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Using Culturally Responsive Teaching and Funds of Knowledge to Engage Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Authentic Learning

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ENGAGE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN

AUTHENTIC LEARNING

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study employed the theoretical frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Funds of Knowledge as lens for understanding how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the Texas border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning. The results of this study include the following themes: Curriculum, instruction and assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students; lessons learned from virtual/online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; culturally responsive teaching practices; funds of knowledge; and authentic learning. The results indicated that while English as a Second Language (ESL) in the border region may not have been familiar with the phrases, culturally responsive teaching or funds of knowledge; through their teaching experiences, they demonstrated genuine cultural competence and caring toward their culturally and linguistic diverse students. This study raises implications for research and practice.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching, funds of knowledge, authentic learning, authentic relationships, emergent bilingual, virtual/online learning, higher-order thinking, culture, culturally and linguistically diverse students, deficit ideology, Mexican American, Latinx, English as a Second Language (ESL)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The great Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset proclaims that every generation "has its own theme, its own preoccupation" (Max-Neef, 1991). The current generation saw its theme of self-reflection, one preoccupied with pondering life's purpose and consideration of others. American violinist, Yo-Yo Ma mirrors that "the pandemic accentuated that part of me that says why am I useful? Am I useful for anything? I'm only useful if I feel I can respond to need" (*Reader's Digest*, 2021, p. 64). Similarly, the current generation of educators arise from the pandemic with a new perspective of the distinct needs of disadvantaged students and the hardships they continue to overcome. The disconnection with students due to the lack of technology preparation and integration activated the demand for educators to respond by reconnecting with sidelined students through the assistance of their parents, guardians, and family members. This endeavor dismissed any pre-existing reluctancies to connect with students and their families. Connecting with students via video, telephone, text messages, and digital applications became an unyielding effort. Teachers and campus personnel developed innovative ways and exerted extreme energies to deliver instruction despite the barriers imposed by the Corona Virus; nonetheless, the pandemic could not be accepted as a setback. Conversely, a paradigm shift was revealed with an adjustment in perspective. Surviving the pandemic provided evidence that anything can be done when together, we do things differently, such as changing our approach to connecting with students, especially with those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD).

The inclusion of minorities in education began with *Mendez v. Westminster*. In February 1946, Judge Paul J. McCormick decided in favor of Gonzalo and Felicita Mendez, who argued that the Orange County school boards in California violated the "equal protection" clause of the

U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment due to the segregation of their Mexican American children from the all-white Westminster schools. In April 1947, the federal appeals court upheld Judge McCormick's decision, 7 to 0. From this litigation, evolved the notable *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1954, the Supreme Court's decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education* paved the way for states to dismantle segregation in schools. In 1964, the 88th Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which initiated the observation of equality in federal law (Steward-Manzanares, 1988). The emphasis on equality led to the authorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which continued to support equal access to education by providing federal funds to schools with impoverished students. U.S. Senator, El Paso lawyer Ralph Yarbrough proposed assistance to schools with limited English-speaking abilities (LESA) in 1967. In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act expanded from the ESEA and recognized the needs of students with limited English-speaking ability (LESA). The Bilingual Education Act has been gradually reauthorized in 1978, 1984, 1988, and 1994. The 1974 Equal Education Opportunity Act required that schools activate instructional programs to compensate for language barriers. Since its inception by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized by five additional United States Presidents, in 1975 by Jimmy Carter; 1980 by George H.W. Bush; 1994 by Bill Clinton; 2001 by George W. Bush and retitled as No Child Left Behind (NCLB); and most recently in 2015 by Barack Obama, retitled as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). Because of the limitations of federal law in education, the Obama administration granted flexibility to the states to extend beyond the previous NCLB requirements in exchange for "rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) responded by formally submitting the state's ESSA Consolidated Plan to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) on Sept. 25, 2017. The USDE approved TEA's ESSA plan on March 26, 2018 (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2020). The originally submitted TEA's 2017 Strategic State Plan delineates the requirements as per the ESSA for the benefit of over 5 million students enrolled throughout 1,207 Texas public schools. It presents four strategic priorities, including the intention of "improving low-performing schools" and enablers, such as, "increasing transparency, fairness and rigor in district and campus academic and financial performance" and "strengthen organizational foundations, such as resource efficiency, culture, capabilities, and partnerships" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Additionally, the TEA acted on the call for equity by using the Texas Equity Toolkit to identify districts that have equity gaps greater than 10 percent in two of the previous three years. The Texas Equity Toolkit aimed to support districts by aligning their continuous improvement plans with increased equitable practices through systemic equity. Systemic equity is defined by Scott (2010) as the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner has the greatest opportunity to learn, enhanced by the resources to achieve academic competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life.

Texas state policy such as the Texas Education Code, Title 2, Public Education, also supported disadvantaged students, including CLD students struggling with limited English proficiency who are under-performing in schools. In Subtitle F. Curriculum, Programs, and Services, Chapter 29, Section 29.001 described that a program of bilingual education or of instruction in English as a second language (ESL) shall be designed to consider the students'

learning experiences and shall incorporate the *cultural* aspects of the students' backgrounds (*Texas Education Code*, 2019). The Texas Administrative Code which gathers and publishes laws authorized by Texas legislation also reiterated the importance for the implementation of culturally responsive practices and application of higher order thinking opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Second language acquisition methods in English are incorporated by promoting the students' background and cultural heritage to boost their confidence while employing higher order thinking skills to learn new material (Texas Administrative Code, 2019).

Although the structures of policy data such as the patterns and characteristics of underserved children have been available to make instructional decisions and increase educational funding initiatives and supplemental programs; more detailed work needs to be done regarding equitable pedagogy and instructional approaches to meet the individual, specific learning needs of CLD students. Our initial focus should be to introduce the value of cultural and linguistic responsiveness to make a real difference in educational outcomes. Teachers and administrators need to become aware of the essential elements of equity and cultural sensitivity towards marginalized minority students. The vision of equal educational opportunity for all students should be possible by embracing different approaches of connecting with students and their families. We could also pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for every child in every school, understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education, and much is known about what to do (Robledo Montecel, 2010).

This study examined the teaching approaches of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers of Mexican American/Latino and diverse students in the Texas border region observing that this student population is the largest Texas ethnic group. According to the 2020-21 Texas

Academic Performance Report (TAPR), Hispanic students encompass 52.9 percent of 5,359,040 Early Childhood (EC) through 12th grade students who are currently enrolled in Texas schools (TEA, 2020). The most recent reports indicated that English Learners (more recently identified as Emergent Bilingual (EB) students totaled 1,108,883 or 20.7 percent of all Texas students. The expectation of this research was to reveal how high school ESL teachers continued to close the performance gaps of their EB students. To demonstrate, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2019-20 State STAAR Performance Report indicated that from 2018 to 2019 all Texas students at the Approaches level, scored at 77 percent to 78 percent, a 1 percent increase and state Emergent Bilingual (EB) students, scored at 69 percent to 70 percent, a 1 percent increase. Similar patterns were revealed at the Meets level score. All state students scored at 48 percent to 50 percent, a 2 percent improvement and the state EB population increased from 36 percent to 38 percent, a 2 percent gain. At the highest passing level, the Masters level, all state students scored at 22 percent to 24, a 2 percent increase, while state EB students scored at 14 percent to 16 percent, a 2% percent increase. This information indicated that although the Texas emergent bilingual subpopulation continued to underperform compared to all state students, they showed equal growth rates at all passing levels compared to all state students and state emerging bilingual students.

The 2019-20 TAPR District STAAR Performance Report also indicated that English learners at the Borderland Independent School District also showed significant improvements. The "Borderland ISD" District STAAR performance report showed that at the Approaches level from 2018 to 2019 Emergent Bilingual students scored from 73 percent to 76 percent, a 3% gain; at the Meets level, district EB students scored at 39 percent to 41 percent, a 2% gain; and at the Masters level, district EB students scored at 14 percent 16 percent in 2019. This indicated that

pre-pandemic, at the approaches level from 2018-19, Borderland ISD Emergent Bilingual students had the greatest growth rate compared to all state students and state emergent bilingual students at all grades and all subjects. The growth patterns in this data further show there was something to be learned from the success of Borderland ISD teachers who worked directly with emergent bilingual students.

Post-pandemic, the 2020-21 State STAAR Performance reports an adverse effect. Due to the cancellation of spring 2020 STAAR, the data showed the exchange from 2019 to 2021. All Texas students at the Approaches level, scored from 78 percent down to 67 percent, an 11 percent decrease and state Emergent Bilingual (EB) students, scored from 70 percent down to 54 percent, a 16 percent decrease. Similar patterns were revealed at the Meets level score. All state students scored at 50 percent to 41 percent, a 9 percent decrease and the state EB population decreased from 38 percent to 26 percent, a 12 percent drop. At the Masters level, all state students scored at 24 percent down to 18, a 6 percent decrease, while state EB students scored at 16 percent down to 10 percent, a 6 percent decline. The decreased scores in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) indicates that learning for all students, at all subjects and all grade levels fell backwards, thus created wider gaps between the achievement of all Texas general education students and the minority borderland Emergent Bilingual students.

The 2020-21 TAPR District STAAR Performance Report also indicated that English learners at the Borderland Independent School District also showed significant loss of learning. The "Borderland ISD" District STAAR performance report showed that at the Approaches level from 2019 to 2021 emergent bilingual students scored from 76 percent down to 49 percent, a 27 decrease; at the Meets level, district EB students scored from 41 percent down to 22 percent, a 19 percent drop; and at the Masters level, district EB students scored from 16 percent down to 6

percent. This indicated that after the pandemic all state students at all grade level and subjects showed a significant decrease in learning, while district emergent bilingual students experienced the greatest losses in STAAR score performance, thus further widening the learning gap. This further supported the need to examine the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' pedagogical approaches. There may be something to be learned from the success of Borderland ISD teachers who worked directly with Emergent Bilingual students before the pandemic.

Table 1: Texas Academic Performance Reports

Texas Education Agency **Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)** **2019-20 & 2020-21 State STAAR Performance** and **2019-20 & 2020-21 Borderland ISD STAAR Performance**					
Student Groups	2018	2019	GROWTH	2021	GROWTH
Approaches level					
All Texas students	77%	78%	+1%	67%	-11%
Texas EBs	69%	70%	+1%	54%	-16%
Borderland EBs	73%	76%	+3%	49%	-27%
Meets level					
All Texas students	48%	50%	+2%	41%	-9%
Texas EBs	36%	38%	+2%	26%	-12%
Borderland EBs	39%	41%	+2%	22%	-19%
Masters level					
All Texas students	22%	24%	+2%	18%	-6%
Texas EBs	14%	16%	+2%	10%	-6%
Borderland EBs	14%	16%	+2%	6%	-10%

Because of the growth and improvements shown by both the state and district STAAR performance reports and particularly the growth shown by the 2019 Borderland Emergent Bilingual students at the approaches level, the researcher endeavored to discover if culturally responsive approaches, such as funds of knowledge scaffolded EB students to authentic learning, (EB students here known as Mexican American/Latinx or culturally and linguistically diverse

students). Therefore, two high school ESL teachers from each of the six comprehensive high schools in the Borderland Independent School District were asked to be interviewed to discover how they effectively supported emergent bilingual, Mexican American/Latinx students towards greater academic achievement.

Research Problem

A problem contributing to low improvement rates for culturally and linguistically diverse, such as, Mexican American or Latinx students is the lack of attentiveness to the specific requirements of *the Every Student Succeeds Acts* (ESSA), for example Schettino, Radvany and Wells (2019) highlighted that the ESSA has given states new opportunities to establish their own goals for teaching and learning in the public schools, and to create accountability systems that are broader and more meaningful than standardized test scores alone. Regrettably, schools have concentrated much of their energies on testing that adversely weakens quality of education, especially for lower performing students who struggle with language barriers. Darling-Hammond (2004) stressed that indicators such as test scores are information for the accountability system; they are not the system itself. Because of the narrow attention expended on testing, the intent and sustenance of combined components of an accountability system are often overlooked and under-utilized. For example, the foundation of results-based accountability systems has clear expectations for student learning, both what students are to learn and how that learning is to be demonstrated (Anderson, 2005). While the literature indicated the expected alignment between what will be taught, how it will be assessed, and how it will be taught, the efficacy of culturally responsive instructional materials and teaching-learning strategies high school teachers employed was limited. Despite the flexibility the ESSA has offered states to reimagine education in a racially, ethnically, and religious diverse settings, culturally responsive practices have not

8

been valued or promoted as a means to address the role of culture in schools, classrooms, and students (Schettino et al., 2019). As a result, programs that seek to value and promote cultural and linguistically accommodated learning for all are needed but not systemically implemented or commonly applied.

Accountability systems embody the values and aspirations of a society, and societies communicate their values through their policies and practices (Anderson, 2005). Because the nation continues to experience growing diverse populations, there is a need for continued evaluation of federal, state, and local school policy to ensure equitable and individualized educational opportunities for CLD students. The role of policy serves to shape and assess the quality, adequacy, and appropriateness of educational services to all students, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or gender. Cortez and Villarreal (2010) encouraged policymakers, educators, and community members to review whether existing policies support or hinder commonly shared goals of improving achievement for all students, and particularly those students who have been historically ill-served or under-served in our educational institutions. This type of focus could minimize another gap in our knowledge, we know little about the number of opportunities parents of diverse students have to make decisions for their children's education and to support positive changes in the educational system (Anderson, 2005).

Another problem that occurred in education was that teachers regarded students from cultures different than their own as less intelligent, less capable, or lacking support or motivation. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education (Yosso, 2005). Tenery (2005) added that stereotypes such as lacking morality, having broken families,

9

not valuing education, and demonstrating low skill levels are invalidated by the data.

Montemayor (2010) added that deficit ideology is seen as something that is broken, then the

action is to fix it; if lacking, then fill that void. Gonzalez et al. (2005) supported that an emphasis

on "disadvantaged" children provides justification for lowering expectations.

Teachers' deficit-based perspectives maintained the practice of unconsciously judging

CLD students due to the teachers' lack of understanding cultures different from their own.

Instead of seeing CLD students as banks of knowledge, they are seen as "empty little heads into

which we well deposit coins of knowledge" (Montemayor, 2010). The misconception that

minoritized students must conform to the already effective and equitable system, clouds

teachers' perspectives and further minimizes learning opportunities for minoritized students.

A third problem related to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the benefits of

culturally responsive pedagogy. Most states including Texas schools showed limited plans to

implement culturally responsive practices to support Mexican American or Latinx students.

Moreover, teachers were unaware of the value of building authentic relationships with students

and their families. It was the responsibility of educators at all levels to be mindful of how the

nation's schools were growing increasingly diverse. It was an educator's duty to set the

culturally responsive standard to ensure all students, including marginalized, disenfranchised,

and culturally and linguistically diverse students were included in the expectation of acquiring

knowledge. Teaching in public schools cannot and should not be considered high quality if it is

not culturally relevant (Scott, 2010). There was limited data to show the extent to which school

systems were aligned to culturally responsive practices and if personnel were adequately trained

with the skills needed to connect students' unique life experiences, background, and family

histories as a conduit to new learning. Scott (2010) added that many teachers are still not

10

prepared to provide educational experiences that effectively serve diverse students in ways that move them to high achievement and other positive outcomes. Because culturally responsive practices are uncommon among teachers, diverse learners continued to unfairly under-perform.

Another problem is that little is known about how culturally responsive teachers used funds of knowledge to propel CLD students to engage in authentic learning or to higher level thinking while learning a second language. In less authentic learning situations students acquire knowledge largely for purposes of getting a good grade on a test. As a result, students may remember less because the concepts remain abstract or disconnected from first-hand learning experiences (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). Gonzalez et al. (2005) defined funds of knowledge as bodies of experiences and knowledge that are historically accumulated and culturally developed from the family that an individual must know to maintain their own well-being throughout their life. They are rich resources that can be used to connect new knowledge from that which is familiar to the student. Funds of knowledge are a form of higher-level thinking because it allows the possibility for pedagogy to extend beyond the confines of the classroom.

There was an overarching perception that Mexican American or Latinx families are untrustworthy and do not value education, consequently, educators miss opportunities to connect with the community or families of diverse students that play a key role in their success. Montemayor (2010) stresses that the combination of all who live within a home are important influences on children and can be a collective force for creating excellent schools. Gonzalez et al. (2005) reinforced that our assumptions about culture shape what we consider to be important information about ourselves and others, and how we interpret and judge human behavior.

11

In schools, the funds of knowledge approach expected that the duties of teachers and staff extend beyond parent participation in crafts or hobbies, English courses for adults, or parent volunteer services. Funds of knowledge are instead sourced as rich assets of student knowledge by which teachers connect to curriculum and instruction. Funds of knowledge enhances meaningful parent and family involvement to develop students' academic performance.

It has become evident that complex or higher-level thinking practice opportunities are lacking for CLD students. Yosso (2005) cautioned on the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower. Students cannot succeed in meeting the demands of the new economy if they do not encounter much more challenging work in school (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Only when content standards, assessments, materials, and strategies are aligned, do students have the maximum opportunity to learn (Anderson, 2005). Because CLD students seldomly receive instruction at the same level of rigor as the content standards, they are deprived of equitable and quality instruction. Setting the expectation for marginalized students to pass high-stakes tests without adequate preparation is unjust. For this reason, more needs to be studied on how or to what extent culturally responsive teachers scaffold diverse learners to higher levels of thinking or critical thinking. It would be advantageous for classroom teachers to see first-hand how *pedagogies of the home*, such as storytelling, including memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme (Yosso, 2005) exemplified academic rigor. In these scenarios, teachers would be able to perceive how Emergent Bilingual children are expected to perform higher level thinking tasks for their non-English speaking adult family members, such as transmuting complex utility invoices, life/car

insurances documents, or bank statements, and/or verbally translating between parents'
employers and business situations.

Beyond the problems stated above with the lack of cultural responsiveness of school
personnel, there also existed a related need for more targeted linguistically responsive
approaches in classroom for CLD students, such as, translanguaging. Gaining the benefits of
translanguaging as a linguistically responsive approach has been uncommon due to English-only
viewpoints in classroom instruction. Baker et al., (2013) made the claim that the tide is slowly
moving away from separating languages in the classroom to the use of two or more languages in
the same lesson. Linguistic responsive practices need to be considered and valued when children
come to school with languages other than English and effective communications skills. For this
reason, Yosso (2005) validated children who most often have been engaged in a storytelling
tradition, that may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories (*cuentos*),
proverbs (*dichos*), advise (*consejos*), or *testimonios*.

Purpose Statement

Because education in the United States is beginning to recognize the unique backgrounds
of diverse students and leaning towards more equitable classroom practices, this study examined
how culturally responsive practices, such as relationships with marginalized students are
developed. The study also investigated how ESL teachers' current practices and strategies are
used to engage Mexican American and Latinx students with learning and instruction. The critical
concept of culturally responsive teaching dated back to Ramirez and Castaneda (1974), who
established that "since the learning style is chiefly the result of the unique, culturally determined
teaching styles, a culturally democratic educational environment should incorporate the critical
elements of the teaching styles characteristic of different cultural groups" (p. 34-35), which

begins by identifying the sociocultural structures of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Au (1993) termed it as instruction consistent with the values of students' own cultures and aimed at improving academic learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings defined culturally responsive teaching as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical references to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes" (1994, p. 13).

Culturally responsive teachers appreciate the innate knowledge diverse students bring into the classroom and regard their background experiences as capital to build on the exceptionality of diverse students. Yosso (2005) related that cultural capital as the sense of group consciousness and collective identity that serves as a resource aimed at the advancement of an entire group. They use this capital (i.e., personal experiences and interests) as the basis for instructional connections to facilitate student learning and development (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Through culturally responsive approaches, teachers can engage in authentic interaction and build healthy relationships with students and their families to gain their trust. Too often, we ignore the quality of our interactions with students and instead focus primarily on the curriculum. In culturally responsive teaching, relationships are as important as the curriculum (Hammond, 2015, p. 72). By witnessing multiple forms of cultural and linguistic capital students already bring to the classroom, teachers would begin to realize and use this wealth of knowledge to anchor new content knowledge in a more constructive and effectual way. Yosso (2005) emphasized the main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower students of color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities.

This study also investigated how culturally responsive teachers used relationships to engage Mexican American and Latinx students in learning and instruction. Ravitch (2013)

emphasizes that a great importance in creating lasting change is social capital, the capital that grows because of relationships within the school and between the school and the community. As cited in Stanton-Salazar (2011):

> Through authentic relationships between the student and school personnel, the student becomes attached, committed, involved and has belief in the norms, activities and people of an   institution…when such bonding between agent and student becomes a defining characteristic of the school community as whole, students experience a certain "we-ness," a collective identity that is highly consonant with increased effort engagement and academic achievement. (p. 1082)

Ladson-Billings (1995) associated this acknowledgement as students' social power, when students "choose" academic excellence. This study sought to reveal how culturally responsive teachers can transfer student social power into academic power.

Funds of knowledge was seen as how the teaching of instruction can be anchored and solidified in students' life experiences. Teachers who valued the unique cultures representative of the students in their classroom, in essence also valued the family's household knowledge. Through this appreciation, the parents also feel acknowledged and respected, thereby forming a relationship between educational professionals and the students' family. It is through authentic relationships that the walls between school and home can be dismantled, thereby promoting the best opportunity for achievement. As cited by Mercado (2005):

> The funds of knowledge approach is one variant of culturally responsive teaching that builds on the resources of the home to improve student engagement and participation, which have been linked to learning and achievement. It is an approach that begins with the study of households rather than the study of pedagogy. (p.251)

For this reason, this study sought to reveal how funds of knowledge helped teachers connect student learning to the curriculum and instruction. This culturally responsive approach engages students in higher level thinking processes which served to increase student achievement. In the words of Jim Cummins (2003), "we provide the scaffolding, for by embedding the content in a richly redundant context where there are multiple routes to the meaning in addition to the language itself" (p. 6). CLD students can be catapulted to higher levels of learning from lessons created with the students' household knowledge, prior experiences, and talents in mind. Human beings and their social worlds are inseparable…embedded in each other, thus, human thinking is irreducible to individual properties or traits (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2005). Thinking and learning in complex settings, can be advanced from social interaction with student peers who each distribute and contribute knowledge from their unique experiences.

