

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP: FOSTERING A
SHARED VISION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING FOR
LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**

by

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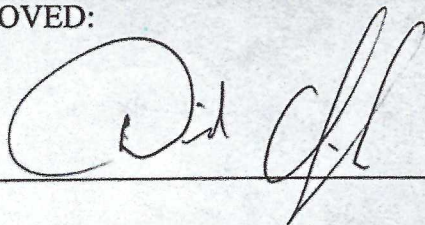
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Culturally Responsive Leadership: Fostering a Shared Vision of Culturally Responsive Teaching for Learners of English as an Additional Language

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Schools in Alberta are becoming increasingly diverse, leaving teachers feeling unprepared with how to best support students. Given the persistence of these challenges and the increasing population of students who are English as an Additional Language (EAL) the aim of this study was to determine ways in which leaders can lead a culturally responsive school. To begin to support this diverse group of students, leaders must lead culturally responsive schools to meet the needs of all learners and help build a sense of belonging for students. To achieve this, researchers have identified that educational leaders must support their teachers with professional learning to implement and sustain culturally responsive teaching practices and promote a culturally responsive school culture. This capstone study provides a review of the literature regarding what Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is and how it both impacts students' learning and helps build a sense of belonging for students. From a leadership perspective, this capstone study focuses on how leaders can foster a shared vision for culturally responsive schools and what their role is in supporting teachers in self-reflection and professional development in CRT. Implementation of these strategies promote the academic achievement of EAL students by helping them feel engaged and motivated to learn. Following the literature review, recommendations are provided to suggest strategies school leaders can implement to promote a culturally responsive school culture that helps bridge the gap for EAL learners.

Keywords: educational leadership, culturally responsive leadership, culturally responsive teaching, culturally responsive schools, student achievement, ELL, ESL, unconscious bias, sense of belonging, shared vision, professional development, change agents, collaborative learning, trust

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Culturally Responsive Leadership: Fostering a Shared Vision of Culturally Responsive Teaching for Learners of English as an Additional Language**Chapter 1: Introduction****Introduction**

In recent years, student populations within Alberta schools have become increasingly diverse, both culturally and linguistically. Specifically, schools continue to see an influx of the marginalized population of English as an additional language (EAL) learners coming into their classrooms, leaving teachers struggling with which approach would work best to support students who are working to learn a new language and fit into a culture different than their own. Kindleman (2020) reported that the number of EAL learners in Edmonton grew by 18% in 2020, making it a quarter of Edmonton Public Schools' student population. Furthermore, data from Statistics Canada (2017) shows that roughly 21.9% of Canada's total population consists of landed immigrants, resulting in an influx of a newcomer population of language learners entering mainstream classrooms. In contrast to the increasingly diverse student populations within Alberta's classrooms, Ducat (2021) found that only 14% of teachers (one of seven) had relevant post-secondary education that prepared them for teaching diverse learners. Gabriel (2019) identified, "In many institutions, instructors are underprepared to teach such highly diverse populations of learners" (p. 1). Additionally, Magogwe and Ketsitile (2015) concluded that the lack of teacher preparation causes challenges for both teachers and students who are EAL. Consequently, now more than ever, educators must be prepared to support the needs and education of EAL learners.

School leaders play a pivotal role in creating inclusive learning environments in which diversity is embraced and a sense of belonging is emphasized for all students and staff (Alberta Education, 2020). One of the ways in which school leaders can begin to address the

needs of EAL learners is through culturally responsive teaching (CRT), an approach that values the cultural and linguistic diversity that EAL learners bring and allows teachers to use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect background knowledge to new concepts to promote learning (Hammond, 2015). Research has suggested that teachers who support EAL learners to embrace their cultural, racial, and linguistic differences can impact the students' academic, social, and emotional successes in and out of school (Smith et al., 2017). Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2016) concurred with these findings when they described the need for teachers to value the differences in EAL learners' culture and background. Valuing these differences provides students with connections that influence their academic and social capabilities. However, researchers have questioned the extent to which current educational leadership programs effectively prepare administrators to lead diverse schools and advocate for policies and practices that further the needs and education of EAL learners (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Oliver (2017) suggested that school leaders are confronted with issues concerning the integration of minority students whose culture differs from their own in the school context. Moreover, there is an urgent need for administrators to ensure EAL learners are given opportunities to see themselves reflected in their learning to help them feel connected and to foster a sense of belonging. Shi and Watkinson (2019) found, "There are many obstacles related to the inappropriateness of the current curriculum that failed to accommodate and address the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students" (p. 4). The researchers also noted that students lacked the academic knowledge to keep up with the demands of the curriculum. Thus, there is an ongoing need for school leaders to address and focus on the educational needs of marginalized students through CRT.

This capstone addresses culturally responsive teaching and how leaders can foster a shared vision in culturally responsive schools to support the learning of EAL learners.

Throughout the paper, marginalized students are referenced as individuals who are newcomers to Canada who have been marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, language, or citizenship. In Alberta, school communities are obligated to ensure that all students reach their full potential by providing learners with optimal learning while fostering an inclusive learning environment (Alberta Education, 2014). Because marginalized students have been disadvantaged in the educational system due to their lack of English and diverse cultures, culturally responsive school leaders have a moral responsibility to counter this oppression and effectively respond to culturally unique school contexts.

Background

Cultural diversity (CD) is on the rise in Alberta classrooms, leaving teachers perplexed about how to effectively support their students. According to Cowley & MacLeod, 2019 the Fraser Institute (2019), 20 out of 29 high schools in Edmonton had over 10% EAL student population in their school and 10 out of 29 high schools had over 20% EAL population. Many culturally diverse newcomer students have historically come into the classrooms with little or no English. Kugler and West-Burns (2010) found that marginalized EAL learners were much more likely to drop out at the secondary school level before graduation due to a lack of engagement and achievement. Consequently, that can be very daunting for mainstream teachers whose culture differs from their students. Crowley (2019) acknowledged that privileged White teachers have difficulty connecting to diverse students as they often lack cultural knowledge, background, and strategies. This has the potential to prevent teachers from seeing the assets students can bring to the classroom, such as their first language and culture. In the school setting, CD students face many obstacles, one being having to learn academic content that is not culturally relevant to them. Hammond (2015) explained that, once EAL learners enter school buildings, they begin to feel marginalized, unseen, and silenced. In addition, newcomers are often taught by educators whose culture is

not the same; therefore, they lack role models in the building. Snyder and Fenner (2021) asserted that “this misalignment is significant because it means our CD students lack role models in teachers who understand their ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural background” (p. 18).

Culturally responsive education is a pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of bridging the cultural divide between White teachers and culturally diverse students and can serve to enhance the motivation of culturally diverse learners (Chen & Yang, 2017). Khalifa et al. (2016) claimed, “Low school performance for students of colour is directly related to the educators in the buildings that serve these students. Teacher expectations are often lower for minoritized students than their White classmates” (p. 1280). Morrow and Gambrell (2018) stated, “In order to provide instruction using best practices, as well as to make appropriate instructional and assessment decisions, teachers need a strong knowledge of good evidence, drawn on from both professional wisdom and the research” (p. 7). However, Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2020) confirmed that more than 50% of teachers do not feel prepared for the challenges of a multicultural learning environment and are not confident in adapting their teaching to the cultural diversity of students. Thus, leaders are tasked with building their competency in leading a culturally responsive school community.

