

# **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

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## MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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Graduate Student:\_\_\_\_\_

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*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Ever since I can remember, I have always felt like a foreigner in the institution of education. I grew up taking bilingual classes up until third grade, then I remember being removed from the dual program once I entered fourth grade. I never knew the reason as to why I was removed, and I doubt my parents knew either, considering their language barrier. My parents are from Guanajuato, Mexico. More specifically, they are from a small village where education rarely existed. The inhabitants of the San Jose del Carmen village were more focused on surviving and obtaining money for food than on going to school. My dad dropped out of school in sixth grade, and my mom was the only one out of her 10 siblings who managed to graduate from high school. When my parents immigrated to the US, they unfortunately had a hard time learning English, and up to this day, they do not know how to speak said language, and are only able to understand a few words. My parents' upbringing and experience with education impacted the way they presented education to my brother and I. Growing up, they would constantly tell us the importance of education. They would reiterate how going to college and obtaining a degree was the only way to ensure a secure future. Throughout my academic career, I took it seriously and used my parents' experience as motivation. Their sacrifices motivated me to do well in school so that I could provide for them in the future. However, I often found myself discouraged because I felt like an outcast in school. When I looked at my teachers, I did not feel a sense of connection with them. Being a Mexican student with brown skin and indigenous features, it was hard for me to feel a sense of familiarity with my teachers, who were often white females or males. I did not sense that teachers cared for me or my education. I also would often notice that they were not enthusiastic about teaching. They lacked engaging us as students, and never truly motivated us to care for our education. I had to find that motivation myself.



I often found myself not being seen in school due to a huge part of the curriculum we would learn, especially in history and English classes. History classes were always full of American history and European history. I did not want to know about these historical events because I did not care for them. I wanted to learn about my heritage, about my ancestors. I was never exposed to my culture in my learning trajectories. Equity in education is crucial. I believe that schools need to be equitable for all students to teach them things that align with their culture. This is vital, especially for multicultural students, to feel a sense of belonging in schools.

One important event in education is the Mendez vs Westminster case of 1946. This case was very important because it aided the process of the Brown vs Board of Education case. The Mendez vs Westminster case focused on desegregating schools for Mexican American and Mexican students. I never recalled learning about this case in school and have only just learned about it now that I am in my master's program. I think that this says a lot about the state of the education we receive. Education is presented in such a mainstream way that teachers are afraid to teach outside of the box and diversify their curriculum. Moll (2010) describes the hardships and brutalities Mexican Americans and Mexican students faced during segregation when it came to their education. The author describes the schooling of Mexican students as being subjected to discriminatory educational practices. Students were often unfairly labeled as intellectually deficient based on flawed intelligence tests. Students had no choice in pursuing academic careers. Instead, they were forced into vocational or industrial education. Most importantly, students were harshly mistreated by having English-only policies imposed in the classroom. Spanish, their native tongue, was banned, and if spoken, they would receive unjust punishments.

For instance, Moll (2010) explicitly pinpoints the exact historical practices that marginalized Mexican-American students as being

characterized by:(a) a strong reliance on IQ testing that categorized the students as intellectually inept, (b) tracking into industrial or other nonacademic forms of instruction, (c) coercive Americanization practices, including the imposition of English-only and the punitive subordination of Spanish, and (d) generally negative perceptions of their culture, motivation, and educability. (p.444).

Mexican students were denied a chance to show their potential from the get-go. Society had labeled them as individuals incapable of learning and stripped them of their culture. The school system's goal was to make them assimilate into American culture, and as the author states, this form of education is called “educational practices for the protection of White privilege”(p.444). Oftentimes in the education setting, students who are Caucasian have often had privileges in the school setting. These privileges arise from segregation, discriminatory funding, and restrictive zoning laws. For instance, one example that comes to mind is the application of redlining, which methodically turned down Black and Latinx families' access to home ownership in specific neighborhoods. This then leads them to underfunded schools in communities of color due to property tax-based financing structures (Rothstein, 2017). On the other hand, schools that are located in primarily White neighborhoods receive better funding, resources, and better-prepared teachers, while students of marginalized backgrounds are often positioned in overflowing, underfunded schools with a small number of educational opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Although my schooling experience was not this severe, and I did not go through this type of severe oppression, I cannot help but think that I, too, was forced to assimilate into American culture within my education. I was taken out of the dual bilingual program in third grade with no good justification and forced into a classroom full of White students. I remember that I was no longer practicing my native tongue at school, which is where most of my time was spent. I was able to practice my native language at home, but my proficiency went down, and my mom noticed this as well. To this day, my Spanish skills are not what they were like when I was in

third grade. My identity was taken away from me involuntarily, and thus my journey of learning American content and culture began.

As a current educator, I want to offer my students the opportunity to learn through a multicultural lens. I hope to provide them with an education that sheds light on their culture and empowers them to take ownership of their learning as well as their backgrounds. I want to be able to inspire my students to dig deep within their roots and help them be proud of who they are and where they come from. I want to shape critical-thinking students who ask inquisitive questions and think deeply about the education they are receiving. Students have the right to be autonomous learners who have choices and a say about the education they are receiving. Therefore, teachers need to practice ways in which they can be educators who offer students an education that aligns with their culture, background, and needs. To do this, one must implement a culturally responsive teaching framework in one's classroom. When one practices and implements CRT, one can recognize, value, and include students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in the learning process (Gay, 2018). The CRT framework surpasses simply recognizing diversity; it consistently combines students' cultural identities into the curriculum that is being taught and into the teaching strategies, and it affects the communication that happens in the classroom to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. If I am to create an inclusive and equitable learning space for my students, as well as to minimize distractions and behaviors, I must learn how to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom so that they have a safe and comfortable space to learn. The CRT framework will inform my work as an educator, prompting me to adopt said framework as a theoretical lens to examine my pedagogy as a preservice teacher in a middle school language arts classroom.

## **Guiding Pedagogical Theory**

Culturally responsive teaching is an educational framework designed to enhance inclusivity, effectiveness, and relevance in learning by recognizing and valuing students' diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives (Gay, 2010). The goal of culturally responsive teaching is to cultivate a supportive and respectful classroom environment where students from all backgrounds feel acknowledged and empowered to achieve academic success. Ladson-Billings(1995) is the person who pioneered the theory of multicultural learning so that students have the opportunity to develop their learning skills in an intellectual, social, emotional, and political way. The author spent roughly three years researching eight teachers who were viewed as excellent educators by the parents of the students they taught. She chose to observe these educators and see whether they were encouraging students to (1) achieve academic success, (2) cultural competence, and (3) critique social inequities. The teachers excelled at achieving the three tenets of culturally responsive teaching, even though each educator had a unique way of teaching. The educators Ladson-Billings observed were all stronger in a different skill. For example, one teacher was more structured and firm in their teachings, while another was more focused on being more progressive with their teaching strategies.

As Ladson-Billings progressed through her research, she concluded that all the exemplary teachers shared the same philosophy of teaching belief. The author concluded that for teachers to be culturally responsive they need to show the following characteristics: (a); teachers need to keep in mind their self-conceptions as well as that of other individuals in a culturally relevant way, (b); the way social relationships are structured in a culturally responsive way, and (c); the conceptions of knowledge culturally relevant teachers have. Teachers work with a diverse student body population. A lot of students struggle with putting effort into their schooling since

they view it as boring. Students would much rather talk with their friends than do their work. This often leads to teacher burnout. Teachers get tired and frustrated when their students do not do any work or when they do not listen to directions. Therefore, it is important to develop engaging lessons that stimulate students' curiosity and encourage them to learn. One way to do this is to create lessons that reflect students' lived experiences while tying them to the curriculum. When students can connect the learning they are doing in the classroom to the real world, they can see the value of the knowledge they are gaining. Culturally responsive teaching aims to tap into the funds of knowledge of students to create stronger and motivated learners.

As teachers, it is easier to get frustrated and let your students get away with this behavior rather than repeating over and over again to them that they need to get their work done. When teachers experience this type of low-working behavior from their students, they are bound to look at their students as low achievers. However, if one wants to be a culturally responsive teacher, one must believe that all students can achieve and are capable of academic success. In other words, one needs to see teaching as a positive force that can reach students and push them to do their best. Teachers need to give themselves more grace and remind themselves that teaching is an art that is unpredictable and always evolving. As teachers, we need to remind ourselves that we need to be patient with our students and help them understand that education is vital in their lives. Enacting culturally responsive teaching strategies can change the classrooms by acknowledging and appreciating students' diverse cultural backgrounds. In doing so, it will enhance engagement and academic achievement. For instance, CRT draws attention to using students' cultural strengths rather than focusing on limitations or learned helplessness, which will then create an inclusive environment that elevates academic expectations for all students. By incorporating students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences into the curriculum, one as an

educator can make their learning experience more relevant and powerful, which is especially advantageous for low-achieving students.