Research Question

The research question that guided this qualitative study was: how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning? Culturally responsive teachers are aware of diverse students' background knowledge and use their individual experiences to connect to new knowledge. Because responsive teachers value the cultural experiences students bring into the classroom, they use this cultural capital to empower minoritized students by building on what they already know. This research question sought to discover if border region English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers were culturally responsive teachers who used caring relationships to encourage Mexican American/Latinx students to become active participants in learning and instruction. The research question also

16

provided the focus to uncover if border region ESL teachers used funds of knowledge to connect

curriculum and instruction to Mexican American/Latinx students' pre-established knowledge and

skills to support their academic achievement. Ultimately, this research question aimed to

discover if border region ESL teachers were culturally responsive teachers who created trusting

relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse Mexican American/Latinx students

through funds of knowledge to support authentic learning experiences through rigorous and

engaging practices.

Theoretical Framework #1: Culturally Responsive Teaching

The culturally responsive teaching theoretical framework structured this research. The

progressive movement of culturally responsive teaching began with Ramirez and Castañeda

(1974) who originated the concept of cultural democracy, which stated that an individual can be

bicultural and still be loyal to American ideals, they elucidate, "Cultural democracy recognizes

that the way a person communicates, relates to others, seeks support, thinks, and learns is a

product of the value system of his home and community" (p. 23). Jacqueline J. Irvine (1990)

maintained that "teachers as cultural translators should become bicultural---thoroughly

knowledgeable and sensitive about black children's language, style of presentation, community

values, traditions, legends, myths, history, symbols, and norms" (p.126). It was Gloria Ladson-

Billings (1994) who coined the term "culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogy that

empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and

historical references to convey knowledge" (p.19). Geneva Gay added that "Culturally

Responsive Pedagogy as the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference,

and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant

to, and effective for them" (p. 36). Lisa Delpit and Joanne Dowdy (2002) asserted that teachers

17

of diverse student populations "must be taught so their total orientation toward language and cultural linguistic principles represents the general attitude and not a bag of tricks" (p.101). Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas (2007) further advanced a vision of the culturally responsive teacher who is respectful of student diversity and recognizes the central role that individual and cultural differences play in the learning process" (p. xv). Paris and Alim (2017) described the importance of culturally responsive teaching, taking into account the fact that culture both remains rooted and continues to shift in the ways that culture always has" (p.9). Sharroky Hollie (2012) continued to expand on cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR) as the validation and affirmation of the home culture and language to bridge the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society. Zaretta Hammond (2015) progressed that an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning using cultural knowledge as a scaffold connect what the student knows to new concepts and content to promote effective information processing. Paul Gorski (2016) promoted that "culture is important as one piece of students' multilayered identities, noting that cultural sensitivity is an important facet when working toward educational equity as long as recognize and embrace students' whole selves instead of assigning them to 'cultural groups' based on one dimension of their identities" (p.224). As of late, it is Sydney Snyder and Diane Staehr Fenner (2021) who continued to expound on the theory of CRT:

> We want to be sure our work with culturally responsive teaching does not get stuck in the safe space of celebrating culturally diversity but instead works toward ensuring multilingual learners' equitable education, even if—especially if—that means breaking out of our comfort zones…to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of

instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall

quality as needed. (p.10)

In essence, culturally responsive teachers are those who are aware and support the views of students from diverse backgrounds; who make themselves familiar with and knowledgeable about diverse students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences; develop their strategies and lessons around what students already know to connect them to new knowledge; and who see themselves as change agents of educational change that will make learning equitable for all students. Culturally responsive teaching refers to a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This more relevant approach to teaching builds marginalized students' confidence through contributions of their own knowledge, culture, and prior life experiences. In this approach, diverse students are self-motivated because they are better positioned to make connections to new content knowledge by interacting in lively collaboration with other students who are learning about their unique experiences as well. For example, Kronenberg and Strahan (2010) incite that even reluctant students make significant academic progress when they are supported through responsive teaching.

For scholars interested in the success of students of color in complex, urban environments, this work provides some important theoretical and conceptual groundwork (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The secret behind culturally relevant pedagogy is the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014). By reimagining learning in the classroom, culturally responsive perspectives focus instead on learning outcomes for marginalized students, such as authentic learning, growth, and academic achievement. This reality is activated by recognizing and rejecting deficit-minded

customs, such as classroom and behavior management or cultural suppression and embracing cultural relevant practices that value and promote students' cultural identities which celebrate their unique experiences and build on their individual background knowledge.

Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) validate that responsive teaching results from a strong focus on students as individuals. Culturally responsive approaches value students, family, and community experiences, to connect new content knowledge to the lived experiences and life histories of diverse students. Ladson-Billings (2001) bolsters that culturally relevant teachers understand that learning is facilitated when we capitalize on learners' prior knowledge…their culture becomes the vehicle through which they can acquire the official knowledge and skills of the school curriculum.

Culturally responsive mindsets advance the need for building caring relationships with their students to give them a sense of safety and belonging. Through authentic relationships and by building trust, diverse students can begin to take risks and participate in unfamiliar learning situations. Kronenberg and Strahan (2005) sustain that students' feelings of belonging may have an energetic function, awakening enthusiasm, interest, and willingness to participate in academic activities. Strahan (2008) expands on the need for "developing academic momentum with reluctant students" by building on their confidence and fostering a greater sense of "connectedness" (p.8).

Proponents of culturally responsive teaching believe in empowering marginalized and diverse students. Gay (2018) endorsed that they plan accordingly and create infrastructures to support the efforts of students so that they will persevere toward high levels of academic achievement. They may be teachers who use and value students' cultural and linguistic

resources, appreciate these abilities as capital to build upon rather than construing them as obstacles to learning. Supporters of culturally relevant approaches are not limited to teachers.

Theoretical Framework #2: Funds of Knowledge

A variant of culturally responsive teaching is funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge as a second theoretical framework was coupled with the culturally responsive teaching theoretical framework to communicate the significance of how to support Mexican American/Latinx students and narrow the equity and learning gaps further exasperated by the Corona virus pandemic. In this study, the funds of knowledge conceptual framework was used to extend on the credence of cultural responsiveness by further interrupting deficit orientations and victim blaming (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Deficit thinking models allege that the student who fails in school does so because of their limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior (Valencia, 1997). This research focused on how culturally aware teachers in the borderland region built on the cultural identities of their Mexican American/Latinx students and extended on the knowledge, skills, and abilities students had learned from their life experiences.

Funds of knowledge is the conceptual fabric which binds the reciprocal relation between personal experience and schooled concepts (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). The premise of funds of knowledge was used to detail the more general emphasis of CLD students' culture. It wass meant as a more precise utility of practices, activities, traditions, experiences, and language use which represent the life experiences of a given sub-group of students.

The term "funds of knowledge" refers to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Greenberg, 1989; Velez-Ibanez, 1988). The funds of knowledge theoretical

21

framework was based on the premise that people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Funds of knowledge is seen as a resource when there is a shift in perspective. The spirit of funds of knowledge aims to enthuse the reaction of educational leaders to acknowledge a new perspective of rich resources which culturally and linguistically diverse students bring our teaching space by using the knowledge of their upbringing to engage in new knowledge.

By focusing on understanding the particulars, the processes, or practices of life (in Spanish, *los quehaceres de la vida*), and in people's lived experiences, we gain a deep appreciation of how people use resources of all kinds, prominently their funds of knowledge, to engage life, including learning (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). This attentive approach to teaching used funds of knowledge to step into the standpoint of diverse students' experiences to make sense of new information from their perspective. The academic achievement of students arises from their upbringing and evolves from that which is familiar, their family networks, histories, customs, rituals, language, and household experiences. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) expounded that this work is a call to invest the time and effort to create enabling structures and greater levels of professionalism for teachers (including administrators and support staff), as we develop deeper insights and understanding of the sociopolitical context of diversity.

As a theoretical framework, funds of knowledge was used to construct this study because of its capacity to situate culturally and linguistically diverse students in a safe learning environment where they can take risks with an unfamiliar culture, language, and content by helping them feel supported and cared for. Through the funds of knowledge perspective, educators will begin to adjust the aperture of their lens through which they see CLD students as

competent, knowledgeable, and experienced individuals who bring rich resources of culture, skills, abilities, and customs as a basis for learning. Funds of knowledge was the pathway to student achievement. It was the summit, the highest point of attainment for students where the teacher-student working relationship lifts students to a place where students increase their knowledge to what they already know (Pivot Learning, 2021). Through the anticipation of authentic learning exercises, CLD students were encouraged to think more deeply, raise hard questions, or process complex real-life issues which only their prior cultural knowledge can sustain. Through authentic learning experiences CLD students were more likely to become motivated and enthused in their learning when classroom activities reflect contexts from their culture and life experiences.

The funds of knowledge theoretical framework also formed the data analysis for this research through the interview questions which sought to identify and recognize how specific culturally responsive practices, such as how funds of knowledge scaffold Mexican American and Latinx students to think and learn at higher levels of thinking. Culturally responsive, equitable practices such as funds of knowledge advanced accelerated learning for CLD students by meeting them where they are as individuals to achieve academically. This is the intention of the *Elementary & Secondary Education Act of 1965* and the continued efforts of the 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act*, to ensure that every child achieves.

Statement of Significance

When teachers create safe learning environments, positive connections, and trusting relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse students, is how they will feel a sense of belonging and safety to take risks in their learnings. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs model represents components of the whole child with which caring and attentive teachers can

support and cater to Mexican American/Latinx students' unique needs. Maslow's list of needs includes the needs of physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization (Hopper, 2020). Maslow's framework also illustrates how students respond to unfriendly environments; therefore, as teacher's we can support students' learning by safeguarding their thoughts and emotions.

Teachers in the Texas-Mexican border region showed much success with Emergent Bilingual students compared to other non-border cities. Texas accountability data from the 2019-20 Texas Academic Performance Report indicated that the Education Service Center, Region 19, which included predominantly border cities has the second highest percentage of English learners who have passed all grades and all subjects compared to the majority of non-border Education Service Centers (Texas Education Agency, 2019). This information indicated that there is knowledge to be gleaned from teachers who create safe spaces and trusting relationships for diverse students to learn. Findings from this type of study would be beneficial in professional development settings for teachers who teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Culturally responsive approaches, such as using funds of knowledge should incite all educators to consider our own positionality and implicit biases toward culturally and linguistically diverse students and begin to consider the world of learning from their lenses based on their cultural upbring. This shift in perspective must begin with a new awareness of marginalized students. Hammond (2015) proclaimed that for too long, culturally responsive teaching has been relegated to this realm of magic and mystery, knowledge that only a select few possess.

Research related to the phenomenon of how culturally responsive teachers have scaffolded diverse students to achieve academically despite continued exclusive practices still occurring in schools today. Ravitch (2013) hinted that if we are unwilling to change the root causes, we are unlikely to ever close the gaps. The root cause of underperforming culturally and linguistically diverse students being how the farsighted perspective and unfocused mindset of teachers cause them to overlook students' innate language and life experiences as rich resources of knowledge to connect to new knowledge. By changing to a more accurate lens and getting used to a different teaching approach, could in fact become an insight to closing achievement gaps for minority and disenfranchised students. Gonzalez et al. (2005) heightened that transformation is enabled through conscious reflection and meta-awareness.

Mexican American/Latinx students have often been identified as inadequate and lacking. The time is right for educators to acknowledge diverse students as vessels half full and not half empty. They should be seen for the abundance of knowledge they do bring to the schoolrooms and associate their assets and abilities to construct new knowledge. Thus, the significance of this research is based on limited literature related to culturally responsive pedagogies or asset-based approaches, such as using the funds of knowledge diverse students bring into the classroom from their culture, customs, and life experiences to authentically learn new knowledge.

Definitions

Authentic Learning. Authentic learning referred to learning classroom encounters whereby students learning by working on interdisciplinary, real-world applicable situations that allow them to learn the foundational skills of thinking, reading, writing, listening, and speaking by engaging in problem problem-solving, critical thinking, note-taking, and/or presentation delivery. Authentic learning opportunities offered a wide variety of educational and instructional

techniques focused on connecting what students are taught in school to real-world issues, problems, and applications (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). Har (2013) carried that authentic learning promotes understanding through discover and doing, which differs greatly from traditional lecture classes, where teachers give students information and content of a subject that students are expected to memorize and repeat on tests. In learning by doing, CLD students were more likely to become motivated and interested in applying their life experiences to learn new concepts and communication skills that continue to build on their lives outside of the classroom.

Culture. Culture is what unites a group of people. They subsist through the configuration of like-minded perspectives and the acceptance of compatible members of the society.

Culture as an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief system (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is a resource that provides people the tools needed to mediate their thinking (Gonzalez et al. 2005). Rosato (1989) adds that all human conduct is culturally mediated, including the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Culture is the collective consciousness and practices that a selected group of people share, such as, values, beliefs, language, laws, world views, morals, assumptions, or knowledge which bonds them. Culture is man's medium, there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture (Hollins, 1996). Culture evolves. It is passed on from one generation to another. It changes with its members. It influences how we think, believe, and behave, which includes how we learn and how we teach others.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy/Teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is a multisensory approach to better understand how culturally and linguistically diverse children learn. In the details of a multisensory approach, teachers will become aware of their own biases, build a trusting environment that supports students cultural and linguistic needs in the classroom by

becoming an advocate for English earners, and best tap into students' strengths and empower them to compete with native-born students. Diversifying teaching to reach diverse cultures is imperative because it provides culturally and linguistically diverse students equal opportunities to validate and endorse the unique proficiencies of diverse students while maintaining their cultural and linguistic identities. Culturally responsive pedagogy begins to bridge the gap between school and diverse students' home.

Diversity. Diversity is rapidly changing schools. Diversity can be overt, what you see in others, but it is also what you don't see about others. It is what defines each person whether obvious or concealed. At its core, diversity means respecting and accepting those obvious or concealed differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical or mental ability, race, sexual orientation, religion, personality traits, and other human differences. Howard (2007) warns that unfortunately some teachers, administrators, and parents view their schools' increasing diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity.

Deficit Ideology. Deficit ideology developed from the perspective that poor students shared a culture of poverty (Gonzalez et al. 2005). By maintaining a perspective of deficiencies, educators assume that CLD students lack the academic skills, growth mentality, or a positive attitude towards achievement in the classroom. It is assumed that minority students come to schools as an empty mind with limited intelligence to think and feel; lack of understanding of the environment in which they live; deprived of the proper teachings to succeed in the academic field; or absent of abilities and talents.

Funds of Knowledge. Funds of knowledge are the local and home knowledge that teachers can tap into and use to connect to new knowledge. Funds of knowledge is a reservoir of diverse people's household knowledge, lived experiences, prior experiences, students' talents, or life

histories that can be used to build from that which is familiar to the individual. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) uphold that people are competent, they have knowledge, and life experiences have given them that knowledge.

Latinx. Martinez and Gonzalez (2020) proclaimed that the term "Latino" has been considered the progressive choice over Hispanic for several decades; however, it is not holistically accepted either because the term "Latino" refers to geography and includes those with ancestry from non-Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, for example, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. The confusion begins when Latino/as do not identify with people from Latin American countries, such as, Haitians and Jamaicans who do not speak Spanish.

Mexican American. This study will use the label Mexican Americans to identify students who inhabit the Texas border region. The term Mexican American exemplifies the immigrant populations originating from the northern Mexican border and extends into the United States borderland and mostly closely characterizes colonial remnants and their descendants (Marcus, 2020). Because the terms Hispanic and Latino/a are used interchangeably, it confuses more than informs. The term Hispanic is deceptive because it derives from the Latin word for Spain, Hispania, and means Spanish (Yankauer,1987). While individuals from the United States/Mexico borderland may speak Spanish, they have little or no connections to Spain. The term Mexican American for the intended purpose of this study is more accurate and relevant.

*Systemic equity***.** Systemic equity is defined as "the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner – in whatever learning environment that learner is found – has the greatest opportunity to learn, enhanced by the resources and support necessary to achieve academic competence, excellence, independence, responsibility and self-sufficiency for school and for life" (Scott, 2010, p. 116).

Summary

The foundation and vision of leveling equitable opportunities for all minorities to receive a quality education was established by the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Equality was then observed by the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*, which led to the authorization of the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). In 1968, the *Bilingual Education Act* recognized the need for the support of students with limited English-speaking abilities. The 1974 *Equal Education Opportunity Act* required the implementation of instructional programs to compensate for language barriers. In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) ordered states to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) continued to design and submit systemic equity plans to the U.S. Department of Education, such as, the 2017 Strategic State Plan and the Texas Equity Toolkit to support under-performing minority and disadvantaged students. The state of Texas continued to update instructional policies through the Texas Education Code and the Texas Administrative Code. The TEA continued to measure achievement gaps through the data revealed in the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) and progress monitor the performance of all students through the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

Several problems was presented which show how minority and disadvantaged student continue to under-perform compared to United States native-born speakers of English. The first problem presented was the lack of attentiveness to the specific requirements of the *Every Student Succeeds Acts* (ESSA). Another identified problem was that it is unclear whether existing policies support or hinder commonly shared goals of improving achievement for all students and

to what extent have parents of CLD students contributed to the policy decision-making for their children's education. Another problem that developed in education was the deficit ideology of teachers who perceive English learners as limited, ignorant, or less intelligent than monolingual English speakers and blame them for their poor academic performance. A third problem related to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy. Little is known about how *funds of knowledge* scaffolds CLD students' learning by connecting curriculum and instruction to their life experiences, family histories, and knowledge acquired through their cultural heritages. It also became evident that complex or higher-level thinking practice opportunities are lacking for CLD students. Lastly, there also existed a related need for more linguistically responsive approaches in classroom for CLD students.

The purpose and significance of this research emerged through the consideration of the research question, how did English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning? This study sought to examine how culturally responsive practices, such as how relationships with Mexican American/Latinx students were developed; how the current practices and strategies of ESL teachers were used to engage CLD students with learning and instruction; and how funds of knowledge helped teachers connect student learning to the curriculum and instruction to increase student achievement. The mindful consideration and attentiveness of culturally responsive approaches, such as funds of knowledge, should move us to reflect on our own attitudes and biases toward diverse students and adapt to a new perception of diverse students and their abundant cultural assets.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There exists a significant disparity between the delivery of instruction in the classroom, authentic learning of minority and diverse students; and the academic achievement for Mexican American/Latinx students. English learners continue to fail state and campus assessments despite campus, district, and state efforts for all students to pass the S.T.A.A.R. exams (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Eduphoria (2021) test results indicate that CLD students regularly re-take the required End of Course exams up to five times to meet graduation requirements. Considerable evidence also indicated that teachers continue to exert much energy on extra tutoring before and after school and summer school, focused primarily on the specifics of state testing standards, with minimal significant gains (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Powerwalks classroom observations showed that learning activities for English learners do not match the cognitive rigor of the state standards (Lead Your School, 2021). Authentic student-teacher relationships and interactions with CLD students were sporadic, especially at high schools with large enrollments. In the face of such of disproportional outcomes, CLD students showed marked improvements, but not at the higher levels of non-marginalized students.

A different approach needs to be considered to meet the unique needs of CLD students. More needs to be done to acknowledge and connect to diverse students by instilling a welcoming socially-emotionally learning environment; becoming familiar with their individual life experiences; and interacting more frequently with CLD students' parents and families. Mandated and defeated tutoring cannot continue with more of the same. More equitable, culturally responsive efforts could serve as healthier, more effective approaches by scaffolding all students, including English learners through authentic and rigorous instruction that is also

aligned to the learning expectations as described in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

As the population and dynamics of CLD students continued to grow and change in schools, questions emerge from the crawling achievement gaps of CLD students. To expand beyond theory, this research sought to answer the question do how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning?

This work was important because state and national accountability data indicates that although English learners do show improvements, they are not excelling at the same levels as the general population. There was important knowledge to be gleaned from the perspective of teachers who are successfully motivating CLD students to learn and surpass the rising expectations of the state standards. These findings proved advantageous as a greater number of students could be identified not only as ready for post-secondary learning, but real-world ready. This work could potentially contribute to the existing body of knowledge by discovering how culturally and linguistically responsive teachers successfully prepare CLD students to compete in a changing global, digital, and multi-lingual society. Existing information on related topics mentioned above were described in this literature review.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

In U.S. schools, teachers are charged with the task of establishing learning environments that foster measurable academic growth in diverse learners (Zaslow, Martinez-Beck, Tout, & Halle, 2001). Adversely, Texas accountability data indicated that a large percentage of EL student populations do not perform well on the S.T.A.A.R. exams. English language learners were expected to pass high stakes tests, yet they were not routinely coached with higher level

thinking strategies or practiced through more rigorous activities. Some research-based strategies which could motivate culturally and linguistically diverse learners to higher levels of achievement, include developing a safe classroom atmosphere, incorporating cultural content, purposeful questioning, scaffolding through higher-level thinking activities, and problem-solving exercises.

Families of CLD students send their children to the United States in hopes of giving their loved ones a chance for a better life. Oftentimes, there were significant sacrifices made by the student, immediate family members, as well as extended members of the family. In addition to the new language, they needed to learn, students encountered other changes such as, new social interactions with new people and varied relationships and new environmental situations in country, city, or school, etc. The changes in their life are endless, but one development which must happen before learning can occur is enculturation. Aceves and Orosco (2014) communicated that enculturation is the process by which students become knowledgeable of and competent in their communities throughout life, and socialization is the process of behaving based on the accepted norms and values of the culture or society the individual experiences. While it was expected that CLD students would experience a transformation by blending into a new environment; diversifying teaching to reach different cultures required a delicate interaction between the initial teacher and student connection. It was imperative to provide culturally and linguistically diverse students equitable opportunities under the law to engage in educational learning activities while preserving their cultural identities.

