

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

Running Head: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

Use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Benefitting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Elementary Struggling Readers

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Abstract

This essay investigates the application of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in teaching the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) struggling readers in elementary grades. Owing to the increase in immigration, the population of the CLD students in the US is expanding rapidly. Due to non-English linguistic background and inadequate learning assistance, these students suffer from reading challenges. The need for early reading intervention has been identified and a literature review on both CLD struggling readers and CRP is presented. CRP may serve as a catalyst in empowering the CLD learners with the reading skills and strategies, indispensable in accelerating their reading progress. Teachers consciously need to make connections to these students' home culture, language, existing knowledge and everyday experiences to assist them in succeeding in reading. The reading intervention models such as Response To Intervention (RTI) and Reading Rescue (RES) are reviewed. CRP strategies such as balanced instruction, engaging reading activities, using multiethnic children's literature, employing student voice and choice, responsive feedback, scaffolding, and, collaborative learning are discussed. Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) program is analyzed to support the reading process of the elementary CLD students. CRP supports informal and ongoing assessments for these students, and suggests modifications of instruction based on the results. Although promising, application of CRP is challenged by the policies, high stake tests, common core, and limited time. Future research includes meeting the academic needs of CLD struggling readers from multiple cultural and linguistic groups in one classroom. Implications and a plan of action are also provided.

Keywords: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), Culturally Relevant Teaching, Struggling Readers, Response To Intervention (RTI), Reading Rescue (RES), Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS).

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of immigrants in the U.S., which led to the expansion of the minority communities (Kena et al., 2014). Consequently, there has been a significant rise in *culturally and linguistically diverse* (CLD) students who belong to multiple ethnic backgrounds whose native language is not English (Banks & Banks, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education uses the term '*culturally and linguistically diverse*' to refer to students who are either *limited English proficient* (LEP) or non-English proficient, and also whose home language is not English (Gonzalez R., et al., 2011). These students belong to various ethnic or cultural groups, social classes and economic backgrounds. This Capstone focuses on the group of CLD students who are first generation immigrants with a culture and language different than those from the mainstream American culture and language.

Since 2000, the census data point in the direction of a more culturally and linguistically diverse society (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). It shows that school-aged population comprise approximately 37% non-English speaking students including, 15% Hispanic, 16% black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Indian/ Alaskan Native students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). By the year 2030, over 40% of elementary and secondary student population will consist of non-English speaking students (Thomas & Collier, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics estimated significant growth in the number of Hispanics and Asians/ Pacific Islanders enrollment in schools by 2023 (Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp). Currently, there is an achievement gap between CLD students and mainstream English speaking students in areas of reading (Proctor et. al., 2007; Slavin et. al., 2009). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results for the fourth-grade indicated that 75% of White students' reading abilities are at or above a basic level, whereas, only 44% of Hispanic students

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

and 40% of African American students are observed to be at same level. Given the increasing diversity of US classrooms this gap is expected to grow further.

The **rationale** behind this study arises from the growing population of CLD learners in the US. On an average, most of these CLD students encounter reading problems. Several strategies have been proposed to treat this issue. Nevertheless, there is still a gap between the teaching practices and the acquisition of reading abilities in the CLD students. My essay attempts to bridge this gap through *culturally responsive pedagogy* (CRP). To the best of my knowledge, very limited research is done to connect these areas. Reading and comprehension difficulties for most of the CLD immigrant students initiate when they are introduced to English texts in US schools. If not intervened appropriately, they gradually end up being *struggling readers*. The primary factors may include, student background (individual cultural and linguistic background; home environment), educational setting (foreign culture, language and system), curricula and teaching methods (existing course content, and classroom practices) and, evaluation techniques (traditional tests disregarding the cultural and linguistic diversity). These call for the need of a multifaceted approach, which would address the reading issues of the CLD learners by exploiting students' background to tune the curriculum, teaching and evaluation methodologies. This can be possible through CRP which integrates all these aspects in education.