Research has suggested that school principals have a profound impact on instruction and student learning; therefore, culturally responsive teaching must be promoted as a school initiative by the principal (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to the Alberta Education’s (2020) *Leadership Quality Standard*, leaders have a responsibility to “[recognize] the school community’s values and aspirations and [demonstrate] an appreciation for diversity” (p. 3). To ensure that teachers develop an understanding of their English as an additional language (EAL) learners and have strategies in place to meet their needs, leaders must build teachers’ capacity for dealing with students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds

(Magogwe & Ketsitile, 2015). To better serve EALs, school leaders need to practice culturally responsive leadership, which begins with intentional professional leadership practices that support cultural responsiveness in the school (Gay, 2018). Effective school principals create conditions for learning that embrace diversity as an asset students bring to the classroom rather than a deficit.

Statement of the Issue/Problem

As student demographics continuously shift, so too must leadership practices and school contexts that respond to the needs of the students. U.S.-based research conveyed that school administrators feel unprepared to lead in diverse schools and implement policy that would respond to diversity issues (Khalifa et al., 2016). The general problem addressed in this research is that school leaders are not adequately equipped with culturally responsive tools and strategies to support their teachers in addressing the needs of EAL learners. Despite the increase in the EAL population, Baecher et al., (2013) stated, “Many school leaders are not prepared to deal with the challenges faced by ELL students and the complex issues concerning linguistically and culturally relevant education” (p. 281). Conversely, as mentioned in the previous section, effective school principals must create conditions for learning to embrace diversity as an asset that students bring to the classroom instead of a deficit.

Research studies conducted by Minkos et al. (2017) also found that school leaders require additional guidance in leading diverse school communities and cultivating schools that promote equity for all students. They argued, “There is a need for clarification of the role of administrators in leading diverse school communities as well as specific suggestions and strategies that may be employed to promote student equity” (p. 1261). Since school leaders have been held accountable for the success of the school, more research is needed to

understand how principals can lead a school community that is culturally responsive to grapple with the plethora of complex issues regarding diversity that affects schools.

Purpose of the Paper/Study

The purpose of this capstone is to examine culturally responsive teaching and provide recommendations to school leaders in fostering a shared vision for a culturally responsive school that meets the needs of EAL learners. Gay (2018) explained that cultural responsiveness must reach beyond the classroom walls. There is a need for school leaders, along with teachers, to modify their professional practices and beliefs to address the many challenges faced by diverse student populations. By uncovering practices that lead to effective instructional achievement of culturally diverse students, this research will provide valuable insight to school administrators who want to implement research-based practices to promote a school culture that is welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of culturally diverse students. This capstone will also highlight the importance of culturally responsive leadership and professional development to ensure that teachers and staff, as well as the curriculum, are continuously responsible to culturally diverse students. Thus, the desired outcome for this capstone is for school leaders to gain the skills to lead in diverse schools and develop culturally responsive practices to support their teachers.

Research Questions

To guide the research, the capstone will include research on the following questions:

1. What is culturally responsive teaching, and how does it impact learning?
2. What is the role of the school leader in supporting teachers with professional development to become culturally responsive educators?
3. How do school leaders create a shared vision focused on culturally responsive teaching practices?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will be used for the purposes of this study:

Asset-based perspective: This perspective recognizes and values students' home languages and cultures and sees them as support for future learning (Snyder & Fenner, 2021)

Culture: Gay (2018) refers to culture as being “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behaviours standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give meaning to our own lives as well as the lives as others” (p. 8).

Cultural diversity: Raisinghani (2018) defined cultural diversity as a person's cultural identity, which is “influenced by ... one's designation of race and ethnicity, religious affiliation, family structure, home and community background, socioeconomic status, languages, values, norms, gender, sexual orientation, learning styles, exceptionalities, and other associated special needs and characteristics” (p. 14).

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT): Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106).

Culturally diverse: Culturally diverse students are considered newcomers who are foreign born and learning English as an additional language in the regular classroom.

Culturally responsive school leadership: Culturally responsive school leadership refers to the important action-based and even urgent work of a school leader. Khalifa et al., (2016) explained it is “the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students” (p. 1278).

English as an additional language (EAL): This term is commonly used to describe students who learn English as an additional language. EAL students may be recent arrivals to Canada from other countries, or they may be Canadian citizens whose dominant language at

home is not English (Alberta Education, 2014). EAL students are students who require English language instruction and support to participate fully in the learning experiences of the classroom. EAL students are alternatively referred to as *ESL learners (English as a second language learners)*, as per use in documents published by Alberta Education.

English language learners (ELL): English language learners are students who are learning English. These students' dominant languages are languages other than English (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

Equity: Equity is based on one's ability to access opportunities, supports, and resources to reach their full potential (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016).

Second language acquisition: Jim Cummins's (1981) theory of second language acquisition describes EAL students' native language ability as a common underlying proficiency. The second language learner has an innate ability to learn another language. Therefore, second language learners can build on the native language to develop their basic interpersonal communication skills in the second language.

Marginalization: Marginalization refers to shunning of a group of individuals by not allowing them to participate fully or have an active voice within communal groups (Snyder & Fenner, 2021).

Building capacity: In an educational context, this refers to building or developing the skills, abilities, or expertise of educators to be more equipped for change.

Professional development: This term refers to the learning opportunities in which educators are actively learning new pedagogy and applying new knowledge to their teaching practice.

English language proficiencies: English language proficiencies are the standards and expectations for language for English learners, as outlined by Alberta Education.

Significance of the Study

The study's significance is relevant and timely as this capstone provides essential information to school leaders on how to serve EALs effectively and, more specifically, how to change the academic trajectory of EALs to improve student learning. Providing culturally diverse students with quality education and an inclusive learning environment is imperative for academic success. The research will aid school leaders in creating an awareness of how to support marginalized EAL learners with culturally responsive teaching. In addition, this research will provide leaders with recommendations for making schools culturally responsive for EAL learners. School leaders play an integral role in supporting and training teachers to develop strong pedagogy around culturally responsive instruction. Alberta Education (2020) indicated that a school leader must make sure that "every student has access to quality teaching and optimal learning" (p. 4).

A culturally responsive school is necessary for EAL learners to be successful; however, there is a lack of professional learning in this area. Research has shown that underserved and underrepresented student groups, such as EAL learners, continue to be marginalized in the school environment (Aslantaş, 2019; Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016). As a result, further investigation is necessary to inform school leaders on how to support EAL students with culturally responsive teaching.

Outline of the Remainder of the Paper

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature on culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student learning. The literature review identifies culturally responsive practices school leaders can implement to lead a culturally responsive school. Chapter 3 includes a summary of all the research compiled. This chapter also provides recommendations on ways that school leaders can lead a culturally responsive school community. Additionally, Chapter 3 offers suggestions to school leaders on how to support their teachers in becoming more culturally

responsive to improve EAL students' learning through professional learning that is ongoing and collaborative.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature**Introduction**

The research in this capstone uncovers possible reasons that school leaders feel unprepared to lead in diverse schools. The three research questions guide this study to provide understanding of culturally responsive teaching and how it supports EAL learners and to identify possible reasons that school leaders are not adequately equipped for the needs of this diverse population. The literature review discusses what has been discovered about culturally responsive teaching practices and the role of the school leaders in leading a culturally responsive school community. It begins with a general background on culturally responsive teaching and the impact on student learning. Then, it moves into a discussion of how school leaders enact culturally responsive leadership in their schools. There is a growing body of literature that explores the tools and strategies that teachers and school leaders require to effectively serve in schools whose populations consist of the marginalized population of EAL learners.