Teachers' over-reliance on lower order thinking skills prevents student from becoming independent, critical thinkers; instead, students are limited from the practice of transferring knowledge across disciplines (Baki, Rafik-Galea, & Nimehchisalem, 2016). The National Center

for Education and Evaluation (2011) reported that the quality of instruction and teacher-child interactions is lower in low-income schools (especially in elementary), which have disproportionately higher numbers of ethnic minority students. Consequently, students who were learning English adversely became dependent on the teachers' step-by-step instruction instead of embracing risk-taking and independent learning. Thus, this research sought to explore the social interactions between EL students and their ESL teachers at the high school level and reveal instructional patterns that can foster more positive learning outcomes. Khalifa (2018) asserted that by learning about and embracing community interests, and by humanizing students in school, educators can contribute to student achievement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching of CLD Students

This research included the language aspect of culture. Culture refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since how one thinks, writes, and speaks reflects culture and affects performance, aligning instruction to the cultural communication styles of different ethnic groups can improve school achievement (Gay, 2018). Geertz (1973) communicated that culture consists of socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things. Goodenough (1957) summarized culture as a symbolic system:

> A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. It does not consist of things, people, behavior or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. (p. 167)

The emphasis on culture was that it sends a message to students that, "You can bring your whole self to this school. You can bring who you are on this educational journey. You don't have to leave your family or culture behind" (Rodberg, 2016, p. 67). In a cultural friendly school,

34

marginalized students were encouraged to become aware of their own culture; encouraged to declare how their culture can contribute to learning opportunities for other students; and embrace the cultures of other students as a value contribution to their own learning. The role of the teacher is not to elevate one culture or denigrate the other, but rather to help students understand that different cultural stances help up to see the world differently (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Culturally Responsive Teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference (Gay, 2018). It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). The descriptor "responsive" implies a student-centered focus that depends upon teachers' knowledge of their individual learners and the contexts in which they are situated (Shaw, 2015). Culturally responsive instruction like differentiated instruction can no longer be an option, it cannot be a fortunate circumstance for minority students depending on administrators or teachers who are aware and value it. Hammond (2015) proclaims that for too long, culturally responsive teaching has been relegated to this realm of magic and mystery, knowledge that only a select few possess.

The number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students continues to increase, yet teacher demographics and the dynamics of classroom instruction have seen little change (Herrera, Homes, & Kavimandan, 2012). Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, or experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). As defined by Hammond (2015):

Culturally responsive teaching is an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural

displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with

teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student

knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing.

(p. 15)

Aceves and Orosco (2014) recommend that teachers learn to use multicultural awareness

skills to gain greater self-awareness, greater awareness of others, and improve interpersonal

skills, and to appreciate the learning of linguistically challenged students through a different lens.

Hence, they promote the practice of culturally responsive methods, to provide teachers with the

critical understanding of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities develop and how

these constructs impact learning (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Spring (2018) details that 91.8

percent of native-born citizens graduate from high school as compared to 72 percent for foreign-

born Americans. On the other hand, the percentage of foreign-born with advanced degrees was

12.5 percent, which was higher than the native-born percentage of 11.9. This showed that CLD

students have the same capability, as any native-born individual to earn an advanced degree

given an equal opportunity to learn (Spring, 2018). Thus, teachers must consciously make

connections to students' cultures, languages, and everyday experiences for students to experience

academic achievement while preserving their cultural and linguistic identities (Aceves & Orosco,

2014). At a time when linguistic, racial, and ethnic student diversity in secondary classrooms has

become the norm rather than the exception, preservice teachers, in-service teachers, and teacher

educators need to become skilled at capitalizing on the assets that CLD students bring to the

classroom (Herrera et al. 2012).

Understanding and connecting to culturally and linguistically diverse students begins with awareness. The process of deconstructing and reconstructing one's thinking through analysis of biases, stereotypes, and the status quo is essential (Lewison et al., 2002). Culturally responsive perspectives require a mind shift for teachers and educational leaders. In this move, educators will realize that diverse students' background experiences lay the foundation to sustain new knowledge. Awareness is the first step toward making a transformational change, by recognizing our own implicit biases against culturally and linguistically diverse students or our mindfulness of current reality and acknowledgement of our past racial history (Hammond, 2015).

The compounded problems with social justice issues are people's assumptions or perspectives of those whose culture and language differ from their own. Hammond (2015) defined this mindset as implicit bias, which is the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that shape our responses to certain groups especially around race, class, and language. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, (2005) added that our assumptions form what we consider to be important information about ourselves and others, and how we interpret and judge human behavior. Unconscious or implicit bias continue to cause lasting social and emotional effects on culturally and linguistically diverse students. Implicit bias, as opposed to explicit bias where a person is aware of their bias and its potential impacts, embodies bias of which a person is unaware (Gullo, 2018). Although (Nance, 2016) contended that explicit bias such as racism and favoritism are unlikely in schools, (Staats et al., 2016) argued that implicit bias may also interfere with many school decisions. Thus, policy implementation fails when the system does not value the cultural background of minority students. Consequently, the students' cultural experiences are often unnoticed, disregarded, misjudged, or overlooked as a means to stabilize new knowledge.

Culturally responsive teaching cannot be accepted as a lucky coincidence for minority students dependent on educators who are aware and value it. Culturally responsiveness positions educators to consider our own demeanor toward marginalized students and allows them to observe their surrounding with new eyes based on their cultural views and values. Hammond (2015) proclaimed that for too long, culturally responsive teaching has been relegated to this realm of magic and mystery, knowledge that only a select few possess. For too long, deficit perspectives have been widely accepted and have continued to impede the forward progress of minorities, such as Mexican American and Latinx students. The time is overdue for teachers and educators to realize that culturally and linguistically diverse students learn differently because of their cultural upbringing. It is imperative that educators activate support and scaffold learning processes based off what CLD students already know. Villegas, A.M., & Lucas, T. (2002) forewarned that the more challenging tasks will be to motivate teacher candidates to inspect their own beliefs about students from nondominant groups and to confront negative attitudes they might have toward these students. Teachers who used and valued students' cultural and linguistic resources, appreciated these abilities as capital to build upon rather than construing them as obstacles to learning. Personal experiences and interests were sources for instructional connections to foster student learning and development.

The first purpose of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning is to refute deficit thinking by having educators undergo a change in heart and in mind about underserved students (Hollie, 2018). Deficit perspectives persist because of accustomed attitudes of disregard and common widespread scornful mindsets which many claim are nonexistent in the classroom. Students are myopically viewed as lacking something. They are blamed for their failures and are seen as the problem (Hollie, 2018). Marginalizing and categorizing diverse

student groups adds to their continued struggle in and out of the classroom, leaving them to re-programmed beliefs that they are insignificant and undeserving. Unmistakably, this complicates or hinders students' academic growth setting them further and further behind. Deficit mindsets stem from people who do not understand or recognize the value of upbringings different from their own. Gonzalez et al. (2005) divulged the fallacy that poor students share a "culture of poverty" and expound on how this misconception was antithetical to school achievement and led to the development of "cultural deficit" models in schooling (p. 34).

A form of deficit ideology is contempt. Contempt is defined as the conviction of the utter worthlessness of another human being. When you are treated with contempt, you never forget it (Brooks, 2020). Long-term, this can deeply distress the emotional and thinking of the brain which directly affect our learning and self-worth. Rejection and disregard of diverse students have the capability of changing the course of young people's lives.

As cited by Gonzalez et al. (2005):

> Teachers reason that when minority students do not excel in school, it is because lack of motivation, poor behavior, or lack of parent support. Poor and minoritized students were viewed with a lens of deficiencies substandard in their socialization practices, language practices, and orientation toward scholastic achievement. (p. 34)

Scorn and contempt continue to linger today which demonstrates that previous, futile attempts to dismantle hatred must be abandoned. Advanced solutions must then originate from resourceful thinking. New ways of thinking must be positioned to irrevocably erase contempt from society. Derision and disdain will not disappear until people are informed and alerted. By owning the problem and examining our implicit biases toward races, ethnicity, and classes

different than our own is the first step toward real solutions. The next step is to speak against it when we witness it, especially against sidelined minorities.

Brooks (2020) who spoke at a National Prayer Breakfast with President Trump declared that moral courage it is not standing up to the people with whom you disagree; moral courage is standing up to the people with whom you agree, on behalf of those with whom you disagree. To better serve the affected marginalized diverse students, it is more advantageous to influence people with compatible mindsets that also hold biases against others. This is epitome of open-mindedness.

Culturally responsive frameworks aimed to reject the contempt of diverse students. This can be accomplished through innovative thinking, such as flexible ideology. Like missionary work, flexible ideology requires a confident approach and understanding that cultures of contempt can be infiltrated by hearing those perspectives we don't understand. In this innovative approach, each side disagrees less by disagreeing better. Inspiring others from deficit thinking is not easy, but necessary for the sake of the afflicted, culturally and linguistically diverse students. It will require listening to understand those who make assumptions of students from diverse backgrounds to determine where the biases lay. This will allow a start to explaining what and how students act and behave based on their cultural upbringing.

Gorski (2010) cautioned against the suggestion that we fix inequalities by fixing disenfranchised communities rather than that which disenfranchises them. Because our priority is to empower marginalized, minority students, we need to be wistful of our own implicit biases. What we believe are problems to be fixed for disenfranchised students may not be considered as such based on their cultural background. As a result, we distract ourselves from the opportunity to develop deeper understandings of the problems we are attempting to solve and without this

deeper understanding, we continue to develop solutions that demonize our most disenfranchised neighbors rather than those that offer new possibilities for equity (Gorski, 2010).

By including "linguistic," in the term culturally and linguistically responsive, the intentionality of the language focus is demonstrated as equal to what we typically consider culture (Hollie, 2018). Language is an imperative component of culture and is a crucial aspect of our identity. It represents our heritage and family values. Language communicates the specifics of our culture, such as, traditions, customs, family histories, literatures, food preparation, arts, and music. Teacher educators need to become skilled at capitalizing on the assets that CLD students bring to the classroom (Herrera, et al., 2012). Capitalizing on their home language is how educators can connect and understand the rich resources of knowledge CLD students bring to the classroom. As described by Herrera et al. (2012):

> Teachers create a low-risk learning environment in which students feel safe to engage in the lesson and share what they know with the teacher and their peers, trusting that their culture-bound ways of knowing, learning, and applying will be respected and capitalized on in the learning process. (p.4)

Linguistically responsive teachers recognize that CLD students' home language provides a bridge to scaffold diverse students' learning towards higher levels of cognition. Reading and writing practices endorse higher order thinking because the product of writing must be mentally processed. The practice of reading and writing are vital steps in becoming a critical thinker. The practice of critical thinking involves the deliberate process of students reading, writing, discussing, awareness of metacognition, and using textual evidence to support their assertions. Thus, the process of reading and writing literature reviews, in itself is a critical thinking practice because it requires the higher-level thinking skill of synthesis. To synthesize is to create a way

to integrate a variety of diverse of information to arrive at a new conclusion. Taghinezhad et al., 2018) established that critical thinking techniques can provide learners with instruments which assist them to surpass the linguistic elements and to foster the art of learning another language. The general practice of reading and writing as a technique to endorse higher-order thinking was important because before the writing is produced, the material must be mentally processed.

Omar and Mohd (2016) asserted that the use of thinking maps by English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers led to positive student outcomes, such as improvements in written and oral language, increased generation of ideas, and boosted students' confidence during presentations. Because writing is a monotonous and a time-consuming process, writing must be taught in isolation from other linguistic skills. Through their research, Singh et al. (2018) emphasized that the higher order thinking skills used by teachers to teach the writing process benefitted the students by helping them gather ideas use in their writing. This study also helped teachers to become cognizant of their role in the writing process and their responsibility to activate student learning with higher order thinking skills. Taghinezhad et al. (2018) also maintained that critical thinking techniques can provide learners with instruments which assist them to surpass the linguistic elements and to foster the art of learning another language.

Hollie (2018) established that the journey to responsiveness happens in two ways: a change in mindset and a change in skillset. The efficacy and impact of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is dependent on the mindset of educators. Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching cannot become an axiom where the significance of "responsiveness" is diluted simply because schools and districts branded themselves as such. The word, responsive denotes an action that extends above other alternatives, such as proficiency or competency. The meaning and functionality of responsive calls for an action. An action set in

the mindset of seeing culturally and linguistically diverse students as the source of the knowledge.

Culturally relevant approaches have been used by a variety of organizations, programs, educational institutions, teacher preparation programs, academies, and non-profit organizations, such as national, state, and regional education agencies; colleges/universities; teacher preparation programs, and educational consulting organizations, such as the *Advancement Via Individual Determination* (AVID); the *Intercultural Development Research Association* (IDRA); and the *Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning* (CCRTL). These establishments have sought to advance and disseminate culturally responsive practices for a variety of reasons, such as improving student motivation, reducing disciplinary referral, supporting brain-based learning, and promoting critical thinking to strengthen students' self and racial identities.

Culturally relevant approaches have been used by educational programs such as *Advancement Via Individual Determination* (AVID). The goals of the AVID College and Career Readiness System are to accelerate underachieving students who have potential into more rigorous courses; teach academic and social skills not targeted in other classes; promote strong student–teacher relationships; create a positive peer group for students; and develop a sense of hope and personal achievement through hard work and determination (avid.org). Mehan et al. (1996) defended that because AVID uses students' own cultures and experiences as instructional resources in conjunction with the professional expertise of different types of teachers, participants can better accomplish the two interrelated goals found to be important in their academic achievement: maintaining their street identity while developing their academic identity.

Cultural responsiveness is also promoted by non-profit organizations such as the *Intercultural Development Research Association* (IDRA) which commits to activate equal educational opportunities for all students. IDRA offers numerous innovations to empower marginalized students of color, one example is, *Cultivating Conscientization in the Classroom*, based on the work of Brazilian pedagogue and educational theorist, Paulo Freire (1970) to implement critical consciousness which seeks to "liberate through education" by identifying and confronting oppression and by understanding the systems which keep diverse students from academic achievement. All the work constructed by the IDRA is built on their model, *Quality Schools Action Framework*, which is a comprehensive action model for graduating and preparing all students for college (IDRA, 2022).

The *Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning* (CCRTL) endeavored to advance responsive practices that validate and affirm the cultural and linguistic individual qualities of diverse students by mining past the currently shallow focus on culture. The CCRTL influenceed practitioners to go where the students are culturally and linguistically, for the purpose of bringing them where they need to be academically (CCRTL, 2017).

Culturally relevant approaches have been shared through earlier models such as Spindler & Spindler's (1993) *Cultural Therapy*, a process used to help teachers to see more clearly the imprints of culture in their own and their students' behaviors. Gay (2018) supported that cultural therapy also makes teachers more receptive to the notion that they may misread some of the behaviors of their culturally different students.

Teacher colleges and universities also offer summer institutes, such the Teacher College at Columbia University who have constructed an interdisciplinary, research-based and holistic vision of professional development that enables educators to become more culturally relevant in

44

their practice (tc.columbia.edu). The *Teacher Perspective Framework* emerged from the *Teacher as Decision Maker Program* at Indiana University, is one of many universities who use a culturally responsive teaching approach for preservice teachers. Their *Teacher Perspective Framework* was designed to develop skills in pedagogical self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-reflection in relation to culturally diverse students.

These organizations each provided data to show the positive impact of organizations that support underrepresented diverse students. *AVID* programs around the country have shown significant progress and positive results among ethnically different groups by embracing the students' own cultures and experiences as instructional resources (Gay, 2018). The National College Access and Success Benchmarking Report, titled *Closing the College Graduation Gap* show that even in contexts of a global pandemic. AVID programs in every high school environment produce college-ready students at rates that exceed the national benchmarks, such as the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) and the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) (avid.org).

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the *Intercultural Development Research Association* (IDRA) continued to advocate for educational equity and served as a resource hub to promote accurate and inclusive education. They have developed several models, publications, and free podcasts and webinar series to advance their work toward educational equity; lessen academic losses; construct frameworks to sustain school improvement; design tools to implement school change; develop instructional approaches for differentiated teaching and learning; and continue to circulate articles, newsletters, and reports for the advancement of educational equity. The results and outcomes of their efforts are illustrated through their IDRA 2019-202 annual report, *The Power of Voice and Action: Accelerating the Promise*. The report

reveals data such as, video galleries of testimonies by students impacted by African American and Mexican American Studies courses; infographics which show how schools are still losing 1 in 4 Black students and Latino students; English & Spanish distribution materials to support family engagement and parent institutes; any many other descriptors of IDRA's detailed efforts that result in equitable educational opportunities for all students (IDRA, 2022).

The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CCRTL) reported a positive impact on teachers who were certified through their Culturally & Linguistically Responsive professional development sessions such as, shifted mindsets by developing teachers' skills set that are more student-centered (CCRTL, 2017). The cultural revolution was promoted in two phrases, a change in mindset, then developing skillset. To become culturally responsive, teachers must first change the lens with which they view their students' cultural and linguistic behaviors, such as respecting the culture which structured how they behave and the language they speak. The second phase required the teacher develop their skillset by validating and affirming the diversity of cultures and languages in the classroom; building positive relationships with diverse students; and using strategies and activities that will empower students and sustain their success in the mainstream culture.

Authentic Relationships with CLD Students

Isolation and lack of interaction with peers and other caring adults causes many students and their families to experience anxiety, depression, and trauma (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The Corona Virus pandemic continues to exacerbate unexpected mental and emotional issues; thus, schools should instead serve as a respite; it should provide predictability, routine…and safety (Ladson-Billings, 2021). It is more important than ever for schools to reconsider culturally responsive practices to engage marginalized, minority students who were already academically

46

left behind even before the pandemic. Schools are called upon with a greater focus to provide restorative structures and safe spaces where a sense of safety and belonging can allow CLD students to take risks in learning.

DePaoli et al. (2004) asserted that to build strong relationships and safe, supportive learning environments, teachers must understand, value, and build upon the cultures, identities, and experiences of students and their families. The foundation for academic achievement for diverse students is structured in the security of relationships and connections from those who value and rely on the students' life experiences, family histories, rituals and occupations, language use, and household experiences to associate new learning. Darling-Hammond (2004) stressed that teachers could be more effective when they know students well, when they understand how their students learn. Building trusting relationships with CLD students and their families is how to genuinely understand their perspectives, behaviors, and how they each acquire knowledge.

 Velez-Ibanez (1988) elucidated the concept of reciprocity as an attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis. Reciprocity as detailed by Moll and Greenberg (1990):

> Reciprocal practices establish serious obligations based on the assumption of *confianza* (mutual trust), which leads to the development of long-term relationships…and constantly provides contexts in which learning can occur—contexts, for example, where children have ample opportunities to participate in activities with people they trust (p. 326)

Relevant to the significance of teacher-student relationships is L.S. Vygotsky's theory of socially mediated knowledge, which revealed that "human thinking develops through the mediation of others (Moll, 2001). Vygotsky concentrated on the relationship between learning

and development and that cognition is a social product that is achieved through interaction and developing individuals acquire these processes from his or her culture (Rosa & Montero, 1990). Blanck (1990) also synthesized from Vygotsky's conceptualizations that social relationships and culture are the *sources* of the mind, the working brain only its *organ*, and the unique social activity of each subject how it *originates*. This is the essence of how humans learn, culture is the context of how the human mind develops. We become human through the internalization of culture (Blanck, 1990). Vygotsky's theory elaborated that the relationship between learning and development stems from culture. The relationship between the two processes takes shape in the zone of proximal development, which is the distance between the effective development of the individual and his or her potential development. "The difference between the level of the tasks that can be performed with the help of adults and the level of the tasks that can be solved with independent activity is what defines the zone of proximal development of the child" (Vygotsky, 1984, p.112).

From this sociohistorical viewpoint, connecting students' learning experiences and incorporating the cultural aspects of the students' backgrounds in classroom instruction not only motivates students to engage in relevant material, but scaffolds their development by enforcing equity and culturally responsive practices. Connections to students' experiences was explained by (Gay, 2002):

> Healthy and productive student-teacher relationships are based on the warm demander theory emerging from broader studies of culturally responsive pedagogy, which explores effective teaching through a deeper understanding of learning styles and interaction patterns of students from diverse, racial, ethnic, economic, linguistic backgrounds. (p. 112).

Warm demander first coined by Judith Kleinfeld (1975) was branded by Antrop-

Gonzalez and De Jesus (2006) as *hard caring* and most recently as, *warm/strict* by Doug Lemov

(2010). Maniates (2016) carried that the purpose of a warm defender is to guide students toward

the zone of proximal development while in a state of relaxed alertness. Teachers who are high in

both warmth and demand toward their students produce the best outcomes (Sandilos et al.

(2017). Warmth was defined as the teacher's ability to exhibit unconditional positive regard,

conveys a sense of caring for students' well-being, show authentic interest in children's lives,

and demonstrate mutual respect (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Ware, 2006).

Warm demander pedagogy was one example of a culturally responsive teaching

framework that describes effective interactions and instructional practices (Sandilos, et al. 2017).

Teachers who embodied a high-warmth and high-demand teaching style promote not only a

culture of academic achievement by managing their classrooms very efficiently but also

conveying to students that they care for their well-being and hold high expectations for academic

achievement (Ware, 2006). This unique combination of personal warmth and active

demandingness earns the teacher the right to push for excellence and stretch the student beyond

his/her comfort zone (Hammond, 2015).

To establish meaningful connections with diverse student populations, researchers have

proposed that educational establishments acknowledge cultural backgrounds instead of being

colorblind (Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, &

Curran, 2004). Schettino et al. (2019) propped that at the heart of such culturally responsive

teaching are educator-to-student relationships that honor the uniqueness of each student and

build both trust and a sense of care. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) also revealed that students

reported stronger trust in their teachers when they perceived teachers as both caring and holding

high expectation. To validate is to provide a counter narrative to students, letting them know in explicit terms that they are not the labels of "deficient, deviant, defiant, disruptive, or disrespectful," but that they are culturally and linguistically misunderstood (Hollie, 2018, p.28-31).

Roy (2020) elucidated that historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew and this one is no different; it is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. This is the time to reconfigure our approach to centering previously excluded CLD students.

Engaging CLD students in Instruction and Learning

A culturally responsive commitment is critical if CLD students are to benefit from equitable instructional best practices. The student population in United States public schools is becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse; however, teachers and school leaders remain fairly monoracial (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Aceves and Orosco (2014) reasoned that many teachers are still ill-prepared to address the needs of linguistically challenged students to eradicate racial disparities in classroom instruction. This causes an interruption in what should be a symbiotic relationship between the teacher and CLD students. The students' existing assets, such as knowledge, abilities, skills are never utilized to sustain the new information.

