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Little attention has been given to the voices of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers at the secondary level in sharing effective strategies that are responsive in meeting the needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students; the purpose of this study is to reveal those practices. For many culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, American public schools have not provided them with a high-quality, equitable education that will prepare them to compete in a global society. An urgent need in research is to identify effective instructional practices that can be used by all educators to address the academic and social challenges that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students encounter both inside and outside of the school community. The purpose of this study is to discover how the practices of ESL teachers have a positive impact on the academic and social development of diverse learners.

This qualitative study involving two ESL teachers at the high school level will explore their effective practices and how those practices address the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. The findings of this study shed light on how the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers lead to instruction that can result in academic achievement for all learners in any classroom setting. This research has the potential to lend valuable insight into policies and procedures educational leaders develop to create culturally competent learning

environments in which all students, particularly culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, can flourish.

THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS  
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SETTING:  
A CASE STUDY

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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**To the people who have made this dream a reality.**

*Curtis & Deloris Brown*

My parents always instilled in me no matter how enormous a task might be, to move forward and persevere. The lessons that I learned from them taught me to take things one day at a time, even though there would be bumps in the road along the way. Their words of wisdom and constant encouragement to attempt new things in life inspired me to complete this journey.

*Delisa Brown*

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*Bernardine Booker Brown*

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**Life has no smooth road for any of us; and in the bracing atmosphere of a high aim the very roughness stimulates the climber to steadier steps, till the legend, over steep ways to the stars, fulfills itself.**

**W.C. Doane**

APPROVAL PAGE

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transformation of schools into learning environments that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their cultural and/or linguistic differences.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The increase in the number of students who speak a native language other than English in U.S. schools has been dramatic and is expected to remain so. As a result, English learners (ELs) are the most rapidly growing population in U.S. schools; for instance, between 1994 and 2004, the number of ELs in grades K-12 increased in the U.S. by more than 50% while the overall student population increased by only 12% during the same period (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). In addition, some states such as Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, and North Carolina have experienced even more dramatic growth rates of ELs, as high as 200% or more (Tinajero, Munter, & Araujo, 2010). English learners are children and adults who are learning English as a second or additional language; and, it should be noted that this term may apply to learners across various levels of proficiency of English (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

My research topic is: The Effective Practices of Culturally Responsive English as a Second Language Teachers in the High School Setting: A Case Study. The reason that I selected this topic is that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers have beneficial practices that all educators can learn from to better educate diverse students and inform educational leaders.

Effective ESL teachers enhance the academic achievement of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students by creating language-rich classrooms in which practices

are used to build English vocabulary and also help students make connections to their native language, home culture and to the curriculum. Additionally, effective ESL teachers acknowledge diversity in their classrooms, incorporate multicultural literature into the curriculum, promote cooperative learning, have high expectations for students, and invite parents/family members to share their cultures and talents (Tinajero et al., 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Indeed, the practices implemented by effective ESL teachers allow students to develop an understanding of and appreciation for others in a diverse society.

Similarly, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is considered one way to meet the needs of all learners (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). CRT affirms students' cultures, viewing their cultures as strengths rather than deficits. In addition, culturally responsive teachers specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find connections among themselves with the subject matter and the tasks that the teacher asks them to perform. It should also be noted that one of the most significant aspects of a culturally responsive classroom is the teacher's belief that students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds want to learn (Montgomery, 2001). I was most interested in learning about the effective practices of high school teachers who both serve EL students and are culturally responsive.

As educators, we know from the literature that the academic achievement of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds would improve if educators would make the effort to ensure that classroom instruction was conducted in a manner that was responsive to the students' home cultures (Gay, 2000; Huerta & Brittain, 2010; Montgomery, 2001; Nieto, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In addition, practices

and policies of the school district are crucial aspects in the enhancement of learning for all students (Gay, 2000, 2002).

We also know from the literature that culturally responsive teaching has been defined as a method that promotes inclusion and authenticity, emphasizing that all individuals (especially teachers) should learn about and respect themselves, one another, and all other people in honor of their many diverse cultural characteristics.

Culturally responsive teaching has been defined as emphasizing the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as a means for teaching students more effectively (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are placed within the real-life experiences and students' frames of reference, they are more personally meaningful, have a high appeal of interest, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. As a result, the academic achievement of students who are ethnically diverse improves when classroom instruction is conveyed through their own experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000). However, we have little information about educational practices that ESL teachers use in the high school setting when instructing linguistically and/or culturally diverse students (i.e., ELs). As a result, the purpose of this study was to discover what the effective practices are that culturally responsive ESL teachers use in the high school setting to adequately address the academic and social challenges of students whose first language is not English.

The information obtained through my study on the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers, can serve as a catalyst for educational leaders to create more

culturally competent schools in which diversity is valued, honored and respected in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures and language backgrounds. Scholars such as Klotz (2006), Gay (2000, 2002), and Montgomery (2001) noted that in order for schools to create culturally sensitive educational environments, educational leaders must set goals for success. These goals for culturally competent schools are to establish settings where all students are made to feel welcome; are engaged in learning; and are included in the full range of activities, curricula, and services (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005; Howard, 2007; Klotz, 2006). As the leaders of their schools, principals must work collaboratively with school staff, parents/guardians, and the community to establish goals that include closing achievements gaps, promoting pro-social behaviors, and creating schools in which all students achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student's race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, or home language.

### **Background Information**

Current federal law under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act defines linguistically diverse students as *limited English proficient* (LEP) (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). LEP students are defined as persons ranging in age from 3 to 21, enrolled in elementary or secondary schools, often born outside the U.S. or speaking a language other than English in their homes, and not having sufficient mastery of written and spoken English in order to meet state standards and excel in an English-language classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). For the purposes of my study, the term

*English learner* (EL) was used to refer to these students. The official terminology of limited English proficient characterizes students in relation to limitations or deficiencies.

While the overall number of school-aged ELs enrolled in U.S. schools has grown rapidly over the past decade; the increase in numbers of Spanish-speakers has outpaced all other linguistic groups (Tinajero et al., 2010). In 2000, the population of all ELs in the U.S. spoke over 400 native languages. The top five languages spoken by ELs in 2000-2001 were Spanish (79%), Vietnamese (2%), Hmong (1.6%), Cantonese (1%) and Korean (1%). In 2002-2003, approximately 5 million ELs were enrolled in grades pre-K through 12, nearly double the 2.7 million in 1992-1993 (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007; Morse, 2005). Projections indicate that these demographic trends will continue in future years and decades (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007; Morse, 2005).

Additionally, 2000 census data indicated that the total number of foreign-born children enrolled in elementary (not including kindergarten) and secondary schools in the U.S., was 2.6 million. That number increases to over 12 million when we include children who were born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents. Although not all students from these figures would be ELs, a significant portion of them are estimated to be by researchers (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). These figures also suggest the reality that all teachers, at some point during their career, will have in their classrooms students for whom English is a second language (Ernst-Slavit et al., 2002).

Data from the 2010 census also provides insight to our ethnically diverse nation. According to the 2010 census, 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of which 50.5 million (16%) were of Latino or Hispanic origin. The Hispanic

population increased from 35.3 million in 2000 when this same group comprised 13% of the total population. The majority of growth in the total population derived from increases in those individuals who reported their ethnicity as Latino or Hispanic (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

ELs represent a diverse group of students with a variety of social and academic needs. Some are immigrants, some are refugees, and others were born in the U.S. but live in non-English speaking families. Students from each of these categories may have characteristics in common with one another. For example, an immigrant from an impoverished country may have experienced similar levels of violence and oppression as a refugee. In other cases, the experiences can vary to a great degree (Henry, 2009). The United Nations defines a *refugee* as a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution. These claims of persecution must be based on race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political party (Pipher, 2002). An immigrant is defined as a person who voluntarily departs from one's native land and gets settled at another place. Usually, people emigrate to another place in order to find permanent residence (U.S. Legal, Inc., 2010).

While much of the discourse related to ELs frequently focuses on elementary-school issues, the fact of the matter is that many of these students are entering our educational system at the secondary level (Fix & Passell, 2003). Gunderson (2008) notes that the definition of secondary varies across jurisdictions, but broadly, the salient feature of this category is that it consists of individuals who range from 14 to 19 years of age. Within the EL category of secondary school students, there are those who were born in

the United States or Canada. There are those who speak no English, those who speak informal interpersonal but not academic English, and those who have developed academic language ability in English (Gunderson, 2008).

Interpersonal English refers to basic conversational language acquired by ELs that is used during interpersonal interaction (Faltis & Coulter, 2008). The term *academic language* refers to vocabulary and language that is utilized in U.S. classrooms (Echevarria et al., 2008). According to Echevarria et al. (2008) academic language has three key elements: (a) content words: these are the key vocabulary words, terms, and concepts associated with a particular topic being taught (e.g., for the American Revolutionary War they would be Redcoats, democracy, Patriots, freedom of religion, etc.); (b) process function words: these are the words that are associated with functional language (e.g., how to request information, justify opinions, state a conclusion, etc.); and (c) words and word parts that teach English structure: these are words that allow students to learn new vocabulary, primarily based on English morphology (e.g., teachers must help students learn that many English words are formed with root and base words joined to prefixes and suffixes). For example, if a science teacher is educating students about photosynthesis, she can help students learn the meaning of *photosynthesis* by explaining the meaning of the root, *photo*—light (Echevarria et al., 2008).

In states such as California, ELs who comprise more than 25% of the total public school enrollment, face unequal opportunities to learn (Oakes, Mendoza, & Silver, 2006). Not surprisingly, unequal educational conditions and outcomes are especially prevalent at the secondary level (Gold, 2006; Valdes, 2001). As Valdes (2001) notes, our approach to

teaching secondary students needs to be reoriented and reconceptualized. For secondary teachers who refuse to accept deficit perspectives that promote low expectations of ethnic minorities and seek to build on the knowledge and resources that ELs bring to the classroom, the need for theoretical and practical guidance has never been more urgent.

In addition, Franquiz and Salazar (2004) found that currents of high, continuing levels of immigration are changing the nation's public schools as well. As high schools feel the effect of these flows, educators are called upon to broaden their personal perspectives and understanding of languages and cultures that are different from their own. The *one-size-fits-all* policies that focus on the implementation of scripted teacher-proof materials, rigid sets of procedures, and neatly packaged programs, robs teachers of the opportunity to construct their own theories and to address the needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Jimenez and Gersten (1999) added that when teachers have opportunities to develop unconditional linguistic acceptance students are better helped in acquiring English literacy.

According to Jimenez and Gersten (1999), unconditional linguistic acceptance means that teachers value the importance of providing students from diverse backgrounds with culturally relevant content and concepts that directly reflect and validate students' life experiences. Jimenez and Gersten (1999) added that during literacy instruction, students are allowed to respond to questions and other prompts in their native language, in English or in a combination of both languages. These same teachers also provide students with the opportunity to select from alternatives to teacher-determined participation. For example, high levels of student-initiated involvement are always visible

in the classroom. Additionally, extended discourse is fostered by the teacher's high level of interest in cultural diversity and by their creation of a learning environment that is supportive of the social and academic needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse (Jimenez & Gersten, 1999). Indeed, over 20 years ago, Snow (1990) indicated a positive correlation between student success and teachers who were culturally and linguistically familiar. Snow (1990) emphasized that academic achievement improves when culturally and/or linguistically diverse children are provided with teachers whose expectations about how the classroom should be organized to meet the students' needs, who understand and correctly interpret the students' ways of expressing themselves both verbally and non-verbally, and whose structuring of relationships and of learning contexts re-creates things with which students are familiar. Thus, the purpose of my study was to discover what the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers are in the high school setting and how those practices can be used by teachers at any level to meet the needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Additionally, the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers might also inform educational leaders on how to create schools that are culturally sensitive and value diversity.

Rance-Roney (2008) added that federal legislation, too, has placed the spotlight on ELs. For the English learner, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation means good news and bad news. The good news is that these students can no longer remain in the dark corners of our classrooms, exempted from all state achievement tests as a result of their English as a second language status. As a result, schools have implemented more

effective and grade-appropriate education for ELs. However, the bad news found in such legislation is that for new learners of English entering high schools for the first time in the U.S., meeting the grade-level content standards (particularly in English language arts) is challenging or nearly impossible. Typically, only the most educationally prepared learners who arrive in our schools with strong literacy and content knowledge in their first language can meet schools' performance goals. Cummins (2000) asserts that it takes five to seven years of exposure to English before ELs can demonstrate academic English proficiency equivalent to their peers who are native English speakers. However, in spite of this finding, NCLB demands that ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for more than one year must demonstrate progress on English proficiency measures *and* meet grade level content mastery established for high school graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). This means that in order for ELs to graduate with a high school diploma, they must not only earn enough course credits, but they must also pass a rigorous state assessment—a requirement that is prevalent in about half of the states in the U.S. While the more rigorous standards take a toll on many students, the effect on school districts and teachers can be equally challenging. Thus, schools' "welcome mat", so to speak, has not been rolled out for ELs at the macro-level of the district and school nor at the micro-level of the classroom community (Rance-Roney, 2008).

In addition, Saifer and Barton (2007) found that pressure on schools to successfully educate students from diverse backgrounds has increased not only because of No Child Left Behind mandates but also due to large numbers of ethnic and linguistic minority students in U.S. classrooms. In 2004-2005, 42% of public school students were

part of an ethnic or racial minority group and 10.5 million school-age children spoke a language other than English in the home, with Spanish being the most frequently spoken language. The statistics show that in most education indicators (including school enrollment, grade retention, completion of high school, and post-secondary enrollment) language-minority youth lag behind their peers who only speak English at home (Saifer & Barton, 2007).

Refer to Table 1 for data regarding U.S. high school status dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender. Refer to Table 2 for data regarding U.S. high school status completion rates by race/ethnicity and gender.

**Table 1**

**Status Dropout Rates of 16- through 24-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: October 2008<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Male Status Dropout Rates (Percent)</b>	<b>Female Status Dropout Rates (Percent)</b>
White, non-Hispanic	5.4	4.2
Black, non-Hispanic	8.7	11.1
Hispanic	19.9	16.7
Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	3.9	4.9
American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	18.6	11.6
Two or more races, non-Hispanic	3.6	4.8

<sup>1</sup> The status dropout rate indicates the percentage of 16-through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school credential. High school credentials include high school diplomas and equivalent credentials such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate. Source: *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2008* (NCES 2011-012) by C. Chapman, J. Laird, and A. Kewal Ramani, 2010, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

**Table 2****Status Completion Rates of 18- through 24-Year-Olds Not Currently Enrolled in High School or Below, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: October 2008<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Male Status Completion Rates (Percent)</b>	<b>Female Status Completion Rates (Percent)</b>
White, non-Hispanic	93.6	94.9
Black, non-Hispanic	89.1	85.0
Hispanic	73.2	77.9
Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	95.1	95.8
American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	74.7	88.2
Two or more races, non-Hispanic	95.2	93.1

The data regarding high school dropout rates and completion rates are significant for my study because it indicates that there is a correlation between Hispanic students (many of whom are ELs) and school dropout. Positive student-teacher relationships and instruction and meaningful academic engagement are just two ways in which educators, such as effective ESL teachers, promote meaningful student engagement and mediate against student dropout.

### **Overview of Research Plans**

As a counselor in a secondary school for the past 14 years, I have observed teachers (i.e., both tenured teachers and untenured teachers) who in previous years have

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<sup>2</sup> Status completion rates measure the percentage of 18-through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who also hold a high school diploma or equivalent credential, such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate. Those still enrolled in high school are excluded from the analysis. Source: *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2008* (NCES 2011-012) by C. Chapman, J. Laird, and A. Kewal Ramani, 2010, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

been insensitive to the social and academic needs of ELs. I discovered that these teachers were not prepared, lacked support systems, and were unable, even with their best effort, to adequately help ELs with language development needs. There was a lack of understanding students' cultural differences by the teachers as well as language differences that created communication barriers in the classroom during instruction. In this era of rigorous accountability, ELs are often viewed as liabilities and not as resources in the daily life of a school.

In an effort to inform teachers in the high school setting about effective teaching practices that are responsive to students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse and to add information to the literature, I conducted a qualitative case study about this issue. Specifically, I designed this study to focus on the effective practices of culturally responsive English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers at the high school level. I selected ESL teachers as the primary subjects for my research due to the population of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students they serve on a daily basis. By conducting this study, I was also able to identify ways in which mainstream teachers could utilize effective practices that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. *Mainstream teachers* are described as content-area teachers who are responsible for providing academic instruction for ELs as well as English-speaking students in core subjects such as English, math, science, social studies in the general classroom setting versus those teachers charged with specifically serving ELs or other student subgroups (deJong & Harper, 2005).

### Research Questions

The research questions for the study were: (a) How do culturally responsive ESL teachers best implement effective instructional practices in the high school setting?; (b) How do effective culturally responsive ESL teachers perceive and address the academic and social challenges of students through their practice?; and (c) How can lessons learned from ESL teachers inform the practices of educational leaders?

In order to bring about a true transformation of the current educational system, *all* teachers must create learning environments in which students are defined not by what they are *lacking*, but rather by the potential resources they bring to the classroom. So real-life experiences, diverse perspectives of the world, and linguistic and cultural knowledge can be shared with educators as well as their peers.

To develop culturally responsive learning environments, schools—especially educational leaders—must establish goals for success. These goals for schools that are culturally sensitive are to create settings in which all students are made to feel welcome, are actively involved in learning, and are included in the complete range of activities, curricula, and services (Klotz, 2006). As the leaders of their schools, administrators must work collaboratively with teachers, parents, and members of the community to institute goals that include promoting pro-social behaviors and closing achievement gaps. The benefits of schools that are culturally competent are numerous and include preventing academic failure, reducing drop-out rates, and engaging students and their family members in the school community (Klotz, 2006).

In addition, Klotz (2006) adds that principals of culturally competent schools encourage respect and understanding for individual differences and strive for high educational standards and levels of achievement for all students. Issues regarding students are examined within the context of environmental factors, including prior educational experiences, instruction, second language acquisition, and culture.

A culturally competent school is generally defined as one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are meaningful and relevant to students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse (Klotz, 2006; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

### **Rationale and Perspectives of the Researcher**

I am a Black female counselor serving students in grades 6-8 at a magnet middle school in North Carolina. A magnet program was implemented at my school four years ago. Magnet schools are referred to as public schools that offer specialized instructional programs in particular disciplines. For example, the magnet program at my school offers concentrations in pre-engineering, math, and science. These schools are designed to accommodate students with particular interests and scholastic ability and, to this end the curricula reflect high academic standards (Banks & Green, 2008). High academic standards for my school, refers to the rigorous core curriculum that is offered. All students enrolled in my school are required to participate in core classes (i.e., math, language arts, science, social studies) that are equivalent to the core curriculum designed for students identified as Academically Gifted (AG) with the exception of students who have been identified as Highly Academically Gifted (HAG). Students who are enrolled in

the HAG curriculum participate in core classes that are equivalent to a curriculum that is designed for two grade levels above the students' actual grade level.

As well, the name magnet reflects the draw with which magnet schools receive students. Students may live in any surrounding area and apply to a magnet program (Banks & Green, 2008). According to Chen (2007) districts originally began embracing the magnet school models in the hope that their geographically open admissions would end racial segregation in schools and decrease segregation of schools in poorer areas. However, that has not been the case at the school where I am currently employed. The children from the school's surrounding neighborhood, many of whom are Black and Latino that live in poverty, have been placed in core classes that are racially segregated. Additionally, each magnet school would have a specialized curriculum that would draw students based on their interests (Chen, 2007). Banks and Green (2008) added that there are specific ways a magnet school could be established that would address segregation. A magnet program designed to combat segregation, such as my school, should encompass educational goals and objectives that will equalize the educational experience of students otherwise marginalized by segregation (Banks & Green, 2008). Indeed, a study focusing on the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers emphasized the significance of creating an educational environment and instructional practices that place emphasis on high expectations and outcomes for all students, including culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, such as ELs.