Gay (2010) suggested that CRT is important to use alongside strong leadership practices that support the major challenges facing diverse students. Building a culturally responsive school community includes transforming many aspects of a school leader's leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of transforming multiple elements within a school context, such as funding, initiatives, and leadership capacity, to ensure they are all culturally responsive. Through building a culturally responsive school, all staff will begin to feel better equipped to support EAL learners in their academic and social-emotional achievement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2018) defined CRT as “using the 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). Bennouna et al. (2021) described culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework aimed at “promoting equitable academic success, positive social identity formation, and an ability to grapple with social inequalities” (para. 6). According to Ladson-Billings (2011), under this framework, each student in the classroom is both acknowledged and nurtured, allowing for more growth to happen within the student. Gay’s work is comprised of six dimensions; culturally responsive teachers (a) validate students culture by building connections with home and school; (b) provide learning opportunities that help learners maintain their cultural identities; (c) use a multidimensional approach to teaching where they engage cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in the curriculum; (d) lead to self-determination and empowerment; (e) transform schools by using students’ existing strengths to drive instruction, assessment, and curriculum design; and (f) empower students by setting high expectations (Thomas & Berry, 2019). When all six features are embraced, students feel included and valued, helping build a sense of belonging within the learning environment.

CRT requires the whole school community to build the sense of belonging and community that EAL learners need to be successful in school. Gay (2018) posited,

Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of colour maintain identity and connections within their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success. (p. 38)

CRT requires all teachers to view culture as an asset that can be used to effectively improve academic and social achievement (Snyder & Fenner, 2021). When educators see EAL learners through an asset-based perspective, they allow for opportunities to honour students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and build teaching upon what students already know (Hammond, 2015).

To provide further clarity, Aronson and Laughter (2016) also referred to Gay's work when describing the four responsibilities a culturally responsive teachers possesses.

Culturally responsive teachers (a) use asset-based perspectives when referring to students and community, (b) use criticism as fuel to continuously educate themselves and become more confident in the theory, (c) acknowledge that culture and difference are essential to humanity, and (d) make meaningful connections to the curriculum when teaching. Having all these conditions are in place leads to empowering students intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

Teachers can use CRT as an asset that enhances academic achievement and increases motivation. Fillion (2019) believed educators can do so by "incorporating student backgrounds and experiences within the student learning opportunities and classroom resources" (p. 27). Educators' drawing upon the experiences of CD students in their lessons has a positive effect on their achievement and eliminates their feelings of marginalization. Snyder and Fenner (2021) urged educators to "expose themselves to cultural experiences similar to those of our students in order to experience alternative ways of doing" (p. 50). In addition, the TESOL International Association (2019) argued that teachers "investigate the academic and personal characteristics of each ELL, as well as family circumstances and literacy practice, to develop individualized, effective instructional and assessment practices for their ELLs" (p. 8). This suggests that, when educators use a student's background and prior knowledge to adequately appreciate and value their culture, the student will invest in their learning.

Adopting CRT in the school community promotes inclusivity so that learners feel valued and have a sense of belonging. According to Alberta Education (2020), leaders must work toward "creating an inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced [and] a sense of belonging is emphasized" (p. 3). Therefore, school leaders must create an inclusive environment to recognize and acknowledge CD students by "demonstrating

empathy” and “creating a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment” (Alberta Education, 2020, p. 3).

Student Achievement

Shi and Watkinson (2019) recognized many challenges EAL students face, such as language acquisition, limited peer relationships, and low self-esteem, which lead to low academic achievement. Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) explained that, when teachers ignore the assets that students bring from their cultures into the classroom, then the students perform lower and have more off-task behaviour. Thus, language and social–emotional needs have a strong impact on the academic achievement of EAL learners.

Alternatively, Hammond (2015) claimed that ensuring all students feel included and valued will allow for learning to take place. Therefore, to increase academic achievement, it is the responsibility of the school to provide a community in which diversity is valued and respected. Gay (2002) noted the impact on student achievement, explaining that “academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters” (p. 106). Therefore, if educators value racial and cultural diversity in learning, students are more likely to find success. In becoming culturally responsive, educators understand the “why” and begin to shift their thinking to believe in equity for all students. Ladson-Billings (2001) indicated that “educators who are culturally responsive see equitable and inclusive education as fundamental to supporting high levels of student achievement” (p. 470). When students intrinsically believe their teachers value their cultural backgrounds and identities, their social and academic successes increase (Camacho et al., 2018).

Furthermore, engagement is key when it comes to students’ learning English. When teachers are culturally responsive, their students are more likely to participate in classroom activities, ultimately enhancing their communication skills (Chen & Yang, 2017). Gay (2010)

suggested that utilizing “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students” (p. 31) makes learning more relevant and effective in the long term. In their experimental single-subject research study on three EAL learners from China, Chen and Yang (2017) discovered that, during an intervention in which culturally responsive teaching practices were used by the teacher, there was a significant increase in the participation of the students. The students increased their performance from an average of 33% to 90% (Chen & Yang, 2017). This result confirmed the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching practices on student learning. In addition, the researchers determined that it was not a natural skill for an educator to understand an EAL learners’ culture to become culturally aware (Chen & Yang, 2017). This research highlights the need for professional development and training to enhance teacher abilities and awareness in order to learn the skill of CRT.

Culturally responsive teaching can be implemented in all schools. Chen and Yang (2017) found three ways to know a student’s culture. Educators can (a) validate students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds by encouraging them to speak their first language and share their stories throughout classroom discussion, (b) challenge students to expand their learning and thinking beyond their one culture, and (c) participate in professional development to further their learning in CRT (Chen & Yang, 2017). Furthermore, by allowing students to share their personal experiences, backgrounds, cultures, languages, and beliefs through everyday instruction rather than one-off activities, such as superficially asking students about their home culture or simply putting up pictures of flags on the wall with no follow-through, teachers can fully embrace the cultural experiences of their students (Long, 2021).

Sense of Belonging

Shainis (2021) mentioned that “the most unspoken barrier is how ELLs often do not feel safe or a sense of belonging” (p. 71) in the school system. Fostering belonging in the classroom can be a challenge to some educators who focus on immediate challenges, such as language barriers, as opposed to understanding a newcomer’s social–emotional needs. Bennouna et al. (2021) found that some newcomer students bring trauma from their home country with them to school, thus hindering their school participation and sense of belonging. In addition, they discovered that most teachers are not trained to work through the social–emotional trauma students bring to school (Bennouna, 2021). Therefore, to maximize learning in the classroom, teachers require support in dealing with the underlying social–emotional needs of newcomer students.

Without a sense of belonging, educators risk students feeling disengaged and therefore not participating in the learning environment. Arnold (2012) discovered that, “on average, about one in four students worldwide reported feeling a low sense of belonging in their school setting” (p. 3). The need for teacher–student connections is imperative in creating welcoming classroom environments that help close the achievement gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students (Predmore et al., 2017). To help close the achievement gap, as Shainis (2021) acknowledged, “getting students talking and sharing about their lives accelerates language acquisition along with a greater sense of belonging” (p. 71). According to Shi and Watkinson (2019),

ELL students valued education, but their perceptions that they did not belong to their school could jeopardise their chances of attending college. ELL students reported that it was hard for people with limited English proficiency to be accepted at school and that teachers were not interested in them. (p. 6)

Thus, language plays an integral role in building sense of belonging in the classroom. To support staff in building connections with students, educators must work toward bridging the language divide (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). Shi and Watkinson (2019) stated, “By using language as a point of entry, we anticipate that ELL students will have more adult interactions and report a stronger sense of school belonging” (p. 6). Integrating scaffolds that support EAL students’ language acquisition is a critical component of CRT training.