Culturally responsive teaching means not accepting failure in one's classroom. High expectations need to be set in stone so that students know that failure is not accepted in the classroom. Educators can help students see the value of education by clearly communicating to students that they are capable of learning and being academically successful, as well as teaching them through a cultural lens. When we focus our teachings to be culturally relevant, we can help our students feel a sense of belonging and help them feel that they are cared for and valued. Practicing culturally responsive teaching means valuing diversity in the classroom. As an educators, it means that we will offer a safe space for students that welcomes them and their backgrounds. When we are teaching in a culturally responsive way, we are taking the time to get to know where our students come from so that we can provide them with the education that best fits their needs.

Additionally, social relations need to be implemented in the classroom to create a culturally relevant pedagogy. By emphasizing building relationships, educators are consciously making the effort to maintain good standing relationships with their students. In other words, teachers and students are fair and mutually respectful. Students put themselves in the shoes of the students, and the students put themselves in the shoes of the teachers. A culture of collective learning was also observed throughout the observations of Ladson-Billings. The teachers she observed demonstrated a huge emphasis on collaboration in learning among the students. The teachers communicated with the students that failure was not an option. They held the students accountable and made sure that each student knew that they had a strength that they brought with

them to the classroom. The teachers highly encouraged their students to use said strengths to help each other out so that they can all be academically successful.

Culturally responsive teachers also place a heavy emphasis on the curriculum they teach and how they perceive knowledge. Educators who practice CRT have a growth mindset. They don't see knowledge as something that happens quickly, it is something that you are constantly working on to acquire and get better at. For students to be academically successful, teachers need to be passionate about knowledge and learning. Educators need to have the ability to pass on this passion to their students so that they can stay motivated to achieve academic success. Learning is something that is not easy. Therefore, scaffolds need to be provided so that students have the opportunity to complete the work they are doing at an appropriate level that they can achieve, so that they do not get frustrated and give up on their learning. Education should be an engaging journey, not a race to get through the curriculum.

Culturally responsive teaching is a theory that must meet the following criteria: the ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). To pursue the first tenet and apply it to my teaching, I have to find ways to engage and motivate my students to care about language arts. As I have built relationships with my students, I have noticed that they are a social group who like to work on things in groups in a hands-on manner. Their learning interests lie in the art of making and feeling a sense of belonging with their peers. As a future culturally responsive educator, I must find ways in which my students can have fun in their learning and creatively learn about language arts. Social relations will be emphasized as well in my classroom. Students tend to only talk to their friends and shy away when it comes to working with others. I plan to make learning more collaborative and help

students see that they need to be open to talking to others they may be unfamiliar with. I will also offer them choices; providing autonomy and letting them know that sometimes they can work with their friends. I will also explain to them that in the real world, when they obtain a position, they are going to have to work with people they may not be familiar with.

As a student, I always appreciated when teachers would tell us the importance of the work that we would be doing instead of demanding we do said work. When my teachers would explain the importance of the work we would have to do, it would motivate me to try and do my best on the assignments that were assigned. In my first two months in the classroom, I have noticed that a lot of my students are not motivated to complete their work. They have a lot of great career goals, but it is my role to help them see that for them to obtain their goals, they need to start now, focus, and take their work seriously. This approach will show them that they can achieve the career goals that they have set for themselves. The culturally responsive theory of Gloria Ladson Billings will aid me in transforming my classroom within this upcoming school year so that I can successfully help my students become academically successful, aid them in becoming critical thinkers, develop a critical consciousness, as well as teach them through a cultural framework that helps them feel seen. I believe this will help students feel a sense of worth and belonging in my classroom.

### **Connections to InTASC Standards**

The goal of my action research project is to find ways to engage my students with the work that we are doing and learning. I also want to find ways in which I can make the material that we are learning culturally relevant. I, of course, want my students to become critical thinkers as well, but my main focus is to find and come up with ways to engage my students and make the material they are working with culturally relevant so that they can find themselves engaged



and eager to learn. I have noticed that my students are not engaged with the material that I present to them. They often have bored looks on their faces and detest doing the work that is assigned to them. I understand that school can be boring at times since I was in their shoes in middle and high school as well. I hated school, but once I got into college and was able to take classes that interested me, I started to see growth within myself and my learning. I believe that I was more successful in college because, as college-level students, we have more autonomy and more of a choice with what we want to spend our time learning about. As an educator who hopes to practice culturally responsive teaching, I want my students to have as much autonomy in their learning so that they can be engaged and find joy in their learning.

My research project aligns with the InTASC standards because I will be creating a space to help my students be academically successful, implementing diverse works of literature from various backgrounds that my students can feel connected to, and I will also push them to be critical thinkers that question the world around them, especially the educational system. My research project meets InTASC Standard 2: Learning Differences, Standard 3: Learning Environments, and Standard 5: Application of Content.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) meets standard two because it supports learning differences and heavily highlights that educators must be conscious of, and consider the various learning needs, backgrounds, and experiences of students to guarantee nondiscriminatory access to education. Acknowledging that students come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds is important to consider because they affect and impact the way each student learns. Therefore, it is crucial to provide students with scaffolds such as instruction that is relevant and meaningful to them. This type of instruction will help reduce the cultural disconnect that may hamper their learning. In my middle school language arts class, I will

achieve standard two by creating culturally rich lessons and connecting to my students' cultural backgrounds. In addition, I will reflect on my teaching strategies by evaluating my students' assessments to see if I am meeting the learning needs of my students. If I am not, then additional differentiation will be implemented so that my students can have more than one opportunity to be successful.

To achieve InTASC standard Three, I intend to create a learning environment that is inclusive and equitable for all students in the classroom. In other words, this translates to a calm, quiet space where students are mindful and respectful of each other's right to learn. Thus, students will come up with classroom rules, procedures, and expectations so that they can have a sense of autonomy and feel like they have a say in the classroom environment. One strategy that I will use to facilitate an inclusive and equitable environment for all students is to encourage positive student relationships. For example, I will incorporate a lot of partner and group work when doing activities such as reading articles and completing annotations on said articles. When we, as educators, allow students the opportunity to collaborate, we are helping them see the value of education as well as to see and hear different perspectives from their peers.

To accomplish InTASC standard five, I will help my students and guide them through my middle school language arts class with all the support that they need. To do this, I will aid students in applying the knowledge they are learning and doing in meaningful ways where they can connect to it personally. To make my middle school language arts class more interesting, I will bring in articles and writing prompts that pique my students' interests. For example, I can have my students write a poem that focuses on explaining what they think of their culture and how it shapes their identity. Another activity that I can implement to meet standard five is to include at least ten minutes of writing time in my classes. This ten-minute free writing time will

be a space where students can write about their personal experiences, family histories, and cultural traditions. This activity will hopefully foster a sense of belonging with them while allowing them to connect to the content in the classroom.

These standards align with the three tenets of CRT and my overall research project. These standards will help to show that the practice of CRT can heavily impact students to show greater success when teachers take the time to implement culturally relevant materials, push students to be successful and not accept failure, and probe students to question their surroundings to become critical thinkers.

### **Summary**

Students in the school system are often dismissed or passed over because they show no care for their education. Teachers are often left burnt out because they get tired of pestering their students to pay attention, stop talking, and do their work. In reality, students are not going to listen to a teacher if what they are learning is boring and irrelevant to them. Students need to be challenged and told that they are capable of achieving great things. Students need teachers who take the time to find a diverse curriculum where they see their students' personal backgrounds being reflected. Students are complex individuals who are trying to discover who they are in the world. If we, as educators, take the time to listen to their needs and observe what curriculum is relevant and engaging to them, then we might have a true impact on these students, motivating all students to find their purpose in the world.

## **Chapter 2. Review of Relevant Research and Scholarship**

Throughout my four years working in public education, I have noticed a disconnection where teachers do not put the effort into connecting and getting to know their students on a cultural level. Education in the classroom is a fast-paced environment where an educator faces many challenges, such as student behaviors, distractions, and being able to manage the classroom. It is easier for educators to take the path of doing the least and doing the bare minimum. Students might take notice of this and see that their teacher's passion for teaching is no longer there. They might give up as well and put little effort into their schoolwork. This can then create room for a more rambunctious classroom with no self-control.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) aims to help teachers build a stronger connection with their students (Gay, 2018). It aims to inspire educators to teach their students in a new light where these pupils can feel acknowledged, respected, and valued no matter their backgrounds. With the CRT framework, teachers can challenge themselves to implement a new culturally responsive manner of teaching to build a stronger connection with their students. There are five essential elements of CRT that Gay examines. For instance, one of those elements is that developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity in the classroom is important (Gay, 2001). In other words, CRT aids the process of connecting with one's students on a cultural level by bringing in material that ties to their cultural background so that their learning experiences can be more meaningful to them. Additionally, this framework assists in the action of creating a safe and inclusive space for every student in the classroom, all the while making teaching and learning fun. Throughout my research of CRT, I found articles that describe how culturally responsive teaching aids the teacher in building a classroom environment that is safe and sustainable. The framework helps the teacher construct a space where all students feel a sense of

belonging and a purpose for being in said teacher's classroom. The following literature reviews will aid me in the process as a novice teacher in creating a classroom where my students feel inspired, have a sense of belonging, and are engaged to learn in a classroom that is well-structured and designed to best fit their needs.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Bal, A. (2018). Culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports: A process-oriented framework for systemic transformation. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 40(2), 144–174.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2017.1417579>