I have been employed at the same middle school for the past 14 years and during that time, many changes have occurred within our school community. For example, when

our former principal (a Black female who is an advocate for all children regardless of ethnicity, language or socioeconomic status) resigned from her position at our school in order to pursue a career with a district in Pennsylvania, the culture and the climate of the school as well as the diversity among the faculty and staff changed dramatically. It seemed to me that the new principal, a White male selected by our Board of Education to serve as the educational leader for our school, was making a concerted effort to hire mostly White teachers for a school that was located in a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood.

The majority of the Black students live in a local public housing community that is less than two miles away from the school. The majority of the Latino students live in the school's surrounding neighborhood in single-family homes as well as an apartment complex located immediately behind the school. Many of our Latino students are enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program as well as the traditional core classes.

The majority of the White students at the school are either enrolled in the HAG program or their families have made the decision to enroll them as students in the magnet program. Many of these students live in suburban areas of the city in two-parent families with middle-class or affluent backgrounds.

For many years, the school had been segregated both racially and to an extent, socio-economically due to district requirements mandating that HAG students be grouped homogeneously for core class instruction. However, when the magnet program was implemented at our school, core classes for non-HAG students became more racially and

linguistically diverse. As a result, White teachers (who had previously only taught HAG students) now had the task of providing instruction for children of color from the surrounding neighborhood. Through my direct working relationships and informal observations, I found that many of these teachers became and remain resistant to differentiating their instructional practice—a strategy research has shown to be very effective in order to meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (Bush, 2006; Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). These individuals want to conduct their classes in the same manner that they have been accustomed to. Some of these teachers have even made comments such as, “These students need to learn to speak English if they want to live in *our* country and attend *our* schools. I am not going to learn Spanish in order to teach anyone.”

Consequently, my decision to conduct this study grew out of my concern regarding the deficit thinking of many White teachers at my school with respect to students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse as well as the challenges these teachers face in determining how they can best meet the academic and social needs of *all* students. However, it has been my observation, that some of my colleagues who are ESL teachers at the secondary level are utilizing practices that are responsive in meeting the needs of a culturally and/or linguistically diverse population of students. I discovered, that by observing the practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting, as well as highlighting the voices of those teachers and their students through the use of in-depth interviews, observations, and reviewing pertinent documents, I have

obtained valuable information regarding effective strategies that would not only be helpful for ESL teachers, but to *all* secondary school teachers and even teachers working in other levels.

Additionally, principals and other educational leaders can benefit from the information obtained from this study in order to establish empowering school cultures in which all students experience educational equity and choice in every aspect of schooling. School leaders can also discover particular insight about how to better work collaboratively with teachers and school staff to closely examine the policies of the district and the school to ensure that they promote instructional practices and activities that prevent failure and increase academic success of their EL students.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In the following chapters, the discussion regarding the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers includes a review of the literature to provide background knowledge about prominent influences that impact the effective teaching practices in American schools. Particularly, as detailed in Chapter II, I considered research on: (a) the impact of differentiated instruction, (b) multicultural education, (c) culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs. Additionally, the literature review demonstrates how varied and complex the factors are that influence teaching and learning in meeting the diverse needs of all students. The review also sheds light on the fact that the majority of the research conducted on the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting does not share the

perspectives of ESL teachers nor take into account their personal experiences with educating culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners.

Walqui (2000) noted that high dropout rates among language-minority students at the high school level are one indication that many schools are failing to adequately support the needs of EL students. The belief that student dropout is due to a lack of proficiency in English often leads educators to overlook the economic, cultural, academic, and personal issues that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students must confront on a daily basis (Walqui, 2000). The review demonstrates to educational leaders, the significance of studying the practices of high school ESL teachers and their impact on the educational success of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

The discussion in Chapter II also includes an overview of my conceptual framework that was informed by the literature on sociocultural theory as described by scholars (Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Rodriguez, Jones, Pang, & Park, 2004; Scribner & Reyes, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory was helpful for me in developing a greater understanding of what ESL teachers think, know, and do in order to provide the best educational experience possible that is responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of their students. The discussion in Chapter III concludes with a review of the research methodology and data collection that was used to conduct the study. My research incorporated case study research methodology and data collection processes such as observations, interviews, and document review. Through shared perspectives and experiences of ESL teachers as well as their students and through observations that were conducted, school leaders will gain insight into what they should be doing in order to

help teachers (particularly general education teachers) to provide the best educational experience possible for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

Chapter IV, contains two sections that present the findings from the fieldwork that was conducted. The first section presents descriptions and perspectives of the two high school ESL teachers selected for the study, including a history of the school district, geographical context, demographics, and descriptions of the ESL classrooms and teachers. Section two addresses one of my research questions, thus, illustrating how culturally responsive ESL teachers implement effective practices at the high school level. I have titled this section, *A Portrait of Culturally Responsive Instruction*. Chapter V will address my second research question, and as a result, reveal responses from study participants regarding how they perceive and address the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level and how they meet the needs of students and their families who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

In Chapter VI, I will address my third research question: *How can lessons learned from ESL teachers inform the practices of educational leaders?* This chapter contains three sections. The first section illustrates how the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level can inform the practices of school leaders. This section will provide responses from the study participants on how educational leaders can support the academic and social development of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Section two will provide recommendations for educational leaders in creating and maintaining learning environments that are responsive in meeting the needs of all students and in doing so welcome the rich opportunity that

ethnic and cultural diversity provides for them. At the conclusion of Chapter VI, I revisit my conceptual framework to discuss new insights I have gained as a result of conducting this study. Please see Appendix I on page 257 for a list of acronyms used often throughout the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The discussion in Chapter II is divided into two sections. Part I will provide a review of the scholarly literature related to effective teaching practices that are being implemented in American public schools that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners. This section will also provide a discussion regarding the possibility of educators developing an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework for classrooms that can result in instructional practices that place the characteristics of individual students, including ELs, at the center of teaching and learning. Part II will provide an overview of my conceptual framework and how it was informed by sociocultural theory in assessing the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level.

#### **Literature Review—Part 1**

The review of the scholarly literature that follows is intended to serve several purposes. First, it is imperative to provide background knowledge about the prominent influences that impact the effective teaching practices in American schools. Second, the review demonstrates how varied and complex the factors are that influence teaching and learning in meeting the diverse needs of all students, but factors are also varied for ensuring improved educational outcomes. Third, significant terms are defined so the reader can comprehend unfamiliar terms individually as well as how they relate to one

another. Fourth, the review of literature sheds light on the fact that the majority of the research conducted on the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting does not share the perspectives of the ESL teachers themselves nor take into account their personal experiences. Finally, this review helps demonstrate to educational leaders the importance of studying the practices of high school ESL teachers and their potential impact on the educational success of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Altogether, I build upon a review of the literature to propose what I am calling an *integrated culturally responsive instructional framework* that I believe can be effective for all culturally diverse students – both ELs and non ELs.

### **Effective Instructional Practices at the Secondary Level**

Based on my professional experience and review of the literature, effective instruction at the secondary level encompasses elements of both differentiated instruction and multicultural education approaches that, together allow teachers the opportunity to be culturally responsive. These approaches can also help meet state and federal standards.

### **Defining Teacher Effectiveness**

According to Varlas (2009), working definitions of teacher effectiveness are often elusive or so politically charged that they are unusable. However, the critical need for highly effective teachers in every classroom calls for a clear definition of effectiveness and action toward creating the conditions for it. Simply put, education communities must develop a comprehensive definition of teacher effectiveness, the professional support to maintain and build it, the methods to measure it, and the sustained incentives to reward its results.

Today in many instances, students' knowledge is summarized as a test score, and teachers' effectiveness is perceived as their contribution to that test score (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Although student scores on standardized tests can be useful in gauging a teacher's effect, they should not serve as the sole criteria. Test scores do not provide a full picture of teacher contributions and student circumstances, not to mention which students get tested and on what content (Varlas, 2009).

Defining teacher effectiveness is not about creating a simplistic, single perspective of effective teaching. According to Gene Carter, the Executive Director for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), "It is a dramatic conceptual shift from focusing exclusively on the teacher to focusing on the act of learning" (Varlas, 2009). The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) recommends extending the definition of teacher effectiveness beyond teachers' contributions to student achievement gains to include how teachers impact classrooms, schools, and their colleagues as well as how they contribute to other significant outcomes for students (Goe et al., 2008). Varlas (2009) added that attempts to simplify definitions of teacher effectiveness undercut aims to improve professional practice in education. In truth, teacher effectiveness should be measured by considering a range of student and school data.

A research synthesis for NCCTQ (Goe et al., 2008) breaks down teacher effectiveness into five points:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade and graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
- Effective teachers utilize diverse resources to plan and structure learning opportunities that are engaging; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instructions as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.
- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and education professionals to ensure student success.

These teacher factors also align with a vision of whole child education, one in which all students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged (Varlas, 2009).

For the purposes of my study, effective instruction is defined as instruction that accomplishes several objectives. First, it emphasizes students' cultural concerns, including family and community issues, and incorporates them into the curriculum, textbooks, and learning activities. Second, it stresses social and academic responsibility, an appreciation for diversity, and high expectations through engaging lessons and demanding activities which promote academic and personal achievement. Third, effective instructional practices are learner-centered and prompt teachers to work from students'

existing knowledge base, improve self-confidence and increase the transfer of school-taught knowledge to real-life situations.

My definition of effective instruction calls for teachers to implement practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching because these approaches address the needs of diverse learners by acknowledging that in order to provide the best learning experience possible for all children, teaching practices must be developmentally appropriate and require educators to know their students and provide lessons in a way that is challenging, achievable, and individualized. All teaching practices must be attuned to the individuality of each student as well as be responsive to students' social and cultural contexts.

### **Promising Instructional Practices for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Learners**

The No Child Left Behind Act requirements for standards-based curricula and standardized testing for all students have changed the focus of educational reform. This is particularly true at the middle and high school levels due to heavy content demands and the implications of high-stakes testing (Stodden, Galloway, & Stodden, 2003). A promising practice for meeting the mandates of standards-based education is *differentiated instruction* (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Differentiated instruction (DI) has increased in popularity among educators since instruction can be differentiated for all students based on their characteristics of readiness, interest, and learning profile. Readiness is assessed by determining a student's current knowledge, understanding, and skill level as it relates to what is being studied. Interest is a student's current knowledge, understanding, and skill level as it relates to what is being studied. Interest is made

apparent by observing what a student enjoys learning about, thinking about, and doing. Learning profile means that a student's preferred model of learning as influenced by factors such as learning style, gender, and culture (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003).

For ELs, this type of instruction can address students' cultural and linguistic differences, learning style, current knowledge, and level of understanding. Indeed, differentiated instruction can be helpful for ELs since these students not only have the task of learning English, but also have the task of comprehending academic course content that is unfamiliar to them.

Another major development in education over the past few decades has been *multicultural education*. Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, and Stuczynski (2011) define multicultural education as "An educational approach that looks beyond curricula's content and strategies from the White, Western European tradition. The goal usually is to broaden students' perspectives and understandings to encompass one or more cultures that are different from their own" (p. 219). The increasing diversity of our student population has motivated some urban and ethnically diverse school districts to establish multicultural policy statements and offer professional development opportunities for teachers related to culturally responsive teaching practices (Banks, 2002).

Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2000) as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. Many teachers at the secondary level have observed the positive effect

on student achievement when students learn in a manner that is culturally relevant (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

The following sections will illustrate how the individual components of differentiated instruction and multicultural education can be helpful in meeting the needs of students who come from diverse backgrounds in the general education curriculum. I also note the important role that educational leaders should take in the implementation of effective instructional practices that meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

According to van Garderen and Whittaker (2006), for decades one of the hallmarks of special education and gifted education has been individualized instruction and flexible grouping of students. In light of the more recent emphasis on educating a growing number of secondary school students with exceptional needs in inclusive environments and including all students in state assessments, both general and special educators are asking significant questions regarding the feasibility of and the responsibility for providing individualized instruction in the general education classroom. Lawrence-Brown (2004) and van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) added that DI has evolved from serving gifted learners to providing support to children from culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse backgrounds within the current context of the general education classroom. DI provides a foundation for accomplishing this goal. Indeed differentiated instruction has proven to be an important element for effective EL teaching.

The basic premise of DI is to systematically plan curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of academically diverse learners by honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's capacity to learn (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). Differentiated instruction requires that educators know their students in such a manner that they effectively plan for students' learning experiences prior to instruction. This is the primary distinction from the Skillful Teacher Model in which the teacher promptly reacts to the struggling student (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). In the DI instruction model, the differentiation is planned within the lesson. Basically, it is the difference between *proaction* and *reaction*. There is more flexibility built in the overall plan, and thus, more effective teaching delivery to more students (Bush, 2006).

Differentiated instruction is an instructional design model that is child-centered. It acknowledges that students have individual learning styles, motivation, abilities, and thus, readiness to learn. Within the learning environment, teachers balance the three required elements of content, process, and outcome. In DI, whereas all of these elements are differentiated, all students are held to standards that measure significant growth and achievement. Pre-assessment as well as ongoing assessments become necessary measures in order to determine where a student is in relation to the learning activity. The goal becomes not only *what* content needs to be taught, but *how* to teach in a manner that most effectively results in each student obtaining the ability to demonstrate understanding of the content of the lesson (Bush, 2006; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

Through DI, a variety of grouping strategies are used depending on content, student projects, and ongoing evaluations to ensure the engagement and success for all learners. These strategies have proven successful for ELs who interact with one another and work together as they develop content knowledge regardless of their ability level, with all learners participating and being challenged appropriately (Santamaria, 2009).

There is a rhythm to differentiated instruction because this strategy allows the opportunity for various groupings that are most effective within the process of learning. For example, the teacher who begins the lesson with whole class discussion might move to individualized assigned tasks, back to whole class, then to small group, back to whole class, and so forth. Students tend to possess varying skills in readiness to learn based on the content, so a skilled math student might participate in a particular small group in math but might participate in a very different group for language arts. The fear of the stigma associated with ability grouping diminishes as students feel fulfilled in reaching their potential goals that correspond with their abilities (Bush, 2006; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

Overall, Bush (2006), Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) and van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) added that differentiated instruction includes three key elements of curriculum: (a) what is worthwhile learning (content); (b) how is the instruction best delivered (process); and (c) what is the evidence that demonstrates learning (product). The differentiation is planned according to the student's readiness, interests, and learning profile.

### **Differentiating Content**

What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values are most significant for students?

These basic questions of curriculum are answered by learning standards and standardized testing. However, scholars such as Bush (2006), Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), and van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) explain a few ways in which teachers can differentiate what is regarded as desirable content: (a) level of difficulty within the same unit of study; (b) access to different sources that deliver the content; and, (c) various requirements of what is learned from the content, such as reading for factual information versus identifying patterns or themes.

### **Differentiating Process**

Curriculum scholars ask what activities and strategies are most effective in enabling learners to obtain the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values identified as worthy (Levy, 2008; Santamaria, 2009; Santamaria, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002; Tomlinson, 2001). In other words, if content is *what to teach*, process then is *how to teach*. *What to teach*, or content, is when teachers establish goals and student behavioral objectives for learning. When this selection of content process is successful, students can make sense of what they are learning, apply it to prior knowledge, and seek categorization, thus making it a part of their knowledge base. The most effective method for sense-making is to challenge students to go to the next level by using what they already know as a catalyst for understanding. This process may be differentiated through a variety of strategies including: learning logs, graphic organizers, journals, literature circles, jigsaw, and mind-mapping (Bush, 2006; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Indeed, as an effective element for

EL teaching, differentiated instruction allows students to use their prior knowledge in order to understand new content.

### **Differentiating Product**

How do educators know if the students have acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are most worthy to learn? What provides evidence of students' understanding of the content? How do educators know that students have made growth that is both meaningful and considerable? In the DI model, assessment is ongoing in order to accommodate flexibility in guiding instruction. However, a product or outcome is essential as evidence of understanding for the learner, and it also serves the student as a tangible representation of their learning achievement (Bush, 2006; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

### **Student Readiness**

Matching the student's skills and understanding to the topic being covered by the teacher is considered *readiness to learn*. Readiness differentiation focuses on the mechanics of moving a student beyond current knowledge to outside of their comfort zone. Tomlinson (2001) identifies *The Equalizer*, a tool identifying eight variables, as a means of differentiating instruction based on student readiness. Those eight variables are identified as: (a) Foundational/Transformational; (b) Concrete/Abstract; (c) Simple/Complex; (d) Single Facet/Multiple Facets; (e) Small Leap/Great Leap; (f) More Structured/More Open; (g) Less Independence/Greater Independence; and (h) Slow/Quick. These variables are adjusted to match students' readiness to be equally and appropriately challenged by the general curriculum. The more the teacher knows about

their students, the more easily these adjustments become during the course of the school year (Bush, 2006). Indeed, understanding ELs' level of skill by effective teachers has proven to be beneficial when differentiating instruction for students.

### **Student Learning Profile**

How do students learn best? There are many measures, models, and studies to select from including learning styles, multiple intelligences, brain-based learning, and domains (e.g. cognitive, affective/emotional, and psychomotor). The four categories identified in the DI model used to plan instruction include: group orientation, cognitive style, learning environment, and intelligence preference. Other factors include culture-influence preferences, gender-based preferences, and combinations of both gender and culture. Although it is challenging to accommodate all learning profiles at all times, it does acknowledge those preferences that are different from one's own (Bush, 2006; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

Simply put, differentiated instruction is an honest and thoughtful approach to teaching a diverse student population. It acknowledges individual differences and seeks to make learning an experience that is meaningful and relevant for all students. If educational leaders acknowledge that differentiated instruction is inclusive of, and thereby appropriate for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, they can initiate the incorporation of differentiated instructional practices into their school's curriculum with confidence. By doing so, principals will allow teachers to make content more accessible to students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse; thus, increasing students' opportunities to experience increased classroom success. Indeed, differentiated

instruction is an approach that can be effective for a culturally and linguistically diverse population of students such as ELs, which research has also shown (Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Santamaria, 2009; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

### **Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education (ME) is an approach that incorporates curriculum and instruction but extends beyond them to consider the restructuring of all aspects of teaching and learning. Its primary goal is to allow students the opportunity to obtain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to be successful in an ethnically and racially diverse society (Banks, 2002; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2004, 2005). Multicultural education is distinct from differentiated instruction because it stresses that all students learn about the history and experiences of diverse groups (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006), whereas differentiated instruction provides some attention to students' prior knowledge, talents, and cultural and linguistic diversity, but these differences are not the central focus of the teaching approach (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008). Banks (2002) has defined the major components of multicultural education as: (a) content integration; (b) the knowledge construction process; (c) equity pedagogy; (d) prejudice reduction; and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure.

Gay (2000) noted that the increasing ethnic diversity of the U.S. population makes multicultural education for all students an imperative, especially if education is to fulfill its basic functions by being personally meaningful, socially relevant, culturally accurate, and pedagogically sound. Indeed, multicultural education will play a crucial role in the instruction of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, such as ELs.

**Content Integration**

The dimension of content integration challenges all teachers to include concepts and examples from diverse groups and cultures in their subject area (Gay, 2000; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Individuals and groups are diverse based upon characteristics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, language, exceptionality, gender, sexual orientation, and religion (Gay, 2000; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Regardless of the degree of heterogeneity of a school district or classroom, all students should learn about the experiences and history of diverse groups so that they are capable of functioning in a global society. Students whose group affiliations are not traditionally represented in the curriculum of the school often feel excluded, but when students see their native language and culture within classroom content and materials, academic achievement improves (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2004; Moses & Cobb, 2001).

**Knowledge Construction**

The knowledge construction process examines whether the information in the classroom includes multiple perspectives and voices. It encourages educators to help students to critically examine how, why, and by whom the text and visuals they use were developed (Gay, 2000; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). It is the responsibility of teachers to recognize when alternative perspectives and voices are not present in published texts and seek appropriate supplementary materials (Gay, 2002; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Indeed, for educational experiences to be relevant for culturally and linguistically diverse students such as ELs, the curriculum design and materials used must reflect and connect with the students' particular life experiences and perspectives.