Bennouna et al. (2021) identified ways in which schools can promote a sense of belonging, and they suggested moving away from the one-off activities such as multicultural celebrations, as they “fall short without lasting efforts to cultivate a schoolwide environment of cross-cultural exchange and inclusion” (p. 13). Promoting cultures and unpacking the needs and challenges of students must be ongoing and systemic across the school to address equity concerns. Bennouna et al. (2021) found that “systemic changes implemented by schools included halal food cafeteria lines and prayer spaces, which not only showed respect for newcomers’ traditions and beliefs, but also helped to sustain them through integration into the everyday school climate” (p. 13). Furthermore, Francis (2022) explained that educators can ensure students feel a sense of belonging by (a) learning a student’s journey, (b) affirming cultural background, (c) understanding second language acquisition, (d) allowing students to use their first language for learning, and (e) keeping the expectations high for all students and providing scaffolds in their learning. Therefore, leaders and teachers need to understand how to systematically promote ongoing culturally responsive teaching practices to foster a sense of belonging for newcomer EAL learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in an Online Learning Environment

When schools shut down and turned to remote learning because of COVID-19, EAL learners suffered academically. Students who had low proficiency in English and lacked connections to other students were forced to learn online, preventing them from engaging in

their learning context. Nuss (2021) discovered that, when it came to EAL learners, during COVID-19, 50% of the students were actively learning in the online class, and only 10% were completing materials and assignments. Students who were EAL learners and struggling with language lacked participation and disengaged from the school setting. However, Woodley et al. (2017) found that culturally responsive teaching can be integrated into the online learning environment. Specifically, in an online setting in which students struggle to make connections, Woodley et al. (2017) explained that learning takes place when instructors can build instructor–student and student–student relationships. Through creating activities that build on students’ existing knowledge and validate what they bring, students are learning and are more engaged with the content (Woodley et al., 2017).

Critical Self-Awareness and School Leaders

Many educators are not familiar with the concept of culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy (Gaias et al., 2019). According to Gay (2010), the journey to become a culturally responsive educator begins by acknowledging one’s own biases. Khalifa et al. (2016) discerned that leaders need to self-reflect on their belief systems when it comes to serving EAL learners and referred to this concept as *critical consciousness* (Khalifa et al., 2016). Critical consciousness is an intervention used to alleviate racial trauma (Mosley et al., 2021). When developing critical consciousness, Mosley et al. (2021) stated, “A person becomes aware of and thoughtfully problematizes their lived experience and socio-political environments (e.g., exposure to racism) and then engages in actions (e.g., engages in Black racial justice activism) in response to their critical reflection” (p. 2). For school leaders, this involves being able to reflect and evaluate their role as principals in creating or diminishing systemic barriers for the academic achievement of EAL learners.

Culturally responsive leaders must self-reflect to effectively understand their bias and lead a culturally responsive school. This self-reflection can be challenging for educators as it

is uncomfortable. Marshall and Khalifa (2018) affirmed, “Some teachers pushed back against the type of cognitive reflection needed for culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 541).

However, a principal’s ability to reflect on culture and race is imperative for improving the educational opportunities for EAL learners (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Chan and Coney (2020) emphasized, “Racialized systems create an unequal playing field, so critical self-reflection is necessary to understand implicit biases and unacknowledged privileges” (p. 3). Furthermore, they must be willing to question their personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school organization to unpack bias (Khalifa et al., 2016). Regarding being reflective of one’s biases, Chan and Coney (2020) stated that leaders must “establish ongoing processes to be reflexive about their biases and how their positionality affects their understanding about equity. Educators must examine how they welcome, communicate, and value one another’s ways of being and knowing” (p. 5). Doing so requires ongoing professional development to help educators engage in proactive, uncomfortable dialogue with themselves to break down their unconscious biases (Chan & Coney, 2020).

Additionally, leading a school in culturally responsive teaching requires leaders to be self-aware. Khumalo and Van der Vyver (2020) described self-awareness as a learning process in which an individual is honest with themselves and uses their experiences to gain new insight. Leaders must be self-aware and reflect on their background knowledge of cultural diversity and the biases that accompany it to create new understandings. Bradbury (2020) confirmed these findings in her study, which showed that leaders’ self-awareness and engagement in reflection leads to a better understanding of their role in the school setting, making them better equipped to make inclusive policy decisions that support their diverse learners.

Leadership Preparation

Leaders must be prepared to lead diverse school settings. Rogers (2020) described how district administrators support the idea of a principals' culturally responsive leadership practice; however, the researcher found that administrators lack the tools to lead diverse initiatives in their schools. Minkos et al. (2017) confirmed these findings in their study regarding culturally responsive practice, adding that school leaders require clarity about their role before leading initiatives to support diverse learners. The results showed that there is a need for additional support for school leaders to lead diverse school communities. Louie et al. (2019) found that, within a five-year span, less than 6% of the school leaders in their study had received professional learning to support their EAL learners. Their study indicated that school leaders have a desire for more professional learning opportunities for leaders and feel they lack the knowledge and understanding of how to serve ethnically diverse students and their families. Similarly, Young et al. (2010) found that the principals in their study did not have the skills to communicate discourses in their school community around diversity. Thus, school leaders require support to lead a culturally responsive school.

EAL learners need school leaders who address the individual needs of students whose backgrounds and experiences differ from their own (Gay, 2010). Fullan (2020) indicated that, when leaders are in a culture of change, they are eager to learn in the areas in which they lack knowledge. Furthermore, Meyer et al. (2022) stated, "Principals could implement shared leadership approaches in their schools and assign these responsibilities to other members of their teaching staff, who might be better equipped with the required skills" (p. 606). Alberta Education (2020) stated that modelling a commitment to learning means leaders are continuously "seeking, critically reviewing, and applying educational research to inform effective practice" (p. 3).

Therefore, when leading a learning community, school leaders must be prepared to support their teachers and staff in professional development for student success.

Agents of Change

Effective leaders need to be agents of change, however, Fullan (2020) insisted it is important to go slow to go fast. Effective and sustainable Educational change takes time. Fullan (2020) stated that change-savvy leadership involves, ‘careful entry, listening, and engaging in fact-finding and joint problem solving before moving too fast into change initiatives (p. 48). Thus, leaders must ensure they work on building strong relationships with people before they can push for change.

When leaders have a strong sense of agency for change, it means that “they believe in their ability to achieve their goals” (Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al., 2021, p. 5). Preston and Barnes (2017) acknowledged a change agent is a person who “intentionally or unintentionally, supports and accelerates educational, social, cultural, and/or behaviour change in an organisation” (p. 10). School leaders play an important role in leading change in the school building. Fullan (2020) argued that a change agent must possess certain skills and knowledge: “The principal of the future—The Cultural Change Principal—must be attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams” (p. 17).

Marzano et al. (2005) described leaders as change agents who have the power to challenge the status quo. Fullan (2020) posited that an effective leader can “disturb them [staff] in a manner that approximates the desired outcome” (pp. 45–46). He also mentioned that they are “better at working through complex issues in ways that energize rather than deplete commitment of the organizational members” (p. 15). When school leaders are leading

a school through culturally responsive practices, it is vital that they challenge the status quo and be willing to lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005). As agents of change, school leaders have the potential to transform teachers' beliefs and instructional practices over time.

To maintain and sustain an awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices, ongoing professional learning and training is necessary throughout a teacher's profession (Long, 2021). A challenge school leaders face is not having the tools to be successful as agents of change. Acton (2021) promoted the idea that principals "[have] received very little formal professional development on how to effectively influence change in their schools" (p. 46); however, most principals have gained enough self-confidence and experience to implement new initiatives.