This article examines Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS). Culturally responsive pedagogy is at the forefront of this framework to support the youth who stem from racially minoritized communities in public schools. Aydin Bal conducted a systematic review of the literature and conducted a multisite mixed-methods formative intervention study in the state of Wisconsin to improve student behaviors who stem from diverse backgrounds. Bal states that the regular PBIS framework is made up of four central tenets, which are: outcomes, evidence-based practices, data-based decision-making, and systemic change. However, Bal found that the PBIS framework failed to include cultural responsiveness, facilitation of student, family, and community involvement, and addressing disproportionality. Therefore, traditional PBIS lacks the sensitivity to cultural and systemic inequities, which furthers the marginalization of underserved students who stem from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, Bal's CRPBIS framework emphasizes the importance of culture when dealing with the diverse needs of students who come from different backgrounds. This framework focuses on the theory of culture and systemic transformation methodology,

where culture is at the forefront of behavior management. In other words, the purpose of the CRPBIS framework is to promote social behaviors and support students' learning, engagement, need for safety, belonging, and affirmative identification. To accomplish these goals, Bal came up with an action plan that consisted of the following: form a Learning Lab, determine the desired outcomes, focus on empirically and culturally validating research-based practices, use data for continuous improvement and innovation, and implement systematic change. Through this action plan, Bal's main focus is to restore effectiveness, efficiency, and justice to address racial disparities in behavioral outcomes.

This article was very impactful on my teaching and understanding of how Bal's CRPBIS framework may be used in educational settings because it places culturally responsive pedagogy at the center of the framework. It goes to show that one as an educator needs to be very well aware of our student's cultural background so that we can find ways in which we can respond to their behavior in positive responsive ways that consist of diversity so that we as teachers can acknowledge the diverse skills students bring into the classroom and teach them to apply those skills in an academic context that will help regulate their misbehavior and help them be successful in school.

Brown, D. (2003, September 1). *Urban Teachers' Use of Culturally Responsive Management Strategies*. EBSCOhost.  
<https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.wou.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=9&sid=a2ff0a00-8072-4bf7-98ea-a1f43277ab8a%40redis>

This article examines how thirteen teachers across seven U.S. cities use culturally responsive teaching to guide the management strategies that aid them in the process of teaching their diverse body of students. These thirteen teachers' management strategies focused on targeting the cultural, ethnic, social, emotional, and cognitive needs of students in their diverse classrooms. Dave F. Brown centered on analyzing the culturally

responsive teaching strategies of the thirteen teachers and compared them with the established literature on CRT. Through his research, Brown found that successful teachers use strategies that exhibit genuine care for their students, assert authority, and establish effective communication patterns with their students. These strategies create a collaborative classroom environment that is business-like and favors learning.

Throughout the article, Brown brings attention to the fact that successful CRT teachers adapt their management styles to their students' cultural and societal contexts, all the while promoting a safe space to learn, creating respectful relationships amongst everyone in the classroom, and constantly engaging in active learning.

This article was very impactful on my teaching and understanding of how CRT may be used in educational settings because, as a novice teacher working at a very diverse school, it is important to learn about the strategies that more experienced teachers use to manage their classrooms in an equitable and culturally appropriate manner. The strengths of the article were that Brown identified the three most important culturally relevant teaching strategies, which were: teachers exhibiting genuine care for their students, teachers asserting authority, and teachers establishing effective communication patterns with their students. When educators use the following three strategies above to implement in their management regime, they are motivating their students to work hard, all the while validating their cultural background and genuinely building a strong connection with them.

Comstock, Meghan, et al. "A culturally responsive disposition: How professional learning and teachers' beliefs about and self-efficacy for culturally responsive teaching relate to instruction." *AERA Open*, vol. 9, Jan. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221140092>.

This article examines how the following factors of teacher beliefs, professional learning, and self-efficacy are intertwined with culturally responsive teaching. Meghan Comstock

et al focused on identifying effective strategies for incorporating CRT into teacher training and classroom pedagogy. Throughout their research, Comstock et al found that teachers greatly benefited from professional learning sessions. The PD sessions aided the teacher's understanding of cultural awareness. These training sessions that they attended enhanced their confidence and their ability to implement CRT into their classrooms. Comstock found that teachers need to be able to receive professional training on CRT for them to be able to implement the framework successfully in their classrooms. Throughout the article, Comstock conducted various interviews and surveys to assess the teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and instructional practices when it came to practicing and implementing CRT in their classrooms.

This article was very impactful on my understanding of CRT because it shows the differences between CRT and how it can look differently depending on how each teacher decides to use it. However, all teachers use CRT to create a better environment in their classrooms for their students. The strengths of the article were that it explained what CRT is and how an educator should implement this framework in their classroom. However, the article emphasizes that if one is going to implement the CRT framework, one must commit to it because it is not easy work. If one aims to be a CRT educator, one must believe in oneself own skills as well as the capabilities of our students.

Larson, K. E., Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., Rosenberg, M. S., & Day-Vines, N. L. (2018). Examining How Proactive Management and Culturally Responsive Teaching Relate to Student Behavior: Implications for Measurement and Practice. *School Psychology Review*, 47(2), 153–166. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-2017-0070.v47-2>

This article examines how proactive behavior management and culturally responsive teaching are intertwined and the effect these strategies have on student behavior. Larson



et al,” focus on addressing the discipline gap, which unjustly affects diverse students of color when it comes to how they get disciplined. They concentrated their research on observing two- seventy-four teachers in eighteen schools through teacher self-reports and classroom observations. The study found that teachers need more training on proactive behavior management and culturally responsive teaching practices so that educators can have a better understanding and more confidence in implementing CRT strategies in their classrooms. The incorporation of diverse demographic factors, like teacher experience and the school’s socioeconomic status, is important to note when using CRT to better understand and cater to students' culturally diverse needs.

This article was very impactful on my teaching and understanding of how proactive behavior management and culturally responsive teaching are interlaced to create a better experience and learning environment for students. When educators provide clear instructions, praise students for specific behaviors, and create lessons related to the real world, more positive student behavior is bound to happen. As a future educator who plans to work in public schools, I will keep in mind the discipline gap and how it relates to discipline in public schools. It is important to hold students accountable for their actions and make it clear to them that their actions have consequences. However, it is also important to keep in mind that students of color are often targeted in a negative way when they face disciplinary action. Therefore, it is ideal for a teacher to deal with the behaviors in their classroom instead of letting the behaviors escalate, where they are harshly and unjustly disciplined. By establishing clear instructions at the start of the day, students' social-emotional needs will be met by reducing any anxieties that may be induced due to the uncertainties that the classroom environment produces. Furthermore, as a future educator, I will keep in mind that research shows that it is crucial to praise positive behavior, especially

when students are meeting classroom expectations. By reinforcing positive actions, students are more likely to strive for being praised, therefore, they will be more inclined to listen and follow the teacher's directions. Moreover, I will constantly be motivating my students in their learning by creating lesson plans that relate to the real world and connect to their cultural background. Through my current first year of teaching, I will focus on practicing the use of reinforcing positive behavior to have a better classroom management plan in my classroom. In addition, I will continue to use this strategy to build a better relationship with my students for the rest of my teaching career.

Lew, M. M. (2016, March 1). *New Teachers' Challenges*. EBSCOhost.  
<https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.wou.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=8f2473f2-a749-4d20-998d-645f3259443a%40redis>

This article examines how culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, and assessment literacy are all interrelated. These three components play key roles in the classroom and are the main aspects that novice teachers have a hard time dealing with. Moi Mooi Lew's and Regena Fails Nelson's research aims to shed light on the preparedness and effectiveness of newcomer teachers and how they are impacted by not being well trained in CRT and classroom management strategies, especially in diverse cultural classrooms. The study found that teachers often lack the skills to apply CRT in their classrooms, viewing it as superficial cultural celebrations rather than instruction that influences students' cultural strengths for learning. Lew and Regena determined it essential that CRT is essential because it requires teachers to take a step back and be intentional with their lesson plans so that they can reflect their students' diversity through them. The importance of developing culturally relevant lesson plans aids in the process of

classroom management. When students see themselves represented through their learning, they are more likely to be engaged. This means that less disruptive behaviors will occur due to boredom.

This study was highly impactful on my teaching and understanding of how CRT and classroom management are extremely connected and how it may be used in the educational setting to minimize disruptions that arise from boredom by developing engaging lessons that connect to students' cultural backgrounds. The strengths of the article were that Lew and Regena offer evidence-based strategies that lead to improvement in regards to managing the classroom more effectively and incorporating CRT strategies into the classroom to fit the needs of all diverse learners.