## **Equity Pedagogy**

Equity pedagogy acknowledges that when educators select instructional approaches they should take into consideration the learning preferences of the students in their classes. All teachers, regardless of subject area, can develop instructional units that are responsive to students' cultures (Edwards & Kuhlman, 2007; Gay, 2002; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Gay (2000) uses the term *culturally responsive teaching* to indicate approaches that empower students to learn and describes numerous opportunities for practice. Similar to multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching celebrates individual and collective accomplishments, provides academic and personal mentoring in survival techniques and self-advocacy, promotes critical thinking, and utilizes cooperative learning groups (Gay, 2000; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Multicultural education is based on the need to provide all students with a high-quality and equitable education. This is particularly crucial for students who have been failed by public schools due to differences such as race/ethnicity, language, immigrant status, and social class (Nieto, 2005). Indeed, multicultural education for ELs can affirm the identities of students through a more inclusive curriculum.

## **Prejudice Reduction**

Polite and Saenger (2003) noted that prejudice reduction means that there should be numerous opportunities for students to develop positive attitudes towards human diversity during their school years. As opposed to ignoring these differences, teachers must acknowledge and celebrate the unique characteristics of individuals and group affiliations, while at the same time, stressing the various characteristics that all students

have in common. In addition, multicultural education calls on educators to develop classroom communities in which differences can be discussed in an open and sensitive manner and teach conflict resolution strategies that provide students with skills for coping with prejudice (Gay, 2002; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Multicultural education takes into account the sociopolitical context in which education takes place by challenging institutional policies and practices, both in society and schools that perpetuate inequality (Nieto, 2005). Indeed, multicultural education can be viewed as a way of achieving equal opportunity for all students of all backgrounds and circumstances, including ELs.

### **An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure**

An empowering school culture is one in which all students experience educational equity and choice in every aspect of schooling. Within the classroom, educators promote principles of shared decision making and democratic citizenship. Students who are ELs are empowered when teachers or teacher assistants can speak to them in their native language or when the flag of their native country is displayed in the classroom. Beyond the classroom, teachers and school staff must work collaboratively to closely examine the policies of the school in order to ensure that they are promoting educational equity for all students (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

It should be noted that the five components of multicultural education enrich the discussion of curriculum and instruction offered by differentiated instruction and by challenging teachers to view their classrooms through the cultural filters of their students. Multicultural education moves beyond instruction and questions basic assumptions

regarding the structure of schools and the purpose of education. Once teachers comprehend how differentiated instruction and multicultural education complement each other, it would be possible to design a unified framework for instructional planning that serves a range of diverse students, including ELs (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Such a unified framework can encompass broader practices related to culturally responsive teaching overall.

Similar to differentiated instruction and multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) utilizes the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). CRT is based on the premise that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have a high level of interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Montgomery, 2001).

Multicultural education should be viewed by educational leaders as a way to confront the inequality that exists in institutions such as U.S. public schools and that its premise is that students regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status can learn and achieve to high levels, and even more essential, that they deserve to do so. Educational leaders who strive to create learning environments that are culturally responsive, must be willing to initiate the implementation of multicultural education that is accompanied by a deep commitment to social justice and equal access to resources for all students.

In the following section, I will provide an overview of how teachers can use culturally responsive teaching practices to deliver instruction that can meet the needs of all students, including ELs.

### **Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Teaching**

As more students from diverse backgrounds populate twenty-first century classrooms and efforts build to identify effective methods to teach these students, the need for culturally responsive pedagogical approaches such as differentiated instruction and multicultural education grows more intense. Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students that differ in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics (Gay, 2000; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In order to meet this challenge, educators must apply not only theoretically sound pedagogy but culturally responsive pedagogy as well.

Some educators use the terms culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education interchangeably. Culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education are similar in that both forms of instruction make classrooms more inclusive for all students, involve students in the construction of knowledge, view students' personal and cultural differences as assets, and use varied means of assessment that promote learning (Sparks, 1994; Richards et al., 2007; Montgomery, 2001). However, it should be noted that the determination to become culturally responsive goes one step beyond multiculturalism. Culturally responsive educators not only teach about people who manifest differences, but are also responsive to the cultural identity of learners (Huber, Heiger, & Parscal, 1992). This means that teachers have a moral responsibility to be culturally responsive or

to design curricular programs that are responsive to the educational needs of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Scholars Huber et al. (1992) added that culturally responsive content acknowledges the influences of culture, language, race, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics that define children as different from the majority. Indeed, culturally responsive teachers can recognize and celebrate the cultural, social, and linguistic differences of ELs to help them become more comfortable within the learning environment.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Defined**

Culturally responsive teaching has been defined many times and in many ways. Nieto (2004) defined it as a method that “necessitates inclusion and authenticity” (p. 353), emphasizing that all people, particularly teachers, should learn about and respect themselves, one another, and all other people in honor of their various diverse cultural characteristics. In addition, Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. 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. As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

When combined, various components of differentiated instruction and multicultural education have characteristics that are similar to culturally responsive

teaching. For example, through differentiated instruction students are placed at the center of teaching and learning. Since each child comes to school with different learning needs, which includes various educational, personal, and cultural contexts and various degrees of academic skills, differentiated instruction guides teachers to plan a variety of instructional methods to meet the academic and social needs of diverse learners.

Differentiated instruction like culturally responsive teaching, dictates that not all students are alike. Additionally, differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and presenting information to students rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Multicultural education is also student-centered. Similar to culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education promotes an acceptance of cultural diversity, and that students' backgrounds and experiences should be the center of their education and learning should occur in a familiar context that takes into consideration the various ways that individuals think and learn. Multicultural education, like culturally responsive teaching also instills within students a sense of pride and confidence in their unique and special backgrounds. Indeed, instruction that utilizes the prior knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse students will have a positive impact on the academic achievement of ELs.

Clearly, how one defines "culture" is also critical to how effective instructional practices are assessed. Many terms are used to describe culture, and how it relates to increasing student achievement. The following is an inclusive view of culture, as described by Saifer et al. (2011):

Culture can be defined as a way of life, especially as it relates to the socially transmitted habits, customs, traditions, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people at a particular time. It includes the behaviors, actions, practices, attitudes, norms, and values, communication styles, language, etiquette, spirituality, concepts of health and healing, beliefs, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. Culture is the lens through which we look at the world. It is the context within which we operate and make sense of the world. Culture influences how we process learning, solve problems, and teach. (p. 9)

Indeed, culture is central to learning in that it impacts the manner in which groups and individuals communicate, receive information, and construct their thinking processes (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### **Educating All Students: Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms**

Scholars have further indicated that culturally responsive teaching is humanizing and it involves creating instructional situations where educators use teaching approaches and strategies that acknowledge, affirm, and build on culturally different ways of learning, behaving, and using language in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

According to Huerta and Brittain (2010), research by various scholars indicates that *humanizing pedagogy* is an effective culturally responsive teaching approach for language-minority students. Bartolomé (1994) and Nieto (2004) added that teachers practicing a humanizing pedagogy recognize the social, historical, and political contexts of their lives and of their students' lives, which includes issues of power, racial and ethnic identities, and cultural values. Therefore, these teachers have developed a critical understanding of their purpose as educators and that of their students as unique individuals influenced by their culture, communities, and the larger society (Freire,

1987). They believe that students differ in the manner in which they learn, not in their ability to learn. Using this knowledge, teachers employ non-traditional practices in which students and teachers share knowledge and power (Bartolomé, 1994; Friere, 1987).

In the pursuit of culturally responsive teaching, teachers use their knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know (Huerta & Brittain, 2010). Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, ability, and many other characteristics. In order to address the needs of these learners, teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a classroom culture in which all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed, supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn.

ESL teachers have the responsibility of educating culturally and linguistically diverse students on a daily basis. Through a study of these teachers' practices at the high school level, that I observed culturally responsive pedagogy that can serve as a foundation for mainstream teachers at any level to implement practices that occur in a culturally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths that students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement. Additionally, the information obtained through my study can inform the practices of educational leaders and encourage them to create learning environments that are culturally competent.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) have provided five broad culturally responsive teaching practices to help educators make their classrooms more inclusive: (a) involve all

students in the construction of knowledge, (b) build on students' personal and cultural strengths, (c) help students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, (d) use various assessment practices that promote learning, and (e) make the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students.

As an educator who has worked with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, I have found Villegas and Lucas's (2002) recommendations to be true. The five teaching practices provided by these scholars address the social and academic needs of a diverse student population. Teachers have a responsibility to all of their students to ensure that they all have an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability. If teaching reflects the cultural and linguistic practices and values of only one group of individuals, then other students will be denied an equal opportunity to learn.

Practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching are examples of effective teaching practices that address the social and academic needs of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, including ELs. These practices take learner differences into consideration and how students are impacted by race, ethnicity, academic background, language, and socioeconomic status. Through an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework utilizing differentiated instruction, multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching, teachers to the extent possible, can provide instructional materials and implement classroom activities that are culturally supportive of all students.

### **Effective Teaching Practices for English Learners in Secondary Schools**

Differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching are three effective teaching practices used in schools at the secondary level to teach diverse students in general. In the following section, I will provide a review of research-based practices that have been effectively used in secondary classrooms and in other levels that have specifically focused on ELs and helped to reverse deficit thinking and underachievement by focusing on ELs' strengths and assets in U.S. public schools.

The effective instructional practices for ELs that are discussed in this section can help inform teachers and educational leaders on how to best meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Hampering efforts to improve education for ELs, have been shortages of teachers who can relate to these students—both socially and culturally, teachers' low expectations for ELs, and over-reliance on instructional methods that overlook the culturally specific prior knowledge of ELs. According to Waxman and Téllez (2002) many educators maintain that the best way to help these students is to provide them with better classroom instruction that focuses on research-based instructional practices that have proven effective for ELs. Such practices include:

#### **Native Language and Literacy Development**

Literacy skills are developed most effectively as a natural outgrowth of the real-life experiences that students bring with them to school from their home and community environments. In a landmark study from the 1990s, Heath (1996) revealed that each community has its own rules for socializing children through language and that ways of

making meaning through texts differ across communities. Optimal literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students builds on children's prior learning, allowing them to derive meaning from their own reservoir of background experiences (Tinajero et al., 2010).

Research has also indicated that a key to successful teaching and learning of secondary ELs is creating personal connections with students' lives and prior experiences inside and outside of the school. In regard to language development, this view is derived from the concept of emergent literacy, emphasizing that learning literacy cannot be reduced to a series of mechanical techniques (Berninger et al., 2006; Clay, 2001; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Each learner's knowledge, experience, attitude, and perspective determine the manner in which information is perceived, understood, valued, and stored (Flood, Lapp, & Fisher, 2003).

Studies conducted on optimal literacy development for students (Gay, 2000; Igoa, 1995; Snow, 1990; Valenzuela, 1999) underscore the need for teachers to show sensitivity and appreciation for the language and cultural norms that ELs bring to the classroom. The evidence points to a need for teachers to not only introduce new skills and knowledge, but also to establish continuity between the school and the home while validating the cultural values and linguistic knowledge of ELs. By doing so schools can increase the self-esteem of students, enhance caring relationships between learners and educators, and provide a foundation for successful teaching and learning (Noddings, 2005).

Furthermore, using the language of the home as a tool for instruction is a key element in fully developing the intellectual potential of ELs and in cultivating each learner's sense of worth. The significance of this vital component of ELs' classroom experience is affirmed by the research of numerous scholars who assert that positive self-identification is intrinsically linked to educational success (Jimenez, 2000; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2002; Nieto, 2002).

Research also indicates that as long as ELs have well-developed skills in their native language (L1) domains, they can draw on L1 language and metacognitive responses to improve their second language (i.e., English) literacy development (Cummins et al., 2005; Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

As previously mentioned in this chapter, student-centered instructional practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching would provide culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, such as ELs, with a curriculum that acknowledges that effective teaching and learning take into consideration students' prior knowledge and experiences, abilities, learning styles, as well as students' previous educational backgrounds. In other words, these practices address individual differences and strive to make learning an experience that is meaningful and relevant for all students.

### **The Role of Language Learning for ELs**

According to Echevarria et al. (2008), the foundation of school success is academic literacy in English. Although not understood by many educators, age-

appropriate knowledge of the English language is a prerequisite in the attainment of content standards. Echevarria et al. (2008) added that we learn primarily through language, and use language to express our understanding.

Without proficient oral and written English language skills (i.e., literacy skills), ELs are hard pressed to learn and demonstrate their knowledge of mathematical reasoning, science skills, social studies concepts, and so forth. Additionally, the relationship between literacy proficiency and academic achievement increases as grade levels rise, regardless of individual student characteristics (Echevarria et al., 2008). Biancarosa and Snow (2004) added that in secondary school classes, language use becomes more complex and more content area specific. English learners must develop literacy skills for each content area in their second language (i.e., English) as they simultaneously learn, comprehend, and apply content area concepts through their second language (Garcia & Godina, 2004). In the following section, I will profile some major instructional/programmatic approaches that address English-language acquisition for ELs.

### **Sheltered English Instruction**

Echevarria, Short, and Powers (2006) developed an effective strategy for teaching content to ELs, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The model consists of lesson planning and delivery in English with instructional strategies grouped into eight components to help ELs succeed in school. The SIOP method of instruction is built on best practices research from mainstream classrooms (Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2008; Doherty et al., 2003), adding strategies that focus on developing skills in English. The

SIOP model is based on the principle that language acquisition is enhanced within social and cultural contexts through meaningful application and interaction (Minaya-Rowe, 2004).

A key component of SIOP is activating and strengthening background knowledge or linking to students' real-life experiences and knowledge. For example, in a social studies classroom, ELs who have not studied the U.S. Civil War in their native countries but have studied (or experienced) other instances of civil unrest on a firsthand basis can speak about those prior experiences to help establish the context for studying U.S. History and the U.S. Civil War (Abadiano & Turner, 2002). Echevarria et al. (2006) tested the SIOP model for its effects on student achievement and academic literacy development, discovering positive outcomes for ELs, including significant gains in writing performance, particularly in expository writing.

Indeed, an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework utilizing differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching can acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students, including secondary ELs, to find connections among themselves and with the subject matter as well as the tasks the teacher asks them to perform. Learning can be meaningful and build on what students already know, allowing them to understand new information more easily. As a result, teaching and learning can encourage students and teachers to connect with others in the school, at home, and in the community.

### **One- and Two-Way Dual Language Education**

Tinajero et al. (2010) explain that while dual language or bilingual programs share many characteristics that contribute to student achievement, two distinct variations on the model have been developed and tested. These models are two-way and one-way dual language (TWDL/OWDL) education programs. The primary difference between the two models is in the student populations the programs serve. Two-way programs include both language minority and language majority students, whereas one-way developmental programs focus on serving the language minority population. Results of studies of one- and two-way dual language programs tell of their effectiveness in educating non-English speaking students, of increasing and enriching language resources in the U.S. by conserving the native language of ELs, and of developing second language skills in English-speaking students. Two-way dual language education is the hallmark of bilingual instruction (Tinajero et al., 2010).

Bilingual instruction is defined as school instruction using two languages, generally a native language of the student and a second language. The amount of time that each language is used depends on the type of bilingual program, its specific objectives, and students' level of language proficiency (Echevarria et al., 2008).

In both OWDL and TWDL education, students develop bilingualism and attain academic achievement. Developing proficiency in the first language has many advantages for language minority students (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2005). First, students develop cognitive and academic concepts, and then learn corresponding labels in English. The native language initiates the development of both the basic and advanced

literacy. It assists students in improving their knowledge of the world in all subject areas and uses the native language to make English more understandable. Furthermore, students in one-and-two-way programs benefit greatly from an additive bilingual learning environment in which students perceive their language as positive and valuable. In monolingual (and even some bilingual) classrooms in which students use or know only one language, the native language of ELs is perceived as a problem or deficiency, resulting in students feeling uneasy and even embarrassed about their proficiency in the native language. However, in two-way programs, *all* students are second language learners (Tinajero et al., 2010).

It should also be noted that culturally responsive teaching is key feature of effective dual language programs. Within this context, the following are significant: (a) the inclusion of original works from the worlds of language-minority groups so that students see the authors as intellectual role models; and (b) acknowledgement of what students bring to the classroom, including experiences, cultural ways, and family history—as legitimate knowledge upon which to build (Tinajero et al., 2010).

Indeed, an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework using the practices of differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching would validate the significance of languages other than English. To the extent possible, teachers could plan lessons that promote language development in all skills (e.g. reading, writing, speaking) while culturally and linguistically diverse students, such as ELs, are mastering content objectives. Echevarria et al. (2008) note that students could be more successful if they are able to make connections between what they know and what

they are learning by relating classroom experiences to their own lives. These meaningful experiences are authentic because they represent a reality for students. In other words, classroom experiences would mirror that which occurs in the learner's world. Authentic experiences would be especially important for ELs because they are learning to attach labels and terms in English, to things already familiar to them.

Efforts to welcome, understand and affirm all students and to treat their cultural and linguistic backgrounds as equally valid and significant should be reflected in every facet within the school environment. This approach is especially important when educators are addressing the academic and social needs of a diverse student population. Effective instructional practices that are culturally responsive, such as those used by ESL teachers, builds upon the cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ways of making meaning, and prior knowledge that all children bring to the classroom. Such instruction also takes into consideration, the role of culture in language and literacy learning. Understanding and accepting various cultures and languages that are represented in the school community will prompt educational leaders and teachers to adopt practices for teaching and learning that will encourage and support student achievement for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs.

### **Possibilities for an Integrated Culturally Responsive Instructional Framework for ELs**

#### **Similarities and Differences among Effective Instructional Practices at the Secondary Level**

Upon review of the literature, it is apparent that, in general, effective instructional practices at the secondary level—differentiated instruction, multicultural education,

culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs specifically—have similar characteristics. For example, all of these practices are student-centered, encourage practices that are responsive and relevant to the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of students, encourage instruction for students, promote the use of cooperative learning groups that engage students in collaborative discussions about the content to promote learning, and support the use of students' primary language as a resource for learning.

In addition to the similarities among differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs, there are distinct differences. For example, unlike the other teaching practices mentioned, the instruction for ELs has a specific focus on English language development (Tinajero et al., 2010). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and effective teaching practices for ELs promote sociocultural consciousness among teachers. Whereas, differentiated instruction does not explicitly promote socioculturally-centered teaching practices. In order to develop sociocultural consciousness, teachers must look beyond individual students and families to understand inequities in society (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These teachers understand that in all social systems, some positions are accorded greater status than others, and such status differentiation gives rise to differential access to power. These teachers are also aware of the role that schools play in both perpetuating and challenging those inequities (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

ELs are a rapidly growing population in public schools. As a result, many mainstream teachers find themselves working with students whose native language is not

English. In the county in which I currently work, these students report for one to two periods daily to ESL classes. However, they spend the majority of their school day with subject area teachers in mainstream classrooms. In order to advance academically, ELs are under pressure to not only catch up to their native English-speaking peers but to also meet state standards and pass required standardized assessments. Therefore, it is imperative that all teachers develop culturally sensitive and language appropriate instruction, similar to that of effective ESL teachers, so that all students can succeed.