Khalifa (2018) noted that school-wide cultural responsiveness and equity-based reform starts in the school. When building change around culturally responsive pedagogy, leaders should aim to "build a positive climate that supports teacher learning in the school" (Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al., 2021, p. 15). Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) stated, "Principals can foster agency by offering encouragement, highlighting and sharing success among teachers across schools, and also by giving teachers some degree of control over their own learning" (p. 15). This suggests that school leaders, as agents of change, can support their teachers through effective leadership with culturally responsive professional learning to shift thinking and instructional practices.

Professional Development

School leaders can support teachers in seeing culturally responsive teaching as an asset that enhances academic achievement and increases motivation. Preparing teachers of all

levels of experience for diverse classrooms is imperative. Raisinghani (2018) explained that leaders can instill change by providing ongoing professional development to prepare teachers for the increasingly diverse student population. Gabriel (2019) identified, “Further professional development would add to the repertoire of techniques for working with diverse English language learners and help these learners bridge the gap to new knowledge and the new culture” (p. 100). Consequently, many new teachers feel overwhelmed and unequipped to meet the needs of diverse students due to lack of quality mentoring or professional development in their classrooms (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). However, when working toward a culturally responsive school, educational leaders have a duty to “lead professional development to ensure their teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are continuously responsive to minoritized students” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). Therefore, educational leaders must be willing to work alongside teachers by offering ongoing learning of culturally responsive teaching practices to their staff.

Dos Santos (2019) stated that PD helps all staff build their professional skills, knowledge, and abilities through specialized training in instructional strategies. Sharma and Jagwinder (2018) described an urgency for professional development so that “teachers remain effective in their teaching” (p. 614). Their research alluded to the idea of educators’ being lifelong and academic learners. When educators are involved in professional development, they collect new knowledge and are involved in self-reflection, which helps build their confidence (Sharma & Jagwinder, 2018).

Effective professional development is ongoing. Long (2021) found that “educators need ongoing interventions to learn how to put effective techniques and strategies into practice” (p. 177). In terms of designing and implementing PD, Alshaikhi (2020) asserted that the traditional methods of the “one-size-fits-all” type of professional development are ineffective and that teachers are not able to implement what they learned after the training.

Thus, school leaders must ensure teachers are implementing the strategies through ongoing accountability and observation (Long, 2021).

Opfer and Pedder (2011) emphasized the importance of providing teachers with time to collaborate, discuss, implement, and reflect on new learning. Vioria (2019) argued that when school leaders provided time to model lessons for their teachers, the observers were able to strengthen their own teaching skills and grow in their self-confidence. Vioria's research found that teachers learn best when they watch their peers and are given time to collaborate in effective lesson planning. When there is structured time in place to implement PD and reflect on the process, teachers are more likely to implement school initiatives, such as CRT. Alshaiki (2020) revealed, "By actively engaging in a community of learners sharing and discussing mutual concerns, teachers were able to build their understanding, develop their confidence and self-efficacy, and improve their practices" (p. 1366). This suggests that professional learning should be a social and collaborative activity. Liebermann (1995) noted that, when educators are engaged in collaborative learning, they can transfer knowledge to skills and build their confidence and self-efficacy. Moreover, when educators have the support of their colleagues and PD is collaborative, teacher learning can bring about lasting school change.

Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) identified effective leadership practices that promote teacher engagement in professional learning. In their study, they discovered that "inspiring a vision of learning, encouraging teachers, modelling, visiting classrooms, and participating in professional development activities with teachers were significantly associated with greater teacher engagement in professional learning" (p. 11). Alberta Education (2020) suggested that a leader "nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning" (p. 3). This suggests that effective leadership can

shape teacher involvement and buy-in when it comes to school initiatives and professional learning activities.

Teacher Collaboration

A key aspect in leadership involves shaping the culture to foster collaboration. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) claimed collaboration between teachers should be engrained in the culture of the school and should positively influence student learning. To support EAL learners, a collaborative approach is needed. School leaders must recognize that “education does not rest solely in the hands of English as a second language (ESL)/bilingual educators but is a responsibility of the entire staff and comprises all levels of school activities” (Baecher et al., 2013, p. 283). Thus, school must build a whole-school approach when supporting their EAL learners. Carpenter (2017) explained, “For collaboration to be effective teachers and administrators must interact in this shared workspace, physically and intellectually, to critically evaluate ideas and issues associated with their teaching and learning skills, knowledge and experiences” (p. 1071). Carpenter also noted that a collaborative culture is established when educators set goals and establish a shared vision of quality teaching and learning and feel safe to share strategies in the group. Furthermore, Carpenter (2017) emphasized, “Fixed teams should work together to investigate student achievement results and based on results intellectually and physically share teaching and learning activities to improve their teaching and learning practice” (p. 1071).

Meyer et al. (2022) uncovered, although teachers are always exchanging plans and resources for teaching, most schools do not have sufficient structured time for teacher collaboration on a more complex level. Meyer et al. (2022) claimed, “Principals are responsible for shaping teachers’ work environments, and in doing so, they can strengthen and support teacher collaboration” (Meyer et al., 2022, para. 1). Furthermore, Fullan and Quinn (2015) noted, “Lead learners orchestrate structures and processes to create an

environment that anticipates and works collaboratively on challenges and innovation” (p. 55).

Investing in teacher professional learning and providing time and structure to allow teachers to engage in pedagogy promote collaboration.

To shift school practices to support culturally responsive teaching, leaders need to establish structures for a strong learning design and deeper collaborative work (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Fullan and Quinn (2015) stated, “Sustained and systematic shifts occur when there are strong collaborative work structures combined with good learning design” (p. 62). This learning can be done through instructional coaches, mentors, and peers who stimulate learning and provide timely feedback (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Therefore, providing teachers with the time and the structures to collaborate on best practices has a direct effect on student learning.

Setting aside sufficient time for teacher collaboration directly impacts student learning (Leithwood et al., 2020). Leithwood et al. (2020) revealed that, when teachers can collaborate about best teaching practices and are given time to analyze common assessment, this collaboration has a direct impact on student achievement. Additionally, when collaboration is part of the school culture, teachers are more likely to work together to improve instructional quality and build and develop their skills.

Adams (2016) acknowledged that school leaders have noticed a “shift in culture among teachers where they are collaborating more and able to connect with other teachers” (p. 45), and they described teachers’ moving beyond traditional teaching practices of the past and feeling more confident in their profession. To do so, Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) explained, “teachers must empower themselves and their colleagues to improve school and classroom practice together over time in relationships that are free from fear or threat” (p. 24). Therefore, building strong relationships through trust are essential when teachers are collaborating to improve student learning. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) continued,

“collaborative models can provide a protected space where educators can present their work to colleagues without being made to feel they are bragging” (p. 24). Thus, school leaders must ensure they invest in building relationships and have structures in place to guide collaborative work (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018).

School Leaders Role

School leaders must ensure their staff are receiving ongoing professional learning to become more culturally responsive. Alberta Education (2020) indicated that a school leader is obligated to ensure they “[build] the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students” (p. 4). Kim et al. (2014) stated that “successful examples of professional development activities suggest that teachers can change beliefs when they have opportunities to learn about ELLs in school contexts, and these changes can have lasting impact on their teaching” (p. 229). Therefore, school leaders must promote a culture of professional learning in their schools so that content area teachers feel equipped to teach diverse students.

School leaders have a crucial role in ensuring their teachers are and remain culturally responsive. Khalifa et al. (2016) found that school leaders can prepare teachers in CRT through mentoring and modelling CRT and providing culturally responsive resources and curriculum. According to Alberta Education (2020) it is the role of the school leader to “[facilitate] access to resources, agencies and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development” (p. 4). Through this school initiative, to make meaningful change in the classroom, all staff need to feel supported (Fullan, 2001). Thus, school leaders must articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching.