Martin, L. D. (2021, June 1). *Reconceptualizing Classroom Management in the Ensemble: Considering Culture...: EBSCOhost*.  
<https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.wou.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=990a733a-caa2-4023-9064-0fe0166439fb%40redis>

This article examines how traditional classroom management is not adequate and oftentimes damaging in educational settings, especially in classrooms where there are higher student-to-teacher ratios. Lisa Martin states that the traditional classroom management approach highlights obedience and control over creating an equitable, inclusive, and engaging classroom environment. Oftentimes, conventional behavioral management centers on students being attentive, quiet, and compliant. The text indicates that when teachers decide to manage their classrooms the traditional way, students are deprived of being genuinely engaged, cognitively challenged, and having their social and emotional needs met. Martin determined that the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies, when combined with classroom management, is more effective, thus

creating democracy, mutual respect, and safe spaces within the classroom setting. CRT practices are essential for teachers to implement in the classroom so that students' diverse needs and experiences can be honored. Effective CRT strategies consist of aligning expectations with the diverse needs of students, creating emotional and cultural safe spaces for all learners, and prioritizing relationships and emotional engagement alongside academic goals. When CRT and classroom management are intertwined, it transforms into a community-based approach to create equitable and engaging learning environments.

This article was very impactful on my teaching and understanding of how CRT may be used in partnership with classroom management because CRT focuses on important principles such as social-emotional learning and creating environments where students act out of personal responsibility due to their own self-autonomy of wanting to learn and further their education.

Parsons, F. (2017, March 1). *An Intervention for the Intervention: Integrating Positive Behavioral Inter...: EBSCOhost*. Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.  
<https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.wou.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=ff51169a-cfbd-4f31-9681-aa392df1f252%40redis>

This article examines the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports with the use of culturally responsive practices to address the inequalities in student outcomes, specifically for marginalized students. Felisha Parsons acknowledges the fact that PBIS is effective in creating structured support systems in schools. However, it often fails to recognize cultural and contextual factors that may contribute to misbehavior within the diverse body of students. Parson's research shows that when schools combine PBIS and CRP, educators can bring forth equity and inclusivity while sustaining the systemic benefits of PBIS. The article presents an elaborate structure for implementing the integration of combining PBIS and CRP to produce a new and improved framework. The

framework emphasizes the significance of understanding cultural backgrounds, cultivating relationships, and modifying behavioral expectations to be culturally set. The important discoveries that Parsons noted consisted of teachers collaborating, assisting professional development training, and participating in community engagement to help improve the overall atmosphere of their classrooms.

The research found in this article regarding the PBIS framework is highly impactful in my teaching and understanding of how PBIS and CRP go hand in hand to improve student behavior. The framework exhibits that students' cultures have a big influence on how they behave in the classroom. Therefore, teachers must familiarize themselves with their students' cultural backgrounds so that they can aid them in creating an equitable classroom management plan where all students can thrive and learn with as few disruptions as possible. Throughout my first year in teaching, I have tried my best to create an inclusive and respectful environment where I hope all my students feel safe and welcomed. This is a PBIS practice that I will continue to implement throughout my future teaching practices. To create an inclusive classroom environment, an educator must recognize and appreciate students' diverse cultural backgrounds so that students feel valued and understood. This, in turn, will lead to stronger teacher-student relationships and stimulate classroom engagement. Which will successively leave little to no room for behaviors to arise in the classroom.

Robison, T. (2018). Improving Classroom Management Issues Through Your Carefully Chosen Approaches and Prompts. *General Music Today*, 32(3), 20–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1048371318812440>

This article examines the use of teachers' language and strategies that can successfully address and avert unwished-for student behaviors. Tiger Robinson draws attention to the value of culturally responsive teaching, which in turn focuses on encouraging reciprocal

respect and integrating assertive yet polite prompts that will strengthen classroom management. Robinson sheds light on positive student-to-teacher interactions and fostering healthy relationships with students who may struggle with behavior in the classroom. Positive reinforcement and praise a culturally responsive strategy that strengthens teacher-to-student relationships and contributes to an overall positive learning environment for all students. Culturally responsive teaching also focuses on being a confident teacher who exudes authority and an authoritative presence. Robinson suggests that teachers should set clear classroom expectations and constantly reinforce them so that all students feel safe and respected in class.

This paper has made a profound impact on how culturally responsive teaching plays a huge role in contributing to teacher and student relationships. It is important to use CRT strategies such as positive reinforcement with students who are displaying disorderly conduct so that their behavior can improve. This improvement in behavior will overall better the class space and create an environment that positively encourages student learning. Additionally, one aspect that most teachers overlook is seeing how language and communication play a central role in CRT and the effects it has on classroom management. When an individual in the teaching profession understands how culture has an impact on language, they can learn how to adapt the language they use with our students to prevent any misunderstandings and behavioral matters in the classroom. On top of language and communication, it is necessary to act on misbehavior immediately when it occurs. Timely and prompt responses to misbehavior need to be enacted on so that students can be reminded of the high expectations placed in the classroom; as well as so students can be reminded of the importance of respect in the learning environment. In addition to analyzing language and communication to enhance classroom management in a culturally

responsive manner, it is essential for educators who value the CRT framework to reflect on their practices and assess the impact of culturally responsive approaches on student behavior and engagement.

Siwatu, K. O., Putman, S. M., Starker-Glass, T. V., & Lewis, C. W. (2015). The Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Self-Efficacy Scale: Development and Initial Validation. *Urban Education*, 52(7), 862–888.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602534>

This article examines data from three hundred and eighty teachers to verify the development of a novel instrument to measure teacher self-efficacy in implementing culturally responsive teaching classroom management practices in the classroom. The research focuses on the importance of addressing the discipline gap, a bias where African American and Hispanic students encounter unreasonable disciplinary actions, which negatively affect their academic outcomes. These unfair consequences often derive from teachers' lack of knowledge about understanding cultural behaviors, which leads to cultural complications in the classroom. The study centers on the vital needs of CRCM practices that bring attention to cultural understanding, positive teacher-student relationships, and effective classroom strategies that are tailored to the diverse cultural needs of the students in the classroom. The CRCM framework is framed as a mindset that influences classroom management strategies that the educator may or may not enact. The five components of CRCM are as follows: recognizing one's ethnocentrism and biases, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, awareness of the broader educational and societal context, a willingness to use culturally appropriate strategies, and building caring and inclusive classroom communities. Teachers need to be reflective of their biases and practices, and confident in applying these strategies. If a teacher does not believe they are

capable of changing their classroom culture, then change will not happen. Teacher self-efficacy is a great culturally responsive teaching strategy that often goes unnoticed. This article significantly influenced my teaching and deepened my understanding of how culturally responsive teaching is made up of a lot of components that contribute to student success. The CRMC framework goes to show that teachers are also professionals who are a work in progress and need to be constantly learning to create an environment in which students will thrive. To achieve student success, teachers must be willing to practice culturally responsive strategies on a day-to-day basis, and they must exude confidence while doing so. As a first-year teacher, I have been struggling with being confident in my instructional practices, especially in classroom management. However, for the rest of the remaining school year and in my future teaching career, I will use the CRMC self-efficacy scale to hold myself and my students accountable. Using the scale as a daily reflection worksheet will be crucial in my career because it will aid me in the process of creating a healthy classroom environment where all students feel that their space for learning is respected and valued.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002, January 1). *Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the Curriculum*. SAGE.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237699170\\_Preparing\\_Culturally\\_Responsive\\_Teachers\\_Rethinking\\_the\\_Curriculum](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237699170_Preparing_Culturally_Responsive_Teachers_Rethinking_the_Curriculum)

The article examines the topic of better preparing upcoming teachers on how to be culturally responsive educators, due to the increasingly diverse student population within the U.S. The authors criticize the lack of teaching teacher candidates about diversity in the courses they take, which in turn limits their knowledge of how they can best fit the needs of their diverse students. Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas suggest a systemic approach to multicultural issues through the curriculum so that teachers may intentionally practice culturally responsive teaching and build a stronger bond with their students.

Culturally responsive teachers have the following six traits: sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of diverse students, a commitment to equitable change, an understanding



of knowledge construction, knowledge of students' lives, and instructional designs that strengthen student experiences. These combined traits should form a framework that guides the educator's instruction and management of the classroom.

This research has had a profound effect on both my teaching approach and comprehension of culturally responsive teaching. As a student in the MAT program, I wish we were taught more about being socially just and equitable teachers in a more culturally sustaining manner. However, through my research, I have learned that it is key to always learn about the backgrounds and cultures of our students so we can better communicate, interact, and teach them. Furthermore, I have gained an understanding that culturally responsive teachers must exhibit certain traits to be considered culturally just and equitable. One practice that I will implement in my instruction is to gain knowledge of my students' lives. By conducting student and family interviews, I will learn about my students' cultural backgrounds, the languages they speak, and their interests. This will allow me to differentiate my lessons and connect the curriculum to the interests of my students so that the lessons can be more engaging and fun. For example, one way I can do this is by incorporating students' experiences into the lessons that I will be teaching so that the engagement in the classroom can increase. For students to have the best experience possible in school, teachers must put the work in to create a safe and caring environment where everyone is motivated to learn because of the differentiated instruction that is being tailored in a culturally responsive manner to fit the needs of every student in the classroom.