In the context of this essay, the *learners* comprise the elementary CLD struggling readers. It is to be noted that CLD struggling readers differ from the conventional English-speaking struggling readers. The latter group not only finds difficult to comprehend texts but is also not interested in reading (Alvarez et. al, 2009). In contrast, the reading issues in CLD learners can be traced back mostly to their cultural and linguistic barriers. The *learning environment* features a diverse elementary classroom containing CLD struggling readers where

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

CRP is employed in English Language Arts class. Nevertheless, reading issues may surface in other content areas too. If not treated on time, with suitable instructional strategies, the CLD readers may encounter severe academic and social difficulties in later stages. The *curriculum and instruction* for the elementary CLD struggling readers include reading materials and teaching practices which affirm these learners' cultural and linguistic identities. There are innumerable reading strategies and pedagogical methods to teach reading to struggling readers in general. However, this essay focuses only on those techniques and interventions which are culturally responsive, and are particularly applicable to CLD readers. Though reading is the primary area demanding attention for these students, instruction needs to be organized around interdisciplinary themes for comprehensive academic achievement. *Assessments* of these students are usually ongoing and formative by nature such as running records, verbal responses, class discussions, multiple choice questions, and other similar informal tests. During evaluation teachers need to take into account the cultural and linguistic factors influencing student learning. Tests are designed carefully to make them more accessible to the CLD struggling readers. The instruction is adjusted based on the reading results of the CLD learners.

This Capstone essay is organized as follows: Section 2 explores the emergence of the CLD struggling readers and the necessity of identifying them in the early grades. Section 3 analyzes CRP as a tool to teach the CLD learners in general. It also attempts to bridge the two areas of CRP and CLD struggling readers, and in the process, explains the ways in which CRP can benefit these readers in particular. Section 4 critically examines two reading intervention models, Response to Intervention and Reading Rescue respectively, through the lens of CRP. Section 5 presents the culturally responsive teaching practices, curricula and instructional strategies for CLD readers. The effectiveness of the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies in

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

teaching the CLD struggling readers is also described. Section 6 briefly covers the assessment of this group of students. Section 7 presents the implications and limitations of this study. Section 8 reflects on future considerations and a plan of action. Conclusions are drawn in Section 9.

2. Addressing CLD Struggling Readers in Elementary Grades

Issues of CLD Struggling Readers: These students who are more noticed in elementary classrooms are unable to comprehend the reading process and have only few appropriate strategies to construct meaning (Garcia, E., 1991; Lenski, 2008; Ramphele, 2009). Hakuta and Snow (1986) noted that students entering a foreign nation where the official language differs from their native language undergo a ‘silent’ phase when they absorb the sounds of the language they hear around them. Sudden exposure to a whole new culture and environment featuring a new language, people, and system of education, may leave them bewildered. Their ability to learn proper English words and phrases, and, use of correct and complete sentences develop gradually with proper instruction and scaffolding. The non-English speaking immigrant parents of these CLD students have little knowledge on American education system, and may find it difficult to help them in reading and prepare them for school success.

Since reading requires more language abilities than any other subjects, I believe, the elementary CLD learners are more vulnerable to difficulties in reading English, as they enter school from homes where English is not the primary language of communication. CLD students in the primary grades are considered mostly as educationally, socially, linguistically and cognitively susceptible due to their diverse culture and insufficient English language proficiency placing them ‘at risk’ in reading (Cavazos, 1990; Olukolu, R. M., 2013).

Need for Early Intervention: The elementary CLD students lack phonological awareness, possess limited English vocabulary, lack fluency and the ability to decode English

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

words and sentences, as compared to their mainstream counterparts (Parker, 2002; Brownell, 2000; Pardo 2004). These are essential in building reading comprehension skills. Students who lack reading abilities in the elementary grades may continue to face reading issues even in the higher grades and may find it difficult to cope up later (Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986). Both the language and content grow in complexity in the higher grades. Thus, unresolved reading issues in the primary levels may lead to greater learning obstructions. The reading components and concepts must be understood clearly by the learners so that they get processed and encoded from short-term to long-term memory that can be retrieved for application in later grades. Teachers need to equip these students with reading strategies to make sense of the content and concepts (Closs, E. K., 2006). Negligence in early reading may hinder advanced linguistic development in later education leading to disastrous effects in a student's academic and professional career, rendering social embarrassment and damaging self-esteem, and, hindering social growth.