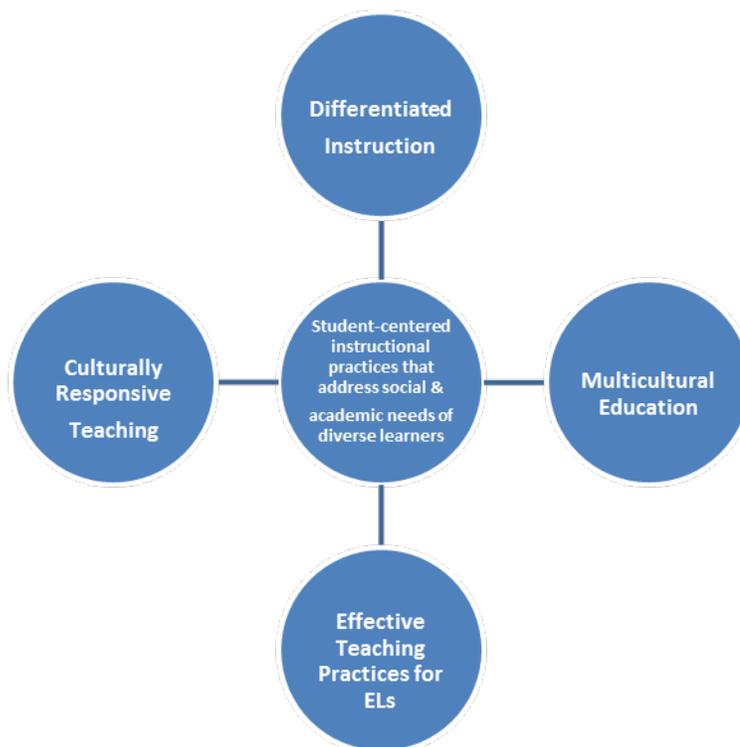
I have identified similarities and differences of teaching practices that according to scholars are responsive in meeting the needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 2007). In addition to this information, Table 3 provides an overview of additional commonalities and distinctions among these culturally responsive practices.

While there are differences inherent in these practices, common elements are numerous. Integrating many of the components of these practices could result in the development of an instructional framework for secondary inclusive classrooms that places the characteristics of individual students, including ELs, at the center of teaching and learning. This integrative instructional framework can also be used as a learning and assessment tool for educational leaders for the observation and evaluation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Thus, the vast literature that I have reviewed can help inform educators about how to move towards what I'm calling an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework that not only incorporates DI, ME and CRT but is sensitive to the needs of ELs and more customized for secondary students (see Figure 1).

**Table 3****Similarities and Differences among Teaching Practices**

<b>Teaching Practices</b>	<b>Differentiated Instruction</b>	<b>Culturally Responsive Teaching</b>	<b>Multicultural Education</b>	<b>Effective Instructional Practices for ELs</b>
Instruction is student-centered	*	*	*	*
Instruction is culturally relevant & meaningful for students		*	*	*
Prior knowledge & experiences of students is a catalyst for understanding	*	*	*	*
Promotes critical thinking	*	*	*	*
Content represents diverse populations	*	*	*	*
Promotes collaborative learning	*	*	*	*
Use of examples & illustrations based on student interest	*	*	*	*
Provides high-quality equitable education	*	*	*	*
Teachers are socioculturally conscious		*	*	*
Focus is on English language development				*
Validates the importance of languages other than English	*	*	*	*

\*Indicates a characteristic of teaching practices.



**Figure 1. An integrated culturally responsive instructional framework.**

### **Significance for Educational Leaders**

According to scholars such as Klotz (2006), Gay (2000, 2002) and Montgomery (2001), in order to create learning environments that are culturally sensitive, schools must set goals for success. These goals for culturally competent schools are to establish settings in which all students and families are made to feel welcome; are engaged in learning; and are included in all activities, curricula, and services. As the educational leaders of their schools, principals must collaborate with members of the school staff, families, and the community in order to accomplish goals that include promoting behaviors that are pro-social and closing achievements gaps.

Necochea and Cline (2000) assert that for school leaders, articulating a compelling vision of educating all students with dignity and respect is important for it enables a school to develop guidelines and directions in how to foster the right to learn, hope, determine, and dream for all students, including ELs. Cooper (2009) added that due to demographic changes, students need leaders and advocates who are prepared to be cultural change agents—educators who possess the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to ensure that curriculum, teaching and learning, student engagement, and family partnerships are responsive to the needs of individuals who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

A culturally-competent school is defined as one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are meaningful and relevant for students of different cultures (Klotz, 2006). In *A More Perfect Union: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children*, the National Association of State Boards of Education (2002) speaks about culturally-competent schools. The report describes the increasing diversity among school children in the U.S., the challenges and opportunities that diverse populations present, and the need to teach all students to high standards while providing a common set of core values. Furthermore, the report encourages state policymakers to counter racism and inequity in their education systems through the use of practices that are culturally competent. The report offered the following recommendations for school leaders:

- Use high academic standards as the foundation of instruction for all students
- Adopt a curriculum that fosters cultural competency

- Model respect for students' identities and welcome a diverse community to participate in schools
- Acknowledge the diverse learning styles of students
- Ensure qualified personnel who are representative of the ethnic and cultural makeup of the students being served

Klotz (2006) and Richards, Brown, and Forde (2004) maintain that issues regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students must be examined within the context of environmental factors including prior educational experiences, instruction, second language development for ELs, and culture. They recommend that integrating culturally responsive practices in: staff development; early intervention and assessment; instruction and curriculum; and community involvement are also needed.

I suggest that educational leaders who support teachers in implementing the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework can make major progress in meeting the report's recommended goals.

By defining the challenges of educating students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds as an opportunity for teaching/educator learning rather than problems, educational leaders can begin to shape thinking and collaborative efforts among the members of the school community in positive ways. Additionally, if educational leaders integrating various elements of practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs, schools can have the opportunity to create an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework for teaching that would provide all students with the

chance to receive a high-quality and equitable education. It should be noted that I drew upon the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework to analyze the data for my study as evident in Chapters IV, V, and VI. These types of practices would also encourage educational leaders and their staff members to promote a climate within the school community that acknowledges, appreciates, and respects cultural and linguistic diversity.

### **Implications for Needed Research**

Upon reviewing the literature regarding effective teaching practices for ELs, I discovered the voices of ESL teachers were not included in the discourse. ESL teachers are charged with the responsibility for educating language minority students on a daily basis, yet their perceptions regarding the implementation as well as the outcomes of their practices appear to have been disregarded in the literature.

The insight of ESL teachers regarding practices that have been most successful in educating ELs would not only be beneficial for other ESL teachers at varying levels, but it would also be helpful for mainstream teachers who have the responsibility for teaching content-area subjects to culturally and linguistically diverse students on a daily basis. Furthermore, the information provided by ESL teachers regarding effective instructional practices for ELs can assist educational leaders in creating culturally competent schools that set goals for student success and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures.

The absence of the voices of ESL teachers in the literature regarding effective practices for ELs, as well as the limited amount of information related to ESL instruction

in secondary schools, is just one of the most compelling arguments for the need of a qualitative study that includes teachers' perspectives, such as the one I conducted.

In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the conceptual framework that I used in (a) assessing the practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting; and (b) determining the extent to which these teachers implement the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework I outlined.

### **Conceptual Framework—Part 2: Assessing Culturally Responsive Teaching through a Sociocultural Lens**

The conceptual framework that I used in assessing the practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting was informed by the literature on sociocultural theory. This theory was helpful for me in developing a conceptual framework to organize my understanding of what ESL teachers think, know, and do in order to provide the best educational experience possible that is responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of their students. It also helped to further consider the possibilities of developing an Integrated Culturally Responsive Instructional Framework.

#### **An Overview of Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory is founded on the premise that learning is socially mediated and grounded in specific cultural-historical contexts (Monzo & Rueda, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning takes place as individuals engage in culturally-meaningful productive activity with the assistance of someone who is more competent. This presumes that the task is completed through collaboration, transforming participation, as the learner gains competence and ultimately, the ability to take on greater responsibility for the more cognitively-demanding portions of the task (Rogoff, 1995).

Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) asserted that the learner must be participating at a level that produces learning and stimulates development. This *zone of proximal development* is the range between the level of difficulty at which the learner can perform independently and the highest level at which they can perform with assistance. It should be noted that continuous assessment of the learner's performance is vitally important to ensure responsive assistance from the teacher and in some instances, assistance from more competent peers (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

As learners move through the zone of proximal development, they become more confident and independent and are able to rely less on others for assistance. At the center of this transformation is the development of the tools that mediate the higher mental functions of which only human beings are capable (Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Mediation is dependent upon a shared understanding of the tool, such as language, and an acceptance of the cultural values that are embedded within the tool (Werstch, 1998).

### **A Conceptual Framework for Sociocultural Practices**

The type of practices previously mentioned are guided by several principles. According to Scribner and Reyes (1999) the first principle of sociocultural theory asserts that development and learning take place within a sociocultural context that is, in part, defined by the teachers and the students within the classroom. Two significant aspects of the classroom's sociocultural context are the developmental level (i.e., cognitive, social, etc.) of students, and the mental model the teacher holds about teaching, and in particular, working with students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

The second principle maintains that social interaction is crucial to students' development and learning in the classroom. One manifestation of this is the practice of *scaffolded learning* in the classroom. For example, a form of scaffolding occurs when a more expert learner with a particular competence works with a novice learner who has yet to acquire that competence (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). In the classroom, teachers scaffold instruction when they provide substantial amounts of support and assistance in the earliest stages of teaching a new concept or strategy, and then gradually decrease the amount of support as the learners gain experience through multiple opportunities for practice (Vacca, 2002). Based on the zone of proximal development first described by developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), scaffolding provides temporary support to the learner based on the notion that what a learner cannot do without assistance today, they can do alone tomorrow (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

Echevarria et al. (2008) found that two kinds of scaffolding can be used effectively with ELs. One is *verbal scaffolding*, in which teachers, cognizant of students' existing levels of language development, use prompting, questioning, and elaboration to facilitate students' movement to higher levels of language proficiency, comprehension, and thinking. Effective teacher-student interaction promotes confidence when it is geared to a student's language competence (Echevarria et al., 2008). An example of verbal scaffolding is: paraphrasing—restating a student's response in order to model correct English usage (Echevarria et al., 2008).

The second form of scaffolding that can be effectively used with ELs is *procedural scaffolding*. An example of this type of practice is: Pairing or grouping

students for reading activities, with more experienced readers assisting those with less experience (Nagel, 2001).

Additionally, teachers can use *instructional scaffolding* to enhance student learning. For example, graphic organizers can be used as a pre-reading tool to prepare ELs for the content of a textbook chapter. The organizer can also be utilized to illustrate a chapter's text structure, such as comparative or chronological (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008). A graphic organizer is a diagram that provides conceptual clarity for information that is difficult for a student to grasp. It helps to identify key content concepts and make relationships among them. Graphic organizers can also provide students with visual clues they can use to supplement written or spoken words that may be difficult to understand (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002).

Rodriguez et al. (2004) added that while scaffolding is usually applied toward intellectual skills and competencies, it takes on an additional meaning in the culturally relevant classroom. Students and teachers, who have varying degrees of competency in one or more cultural orientations, can gain insight and greater competency in each of the cultural orientations that are present in the classroom. Scaffolding promotes social interaction as well as the development of multicultural competencies within a classroom that is culturally and linguistically diverse as it supports academic development for students (Rodriguez et al., 2004).

The third principle of sociocultural theory maintains that development and learning do not occur in a static environment (Rodriguez et al., 2004). In other words, development and learning occur within dynamic and ever-changing social and political

contexts. Social interaction among individuals continuously transforms the sociocultural context of the classroom. Classrooms that are culturally responsive provide ongoing opportunities for students and teachers to interact with one another. These interactions would allow ESL teachers with opportunities to obtain considerable knowledge of who their students are culturally and developmentally. Just as significant, teachers would have the opportunity to address the political ideologies that shape and re-shape their students' academic and social lives. For example, students would be made conscious of the social and political marginalization of people of color that have resulted in their underrepresentation in higher education and in the more rigorous courses or high academic tracks in public schools. As a result, students would be able to view their efforts to develop as scholars and leaders as a means to transform not only themselves, but their communities (Moses & Cobb, 2001).

In addition to the three foundational principles that have been described regarding the importance of sociocultural context, social interaction, and the dynamic aspect of learning, the fourth principle of sociocultural theory can be seen more specifically in teaching practices that are considered to be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of students (Rodriguez et al., 2004). The first of these constructs proposes that culturally mediated activities are essential to effective teaching. Culturally mediated activities are characterized by the use of symbols, thoughts, cognitive processes, and social contexts derived from an individual's culture. Teachers encourage students to engage in culturally mediated activities that are specific to their real-life experiences. Two examples of culturally mediated activities are the use of an EL's primary language—language being a

symbolic system that transmits culture, and the use of social structures such as collaborative learning, which mirror familial and community values of sharing and helping. At the same time, students participate in culturally mediated activities derived from the teacher's and other students' experiences. The result is a process in which teachers and students develop a variety of behavioral, cognitive, and cultural orientations (Rodriguez et al., 2004).

### **Key Themes—Sociocultural Theory**

Overall, the characteristics of sociocultural theory are reflective of the practices discussed not only in the literature related to differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching, but also those addressed in the literature regarding the practices of ESL teachers.

One recurring theme indicated that teachers should promote collaborative learning in classrooms with diverse learners. According to scholars (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), pairing or grouping novice learners with more expert learners in a classroom that was culturally and/or linguistically diverse could result in novice learners gaining greater insight, competency and confidence in acquiring academic skills. This type of collaboration can also lead to learners and teachers gaining greater cultural competency of people who are different from themselves through ongoing social interaction (Rodriguez et al., 2004). Another theme inherent in sociocultural theory stressed the importance of teachers exposing students to the political and social marginalization of minorities that has resulted in practices that would be deemed as socially unjust within institutions such as public schools (Moses & Cobb, 2001). For example, in the case of

ELs, teachers could raise the consciousness of students by making them aware of the contradictory implementation strategies for California's Proposition 227 by engaging in dialogue that focuses on its impact on teacher beliefs as well as classroom practices in schools.

Proposition 227 was a ballot measure approved by voters in California that effectively ended bilingual education programs in the state (with some exceptions) and replaced programs with the structured English-immersion model. The intention of the bill was to educate ELs in a rapid, one-year program. The proposition was controversial because of its close proximity to heated political issues including race, immigration, and poverty (Stritikus & English, 2010).

In addition, Rodriguez et al. (2004) found that sociocultural theory emphasizes the significance of students and teachers engaging in mediated activities that specifically focused on the language, culture, and personal experiences of students. These types of activities resulted in the acknowledgement and acceptance of individuals' cultural and linguistic differences and also promoted collaborative learning which resembled familial and community values of helping and sharing.

### **Academic and Social Challenges Explored through a Sociocultural Theoretical Lens**

Considering the effective practices of culturally responsive English as a Second Language teachers in a high school setting through the lens of sociocultural theory is very appropriate. The effective instructional practices described above are aligned with the principles of sociocultural theory that I discovered while conducting my study of ESL teachers in the high school setting. These practices included but were not limited to: (a)

including students' real-life experiences and native languages in the classroom, (b) implementing curricula that values students' cultures, (c) promoting cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups, (d) implementing writing assignments that are reflective of the cultural backgrounds of students, and (e) engaging students in dialogue that promotes the use of critical thinking skills.

These are the characteristics that informed my conceptual framework regarding behaviors that I observed and assessed through teacher-student interaction as well as through the instructional practices that occurred in the classroom setting. I also discovered that these same characteristics emerged through the stories that the ESL teachers and student participants had the opportunity to share through in-depth observations and interviews that I conducted during the study. I describe my qualitative case study research design in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Overview of the Study**

I conducted a qualitative, collective case study involving high school ESL teachers at two sites within a local school district. The research questions for the study were: (a) How do culturally responsive ESL teachers best implement effective instructional practices in the high school setting?; (b) How do effective culturally responsive ESL teachers perceive and address the academic and social challenges of students through their practices?; and (c) How can lessons learned from ESL teachers inform the practices of educational leaders? The research questions restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms and illustrate my interest in assessing the effective practices of ESL teachers in the high school setting and how those practices can result in educational leaders helping to create learning environments that are culturally competent. My research was grounded in general qualitative research principles and specific case study design practices.

Qualitative research involves close attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and places a study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, the participants, and natural settings. Qualitative researchers have the tendency to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem that is being studied. This up close information collected by actually talking directly to people and

seeing them act and behave within their context is a significant characteristic of qualitative research. In the natural setting, the researchers engage in face-to-face interaction over an extensive period of time (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Prior to beginning the research process, I was required to obtain permission from the Research and Evaluation Department for the local school district to conduct research at two high schools. Additionally, I had to obtain permission from two high school principals (one principal per high school) as well as two ESL teachers (one teacher per high school) to conduct the study. Once I had obtained written permission from the Research and Evaluation Department for the local school district, I then submitted my application to conduct research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving approval from IRB and my dissertation committee, I met with both principals and received their written consent to conduct research at their respective high schools. I then contacted other adult participants (i.e., ESL teachers, LEP Program Manager) to discuss the study and to develop a schedule for interviews and/or observations.

My qualitative study was interview-based and observation-based, and it was also informed by relevant documents. First, I collected pertinent information during the study by interviewing the two high school ESL teachers in order to highlight perspectives of their experiences as ESL teachers and how they use practices in the classroom to best meet the academic and social needs of their students. I also interviewed English learners assigned to those teachers' classrooms in order to illuminate the voices of students with respect to their perceptions of their teachers' practices, and so they could share

perspectives of their experiences in the ESL classroom. Interviews were also conducted with the LEP Program Manager for the school district, the schools' principals, and the curriculum coordinators. These individuals were able to provide insight into the best practices and expectations of the district regarding culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level.

In addition to interviews, observations of the ESL teachers were conducted during instructional time in their classrooms. Conducting a portion of my study within the classroom setting allowed me the opportunity to observe students and teachers in an environment that was both comfortable and familiar for participants, resulting in interaction that was spontaneous.

Third, I gathered and reviewed documents that: (a) offered an indication of culturally responsive teaching such as student work samples completed by the students of each ESL teacher studied in English language arts, math, science, and social studies; and (b) state, district, and school documents that shed light on the instructional expectations that the ESL teachers had established for their students. The state, district, and school documents included: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners in Grades 6-12, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs) test score data, report card data, attendance data, and the Title III/LEP Handbook for the school district.

Once the data were collected, I analyzed the information and looked for emergent themes that could inform educators about the characteristics that exemplify the effective

practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting. Once I identified commonalities among the ESL teachers, I compiled information related to their practices and quotes by themes. Finally, I interpreted the information obtained through data collection and incorporated my insight into the stories I share about the study participants (e.g. ESL teachers and their students).

### **Designing a Qualitative Case Study**

Creswell's (2007) working definition of qualitative research emphasizes the design of research and the use of distinct approaches to inquiry. He states:

*Qualitative research* begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (p. 37)

Notice that in this definition Creswell (2007) places emphasis on the process of research as streaming from philosophical assumptions to worldviews, through a theoretical lens, and on the procedures included in studying human or social problems. Then, a framework exists for the procedures—the approach to inquiry, such as case study research. Although Stake (1995) noted that case study research was not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied (i.e., a case within a bounded system), others present it as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005;

Yin, 2003). Creswell (2007) views it as a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of inquiry.

Specifically, case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over a period of time through comprehensive, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents) and then reports a case *description* and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

A case study is a good approach when the researcher has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases (Creswell, 2007). Cases may involve an individual, several individuals, a program, an event, or an activity. Investigators must determine what type of case study is most useful or promising. The case can be single or collective, multi-sited or within-site, focused on a case or an issue. (intrinsic, instrumental) (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). For example, several programs (a multi-site study) or a single program (a within-site study) may be selected for investigation (Creswell, 2007).

In addition, Creswell (2007) found that various types of qualitative case studies are not only distinguished by the size and type of the bounded case, but also by the intent of the case analysis. Three variations are noted in terms of intent: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) noted that in a *single instrumental case study*, the inquirer focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue. In a *collective case*

*study* (or multiple case study), the one issue or concern is again selected; however, the inquirer selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue. The researcher might choose for study, various programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site. Often, the researcher uses purposeful sampling, meaning the researcher selects individuals and sites for the study since they can purposely inform him or her of the research problem and phenomenon of the study to select cases to show various perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2003) also maintained that a multiple case study design uses the logic of replication in which the researcher replicates the same inquiry procedures for each case.