### **Summary**

Culturally responsive teaching and classroom management are two educational frameworks that are heavily intertwined with one another. To create a well-managed classroom, I, as a teacher, need to start practicing and implementing culturally responsive strategies into my lessons so that I can start noticing a change in my students' behavior. Most of my students are Hispanic and range from diverse backgrounds. As a Mexican teacher, I am fortunate enough to have some background on my students and cultural context, and culturally connect with them to keep them engaged. It is important to note that culturally responsive teaching focuses on developing engaging, fun lessons that build on students' background knowledge. When students

are engaged and enjoying the content that they are learning, fewer behaviors are bound to happen. Instead, students will focus on their work in lieu of disruptions. Likewise, the CRT framework is an approach that heavily acknowledges, values, and includes students' diverse cultural backgrounds into classroom instruction and management. When one applies the CRT framework to classroom management, it aids the educator to create an inclusive environment where all students feel respected, understood, and engaged. Which leads to a notable decline in the reduction of misbehavior. As my teaching career progresses, I will constantly evaluate and assess the demographics of the students I teach and establish a culturally inclusive learning environment based on the backgrounds of my students. This CRT practice will allow me to affirm students' identities by making sure that the rules, expectations, and disciplinary approaches are culturally sensitive to their needs. In turn, my students will be able to notice a difference and see that they are being heard and cared for in my classroom. This will evoke a more positive, respectful dynamic with everyone in the classroom as well as an increase in engagement, leading to fewer disruptions in the learning environment. Altogether, the CRT framework has an immense positive impact on classroom management, and it also provides an equity-based approach to classroom management that reduces misbehavior by fostering respect, engagement, and inclusion for all.

### **Chapter 3. Methods**

According to Sagor (2000), action research is “a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action” (p.3). Educators participate in action research projects ( ARP ) to become proactive problem solvers and refine their instructional methods based on data rather than trial and error. ARP is a method that helps teachers identify the skills they need to improve to give their students the best educational experience they can. This method is empowering and useful because it allows teachers to focus on issues that are directly relevant to their practice. Even though teaching is a demanding profession that requires a lot of mental effort, action research is a process that is worthwhile because it allows one to take a step back and reflect on one's practices to determine how collecting data will improve our instruction and improve our students' learning.

Action research is made up of seven crucial steps: selecting a focus, clarifying guiding theories, identifying necessary research questions, collecting data, analyzing the data, reporting findings, and taking informed action (Sagor, 2000). Selecting a focus starts with being reflective and identifying areas for pedagogical betterment. This reflection must take into consideration what aspects of teaching need to be enhanced and what student learning outcomes need to be improved for their benefit. After the focus has been identified, the researcher must then pinpoint a theory to guide their study. The selected theory must be meaningful and relate to the ethics and beliefs of the researcher, and also be pertinent to the lives and occurrences of their students. Thereafter, the researcher must generate “a set of personally meaningful research questions to guide the inquiry” (Sagor, 2000, p.4). Determining both the pedagogical theory and research questions to lead the research is vital, as they are the ones that instruct the progression of the study.

Next, researchers collect essential data that connects to the guiding pedagogical theory and guiding research questions. To develop good quality data to analyze, the researcher should use triangulation, the use of multiple data sources, to ensure that the data is valid and reliable. When analyzing data, one must carefully identify any patterns or trends. Analyzing these patterns and trends is crucial because they can help us determine what the data means and why the data played out the way it did. In other words, the analysis of data helps the researcher to “better understand the phenomenon under investigation and as a result can end up producing grounded theory regarding what might be done to improve the situation” (Sagor, 2000, p.6). Then, the closing steps of the action research process are to share the findings with colleagues and supervisors to take informed action. In simpler terms, once researchers report their results with colleagues and supervisors, they must implement changes based on their findings in their classrooms so that they can improve their teaching practices and student learning.

As an extremely occupied teacher candidate who is working full time in the middle school setting, I believe that it is my responsibility to constantly be looking for ways to improve my teaching practices. Therefore, the action research process is a great method for me to use to improve my instruction and study. Since I am interested in improving classroom management through a culturally responsive framework among my students in an eighth-grade dual language arts classroom, the act of constantly reflecting and improving my instruction is an effective way to improve my teaching. From the lessons that I develop, I am obtaining new information that lets me know about my students' participation and engagement with the lessons and assessments that I construct to assess their knowledge. As I observe them and instruct, I sometimes have to make changes along the way and provide additional scaffolds to better engage my students and better handle classroom management. Since my focus is on culturally responsive teaching

practices and their impact on classroom management and the effect it has on my students, I can immediately know what is working and what is not when it comes to instruction for my students. Moreover, this action research process has allowed me the ability to implement theoretical concepts into action and identify what works for my students. Hence, the following research questions guided this study:

- How does culturally responsive teaching improve and affect classroom management?
- In what ways does student engagement in learning enhance my culturally relevant teaching practices?

### **Contexts of the Study**

I am a teacher candidate at a low-income, urban middle school in Salem, Oregon, which is positioned in a primarily Latinx community. The school has a population of 1,039 students, with students of color making up 80% of the population. The racial demographics of the school are: 1% American Indian, 3% Asian, 1% African-American, 69% Latinx, 4% Multiracial, 3% Native Hawaiian, and 20% White. According to the district report, 48% are experiencing poverty, and every student qualifies for free lunch (Oregon Department of Education, 2024). There are 29 students in my eighth-grade dual language arts classroom. Among my students, 10 of them are Emergent Bilinguals, 2 are Talented and Gifted, and 1 student is part of the Migrant program. Additionally, 15 of my students are male, and 14 are female, and they are all from Latinx backgrounds. None of my students from my 5th-period class are on IEPs or 504s. Out of my 29 students, 2 of them are currently enrolled in the ELD program. However, 2 other students would benefit from being enrolled in ELD as well, since they have expressed difficulty in communicating in the English Language. All of my students speak Spanish, and 25 of them are bilingual. About 20 out of 29 of my students are stronger in English than they are in Spanish.

My students all have different backgrounds that they bring to class with them. Their academic backgrounds and cultural fund of knowledge are all different, which they use to their advantage to gain new knowledge. Throughout history, students of Color have been treated unfairly and often have faced numerous disadvantages throughout their academic careers. My students have expressed discomfort and a sense of not belonging in their classrooms due to the lack of cultural connection between their other teachers, who stem from different cultural backgrounds. This situation that my students have been experiencing makes it hard for them to enjoy school and feel a sense of belonging. Additionally, some of my students face a language barrier at school, which makes it difficult for them to pass their classes that are fully instructed in English. My students also stem from a background of working-class families who speak little to no Spanish (Spanish or English?). They often spend long hours at work, then come home too tired to support their students with their education. This makes it strenuous for them to receive educational help at home since students have more demanding real-life responsibilities that they need to help their parents with. My students have expressed that they care about their academic success and want to do better. However, the stress of their real-life responsibilities weighs more heavily on them than their educational responsibilities. Some of the teachers in the building might be surprised at the struggles that my students are facing. Nonetheless, once I have gotten to know them on a personal level and have developed a stronger relationship with them, students are starting to feel more of a sense of belonging in my classroom.

My students all come to the classroom with different forms of knowledge. They are all smart in their own way. When they put their mind to something and take the task seriously, my students have demonstrated to be more than successful when it comes to their academics. Most of my students have the basic skills they need to read and write in the Spanish language. On the other

hand, though, they still struggle with more theoretical concepts (e.g., explaining citations and quotes in their essays). Since my students are in eighth grade, and as we are approaching the halfway mark of the school year, it has seemed that they are starting to feel tired and worn out when it comes to their academics. This is important to take into consideration because the unit focus for this action research practice asked students to write an informative essay answering the essential question of what lengths Frederick Douglass went through to obtain his freedom. Since starting the writing process for this informative essay, I have taken it upon myself to scaffold my students' learning by reviewing and reteaching the skills of obtaining evidence to use for their quotes in this essay before releasing them to write their essay. Even though my students have learned the skills of collecting evidence and quotes for their essays in previous years, it is always important not to assume that they are proficient in these skills. My student language arts teacher from the previous year has advised me to reteach this concept of evidence collection since it is one that our students struggle with the most. Even though my students are still not proficient in the skills of citing and analyzing evidence, they are more than capable of arguing and proving a point through the act of conversation. Students have friendly arguments with one another in my classroom every day. It is something that they do proficiently and are very good at. I have found that my students excel more in their academics when it is a hands-on project where they can have creative freedom, or when they can see a connection between content/assessment and their lived experiences.