Effective leaders model the way. Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) asserted, “Principals seek to be the change by modelling risk-taking and engaging in professional

development with their teachers” (p. 4). This suggests principals can influence their teachers by being lifelong learners.

Shared Vision

Strong instructional leaders establish a school vision to influence school effectiveness and bring about change in their building. Doten-Snitker et al. (2021) described a shared vision as a collaborative effort between multiple stakeholders who are creating and agreeing on goals, strategies, and roles to empower and affect change. Qadach et al. (2020) referred to a shared vision as the extent to which members of a group “agree on a vision of the future, which may then form the basis for action” giving them an overall purpose (p. 619). It is an ongoing process that involves communication, agency for change, and feedback about project goals (Doten-Snitker et al., 2021). A shared vision cannot be a top-down approach (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Kouzes and Posner (2019) asserted, “Leaders must foster conditions under which people will do things because they want to, not because they have to” (Chapter 3).

Wilson’s (2011) research on the six school-level factors that make high-performing schools, highlighted the importance of a shared vision. Educational leaders who have been successful have committed themselves to doing whatever it takes to achieve their vision. Wilson stated, “The vision speaks to powerful dreams and positive values voiced by the school community” (p. 394). Stating and believing in a shared vision keeps everyone moving in the same direction and valuing the same cause, especially when it comes to supporting diverse students. In addition, successful school leaders establish an inclusive vision with a focus on learning and growth as opposed to remediation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Effective school leaders establish a school vision to bring about change in their school context and are passionate about making a difference. Kouzes and Posner (2019) identified that “envisioning the future is a process that begins with an inspiration, a feeling, or a sense that something is worth doing” (Chapter 3). Furthermore, they believed that “finding your

vision, like finding your voice, is a process of self-exploration and self-creation” (Chapter 3). Thus, to make a change, leaders must believe they are doing it for the good of the school community. Kouzes and Posner (2019) further mentioned that “to exercise leadership, you must believe yourself before anyone else will believe that they should come aboard with you” (Chapter 3).

Kouzes and Posner (2019) described the need to enlist people in creating the vision. Strong leaders bring all stakeholders together with a shared purpose for the common good. This ignites a passion and motivates educators to commit and communicate the vision to others in the school. Qadach et al. (2020) indicated that “teachers who participate in the school process and are involved in the school’s vision formulation (a shared vision) will feel as if they are a part of the school” (p. 621). Involving multiple educators in the shared vision process is an effective way to retain teachers, expose concerns, and prioritize equity as a school initiative.

School leadership influences the success of student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Thus, it is essential for the principal to play a leading role in sharing a purpose and vision for culturally responsive teaching in the school (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). The most effective leaders in leading change are the ones who understand the cause and the benefits it could have. Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) pointed out that “deep knowledge of the theory and research on second language acquisition allows school leaders to be able to analyze and reframe how the school addresses ELL’s educational needs” (p. 648). A sound knowledge base in how to support language learners will help shape the school vision for achieving this goal. When a school leader is well informed and grounded on their stance of the issue at hand, they can work with all stakeholders to build a vision and carry out the school’s goals.

Promoting a Culturally Responsive School Culture

When school leaders lead by example by focusing on diversity, school leaders can build a school culture in which everyone feels welcome. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated, “Culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students” (p. 1273). Kalkan et al. (2020) described school culture as “consisting of the combination of the aims and activities of the organization with the social values and the systematic examination of the people’s movements and attitudes within the organization” (School Culture section, para. 1). Lee and Louis (2019) insisted that the school administrator plays an integral role creating and forming a strong school culture for the schools’ employee to ensure a positive school culture.

Culturally responsive schools must have an inclusive school culture. Senge et al. (2012) asserted that culturally responsive leaders are determined to create a welcoming school environment for all students and families. Lindsey et al. (2004) revealed, “Culturally proficient educational leaders take responsibility for helping each student understand himself or herself as a unique, competent, and valued member of a diverse cultural community rather than a deprived minority in a dominant culture” (p. 44). Personal invitations to families to join celebrations, parent council meetings, and parent information nights are crucial in connecting with families. One way to help EAL families feel included is translating any informational material that goes home. Thus, a culturally responsive leader would work alongside teachers, students, and parents to promote a school culture that is inclusive and validating of minoritized students.

In addition, Khalifa et al. (2016) mentioned that school leaders can promote a CRT school culture by making connections with the community and bridging the gap between school and home. Furthermore, principals can influence student success by having strong

relationships with students and families, advocating for community-based interests, and creating schools as spaces of inclusivity (Ishimaru, 2014). For leaders serving a demographic of EAL students, it is important to connect with the community and families when promoting a culturally responsive school culture.

To promote a culturally responsive school culture, school leaders must build relationships with all stakeholders. Karadağ and Özdemir (2015) discovered that teachers are more eager to teach and students are more adept to learn when there is trust in the school culture. Al-Subaie (2021) explained, “Once you include trust in the school’s culture, you can have more powerful conversations to help everyone grow and improve” (p. 3). Kalkan et al., (2020) acknowledged that, when school leaders develop a positive school culture, they “have a clear sense of duty and purpose and develop positive relationships with the members of the organization, and transform the school as a sustainable structure into a learning organization with the participation of all partners” (School Culture section, para. 2). They acknowledged that fostering effective relationships through cooperation and trust allows for a strong school culture.

Trust

Effective leaders cultivate a climate of trust among staff, students, and parents in building a community of professional learning. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) defined trust as “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (p. 257). Furthermore, trust can be described as “a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something that you about will not be harmed” (Price et al., 2015, p. 68). School leaders who create trust boost levels of motivation and effort for achievement among educators which can correlate to student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In contrast, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) suggested, “When teachers and principals do not trust one another,

each seeks to minimize their vulnerability and risk by adopting self-protective stances” (p. 258). As a result, teachers are disengaged from their own professional learning.

Thus, trust is an essential component when leading a school. Kouzes and Posner (2019) emphasized, “Without trust, you cannot lead” (Chapter 5). Farnsworth et al. (2019) explained that there are certain behaviours and skills a school leader needs to possess to gain trust from their staff. They that found leadership behaviours, such as treating staff as colleagues and being friendly, reliable, open, and honest were associated with high levels of trust. Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner (2019) characterized listening as an essential skill when trying to build trust with others. The researchers indicated, “You show you trust people when you listen to them and provide opportunities for them to contribute freely, make choices, and be innovative” (Chapter 5). Thus, through certain behaviours and skills, effective leaders can cultivate a climate of trust among the school community.

Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) discovered, “A climate of trust acts as a necessary condition for sustained school change and improvement” (p. 5). Marshall and Khalifa (2018) acknowledged that, when leaders build trust with their teachers, they are more likely to engage in challenging conversations about their practice and help support them with culturally responsive practices. They noted, “Trust has a strong relationship with the coaches’ ability to promote cultural responsiveness. Teachers would not be open to equity-oriented dialogues about their practice until after they established a level of trust with their coach” (p. 537).

Furthermore, trust among stakeholders in a school building builds a climate of success. When there is trust between principals, teachers, students, and parents, a climate of collaboration is highly likely (Price et al., 2015). Strong leaders show trust through listening and allowing others to contribute freely to make choices and offer innovative ideas (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). School leaders who create trust through authenticity and honesty with their

staff help inspire teachers to move to higher levels of effort and achievement (Price et al., 2015).