The National Reading Panel (2000) report also indicated that early reading intervention is more advantageous than later remedial actions. This may reduce the number of CLD struggling readers in 'special' or 'compensatory' education programs which are frequently observed to be conceptually complex, ineffective and detrimental. This is due to sub-standard education quality in these programs as they are conducted at low socio-economic schools and aim at the low-track students (Garcia, E., 1991). The reductive approach in the remedial curricula and the simplified instruction result in an achievement gap between the mainstream and CLD learners (Callahan, R., 2005). Studies indicate, on an average, teachers are not professionally trained to recognize the varied cultures of the CLD students and utilize their heritage language (Karathanos, 2010; Polat, 2009). They teach basic language skills without a context or a productive activity. Hence, early reading intervention is imperative to bring about reading success in the CLD students.

3. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teaching Elementary CLD Struggling Readers

Overview of CRP: Researchers have identified CRP as a powerful tool to address the reading issues of the CLD learners in the elementary grades (Au K.H.P., 1980, Bell et al., 1998, Delpit L., 2006, Gay, 2000). It aims at closing the achievement gap between the CLD students and their mainstream counterparts. Over the years, multiple terms have evolved, such as, ‘culturally responsive teaching’ (Gay, G., 2000), ‘culturally relevant teaching’ (Ladson-Billings, 1994), ‘culturally congruent’ (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), ‘culturally appropriate’ (Au & Jordan, 1981), and ‘culturally compatible’ (Jordan, 1985).

Culturally responsive teaching is a holistic and empowering educational approach that recognizes, encourages and engages students’ cultural assets in instruction to foster the scholastic achievement of CLD learners (Gay, G., 2002). This is achieved by creating an active, caring, flexible, safe and respectful learning environment where students are perceived and respected as cultural beings, and, their cultural experiences are taken into consideration thereby improving academic outcomes (Diamond & Moore, 1995). This aligns with situative theorists who believe that culture shapes our thoughts, behavior and actions, and, ideas, beliefs and interpretations. Culturally relevant teaching enables teachers to address students’ home language and culture which positively contribute to school success. It “*empowers students to maintain cultural integrity, while succeeding academically*”, and is “*specifically committed to collective..empowerment*” (Ladson-Billings, G., 1994, p-160). CRP is based on three criteria – academic success, building cultural competence, and, developing socio-political consciousness to critique the cultural values and norms that give way to social inequities (Ladson-Billings, G., 1995). Teachers may not know all cultures and languages but they need to make efforts to learn and respect the CLD learners’ cultural values, and perceive their diverse languages as assets to

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

the classroom. These classrooms are student-centered and teachers' capitalize on the CLD learners' home culture and language (Aceves & Orosco, 2014).

Teachers who are culturally sensitive may have positive impact on CLD students (Plata, 2008). They are aware that students learn best when the curriculum content is connected to aspects they already know (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Montgomery, 2001). As Howard (2006) stated, "*We can't teach what we don't know*", teachers need to possess knowledge on not just the content matter but also on their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In a classroom, culture can be classified in various ways – culture, which the teacher and students bring in class, and, culture, which is the product of constant communication and discussions. In teaching CLD struggling readers teachers need to be conscious of the existing complex cultural contexts impacting students' abilities to acquire reading skills, and, build on their linguistic and cultural experiences (Artiles, 2003). This indicates bridging of the gap between school and home cultures. Professional development programs should assist teachers in realizing the role of cultural diversity in education and meaning of cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Culturally responsive reading instruction is designed in accordance with students' interests, prior knowledge, experiences, home language and culture (August & Hakuta, 1997). It is advantageous to construct learning on students' strengths recognizing that they have "*significant experiences, insights, and talents to bring to their learning*" and "*finding ways to use them in the classroom*" (Nieto, 1999). Schools adopting CRP create learning situations to provide students essential resources responsive to ethnic diversity. It features teacher support for CLD students and reflects on cultural disparities (Ladson-Billings, G., 1995).