As a general rule, qualitative researchers are unwilling to generalize from one case to another since the contexts of cases differ. To best generalize, however, the researcher needs to choose representative cases in the qualitative study. The final type of case study design is *intrinsic case study* in which the focus is on the case itself (e.g., evaluating a program, studying a student who is experiencing academic difficulty) because the case illustrates an unusual or unique situation (Creswell, 2007).

### **Sampling Process**

For the purposes of this study, I used a collective case study design. This type of case study design was well-suited for my study since I assessed the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at two high schools within the same district. So, my cases consisted of two culturally responsive ESL teachers that were bounded by two high school settings. The unit of analysis was the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting. In addition, I applied the purposeful sampling

and generalization principles by assessing the practices of ESL teachers at the high school level who met the criteria for what constitutes culturally responsive ESL teachers based on the effective instructional practices I described in Chapter II. I consulted with the LEP Program Manager for the school district for recommendations of teachers who met the criteria. The selection of the teachers for the study was also based on recommendations received from other ESL teachers in the same district. I also had the opportunity to conduct impromptu observations in both ESL teachers' classrooms prior to their selection. Those unplanned observations provided me with a picture of the ESL teachers' practices and how they aligned with the criteria of what is described as culturally responsive instructional practices in the scholarly literature. Additionally, the selection of one White female ESL teacher and one Latino male ESL teacher allowed me the opportunity to assess the practices of ESL teachers who were diverse. The inclusion of two ESL teachers from two high schools in the same district for my study allowed various perspectives to be shared regarding effective teaching practices that are responsive to the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. It should be noted that in order to maintain anonymity, proper names of study participants and locations are pseudonyms.

### **Research Setting**

The setting for the research study included two public high schools for grades 9-12. Those schools were Edwards High School and Grant High School. It should be noted that at the high-school level, that many teachers defer to each other as experts in their particular subject area (e.g., English, math, science, social studies). As a result, ESL

teachers are viewed by many colleagues as having expertise regarding issues that are specifically related to students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. However, all educators within the high-school setting have the responsibility of teaching diverse students, including ELs. This means that all staff should be adequately prepared to address the academic and social needs of these diverse learners.

Both schools referenced in this study are located in the small town of Kent, North Carolina. The current population of Kent is estimated at 22,965. According to the town's Chamber of Commerce, many people are attracted to the community as a result of the town's location very close to metropolitan cities. Additionally, Kent has a diverse population of residents that include: White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian (Kent Chamber of Commerce, 2012<sup>3</sup>). The town has experienced significant changes in the downtown area. In the mid-1990s, Kent's main street was a two-lane country road. Today, there are several busy shopping centers with well-known retailers and restaurants located on that same street. The town has continued to grow rapidly despite a passion to preserve sites with historical significance (Kent Chamber of Commerce, 2012).

### **Secondary Education in Weston Public Schools**

The high schools chosen for this study, Edwards High School and Grant High school, are a part of North Carolina's Weston Public School district. These are the schools in which the two ESL teachers who participated in this research study worked.

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<sup>3</sup> Kent Chamber of Commerce is a pseudonym. The full citation was provided to the dissertation committee chair. The reference was amended to protect the anonymity of the reference.

In addition to both schools boasting a diverse student population, the school campuses are also similar in style. The campuses are laid out in a college-campus style with numerous small buildings rather than one large building. Both schools have two gymnasiums, auditorium, cafeteria, courtyard, office building, and a library.

During 2011-2012, Edwards High School had a staff of 138 and student enrollment of 1817. The racial makeup of the student population consisted of: White, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander. The principal of the school is a White female with an advanced degree in educational leadership. She has served as the principal of Edwards High School for 11 years.

The principal of Grant High School is a White male. He holds a master's degree in school administration and is currently pursuing a specialist degree in educational leadership at a local university. He has served as the principal of the school since 2009. The school had a staff of 94 during 2011-2012, with student enrollment of 1620. The racial makeup of the students at Grant High school during 2011-2012 consisted of: White, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander.

It should be noted that ESL teachers in the Weston Public Schools are required to use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) as a means of instruction for ELs. SIOP is a model of sheltered instruction that is designed to make grade-level academic content understandable for ELs while at the same time developing their English language (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). While ESL teachers are required to participate in training for SIOP, principals have the option of requiring other members of their staff to participate in professional development related to SIOP.

### **Data Collection**

Case study research requires the collection of pertinent data. The data collection in case study research is usually extensive, using multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, and documents. For example, Yin (2003) suggests six types of information to collect: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. Though Yin (2003) identified six sources of evidence for case study research, the use of each might require various skills from the investigator. Not all sources are necessary in every case study, but the significance of multiple sources of data to the reliability of the study is well established (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). As mentioned, I considered the following sources in my study: interviews, direct observations, and documents. No single source of evidence has a complete advantage over the others; rather they might be complimentary and can be used in tandem. Therefore, a case study should use as many sources as are pertinent to the study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

### **Interviews**

I conducted interviews with study participants at each high school and at the administrative center for the school district. These individuals included: two ESL teachers (one ESL teacher per high school), six EL students (three EL students per high school), one LEP Program Manager for the school district, two principals (one principal per high school), and two curriculum coordinators (one curriculum coordinator per high school). Interviewees were selected using purposeful sampling. Up to 90 minutes was allotted for each adult interviewee, and 20-45 minutes was allotted for each EL student,

depending on the participants' availability and interest in sharing extensive information. At the conclusion of the study, I conducted a one-hour follow-up interview with the ESL teachers to allow them an opportunity to reflect on their practice and to share my preliminary themes. At the conclusion of the interview, I requested that the teachers provide their perceptions of the validity of my findings and interpretations related to my preliminary analyses. The total hours of interview data was 15 hours.

The participants for my sample were selected based on the information needed using the interview approach to inquiry. Teachers and students shared perspectives regarding their lived experiences inside and outside of the ESL classroom and the LEP Program Manager provided insight into the best practices and expectations of the district regarding culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level. Additionally, the principals shared their perspectives regarding the school climate and how it impacts the social and academic development of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Furthermore, the curriculum coordinators provided insight regarding curriculum development and teacher training that can introduce new methods and procedures that improve the quality of instruction for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs. The information obtained through these interviews afforded me with insight to describe multiple perspectives related to the study (Creswell, 2007; Weiss, 1994). However, the ESL teacher data took priority over the data related to other participants since it was the culturally responsive effective practices of these teachers that were being assessed for the study.

Interviewing is a significant means for data collection because, as Weiss (1994) noted, interviewing provides us with a window on the past. Through interviewing, we can also learn about settings that will otherwise be closed to us (e.g. the classroom setting, exclusive organizations, the private lives of families/individuals).

There are basically two types of interviews: (a) surveys, which are used primarily for quantitative research and feature close-ended questions which can be converted into statistical data; and (b) qualitative interviews that are replete with open-ended questions, whose questions take on the form of a narrative by the respondent regarding his or her experiences, perceptions, and opinions (Tellis, 1997; Weiss, 1994). For the purposes of my study, qualitative interviews featuring open-ended questions were used. Questions focused on: (a) ESL teachers' perceptions of the academic and social challenges that ELs encounter in the high school setting; (b) instructional and curricular strategies and practices that ESL teachers find to be most beneficial in meeting the needs of ELs and the extent to which those strategies and practices related to the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework I proposed in Chapter II; (c) how ESL teachers' cultural backgrounds might impact their views of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students as having deficits and/or assets; (d) ELs' perceptions of the academic and social challenges they encounter in the high school setting; (e) ELs' perceptions of the instructional and curricular practices used by ESL teachers in meeting their academic and social needs; (f) ELs' perceptions of the benefits of an education as viewed and determined by American society compared to educational norms in their native country; and (g) policies, procedures, and standards that are in place at the school and district level

to ensure that the educational needs of ELs are being met. Many of these policies, procedures, and standards were evident from interviewee feedback and from the documents I reviewed, which are later discussed.

An interview protocol with open-ended questions and ample space to write between questions to record the interviewee's comments was used (Creswell, 2007; Tellis, 1997). I also tape recorded sessions and took detailed notes. Taping was advisable because it would be impossible for the interviewer to record every word on a notepad. Note-taking cannot account for pauses in the dialogue or allow the investigator the opportunity to concentrate on the body language or facial expressions of the subject (Creswell, 2007; Weiss, 1994). It should be noted that I transcribed all interviews. Transcripts were completed through the use of audiotapes and detailed notes. I found that completing the transcripts on my own allowed me the opportunity to reflect in-depth on the perspectives that were shared by study participants. Additionally, I made photo copies of all transcripts and filed them in a secured location for future reference (see Appendixes A–F for examples of the interview protocols that were used in the study).

An interview can be a valuable means to gather information; however, it should be noted that if the researcher does not take the time to establish a friendly rapport with the respondent, the subject may be reluctant to talk. I established a friendly rapport with the study participants by sticking to the questions, completing the interview within the specified amount of time, being respectful and courteous, and by being nonjudgmental.

## Observations

According to Merriam (2009) observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observations take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of a location designated for interviewing. Second, observational data are representative of a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) added that observing in a setting is a unique skill that requires addressing concerns such as deception of the individuals being interviewed, managing the impression that participants might have on the interviewer, and the potential marginality of the researcher in an unfamiliar setting. Similar to interviewing, observations have a series of steps that include designing an observational protocol as a method for recording notes in the field. The observational protocol should include both descriptive and reflective notes (i.e., notes regarding the researcher's experiences, hunches, and learnings) (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) added that the information obtained using the protocol, can be useful in developing the chronology of the manner in which the activities occurred during the observation. Merriam (2009) maintained that field notes based on observation need to be in a format that will allow the researcher to find desired information easily. Notes usually begin with the time, location, and the purpose of the observation. Field notes should be highly descriptive. In other words, the notes should provide enough detail so that readers feel as if they are there, seeing what the observer sees (Merriam, 2009). See Appendix G for an example of the observational protocol that was used in the study.

During the study, I conducted eight observations in the classrooms of the two ESL teachers totaling four observations per teacher. During the observations, I conducted myself as a non-participant observer and maintained hand-written field notes that documented the teaching and learning that occurred within the classroom as well as the interaction between the teacher and students. The observations were one hour and 35 minutes in length—the length of one class period, totaling approximately 13 hours of observation data. This allowed me the opportunity to observe the transition of students and teachers at the beginning and conclusion of class sessions.

During observations, I recorded aspects such as the physical setting, particular events and activities, and my own reactions. Following each observation, I took the time to reflect on the events that took place during the class period and wrote down notes regarding the practices of the ESL teachers and assessed if they aligned with my conceptual framework. Additionally, I used a rubric that I developed containing key components that are indicative of the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework for ELs that I proposed in Chapter II to assess the practices of ESL teachers in the high school setting. Such components will relate to differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective instructional practices for ELs. See Appendix H for an example of the rubric that was used in the study.

### **Documents**

Documents for a case study can include letters, memoranda, agendas, study reports or any items that could add to the data base. The validity of the documents should

be cautiously reviewed so as to avoid including inaccurate data being included in the data base (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). One of the most significant uses of documents is to corroborate evidence gathered from other sources. The potential for over-reliance on documents as evidence in case studies has been criticized. Yin (2003) warns there could be risk of this occurrence if the researcher is inexperienced and mistakenly identifies some types of documents as the absolute truth.

For my case study, the documents that I included are first, student work products. Student work products provided insight into the academic progress of ELs regarding the impact of ESL teachers' practices. Second, World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners in Grades 6-12. WIDA's vision of language proficiency encompasses both academic and social contexts tied to schooling, particularly to standards, curriculum, and instruction, especially WIDA's ACCESS for ELLs (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2007). Third, WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) test score data which is the assessment used in the state of North Carolina for the initial identification and placement of students identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Fourth, the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners, which is a scale test that addresses the English language development *standards* that form the core of the WIDA Consortium's approach to instructing and testing ELs. I also reviewed additional pertinent documents that helped me address my research questions such as report card data and attendance data. Although I had planned to review school records documenting the educational background of ELs

and their native country of origin, I was unable to do so. This information is confidential and is located in students' cumulative school files. Since I am not an employee of the high schools selected for the study, I was unable to access the information. Instead, this information was reported to me by the ESL teachers and the ESL students during the scheduled interview sessions. In addition, I reviewed the Title III/LEP Handbook for the school district.

A review of report card data provided information related to the academic progress of ELs and indicated if the practices of ESL teachers had a positive impact on student achievement. In addition, I reviewed attendance profile data that provided information that can signify the level of importance that ELs place on obtaining a high school education and the benefits that schooling can afford them. The information regarding ELs' native country was important because in order to create the best educational programs for ELs, educators must understand diverse backgrounds. These learners bring to the classroom, a vast range of educational and cultural experiences as well as significant linguistic differences. These characteristics have implications for instruction, assessment, and program design. Once educators have determined students' backgrounds and abilities in their native language, they can implement effective techniques and materials in their instructional practices (Echevarria et al., 2008; Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999). A review of the Title III/LEP Handbook for the school district provided information regarding how school staff must comply with state and federal guidelines while serving EL students.

Overall, the collection of these written data provided me with an opportunity to review documentation that can determine if the practices of ESL teachers, as well as the policies and procedures of the school district, have a positive impact on the academic performance of ELs in the high school setting. WIDA test score data and ACCESS test score data provided information regarding the academic ability level for ELs and has implications for ESL teachers when developing curriculum and instruction for students. I spent seven hours gathering and reviewing relevant documents. So all together, I devoted a total of 35 hours to data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Analytical approaches for case studies can include a *holistic analysis* of the entire case or an *embedded analysis* of a specific aspect of the case. Through this collection of data, a detailed description of the case emerges in which the inquirer details aspects such as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-by-day rendering of the activities of the case. After the description is provided, the researcher might focus on some key issues or *analysis of themes* for understanding the complexity of the case. One strategy will be for the researcher to identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2003). This analysis is rich in the *context of the case* or setting in which the case is presented. When multiple cases are selected, a typical format is for the inquirer to first provide a detailed description of the case and themes within the case, known as a *within-case analysis*, followed by a thematic case analysis across the cases, known as a *cross-case analysis*, as well as *assertions* or an interpretation of the meaning of the case (Creswell, 2007).

In the final interpretive phase of the study, the researcher provides a written report of the meaning of the case, whether that meaning comes from learning about the issue of the case (an instrumental case) or learning about an unusual situation (an intrinsic case). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, this phase constitutes the *lessons learned* from the case.

In the following section, I will discuss the approach that I used throughout my study in order to assess the quality of culturally responsive instruction for ELs in the high school setting.

### **Approach to ESL Instruction Data Analysis**

As explained earlier, case studies can embed a *holistic analysis* of an entire case or an *embedded analysis* of a specific aspect of the case (Yin, 2003). For the purposes of my study, holistic analysis was used and my unit of analysis was the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting.

#### **Holistic Analysis**

Case study analysis generally involves a spiraling or cyclical process that progresses from more general to more specific conclusions (Creswell, 2007; Silverman, 2000). Data analysis may begin informally during observations or interviews and continue during transcription when recurring themes, patterns, and categories become apparent. Once written documents are available, analysis will involve the coding of data and the identification of prominent points or structures. Coding techniques are used to help organize and analyze the overwhelming amount of data collected during qualitative research. Having additional codes is highly favorable (but less common in qualitative

research than in quantitative research), especially in structural analyses of discourse, texts, syntactic structures, or interaction patterns involving high inference categories ultimately leading to the quantification of types of items within categories (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Data reduction may include quantification or other means of data aggregation and reduction, including the use of data matrices, tables, and figures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purposes of my study, coding was used to help organize data that had been collected, based on themes, and patterns that were identified during analysis. The information obtained through a review of the literature as well as my conceptual framework were used to inform me as to what behaviors I should expect to observe regarding the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers in the high school setting.

### **Interpretation**

Establishing the significance or importance of findings or themes is critical. The discussion should ideally link these themes explicitly to larger theoretical and practical issues. However, generalizations regarding populations are not desirable or appropriate in most case studies. Investigators should be cautious about drawing unwarranted inferences due to small sample size particularly if the case is not typical of other cases. Researchers frequently propose models or principles based on their results to be supported, tested, compared, or discredited by themselves or others in subsequent research (Schmidt, 1983; Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

Data may be analyzed and interpreted through various ideological lenses (e.g. positivist, critical; Duff, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), although descriptive/

interpretive approaches are still most common. Researchers must provide sufficient evidence for their claims or interpretations in order to make them credible, clear, and convincing to others. Investigators must consider alternate explanations, and account for results that may be contrary to the themes that emerge or for differences among triangulated sources. In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Typically, this process involves corroborating different sources to shed light on a perspective or theme (Creswell, 2007). It might also be worthwhile for the researcher to consult study participants for their interpretation of data or findings to ensure its credibility of the accounts that have been documented for interviews and observations, a process called member checking (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The follow-up interviews I conducted with ESL teachers at the conclusion of data collection, provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their practice. At the conclusion of the interviews, I requested that the teachers provide their perceptions and interpretations of the data that was documented for preliminary analyses. This type of feedback received from the teachers increased the validity of my findings and interpretations. I also contacted study participants through written communication to provide them with an opportunity to review transcripts from their individual interview sessions. An examination of the transcripts by study participants and the feedback that

they provide would ensure the accuracy of data collected during interviews. I was interested in the views of the participants regarding preliminary analyses as well as what may be missing from the data that had been collected. Indeed, according to Stake (1995), study participants should “play a major role as well as acting in case study” research. They should be requested to examine rough drafts of the researcher’s work and to provide alternative language, “critical observations or interpretations” (p. 115).

Triangulation and member checking practices help ensure a study’s validity. Creswell (2007) considered *validation* in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the *accuracy* of the findings, as best described by the investigator and the study participants. This view also suggests that any report of research is a representation by the author. Validation is also viewed as a distinct strength of qualitative methodology in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed rich description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study add accuracy and value to a study.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural and linguistic diversity among the student population in schools continues to increase at a rapid pace. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers and educational leaders implement practices and create schools that are culturally competent in order to meet the social and academic needs of students. I decided to focus my study on ESL teachers, since they have the responsibility for educating one of the most diverse populations of students within the school community. As a result, they have the challenge of implementing effective practices that are culturally responsive.

By focusing on the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers through qualitative research, I was able to identify ways in which educators in mainstream classrooms could teach in a manner that is culturally responsive. In order to bring about a true transformation of the current educational system, regular education teachers need a clear understanding of culturally responsive practices and their potential for improving student learning outcomes. Thus, deficit thinking regarding students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse as well as traditional teaching practices that do not address the academic and social needs of a diverse student population, must be changed and schools must be reinvented.

If this transformation is to become a reality, educational leaders must be willing and prepared to transform the current curriculum to one that addresses *all* of their students' needs. Therefore, school administrators can also benefit from the findings of this study. Educational leaders can be provided with valuable information regarding how they can transform schools into culturally responsive learning communities. Administrators can learn how to: (a) implement and encourage policies that view diversity as an asset for schools; (b) provide staff development on best practices for teaching students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds; (c) provide teachers with ongoing opportunities to collaboratively explore best practices of culturally responsive pedagogy; and (d) resist political pressures for staff members to teach to the test.

Increased student learning can only be achieved if teachers receive *consistent* support from school administrators. A teacher's willingness to implement new practices

and embrace knowledge on how to best meet the needs of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds will mean nothing without that support.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STORY OF TWO ESL TEACHERS

#### Introduction

This qualitative, collective case study examined the effective practices of two ESL teachers at the high school level. I wanted to discover how ESL teachers as culturally responsive educators best implemented instructional practices in the high school setting, how those teachers perceived and addressed the academic and social challenges of students through their practice, and how lessons learned from ESL teachers can inform the practices of educational leaders. This chapter contains two sections that present the findings from the fieldwork that was conducted. The first section presents descriptions and *stories* of the two high schools selected for the study including a history of the school district, geographical context, demographics, and descriptions of the ESL classrooms and teachers.

