Approach to Understanding ESL Teachers’ Practices in Supporting ELLs In and After the Pandemic. *Language and Literacy*, 25(1), 32-56.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2781646681/fulltextPDF/C2F7CD09A79A4675PQ/1?accountid=14375>
- Muñiz, J. (2019). *Culturally Responsive Teaching A 50-State Survey of Teaching Standards*. New America,
<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/culturally-responsive-teaching/>
- Vissering, D. (2022). Moving Elementary School English Learners Forward: Understanding How COVID-era School Disruptions Impact English Learner Education. *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/568