Castelli (2016) found the way in which school leaders communicate is an integral component of building a culture of trust. The researcher argued, “An encouraging tone on the part of the leader is more likely to gain the attention and trust of followers than distant and impersonal exchanges” (p. 222). Furthermore, Sarros et al. (2014) found that using empathetic language when communicating allows leaders to gain trust with their staff. Thus, effective communication skills are key in creating a safe environment that promotes trust.

In addition, credibility in a leader is built through trust. Kouzes and Posner (2019) explained that educators must be able to believe in their leaders and trust their words that they have the knowledge and skills to lead change. The researchers stated, “When leaders do practice what they preach-and do so consistently-people are more willing to entrust them with their careers, their security, and their future” (Chapter 5). Castelli (2016) affirmed, “Followers will produce more effort if they perceive their leader as a positive role model whose actions demonstrate integrity” (p. 221). This suggests that the key to creating an environment that promotes trust is showing integrity and authenticity.

Summary

Based on the research throughout this literature review, it is evident that culturally responsive teaching has a positive effect on building EAL students’ sense of belonging and increasing student achievement. Gay (2010) posited that using the prior experiences of culturally diverse students makes learning more relevant to them. Thus, using a culturally responsive teaching framework helps build a sense of belonging for students whose cultures differ from their peers. In addition, as the research shows, when educators are more culturally responsive in their teaching, student academic achievement for EAL learners is boosted (Snyder & Fenner, 2019).

The research has shown that, as leaders, principals have a responsibility to prepare teachers to become culturally responsive to better support their EAL learners. Unfortunately, most school leaders lack the tools and strategies to lead culturally responsive professional learning (Rogers, 2020). However, as agents of change, leaders who are passionate about leading schools with diverse populations challenge the status quo and are willing to lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005).

To maintain and sustain knowledge of CRT practices, teachers require ongoing professional learning (Long, 2021). As mentioned in this chapter, when working toward a culturally responsive school, educational leaders have a duty to “lead professional development to ensure their teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are continuously responsive to minoritized students” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). Sharma and Jagwinder (2018) confirmed that providing teachers with ongoing professional learning motivates them to become stronger in their instructional practices. In terms of implementing professional learning, there must be a collaborative approach between educators. This was supported by both Alshaihi’s (2020) and Liebermann’s (1995) research, which identified effective PD as a social and a collaborative endeavour.

Stating and believing in a shared vision keeps everyone moving in the same direction and valuing the same cause, especially when it comes to supporting diverse students. Kouzes and Posner (2017) believed having a shared vision produced a common good and gave all educators a shared purpose. Regarding shifting teaching practices through a shared vision, Kalkan et al. (2020) acknowledged that fostering effective relationships through cooperation and trust allows for a strong school culture. Therefore, establishing trust with staff is imperative when fostering change in a school.

In Chapter 1, a brief overview of why there is a need for culturally responsive teaching practices was examined. EAL newcomer students often come into the Canadian

education system with no English language skills and no cultural references to Canadian culture, leading to a lack of engagement and participation in the classroom. Kugler and West-Burns (2010) and Hammond (2015) found that, once EAL learners enter the school system, feelings of being marginalized begin to surface, causing them to have lower academic achievement and high dropout rates in high school compared to their Canadian peers. Moreover, educators feel unequipped to support EAL learners whose culture differs from theirs.

Then, Chapter 2 provided a review of the relevant research regarding the role of the school leaders in fostering a shared vision for culturally responsive teaching through professional development. It examined the challenges leaders face in preparing to lead diverse schools and how they can implement ongoing and collaborative professional learning. The conclusion reached through a review of the research is that, by fostering a shared vision for culturally responsive teaching in the school community, EAL learners will be more engaged in their learning, in turn having a positive impact on their achievement.

In Chapter 3, the research will be synthesized to provide recommendations to educational leaders so that they can implement and employ strategies to support their teachers with culturally responsive teaching practices.

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Summary of Findings

The intent of this capstone was to review culturally responsive teaching practices and uncover the role of the school leader in fostering a shared vision for culturally responsive schools. Educational leaders play a critical role in establishing a shared vision that promotes inclusivity through a culturally responsive school culture. Khalifa et al. (2016) determined that “school leaders must actually promote a culturally responsive school context with an emphasis on inclusivity” (p. 1282). As administrators lead the way to promote a culturally responsive school culture, educators will be more equipped to meet the diverse needs of EAL learners.

Implications of the Research

School leadership is crucial to the success of EAL learners. As agents of change, principals have a profound impact on leading culturally responsive schools when they are passionate about the endeavour (Khalifa et al., 2016). The purpose of this capstone was to provide insight into how school leaders can build a culturally responsive school culture to better serve EAL learners and meet their diverse learning needs. Furthermore, this capstone identified how school leaders can provide ongoing and collaborative professional learning to help their teachers be more competent in culturally responsive teaching. Through professional learning, deep self-reflection, and a shared vision, educators can work toward building a sense of belonging for the marginalized population of EAL learners.

Principals have a duty to provide their educators with resources and professional learning to continue growing (Alberta Education, 2020). In doing so, effective school leaders can create conditions for learning and work toward building trust with their staff (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). Therefore, structures must be in place to facilitate ongoing and collaborative learning opportunities to help teachers feel supported when learning about CRT. Culturally

responsive teachers can feel more confident as they navigate how to “scaffold instruction and build bridges between the cultural experiences of ethnically diverse students and the curriculum content of academic subjects to facilitate higher levels of learning” (Gay, 2018, pp. 52–53).

Supporting EAL learners must be a whole-school collaborative approach. Relying on one individual to support all the EAL learners in a school is not effective. Baecher et al. (2013) explained that successful leaders “recognize the need for common planning time and a collaborative teaching approach that engages not only ESL specialist teachers but involve all teachers” (p. 283). To provide optimal opportunities for teachers to engage in culturally responsive teaching, a collaborative culture in which goals and visions are established is imperative (Carpenter, 2017). School leaders must ensure teachers are provided with ongoing professional learning to nurture a culturally responsive pedagogy so that ethnically diverse students feel the curriculum is relevant to them and feel a sense of belonging in the school and the classroom.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to assist principals in leading an inclusive learning environment for EAL learners in which diversity is embraced and a sense of belonging is emphasized (Alberta Education, 2020). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), culturally responsive leaders demonstrate a culturally proficient and responsive leadership style by continually accepting, embracing, and appreciating the different cultures that exist in their school and in the community by using strategies and practices that include all students and families. School leaders can address the needs of EAL learners by building teacher capacity in culturally responsive teaching for EAL learners through professional development. Smith et al. (2017) explained that student achievement grows when teachers are responsive to the cultural, racial, and linguistic differences of their students. Therefore, the

recommendations that follow are designed to guide school leaders in supporting their teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching. Moreover, fostering a shared vision for CRT improves student learning of the EAL school population.

Recommendation 1: Build Capacity in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Building teacher capacity in CRT is imperative for educational leaders when they are establishing an inclusive school culture that addresses the needs of EAL learners. When educators take an asset-based approach and acknowledge the culture and differences of their students, they can make meaningful connections to the curriculum when teaching, in turn improving student achievement and motivation (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In promoting CRT, school leaders must be committed to the success of all students. This is necessary as “we are *all* teachers of MLs and must collaborate for their academic success and personal well-being” (Snyder & Fenner, 2021, p. 21). Additionally, educators who adopt a culturally responsive teaching model, promote an inclusive environment in which diversity is embraced (Alberta Education, 2020).

Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy requires a school leader who listens to their staff and students, is self-aware, and continuously reflects on their own practices to ensure they are serving the school community equitably. CRT creates opportunities for students’ voices to be heard when teachers “provide multiple entry points and opportunities to honour students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and build teaching upon what students already know” (Snyder & Fenner, 2021, p. 23). By understanding how CRT supports student learning, school leaders can foster a school community that is culturally responsive to student needs.