I have worked with my students for about six months now. I can confidently say that I know my students well and am familiar with their interests, goals, and what they want to do after they graduate from high school. My students' goals consist of becoming registered nurses, lawyers, chefs, mechanics, and opening up their own businesses. After hearing their goals, I have

done my best to encourage my students to follow and stick to their goals. Students have shown more motivation in their studies when I demonstrate empathy, encouragement, and a sense of truly believing in them. Building these relationships with them has taught me that it makes my students more engaged in the lessons due to the encouraging words I provide them with. I am fortunate enough to have a deeper connection and understanding of my students' backgrounds because I am too of the Latinx culture and I am familiar with our ideologies and the way we behave. However, I am still trying to actively include material from the Latinx culture and implement it into the curriculum so that my students can have the opportunity to see their culture through their learning.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this study have come from the eighth-grade dual language arts class that I have been teaching since September of 2024 to June of 2025. While most of my data emerges from a specific unit taught during the first two weeks of March, I will be comparing it to data from the previous units I have taught. In line with the recommendations of Sagor (2000), I have gathered unit plans from two different units: one being an argumentative unit with a focus on how the advancement of technology is affecting our society, and the other being their most recent informative unit focused on how Frederick Douglass fought for freedom through the empowerment of literacy.

**Table 9.2.**  
**Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources**

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3
How does culturally responsive teaching improve and affect	Off-Task Behavior	Student Survey	Lesson Plan Reflections



classroom management?			
In what ways does student engagement in learning enhance my culturally relevant teaching practices?	Informal Student Observations	Formative Assessments	Clinical Teacher Feedback

Most of the data has come from the subsequent unit. Additionally, I have also accumulated each lesson plan taught within these units, teaching reflections from my daily journal, informal observations of student engagement, official and unofficial information from the curriculum, exit tickets, formative assessments, and feedback from my clinical teacher and university supervisor. Using the data above, it has helped me created an instructional timeline to monitor the content delivered and its corresponding schedule.

To guarantee the validity of my data analysis, I open-coded each of my data sets to pinpoint trends and patterns. I used deductive coding to look for concepts related to the three tenets of CRP: achieve academic success, develop cultural competence, and critique social inequities to observe the effects this would have on classroom management (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Stated differently, as I coded the data, I was inspecting for areas that related to these three tenets, to make sure that my analysis and teaching corresponded to the framework of CRP. While I observed other trends that showed up in my data, I strictly focused on the trends that connected to the framework of CRP. I accomplished this by triangulating each data set, ensuring that I had several pieces of data connecting to each tenet of CRP. By doing the process of triangulation, my results showed that several of the data pieces I collected aligned with each tenet and trend. Thus

showing that my data analysis was dependable and trustworthy. Referring to the instructional timeline mentioned earlier, I was able to associate the codes with explicit assessments and lessons, guaranteeing that the collected data precisely represented the learning experiences that my students were being exposed to in the classroom. Following the completion of my analysis, I asked my clinical teacher and colleague, who teaches sixth-grade dual language arts, to inspect my work. Both of their feedback has motivated me to analyze the data several times again and see what I can do next time to improve. This step has made the credibility of the study more reliable.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I followed a career in teaching due to a very straightforward reason: to teach students in a manner that is culturally responsive to their background and lived experiences. However, even though I emerge from a similar background as my students, they all experience life differently. I have learned that Latinx students and other students of Color experience more struggles in their education due to the cultural differences between them and their teachers. As a teacher candidate, my main goal is to at least help my students feel a sense of cultural belonging when they are in my classroom, because I, too, know how it feels to have a cultural disconnect with teachers who are not from the same background as you. I am Mexican-American, and I believe that my experience in life and education is similar to that of my students. After talking to their parents during conferences, I was able to build a deeper connection with them and listen to their concerns their children face at school. Talking to their parents has allowed me to hold my students to the same expectations their families hold them to. This is very important in Mexican culture. Family is everything, and one is always striving to feel validated by one's parents to

make them proud. Having a connection with my students' parents has allowed me to instruct them in a more personal way.

When I realized this instructional approach, I was able to make connections between my students and my own culture, and culturally relevant pedagogy. When observing the three tenets of the framework, I learned that when one, as an educator, encourages academic success, cultural competence, and critiquing social inequities, I was also able to grow as a teacher and connect with my students on a deeper level. As a Mexican-American individual who was born in the U.S. and is furthering away from her culture, I often do not feel a sense of belonging in the world either. Therefore, I must teach my students in a culturally responsive manner so that I can build a sense of belonging in my classroom for them. They are learning in an environment where American culture comes first. However, I want to teach them in a way where they feel their culture is being valued and respected. Through these past teaching experiences with my students, I have learned that using the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy has allowed my students to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, all the while keeping them engaged and managing the classroom.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

Three major themes emerged from analyzing the data. They are: improved student engagement through cultural relevance, decreased behavioral incidents through relationship building, and strengthened classroom community and student-teacher connection. Each theme is examined with supporting data.

### **Improved Student Engagement through Cultural Relevance**

One theme that frequently occurred in my study was that students were more engaged in the material when it was culturally relevant to them. This is connected to the fourth tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy: focusing on student-centered learning. For example, I started the Frederick Douglass unit by building students' background knowledge on the concept of freedom. I started with a daily warm-up, which we do every day in my Dual language arts classes. For five days straight, I asked students to answer a group of questions about their beliefs in the concept of freedom. Two questions that affected students were: "What does freedom mean to you?" and "Why is freedom important?" While the questions posed to my students were simple, they led to an important discovery: my students enjoyed the act of writing when the topic was relevant and significant to them. Engagement with writing also increased when my students were being told that their writing would only be graded if they participated in the activity, and not based on grammar or conventions. After witnessing my students' enjoyment in writing when tasked with interesting prompts, I was dedicated to incorporating more writing prompts that feel more personal and culturally relevant to them. To do this, I found myself reflecting in my journal at the end of each work day. Through thoughtful reflection on my teaching that day, I posed several questions:

How can I incorporate more free writing time into my classroom? I know that teaching the curriculum and staying on schedule is crucial. However, students seem to

enjoy writing more about topics they find interesting. Several students expressed to me that it felt therapeutic, almost like writing in a journal. This motivated me because it allows students to freely express themselves without the worry of a grade. I will try my hardest to provide students with interesting prompts that interest them to keep them engaged while meeting their needs (Lesson 1).

The next day, I introduced students to Frederick Douglass. I gave them the gist of who he was and his importance in US history. I explained to my students that Frederick Douglass was a slave who didn't have freedom, but through his dedication and determination to learn how to read, he was able to escape and be free. I truly wanted students to think about the concept of freedom, and especially how it affects people of color and minoritized groups. I wanted to focus and make a connection with this concept because about 90% of my students are first-generation Latinx students. They come from backgrounds where most of their parents only went to middle or high school because they needed to work and earn money instead of an education. Before we had made any more progress within this unit, I wanted to make a connection to my students' background abundantly clear, so I told them,

*After reading your responses to the freedom prompt yesterday, I think it's abundantly clear that we all value freedom and see it as an important thing in our lives. This story that we are about to read deals with fighting for one's freedom to obtain a better life using the power of education. I know that school can be boring at times, trust me, I get it. When I was in school I often zoned out and did not pay attention when the teacher was teaching and giving instructions. When we were released to work independently, I always had to ask the teacher to explain again what it was we were supposed to be doing. I could've not asked the teacher and just done nothing and gotten a D or an F in their class. But I always thought about my parents, especially my dad. You see, my dad only went to school up until he was in sixth grade. He had to drop out because he had to go and work to buy food and be able to survive. My dad worked long hours and was only able to make enough money to buy food. My dad always told me that he wished he could continue school because he wanted to keep on learning and be able to get a better-paying job with the education he would've gotten. You see, when you go to school and you learn, you're able to learn about things that are right and wrong. You're able to determine if the things that are happening in your life are good or bad. In a way, my dad did not have any freedom because he had to work long hours to be able to survive. He wished he had the opportunity to continue his schooling because then he would have better opportunities in his future. My dad learned that, in a way, education gives you more chances to have more freedom in your life (Lesson 2).*

From that day on, I expected my students to be able to see the value of education in their lives. By doing this, I wanted my students to reflect on their parents' history with education and see how education can be seen as a form of freedom, since this is a major theme in the story of Frederick Douglass. By sharing this personal story with them, I wanted them to have an opportunity to connect their learning with their lived experiences, especially those of their families. However, to truly push students to see the relevance of the concept of education as a form of freedom, I had to get to know my students' interests and integrate them into my lesson plans and instruction. I explicitly avoided instructing directly and in a lecture-type way, and instead, I centered on giving students individualized attention. When I looked back at my unit and lesson plans, I found that I only gave direct instruction for about 10-15% of the class time. This method allowed me to get to know my students on a more personal level. I learned that a lot of my students are enrolled in sports, band, orchestra, choir, or other extracurricular activities. Additionally, I also learned that my students had more demanding responsibilities, like taking care of their siblings, and therefore, missing school because of it. This newfound information allowed me to see what materials and content I could incorporate into the lesson so that students' lived experiences are represented in the content they are learning about. This allowed for a better connection as well as an increase in their engagement with the material and curriculum.

During one of the lessons, I instructed students to read a paragraph in the Frederick Douglass article titled “La Narrativa de la Vida de Frederick Douglass,” by Frederick Douglass. This paragraph is a key example of how education as a concept of freedom is crucial. Education is a vessel that allows us to grow, learn, and have more freedom in our future lives. This paragraph entails these critical lines:

*La señora, al enseñarme el alfabeto, me habia dado la pulgada, y ninguna precaucion podia evitar que tomara la vara (The lady when teaching me the alphabet,*

*had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the rod.)*  
(Douglass, 1845).