Regardless of the lack of development in diverse instruction there is a growing body of evidence which shows the significant gains made by students acquiring a second language. For example, Spring (2018) exemplified that even though the number of native-born citizens who graduate from high school is significantly higher than foreign-born American students, more foreign-born students now surpass the number of native-born Americans with advanced degrees. Because of the potential Mexican American/Latinx students have shown in recent years, such as

the 2019-2020 TAPR and the 2020-2021 TAPR which demonstrated that the growth rates of the STAAR assessment for students in the border region were equivalent or higher than all state and EB students, culturally responsive teachers today need to make their instruction even more relevant to further advance their capabilities.

Culturally responsive approaches begin with the respect and devotion to diversity in and of itself. To unlock the potential of CLD students, culturally responsive educators must extend beyond multicultural awareness, which includes moving onward despite cultural prejudices or pressing forward regardless of language barriers while understanding that the hardships is where growth and development occur. Culturally responsive instruction was initially introduced by K.H. Au (1993), who defined it as, "instruction consistent with the values of students' own cultures and aimed at improving academic learning" (p.3). The central ideas of culturally responsive teaching, as simplified by Hammond (2015) as:

> an educator's responsibility to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. (p.15)

Lucas and Villegas (2011) expanded on the idea of culturally responsive teaching and introduced the term linguistically responsive teaching to include "respect and positive attitudes toward linguistically diversity, ability to identify the language demands of classroom discourse and tasks, and application of key principles of second-language learning in the classroom" (p.53). Linguistically responsive teachers (LRTs) practice sociolinguistic consciousness, meaning that they "understand the ineffectiveness of learning English at the expense of leaving one's home language or dialect, while also understanding the effectiveness of connecting

between language, culture, and identity" (Pereira & de Oliveira, 2015, p. 212). Hollie (2018) expounds on responsive academic language instruction as designed to enable students to learn how to move from their home language to the language of school. This requires the linguistically responsive teacher to accept that all languages are valuable for classroom instruction. Hollie (2018) fortified that LRTs need to lose the hegemonic view of Standard English and endorse the use of home languages spoken by the students' respective families in the classroom. Yosso (2005) validated linguistic capital as the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style via storytelling tradition, oral histories stories (*cuentos*) and proverbs (*dichos*) to communicate with different audiences. As cited by Sclafani (2017):

> When given a larger pool of linguistic resources that extends to their language of origin, it appears that students can focus more upon an actual task that is assigned to them, as opposed to primarily becoming concerned with finding the proper words in the dominant language to complete that task. (p. 7)

Students' academic achievement and their cultural and linguistic uniqueness are reciprocal in nature. Aceves and Orosco (2014) magnified that by incorporating students' unique perspectives, experiences, cultural beliefs, and languages while inviting students to construct new understanding is how to open their path to learning. Through their accumulated capital, such as gifts and talents are the pathway to gaining a true educational experience.

Culturally and linguistically diverse students like gifted and talented students are often misunderstood, by diversifying teaching via differentiation provides all students opportunities to reveal their distinct knowledge and skills in unique ways. Pereira and de Oliveira (2015) unfolded that many scholars in the field of gifted education have advocated for differentiating

instruction to the meet the needs of gifted leaners, and that differentiation should be used with all learners" including CLD students (p. 211).

School leaders can provide support for culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom by providing constant reminders that include a focus on increasing the academic demand of class activities as well as emphasizing the importance of implementing positive and emotionally safe environments for each student. Aceves and Orosco (2014) validated that:

> the support of culturally responsive school leaders (CRSL) could also more effectively influence how teachers adopt instructional best practices and diversify instruction to even out the playing field for culturally and linguistically diverse students; protect the rights of CLD students under the law to experience learning and academic achievement while maintaining their cultural and linguistic identities; and provide educators with the critical understanding of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities develop and how these constructs impact learning. (p.10)

Ford, Stuart, and Vakil (2014) also contended that teachers should be cognizant of the differences between disabilities and cultural-linguistic differences to make wise, informed instructional decisions. Teachers need to be mindful of classroom dynamics and how students interact with the learning, such as when students' negative behavior can be misinterpreted as an expression of frustration from lack of understanding. Smith and Darvas (2017) recurred that autonomy refers to student-centered learning values in which an instructor creates a safe learning environment where students feel comfortable interacting with instructors and peers. In this learning environment, students regularly exercise independence and self-monitoring approaches. Students are active participants in planning, monitoring, reflecting, and evaluating their learning process. The general trend of positive classroom climate as an instructional strategy or technique

to support higher levels of thinking is that it establishes the importance of how the emotional state of CLD students influence the extent to which they learn. Hammond (2015) added that neuroscience tells us the brain feels safest and relaxed when we are connected to others that we trust to treat us well. Caring teachers, by definition, establish a classroom climate in which students feel emotionally safe and sense that their teacher is concerned for their well-being and future success (Sandilos, et al., 2017).

In their investigation Matsumura, Slater, and Crosson (2008) determined that the correlation between rigorous instruction practices and the teacher's efforts to create a respectful, supportive classroom environment plays an important role in student learning, suggesting that the ideal learning environment would balance a positive classroom climate with academic demand. This unique combination of instructional practices invited a closer study of classroom climate and its effect of rigorous instruction in the classroom. The authors closely considered classroom climate, such as the degree to which students feel connected and supported, the degree to which students feel safe and welcomed with opportunities to positively interact with their peers; and the degree to which teachers promote respectful, caring relationships and emotional safety. Matsumura et al. (2008) determined that the results of their study supported the idea that both the affective and academic dimensions of instructional practice do reinforce each other and contribute to optimal student success.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research seeks to describe, interpret, or translate the meaning of observed, naturally occurring phenomenon in a sociocultural setting. A phenomenon is anything or part of the world as it presents itself to, or, as it is experienced by, a subject (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined "phenomenology as the way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively" (p.26). While phenomenology reveals meanings, interpretative phenomenology endeavors to understand and interpret the meaning from the participant's perspective (Pringle et al., 2011). This chapter contained the description of qualitative research, particularly an interpretative phenomenology, and how it will be used to examine the lived teaching experiences of high school English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and their interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Qualitative research seeks to discover meaning in flexible and naturalistic environments by using open-ended research questions to examine an experience or a situation (Maul, 2015). The following four characteristics are identified by most as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research commits to understanding the significance of how people have made sense of their life experiences, environment, and the world in which they live. Because identifying meaning is the key principle of qualitative research it is fitting that the researcher serve as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data. The outcome of the research is then communicated through a rich description. Lichtman (2013) reinforced that qualitative research is a way of knowing that assumes that the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information with his or her eyes and ears as a filter. The

researcher is not only situated at the center of the inquiry process, but can continue to evolve its interpretation, through an interpretative phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a study of lived experience, a different way to construct knowledge and research the gaps in the discipline (Lichtman, 2013). Told from the words of the participants, the phenomenological experience brings consciousness to how things are done and examines the emotional involvement of the lived experience. More specifically, the interpretative phenomenology approach examines people's experience of a phenomenon, interprets its universal essence, and contributes to its development by understanding of the objective of extending beyond the lived experiences. The intention of the phenomenological approach was to discover new understandings from a broad-minded examination of the participants' lived experiences.

The interpretative phenomenology approach provided this researcher with a construct to collect data from participating ESL teachers through semi-structured interviews. By exploring their experience and careful examination of the participating teachers' interaction with diverse students, the researcher did not take for granted the natural interaction between them and sought instead to gather detailed evidence of how authentic learning and student interactive activities best supported learning and achievement for diverse students. Through reflexivity and critical self-awareness of the interview responses, the researcher's personal biases did not influence the data by staying mindful of her own interpretations to allow the significance of the phenomenon to present itself. The researcher disciplined herself by temporarily setting aside her own experiences and viewpoints to be best able to recognize the essence of the teachers' situations and their truths. She did, however, produce a cultural interpretation of the phenomenon to support its development, while maintaining her association with it. Throughout the study, the

researcher committed to a studious examination of the participants lived experiences and remained openly curious. The interpretative phenomenological process was safeguarded through the researcher's fidelity and commitment to making the familiar different and the expectation of receiving new understandings from the experiences of others.

Participants

Polkinghorne (1989) advised that phenomenological researchers should interview between 5-10 participants who have all experienced similar events (phenomenon), as such, the commonality of their experiences that can be captured and interpreted. Hurner (2017) validated that since there is more than one participant, there is more opportunity for connections to be made with teacher candidates within the environment. IPA is seen by many researchers and admirers of the approach as the most "participant-oriented' qualitative research approach; a research approach that shows respect and sensitivity to the 'lived experiences' of the research participants (Alase, 2017). The essence of conducting an IPA research study with homogenous participants was to get a better gauge, a better understanding of the overall perceptions among the participants lived experiences, and an understanding of the true make-up of the research subject matter (Alase, 2017). For these reasons, purposeful sampling was applied in this study to focus on information-rich cases whereby all the participating teachers were chosen because of their high school ESL experiences. Purposeful sampling assumes that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Roulston (2010) validated that to use phenomenological interviews effectively, it is essential that the interviewer has identified participants who have both experienced and are able to talk about the lived experience under

examination. Smith et al. (2009) also reinforced that reduced participant numbers allows for a richer depth of analysis that might be inhibited with a larger sample.

The participating teachers included nine English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who agreed to be interviewed: one was from high school 001; three were from high school 002; two were from high school 004; one was from high school 005; one was from high school 008; and one was from high school 011. The candidates consisted of two Latino males; five Latina females; one White male; and one White female. One participating teacher has between 0-5 years teaching experience and began teaching during the COVID-pandemic shutdown. Two of the participants had between 5-10 years teaching experience. Three of the participating teachers had between 10-20 years teaching experience. Three other participants had more than 20 years teaching experience. Every participating teacher was interviewed one time.

Site Selection

This interpretive phenomenological study included ESL teachers' interviews from each of the six comprehensive high schools in the Borderland Independent School District. This district was selected for investigative purposes for three main reasons. First, the researcher had direct accessibility to the ESL teachers' names in each of the high schools.

Secondly, the researcher found in the 2019-2020 TAPR that pre-pandemic, Borderland ISD emergent bilingual students had the greatest growth rate compared to all other state students at the approaches level for all grades and all subjects. The equivalent growth patterns in this data also show there may be something to be learned from the success of Borderland ISD teachers who worked directly with emergent bilingual students. This is significant because BISD teachers not only work with a sizeable population of emergent bilingual students, but they also serve a substantial number of newcomer students who regularly crossover from neighboring Mexico.

Third, the 2020-21 TAPR indicated that after the pandemic, all state students at all grade level and subjects showed a decrease in learning according to STAAR tests results, while district emergent bilingual students experienced the greatest regressions in STAAR performance scores, thus further widening the achievement gap. The prolonged COVID-19 shutdown suspended student-teacher communication and interactions, which may be the leading reason why Borderland emergent bilingual STAAR scores deteriorated the most. This further supports the need to examine ESL teachers' pedagogical approaches, such as culturally responsive teaching that worked pre-pandemic.

According to the 2020-21 Texas Performance Reporting System, BISD Emergent Bilingual students accounted for 25.6 percent while Texas Emergent Bilingual students accounted for 20.7 percent. This study included nine English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, six female teachers and three males from the six comprehensive high schools in the Borderland Independent School District (BISD). Geographically, high school 001 is the nearest to the Mexican border crossing at 3.5 miles (12 minutes); high school 004 is 6.8 miles (13 minutes); high school 008 is 7.5 miles (16 minutes); high school 002 is 9.2 miles (17 minutes); high school 005 is 11.2 miles (17 minutes); and high school 011 is the furthest from the nearest Mexican border crossing at 12.1 miles (22 minutes).

According to the 2022-23 BISD District Improvement Plan, BISD covers 136 square miles of the county. The district is bordered by the Texas/New Mexico state line to the north, the Rio Grande River and Mexico to the South, another large, 6A school district to the west, and two smaller 4A and 3A school districts to the southeast. It is the second-largest school district of the 12 districts located in the state's Region 19. BISD comprises of fifty-one campuses: twenty-five elementary schools; ten middle schools; five PK-8 "combo" schools; six comprehensive high

59

schools; one exclusive early college high school; one alternative high school; one elementary-level Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) campus, one secondary-level DAEP campus (grades 6-12), and one Early Childhood Center.

The BISD District Improvement Plan also reports there are 47,204 enrolled students Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. It serves:

92.2% Hispanic students;

3.7% White students;

2.2% African-American students;

69.1% Economically Disadvantaged students;

55.0% At-Risk students;

27.8% English Learners students;

13.0% Special Education students

6.9% Gifted and Talented students; and

1.0% Homeless students (Socorro Independent School District, 2022).

The Borderland Independent School District's teacher demographics show that:

87.8% Hispanic teachers;

9.9% White teachers;

1.8% African-American teachers;

71.4% Female teachers;

28.6% Male teachers;

71% Have six years of teaching experience or more;

29% Have five years of teaching experience or less;

32% Possess a master's degree; and

15 teachers in the district possess a doctoral degree.

According to the most recent 2020-21 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), the 2021 Accountability Rating was "Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster" due to the cancellation of spring 2020 STAAR; however, 2019 and 2021 STAAR date are shown.

For English I End of Course, in 2019, 28% of students scored at "meets" grade level and decreased to 22% in 2021.

For English II End of Course, in 2019 23% of students scored at "meets" grade level and increased to 26% in 2021.

For Algebra I End of Course, in 2019 63% of students scored at "meets" grade level and decreased to 17% in 2021.

For Biology End of Course, in 2019 39% of students scored at "meets" grade level and decreased to 25% in 2021.

For US History End of Course, in 2019 55% of students scored at "meets" grade level and decreased to 44% in 2021.

For All Grades, All Subjects, in 2019 41% of students scored at "meets" grade level and decreased to 22% in 2021 (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

Because of the growth and improvements shown by both the state and district STAAR performance reports and particularly the growth shown by the 2019 Borderland emergent bilingual students at the approaches level, the researcher endeavored to discover if culturally responsive approaches, such as funds of knowledge scaffolded EB students to authentic learning (EB students here known as culturally and linguistically diverse students.) Therefore, two high school ESL teachers from each of the six comprehensive high schools in the Borderland

Independent School District were asked to be interviewed to discover how they effectively supported emergent bilingual (EB) students towards greater academic achievement.

Throughout the 5 years of teaching emergent bilingual students, the researcher received opportunities to attend district level professional development trainings with other campus ESL teachers and build curriculum and write lessons with ESL teachers from other BISD high schools. By building working relationships and getting to know other ESL teachers throughout the district, the researcher heard stories of the close, positive relationships between the ESL teachers and their students, more so than the regular English teachers with their students at her own campus. The researcher took an interest in this distinction. Months later, after discovering that the BISD emergent bilingual students were showing higher growth rates than state level English and ESL students, this curiosity was heightened. Because of the researcher's positionality as an ESL teacher, she continued to learn of other ESL teachers' positive working relationships with their emerging bilingual students. This is how the idea developed to examine if culturally responsive practices and funds of knowledge were used to engage culturally and linguistically diverse students in authentic learning to make these gains.

It was the determination of the researcher to discover if the ESL were indeed using culturally responsive practices, such as funds of knowledge to engage CLD students in authentic learning. The interview questions were carefully constructed to reveal this knowledge. Although the ESL teachers in Borderland Independent School District have never received any professional development on culturally responsive teaching or using funds of knowledge to address the needs of diverse students does not suggest they are not using in these practices. Through the teachers' responses of the pre-determined interview questions the researcher gained insight of their lived experiences of teaching diverse students.

Methodology

The methodological framework utilized in this research is qualitative, more specifically, an interpretative phenomenology, in which an analytic approach involved the detailed examination of the lived experiences of individuals (Lightman, 2013). The purpose of the interviews conducted at the Borderland ISD sought to get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), specifically the experience of how culturally responsive teachers create trusting relationships with CLD students through funds of knowledge to support authentic learning experiences through rigorous and engaging practices.

Data Collection

The research question was asked to determine, comprehend, and interpret the essence of the lived experiences of the participating teachers interacting with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Told from the words of the participants, the phenomenological experience brings consciousness to how things are done and examines the emotional involvement of the lived experience. More specifically, the interpretative phenomenology approach examines people's experience of a phenomenon, interprets its universal essence, and contributes to its development. The researcher was not only situated at the center of the inquiry process, but continued to evolve its interpretation, through an interpretative phenomenology. The researcher in this study was also considered an instrument in this interpretative phenomenology to extend on the capacity of the research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) supported that since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument who is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data. A phenomenological study will develop into an interpretative phenomenology when the researcher

also intensifies with their own experiences and the context and situations that influence their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures for the data collection of this study commenced with an approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving the IRB consent, the researcher remitted a request using the researcher's university email with cover letter to the projected participating teachers' principals to obtain permission to contact their teachers. The researcher did not anticipate running into any problems in obtaining the district's permission to contact or recruit teachers to research and study.

Initially, the principals did not respond since the district was experiencing frequent unsolicited spam emails for several weeks. After several days of no response from the principals, the researcher then emailed the same type-written request using the researcher's district email to provide them self-assurance from a familiar district email. Consent from all six principals representing the six BISD high school campuses was eventually granted after several weeks.

Twelve ESL teachers, two from each high school were emailed and recruited to participate in this study. The recruitment of teacher participants was also delayed after there was minimal to no response from the teachers. As a second attempt, the researcher then called each of the high schools to ask for the teacher's conference times. Then, the researcher made a schedule of the teacher's conference times, called each one to explain the purpose for the study and extended an invitation to participate as candidates.

Three in-person interviews were agreed upon and conducted without complications. The researcher encountered obstacles when she was often mistakenly transferred to the wrong classroom or when the projected participating teachers did not answer their classroom telephone

calls. Once contact was made with the remaining teachers who agreed to be interviewed, the

researcher also strained to obtain the signed *Informed Consent* forms. The researcher soon

realized the teachers were struggling to find the time to print, sign, and return the informed

consent forms. Therefore, the researcher printed, mailed, or hand-delivered the informed consent

forms to the teachers' home campuses and provided an envelope to have the content form

returned. The teachers were all called again to re-schedule times to meet virtually or conduct the

interviews via telephone.

Additional difficulties ensued, when the researcher finally set appoints to conduct the

interview during the teacher's conference times or after school. Some of these appointments

were cancelled by the teachers when their students came in unexpectedly for assistance or

seeking tutoring. These interview sessions were frequently reset for a later date. None of the

participants agreed to be interviewed on a Saturday.

Several weeks followed with the same type of struggle and exertion, but one by one the

interviews were slowly completed. After each one of the remaining interviews, the teachers

shared how they struggled to find the time and energy to meet for the interview. In varied

accounts, they described the extra efforts and duties required of them after returning from the

pandemic. They described the 30 hours of tutoring required by the state for each student in every

STAAR-tested subject they failed to pass. They told of the extra documentation required of them

for each student they tutored daily.

All the participating teachers who agreed to be interviewed eventually endorsed the

Informed Consent for Participants document which sanctioned and activated the research

process. Both the cover letter invitation and the informed consent form can be found in the

appendices. Through the Informed Consent form's explanation and procedures, the participants understood and agreed to engage in a face-to-face, telephone, or virtual interview.

Interviews

Two ESL teachers from each of the six comprehensive high schools in the Borderland Independent School District were recruited to participate in this study. No kindergarten through 12th grade students were recruited or interviewed. The names of each of the ESL teachers from each of the six corresponding Borderland Independent School District's high school campuses were requested from the district's Bilingual/ESL Department. Once the identities and consent of the ESL teachers were granted, they were each invited to attend an initial, 30-minute virtual Microsoft Teams group meeting where they were provided an explanation of the logistics of study, such as, the utilization of the individual interviews, the processing procedures of the interview transcripts, the examination and categorization of the interview question responses, and the protection and security of the students' identities and campus names. A question-and-answer session was offered during this meeting for the participants to ask questions of this researcher.

The ESL teachers accepting to participate were provided with the consent forms to be signed acknowledging agreement to be observed and interviewed. Every participating teacher was interviewed one time. Each interview was limited to 30-45 minutes to conform to each teacher's regularly scheduled conference time if they chose to be interviewed during the school day. Those opting to be interviewed before or after school, were also be held to no more than 30-45 minutes. The participants will be given a choice of being individually interviewed, via telephone, online via computer mediated interaction, or face-to-face at their respective campus giving them a sense of security and comfort level in more readily responding to the interview

questions. Telephone calls were used for clarification or confirmation of meeting dates, times, or locations. Ultimately, three interviews were completed via telephone; three were held virtually on *Microsoft Teams*; and three were done face-to-face at the participants home campus.

Appendix A, titled "Interview Guide" includes a variety of interview question types to be asked of the ESL participating teachers. In this study, the participating teachers were encouraged to introduce themselves and reflect on their lived experience of interacting with diverse students in their classroom setting, via very general, specific, comparison, and open questions. The initial semi-structured teacher interviews began with the grand tour question, "tell me a little about yourself and your teaching career." The purpose of this general question served as a good way to begin the interview process; quickly become acquainted with the participating teachers; and establish a rapport with the participant after sharing similar teaching experiences. Lichtman (2013) extends that grand tour questions are designed to explain a series of events or describe oneself in detail. Establishing a positive rapport with the interviewees, could more impactfully produce good data.

The teacher interviews also included some predetermined questions, such as, "What was something that happened recently in your classroom that you learned from working with diverse students?" "What do you see and hear in your classroom that will help you describe the characteristics of borderland students?" and "What incidents can you share regarding using students' life experiences in your lessons?" The comparison question, "How could you compare how you interact with diverse students now to when you were a first-time teacher?" was included to help the participating teaching put their current situation into a meaningful framework (Lichtman, 2013). Open-ended questions were also asked and were followed with probes to obtain additional details from unclear responses (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Open questions are

those that provide broad parameters with which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer (Roulston, 2010). Three open questions were asked, "How do you get to know all your students individually?" "How do you motivate your emerging bilingual students?" and "Describe some ways in which you encourage diverse students to think more deeply."