CRP in Teaching Elementary CLD Struggling Readers: CRP must be specifically applied to elementary CLD struggling readers since they need more explicit and intensive

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

instruction than upper grade readers. To achieve this, teachers need to ensure that students are encouraged sufficiently to involve in frequent reading activities. Teaching methods that address cultural and linguistic issues are highly appropriate for CLD learners to become effective readers (Beaulieu, 2002; Nichols et. al., 2000). Curriculum needs to be re-designed in a way that the learners are able to grasp the content and concepts from different cultural standpoints.

Classrooms, incorporating CRP, are student-controlled where interactions with the teacher and among students are instigated by the teacher. Participation is highly valued and nurtured. CRP perceives the classroom as a community of practice, and fosters interaction among students through which they learn from one another. Curriculum and instruction are structured strategically to foster acquisition of reading skills in CLD learners. It is accelerated by developing a collaborative environment in which teachers expect all students to aim and achieve high (Callins, T., 2006). This expectation needs to be coupled with strong reading instruction for the CLD learners. Small groups of CLD struggling readers or even one-on-one teaching is preferred over larger ones to organize the instruction better (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Elbaum et. al., 2000). This provides students more reading time, helps the teachers to keep track of their understanding and progress, and, offer feedback instantly.

As Delpit (2002) proclaimed, *“If we are to invite children into the language of school, we must make school inviting to them”* (p. 42), CRP fosters a deeper understanding of the CLD learners’ reading habits and needs, cultures, and interactive styles in planning instruction. Culturally responsive teachers attempt to approach the students by recognizing the socio-cultural contexts that impact their communication and practices. They assist the CLD learners to connect their home and school cultures by making constant references to their familiar surroundings in teaching reading. For elementary CLD readers in particular, reading skills can be enhanced

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

further through their interactions with their parents over reading activities (Cummins, J., 2001; Whitehurst et. al., 1994). However, due to language barriers parents of CLD students may not feel confident to communicate with teachers (Davis, Tonya L., 2012). CRP attempts to encourage and involve the parents in “school learning” activities in improving and increasing the reading practices of the CLD struggling readers (Iddings, 2009; Moll & González 1994; Nieto, 1999). Parental involvement and interactions with teachers may develop a reciprocal relationship which forms a strong basis for the education of CLD students.

4. Culturally Responsive Reading Intervention Models

Reading Programs: Reading programs and teaching expertise in reading are considered to be crucial in CLD learners’ reading achievements (Duffy, 2001; Knipper, 2003). Multiple scholars inferred that reading programs and early interventions must be culturally responsive to teach reading skills to the CLD learners (King et. al., 2008; Klingner et. al., 2005). The Kamehameha Elementary Education Program in Hawaii (Au, K. 1980; Au & Jordan, 1981; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) is one example where different reading programs and reading lessons based on Hawaiian conversation led to distinct improvements in reading skills of the students. Some other reading programs include, Direct Instruction Reading, Fluency-oriented Reading Instruction, Concept-oriented Reading Instruction, and, Success for All (Duffy, A., 2001). Though there are numerous reading models due to the scope of the essay I have focused on Response to Intervention (RTI) and Reading Rescue (RES) intervention models.

RTI Model: This culturally responsive intervention model addresses students’ needs across tiers of support and intervention (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). It features three tiers of intervention – the 1st tier includes quality instruction for all students, modeled on proven practices. In this tier, students are taught reading skills such as, phonological awareness,

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. They are then assessed using tests such as DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). Those who fail are then moved to the 2nd tier where students are offered complete help and support through one-on-one tutoring or small group instruction. Those who show significant signs of improvements are moved back to the first tier, while those who still struggle with their reading are then moved to the 3rd tier. This stage is marked by intensive instruction, and, the learners are referred to a Child Study Team.