Section two addresses my first research question, thereby showing how culturally responsive ESL teachers implement effective practices at the high school level. I have titled this section, *A Portrait of Culturally Responsive Instruction*. In Chapter V, I will address my second research question and therefore reveal responses from study participants regarding how they perceive the effective practices of culturally responsive of ESL teachers at the high school level and how they meet the needs of culturally and/or

linguistically diverse learners and their families. The third research question for this study will be addressed in Chapter VI.

As noted in Chapter III, both Edwards High School and Grant High School are located in the small community of Kent, North Carolina. According to the Kent Chamber of Commerce (2012), many people are drawn to the community largely due to the town's centralized location within a metropolitan area. In addition, the current racial makeup of the town is quite diverse. The Kent Chamber of Commerce (2012), also notes that location, temperate climate, an active community and friendly neighborhoods draw people to call the town home—a town where history reflects a group of people working together to create a sense of community. As previously mentioned, both Edwards High School and Grant High School are located in Kent, North Carolina which is a part of the Weston Public Schools. Over the past 40 years, many of the Weston Public Schools have re-segregated. According to Free<sup>4</sup> (2012) this could be attributed to national court decisions and local political decisions that preferred neighborhood schools over ones that were economically and racially balanced (Free, 2012). In spite of zoned assignment plans providing families with diverse school choices, local schools tend to reflect the racial makeup of their neighborhoods. Those same neighborhoods, while changing, continue to reflect the legacy of zoning laws that laid out where Black people were permitted to live for most of the twentieth century (Free, 2012).

Free (2012) found that previous local and national newspaper reviews of U.S. census data from 1980, 1990 and 2000 have indicated that the city of Weston and its

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<sup>4</sup> Free is a pseudonym. The full citation was provided to the dissertation committee chair. The reference was amended to protect the anonymity of the reference.

surrounding county is one of the state's most segregated major population centers. In focusing on Latino population data from the 2000 census, the national newspaper concluded that Latinos here are more segregated from Whites than most cities in the U.S. In order to balance the schools both racially and economically, the Weston Public Schools used to bus students across town. However, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down those practices in a series of decisions during the 1990s (see *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell*, 1991; *Freeman v. Pitts*, 1992). Locally, busing was discontinued in 1995 in favor of "choice zones," which allow families the opportunity to choose from among multiple schools. As a result, racial segregation quickly accelerated in the schools and led to concentrated poverty in certain schools (Free, 2012).

Located in the eastern part of the county, Edwards High School and Grant High School are located within seven miles of each other. Students living in either the Edwards High School residential area or in the Grant High School residential area have the option of requesting a high school choice transfer to any high school within the district during the high school choice transfer period that occurs in late January to early February. Both Edwards High School and Grant High School are laid out in a college-campus style with numerous small buildings rather than one single large building. The campus at Edwards High School has a total of nine main classroom buildings and the Grant High School campus has a total of seven main classroom buildings.

Recently completed renovations at Edwards High School have resulted in changes to the entire school. A two-story, L-shaped building has been constructed. It houses 16 classrooms, office facilities for administrators, curriculum coordinator, counselors, and a

new media center. The original office building has been renovated as well. It now houses fine arts as well as the business and technology education programs. In addition, the auditorium and some of the current buildings have been updated.

In 2011-2012, Edwards High School had a student enrollment of 1817. The number of female students was 882 with 935 male students. The demographic makeup of the school was 65% White, 11% Black, 11% Latino, 3% Multiracial, 1% Asian, and less than 1% other. The average percentage of students who attended school daily was 93% compared to the district average of 94% and the state average of 95%. The school had a staff of 138 during 2011-2012. Approximately 7% of the staff were ethnic minority (Director of Student Services – Edwards High School, June 27, 2012). The principal of the school, Miss Goodwin, is a White female with a master's degree in school administration and a specialist in education degree in educational leadership. She has served at the school for 11 years.

Grant High School had a student enrollment of 1513 during 2011-2012. The number of female students was 747 with 766 male students. The demographic makeup of the student population was 44% White, 30% Black, 20% Latino, 2% Asian, 3% Multiracial, and less than 1% other. The average percentage of students who attended school daily was 93% compared to the district average of 94%, and the state average of 95%. During 2011-2012 the school had a staff of 94. Approximately 3% of the staff were ethnic minority (Director of Student Services – Grant High School, July 18, 2012). The principal of the school, Mr. Crane, is a White male with a master's degree in school administration. He is currently pursuing a specialist in education degree in educational

leadership through an online program for a local university. He has served as the principal of Grant High School for two years.

### **Introducing the ESL Teachers**

The ESL teachers who were selected to participate in the study are Mrs. Marshall, a White American female teacher at Edwards High School and Dr. Alvarez, a Spanish male teacher at Grant High School. I first met with both teachers in their classrooms in order to discuss plans for conducting my study. Mrs. Marshall has a bachelor's degree in speech pathology and audiology and has completed some graduate studies in this same discipline as well. In addition, she has completed some graduate work for a master's degree in administration, psychology, and speech pathology. When I asked Marshall what motivated her to become an ESL teacher, she explained it this way:

Actually, it was part of my background. I was a speech therapist for almost 20 years before this, so I had a language background. I grew up as an Army brat and I traveled around and lived in different cultures and went to three different high schools. I lived in Germany, Virginia, and Washington State, all over the place. I was ready to change from speech therapy and an ESL teaching position was available at an elementary school in the [named school district]. I absolutely just loved it [teaching ESL students] from the first day. It duck-tailed my language and culture interest in that, and then I went on and got my [ESL] certification.

Based on Marshall's response as to why she became an ESL teacher, it is apparent that she has a passion for teaching students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

Dr. Alvarez earned bachelor's degrees in medicine and anthropology, since he once aspired to become a forensic scientist. He was also studying to become a teacher at the same time he received both bachelor's degrees. In addition, Alvarez received a master's degree in school administration as well as a doctorate degree in international

administration while he was living in Spain. Alvarez also recalled the reasons as to why he was motivated to become an ESL teacher. He shared it this way:

When I was living in Spain as a young boy, I never understood why my father wanted me to learn to speak English, since we were living in Spain. My father used to tell me that I needed to learn English because I never knew when I was going to have to use it. One summer, my father made me take an English class instead of going on vacation to Greece with my family. I took one class and failed it miserably. As a result, my father made me take another English class. The second time I passed the class. I enjoyed the second class so much because the teacher was fantastic. She was from England and I loved her class so much that I decided that I would become an English teacher. When I moved to the United States and got a job teaching English, my father reminded me of what I told him once, "Why do I need to learn English? Everybody in this country [Spain] speaks Spanish." My father said to me, look where you are going now. That was a lesson that I remembered my entire life.

Based on their perspectives regarding why they were motivated to become ESL teachers it was clear to me that Marshall and Alvarez were two teachers who entered the education profession with a passion for teaching students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. In addition to their passion for teaching culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, both ESL teachers had to meet certification requirements for their discipline. Teaching certification for ESL in the state of North Carolina requires individuals to obtain a Master of Education degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or a Master of Arts degree in teaching ESL. The Master of Education degree in TESL is designed for individuals who already hold a teaching license, this program prepares students to earn an additional certification to teach ESL in grades K-12. Upon completion of the program, graduates understand how diverse languages and cultures impact learning English and are able to teach in diverse settings. The coursework for this degree includes

linguistics, language learning, TESL methods, authentic assessment, TESL advanced pedagogy, language acquisition, and intercultural communications (Education-Portal.com, 2012).

Individuals who earn the Master of Arts degree in teaching English to ESL students are prepared to teach English to ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language [EFL]) students. The program is designed for prospective teachers with a bachelor's degree in a related field who have yet to obtain teaching licensure in North Carolina (Education-Portal.com, 2012). Topics covered as a part of the program include: reading and language development for learning the English language, TESL methods and multicultural education. Graduates are well versed in the areas of content pedagogy, diverse learners, student assessment, educational research and community involvement (Education-Portal.com, 2012).

### **The ESL Classrooms**

When I first entered Marshall's classroom at Edwards High School, I was greeted by a large colorful tapestry hanging on the door with "VENEZUELA" embroidered in bold black letters across the bottom. I also noticed a large red Asian umbrella beautifully decorated with blue flowers and a yellow, blue, and pink piñata created in the shape of a donkey perched on top of a storage cabinet. I also spotted a Native American dream catcher hanging on the wall with a story about its origins. I must note that there was one thing in particular in Marshall's room that really stood out for me, it was a poster that had been created by one of her ESL students. The large pale blue poster simply stated in oversized brown letters, "We're Mexicans Not Mexicant's." The message on the poster

spoke volumes to me because the words that were chosen by the student described how strongly he felt about his heritage. It also revealed how the student reacted to negative stereotypes regarding people who were of Mexican ancestry and their ability to excel academically like many of their peers. The poster in addition to other culturally relevant artifacts found in the room, informed me that Marshall encouraged her students to express their sense of pride regarding their race and ethnicity and that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students could excel academically despite the obstacles they encounter.

When I first visited Alvarez's classroom at Grant High School, I noticed numerous photographs of the ESL students posted on the doors of a large storage cabinet. Additionally, there were flags of countries from around the world that resembled a border near the ceiling that circled around the entire classroom. I also noticed a trio of dolls placed on top of a bookshelf dressed in sombreros and brightly-colored native clothing that appeared to be of Latino origin. It was apparent from the classroom setting, that the teacher had created a learning environment that made students feel that their differences were valued and respected. Indeed by displaying symbols that are connected to students' heritage, these behaviors are indicative of an educator who is responsive to the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

In both classrooms, I observed that Marshall and Alvarez had posted the following: signs in various languages spoken by students and their families, word walls, posters regarding the various parts of speech, maps of various countries, a globe, and class rules. Both teachers had also written the following information on their white

boards in the front of the classroom: the day's date, language objective, essential question, and a summary of what the students had learned that day. Similar types of instructional plans are frequently used by culturally responsive educators and are known as the symbolic curriculum (Gay, 1995). These curricula include images, symbols, icons, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values. The most common forms of symbolic curricula include: bulletin board decorations; signs posted in a publicly displayed statement of social etiquette and rules and regulations. Therefore, the walls in culturally responsive classrooms, like those of Marshall and Alvarez, are valuable advertising space, and students learn important lessons from what is displayed there. Over time, students come to expect certain images, value what is present, and devalue that which is absent (Gay, 2002).

Saifer et al. (2011) summed up the importance of incorporating images or artifacts that are representative of students' culture and language differences into the school setting this way:

What students see in their school and classroom environment gives them important clues about what is and is not valued by their teachers. A culturally responsive environment can help students feel a sense of belonging and emotional safety, opening the door to learning. (p. 75)

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers can enhance students' self-esteem when they construct learning environments that reflect the cultural membership in the class. This type of recognition gives students a positive feeling about their worth as individuals and as members in the classroom.

Additionally, Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) maintain that what is not visible in the physical environment can be as intense a statement as what *is* seen. The challenge for educators is to provide materials and ideas that display the cultures of the children, youth, and adults in the school community, while omitting stereotypic and inaccurate materials from daily use.

Saifer et al. (2011) describe some examples of actions that teachers can take to create a more culturally responsive learning environment including:

- Posting photographs of students on a classroom wall. Taking photographs of students while they are engaged in class activities or asking students to bring photographs of themselves to post.
- Posting signs in multiple languages spoken by students and family members at the school. This includes welcome signs in the school office. Using quotes, posters, music, or literature in students' native languages in the classroom also acknowledges students' culture.
- Including culturally relevant books in the classroom library. Having a wealth of books and other materials available for students to read that are authored by people from the various cultural groups represented in the classroom or regarding topics that reflect their culture.
- Inviting family and community members into the classroom. Guest speakers/presenters can share information about topics such as their careers, talents, culture, family, or childhood experiences.

Indeed, Marshall and Alvarez displayed culturally responsive artifacts in their classrooms that were representative of their students' various ethnic backgrounds. These artifacts conveyed a message to all who entered both ESL classrooms, that cultural diversity is something that is celebrated, respected, and honored,

In addition to creating learning environments that are culturally competent, culturally responsive teachers at the high school level, such as the two teachers observed as a part of this study, also have the task of implementing instructional strategies/practices that address the social and academic needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Both Marshall and Alvarez incorporated instructional practices that not only addressed the individual learning styles of students they had to also present the content in a manner that would be culturally relevant and meaningful so that students would be able to connect their prior knowledge and experiences to the new information they needed to learn. The following section will address those strategies as perceived by various study participants (e.g., ESL teachers, ESL students, the LEP Program Manager, principals of both high schools) and by returning to the study's first research question that relates to culturally responsive instructional practices. The question is: "How do culturally responsive ESL teachers best implement effective instructional practices in the high school setting?"

In line with the research about culturally responsive teachers—and as evidenced by the various data collected for this case study—Marshall and Alvarez demonstrated effective instructional practices in the high school setting by: (a) learning who their students are; (b) connecting with families and the community; (c) incorporating culturally

responsive materials/activities in the curriculum; and (d) analyzing curricular materials (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2004; Montgomery, 2001; Moses & Cobb, 2001; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

### **A Portrait of Culturally Responsive Instruction**

During individual interview sessions with Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez, I asked them both the following question: If you are culturally responsive, what does being culturally responsive mean to you? In your opinion, what exemplifies a culturally responsive ESL teacher?

Mrs. Marshall provided the following description of a culturally responsive teacher:

I think it's somebody who is aware and respects other cultures, but you have to be aware [that all students are different], you have to know it [how to respond to the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners].

Dr. Alvarez described a culturally responsive teacher in the following way:

I think that culturally responsive teachers associate their teaching with the things that they [students] know, what they're familiar with. The teacher is not just checking the background of students [personal background, educational background] and saying, okay, I know my students they can understand this [the lesson/activity], but I need to give them more information because many of the things that we are covering in class are unfamiliar to them.

Indeed, both Marshall and Alvarez are teachers that acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find relevant connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks teachers ask them to perform. In such culturally responsive classrooms, teachers recognize the differing

learning styles of their students and develop and/or implement instructional approaches that will accommodate these styles. In light of the value of culturally responsive instructional practices, schools and educational leaders need to support teachers in their quest to learn about the use of these strategies. Many teachers find it increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of the learners who populate their classrooms. Few teachers find their work effective or satisfying when they simply provide a curriculum for students with no regard for their varied learning needs (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). For many educators, such as Marshall at Edwards High School and Alvarez at Grant High School, differentiated instruction offers a framework for addressing learner variance as a critical component of instruction. Observational data suggested that connecting content and students in meaningful ways is what Marshall and Alvarez strive to do every day in their classrooms.

### **Differentiated Instruction: An Approach to Responsive Teaching**

Responsive or differentiated instruction means that a teacher is attuned to the varied learning needs of students as a requirement of a thoughtful and well-articulated curriculum. In other words, the instructional methods are student-centered. Responsive teaching or differentiated instruction suggests that a teacher will make modifications in how students gain access to important knowledge and skills, in a manner that students make sense of and demonstrate essential knowledge and skills, and in the learning environment, all with an eye on supporting maximum success for each student (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Differentiated instruction necessitates that a teacher work continuously to establish a positive relationship with individual students and as a result,

come to understand which approaches to learning are most effective for various learners (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). This means that in order for teachers who are culturally responsive, such as Marshall and Alvarez, they must first get to know their students in order to respond to their academic and/or social needs in the classroom. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) maintain that attending to students' backgrounds and needs builds bridges that connect learners and important content. Such connections can contribute to relevance for students, an important attribute of student engagement.

### **Making Connections: Learning Who Students Are**

During my interview sessions with Marshall and Alvarez, both of them informed me that the first key to effectively working with students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse is *getting to know your students*. One of the ESL teachers, Marshall at Edwards High School summed it up this way:

The best practice is absolutely getting to know the students first and then to connect with them on that level because most of the students, when you have that kind of connection, their performance is so much better and they're hooked with you and they'll go with you anywhere with education. They will go on. I try to get to know my students. I try to find out where their needs are, where their interests are.

The ESL teacher from Grant High School, Alvarez, also provided his perspective on the significance of getting to know students:

I think it's very important to teach them [students] regardless of their cultural background but it's also important to see what they know. So it's very important that you know their background, I think it's the most important thing. For example, if I'm talking with a student from Mexico and I say, "What is *mole*?," "What is an *enchilada*?," "What is a *taco*?" They will tell me. But if you're talking with an El Salvadorean, they will say "I don't know what that is" or if

you're talking with an Asian student, they won't know what it is either. You know, it's very important you know the background.

Dr. Alvarez added:

I observe my students for the first month they are in my class. I take surveys and interview them with simple questions like: What is your favorite color? What is your favorite TV program? What is your favorite type of music? Those students who have the same things in common, I put them together in a team, because that makes a difference, it's something really simple and it works.

Indeed, the practices that both Marshall and Alvarez implement in getting to know their students provides them with an opportunity to assess students' backgrounds and knowledge in an effort to best meet academic and social needs of diverse learners.

Both teachers demonstrated Saifer et al.'s (2011) suggestion that one of the first steps in getting to know students may involve a shift in thinking on the part of the teachers from being the "sage on stage" to the "guide on the side." (p. 49). This means changing the teacher's role from where he/she passes knowledge on to his/her students and directs the learning in the classroom to one where he/she recognizes the social, emotional, and cognitive strengths and needs of students and "meets students where they are," while still maintaining high academic standards.

The practices of both ESL teachers regarding getting to know their students correlates with the scholarly literature on effective practices of responsive or differentiated instruction. In fact, during observations of both teachers, I noticed that when students entered the classroom, the teachers personally greeted each student, knew them all by name, and pronounced their names correctly. As a middle school counselor, I

know how important it is for educators to recall who students are and to pronounce their names correctly. Since the name identifies who that student is as an individual, they appreciate adults who first of all, remember who they are by referring to them by their name, take the time to pronounce their name correctly and perhaps even ask the student about the origin of their name. It conveys a message to the student that the teacher is focused on who they are as an individual. The teachers participating in the study also made it a practice, prior to the beginning of the lesson, to engage students in conversations regarding their school day, their families, personal activities/issues in school or outside of school, and any concerns they might want to discuss regarding current events/issues such as immigration. Students also had the opportunity to discuss native traditions, customs and languages so that everyone (including the teacher) could become more culturally aware of one another.

What I observed in Marshall and Alvarez's classrooms illustrates what Saifer et al. (2011) state is one of the most significant ways that teachers can let students know they are valued and respected is to have conversations with them regarding their home, family, and community life. These conversations are important to culturally responsive teaching. They help practitioners comprehend students' worldviews and build relationships with them. These conversations, such as those I observed during my study, are important because they provide teachers with important clues about the background knowledge and strengths that students bring to the classroom on which the curriculum can benefit. Culturally responsive teachers like Marshall and Alvarez use the information that is revealed during these conversations to modify the curriculum so that it is more

relevant and meaningful for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

Alvarez explained it this way:

I have students who just came into this country who just finished middle school or they were attending high school. So, at first I'm thinking they will know basic concepts, but they don't know them in English. When I get to know what students understand by first having conversations with them and then review their records, I realize that I have to provide all of the basic information for them, the foundation for learning, I need to be more explicit. I need to teach them what they're missing.

Furthermore, Alvarez understands the benefits of engaging in basic conversations with students in order to assess what they already know and what they need to learn in order to be successful in school. He also utilizes the students' cumulative school records to determine how he can connect students' prior knowledge and experiences to new content/concepts.