A list of new topics, areas, or issues were also listed in the interview guide to help transition to areas that may not have been considered in the previous questions. These topics included student diversity; border students; culturally responsive teaching; uniqueness of diverse students; relationships with diverse students; engaging diverse students; and authentic learning experiences. To provide the participating teachers an opportunity to add any final comments that may have not been covered in the interview, the closing question of the semi-structured interview; included the question, "Can you think of anything else you would like to say about teaching culturally or linguistically diverse students?"

The aim of IPA was to illustrate, inform and master themes by firmly anchoring findings in direct quotes from participant accounts (Smith et al., 2009) thus, the interpretation of data in this study began by transcribing the interview responses verbatim into Microsoft Word, a word processing document. Microsoft Word has a voice input feature that transcribes recorded audio files. Since the microphone feature in the researcher's cell phone for inputting text, picks up less background noise, the researcher's code-protected cell phone was used to transcribe each interview and upload to the password protected UTEP OneDrive account. The anonymity of the participants was protected by assigning pseudonyms to each campus and interviewing teacher. To further protect the identities of the names mentioned in the interviews, no transcriptions were be saved on the researcher's personal cell. Capturing the most accurate and complete interview

responses was crucial during the transcription process. Asynchronous online meetings and telephone calls were offered to schedule approximate times to meet and clarify the responses.

Three interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams; three interviews were conducted via telephone; and three interviews were conducted in-person at each participants' home campus. The transcribed interviews were then examined through a phenomenological reduction where the process of continually returning to the essence of the teaching experiences to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

In this interpretative phenomenology, the researcher provided the key details extracted from the interview transcriptions of nine high school English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who currently teach 9th through 12th grade emerging bilingual (EB) students, also known as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

The transcribed interviews were uploaded into the document browser where the theme titles were identified through the horizontalization process of *MAXQDA* program. The data was further analyzed and color-coded to find common themes among the participant responses. Each of the themes unveiled through this analytical approach are presented and supported in this chapter with quotations and phrases from each of the participants' interview transcriptions. Horizontalization is the process by which the data is laid out for examination and treating it with equal value during the initial data analysis stage (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In horizontalization, there is an interweaving of people, conscious experience, and phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The MAXQDA software program was used to triangulate the researcher's statements, observations, and interviews responses to convert into common and orderly themes. To extract

the general sense from the interviews, the first step involved coding each of the nine interviews consecutively, question by question; for example, all question items numbered 1 were compared, analyzed, and coded in the *MAXQDA* program. Then all question items numbered 2 were compared, analyzed, and coded, etc. All interview question responses were analyzed and coded accordingly, until all nine participant interviews each with 12 question responses were coded. In total, 151 codes emerged when the coding process was complete. All interview responses were organized using the MAXQDA software in one interface or section; viewed and categorized in a second interface; managed and coded in a third interface; and stored and retrieved in a fourth interface.

The Code System in the *MAXQDA* program then listed the surfacing themes and topics, to which the researcher then assigned a title and a corresponding color to be organized by their congruence to the research question. The themes were then assigned, categorized, and sequenced accordingly. Cole and Knowles (2001) validate that these data are then thematically interpreted and considered in relation to relevant, rich life history accounts, which ultimately represent both the researcher's interpretation and the researcher's theorizing about those lives in relation to broader contextual situations and issues. Patterns emerging in the color-coding system were also used to organize. All unfrequented data was also categorized into a related theme to ensure the data was complete.

MAXQDA shows the occurrence of codes across multiple documents using features such as the code matrix browser. From the amalgamation of the structural and textural description process, the interpretative phenomenologist then extracts the essence of the phenomenon by writing a composite description (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The summarizing progress involved

the description of the distribution of the codes, their frequencies, identifying patterns,

quantifying findings, or identifying good examples to get an overarching sense of the data.

The researcher then downloaded a separate *Excel* document from the *MAXQDA* program

with excerpts from the participants' interview question responses to support each theme. Eleven

Excel documents were downloaded to store all the relevant comments and phrases for each

theme. Within each of the *Excel* documents, all the comments and phrases were organized to

support the findings in this chapter. The following table shows the frequency of related themes

including sub-themes and key phrases:

Table 2: Frequency Table of Themes, Sub-Themes and Related Phrases

Themes	Sub-Themes	Related Terms/Phrases	Frequency
Characteristics of Culturally & Linguistically Students	• Struggle • Sacrifice • Often live away from parents or live alone	-Scared, terrified -Low morale -Fears, solitude, heartaches -Survive -Strive to connect with home	5
1.) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment of Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students	• Literacy skills • Read/Write • Speak/List	-Making connections -Prewriting -Brainstorming	17
	• Balancing state testing & accountability to monitor & measure growth	-Difficult, condemning -Harsh, alienating -Uphill struggle -Grappling with lack of English	17
2.) Lessons learned from Virtual Online Teaching & Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic	• Education was & still not equitable • The COVID experience weakened the necessity to bond with my students	-Very challenging, tough, difficult -Lack of connectivity -uphill battle for diverse students	18
	• Teaching practices did improve • New perspectives of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students	-Peer to peer teaching benefits all learners -Enjoy sharing their story -Learn English in a crash course -Group work helps with gaining insights -Engage when learning is relevant -Value Learning Embrace challenges	12
3.) Culturally Responsive Teaching (Theoretical Framework 1)	• Flexible/adaptable • Patient/caring • Self-reflective • Open-minded	-Value collaborative learning -All-encompassing	21
4.) Funds of Knowledge Resources (Theoretical Framework 2)	• Relationships • Parental/Family Involvement	-Personal experiences -Traditions/practices -Foods/customs -Life experiences -Historical backgrounds	31
5.) Authentic Learning	• Higher-Order Thinking & Learning	-Making connections -Asking questions -Embracing mistakes as learning opportunities -Learning in motion	21

Through this process, a structure materialized which became the outline for the findings. The process served to ensure the lived experiences of the participating teachers aligned with the research question, "how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning?" With these data analysis tools, the researcher sorted and prioritized the most significant data; structured the frame of the composition; and began the research writing process.

Role of the Researcher

As an educator with 22 years of public-school experience, this research project supported the researcher in her role as a teacher support and staff developer for the high school campus she serves. As an educational professional, the researcher had an interest in studying the lived teaching experiences of high school ESL teachers as way to reveal the knowledge needed to effectively support diverse students, Mexican American, and Latino/a emergent bilingual students. As a classroom teacher who taught high school English classes for 10 years, high school ESL classes for 5 years, and conducted teacher trainings for 7 years, this researcher aimed to extract the essence of how ESL teachers positively influence English learners through their daily social interaction and classroom experiences. In this conscious experience, this researcher sought to find multiple truths by examining the participating teachers' narrative descriptions of their daily classroom interactions, while conducting a deep analysis of the collective descriptions. The researcher interpreted the phenomenon and continued to evolve the interpretation to refine teaching and instructional practices that better support diverse English learners.

The role of the interpretative phenomenological researcher was to identify a gap in the knowledge of a familiar topic. In the case of this study, the researcher examined the lived experiences of high school ESL teachers throughout the Borderland Independent School District through twelve interview questions relative to their culturally and linguistically diverse students. The researcher of this study was aware of the reciprocal process of this qualitative study, which allows the researcher to observe how her presence affects the research process (Lichtman, 2013). Rather than to take the position of objectivity (as an outsider) or get others to confirm existing viewpoints, the researcher of this study instead embraced the space where the information streams *from* and *to* the research study at the same time. It was understood that the researcher may influence the research study while at the same time be affected by the study.

This study encompassed the researcher's life experience 50 years ago as a former monolingual Spanish-speaking, emergent bilingual student during her first encounter in an English only, public-school setting in the first week of school. This personal narrative was also considered and contributed to the findings of this interpretative phenomenological study. This is the researcher's personal narrative:

"*¿Que dijo la maestra?*" I do not recall the lesson or if Graciela ever answered. This defining moment of my life regretfully began as a six-year-old when I nudged the girl across the row from me to clarify what the teacher was saying and writing on the board. Mrs. Armstrong was a small-framed, senior Anglo woman with short, silver/white hair. She uttered something foreign (to me) as she wrote on the dusty, green chalkboard. Time stopped, as she stopped writing at the sound of my voice. I returned to consciousness when Mrs. Armstrong turned around and I realized, she was addressing me. I vividly remember the bulging, blue veins translucent through the pale skin on her

hands and the bony finger that directed my lifeless body towards her and then to the door

leading into the hallway. In my hypnotic state, I floated weightlessly towards the door

ahead of my teacher. I never noticed the paddle board behind her back, if I had, I would

have run, and never stopped. Once in the hallway, Mrs. Armstrong bend down toward

me, her blue eyes mesmerized me, I had never known such a color was possible any

person's eyes. Her celestial blue eyes, deceived me, abandoned me in a vast land of

bewilderment from the first English words I learned, "in this school, we only speak

English." Time skipped again, from the physical pain of being paddled three times.

This was the first time and the only time I would receive any such unsympathetic

and heartless reprimand in my Kindergarten through 12th grade public school experience.

In retrospect, I now believe that the lapses of time were possibly how I was protected

from the pain in my heart; the humiliation before my classmates; and the betrayal from

someone I truly admired, my first teacher.

This experience as a first time English learner has sparked a heightened sensitivity

towards the adversities also facing linguistically diverse students who are trying to learn English

as a second language. It bared how the researcher became attentive to the continued dejections

suffered by many other culturally and linguistically diverse students over the decades.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In this conscious study, the researcher did not see herself as an outsider being that for 5

years of the 22 years as a public-school educator, she served as a high school English as a

Second Language (ESL) teacher. Equally, she did not consider herself an insider, as 50 years had

passed since she was reprimanded and paddled by her teacher for speaking Spanish in school.

Instead, the researcher's positionality welcomed the role and responsibility as a learner to collect

75

the interview responses, interpret the data, extract its meaning, connect to personal past experiences, and be shaped by the findings. Careful reflection was taken to ensure the study was not more about the researcher's past as a former emergent bilingual student nor her teaching experiences with emerging bilingual students, than of the participating teachers in the study. To elude bias, the researcher remained studious of the value of multiple perspectives of the participating teachers' experiences and reserving her own personal assumptions and beliefs. The researcher remained cognizant of the balance and reflexivity throughout the research process termed "working the hyphen…in essence, the researcher-participant relationship and how one affects the other" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, as cited in Lincoln, 2010, p. 5).

This interpretative phenomenology approach carefully analyzed in-depth interviews to discover the essence of the lived experiences of ESL teachers and their interaction with marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse students. The methodological triangulation of these data collection structures combined with the researcher's reflexivity will complete the data collection process, thus enhance its findings. The validity of IPA will always move with and through the researcher's intentional relationship with the phenomenon…that encapsulate the in-between spaces between subjects and the world and is that which links us as humans, with the world we experience (Vagle, 2009).

To further ensure the essence of the lived experiences of the participating teachers materializes over the researcher's biases, the researcher sought to remain mindful of the influence her own experiences of teaching diverse students could have on the interpretation of the data. By revealing her own classrooms experiences of working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, the researcher endeavored to stay cognizant of her own assumptions throughout the research process. The researcher was also aware of how her own

background as a monolingual Spanish speaking student herself may affect the study; however, the honest use of member checking to identify her own biases of the observations will prevent any misinterpretations. The researcher did not seek to eliminate her own theory or beliefs, but to understand how her experiences may impact the study and how the study impacts the researcher.

This study involved nine ESL teacher candidates who gave their consent (see Appendix B) and agreed to a 30–45-minute interview, including twelve interview questions. The anonymity of the participants was protected by assigning pseudonyms for the district, each campus, and each interviewing teacher. All records related to this qualitative research study will be stored and password protected for at least 3 years, after which it will be destroyed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the interpretative phenomenology approach (IPA) of conducting nine interviews with nine Borderland Independent School District (BISD) English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. Of the ESL teachers who agreed to be interviewed: one was from high school 001; three were from high school 002; two were from high school 004; one was from high school 005; one was from high school 008; and one was from high school 011. All the high schools are between 3½ miles to 12 miles from the northern Mexican border. The candidates consisted of two Latino males; five Latina females; one White male; and one White female. One participating teacher had between 0-5 years teaching experience and began teaching during the COVID-pandemic shutdown. Two of the participants had between 5-10 years teaching experience. Three of the participating teachers had between 10-20 years teaching experience. Three other participants had more than 20 years teaching experience. Every participating teacher was interviewed one time.

Findings

After the analysis of the interview questions, the researcher carefully combed through each *Excel* document which held the comments to their related themes and arranged the comments in a meaningful and sense-making order and began the penning of the findings. As the Table 1 indicated, this process isolated five themes each with at least one sub-theme. The researcher was able to identify related terms and phrases from the teachers' interview responses to determine the general themes. The five general themes were: 1) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment of Culturally Linguistically Diverse Students; 2) Virtual/Online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed new information about diverse students; 3) Evidence of Culturally Responsive Teaching among the participating teachers; 4) Application of

Funds of Knowledge by the participating teachers; and 5) Higher-order thinking and learning promotes authentic learning. Therefore, chapter 4 was organized into five sections and informed by the research question that guided this qualitative study, "How do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning?" The sub-themes and related terms and phrases were used to determine the frequency of use within the data. The commonality and the frequency among the teachers' responses served to fulfill the focus of the research question.

To examine the phenomenon in this study, the lived experiences of the participating teachers were explored through their responses of the interview questions. The frequency and commonalities among their responses also supported the significance of the findings in the study. The researcher assigned pseudonyms for each of the teachers participating in the study to protect their identity and member checking was employed to validate their responses.

Unique Characteristics of Borderland Students

Here, I provided an overview of the unique characteristics of borderland students to understand the commonalities among culturally and linguistically diverse students and what made them unique. To maintain the purpose of this study and uphold the goal of the research question, "how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning," I collected five defining themes in relation to the characteristics of diverse students from the perspectives of the participating teachers to understand the uniqueness of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Four participating teachers described their diverse students as "fearful, struggling, sacrificing, and living away from parents." Ms. Cappy explained

79

her current teaching experience as, "I taught mostly English I students, who come in so scared and terrified. Their morale was incredibly low because in their mind, they knew nothing…You had to understand a little bit about what they've gone through, their struggles" (Personal communication, May 14, 2022). She described how she attempted to explain to her students that their position did not suggest they could not properly write an essay, but that they have not yet learned the English language enough to write the essay. Mr. Montezuma at a different high school also related that he, "heard the commonalities of their fears, desires, solitude, heartaches, as well as their willingness to bond within themselves in the classroom to survive. I heard positive comments that helped assert to themselves that they were struggling and sacrificing for the right reasons" (Personal communication, August 24, 2022). An example of the students' sacrifices was told by Ms. Helena, "I noticed that because we are a border town, they still retained their living situations in another country" (Personal communication, August 19, 2022). Diverse students often lived away from their parents by living with family friends/relatives, or lived alone in attempts to gain an American education, as expressed by Ms. Vanguard, who divulged:

> Many of my students live in Mexico and they cross the border either every day or they come live here with a friend or relative or even by themselves for the week and then they go home on the weekends… Still other students, just they lived alone. Most of the time they had a guardian listed in the school records of course, but the guardian had really no connection to them" (Personal communication, April 4, 2022).

> Mr. Montezuma also talked about "how they networked in order to have some connection to their home" (Personal communication, August 24, 2022).

Through the data collection, I realized that the diverse students the teacher participants described had many common characteristics, in addition to their efforts of obtaining an American education. Through the teachers' responses, it was evident that high school culturally and linguistically diverse students struggled because they were separated not only from their family and parents, but also from their home country.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The first theme which emerged from the teachers' interview responses was on the "Curriculum and Instruction" of CLD students which was presented to communicate how ESL teachers connected diverse students to the state's curriculum, since classroom instruction is driven by the state curriculum. It served to understand what students needed to know and do at every grade level. The sub-theme, "State Testing and Accountability" was included to explain what diverse students should be able to know and do and how to measure their learning. Curriculum and instruction were monitored and evaluated through the state testing and accountability system; thus, the participating teachers were asked how they managed the balance of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students to learn a second language while simultaneously preparing them for the state's end-of-course exams. Some common sub-themes that emerged from the data in relation to the curriculum and instruction of culturally and linguistically diverse students were literacy skills, such as reading, listening, speaking, making connections, prewriting, brainstorming, quick writes, and essay writing. Ms. Cappy reported:

> So as far as them making that connection to curriculum that seemed scary. I've shown
> them how the TEKS may seem overwhelming, but they also needed to understand that
> they pretty much already knew the questions being asked on the *STAAR EOC*. As far as
> making that connection, again it's just about building that confidence. When they began

writing essays, I reminded them to engage their reader with something that was broad, so when they shared their experiences, they we're already making those connections. It was about building their confidence (Personal communication, May 14, 2022).

Mr. Montezuma (Personal communication, August 24, 2022) added that, "They used what was familiar to them, made personal connections, and used their world to engage." Ms. Helena (Personal communication, August 19, 2022) also emphasized that "I built on what they were learning and how their culture is, so I tried relating certain things in the curriculum to what was happening in their life." Ms. Vanguard acknowledged that in her class:

They wrote a paragraph connecting it to themselves and to the text. It helped them connect it to the text, so it helped them make those connections, and it also it gave them ownership over their writing because if they connected it to themselves and connected it to the text then it made it like their baby. They took pride in their writing if it involved them personally. (Personal communication, April 4, 2022)

Ms. Pearl added that her diverse students:

made little connections. Even though it was not entirely curriculum and instruction there was still some learning there. It was part of the vocabulary that they were starting to get. I think that's what made learning, it was not just all about the curriculum. Obviously, we wanted to make sure that there was curriculum in there because that's what we're here, for but it's also about the learning of other key concepts like vocabulary, the culture, and all of those things. (Personal communication, September 9, 2022)

Ms. Verde shared about her lessons:

I taught my lessons to connect to their lives when I explained the assignment and I provided ample examples and incorporated their cultures, music, traditions, or whatever

could apply to those specific assignments. When students…generated an essay, they

agreed on how they explained the true meaning of friendship to other students. We began

by brainstorming. As an example, I allowed them to discuss how friends are a major part

of their life and many of them gave examples. We also discussed the importance of using

the kind of music that they listen to in their writing. Many students did not have roots

here, so when everybody was involved talking about their own experiences, they also

shared and used those kinds of experiences and backgrounds. This encouraged them to

begin their own story of friendships. This then supported their academic achievement

because students became interested in writing their essay. When they were able to speak

and write about themselves and their experiences, so they tended to place more effort

when they were writing or involved in something that they loved. (Personal

communication, February 8, 2022)

Similarly, Ms. Serrano (Personal communication, April 24, 2022) shared that, "I taught

the students to use these cultural *dichos* as a hook within their introduction or to close their

writing and made it more interesting." Mr. Azul highlighted that:

Presentation skills were one thing, but when they were standing up there talking about

Chihuahua, for example, they were actually researching, they were writing, they were

practicing the pronunciation, they were practicing the vocabulary, they were doing the

presenting. They only saw that they had to stand up there and talk about Chihuahua,

their home state. So, we learned how to not trick them, but still incorporated all the

literacy skills. For example, we did a mural once and the kids were so excited because it

was one of the coolest murals that I wish I still had. They didn't realize they went through

the entire writing process just to paint. We did the brainstorm, we did the prewriting, we

did the actual writing, and after it was all done, all they remembered was that they got to

paint about <u>Enrique's Journey</u>, a book about a kid from Honduras who travels by train to

United States. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

These intricate, detailed responses to my interview questions not only emphasized the

importance of connecting diverse student learning to the state's curriculum, using relevant

lessons in their instructional process to bridge diverse students' background to new knowledge,

but also provided sufficient context for understanding how they knew that instruction was

working. There was ample testimony which demonstrated that curriculum and instruction was

effective when responsive teachers connected their lessons and new knowledge to their students'

background, culture, life experiences, music, traditions, customs, language, or "their world."

Balancing State Testing & Accountability

This section revealed a second sub-theme of curriculum and instruction of CLD students.

Adversely, some of the participants' responses to the effects of state testing and accountability

were not as favorable as revealed in the following sub-theme, balancing state testing and

accountability. While it was understood that the purpose of state testing and accountability was

informative and helpful, because it was used to monitor and measure the growth of all students

and determined whether they learned or not, nonetheless, three participants relayed that this

expectation of CLD students was "difficult, harsh, and condemning." Balancing state testing and

accountability was expounded here to understand what was expected of all ESL teachers to teach

their students and the effects of state testing results on culturally and linguistically diverse

students. The following perspectives emerged from the data in relation to state testing and the

accountability of diverse students as evident from three of the participants responses of the

interview questions. Ms. Vanguard (Personal communication, April 4, 2022) challenged:

to say that a test measures everything is just it's absurd. I have one little girl that she

hasn't been able to speak English at all until this year. Recently, she read a part in class,

and it just made my little heart happy, but I haven't found that balance. A lot of the times

it takes a couple of years, I mean it takes 5 to 7 years for some of them to gain their

academic language, and so by the time students are Seniors, they're either passing the test

or they're passing their projects for House Bill 4545. I know that's not the answer that

administration wants to hear, but I haven't found that balance.

Mr. Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) also questioned:

I don't even know if there's a delicate balance. I mean for some of these kids, we know

that it takes years to be able to converse just socially without being really academic.

You're almost condemning them to like failing out of high school because of how just

rigid we are in the state about having to pass that STAAR. I have experienced some

success stories with a lot of students who you know, got it done, but when you're asking a

Senior student to take a freshman or sophomore level English test because it's their first

year in the state, you know, it's really harsh. It's really alienating for them.

Mr. Montezuma illustrated that, "It's an uphill struggle for them. They are always

grappling with their lack of English and not being completely assimilated to school in the United

States; therefore, a big part of their success is that someone is on their side," yet he encourages

that, "no matter what, I made sure they always trusted me by being a credible, consistent teacher

and person" (Personal communication, August 24, 2022).