I believe, that instruction provided in the 1st tier itself in the RTI model needs to be culturally responsive. Explicit instruction and continuous monitoring are integral aspects of this tier. It is imperative for teachers to undergo professional training in dealing with CLD students specifically, involving their means of learning English and methods of assessments. If the instruction fails to yield positive results, teachers should re-evaluate and adjust it to suit the academic abilities, interests and needs of these learners. CRP incorporates students' ideas, responses and experiences into lessons. Graves et. al. (2004) observed that in a first grade classroom comprising CLD students, teachers possessing knowledge on reading instruction and on second language instruction were able to teach the struggling readers easily. They made effective use of those students' prior knowledge and connected it with the content. This is considered to be one of the most fruitful strategies applicable to the struggling readers (Walker, B.J., 2005). Thus inclusion of CRP techniques in the 1st tier may resolve the reading issues negating the need of moving students to the next tiers. However, culturally responsive RTI has its own challenges. If students are unable to progress in the 1st tier, blindly moving them to the next level may be unfair to them. Moreover, modification and implementation of instructional practices by the teachers are questionable when using the RTI model. It is also essential to

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

evaluate the school contexts before using RTI models since the academic situations of all CLD learners are not same (Richardson & Colfer, 1990).

RES Tutoring Intervention Model: This model proved to be beneficial for CLD first grade struggling readers (Ehri et. al., 2007). Those students comprise mostly lower SES and language minority learners, and they read at the lowest level in their class as evaluated on reading tests. Intensive tutoring is provided in areas of phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and, reading comprehension. The tutors include trained teachers and reading specialists who provided on-site coaching and guidance. The reading strategies that the trained educators apply include re-reading, decoding of words and sentences, and, questioning. The texts used are short in length and are thought to be helpful in using letter-sound correlation and in decoding words. In the first session the tutors read the books to the students, while in the second session the students are allowed to re-read the books independently. The outcome discloses that independent reading is positively related with reading achievement and yield high accuracy scores. Whereas, reading at instructional level is negatively related with reading progress. The tutoring of these students raised their level of reading from below average to average. With RES tutoring the struggling readers were able to decode words and understand the text more efficiently than those who received small group intervention.

In addition to above procedure, the instruction delivered in this model, by the trained and experienced teachers and professional reading specialists also play a vital role in strengthening students' reading skills. The intervention allows them to coach students on a one-on-one basis whereby they are able to adjust their instruction according to the individual requirements of the students. This is one of the significant components of CRP. The tutors also provide adequate

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

practices, allot greater amount of time than in small group instruction, and, offer immediate feedback which assist the students in understanding better.

In another study, the RES model used for first graders features a daily 30 minute session including reading materials both familiar and new to students, administering a running record, modeling reading aloud by the tutor, letter-sound recognition, and, writing a single sentence, jumble it, and then re-order (Clay, M. 1985; Lee & Neal, 1992). After the intervention those students exhibited greater proficiency in reading. This intervention can be further made culturally responsive by using the students' background knowledge and experiences.

Other Reading Programs and Intervention Models: Next Steps (Morris, 1999) is another reading intervention model effective in training elementary CLD struggling readers. Core Intervention Model (Gerber et. al. 2004) offers direct instruction to small group of learners and involves scaffolding to teach and support reading abilities. Reading First program – focusing on phonics and phonemic awareness, Reading Street – incorporating core reading textbooks, Reading Reels – applying multimedia in regular lessons, and, Success for All – offering instructional strategies and phonetic curricula, are other reading programs for elementary grades.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices for CLD Struggling Readers

CRP Techniques: CRP considers various factors in designing the curriculum and instruction for the CLD struggling readers, such as, interest and motivation of the learners, culturally responsive curriculum, quality of instruction, teacher-students relationship, and additional support. Students' performances are monitored and instruction is tailored to suit their needs. Researchers suggest that instruction should incorporate reading practices in meaningful contexts (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001), and feature lessons in teaching decoding, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary growth, and comprehension

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

tactics (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, 2002). Some of the efficacious teaching approaches of CRP for the elementary CLD struggling readers are stated below:

Balanced instruction including multiple strategies and activities on struggling readers in elementary grades results in improvements in various reading areas (Duffy, A.M., 2001) such as fluency, word recognition, comprehension, and, building confidence and positive attitude in reading. However, the type and amount of support differ from one student to another. Existing literature indicates that teachers who integrate basic and analytical thinking abilities, and incorporate explicit instruction in oral language development, and, encourage and guide student-controlled collaborative approaches can remarkably influence growth in reading (August & Shanahan, 2006). Instruction and activities act as stimuli prompting the desired response from the learners and enable them in making the correct associations.