I asked students to work in pairs and discuss what they thought these lines from the article were about. I told them to think about how education can help one become more intelligent and help one's life be more successful. When one has a better life, one has more opportunities to do things one likes. As students talked, I witnessed many conversations with a lot of insight. Students had the opportunity to discuss their views on education and freedom, which allowed me the opportunity to work collaboratively in a more engaging manner, rather than me deconstructing the lines for them piece by piece. After their discussions, students were tasked to write on the concept of education as freedom. I posed students the following question: In what ways do you think your education will benefit you in the future? How might education open up more opportunities for you later in life? I told students to imagine their ideal life; to imagine having a less stressful life. The results were genuine and honest. Students expressed that having prompts like these helped them feel more relaxed and heard. It allowed them a space to be able to express their feelings without any worry. One student told me that the prompt allowed them to see the value of education and why we do what we do in the classroom. Here are a few lines from his writing:

*Al principio, no pensaba que la escuela fuera tan importante. Sentia que solo era algo que hacer, porque mis padres me obligaban. Pero ahora, me he dado cuenta de que aprender me da mas opciones y más poder sobre mi propia vida. Se que con una buena educación puedo elegir el trabajo que quiero, y no estar atrapado en algo que no me gusta.*

This response showed that this student applied being reflective in their experience with education and showed how their mind changed from negative to positive within their academic views. Afterwards, students shared their writing with their partners, which then allowed them to

hear others' views. However, there was a sense of understanding in the room about how education can better one's own life and allow us to have more freedom. Students felt inspired to continue to learn more about the topic and share more of their experiences as well. Students were also proud because they completed a piece of writing with little to none of my help. Students enjoyed the writing process, which made me happy because they had expressed their dislike for writing essays before. This written prompt response activity set forth the skills students would need for the Frederick Douglass unit. The unit started by having students read the article, *De La Narrativa de la Vida de Frederick Douglass, un Esclavo Americano*. The article explains Douglass's struggles he went through to learn how to read and write, which allowed him to obtain his freedom and escape slavery. I assigned this vigorous text to my students because I wanted to challenge them in their reading abilities. Students would read the article in chunks and discuss it together. The first time I tried this approach, students struggled immensely. Nevertheless, I grouped students to work in groups of 3-4, which allowed them to collaborate more and engage more critically with the Douglass article. Students showed a significant increase in engagement when the CRT strategies being used allowed them to see connections between the content they were learning and their own experiences. For example, we went from having an average student participation of 45% before this unit to 76% of people participating in discussions at the end of the unit.

To make sure that I could correctly calculate whether students were actively engaged through culturally relevant material, I kept track of on-time assignment completion and students' enthusiasm and interest in activities that were assigned to them throughout the unit. By connecting the story of Frederick Douglass with students' cultural identities, home languages,



and personal goals, classroom learning shifted from disinterested to purpose-driven participation. Table 1 shows a summary of weekly engagement data tracking for the Frederick Douglass Unit.

Week	Participation Rate	On-Time Assignment Completion	Observable Enthusiasm
1	44%	40%	20%
2	43%	45%	23%
3	61%	60%	65%
4	67%	75%	76%

Table 1. Engagement Tracking Over 4 Weeks of the Frederick Douglass Unit

Table 1 clearly shows an upward trend in student engagement over the four-week Frederick Douglass unit. The table measures participation rate, on-time assignment completions, and observable enthusiasm. The students started with relatively low levels in week 1, with a 44% participation, 40% assignment completion, and only 20% enthusiasm. However, by the end of week 4, students' participation and engagement with the content they were learning improved. At the end of week 4, there was 67% participation, 75% completion, and 76% enthusiasm. However, the most significant improvements happened between weeks 2 and 3, noting a possible turning point in students' connection with the material. This pattern indicates that as culturally relevant content deepened in the classroom, students became more engaged, which supports the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching in increasing academic involvement and emotional investment.

Before introducing CRT strategies, the Frederick Douglass unit was not of interest to my students. Students were not able to see how Frederick Douglass's life was relatable to theirs or to those of their families. For example, by the end of week 2, student engagement logs showed only

43% of the students in the class were actively participating and contributing during discussions, and less than 45% were actively turning in written assignments. Many of the students' responses were also short, confusing to read, and missing key details. However, after introducing students to the activity of the cultural connections chart in week 3 and student voice journals in week 4, students began making meaningful connections between their lives and Douglass's experiences. One journal entry from a bilingual student stated, "My dad never learned how to read in Spanish or English, but he taught me how to fix cars. Douglass learning to read reminded me of my dad teaching himself things to survive" (Student A, Journal Prompt X).

This emotional and cultural relevance translates into students having a stronger academic performance and being able to think critically in terms of what we are learning, which connects to them in a personal way. Additionally, in week 3, we completed a class discussion. 61% of students participated compared to the last class discussion we had. Where only about 44% of students actively participated and added insight into the discussion. Students were able to see how the act of translating things, or doing things to survive, connected to them or their family's life. Assignment completion also improved. The final essay draft had a 75% submission rate, compared to the beginning of the unit, where only 40% of students turned in their work. As students walked into my classroom, they were eager to better understand Douglass's struggles. I noticed that their enthusiasm at the beginning of the unit was underwhelming. They seemed very disinterested and bored with the subject. In week one, only 20% of the students passively participated. At the end of the unit, 76% of the students would constantly share their connections with me as I walked around the room while they were reading. This allowed me to get to know my students better on a personal level as well. Instead of students sitting passively, students started to actively construct meaning into what they were reading about.

## Decreased Behavioral Incidents through Relationship Building

A second theme that became apparent after analyzing data was decreasing behavioral incidents through relationship building with my students. I focused on getting to know my students on a personal level and listening to their wants and needs. This, in turn, allowed me to gain their trust, which in turn made them respect me more. Culturally responsive relationship building significantly reduced classroom disruptions and increased positive behavior. As students started to feel seen, heard, respected, and understood, I realized that discipline shifted from reactionary correction to proactive community building. Table 2 shows a decline in both minor disruptions and major behavioral incidents throughout the four-week Frederick Douglass unit, alongside qualitative observations that suggest a positive shift in classroom culture.

Week	Minor Disruptions (talking out, off-task)	Major Incidents (referrals, defiance)	Notable Observations
1	10	2	Students are talking over each other.
2	9	1	One verbal conflict. Resisted redirection.
3	6	1	CRT strategies introduced; group work improved.
4	4	0	Peer-led reminders. A calmer tone in class.

Table 2. Weekly Behavior Log (Weeks 1-4)

After two weeks of frequent disruptions and little to no peer connection, introducing culturally responsive strategies led to a noticeable drop in behavioral incidents and improved classroom dynamics. Students began to show more self-regulation, peer accountability, and openness. This

aligned with Douglass's journey of self-discipline and freedom through knowledge. One activity that I incorporated into the classroom was restorative circles, a strategy that aims to allow students to build a stronger community, resolve any conflicts that might be arising, and create safe spaces for students to talk to one another in a respectful manner. I did this over the last two weeks, and students showed signs of improvement in their behavior. Behavioral data from the first two weeks indicated a strained classroom environment. With 19 minor disruptions and 3 major incidents in just 10 instructional days, the classroom felt chaotic rather than proactive. Students would defy group work expectations, talk out of turn, and struggle with transitions. Several students commented in their journals or exit tickets that they didn't feel 'heard' or 'seen,' and one wrote: "I don't think this book matters to me-it's just school stuff." (Student Y, Journal Prompt X)

However, when week 3 came into play, culturally relevant strategies were introduced into the classroom, and I exposed students to the first restorative circle with the question of: What does freedom mean to you today? This discussion helped students to see Douglass's fight for literacy through a personal and modern lens. For example, one student said: "Freedom is when you talk without getting cut off or laughed at" (Student Q, Class Discussion Day 3).

That example from the student became part of the class's shared agreements. As a result, the number of interruptions dropped, and a student who had previously been referred for defiance was observed in week 4 redirecting a peer with, "*Hey, let him finish talking first, it's annoying when you guys interrupt*" (Student B, Class Discussion Day 4). This is important to note because discipline can be reinforced through culturally affirming relationships rather than control. In this case, this happened in my classroom. Students tend to behave more when they get redirected by their peers, whose opinion is more significant to them. Though only two weeks had passed since

incorporating CRT strategies, the tone and structure of the class improved remarkably. Students began to meet expectations, and behavioral data reflected this: only four minor disruptions and zero major incidents in week 4. The groundwork was laid for deeper learning and a more emotionally safe space, both of which are crucial when asking students to connect to powerful texts like *La Narrativa de la Vida de Frederick Douglass*.