Principally, I also learned from most of the participants the value of student growth

versus dwelling on the non-passing status of the test results. These responsive teachers modeled

resiliency and perseverance for their students to encourage them to keep moving forward, for instance, Ms. Pearl who leveled that:

we wanted to make sure that the kids knew that even if they didn't pass, it was not the end of the world. If they didn't pass it the first time, that didn't mean that they were doing terrible. It just meant they needed to make sure that they gave more effort. We also put more effort into helping them pass. We encouraged them as much as possible. We wanted to make sure that while, yes, the language of state testing is important, even though it is annoying. We don't always like it, but there are skills in there that we can help them with, like vocabulary, using the dictionary, using contexts clues, understanding specific strategies that are there, that a native English speaker would naturally understand, but we do not understand at first. (Personal communication, September 9, 2022)

Ms. Serrano (Personal communication, April 24, 2022) acknowledged that while, "tested content is always being taught, reviewed, and learned using different methods. Tutoring was offered. However, at the end of the day, I was just as happy for example, with the student that started at 7% and was scoring 20-40% at the end of the year. I shared with the students how that "growth" would help them pass the test, even if it didn't happen in their first year. I didn't stress over it because from day one, my students were told that the only thing I wanted to see was growth." Ms. Helena (Personal communication, August 19, 2022) justified:

Yeah, it was a difficult thing to hold them at the same level when they're barely learning the language. We were just looking for growth. We could not expect them to win a race the first time they've ever raced, so we tried to have them best prepared for their first test. Once they took it, we monitored their scores to make sure that they're improving, so

every time they took the test, we worked on the areas where they scored low. We tried to look at the positives and as long as they were showing growth, we praised them.

Ms. Pearl (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) added, "we tied to get them to strategize as much as possible. We gave them as many resources as we could. We tried to show them what resources were available to them. Ms. Cappy justified:

When it came to testing and state accountability… they needed to understand that they had the tools that were readily available to them. I reminded them to do their best. I tried to give them that confidence that they were smart, because their brain was now running on two languages which was not always easy to do, but that did put their brain a little bit higher capacity than others, because they put in the work. They showed me day after day, that they could do it. (Personal communication, May 14, 2022)

Mr. Azul (personal communication, October 30, 2022) asserted that:

The balance came in yes, knowing their limitations, but then you also knew their potential. Yes, I know they're limited by language, but then I also knew that they I were intelligent, and I also knew their potential. I believed that even if they couldn't write right now, eventually they would. Mr. Azul boosted his students by voicing to them, "Don't tell me that you can't do it. We need to figure out how we're going to get you to do great things!"

Virtual Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The second theme illuminated the ESL teachers' virtual experiences of working with CLD students during the COVID pandemic. Again, I gained unexpected knowledge, which reminded me of an old Mexican adage that I grew up hearing from my mother and grandmother, "*No hay mal que por bien no venga*" (Good things can develop from negative events). Although

the participating teachers confessed that teaching online during the pandemic was very

challenging and difficult due to various obstacles, they came out of it with the newfound

awareness that their teaching strategies and approaches had improved because of their hardship.

It was evident that these teachers caringly responded when some students could not learn.

All the participants told of the complexities of teaching online during the pandemic, as

Mr. Montezuma (Personal communication, August 24, 2022) emphasized, "The COVID

experience weakened the necessity to bond with my students, to have an encounter, or to build a

rapport and connection that really only happened in the classroom. COVID impoverished all of

us!" Ms. Vanguard's testimony disclosed the same sentiments:

> Education was not equitable at all during the pandemic. It's not equitable now, but during
>
> the pandemic, I had kids who couldn't log in to *Imagine Learning* (an online foundational
>
> literacy skills program). The geofences we had in our programs did not allow students to
>
> log into (the district) network if they we're outside of the United States…In February,
>
> they got snow across the border and their electricity went out. It got so cold, and my
>
> students were messaging me, telling me, 'I'm cold. We're using our car battery to get Wi-
>
> Fi' and I'm like, okay, stop. Thank you for messaging me. Get off your laptop, you're
>
> present asynchronous. Get warm. Thank you for letting me know you're okay but take
>
> care of yourself now and make sure your little brothers and sisters are fed and warm.
>
> Don't worry about school right now. It was just… it was horrible. (Personal
>
> communication, April 4, 2022)

Ms. Pearl also spoke about the power outage in Mexico, "One day something happened

with the electricity across the border. Almost the entire city had no electricity. I had no

connection with any of those students who were over there that day. There was no way to contact

them. There was nothing that I could do. So, we all had to step back obviously" (Personal communication, September 9, 2022). Mr. Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) added, "It became a full lockdown when BISD first locked down, our district was geofenced. So, any student who lived in Mexico couldn't log in and participate in the classes at first. For the first few weeks, they had no access to what we were doing, so they fell further and further and further behind." Ms. Verde (Personal communication, February 8, 2022) felt that "There's no doubt that the pandemic had made it very challenging for everyone, teachers, and staff. Everyone lost someone or they were out of work for an extended amount of time. I don't think that they made their education a priority." Ms. Cappy told about her frustrations:

> One of the challenges was that I wasn't there with them to visually see if they were on task. High schoolers did not want to turn other cameras because they were 'embarrassed.' Also, planning those exclusive lessons took hours to do. I was sitting at my computer till 10:00 o'clock at night creating specialized lessons. My teaching team came to understand the struggles of an ESL teacher, because at that point, all the students were struggling learners, all of them were. (Personal communication, May 14, 2022)

Ms. Pearl (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) also shared:

> Teaching through the pandemic was quite difficult, it happened during my first year of teaching. It was my first year of teaching, my first year of teaching ESL, and it was all online. It was tough especially because there were also problems with connection. Skills like phonics and any type of way of trying to get them to say certain words, to be able to pronounce certain words was also difficult because even though I had my camera on, there would be a sound delay. There could be something that would happen with their

connection so some of those kids didn't get as much interaction as they should have, but I know that those kids did push themselves forward after that.

During the data disaggregation process in preparation for the findings of this chapter, I realized how the teachers' strength, fortitude and endurance had made a difference not only for culturally and linguistically diverse students, but for all students. Once the interview question was asked, "What can you add from your experience of working with CLD students online during the pandemic?" The teachers candidly shared their struggles, but what I found particularly interesting is that they did not spend too much time in this negative space. They promptly transitioned to the details and benefits of teaching online. I learned from the participants that not only had they pioneered through an unfamiliar and catastrophic teaching experience, but that the struggle itself moved them to reflect on their teaching approaches and dive deeper into their instructional practices to ensure they reached all their students. Ms. Serrano (Personal communication, April 24, 2022) found her connection with home and family advantageous, "I feel we had a really good experience working online with our students, during COVID. In part, I think it was because the students shared that they enjoyed being in Mexico with their families and not having to cross back and forth." Mr. Peregrine also saw advantages for his marginalized students:

> I told mine, 'You know, keep your cameras off I just want to hear your voice, keep it off.' A lot of my more quiet and shy students who hated participating in class, actually had more to say…but at least now they felt a little bit more confident with people. I kind of regretted the fact that we moved away from online education so much because it really did help a lot with the more with shy or silenced students to actually have a chance to be heard. (Personal communication, September 29, 2022)

In the face of the COVID pandemic, Ms. Cappy realized that:

It had to do with what I was asking prior; how I was asking it; how I was evaluating

every single step of the way what they were learning; how I knew if they were learning it;

if they were not learning it; how to direct it, or redirect, or reteach. It had to be incredibly

well-thought out and orchestrated to catch what they weren't understanding. And our

formative assessments had to be more frequent than usual. (Personal communication,

May 14, 2022)

Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) quickly saw an opportunity to

adapt:

You know, TEAMS breakout rooms were the most amazing thing in the world, because

nobody's ever going to tell you they don't understand in front of you know, 30 ceiling

fans. That's really what they all looked like. They were all ceiling fans so having those

breakout rooms was a blessing because you could move students into the breakout rooms

and talk to them in their language a little bit. Where you could make them feel at ease.

Sometimes it was just a simple explanation, for example they'd ask, "*Que es*

eSchoology?" You could explain it to them in a breakout room, but they're not going to

ask you in front of 30 other kids… The idea of having to reinvent myself started when I

saw these platforms and technologies that we were using from *Writable* to *Schoology*

which were being used to reach students. *Writable* allowed me to see what they're doing

live, in real time. I realized, yeah, we need to change because they're not the same

student. They are different students. We always complain how the students that we have

now are not the ones like what we used to have back in the day. Okay, but what are you

going to do about it? I mean, you had to adjust. You just can't sit here and complain.

The same thing does with our emerging bilingual students, okay, don't tell me the

obvious. How are we going to help them? Let's break through, let's use *TEAMS breakout*

rooms. Let's use *Schoology*. Let's use *Writable*. Let's use the *Google Voice*. We can't just

let them slip through the cracks!

New Perspectives of Teaching Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students

Another sub-theme, "new perspectives of teaching culturally & linguistically diverse

students" emerged from the teachers' virtual learning experiences during the COVID-19

pandemic. New awareness and appreciation of CLD students revitalized attitudes, especially

after enduring unforeseen blockages and surviving a global COVID pandemic.

Mr. Montezuma (Personal communication, August 24, 2022) recounted, "they come to a new

country, language, culture, and many times being away from parents and loved ones, etc. They

want to better themselves and desire to surpass parental expectations for them, so they take on

that challenge." Ms. Serrano (Personal communication, April 24, 2022) realized the extent to

which CLD students and families make sacrifices, "I recently moved to a new campus where

even more students travel, daily, back and forth, across the border than I previously thought."

The experiences of Ms. Cappy, Ms. Pearl, and Ms. Helena exemplified how considerate CLD

students were towards one another. The students were for the most part accepting and supportive

of each other." Ms. Pearl (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) noticed that:

They're more willing to work in groups. The groups that they were familiarized with and

within those groups, they started doing specific types of learning, so instead, they did

occasionally speak Spanish. There's still some learning being done there that helped

them or allowed or provided them with the insights they needed and just being in a

regular classroom would not. It did help them with language acquisition as well.

Ms. Helena appended, "the biggest thing that I learned is that the kids that are more advanced, actually learn by teaching their peers, so I implemented this strategy in the classroom to help the higher kids build on what they've already learned, and also the kids that are at the bottom kind of help them up by peer-to-peer teaching" (Personal communication, August 19, 2022). This reciprocal teaching helps both more advanced English speakers as well as less emerging bilingual students. Ms. Cappy (Personal communication, May 14, 2022) validated that even secondary students learn in their native language, "So yes, (my student's) dad was Japanese, and her mother was from Mexico, so she understood Spanish. She wrote all her notes, everything that she did in the classroom, she always wrote in Japanese. Her notes were in Japanese, her dictionary was in Japanese." In this process, Ms. Cappy's Japanese-speaking student was able to help herself and her Spanish-speaking peers learn English. Ms. Vanguard (Personal communication, April 4, 2022) attested that CLD students did engage in learning when they connected to the material, "We just read the Flying Tortilla by Denise Chavez. They really like reading aloud when it was something that interested them, something that's relevant." Mr. Azul acknowledged his awareness that their language issues were not a lack of intelligence, he divulged:

> Something else that happened recently is that these kids loved talking about themselves, and I think that was the way I was able to connect with them now. This forced me to try and find ways to meet them halfway instead of expecting them to come to me. I realized it was a language issue. My diverse students are smart, so I made some adjustments. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

After a year and a significant part of another of interrupted learning for students, the data gathered in these interviews revealed renewed attitudes, fresh perspectives, and revitalized

approaches to teaching CLD students. One of the participating interviewees stressed that diverse students did value learning and embraced challenges. It was in the struggle that they found their own misconceptions towards culturally and linguistically diverse students and how they came to understand that their teaching approached had to change.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theoretical Framework 1

The testimonies, expectations, reflections, observations, commitments, and approaches to teaching mentioned above, all associated to the first theoretical framework included in this study, culturally responsive teaching. In each of these acknowledgements, the participating teachers in this study began to realize that their response to intervention had to change. They made their adjustments without knowing that this practice had been previously termed, culturally responsive teaching.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning. Thus, the data and evidence as revealed through the testimonies of the participating teaching interviews in this third section further delineated in the purpose statement in chapter 1. The first theoretical framework, culturally responsive teaching surfaced as a theme 21 times. The data collection also revealed several sub-themes. I learned from the participating teachers in these interviews how they had each become flexible and adaptable; patient and caring; self-reflective; and open-minded high school teachers who empathized with CLD students to structure their learning. Villegas and Lucas (2002) affirm that culturally responsive teachers use what they know about their students to support their learning. Ms. Serrano (Personal communication, April 24, 2022) disclosed in her interview:

What I have noticed is that many of these students come with extra challenges that other

students do not face. Many students travel back and forth between the border, daily.

Understanding this concept meant that I had to adjust certain practices, for example,

during day-light savings time, I moved tutoring to before school. The fact that these

students were walking back across the border in the dark did not sit well with me.

Homework was a challenge as well. By the time many of these kids get home, it was

late. I did my best and planned my lessons with plenty of time to accomplish them in

class. The only time a student had homework was if they did not complete the task

within that time given.

Ms. Cappy's compassion illuminated through her interview when she admitted:

I had the patience for them. I don't want to say the brain for it, but I guess the curiosity to

try to find out what worked for a particular child. When they told me that I would receive

a Japanese student, I panicked a little but then I was like, 'Okay, now it's time to see if I

could really be a true, true, true, true, true ESL teacher. (Personal communication, May

14, 2022)

Ms. Cappy also showed genuine empathy towards her students:

I saw most of us and our culture and I saw my grandpa and I saw my students'

grandparents, like my grandpa. They just needed to know that somebody was there to

back them up, unfortunately as far as what I saw was a lot of them, they gave up pretty

quickly. It was, it was hard work because I'm not only teaching English as a subject, but

as a language, and I'm also trying to build their esteem within themselves. (Personal

communication, May 14, 2022)

It has been repeated that culturally responsible teachers know their students very well, as conveyed through one of Ms. Pearl's (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) accounts:

It has to do with getting to know them and getting to know their likings. You try to get to know exactly what they like, and if you're also a teacher who has a culturally and linguistic diverse background yourself, you can also adapt that towards what they know. For instance, if they asked me something about my family, it's easy to for them to make connections regardless of whether they had the same experience or not. They had something that they can relate to and that really did help them." Villegas and Lucas (2002) sustained that culturally responsive teachers are familiar with their students' prior knowledge and beliefs, derived from both personal and cultural experiences, as evident in Ms.

Vanguard's interview response. She explained:

I used a lot of culturally relevant texts, so I try to find connections to other cultures, for example, these past nine weeks, we were looking at magical realism and fantasy. They loved it and they were doing great with it and they were having a really good time, but for my students I wanted them to just escape a little bit. The play took place in a tortilla factory, and it told of the reincarnation of Oñate and we got to talk about the problematic nature of Juan de Oñate. It was just really interesting, and the kids were really getting into it. (Personal communication, April 4, 2022)

Mr. Azul and Mr. Peregrine shared a similar heightened sociocultural consciousness. Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) admitted, "That's one of the things I've had to do is reinvent myself and it's something that I'm conscious of this year. I forced myself every day is to avoid sitting at my desk." Mr. Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) shared, "Also having to really like pay attention to different cultures as has helped me understand

as a teacher myself, that not everyone has the same cultural practices." Villegas and Lucas (2002) described culturally responsive teachers act as active agents of change in educational institutions, as professed by Ms. Serrano, "Every year I must assess and be flexible enough to change what needs to be changed for the benefit of the student population I have at that time." (Personal communication, April 24, 2022)

Culturally responsive teaching methods teach *to and through* the strengths of these students (Gay, 2018) as evidenced through the approaches of the participants of this study, where they also held their students to hard work and quality production. Gay (2018) bolstered that students perform much better in environments where they feel comfortable and valued…Telling our personal stories plays a prominent part in our conversations as we work to capture the essence of culturally responsive educational ideas, theories, principles, and practices.

Funds of Knowledge: Theoretical Framework 2

The fourth theme and the second theoretical framework "Funds of Knowledge" materialized 31 times, more than any other theme or subtheme in this data collection. Villegas & Lucas (2002) authenticated that teachers who know about their students' family lives are better prepared to understand the children's in-school behavior and to incorporate the "funds of knowledge" those families possess in classroom activities. *Funds of knowledge* is the conceptual fabric which binds the relationship between personal experience and schooled concepts… it is the reciprocal relation between every day and scientific concepts (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and vice versa. This is the essence of making sense of your learning environment. This household economy was first coined by Eric Wolk (1966) who distinguished between several types of funds: caloric funds, funds of rent, replacement funds, ceremonial funds, and social funds. Gonzalez, et. al., (2005) connected that the premise of *funds of knowledge* is that minority

students are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge.

An abundance of sub-themes was collected through the participants' interview responses, some of these included family values, music and song, religious backgrounds, personal experiences, traditions and practices, foods, customs, historical backgrounds, and occupations, and students' native languages. Ms. Serrano identified connections to family values:

I've noticed my classroom students became more like a family. They brought along their values and behaviors from their culture, and some students had even pointed it out. For example, they mentioned that they had learned that other classrooms were not the same because many other cultures are not as close, or friendly, or social. (Personal communication, April 24, 2022)

Ms. Pearl appreciated her students' music and songs as they completed projects in her class:

One of the things I noticed a lot was these kids sing so much! At any point in time, I don't know why they did that, one of them would start singing something and the rest would start chorusing. I was always afraid of getting in trouble with the teachers next door because it felt like were in a karaoke! They were constantly singing something and while they're working. (Personal communication, September 9, 2022)

Ms. Pearl also shared her perceptions to their religious backgrounds:

Also, when they made mention of the books that we're reading like Persepolis or Maus, those had to do with religion. Even though that I knew that not all the students practiced the same religion, usually their cultural background was very similar. I could make those

connections like this religion was equivalent to this, and so we made those types of

connections. (Personal communication, September 9, 2022)

Ms. Verde (Personal communication, February 8, 2022) imparted evidence to show how

her students connected to their personal experiences, "Many students did not have roots here, so

when everybody was involved talking about their own experiences, that they wanted to use and

share those kinds of experiences and backgrounds, it encouraged other stories to begin their own

story of friendships." Mr. Azul told of a mural project his students created to learn about

symbolism:

> My students did a whole mural, which involved researching about murals. We had to
>
> research famous artists before they got to painting, I instructed them, 'I want you to tell
>
> me in writing what you're going to draw which is the symbolism behind it.' The project
>
> was about incorporating all these skills into one project. They didn't realize everything,
>
> they were doing… All they knew was they we're sharing their life experiences. They
>
> talked about Chihuahua. They talked about Peru. They talked about Guatemala. I go
>
> back to the young lady who stood up there… excitedly talking about '*apache*.' She also
>
> presented about…the Mexican version of '*matachinas*.' She talked about how they got to
>
> do that for one of their holidays. She repeated the names and she was so excited…while I
>
> appreciated her practice of her presentation skills. In class, we're doing all these things, so
>
> it was about combining these things which encouraged them want to learn more. I think
>
> that was the key. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

Ms. Vanguard and Ms. Helena made connections to the students' foods and customs. Ms.

Vanguard (Personal communication, April 4, 2022) described:

I had them share their experiences when we were reading the <u>Flying Tortilla Man</u>. One of their project requirements was to bring food that somehow connected to the text. The setting was a tortilla factory, so they brought food in that could possibly be made up the tortilla factory and they shared why it was important and how it connected to the text. Ms. Helena (Personal communication, August 19, 2022) also related that:

I found commonalities in something that I could use, that they were well versed in, that we could kind of build upon, so the one of the biggest ones was food. Everybody eats food. Everybody has their preferences of what food they like or dislike, so that was kind of an easy topic that everybody had in common. We can build upon that, just different things in that made sense to them.

The most common sub-theme connected to the students' lived experiences was their native language. Ms. Serrano, Ms. Cappy, and Ms. Pearl all shared teaching experiences of using the students' native languages in their lessons. Ms. Serrano celebrated, "I love to teach them how to use their culture to enhance their writing and give their compositions their own personal 'tone.' For example, we did a lesson on idioms, '*dichos*.' Then, I taught the students to use these cultural '*dichos*' as a hook within their introduction, or to close their writing and make it more interesting" (Personal communication, April 24, 2022). Ms. Cappy added that, "So, when it comes to customs, culture, or language, and they realize that English steals from all languages, they catch on, that it is do-able, that it's going to be okay. They see certain words in there and they feel very proud to see their own language in the work" (Personal communication, May 14, 2022). Ms. Pearl (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) shared that:

One of the teachers that I really learned a lot from, used cognates. The '*cognados*' we'd call them. Take for example the English word, comrade, sometimes the words do not

specifically translate. There were many different ways that we could translate, but the word comrade sounds very similar to '*compadre*." It doesn't have the exact same denotation but it's very similar, so they made a reference there and they were like, *'O, compadre. ¿Son compadres?*' Yes. That's how it worked.

Mr. Montezuma (Personal communication, August 24, 2022) recounted:

One of the most memorable experiences was from (a male student) from Czechoslovakia. His father was stationed at our local Army base in the Sergeant Major's Academy. Throughout the year, (my student) created *PowerPoint* presentations of his home country. He introduced to the class to where he lived; what his father was doing in the United States; the foods he was accustomed to; and shared simple language exercises that he spoke. I remember that on another occasion for his country's Independence Day, he came dressed as military personnel and explained the importance of that day. This would inspire other students to talk and present about Mexico as well. They reciprocated. There were fantastic interactions between students.

The inspirational experiences shared by Mr. Montezuma's student, exemplifies trust between him and his teacher and his classmates. Moll et al. (1992) identified this concept as reciprocity and *confianza*, "a sense of trust and faith…that constantly provides contexts in which learning can occur—contexts, for example, where children have ample opportunities to participate in activities with people they trust" (p.174). Linares & Munoz (2011) reinforced that in the process of working closely with students, teachers can potentially draw out hidden talents and abilities, thus the importance of building positive, trusting relationships with CLD students.

Building Relationships

Another sub-theme of *funds of knowledge* that emerged from the participants' shared lived experiences was the importance of building positive relationships with students, parents, and families. Gay (2018) declared that you can't teach what and who you don't know…which establishes that students perform much better in environments where they feel comfortable and valued. Mr. Montezuma validated this point:

I've had students from Mexico, Germany, Korea, Turkey, and Czechoslovakia. They all wanted to learn. They were all making a sacrifice to learn English, but they were wary about being in a new environment and a language. Having a sanctuary in their classroom and teamwork made everything so cohesive. The impact and effectiveness come many years later when they reach out through social media and want to share their success with me. (Personal communication, August 24, 2022).