Engaging reading activities such as the use of children's literature, texts featuring colorful illustrations are motivating and easier to understand for the CLD struggling readers. Tankersley (2005) proposed the use of pictures in explaining the texts, and books containing images corresponding to the text. Those reading materials can introduce the sounds and usage of the English letters easily to the elementary CLD learners. He further suggested the use of vocabulary cards containing pictures to teach the struggling readers new words. Jimenez and Gersten (1999) also recommended the use of story maps and graphic organizers in supporting the instruction for the CLD readers. KWL charts and word splash are other common strategies for struggling readers. Visual representations are cognitively appealing and enable quick identification and recollection of the reading content. They may succeed in piquing the elementary learners' interests and hold their attention. Also, different modes of instruction can make the learning conditions favorable in varied ways. Teachers may read books together with

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

students which may inspire and interest them more, and help them understand better. Both fiction and non-fiction short texts can be incorporated in the curriculum as these are easy to read, and, less intimidating and time-consuming. Short texts can provide them practice with high-frequency sight words and re-reading those books can help develop fluency (Ehri et. al., 2007).

Children's multicultural or multiethnic literature has been identified by CRP as effective in teaching the elementary CLD struggling readers (Bieger, E. M., 1996; Au, K. 1993). This literature focuses on people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds including people of color, on regional cultures, on religious minorities, on the aged and the disabled. Multiethnic literature can be used in an elementary classroom as a part of a literature-based reading program to strengthen the cultural identity of the CLD readers. It will boost their comprehension at a fast pace as they can relate more to those books, and feel more interested in reading. It will also develop a sense of understanding and regard for other cultures among the mainstream students.

Student voice and choice are considered to be of prime importance in teaching CLD learners. CRP reflects curricular materials that validate and are cognizant of their cultural and linguistic identities (Banks, 1995; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). If students are provided the opportunities to read books of their choice, and, initially allowed to express themselves in their language and then translate in English, their reading abilities develop in both languages. In her book, *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) has portrayed how the teachers reached out to their students in culturally responsive ways. One of them was Patricia Hilliard who taught complex concepts of poetry such as, rhyming, onomatopoeia and alliteration to the second graders through self-composed song lyrics of their choice.

Responsive feedback is an efficacious instructional strategy for the CLD struggling readers (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). CRP supports immediate feedback on

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

students' responses and performances in keeping with their cultural preferences. Students' ideas are accounted while guiding them in constructing new meanings. They are constantly encouraged to involve in reading activities and are prompted to think and expand their responses. This helps them to keep a track of their own understanding and thinking. Instant feedback is necessary for mental development as the schema gets reconstructed to store the correct inputs. It also impacts learners' responses as their misconceptions are clarified, and signals them if they are on the right track. This elucidates their understanding and fortifies their learning.

Scaffolding is pivotal in preparing the elementary CLD struggling readers to become proficient in reading. Instructional scaffolding which is specifically culturally responsive modifies the level of difficulty for every reading assignment, and gradually moves from easy to the more advanced reading. Through scaffolding, teachers help students to learn in their *Zone of Proximal Development*. Adequate amount of time is allotted to students to respond to varied range of questions including open-ended, text-based and reasoning questions. The use of CLD students' first language is also advised to enable comprehension in reading English texts (Carlo et. al, 2004; Gerber et. al., 2004). Scaffolding resembles *shaping* and *chaining* from a behaviorist perspective in which students are trained towards attaining the target behavior, and are moved from learning simple to complex concepts in the process.

Teacher modeling, in teaching reading to the elementary CLD struggling readers, is another vital element in CRP (Vaughn et al., 2006). It uses reading skills and strategies in understanding the content and concepts, and, critical thinking, while respecting the cultural and linguistic differences in a classroom. The teacher demonstrates learning expectations and outcomes, and imparts examples based on students' cultural and linguistic experiences.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS): PALS proved to be effective for the elementary CLD struggling readers (Patterson & O’Neill, 2013). This program aims at rectifying essential reading skills including fluency and comprehension. It features peer-mediated reading facilitated by the classroom teachers. In PALS students work together in pairs which are formed strategically. High-performing students are paired with average-performing readers, who in turn are paired with low-performing or struggling readers. Appreciation and points assigned for completing every activity are integral to this program. These act as positive reinforcements, and motivate the students to deliver improved reading performances. In the process, students help and inspire each other in reading. The teacher acts as a facilitator and intervenes as necessary.