### **Growth in Classroom Community and Sense of Belonging**

Before culturally responsive strategies were introduced, students showed a limited sense of belonging and connection to the content and each other. After implementing CRT strategies in week 3, students began to share more openly, relate personally to the text, and express greater pride in their identities, all of which contributed to a stronger classroom community. Table 3 shows a positive shift in student perceptions of classroom climate and cultural responsiveness from week 2 to week 4 of the Frederick Douglass unit. Across all four survey statements, average ratings increased by nearly a full point on a 5-point scale, proving meaningful improvements.

Survey Statement	Week 2 Avg	Week 4 Avg
“I feel like I belong in the classroom”	3.2	4.1
“Me teacher understands and respects my culture/background”	3.4	4.3
“I feel comfortable expressing myself in this class”	3.1	4.0
“Classmates treat each other with respect”	3.3	4..2

Table 3. Student Survey Results: Sense of Belonging (Weeks 1-4)

During the first two weeks of the Douglass unit, student energy in the room was quiet, disconnected, and surface-level. Several students kept their heads down or stayed silent during discussions, and informal journals reflected a distance from the material. One student wrote:

*“He (Douglass) cared about reading because he was a slave. That doesn’t matter now.”*

However, things began to change after week 3, when CRT strategies that foregrounded identity, lived experience, and community voice were introduced. In one memorable journaling session, students responded to the quote: “Once you learn how to read, you will be forever free.”

Additionally, the writing prompt asked students the following question: What kind of freedom does learning give you outside of school? Some students' responses were the following:

- *“I can help my grandma read her medicine bottles”(Student A).*
- *“I translate mail letters for my mom because she can’t read English” (Student B).*
- *“Reading and writing allow me to express myself more freely than verbally”  
(Student C).*

These student reflections show how CRT strategies help bridge Douglass’s struggle with students’ sense of power and identity. The content no longer felt like distant history; it became personal, urgent, and validating to them. Additionally, students started to support each other more. In week 4’s restorative circle discussion, one student who has a hard time focusing was told by another peer:

*“You stayed focused all of class today. I noticed, and I am proud of you.”*

Community building is vital and inseparable from academic engagement, especially in historically underserved classrooms. When students feel emotionally safe and culturally affirmed, they take more academic and social risks. This theme showed early signs of that shift:

stronger peer bonds, more heartfelt writing, and students seeing themselves, just like Douglass, as individuals taking control of their own lives.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion**

There were many strategies that I used in my classroom that are supported by current research, especially when integrating culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. One of the most crucial strategies that I incorporated was to build relationships and get to know my students. As Gay (2018) emphasized, teachers must understand and respect students' cultural backgrounds to help them in their process of learning. I did this in numerous ways. My students and I began to know each other through greeting them at the door, daily check-ins, and multiple one-on-one informal conversations with each student. During my teaching experience, I reflected on how I could incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the content we were learning about. I am fortunate enough to stem from the same background as most of my Latinx students. This made it easier to connect with students and talk about things we have in common, as well as to understand the differences in communication styles that we have from other cultures. Through constant reflection and analysis of my teaching practices, I understood that recognizing and applying students' cultural background into the curriculum allows them to enjoy their learning more profoundly. This was similar to Gay's (2018) funds of knowledge process. In doing so, I was able to diligently implement students' home and community knowledge into the classroom so their learning experiences could be more enjoyable. This permitted me to realize that I can impact the way my students learn and experience their education. By executing this strategy of CRT, I was able to create an inclusive learning environment for all students. I then continued to incorporate CRT strategies into my classroom so that my students had a space to feel inspired,

have a sense of belonging, and be engaged in a classroom that is well-structured and organized to fit their learning needs.

To continue building my students' engagement levels and sense of belonging in the classroom, I integrated hands-on activities as well as cultural lessons throughout the school year. This activity was based on a co-worker's idea of introducing students to a cultural concept and fortifying their knowledge of said concept. It asked students to create their own "*Alebrije*," a Mexican fantasy animal made up of different animal parts. Students then had to write a paragraph describing their *Alebrijes*, which allowed them to get a better understanding of a concept that is a part of their culture. When one works in a diverse cultural classroom, one needs to take a step back and be intentional in one's lesson plans, just as Lew (2016) suggested was important for students to see themselves reflected and represented through the content they are learning about. Throughout this lesson, I observed that students were sincerely engaged in their learning and participating in the assignment. As I crafted this assignment, I took into consideration the backgrounds of my students, such as students' cultures and interests, to make sure that they would find the assignment interesting as well as engaging.

To continue to build students' sense of belonging in the classroom, I actively continued to get to know my students on a personal level. I took the time to build relationships with every one of my students to get to know more about who they are as individuals and their hobbies. Discussions about random questions they posed to me, greeting them every day at the door, and sitting with them one-on-one to have genuine conversations aided the process of a sense of belonging in the classroom. Through Brown's (2003) CRT strategy suggestions, students were able to see that I genuinely cared about them and their learning. This, in turn, motivated my students to complete their assignments more often and improved their turn-in ratio. All of this



was accomplished through the use of strong communication patterns between student and teacher relationships. As the year progressed, the students began to view me as a trusting adult whom they were very comfortable formulating personal conversations with.

## **Limitations**

A theoretical limitation of this study could be found in the act of giving students autonomy over their learning. Although I consistently incorporated culturally relevant lessons into the classroom, I struggled to give my students a choice in their learning. I often shared with students that learning is fun and interesting, especially when one is interested in a topic. However, I never allowed students to research a topic they are interested in and write about it. If I had presented students with the opportunity of choice on a topic of their interest, they would have been able to see the value of learning and how learning becomes more powerful when one has autonomy over their learning. Furthermore, this prohibited them from showing me their writing skills, especially within a topic they are genuinely interested in. Without having a choice in one's schooling, it can be easy to be complacent and passive with one's learning. However, when one is eager to learn and engaged with the material, one, as a student, does more of the cognitive lift, which positively impacts one's experience. This limitation can be addressed by adding a focus on student autonomy and letting students choose one topic they are interested in within each unit. If students are given more autonomy in the classroom, students will develop more critical thinking skills to better help them be successful in their overall education and personal lives.

Several methodological limitations are present in my research. It is important to note that this study was conducted within several months with one-third of my students. This research project began during the second trimester of the school year, which was a trimester where

students were very academically focused due to the effect of extraneous factors. I believe that if this research project had occurred at the start of the school year, the data that was collected would have been more accurate and more comprehensive. Similarly, due to my lack of expertise as a novice teacher, I was unable to precisely adapt the core curriculum to my style or ideas of teaching. Due to being a first-year teacher and teacher candidate simultaneously, I was unable to confidently execute some of the lesson visions I had in mind and instead stuck to the recommendations of my clinical teacher. Furthermore, I did not have enough time to interview students and obtain their attitudes towards my teaching. Even though the act of action research centers on one's self-reflection, the addition of the voices you are making an impact on would greatly affect one's data collection more constructively and positively. Much of the research that is being done and studied by professionals often lacks the inclusion of students' voices and how the research impacted them. This is a limitation that should also be acknowledged and should instead start including the voices of students when analyzing data, so we can truly see the impact we as educators are making on our students.

In taking into consideration the practical limitations of my research, it is important to note that not all teachers would be able to utilize and implement my pedagogical approaches into their classrooms. Mainly, all educators have different types of students and demographics in their classrooms. My students emerge from a diverse Latinx background with working-class families. This, in turn, meant that my instruction would have to fit students' cultural backgrounds as well as their learning styles. With more practice with research as well as adaptation, I believe that my research would be able to aid some teachers in wanting to implement CRT strategies into their classrooms. However, the research that I conducted in my classroom is something that takes long-term planning and great thought. A teacher would not be able to successfully implement

these CRT strategies right away. It takes one genuine time to implement it successfully in the classroom. The United States is a very diverse country, and it will only continue to grow and be even more multicultural. Classrooms in similarity are also growing to be more diverse with students of all kinds of backgrounds. Therefore, more research needs to be done on how educators can be more efficient in teaching a classroom where more than one culture is present.

## **Conclusion**

For students to have a genuine positive experience in their K-12 education, they must be represented through the curriculum, engaged with the material, and feel a sense of belonging and respect in the classroom. A lot of students who stem from diverse cultural backgrounds feel a lack of representation in the content they are learning. This then affects them and disengages them from their learning. They then see no point in what it is they are doing, and then they do not care to turn their school work in. Students from diverse backgrounds and cultures deserve to be seen and represented through their education. It also allows students to hold onto their cultures and discourages them from assimilating into the white dominant culture in the US. The educator must constantly reflect and implement teaching strategies that allow our students to be culturally seen and appreciated. As educators, we want our students to have the skills they need to be successful after they graduate from high school. When teaching in a culturally responsive manner, students can gain real-life and academic knowledge to help them deal with any obstacle that comes their way. Students deserve the right to learn and be educated in a manner that aligns with their cultural backgrounds, since it will only benefit them and enhance their learning. Culturally responsive teaching is a framework that aids both the student and the teacher to have a more positive and better experience in the classroom. It allows students to be active, critical

thinkers in both the classroom and in their personal lives. This can then lead students to have the tools and resources they need to set up their future success after high school.

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