Recommendation 2: Critical Self-Awareness and Reflection

Leaders must lead themselves first before they can effectively lead others. Beginning a journey toward culturally responsive teaching requires school leaders to first be self-aware.

They must ensure that they “have an awareness to self and [their own] values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1280).

Gay and Kirkland (2003) explained that, in being more self-aware, leaders need to understand who they are as humans, and they must understand their school communities and demographics and question their own knowledge and biases. In addition, school leaders must be self-aware of their background knowledge of cultural diversity and the biases that accompany it to create new understandings. To move staff forward in fostering cultural competence, leaders “must be willing to interrogate personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school organization” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1280). Once they begin to reflect and change their own biases, they are more competent to address and challenge the biases their staff have.

Culturally competent leaders model the behaviours that are desired to positively impact the school experience of marginalized students. Engaging and modelling in self-reflection is pivotal in addressing biases and challenging beliefs. Bradbury’s (2020) research suggested that leaders who engage in self-reflection are better equipped to make decisions that support diverse learners. Gay and Kirkland (2003) indicated that educational leaders can support their staff in being more self-reflective by modelling the process in their own teaching. Thus, through self-awareness and reflection of their own personal biases, educators can become more effective in leading culturally responsive teaching to improve the educational experiences of all students in the school community.

Recommendation 3: Build a Sense of Belonging for EAL Learners

Alberta Education (2020) stated that educational leaders have the duty “[to create] a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment” (p. 3). In doing so, school leaders can foster a sense of belonging for EAL learners by deepening relationships with students and supporting teachers with professional learning to accelerate the language

acquisition of EAL learners (Shainis, 2021). Furthermore, Francis (2022) mentioned that educators can ensure students experience a true sense of belonging in many ways:

- Ask/Learn students' stories and journeys
- Validate and affirm cultural backgrounds and experiences
- Understand the process of second language acquisition
- Allow for the use of students' home language to access content and classroom interaction
- Keep the bar/expectation [*sic*] high for all students regardless of background and provide scaffolding to help them meet those expectations (A True Sense of Belonging section, para. 3)

Additionally, to support students feel welcome, Shi and Watkinson (2019) argued that scaffolds and strategies must be in place to support language acquisition. Therefore, as educational leaders strive to build a sense of belonging in their school community, it is imperative that they build teacher capacity in getting students talking and sharing about their cultural experiences. Shainis (2021) found, "Getting students talking and sharing about their lives accelerates language acquisition along with a greater sense of belonging" (p. 71), meaning an educational leader plays an active role in ensuring their teachers have the body of knowledge and tools they need to lead a culturally responsive classroom.

Recommendation 4: Providing Opportunities for Professional Growth

Providing professional development for all staff is instrumental in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in the school. Sharma and Jagwinder (2018) stated, "The need for life-long learning is highly required in the teaching profession" (p. 614). Therefore, the duty of the school leader is to implement effective professional development that is intentional, is ongoing, and nurtures the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers (Sharma & Jagwinder, 2018). Raisinghani (2018) explained, "Efforts are needed to provide

ongoing professional development and support to help prepare teachers to deal with the complexity of socio-political-cultural dynamics inherent in today's diversity-rich classroom" (p. 16). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), this means that "principals must play a leading role in maintaining culturally responsiveness in their schools" (p. 1281). As instructional leaders in their building, they can do so by allocating resources, offering professional development, and following up with coaching and modelling CRT lessons.

Additionally, to be effective, professional development needs to be collaborative among teachers. Alshaikhi (2020) found that teachers' "skills were enhanced as a result of participation, communication, and collaboration" (p. 1366). School leaders must build professional learning communities in which teachers can engage in collaborative learning and effectively implement research-based instructional strategies. Additionally, Long (2021) indicated, "Accountability and observation of the implementation of culturally responsive teaching techniques and strategies must be part of the process" (p. 177).

School leaders are fundamental in prioritizing, leading, and implementing professional learning for their teachers. Hendawy Al-Mahdy et al. (2021) explained, "Principals continue to play a key 'management role' through finding and allocating resources and organizing the timetable to ensure the feasibility of teacher participation." (p. 4). They also acknowledged that school leaders who build trust with their staff, inspire a vision for learning, engage in modelling, and conduct classroom walkthroughs have more success in teacher engagement in their professional learning. Thus, a school vision focused on culturally responsive teaching practices is essential in leading a learning community of diverse learners.

Recommendation 5: Foster a School Culture that is Culturally Responsive

The last recommendation for school leaders is to foster a school culture that is culturally responsive and doing so begins with a vision. Strong leaders can find their vision

and bring all stakeholders together for the common good of supporting all students (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Doten-Snitker et al. (2021) found that school leaders can build a shared vision by “employing practices of co-orientation, formational communication, and collaboration to empower stakeholders to contribute to the goals and design of a project, and not simply to be its implementers or beneficiaries” (p. 224). According to Qadach et al. (2020), when teachers are involved in the formulation of a school vision, their levels of commitment are higher, making them feel part of the school and decreasing their intention to leave. Moreover, a school vision helps build the school culture.

Schools that have strong school culture are institutes where teachers and students thrive (Kalkan et al., 2020). Building a strong school culture can be nurtured through visionary leadership, which Alberta Education (2020) identified as leaders who are “promoting innovation, enabling positive change and fostering commitment to continuous improvement” (Alberta Education, 2020, p. 3). In creating a culturally responsive school culture, school leaders must create a clear sense of purpose and develop strong relationships with staff and culturally diverse families (Kalkan et al., 2020). Thus, all stakeholders, namely staff, students, and families, are crucial in building a culturally responsive school culture.

In building a school culture that is culturally responsive, it is integral to involve all stakeholders, including students and families. Research has found that, when principals build strong relationships with students and families through community connections, the students tend to have more success in school (Ishimaru, 2014). Therefore, leaders must take the initiative to promote a school culture that involves the community and that is inclusive for all families. Making language accessible through translations is one way to help students and families feel welcome and included in the school. Thus, by cultivating a school community that embraces cultural diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging, school leaders can begin to shift the pendulum to build a culturally responsive school.

Conclusions

In conclusion, based on the research conducted, the recommendations for school leaders to develop a culturally responsive school are to build teacher capacity in culturally responsive teaching by providing teachers with ongoing and collaborative professional development and to foster a vision for a culturally responsive school where diversity is embraced, and a sense of belonging is nurtured. Additionally, school leaders must build a school culture that is inclusive so that all students feel as if they belong to ensure ethnically diverse students are achieving the academic success necessary to be successful citizens.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although the findings of this capstone have indicated ways school leaders can build culturally responsive schools, further research is needed. This capstone highlighted the issues that school leaders face in leading a culturally responsive school; however, there is a growing body of research that is beginning to evolve regarding culturally responsive division leaders. Many school leaders feel that they have no direction from the division to lead a culturally responsive school; thus, school-based leaders would benefit from research on how prepared the district-level personnel are in leading a culturally responsive school division.

Final Statements

As demographics continue to change in schools, so too must leadership practices. Culturally responsive teaching practices need ongoing attention, and teacher training must move beyond the one-and-done professional development. Training must be intentional, ongoing, and collaborative to be effective and sustainable. A review of the literature indicated that fostering a school culture that is culturally responsive positively impact students' achievement and engagement and helps build a sense of belonging so that all students feel welcome. Finally, further recommendations were given to provide practical applications of areas schools leaders can focus on in building a culturally responsive school community.

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