PALS feature 4 major reading activities, peer reading, retelling, shortening of paragraphs and prediction, to enhance fluency and reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the reading components and activities in the PALS program differ from one grade to another. For example, grade 1 focuses on letter-sound correspondence, phonemic awareness, early decoding, sentence reading, and fluency; and grade 2 adds comprehension activities. From grade 3 onwards the major reading activities are introduced. In accordance with CRP, PALS account for the cultural and linguistic factors in designing instruction and deciding the reading materials (Patterson & O’Neill, 2013). The other factors considered include, age, grade, race, gender, social behavior, student achievement and special needs students. Fuchs et. al. (1999) detected that PALS students achieved higher in reading areas than non-PALS students. Saenz et. al. (2005) combined peer tutoring with instructional inputs for reading practices. Results indicated significant gains in reading comprehension of English Language Learners with Learning Disability.

Collaborative and peer learning techniques beneficial to the CLD students are fostered by CRP (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). It emphasizes on developing a caring and cooperative

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

learning community in which students are made aware of different cultural groups and are motivated to learn from one another. Collaborative learning is culturally responsive as the assignments are created on the basis of the students' reading skills. It features heterogeneous grouping of students based on their reading abilities. Their ideas expand through sharing of views which eventually modify the structure of the schema as new concepts are accommodated. In cooperative learning teachers observe and assist the students who encounter issues in comprehending the text or task. In a collaborative learning session, featuring CLD students, teachers generate questions and involve the learners in discussions to clarify the concepts, and enable them to connect it to their respective cultural backgrounds (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996).

However, CRP also suggests joint effort between teacher and students. It was observed that teachers adjust their instruction and encourage student interactions over the content both among themselves and with the teacher (Garcia, E., 1991). Other collaborative reading programs include, Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), Class-wide Peer Tutoring (Greenwood, C.R. 1991) and, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (Stevens, R.J. 2003).

6. Assessments for Elementary CLD Struggling Readers

Assessments for the elementary struggling CLD readers need to be ongoing in nature. Teachers may select both informal and formal methods of evaluation and should acknowledge the readers' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the process. Assessment outcomes may vary widely, as interpretations of the same text may differ depending on these students' prior knowledge and experiences. However, Klingner et. al (2005) have pointed out that the difference in performances of CLD struggling readers have been misconstrued as their reading disability requiring amendments. Thus the instruction tools and curriculum need to be re-evaluated to avoid any misinterpretation of student learning. In assessing CLD learners a teacher needs to

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

consider the reading materials and the opportunities provided to them for practice and feedback, their home reading environment, and, their existing academic views and experiences in reading.

CRP features constant observation of these students, their interactions with the teacher and peers (King et. al., 2008). There are various basic reading inventories that can be used for the elementary CLD readers in areas of word recognition, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The CLD readers' word recognition skills can be tested by using a standard sight word list such as, the Dolch (1955) or Fry (1980) list. The Cloze Procedure is apt in evaluating their vocabulary or comprehension abilities (Alderson, J. C., 1979). Examples of culturally responsive assessment may include, short discussions on a topic or story between teacher and student, or among students themselves to evaluate their comprehension skills, informal reading inventories and testing strategies such as, STAR and DIBELS, and, mid- and end-of-unit paper and pencil tests. Informal observation of students in Book Club may be useful too (Kong & Fitch, 2002). Multiple choice questions are a favorite among culturally responsive teachers in evaluating elementary CLD struggling readers. Performance assessments are highly suitable for these learners as they offer them the scope to exhibit ways of relating the new content to their existing knowledge (Shade et. al., 1997). Some of the reliable formal reading tests may include Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests, Gates-MacGinitie Reading tests, and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

7. Implications and Limitations

Implications for teachers and practitioners include the importance of identifying the students' home culture and language, the compelling need of addressing the issue of reading in elementary CLD learners, and, the use of CRP in this endeavor. Though all readers can profit from CRP, it particularly holds the potential to disproportionately benefit and positively impact the reading process of the elementary CLD struggling readers. This may help close any