Gonzalez, et al., (2005) maintained that the deeper relationships we develop with our students and their families, the more invested and committed we all become to the educational process. For example, Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) disclosed:

The relationships came slowly, you can't force them. For some kids it takes two to three weeks, with some kids you connected with right away, but were always talking to them. You're always working with them and you're always trying to figure out what it is that the student is like. It's got to be sincere because one thing that kids know, they can sense hypocrisy, as anybody can, so it's got to be sincere.

At the beginning of the school year Ms. Verde began building relationships with her students' parents first, she conveyed that:

I developed relationships not just with the students, but with the parents as well.

Normally, I contacted the parents so that I can introduce myself and if they had any

questions being that the majority of the students the parents don't speak English, I try to

make them feel comfortable and answer their questions that they might have…I always

enjoyed that engagement with the parents before I even met the students and then once

the students came to the classroom, I developed a relationship by asking about their

culture, their preferences and favorite food; their songs; and their traditions. I felt this

would let the students know that I was interested in their values and their culture. It

helped create more fun for them. I found that this was effective. Students felt more

comfortable, and all students tended to participate in discussions that challenged them.

(Personal communication, February 8, 2022)

From Mr. Azul, I learned how he validated and affirmed his students to build

relationships with them, he narrated:

I had this young lady who went to a concert in Mexico to see *Iron Maiden*. She was an

amazing student, but it took me two weeks to get her to smile and I once I finally saw that

Iron Maiden sticker on her notebook, I knew she was done! We started talking about *Iron*

Maiden and helped her fit in with the others in class. And that was our borderland

approach, we tried to find things that made us come together instead of building walls.

(Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

Gay (2018) emphasized that telling our personal stories plays a prominent part in our

conversations as we work to capture the essence of culturally responsive educational ideas,

theories, principles, and practices. I learned from the participating teachers that some of them

already used this approach. For instance, Mr. Azul who revealed his background to show his

students they were participating in a safe place, "It starts with the environment in the classroom. I open myself up a little bit for them to understand that the classroom was a safe zone. One of the first things I told them was that no one will ever make fun of you in this classroom" (Personal communication, October 30, 2022). Mr. Peregrine also made himself vulnerable when he bared his lack of writing skills in Spanish:

> I wrote essay in Spanish. It was the worse essay I had ever written. It was horrible! It was so bad, but they saw I was trying, and they were able to give me ideas and stuff and that really seeded the understanding that it is okay to make mistakes. It's okay to be confused, but you need to try, and so we talked about that. (Personal communication, September 29, 2022)

> Mr. Azul also made attempts to learn their language, he admitted:

> "I learned from them. I'm trying to pick up as much language from the Guatemalan kids as they pick up from me. My goal was by the end of the year to speak Guatemalan or Peru. I told them I wanted to learn from them as much as they learn from me, so I always use the word "*apache*" now, that's the one thing I've learned. There's another one "*esquincles*," I think that was what they refer to as snaps. Snapping your fingers is "e*squinklies*," something like that. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

> Ms. Cappy who also appreciated the opportunity to improve herself for their advantage:

> I've always told them what I love about teaching English was that sometimes the students open my eyes to something I never thought of before. I may have not seen it that way because I am one person with my own experiences. I don't know their life. I don't know what experiences they've had. I've told them it's so important for you to share, because so many times do my students make me a better teacher because the students bring their

own experiences to the lesson. Whatever they've gone through, just brings on a whole different light to whatever we're discussing in class. They don't realize what they have to offer. If no one gives him that chance, to offer it. (Personal communication, May 14, 2022)

These life experiences of teaching corroborated with Gay's (2018) reflections, "the themes that run through all of my culturally responsive teaching and other interactions with students are 'we are partners in the quest for learning' and 'the better we can combine our resources, the better all of us will be. I will teach better, and you will learn better'" (p.273).

Parent & Family Engagement

A component of *funds of knowledge* is the significance of parental/family engagement. In the past, we often referred to family engagement as "parent involvement" rather than "family engagement." The term "engagement" signifies a commitment between educators, families, and guardians of CLD students by establishing a safe place and a supportive environment where diverse learners are more likely to trust and commit to learning. Gonzalez, et al. (2005) warned if educational institutions are serious about creating partnerships with the community, the relationship cannot be an asymmetrical alliance, with one side defining and limiting the role of its counterpart. This reality was evident through some of the participating teacher responses of students commonly living away from their parents and/or home country. The participating teachers in this study showed positive perspectives and healthy approaches to connecting with the parents of their CLD students. For example, Ms. Pearl discerned from her experience, "One of the things I've noticed about students that are from different cultures is that the parents have this bigger expectation" (Personal communication, September 9, 2022).   I learned from two other participants, Mr. Azul and Ms. Vanguard that the parents of their diverse students were

supportive, humble, and respectful. Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) noted:

> To me parent involvement was very important especially with our emergent bilingual group, because this was how we get them from all angles. Our students' parents were so supportive, but a lot of times they're very, I don't want to say humble, but they were. In their culture they commonly say, "*Ay que respetar a su maestro* (you must respect your teacher).

Ms. Vanguard (Personal communication, April 4, 2022) added, "Culturally they just really respect teachers, their attitude is rooted in respect for education, which I appreciate." Three of the participating teachers shared direct connections and interactions with their students' parents, for example, Ms. Verde, who reached out to parents and guardians to share positive reports, "I have made it my mission early in my career to involve parents, as they are in essential components of student success. I've always been successful in contacting them. I don't just call for negative reasons. I like calling them for positive situations and to praise the kids often because that is the key to their success" (Personal communication, February 8, 2022). Ms. Cappy assured that, "Yes, I've called students' home that weren't doing so well, but at the same time, if those students were doing better later, I would call back to let parents know they're doing better" (Personal communication, May 14, 2022). Mr. Montezuma related that:

> Parents and guardians love to hear about their children's progress. I've been invited to homes to communicate about the children. I've even been invited by one of my students' fathers for dinner and to the Army base's *Around-the-World Banquet*. It was a beautiful experience. I've gotten to meet so many of my students' parents and guardians. They

have even called me from Mexico to give updates of their children. (Personal

communication, August 24, 2022)

Still two other participating teachers shared how they valued parental engagement. Mr.

Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) described:

I'm sure it's weird for them when they walk into a classroom and the person teaching

their student English is this 6-foot-1, white Angelo guy. They were probably wondering,

'Yeah, really? And later, 'yeah!' It really brought a lot of our parents into the fold and

then they would volunteer later, you know, come in and talk to students and stuff.

While Mr. Azul resolved on why athletes love their coaches and their parent, "because

they're considered family. They feel like they're a part of something bigger than themselves. I

believe the same thing applies with this population of parents" (Personal communication,

October 30, 2022).

The participating teachers related to the importance of connections to parents; others

verbalized connections to guardians; and Mr. Azul voiced a wider connection to the family of

diverse students. Ms. Serrano voiced her concern over not readily connecting with her students'

parents:

The downside is that many of these parents are not, or cannot be, physically

involved/present. It can be difficult to conference with parents, face-to-face, as many of

them cannot cross the border. Often, students use the contact information of a

"guardian". Sometimes, this can create issues when the guardian is held responsible for

the student's academic and/or behavioral issues (Personal communication, April 24,

2022).

Like Mr. Azul, Ms. Cappy extended her views of her students' families:

I still didn't give up on them. I saw behind their face, their grandmother, Grandpa, their

Tia, their *Tio*, their mother, or their dad. I assured them, "You know what? You might

think that your parents are not supportive of you right now, but believe me, they are.

Right now, they're just trying to get you through, but the minute they see you walk with

your cap and gown, down that aisle, to get your diploma, that is our moment (as parents)

to let the tears come down. It's not because they're glad they don't have to drive you to

school anymore. The tears come because they didn't give up on you. (Personal

communication, May 14, 2022)

I gleaned through the teacher's responses that they commonly communicated with the

guardians, more so than the students' parents, which created greater gaps in their learning. This

shows that building connections with the extended family and guardians was vital to the well-

being of the CLD students. The importance of shifting our expectations from "parental

involvement" to "family engagement" was highlighted by Snyder & Staehr Fenner (2021), "In

order to build an effective relationship with (diverse) students' families, it is important to begin

with an asset-based perspective by recognizing that (CLD) families may be engaged in numerous

ways that are not apparent or perhaps in line with how we traditionally think of parent

engagement (p.231). Gonzalez et al. (2005) further supported that in doing so the children and

parents feel more ownership in their school, build their self-esteem, and develop a stronger

comfort level with the school.

The Effects of Higher-Order Thinking

The fifth theme emerged as the authentic learning of culturally and linguistically diverse

students, which related the question, how will we know if they have learned? Here 21 pieces of

evidence related to authentic learning as told through the participating teachers' interview

responses will be considered to address the research question, how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning? The last interview question (how do you motivate your diverse student to step out of their comfort zone to engage in higher level thinking and learning?) was asked of the participants to determine if the responses could contribute to the outcome of authentic learning. Ritchhardt et al. (2011) suggested that if we want to support students in learning, and we believe that learning is a product of thinking then we need to be clear about what it is we are trying to support. For this reason, I speculated that we must first consider the effects of higher-order thinking, a sub-theme of authentic learning.

Culturally responsive teachers who strive to support students' knowledge construction actively involve children in learning tasks that promote the development of higher-order thinking though processes, including the skills of hypothesizing, predicting, comparing, evaluating, integrating, and synthesizing (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). If we want to build teams and organizations capable of innovating, we need diversity. Diversity enhances creativity. To maximize their human potential culturally, diverse students must be "in community" with self and others. As they evoke various diversities in crafting their connections and relationships, they will become smarter (Gay, 2018). Through this data collection, the sub-theme of higher-order thinking surfaced as a scaffold to support diverse students towards authentic learning. I learned through analysis of the participants' responses that by exercising higher-order thinking, we learn and understand. As revealed through the teachers' lives experiences, this involved: continuous learning; building knowledge; taking gradual steps; motivating; taking risks; incremental steps; competing to learn; verbal praises to motivate, all action-oriented and forward teaching

approaches. For example, Ms. Cappy (Personal communication, May 14, 2022) built her

students' thinking by using their native language, she recounted:

> One of my strategies, I used to help build them up on a lot is the use of cognates. I've
>
> always told them; my Spanish made my English better. It wasn't the other way around. It
>
> was the fact that my first language, Spanish gave me the high academic words to use in
>
> English. It was the cognates that make my writing better in English. When they realized
>
> that were writing at a higher level than monolingual English-speaking students by using
>
> cognates, that gave them a little bit of leverage to feel confidence.
>
> Ms. Vanguard embraced incremental steps to literacy, she explained that:
>
> A lot of times teachers overlook the listening and speaking and that's how language is
>
> acquired. You learn to listen first, then speak, and then read and write. If you can't listen
>
> in English, then you can't read or write in English, so I incorporated a lot of the listening
>
> and speaking, as well as the reading and writing. (Personal communication, April 4,
>
> 2022)
>
> Ms. Pearl (Personal communication, September 9, 2022) recognized her student's gradual

steps to success through a haphazard experience:

> I don't know how the kids did it but when it came to presentation time, they broke down
>
> the presentation into three parts for my reluctant student. His part was like two sentences.
>
> I thought, "Oh no! He's going to go up there. I don't know how he's going to present! He's
>
> going to freak out! He's going to leave his classmates hanging! But he presented. I don't
>
> know what happened. I don't know whether giving him the opportunity to do a different
>
> assignment did something. I don't know if it was the classmates who did it, but he
>
> presented his two sentences. The presentation did not last that long, but it was something

different. I thought that was really impressive. His pronunciation was great and the fact that he presented in front of his classmates after he had he refused to do so earlier. I thought that was really great, obviously! He had now presented in front of a regular classroom. I think that's a higher step, and I want to think it's the environment so that helped him.

Mr. Azul used humor to motivate his students to take risks, he advised that:

Once they believe, it sets the tone. We do presentations right away, and if they tell me 4 words in English, I applaud them with our silly things (praises in the classroom) because if these kids can be silly in the classroom, then they believe no one is judging. We (praise) with "roller coaster!" We're praising with "*fabuloso*!" We started celebrating with the "grilling and well done!" Yes, these are silly, but it's designed to break down those barriers so even the cool kids like it. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

Ms. Helena also used praises, simple incentives, and competition to move her students forward, "for me the biggest motivator is stickers. They just love stickers, so you motivate them and use their very competitive spirit to engage in the lesson. The second thing is just praise, they want to be noticed for doing good things" (Personal communication, August 19, 2022).

Through their reflections and responses of the interview questions, the participating teachers have demonstrated how they used their strategies, approaches, and activities to advance their diverse students from one level of thought to another. Jensen (2005) reinforced that when teachers orchestrate an activity, an experience, a field trip, a guest speaker, or a stimulation, in essence what they do is involve them in the active component of thinking. The participants talked about their teaching experiences of building from the students' native language, taking gradual steps, using humor to motivate students, and embracing incremental steps toward

111

literacy, of which involved the learning-in-motion and forward-thinking of the students. The evidence showed that this forward movement of thought is synonymous with higher-order thinking, which then positions their authentic learning, the fifth and finally theme.

Authentic Learning

The research question was posed to determine how culturally responsive approaches and funds of knowledge are used to engage diverse students in learning. To define authentic learning I considered, David Perkins' (1992) definition, "Learning is consequence of thinking. Retention, understanding, and the active use of knowledge can be brought about only by learning experiences in which learners think about and think with what they are learning…knowledge comes on the coattails of thinking. As we think about and with the content that we are learning we truly learn (p.8). Hammond (2015) also supplemented that "culturally responsive teachers take advantage of the fact that our brains are wired for connection...They balance giving students both care and push (p.17-19). Ritchhardt et al. (2011) expanded that students need to see that all learners make mistakes and that learning often occurs from reflecting on those mistakes.

A sub-theme that emerged from the participants' experiences of teaching CLD students was involvement in action-oriented responses of extending on a thought. For example, Ms. Cappy (Personal communication, May 14, 2022) recounted:

> Often times it takes a while, but sometimes when they feel comfortable around each other, they will voice their connections, because again if they don't have that environment they're not going to share. So, you need to completely work on developing that type of environment where they support each other and even if they think it's a dumb idea and they say it anyway. When they themselves are stopping the lesson to share and not me having to stop and force stories or for them to really think about my question, 'has this

happened to you or why do you think that happened?' Authentic learning is happening

when it's them stopping the lesson more than I do, to share a connection.

 Ms. Verde and Ms. Pearl also elaborated on progressive movement of asking questions in the

text. Ms. Verde communicated, "I know that learning is happening when students are engaged in

the lesson or ask questions for clarity. Mr. Pearl shared:

> Recently, we're reading <u>Animal Farm</u>, if the students didn't understand the question, then
>
> there really was no authentic learning. They would just pass it by, but if they really get to
>
> know you, if you really get to engage with them and they don't understand the question,
>
> tell straightforwardly, but they'll also adapt it too, so they show you, their understanding.
>
> instance, they asked me about the character, Boxer and they didn't understand about his
>
> or about how hardworking he was. They weren't really understanding those types of
>
> details, so instead of just telling me I don't understand this, they start telling me I don't
>
> understand why Boxer allowed himself to do this, so they make the questions connected
>
> the reading. This is how I knew for sure that even though they didn't know the entire
>
> book, they still made connections. They would show that they were at least involved in
>
> something. They would offer 'I can tell you this, but I need you to tell me more so I can
>
> bring it back in.' I think that was authentic learning. (Personal communication,
>
> September 9, 2022)

Many of the participants felt there was much to be said and gleaned from making

mistakes and embracing failure as a path to learning. Mr. Azul defended the act of taking risks:

> It starts with them knowing that the minute they walk in that door no one's going to
>
> judge. You're going to learn, and we're going to make mistakes. In the past, I would
>
> always tell my soccer team, "the team that makes the most mistakes, is always going to

win, because if you're not making mistakes, you're not taking chances and you're not learning. So, if you're scared to make a mistake then you're going to play it safe. If you are going to stand up there and choose to say "the cook" instead of saying "chef" like me. They have to not be afraid to make mistakes. Mistakes are okay and that's where learning begins. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

Mr. Peregrine and Ms. Verde both emphasized the advantage of mistakes and failure. Mr. Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) supported, "By emphasizing it's okay if you don't get it right. I mean in my class they're making mistakes all the time and we celebrate them because hey you learned how not to do it!" and Ms. Verde (Personal communication, February 8, 2022) shared, "we can't be successful, if they don't fail, so failure in the class is not a negative thing…we all learn from our failures. That's the support I have in place, so that they can feel comfortable when they're being academically challenged." Mr. Azul also imparted his excitement about building on what the students already knew, he illustrated:

So, the question is 'how do I use these practices?' I think it's by using all your tools and getting to the kids from all these different angles, whether it's through their writing, their conversation, or having them build on what they learned today. That's the thing that I love, whatever we learn today, we're going to build on it. We're not going to rest on it, because tomorrow I want you to be a little bit better than today. If today it took you 30 words to translate to comprehend the story, then our goal is that by October it's going to be 25. By November it should be 20, by December or by the end of the semester you should be at 15. By the time the STAAR test rolls out, you should be at 5 to10 words and those should be key concepts. I shouldn't give them a list of 150 words that they're just

114

going to keep in their notebook and that they're to look pretty. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)

The cognitive verbs used by the scholars of higher-level thinking and learning, such as Benjamin Bloom, Author Costa, Lynn Erickson, Howard Gardner, Karen Hess, Eric Jensen, Sandra Kaplan, David Krathwohl, Robert Marzano, Joseph Renzulli, and others each aimed to scaffold the student toward learning. The progression of thought are the thinking practices and processes that are integral to understanding. Some of the participating teachers in this study shared how they moved students toward authentic learning. Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) indicated that authentic learning was happening when they started not just learning vocabulary words, it is when now they learned the application of them or when they ask, "how do I apply this in my other classes? How do I now apply what I've learned about the skill?" Ms. Helena (Personal communication, August 19, 2022) shared, "As far as the authentic learning, I oftentimes see if the students are able to apply it, such as teaching it to another classmate or showing it on their actual work, whatever we're learning." Mr. Peregrine (Personal communication, September 29, 2022) described:

> As we're doing things, there's a lot of like talk. Everyone is conversing, trying to figure out together, because in the class there's not just one way of doing it. Being able to give them the tools to start, and I sit back and watch as they grow and become better at coding and things. You can really see a lot of these students start to catch on and do more. You'll hear like more excited whispers, sometimes there's a cheer and you all freak out, so that way I see some authentic learning happening.

From the participating teachers and their responses to the interview questions, I learned that culturally responsive teachers guided and moved their students toward growth by building

115

from their native language, taking gradual steps, using humor to take risks in learning, and embracing incremental steps toward learning. Authentic learning was supported through the action-oriented process and forward movement of higher-level thinking. It was evident when the teachers provided CLD students various ways of learning after starting with an unfamiliar or abstract concept and ended up showing their understanding as a concrete observation that was visible or audible.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to capture how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region used the theoretical frameworks, culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning. The study examined ESL teachers' current practices and strategies, such as relationships, parental engagement, and funds of knowledge to engage CLD students with the curriculum, instruction and learning. The research question that guided this qualitative study was: how do English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the border region use culturally responsive teaching and *funds of knowledge* to engage culturally diverse students in authentic learning? The research question was developed based on the qualitative data that was intended to provide the essence of ESL teachers' cultural responsiveness and practice of using diverse students' funds of knowledge to attain authentic learning. This research question aimed to discover how culturally responsive teachers created trusting relationships with CLD students through funds of knowledge to support authentic learning experiences through rigorous and engaging practices.

Methodology and Procedures

This study, a qualitative research methodology was considered an interpretative phenomenology to examine the lived teaching experiences of high school English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and their interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Twelve interview questions were asked of nine high school ESL teachers who currently teach 9th through 12th grade emerging bilingual (EB) students to inform the findings of this study wherein five themes, in relation to the participants teachers' experiences of teaching CLD students emerged from the data. The interview questions were constructed to help extract this information. These themes included: (1) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment of Culturally

117

& Linguistically Diverse Students; (2) Lessons learned from Virtual Online Teaching & Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic; (3) Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices; (4) Funds of Knowledge; and (5) Authentic Learning.

In the first section, I included the characteristics of diverse students as described by the participating teachers to understand the uniqueness of culturally and linguistically diverse students. I identified and integrated the five general themes which emerged from the interview responses to understand the classroom and learning experiences of high school culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The researcher's positionality welcomed the role and responsibility as a learner to collect the interview responses, interpret the data, extract its meaning, connect to personal past experiences, and be shaped by the findings. Careful reflection was taken to ensure the study was not more about the researcher's teaching experiences with emerging bilingual students than of the participating teachers' experiences. To elude bias, the researcher remained studious of the value of multiple perspectives and cognizant of my own personal assumptions and beliefs. To further ensure the essence of the lived experiences of the participating teachers materialized over the researcher's biases, the researcher sought to remain mindful of the influence her own experiences of teaching diverse students could have on the interpretation of the data.

Presentation of Findings

In the first theme, "Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment of Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students," the participating teachers expressed that curriculum and instruction was effective when they connected their lesson and new knowledge to their students' background, culture, life experiences, music, traditions, customs, language, or "their world." While they admitted that the expectation imposed on CLD students was "difficult, harsh, and

condemning," they also understood that the purpose of state testing and accountability was helpful by measuring and rewarding student growth, which encourage them to keep moving forward. Gay (2018) amplified that curriculum content for culturally responsive teaching needs to be diversified (in form and substance) to reflect and maximize the knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and learning of students from different ethnic, racial, and social groups. Ladson-Billings (2021) augmented that "an important aspect of assessment in a re-set school is that it will reflect incredible variety…Students will have the opportunity to use art, music, and dramatic performances, as well as pencil and paper tests and essays" (p.74).