In addition to establishing a good rapport with students as a means of getting to know them better, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez incorporate lessons that involve writing. These types of lessons allow the students to share stories of their real-life experiences and their worldviews. Review of these written assignments affords Marshall and Alvarez an opportunity to assess what students understand, what they need to know or learn and what their interests are. Therefore, the written information can be used by teachers to develop lessons that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

Mrs. Marshall also required her students to write one-page journal entries on a daily basis. As Montgomery (2001) suggests in her discussion of journal writing, teachers

such as Marshall should provide opportunities for students to write in journals to share their personal understanding regarding a range of topics in various cultural contexts that inform, clarify, explain, or educate them about our culturally diverse society. The journals provide students with a differentiated instructional activity that permits students to work individually and make their own personal connections with specific topics. Students develop their own insight into the topics provided by the teacher and are given the independence to write what they desire about the subject with the assistance of a writing prompt provided by Marshall.

Mrs. Marshall would write the journal title for the day on the white board in the front of the classroom and ask the students to take out their notebooks in which they would write down their response to the title. She would also turn off all of the lights in the room in order to create an atmosphere in which the students could feel more relaxed. An example of a journal title was: *My Bucket List*. Not only was this an assignment that allowed students the opportunity to improve their writing skills, punctuation, and grammar they also learned what a “bucket list” was after it was explained to them by Marshall. She told the students that it was a new and creative way of saying what you wanted to do with your life—setting goals. After the writing assignment ended, each student was given the opportunity to discuss what they had written on their bucket list. One student said that he wanted to travel to France, and another student said that he wanted to play professional soccer in a large stadium. The sharing of information provided the teacher with an opportunity to get to know the students better and to understand what some of the goals were that students had established for themselves, and

how they learn. During an interview, one of Marshall's students, Lizette, described the journal writing experience this way:

When like we're doing the journal thing when we write every day that we wrote to her [Mrs. Marshall], it's just helping me open my mind more and it's fast and not like being there for 10 minutes thinking, "What am I supposed to write?" and she's like helping us to you know, to put our thoughts on paper. The other teachers give, you know, like certain times to be finished and it's not quiet and everything. They [other teachers] are over there talking and whispering but they're not like Mrs. Marshall. You just think and you start writing it. Mrs. Marshall turns some of the lights off in the room. It's like being by yourself in your room [at home], you're just thinking about what to write. It's the same way that you're thinking. You're writing it down and it helps a lot.

Altogether, making connections with the students, whether it is through conversations or through students sharing information in their journal entries, getting to know students is a responsive or differentiated instructional practice that is beneficial for educators in addressing the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

In Marshall's class, after students write their journal responses down and have the opportunity to discuss them during class, the notebooks are collected by Marshall for review. Ongoing review of the journal writing assignments allows Marshall to formatively assess students' writing abilities (e.g. grammar, punctuation, capitalization), their ability in understanding the English language, and their interests.

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez must have knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds in order to develop skills for cross-cultural interaction and to implement instruction that is responsive to the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. As highlighted in this study, this

can be accomplished through differentiated instructional practices such as conversations and/or activities that take place in the classroom that allow students the opportunity to introduce themselves to their peers and to the teacher. According to Saifer et al. (2011) this can be accomplished through the use of questionnaires or through community building activities that require students to share information about themselves through a personal poem or story about their families.

As educators build and strengthen relationships with students, their efforts create trust, shared responsibility for education, and mutual support. If you ask students why they have a favorite class or subject, they will often respond by telling you that they have a personal connection with the teacher. In fact, many teachers have seen a turnaround in students' behavior in the classroom and academic performance after getting to know students on a personal basis through activities such as personal interviews (Nieto, 2003).

### **Incorporating Culturally Responsive Activities in the Curriculum: Promoting Cooperative Learning that Enhances Critical Thinking Skills**

Cooperative learning is an instructional practice that is responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of learners who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. During my observations of Marshall and Alvarez, I noted that activities in their classrooms heavily involved the use of cooperative learning groups or pairs. Both teachers implemented what Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) suggest is an effective differentiated instructional practice. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) found that incorporating small-group teaching into daily or weekly instruction allows the teacher and students to become accustomed to procedures that allow students to work independently (or in small groups). While the teacher works with a few students, the door

is open for the teacher to target instruction on a regular basis to students who need to be taught in different ways, students who need assistance with basic skills, students who need to hear more competent readers read aloud or who need safe opportunities to read aloud, students who need to be pushed further than grade-level expectations.

Additionally, Holt, Chips, and Wallace (1991), like Marshall and Alvarez, recognize the benefits of cooperative learning in classrooms that serve culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. For example, Holt et al. (1991) suggest that English Learners (ELs) need the maximum amount of time possible for understanding and using the English language in a low-risk learning environment in order to reach the language proficiency of many of their English-speaking peers. By using cooperative learning groups, Marshall and Alvarez offered students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse the opportunity to learn how to successfully interact with their peers who are proficient in English language skills in mainstream classrooms.

The type of collaborative learning that I observed in Marshall and Alvarez's classrooms (i.e., cooperative groups or pairs) involved all students in the construction of knowledge. Villegas and Lucas (2002) found that contrary to having students memorize predigested information, culturally responsive teachers strive to support students in their construction of knowledge by actively involving them in learning tasks and challenging them with problems that promote higher-order thinking skills (i.e., hypothesizing, predicting, comparing, evaluating, integrating, and synthesizing). Activities that involve active roles include: collaborative projects for small groups of mixed ability students, authentic dialogues, and encouragement of students to assume increasing responsibility

for their own learning. Marshall explained the use of cooperative learning in her classroom this way:

When I use cooperative groups, with that group that you observed, I do it in different ways. Sometimes it's paired and sometimes it's teamed and sometimes it's just two groups that I'll have it with. It works really well when they [students] are very open and they work in different ways with each other. I think it's helped to give them a little bit more experience about staying on topic when they're doing group work too. And you know, I do have to guide that sometimes with a time limit, or you know, just a little bit of monitoring with it that way, but they're good with that and they're really creative, very creative.

Examples of cooperative learning occurred in Marshall's classroom and Alvarez's classroom on a daily basis during my observations. During one of my observations in Marshall's classroom, a cooperative learning activity involved students competing in a race to identify the abbreviations for individual states within the United States. Prior to beginning the assignment, Marshall asked the male students to select a female partner for the activity. This would allow the students to work in pairs that were not biased by gender. The teacher then explained what Washington, DC was to the students since it was also on the map. She explained that it wasn't a state, but that it was a district that had been designated as the nation's capital. This type of explanation for students was significant since many culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, particularly ELs, are not familiar with U.S. history.

The students were given a map with states' abbreviations by the teacher and were asked to spell out the names of each state. The first team to complete the task—would be determined as the winner of the race. Not only was this an activity that challenged students to communicate and collaborate with one another as team members to

accomplish a goal, the activity also provided them with information that can be helpful in social studies classes. At the conclusion of the race, the first, second and third place teams were asked to read the names of the states aloud in the order in which they appeared on the worksheet. As the students read the names of each state, the teacher assisted them with pronunciation when necessary.

During an interview, one of Marshall's students, Felix, described his experience with collaborative learning as the strategy that his ESL teacher used that had been most helpful for him in learning and understanding English. He stated, "Um, usually we do group work, and we like work together. We do group work like where we did the state thing where we had to race in teams, that helps me out for learning, and with the tests." Felix added, "When we [students] work together, we help each other understand things."

Dr. Alvarez also used cooperative learning groups during my observations of his classes. In fact, the students were grouped in teams daily that were named after local colleges and universities located in North Carolina. Alvarez explained that teams were given names of colleges and universities in an attempt to peak students' interests in the higher education opportunities that were available for them. According to Alvarez, cooperative learning groups are especially important for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. He explained it this way: "I put them [students] in teams in order for them to learn from each other. I mix students on teams with ones that are very talented and the ones that are struggling to learn." He added, "I like putting students in groups so that they can learn from one another, with more advanced learners. I mix them because it works well for the students. I think that it works fantastic in class."

An example of a cooperative learning activity in Alvarez's classroom that I observed was an assignment regarding airplane travel. At the beginning of the lesson, Alvarez distributed worksheets to students for the assignment. The title of the worksheet was *Opinions About Air Travel*. The questions for discussion were: (a) "How many times have you flown on a plane?" and (b) "When was the last time you flew on a plane? Where did you travel to?" The students were required to read a series of sentences on the same worksheet and circle the numbers that best expressed their opinions. Examples of the sentences that students responded to were: "Air travel is safe.; The airplane is the most important invention ever.; People should be allowed to smoke on airplanes if they want to.; and Babies should not be allowed to fly on planes because they cry too much." Possible answers for the sentences were: (a) "I agree completely, (b) I mostly agree, (c) I'm not sure, (d) I mostly disagree, and (e) I disagree completely." After students completed the worksheets individually, Alvarez asked them to discuss their responses to the sentences aloud with other students in the classroom as a whole group. When Alvarez asked them to respond to the first question (i.e., How many times have you flown on a plane?) students shared their personal stories about flying on a plane. Students also shared their stories of never having flown on a plane and how they desired to do so one day. One student shared a story about how she and her family had flown to the United States from Romania in the hope of becoming U.S. citizens. Alvarez also participated in the discussion by sharing stories with students about his travel experiences on airplanes.

During an interview, one of Alvarez's students, Martin, described how he felt about the *Opinions About Air Travel* activity:

When we did the activity in class about the airplanes I thought it was really cool. Dr. "A" teaches us about different things that we've already done or what we want to do. When we do activities like this, we learn about new things that we never did before. I've never been on a plane so I learned a lot today. I learned what baggage was, if it was better to take a direct flight or get a connecting flight. I even found out what a flight attendant was. I know that a gate is where you catch the plane. I know a lot more about planes than I did before we talked about it.

This student affirmed that the idea that cooperative learning activities afford students with the opportunity to share personal experiences that introduce them to new information that can be learned from their peers.

After students had the opportunity to share individual stories and their perspectives about traveling on airplanes, Alvarez requested that students discuss their responses as teams. This type of interaction generated dialogue among the students and provided them with an opportunity to use their critical-thinking skills in explaining their responses to their peers. Alvarez reminded students that there were no incorrect responses to the questions and that they were simply sharing their opinions regarding airplane travel. Alvarez also explained to the students why it was important for them to be able to express their perspectives in classes outside of the ESL classroom:

In other classes, especially in high school and also in college, you can respond with a yes or no answer. However, you must be prepared to explain why you replied yes or no. You must be able to express in your own words why you answered a question in a certain way. It lets the teacher know how you think and why you view things in the world in specific ways.

For clarification purposes, Alvarez provided an example for students regarding the significance for explaining yes or no answers:

If you asked your mother if you can go outside and play with your friends and she says no, if she explains why she said no, it's clearer for you. Teachers are pleased when you [students] can explain your answers to them. It lets them know that you understand how to use your critical thinking skills in order to answer a question or to solve a problem.

Altogether, culturally responsive teachers such as Alvarez emphasize to their students the significance of being able to use critical thinking skills in order to be successful in mainstream classrooms, institutions of higher learning and beyond.

Based on my observations in Marshall's and Alvarez's classrooms, it is apparent that cooperative learning is an effective instructional method in which students work together in small heterogeneous groups to solve problems, to complete projects, or to accomplish other instructional goals while the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator. Cooperative learning activities lead students to engage in dialogue that facilitates the use of critical thinking skills in order to develop solutions to problems and allow students to express their perspectives regarding various topics. Johnson and Johnson (1994) note that the responsive or differentiated instructional practice of using cooperative learning has also been found to promote relationships among diverse learners, improve students' ability to see other perspectives, and develop self-esteem. Overall, Marshall and Alvarez's teaching practices are both differentiated and culturally responsive in that they promote cooperative learning that provides an opportunity for students to work collaboratively as they develop content knowledge and devise solutions to problems.

### **Multicultural Education: A Sociopolitical Approach**

Gay (2000) noted that the increasing ethnic diversity of the U.S. population makes multicultural education for all students an imperative, particularly if education is to fulfill

its basic functions by being personally meaningful, socially relevant, culturally accurate, and pedagogically sound. In other words, multicultural education will play a critical role in the instruction of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Below I describe how the two teachers I studied integrated curricular materials so that EL students would have critical cultural content, which is a key multicultural education practice (Banks, 2004).

### **Integrating Curricular Materials for Critical Cultural Content**

The dimension of content integration challenges all teachers to include concepts and examples from diverse groups and cultures in their subject area (Gay, 2000; van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Regardless of the heterogeneity of a classroom or school district, all students should be exposed to information about the experiences, history and accomplishments of diverse groups so that they are capable of functioning in a global society. Students whose group affiliations are not traditionally represented in the school curriculum, such as culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, often feel excluded; however, when they see their culture and native language within classroom content and materials, academic achievement improves (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2004; Moses & Cobb, 2001).

In Marshall's and Alvarez's classrooms, the *Shining Star* book series is used with students for instruction. Although I did not have the opportunity to observe Alvarez using the *Shining Star* book series with his students in class, he spoke about it briefly during a meeting that was held prior to conducting the study to plan a schedule for interviews and observations. Alvarez indicated that he really liked the information in the *Shining Star*

book series. He noted that he used the *Shining Star* books unit by unit and added that he used all of the teaching resources that accompanied the book series: CDs, videos, workbooks, notebooks for vocabulary, activities to increase reading comprehension, and activities to improve grammar. Alvarez also noted that he used the book series as a means to prepare students for taking exams in their core class curriculum. He also noted that the book series provided students with perspectives from a variety of individuals who were culturally and/or linguistically diverse, someone with whom the students could identify.

The *Shining Star* book series was designed to help ESL teachers develop the English skills students need for core subjects. Each unit in the book series contains selections regarding various topics including: science, social studies, and math. More importantly, the books were authored by both male and female individuals of various ethnic backgrounds and featured literary selections regarding male and female individuals and groups who are ethnically, racially and culturally diverse. These literary selections help students understand the vocabulary organization of different types of texts such as non-fiction articles, poems, and stories. Additionally, the book series helps teachers to provide students with the skills they need to approach the content of the various subjects they take in school. As previously mentioned, scholars (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Gay, 2004, Moses & Cobb, 2001) assert that when diverse students are able to see content that is representative of people or groups that are culturally and/or linguistically diverse, they can flourish academically.

Mrs. Marshall described the book series in the following way:

I love that *Shining Star* book because it touches on core content in our high school subjects in history, in human geography, in biology, chemistry, math. It hits literature, it hits these areas that they have in different courses and it fills in a little bit like *scaffolding* would be. It fills in some missing information [for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] they may have never gotten. With some of the background that students that have been in the United States the whole time [their entire lifetime], they've gotten this information. The books also allow students to hear stories about individuals that are people of color like them. I think that makes a big difference too. I think that it keeps them interested in learning.

Mrs. Marshall continued her description of how she used the *Shining Star* book series for instruction this way:

We all know about the Martin Luther King holiday coming up and why we have it and that it's the third Monday and these types of things. When we start pointing those things out and talk about some of the historical issues that go along with it [civil rights, segregation], and how they [students] may be impacted by similar things like that in today's society, such as immigration laws, it fills out their academic knowledge in U.S. history for specific times. We talk about things like the Great Depression through different lessons that we have—through instruction that we have here [in the ESL classroom].

Indeed, integrating the use of materials such as the *Shining Star* book series, provides students with the opportunity to be exposed to the accomplishments/contributions of culturally and/or linguistically diverse individuals and/or groups that may be otherwise missing during discussions that occur in many mainstream classrooms.

Dr. Alvarez explained why he thought the use of the *Shining Star* book series was helpful for his students:

The *Shining Star* books have been helpful for me in teaching students about events in U.S. history especially when the units cover topics such as immigrants

coming to this country and the challenges that they encountered. That's something many of them [students] are familiar with. They [students] also have the opportunity to hear stories about people who are culturally diverse that have come to the United States and have made contributions to society such as Desi Arnaz [the Cuban band leader and television star]. Right now, we're talking about current events in class like the economy. We're talking about science, we're talking about some terminology in biology, and we're talking about the basic operations in math. I'm always teaching something that is connected to core subjects. I'm giving a little information to the stories that are found in the units in the book. It helps students to understand subject matter better by relating it to their prior knowledge and experiences.

Dr. Alvarez praises the *Shining Star* book series for not only providing students with useful information that can be applied to the core class curriculum, he also views it as a vehicle that allows students the opportunity to hear inspiring stories of diverse people that may have overcome similar obstacles as newcomers to the United States.

During an interview, one of Marshall's students, Lizette, commented on the advantages of using the *Shining Star* books in class:

She [Marshall] taught us about Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. You know we read the *Shining Star* book about them and get to know more about different types of people and the history. It's been helpful for me in class because I know about them already before we start the unit [in social studies class].

During an interview, Felix, another student in Marshall's class added:

Well, like we always do work like stuff on social studies that we learn about— Lewis and Clark in the *Shining Star* book. We studied it in ESL before we studied it in our regular class. She [Marshall] talked about Sacagawea and how George Washington got them to show that's how they got their land through The Louisiana Purchase. I was able to talk about these things when I went to social studies class.

Together, both students acknowledged how the use of the *Shining Star* book series has helped them to flourish academically in the mainstream classroom.

It should be noted that although Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Lewis and Clark are well-known historical figures that are often discussed in social studies classes, Marshall took instruction to another level with her students. For example, during one of my observations in Marshall's classroom the lesson focused on a story about Abraham Lincoln in the *Shining Star* book series. Students were required to take notes while they read the assignment. Marshall first explained to students how they should take notes. She then advised them not to copy whole sentences from the book, but to write down a few key words to remember what was written by the author. The teacher also demonstrated for students how they should organize their notes using a *graphic organizer*. The graphic organizer was used to copy a timeline of important events that occurred in Lincoln's life. According to Echevarria et al. (2008) a graphic organizer is a schematic diagram that provides conceptual clarity for information that is difficult to grasp. It helps students to identify key content/concepts and makes relationships among them. Graphic organizers also provide students with visual clues they can use to supplement written or spoken words that may be difficult to understand, for students such as ELs, who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. The notes that students had taken were used to complete the timeline. The graphic organizers were used by group members to tell the story about Lincoln's life.

During the assignment, students learned about *the human spirit*. The teacher explained that the human spirit was defined as the courage to stand up for what you

believe. She continued by saying that the human spirit was the desire to use one's talents and to live a life of service. Marshall added that for others, the human spirit was the ability to succeed even after repeated failures. She advised the students that they would read about a person in the unit who possessed these qualities. That person was U.S. president Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln was described in the *Shining Star* book as a man who experienced sadness and failure, but who went on to demonstrate what the human spirit can accomplish. For example, as president of the United States, Lincoln successfully led the country through one of the most difficult times in its history, the Civil War (Chamot, Hartmann, & Huizenga, 2004). This historical figure was representative of individuals who had persevered through hardships. This story can be related to the challenges that many individuals have overcome and obstacles they encountered, including culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. For example, culturally and/or linguistically diverse students who have not studied the U.S. Civil War in their native countries but have studied (or experienced) other instances of civil unrest on a firsthand basis can speak about their prior experiences to establish a context for studying U.S. Civil War (Abadiano & Turner, 2002).

The unit on Abraham Lincoln covered information related to his education, his early political career, the issue of slavery, the Civil War, efforts to reunify the country, and Lincoln's assassination. The teacher asked students to work in small cooperative groups. They were instructed to imagine that it was 1859 and Abraham Lincoln was running for president. They had the task of using their critical thinking skills to persuade their friends to vote for him. The students were instructed to talk about three or more

reasons why Lincoln would be a good president. They also had to support their reasons with facts from his life. The students discussed Lincoln's political career, his successes, his failures, and what they admired most about Lincoln and why. These kinds of topics resulted in discussions that are considered as taboo in many mainstream classrooms. The discussions that students were encouraged to engage in by Marshall, revealed to students the disparities between Whites and people who were culturally and/or linguistically diverse which existed for hundreds years in this country and still exist even in today's society.

The lesson regarding Abraham Lincoln that was presented in the *Shining Star* book series is just one example of how dialogue among students can allow them the opportunity to share their perspectives about topics such as socially unjust behavior that exists in society.