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

achievement gaps in reading between the native speakers of English and the non-English speaking learners. Teachers who adopt and apply CRP in teaching reading to these students aim at implementing appropriate reading practices improving student performance through a positive reinforcement of their cultural identity. Those educators target at enabling the students to apply the reading strategies independently to make sense of the text (Caskey, M.M., 2008). Culturally responsive reading approaches and instruction prove to be promising as they consider students' motivation and engagement in high regard. This will enhance not only their reading accomplishment but also their overall academic, social and behavioral success.

This essay identifies some major culturally responsive reading intervention programs and instructional strategies to resolve the reading issues of the elementary CLD struggling readers. It attempts to answer following questions: 1) How can instruction be matched to better suit a particular student's cultural and linguistic background? 2) What texts can be introduced in the curriculum that would reflect the students' culture and therefore develop interests in reading? 3) How to improve reading in CLD struggling readers? 4) How to close the achievement gap in reading between mainstream English-speaking students and CLD learners?

Limitations of CRP include challenging implementation and integration in the conventional education system. Considering the cultural and linguistic diversity in a classroom, and synthesizing students' reading needs into the existing curricula can be a complex and time-consuming procedure. Moreover, the stringent academic policies, high stake tests for all students, the rigorous Common Core State Standards, and the responsibility of teachers in covering the curricular materials in a restrictive time, question the practicality of CRP. The RTI model has some limitations as there is no way to identify if the CLD struggling readers have at all received proper intensive instruction and structured reading opportunities in a given tier before shifting

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

them to the next tier. It may not be justified in moving them to the consecutive level without accounting for other factors. The PALS program is not effective for students with high incidence disabilities (Saenz, 2005). In a classroom where it is applied the teacher may miss the scope of rectifying erroneous interpretations of some students (Richardson & Anders, 1998). Since this is a student-led program, they may not take it seriously which may adversely affect the learning.

8. Future Considerations and Plan of Action

Not all reading strategies and intervention programs may be equally applicable to all CLD students. Whether or not, the amount and type of instruction and intervention be the same for all CLD learners in all elementary grades demands further investigation. Suitable instruction is required to meet the varying academic needs of the CLD struggling readers in order to help them succeed in reading. Placing all learners in the same reading program will not be appropriate (Valencia & Buly, 2004). Moreover, the pace of improvement and learning may also differ from one student to the other. Hence, the questions arise, 1) How to include cultural experiences of all students in instruction? 2) How to cater to the reading needs of students belonging to multiple cultural and linguistic groups in one classroom? 3) How to improve student learning in a multicultural classroom? 4) How the implementation of CRP can be accelerated? Intensive and careful experimental studies are required to answer these questions.

A prospective *plan of action* to address the above questions is to implement CRP in all the aspects of education (classroom setting, course materials, teaching methods and assessments) for the elementary CLD struggling readers. Schools need to introduce compulsory ongoing training programs on CRP and lend additional support to the teachers in consolidating the culturally responsive teaching practices in the regular classrooms, and calibrate their instructional techniques, and remodel the existing curricula according to student needs. However,

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Struggling Readers

reading interventions should be ongoing as the students progress towards the upper grades. Teachers need to collaborate in teaching the CLD struggling readers so that they are familiar with a particular student's reading abilities and know where to begin with in a new grade.

9. Conclusion

In this essay, the emergence of CLD struggling readers and the necessity of identifying them in the elementary grades are examined. Early reading intervention is a prerequisite to resolve their reading issues, and prevent the urgency to place them on any remedial education programs in the later stages. CRP seems to be propitious in equipping the teachers with the appropriate instructional plans and programs in treating the reading problems of the CLD learners. Two culturally responsive reading interventions, RTI and RES, and some instructional methods with a focus on PALS program have been elaborated. The implications of this study, limitations, possible questions for future research, and a brief plan of action are also provided. To round up, CLD struggling readers can learn to read successfully when adequate and pertinent support and instruction are delivered while preserving their cultural and linguistic identities.

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