The second theme, "Lessons Learned from Virtual, Online Teaching & Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic," revealed the teachers' responses about their struggles, but they did not spend much more time in that which happened in the past. They pressed forward with the details and benefits of teaching online. The data gathered in these interview responses concluded with renewed attitudes, fresh perspectives, and revitalized approaches to teaching CLD students. I learned from the participants that not only had they survived an extraordinary teaching experience, but that the struggle itself moved them to reflect on their teaching practices, which allowed them to improve the delivery of their online instruction. Again, I noticed the forward thinking of responsive teachers and how they supported and guided their students through the careful consideration of their teaching practices. Through the participants lived experiences of online teaching during, I realized how the teachers' strength, fortitude and endurance had made a difference not only for all students, but on their own teaching practices. Hammond (2015) strengthened that "the commitment to be an effective educator of culturally diverse dependent learners builds the stamina and courage to persevere when the process gets challenging" (p. 55). Such a recognition of resilience not only unlocks new temporal understandings but also

119

encourages educators to think deeper about spaces in which community can be built, including online and virtual platforms (Carter, R. & Nicolazzo, Z., 2019, as cited in Miller, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017).

The third theme revealed the theoretical framework, "Culturally Responsive Teaching." Some of the participants defined it through examples of their teaching experiences. Ms. Cappy disclosed, "I have the patience for them." Mr. Azul reflected, "that's one of the things I've had to do is reinvent myself." Mr. Peregrine admitted that "paying attention to different cultures as has helped me understand as a teacher myself, that not everyone has the same cultural practices." Ms. Serrano empathized that many of her students travel back and forth to the border daily, so she changed her tutoring times to before school during day-light savings time, so the students would not walk back across the border after dark. Ms. Vanguard maintained high expectations of her diverse students by "using a lot of culturally relevant texts…to find connections to other cultures, for example, these nine weeks, we're looking at magical realism and fantasy…they're doing great with it." Gay (2018) reinforced that culturally responsive teachers are warm demanders who hold students accountable for high academic efforts and performance. Villegas and Lucas (2002) describe that "such teachers, therefore, make it a priority for their students to develop facility with the mainstream ways so that they can effectively function in society as it is now structured" (p.37).

Although the ESL teachers in Borderland Independent School District have never received any professional development on culturally responsive teaching nor on using funds of knowledge to address the needs of diverse students, did not suggest they were not using these practices. Through the teachers' responses of the interview questions the researcher gained the insight that their culturally responsive approaches were innate. The ESL teachers in the border

120

region were already culturally responsive without knowing there was a name for it. Their intrinsic qualities and characteristics as caring, considerate, and supportive approaches to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students is how they were able to respect, appreciate, and use the diverse students' language, abilities, knowledge, skills, family histories, culture, customs, music, stories, *cuentos*, traditions, foods, and lived experiences to engage them in authentic learning.

The fourth theme unveiled the theoretical framework, "Funds of Knowledge," which was seen and validated by teachers as the knowledge and resources that students have learned from their backgrounds, culture, family, and their own life experiences to build on new knowledge. A sub-theme in *funds of knowledge*, was the component of building relationships and *confianza* with and among CLD students so they have a sense of belonging and a safe place where in they can be encouraged to step outside their comfort zone. Another sub-theme in *funds of knowledge,* was parental and family engagement. Schwartz (2015) validated that "FoK research seeks to generate relationships of reciprocity and trust so that students' lived experiences and histories, their own and those of their communities are view as and utilized as valuable resources for learning in academic spaces" (p.610).

The fifth theme, "Authentic Learning," was acquired from the participants' interview responses as it occurred when CLD students were involved in the process of thinking, such as building from their native language, taking gradual steps, using humor to take risks in learning, and embracing incremental steps toward learning. It became evident when alert teachers introduced an unfamiliar concept, guided CLD students in the forward movement of higher-level thinking, and ultimately, allowed them to show their understanding with a unique visible, audible, or tangible product. Through the participants interview responses of how they scaffolded

CLD students to authentic learning, one participant realized that they must first feel safe and comfortable around each other, before they will share a connection to the learning activity. The Great Schools Partnership (2013) elucidated that authentic learning is also more likely to be interdisciplinary given that life, understanding, and knowledge are rarely compartmentalized into subject areas, and as adults, students will have to apply multiple skills or domains of knowledge in any given educational, career, civic, or life situation.

Review of Related Literature

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Families of CLD students send their children to the United States in hopes of giving their loved ones a chance for a better life. Oftentimes, there are significant sacrifices made by the student, immediate family members, as well as extended members of the family. In addition to the new language they must learn, students encounter other changes such as, new social interactions with new people and varied relationships and new environmental situations in country, city, or school, etc. While it is expected that CLD students will experience a transformation by blending into a new environment; diversifying teaching to reach different cultures requires a delicate interaction between the initial teacher and student connection.

Culturally Responsive Teaching of CLD Students

Culturally responsive teaching approaches move us to reposition our attitudes and actions to benefit culturally and linguistically diverse students and allows our cultural mind to shift and support our understanding of the world as seen through eyes of minority and sidelined students based on their cultural practices and life experiences. Since how one thinks, writes, and speaks reflects culture and affects performance, aligning instruction to the cultural communication styles of different ethnic groups can improve school achievement (Gay, 2018). By including

"linguistic," in the term culturally and linguistically responsive, the intentionality of the language focus is demonstrated as equal to what we typically consider culture (Hollie, 2018). Linguistically responsive teachers recognize that CLD students' home language provides a bridge to scaffold diverse students' learning towards higher levels of cognition. Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching cannot become an axiom where the significance of "responsiveness" is diluted simply because schools and districts branded themselves as such. The word, responsive denotes an action… in the mindset of seeing culturally and linguistically diverse students as the source of the knowledge.

Authentic Relationships with CLD Students

To build strong relationships and safe, supportive learning environments, teachers must understand, value, and build upon the cultures, identities, and experiences of students and their families (DePaoli, et al., 2004). Trusting teacher-student relationships create a reciprocal interaction where the give and take exchange between them provides the teacher with pertinent information about the students' knowledge and experiences to present an optimal learning experience. An authentic relationship is built on knowing the true spirit of individual students and the genuine consideration of flexible culturally responsive teachers.

Engaging CLD students in Instruction and Learning

Students' academic achievement and their cultural and linguistic uniqueness are reciprocal in nature. Aceves and Orosco (2014) magnify that by incorporating students' unique perspectives, experiences, cultural beliefs, and languages while inviting students to construct new understanding is how to open their path to learning. Through their accumulated capital, such as gifts and talents are the pathway to gaining a true educational experience. To unlock the potential of CLD students, culturally responsive educators must extend beyond multicultural awareness,

which includes moving onward in spite of cultural prejudices or pressing forward regardless of language barriers while understanding that the hardships is where growth and development occur.

Implications

The literature review provided many rationales and recommendations for educators to become more culturally aware and teachers in the classroom to become more culturally responsive. While English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Borderland Independent School District may not have been familiar with the phrase, culturally responsive teaching, through their teaching experiences, they demonstrated genuine cultural competence and caring toward their culturally and linguistic diverse students as discovered through the themes which emerged from their interview responses. It is also important to note that even though they were not acquainted with the expression of *funds of knowledge*, there was some evidence to show they utilized some its foundational elements to some extent. Thus, several implications can be obtained from the findings of this study.

Implications for Practitioners

The following implications for practitioners emerged as a result of this study. Findings in the *Texas Education Agency's* 2019-20 State STAAR Performance Report indicated that although the Texas emergent bilingual subpopulation continued to underperform compared to all state students, they revealed equal growth rates at all passing levels compared to all state students and state emerging bilingual students. It also showed that pre-pandemic, at the approaches level from 2018-19, Borderland ISD Emergent Bilingual students had the greatest growth rate compared to all state students and state emergent bilingual students at all grades and all subjects. The growth patterns in this data further suggested there was something to be learned from the

124

success of Borderland ISD teachers who worked directly with emergent bilingual students. The post-pandemic, 2020-21 State STAAR Performance reported an adverse effect. This information indicated that after the pandemic all state students at all grade level and subjects showed a significant decrease in learning, while district emergent bilingual students experienced the greatest losses in performance, thus further widening the learning gap. This further supports the need to examine the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' pedagogical approaches as there remains something to be learned from the success of BISD teachers who worked directly with emergent bilingual students, pre-pandemic.

There was important knowledge to be gleaned from the perspective of teachers who are successfully motivating culturally and linguistically diverse students to learn and surpass the rising expectations of the state standards. This work could potentially contribute to the existing body of knowledge by discovering how culturally and linguistically responsive teachers successfully prepare CLD students to compete in a changing global, digital, and multi-lingual society. Existing information on the related topics mentioned above were described in the literature review.

As educators, we should all recognize that all students including, culturally and linguistically diverse learners bring knowledge and skills from their own life experiences and backgrounds to support new content knowledge and language acquisition. Mr. Azul (Personal communication, October 30, 2022) valued this principle, when he asked his student, "tell me about your last name, where does it come from?" By incorporating the student's "actual life experiences" into the lesson activity, he validated the student's identity and affirmed his culture. In this approach, the teacher understood how the student's culture sustained his new learning. As was evident in the literature view, it is imperative that educators to be aware of their own deficit

ideologies by adopting sociocultural consciousness, that is conceptions of self and others (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2018) cautioned never ask students to eliminate a way of thinking, behaving, and communicating without providing alternative replacement options. Hollie (2018) also advised against the adverse effects of "deculturalization as the educational process of destroying a people's culture and replacing it with a new culture (p. 49).

To help students from diverse backgrounds build bridges between home and school, teachers need to know about the lives of the specific children they teach. Prospective teachers cannot develop this knowledge in advance of programs of preservice teacher education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 80). One participant in the study noticed that her students crossed the international bridge on a daily basis and responded by allowing them an earlier tutoring time so they would not be crossing the bridge to return home in the dark. Culturally responsive teachers must teach students the normalcy and necessity of crossing cultural borders in multicultural societies and the world and demonstrate skills for how this can be done. Gay (2018) encouraged that responsive teachers should also reveal (their) own success and challenges in doing so. We live in a world that demands that people work and adapt to the cultural beliefs of others outside our country as well as become multilingual, to successfully compete in a global society. It is important for educators to realize (and be aware) that diverse students have become effective border crossers (Mehan et al., 1996).

The nine participating teachers in this study all demonstrated genuine care and concern for the individual needs of each of their CLD students. This is how they gained insights about them to differentiate their instructional practices. For example, Ms. Pearl who quickly gained insight that her students' parents had "bigger expectations" for their children. Educators must also understand family structures and extend beyond parent communication and involvement to

126

include engagement with CLD students' families, guardians, and networks to support all aspects of diverse students' educational experiences. This practice was supported by the second theoretical framework in this study, "Funds of Knowledge" which was utilized by attentive teachers as the knowledge and resources that students have learned from their backgrounds, culture, family, and their own life experiences to build on new knowledge. Garcia et al. heightened that family engagement is ongoing, meaningful interaction between schools and families that is characterized by two-way communication. Its focus is on supporting student learning (as cited in Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021, p. 231).

Another implication for veteran teacher practitioners surfaced as a result of this study. Research-based practices such as culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge should be directly coached and connected for all teachers. Even veteran teachers can continue to develop effective habits towards continuous pedagogical improvements. According to the Texas Teacher Evaluation & Support System [TTESS], 2022:

Planning (Domain 1) *Knowledge of Students* (Dimension 1.3) Through knowledge of students and proven practices, the teacher ensures high levels of learning, social-emotional development and achievement for all students;

Instruction (Domain 2) *Differentiation* (Dimension 2.4) The teacher differentiates instruction, aligning methods and techniques to diverse student needs; and

Professional Practices and Responsibilities (Domain 4) *School Community Involvement* (Dimension 4.4) Systematically contacts parents/guardians regarding students' academic and social/emotional growth through various media.

As campus and district instructional leaders, implications for campus and district administrator practitioners include suggestions to implement, train, evaluate, and provide

127

growth-oriented support systems for culturally responsive practices and funds of knowledge across the organization. Campus and district leaders should promote the continuous development of culturally relevant pedagogies to support culturally and linguistically diverse Mexican American/Latinx students. As cited in the Texas Principal Evaluation & Support System [PTESS], 2022:

> Domain 3: Positive School Culture, Indicator 3.2: Behavioral Expectations and Management Systems Establishes clear expectations and systems for behaviors, including social and emotional supports; Indicator 3.3: Proactive and Responsive Student Support Services Leads strategies to proactively provide and coordinate student support services. Uses schoolwide routines and procedures to proactively identify and respond to students' needs; Indicator 3.4: Involving Families and Community Productively involves and coordinates family and community involvement. Confidently serves as a driving force in creating a culture that welcomes all families and community members as partners.

Implications for Districts & New Teacher Mentor Programs

The following implications for school districts and new teacher mentor programs emerged as a result of this study. At this point in time, the Borderland Independent School District shows no efforts to practice or advance culturally responsive teaching or funds of knowledge practices; therefore, I recommend that all (BISD) staff members be introduced to and informed of deficit ideologies by teaching and promoting cultural awareness and knowledge through professional development to sustain cultural competence and extend beyond cultural diversity celebrations. By incorporating asset-based approaches and recognizing students' banks of knowledge, diverse students will be better prepared to build on what they already from their life experiences. Sensemaking or meaning making can be enhanced for CLD students via the

influence of contextuality of using their reservoirs of skills and knowledge they each bring from home, such as language foundations, family histories, music, literature/storytelling (*cuentos*), household experiences, family occupations, agricultural knowledge, artwork, customs/traditions, etc.

In the study, the participating teachers initially described their CLD students as, "fearful, struggling, sacrificing, and living away from parents…low morale…commonalities of their fears, desires, solitude, heartaches." By reflecting on their experiences of working with culturally and linguistically diverse students despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it was evident how they were able to support their students. The interview responses shifted to more encouraging comments, such as Ms. Vanguard's (Personal communication, April 4, 2022) description, "We encouraged them as much as possible." "They loved The Flying Tortilla Man, they're doing great with it, they're having a really good time, but for my students I wanted them to just escape a little bit." "We need to figure out how we're going to get you to do great things!"

DeCosta et al. (1993) emphasized that the climate of strain on everyone's mental health continues to be an area we cannot avoid. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to linger and continue to impact the mental well-being of teachers and their students. Thus, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives and programs are compulsory to build resiliency and support more goal-oriented students. The practice of culturally responsive teaching also provides a foundation which starts with the educators' paradigm shift to further supporting SEL objectives, such as students' self-awareness, empathy for others, and relationship building.

Gay (2018) reported that the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) described the intent of SEL programs as creating learning environments that meet the needs of students for belonging, safety, and community, and thereby provide ideal

conditions for high-quality academic, relational, and personal wellness. Although SEL also has a strong affinity with many of the aspects of culturally responsive caring, there is limited data to show how SEL and CRT are being used to support and boost the Mexican American/Latinos and Asian Americans. For these reasons, future implications of this study included suggestions to employee CRT and SEL practices to strengthen foundations of learning partnerships between faculty and students (Yeh et al., 2022).

Implications for Universities & Teacher Preparation Programs.

The following implications for practitioners at the university level and teacher preparation programs emerged as a result of this study. The participating teachers in this study shared their perspectives and lessons learned based on their lived experiences of teaching diverse students. Of particular interest was Ms. Pearl, whose first-year teaching began during the COVID shutdown. Her experience differed in that her first teaching year was complicated with the trial-and-error practices in attempt to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In her interview, she disclosed, "my experience of working with culturally or linguistically diverse students online during the COVID pandemic was quite difficult, it happened during my first year of teaching. It was my first year of teaching, my first year of teaching ESL, and it was all online. It was a little bit tough" (Personal communication, September 9, 2022).

The lessons learned, self-awareness and reflections were discovered after the strain and mistakes were made in multiple attempts to motivate students to learn. To prevent the struggle and save time in effective teaching practices for new teachers, I propose that universities and teacher preparation programs should expound on the practice of learning about diversity and building on intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or interact; valuing others'

values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself" (Byram, 1997, as cited in Guo et al. 2009, p. 3).

Training should extend beyond a single multicultural course. Guo, Lund, and Arthur (2009) recommend that diversity and equity issues must be infused throughout the courses and fieldwork experiences. Teacher preparation programs need to help preservice teachers critically examine the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. Examples of cultural contexts, includes culturally responsive teaching and using funds of knowledge, such as, building strong, trusting relationships bonded in c*onfianza* with CLD students to gain the most productive and rewarding teaching and learning experiences for both teachers and the students.

Implications for Further Research

This work is incomplete. There is still a great need for the promotion and improvement in the field of culturally responsive teaching. The themes extrapolated from the interview responses were limited to the lived experiences of nine English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from six high schools in the Borderland Independent School District in West Texas. These views and observations were concentrated on mostly Mexican international students whose families live in the neighboring border city in northern Mexico. Only three of the nine participating teachers mentioned examples of other culturally and linguistically diverse students, from Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Japan, Peru, Germany, Korea, and Turkey. Culturally responsive teachers should continue to learn and understand other cultures as well, since the candidates in this study were limited to two Latino males, five Latina females, one White male, and one White female. Gay (2018) admitted that more data are available on the need for and experience with *culturally responsive teaching* as it relates to African Americans than to other groups of color.

131

Some of these researchers included: Jacqueline J. Irvine (1990); Gloria Ladon-Billings (1994); Geneva Gay (2000); Lisa Delpit & Joanne Dowdy (2002); Django Paris (2012); Sharroky Hollie (2012); Zaretta Hammond (2015); and Sydney Snyder & Diane Staehr Fenner (2021). References to culturally responsive teaching in relation to Latinos was limited to the work of Manuel Ramirez III & Alfredo Castaneda (1774) and Ana Maria Villegas & Tamara Lucas (2007). The work of *funds of knowledge* was limited principally to the efforts of Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti (2005), which was confined to elementary school families and settings. This confirmed that more efforts in the matters of culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge needs to be dedicated to other ethnic and minority groups, such as Asian Americas, Latino Americans, and Native Americans at the secondary levels.

Because of the limited researchers and resources available to build on theoretical frameworks of culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge, this also limits cultural school curriculum designers to incorporate content about ethnic and cultural diversity in regular school subjects (Gay, 2018). Schettino, Radvany and Wells (2019) informed that after examining all 50 state ESSA plans submitted to the Department of Education, they looked specifically for references to culturally responsive practices and programs, as well as the importance of recruiting and developing culturally responsive or relevant-- or at least culturally competent— educators. In their report, they included a map which highlighted those states that had included some aspect of cultural responsiveness or competence in their plans. The state of Texas was not highlighted. Further, even though *the Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) has allowed states to reimage educational programs to support the growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse populations, Texas does not indicate to be a culturally responsive state.

Another possible research topic to be considered is the need to implement culturally responsive teaching practices, such as funds of knowledge at all levels of education, including: college/university classrooms; teacher preparation and universities; in-service professional development of currently practicing teachers; state curriculum development for all subject at all grade levels; regional and district organizational mission and vision statements; regional and district level initiatives and program expectations; campus-level mission and vision focus; all campus-level programs, such as athletics, academics, counseling, student activities, etc.; Professional Learning Communities (PLC); campus leadership meetings; administrative staffing sessions; teacher lesson planning/tutoring sessions; visible in common assessments and formative assessments; graduation ceremonies; and parent and family engagement events. Culturally responsive initiatives should be visible at the micro and macro levels and into every corner of every classroom. It should be visible everywhere, to the families for all students. Culturally responsive approaches should be systematically supported to empower all students at every grade level. Gay (2018) maintained that "it should be considered as the "new normative" and permanent criteria for providing equitable and excellent education for the demographically diverse students in U.S. schools" (p.284). Synder and Staeher Fenner (2021) concluded that if we want to change the system, educators must speak the truth about the equity and injustice that is prevalent in our society and teach students what it means to advocate for themselves and others.

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1. Tell me a little about yourself and your teaching career.

2. What was something that happened recently in your classroom that you learned or discovered from teaching diverse students?

3. What do you see and hear in your classroom that helps you understand the uniqueness of borderland students?

4. How do you develop practices for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students? What does that involve?

5. How do you use these practices to engage diverse students in authentic learning? How do you know when authentic learning is happening?

6. How do you develop relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse students? How do you know this is effective? What is the impact?

7. How do you connect student learning to the curriculum and instruction? How do you know when this is working?

8. How do you motivate your emerging bilingual students to step out of their comfort zone to engage in higher level thinking and learning?

9. What can you share regarding using students' life experiences in your lessons (such as, their customs, music, culture, languages, beliefs, household experiences, occupations, family histories, backgrounds, or prior knowledge)? How do these experiences support their academic achievement?

10. Tell me about your experience with the parent involvement of your diverse students. How have these connections helped with student participation?

11. What can you add from your experience of working with culturally and/or linguistically diverse students online during the COVID pandemic?

12. How do you find the delicate balance of teaching diverse students with regard to state testing accountability

CURRICULUM VITA

MaryBelle Gonzales, the first daughter of Cruz H. Gonzales, Jr. and Herlinda Licon Gonzales, was born in Van Horn, Texas. She graduated from Van Horn High School, Van Horn, Texas in 1984. After graduation, she married and raised two children, Alberto and Beverly Celeste. While raising two children, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Texas in May 1999 and later a Master of Education degree in Secondary School Counseling from Sul Ross State University, in May 2004. Since then, she has obtained several Texas professional certifications, including Principal Grades (EC-12), 2011; English as a Second Language Supplemental, 2011; School Counselor Grades (EC-12), 2004; Gifted and Talented, 2002; and Secondary English Grades (6-12), in 1999.

She began her teaching career as a high school English teacher at Van Horn High School, Culberson County-Allamore Independent School District in 1999. In 2007, she worked briefly as a Professional Development Consultant at the Education Service Center, Region 19 in El Paso, Texas. In 2008, she became an Instructional Specialist at the Socorro Independent School District in El Paso, Texas. In 2011, she continued training teachers at the Education Service Center, Region 18 in Midland, Texas. In 2014, she returned to teaching in the classroom to experience English as a Second Language (ESL) at Socorro Independent School District and began working on her Doctor of Education degree.

As a public-school educator with over 23 years of experience, MaryBelle continues to serve in her role as Dean of Instruction at Americas High School in the Socorro Independent School District in El Paso, Texas. She earned her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Administration from the University of Texas in El Paso in December 2022.

Dr. Gonzales' dissertation entitled, "Using Culturally Responsive Teaching and Funds of Knowledge to engage Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Authentic Learning" was supervised by Dr. Jesus Cisneros.

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