When Marshall used the *Shining Star* book series to serve as a catalyst for discussion, she reversed the trends of not addressing controversial or taboo subjects in the classroom with students. She dealt directly with controversy by allowing the students to explore a wide range of ethnic individuals and/or groups; contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, gender, and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives. For example, one unit in the *Shining Star* book titled *The Train to Freedom* focuses on Black slaves in the United States and how they took a dangerous chance to escape to freedom. Another unit in the book titled *Five New Worlds at a Time* is a personal narrative told by an immigrant girl from China. She describes her fear of not understanding people at her new school in the United States. With her mother's help, she

faces the challenge of learning English. These are stories that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse because they may be familiar for students who have encountered real-life experiences that mirror the challenges that are presented in the text. Indeed, the implementation of curricular materials for critical cultural content by teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez in order to meet the academic and social needs of diverse learners, is characteristic of a culturally responsive educator.

### **Hallmarks of Being an Effective Culturally Responsive Instructor**

As more students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds enter classrooms, efforts to identify effective methods to educate these students means that a need for culturally responsive instructional practices is even more profound. Today's classrooms dictate that teachers educate students that vary in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics (Gay, 2000; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In order to meet this challenge, educators must apply not only theoretically sound pedagogy, but culturally responsive pedagogy.

Many educators use the terms culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education interchangeably. Culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education are similar in that both forms of instruction make classrooms more inclusive for all students, involve students in the construction of knowledge, perceive students' personal and cultural differences as assets rather than as deficits, and use different means of assessment that promote learning (Montgomery, 2001; Richards et al., 2007; Sparks, 1994). However, it should be noted that the goal to become culturally responsive goes

one step beyond multiculturalism. Educators who are culturally responsive not only teach about people who exhibit differences, but are also responsive to the cultural identity of learners (Huber et al., 1992).

Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as vessels for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of learners, they are more personally meaningful and have a higher appeal of interest, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

### **Getting to Know Students**

Marshall and Alvarez exhibited many of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching during my observations in their classrooms, which I previously described in the discussion of differentiated instruction. In addition, I observed Marshall and Alvarez standing at the classroom door daily and greeting each student and addressing them by name. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) added that the use of journals through which students have an opportunity to establish written conversation with the teacher can give educators a glimpse into students' lives and experiences.

### **Involving Students in Knowledge Construction**

Villegas and Lucas (2002) maintain that contrary to having students memorize predigested information, culturally responsive teachers support students in their

construction of knowledge by actively involving them in tasks that challenge them with solving problems that promote critical-thinking skills (i.e., hypothesizing, predicting, comparing, evaluating, integrating, and synthesizing). Activities that involve these types of active roles include collaborative learning group projects with students of mixed ability, authentic dialogues, and the encouragement of students to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning. Instead of simply lecturing to students and having them to memorize new information that was introduced in class, both Marshall and Alvarez involved students in learning tasks that challenged them to use their critical-thinking skills. A primary method that both Marshall and Alvarez used to display this practice was the use of cooperative learning groups or pairs on a daily basis. It should be noted that in addition to using cooperative learning strategies, Marshall and Alvarez also implemented instruction that allowed students the opportunity to work independently during class time.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, Marshall used cooperative learning groups for in-class activities such as the assignment that involved students working in cooperative pairs and identifying states within the United States using a map and states' abbreviations.

### **Building on Students' Personal and Cultural Strengths**

Saifer et al. (2011) maintain that "What students see in their school and classroom environment gives them important clues about what is and what is not valued by their teachers" (p. 75). In other words, a culturally responsive learning environment can make students feel welcomed and give them a sense of belonging and emotional security, thus

improving their need to want to learn and be in that classroom. During my observations of Mrs. Marshall at Edwards High School and Dr. Alvarez at Grant High School, I noted how both teachers worked to be welcoming of their students and to build on their personal and cultural strengths. One way they did this was by incorporating images and artifacts that were representative of their culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, one of the artifacts in Marshall's classroom was a poster that had been created by one of her ESL students. The large pale blue poster simply stated in oversized letters, "We're Mexicans Not Mexicant's." the message on the poster were words that the student had selected to describe how strongly he felt about his heritage. It also revealed how the student felt about negative stereotypes regarding people who were of Mexican heritage and their ability to achieve academically like many of their peers. That poster in addition to other artifacts in Marshall's classroom informed me that the teacher encouraged and supported her students in expressing their sense of pride regarding their race and ethnicity and that they too can excel despite the challenges they encounter as individuals who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

When I first visited Alvarez's classroom I immediately noticed numerous photographs of ESL students posted on the door of a storage cabinet. I also noticed flags from countries from around the world that resembled a border near the ceiling of the classroom. Alvarez had also placed some dolls that appeared to be of Latino origin on top of a bookshelf. It was apparent that the teacher had created a learning environment that made students feel that their cultural and/or linguistic differences were valued and respected.

I also noted that both Marshall and Alvarez had posted signs in various languages spoken by students and their families. By placing the signs in their classrooms, both teachers advocated the use of English in their classrooms as well the use of students' native languages. Alvarez provided his perspective on the use of both English and native languages in education:

I believe in bilingual education because I learned like that [to speak English] so I know that method works fantastic. The benefits of being bilingual are wonderful because I got my license as a health care interpreter. I got that diploma at [named local community college]. There are different avenues you can take by being bilingual and I teach that to my students.

On the other hand, Marshall had mixed beliefs on the use of bilingual education for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. She explained it this way:

I'm mixed on bilingual education. I basically come down anti-bilingual which sounds strange for me as a person. The reason is that I feel that it limits students. I've had students come from this is in earlier years, from California and Florida and Texas who were in bilingual programs who had been in the United States in the educational system for eight, ten years and could not read, write speak in English and to me that handicaps them. It keeps them [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] marginalized in our society and I think that when students are here we can make it work and we can give them the instruction and the support and work with them. I don't think we have to have a straight bilingual education to do this. I think we can do this. I think we can teach English so that they [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] can function in our society and that's why I feel very strongly about that.

Mrs. Marshall added:

I do speak Spanish. I speak a little German, a little French, a teeny bit of Chinese and bits of languages but, not fluent. I definitely think that there are benefits of being bilingual. You know the whole process that the students go through to learn a second language. For me, I am able to understand especially when newer

students are here [in the ESL classroom] and they're speaking one language then I can catch what they're saying. I can use their native language to help with understanding new concepts or content they're not familiar with. I can communicate with their parents enough that I can talk to them in a phone conversation and parent conferences and explain things to them. I do not instruct in another language, but that is the definite advantage about being bilingual.

Overall, Marshall does not use bilingual instruction as a part of her practice during class time. However, she does acknowledge that students' native languages can serve as a valuable tool for explaining concepts and/or content that is unfamiliar to students and for establishing an effective means of communicating with families.

Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force (1989) assert that that what is not visible in the physical environment can be as profound a statement as to what is seen. The task before teachers and educational leaders is to provide materials and ideas that exhibit the cultures of culturally and/or linguistically diverse individuals within their school community, and eliminate materials from daily use that are stereotypic and inaccurate in nature.

### **Analyzing the Curriculum**

Villegas and Lucas (2002) assert that the school curriculum is socially constructed and based on the standards of the White, middle-class, American culture. To assist students from historically marginalized groups, such as culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, to overcome the feeling of being alienated from school and to teach these students about social inequality and ways to counter it, teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez have implemented materials into the curriculum that are representative of diverse cultures. Marshall's and Alvarez's use of the *Shining Star* book series was one

example of a vehicle they used for introducing culturally and/or linguistically diverse students to textbooks that were authored by both male and female individuals of various ethnic backgrounds. In addition, the literary selections in the book series feature stories about male and female individuals and groups that are ethnically and culturally diverse.

### **Utilizing Assessment Practices that Promote Learning**

Historically, standardized test scores have been widely used to place students in various educational tracks (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Additionally, students enter school with culturally specific understandings of the appropriate ways of displaying and conveying their knowledge. If educators and students do not share this type of understanding, the teacher could easily misinterpret the students' competence unless he/she is aware and sensitive to cultural differences. For example, when ELs are assessed informally, they frequently appear to be competent in English. As a result, the teacher may assume that these students are competent enough to take on academic content without support for language comprehension (de Jong & Harper, 2005). The concern is that these students have a high degree of social language skills in English but do not have enough academic language skills in a second language to be successful in the classroom environment (Huerta & Brittain, 2010). Again, *social language* is defined by Echevarria et al. (2008) as basic language proficiency associated with fluency in daily situations, including the classroom. *Academic language* is used in formal contexts for academic subjects (Echevarria et al., 2008). The LEP Program Manager for Weston Public Schools, Mr. Solomon, commented on the challenges ELs encounter in acquiring English language skills:

Kids can walk down the hall, talk to their friends, ask a girl out, but then academic language can take four to seven to 10 years. And a lot of people say, young people [elementary school-age children] can learn a language must faster, not so much. Um, they can acquire the language without an accent, but they don't have as much distance to make up. . . . If you have a kid coming in [to the public schools] in second grade who doesn't speak English, you know they have to go back and master the phonics and awareness of English and basic vocabulary—sight words and all that stuff, but that's like two years' worth of work.

Mr. Solomon continued:

You've got a kid that comes in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, he's got to master all of those 10 years first, and so it looks like they're not acquiring the language as quickly. They're probably acquiring at the same rate, they're just so far behind.

When considering Marshall's and Alvarez's practices, both teachers not only demonstrate a clear understanding of the language acquisition process for diverse students, but must also be well-versed in teaching practices that address the academic and social issues regarding culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs.

Huerta and Brittan (2010) assert that in order to assess students' progress, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez, use a variety of approaches. These two teachers use varied approaches due to their awareness of the English language acquisition process for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. In addition, Huerta and Brittan (2010) suggest culturally responsive teachers use a learning-oriented assessment approach that asks students to construct their responses as opposed to selecting a correct answer and apply their knowledge to solving real world problems as opposed to using their skills in a decontextualized manner. During my observations in Marshall's classroom and in Alvarez's classroom, both teachers regularly used informal

assessments to monitor student understanding by having students to answer key questions at the end of the class period. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) assert that such an approach can help a teacher sense which students have mastered the idea or skill, which students hold misconceptions, which are still at the starting block of proficiency, and which students need additional support to become proficient. In addition to the informal assessments that took place at the end of each class period, both Marshall and Alvarez allowed the students to engage in dialogue within their cooperative learning groups regarding assigned tasks, with the teacher monitoring the discussions to assess student understanding.

Culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez are aware of the potential for cultural misunderstandings and as a result, interpret assessment results for students from diverse backgrounds with caution, providing students with different avenues to demonstrate their knowledge about the topic of instruction (Huerta & Brittain, 2010). This form of assessment is important because the dependence on a single form of assessment presents disadvantages for some children, including culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, such as ELs.

### **Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment**

Culturally responsive teachers understand that the classroom is not a neutral setting where all students can participate in instructional activities/assignments equally and present what they know freely (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In other words, these teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez, embed in their practices rules that dictate what is considered as knowledge, how questions are used, stories are told, access to the floor is

gained, knowledge is displayed, space is organized, and time is used. Culturally responsive teachers create classroom communities that are inclusive in which all students understand the appropriate ways of participating in learning by clarifying to students the socio-cultural expectations built onto various learning activities, when necessary. For example, it can be culturally challenging for some students to participate in cooperative problem-solving projects to develop solutions to problems if they have been accustomed to learning through another instructional approach, such as working independently or lecture by the teacher.

To enable students to participate effectively in collaborative problem-solving projects, culturally responsive teachers help them understand not only how to participate in this kind of activity, but also inform students why it is significant for them to adopt new ways of learning that are not familiar. Villegas and Lucas (2002) added that it is not the intention of the teacher to replace the cultural patterns of students but instead provide support for students while adding on new patterns to their culture.

Culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez cultivated a taste for diversity in their classrooms. They posed questions than can be answered from various vantage points and made it safe for students to express their diverse views. In fact, during an observation in Alvarez's classroom, the teacher made a point of informing students that there were no incorrect answers and that they were simply sharing their perspectives about the topic they were discussing in small groups and as a whole class. They introduced multiple ways for students to solve problems (e.g. cooperative learning groups, independent assignments). They learned about the cultures of their students and

used examples, illustrations, and materials related to varied cultures (e.g., *Shining Star* book series). They introduced students to compare idioms, ways of celebrating important events, heroes, stories, and so forth. As Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) assert, “‘Our world, and our students,’ is much expanded by seeing possibilities through many different eyes” (p. 22).

It is not necessary for teachers to implement all of the practices mentioned above as a means of becoming a more responsive teacher. However, it does matter for teachers and educational leaders to begin discovering ways to become more aware of individual learners in order to make classrooms more generous in reaching out to a variety of students with different pathways of teaching and learning so that the potential of all learners can be realized.

### **Distinct Contexts of Secondary Education and EL Instruction Matter**

Effective instructional practices for ELs can help inform educational leaders and teachers on how to best meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Hindering efforts to improve education for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners have been the lack of teachers who can relate to these students, both socially and culturally, teachers’ low expectations for diverse learners, and an over-dependence on instructional methods that disregard the culturally specific prior knowledge of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs. ESL teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez educate some of the most diverse learners in the school and are implementing practices that are not only effective for their students, these practices can be translated into instructional methods used in mainstream

classrooms as well. According to Waxman and Téllez (2002) many educators assert that the best way to help culturally and/or linguistically diverse students is to provide them with better classroom instruction that focuses on research-based instructional practices that have proven effective for ELs.

Effective research-based practices for ELs are culturally responsive in nature. Those practices highlighted in Chapter II include (a) native language and literacy development; (b) sheltered English instruction; and (c) one- and two-way dual language education. Literacy skills are developed most effectively as an outgrowth of the real-life experiences that students bring with them to school from their home and community. Optimal literacy instruction for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students builds on children's prior learning, allowing them to derive meaning from their own reservoir of background experiences (Tinajero et al., 2010). Research has indicated that a key component to successful teaching and learning of students in secondary schools who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse, is creating personal connections with students' lives and prior experiences inside and outside of the school (Berninger et al., 2006; Clay, 2001; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000).

Furthermore, using the native language of the home as a tool for instruction is a key component in fully developing intellectual potential of ELs and in cultivating their sense of self-worth. The importance of this key element of the classroom experience for ELs is supported by the research of numerous scholars (Jimenez, 2000; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2002; Nieto, 2002). Biancarosa and Snow (2004) point out that in secondary school classes language use becomes more complex and more content-area specific. As a

result, English learners must develop literacy skills for each content area in their second language (i.e., English).

Altogether, student-centered practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching would provide culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, such as ELs, with a curriculum that acknowledges that effective teaching and learning take into consideration students' prior knowledge and experiences. These practices also honor students' abilities, learning styles, previous educational backgrounds, and they recognize language as a tool for instruction.

### **Other Hallmarks of Culturally Responsive Practice**

According to Saifer et al. (2011), school staff may find it challenging to connect with families and the community to learn about local cultures. Some teachers may reside in one community and travel to a different community to teach their students. Some activities that culturally responsive teachers use to get to know students and their families include visiting homes, conducting home surveys, holding potluck dinners, creating family picture boards, planning multicultural fairs, connecting with school or community family resource centers, and sharing photo albums created by students using disposable cameras (Saifer et al., 2011).

Although I did not have the opportunity to observe Marshall or Alvarez participating in the types of activities mentioned above, information that was provided by both ESL teachers during interviews shed light on how these connections were beneficial for diverse learners and for the teachers. While I did not mention the significance of culturally responsive teachers making connections with families and communities in

Chapter II, both Marshall and Alvarez have maintained that relationships established through this type of interaction can be helpful for educators and families in addressing the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners.

### **Connecting with Families and the Community**

During an interview with Marshall, she commented on home visits as a culturally responsive ESL teacher:

I think a culturally responsive teacher is someone who is aware and respects other cultures . . . you have to find out things and sometimes you get it just by doing your own research, sometimes you get it by visiting families. I usually do home visits on Saturdays or on Sunday afternoon because I'm too dead during the week. I'll also go to certain things in the community like the Cambodian New Year celebration. They have that over at a temple in [named the city]. Or I'll go to the big Hispanic Day celebration on December 12. They do a Guadalupe Day at a local Catholic church. That's just about an all-day event. However, I'll stop by and visit with families before and after that event as well. I also attend weddings. I'm invited to weddings and *quinceañeras* which are fun and beautiful. I've also been invited to baptisms. Those are the basic things that I've been to.

Dr. Alvarez is also very involved with his students' families by conducting home visits. The home visits allow him the opportunity to sit down and talk with parents or guardians about issues that are occurring in the school that they may not be aware of regarding their children. Alvarez described the home visits this way:

When I go into the home and meet with parents, the students become more motivated after the home visits. Many times this results in higher achievement, reduced student misbehavior, reduced absences and increased parent involvement. It helps me to bring students back into the fold when other methods of reaching parents have not been successful.

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez understand the significance of initiating personal contact with families outside of the school setting and the positive impact that it can have on teaching and learning.

According to Delisio (2008) teachers and administrators from many schools across the nation are hitting the streets in an attempt to increase parent, community and school communication. Each school district model is somewhat different, but each has at its core a need to bridge the gap between families and institutions to: increase family participation, school attendance, and student achievement. Benefits seem to be especially apparent in low-income communities with large numbers of culturally and/or linguistically diverse families that might be intimidated by “the system.”

Dr. Alvarez commented that interaction with families (including home visits and parent conferences) were very beneficial for the teacher, students, and their families. He explained it this way, “Many nights when I’m asked by the principal to attend meetings [parent-teacher conferences] with ESL parents, I’ll educate them on school policies and procedures in the United States.” He added, “I also talk with them [parents] about many other things they may have concerns about such as immigration and citizenship.”

It should be noted that communication with families by the teachers helps the families to gain *cultural capital*, the skills needed to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the norms of behavior that govern schools (Briscoe, Smith, & McClain, 2003). Without this type of information, many minority parents, especially culturally and/or linguistically diverse families who are new to the United States, may not feel competent enough to negotiate the school system on behalf of their child or

knowledgeable enough to support their child's efforts in school (Bazron et al. 2005). Teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez help families by talking with them directly as opposed to using more formal written communication such as letters or notes. Kalyanpur (2003) maintains that this is especially valuable for families from relational cultures, in which personal connections and conversational language are the preferred manner of gathering information.

Kyle and McIntyre (2000) maintain that knowing the students' interests, families, and home routines, and then utilizing this information to connect in meaningful ways, can have enormous rewards in helping to develop happier, healthier, and smarter children. Teachers frequently use the information discovered during home visits as the foundation of curriculum topics or for selecting books for students to read (Saifer et al., 2011). After all, culturally responsive instruction is always student-centered. Students' lives, interests, families, communities and cultures are the basis for what is taught (Saifer & Barton, 2007).

During an interview with Marshall I asked her if she had established any connections with community agencies that could provide resources for her students that could meet their academic and social needs. Marshall informed me that she had established partnerships with a local college and a local YMCA that provided program opportunities for her students.

The *Soy Un Lider* (I Am Leader) Conference is held on a local college campus annually. It is a one-day conference that promotes and encourages Latino high school students to move onto higher institutions of education. During the conference, the

students at the local college host a variety of workshops that deal with the college application process, providing information for documented and undocumented students (and what to do if you are undocumented), affordability, and financial aid options.

The conference also includes a college fair with over seven local college representatives speaking to the high school students and providing them with brochures and pamphlets and empowering them to become leaders. Tours of the college campus where the event was held were provided as well as a luncheon that took place in the host college campus cafeteria so that *Soy Un Lider* participants could interact with other participating schools as well as other students and teachers from the host college.

Marshall noted:

I think that this experience is important for my students. They need to be aware of the opportunities that are available for them by obtaining a college degree. Many students don't believe that attending a college or a university is an option for them either due to the rising cost of tuition or due to their immigration status. The conference works to make college not just a dream for Latino students, but a reality.

One of Marshall's students, Lizette, commented on why she wanted to take more field trips to institutions of higher learning:

I would like more field trips. Um, like to the local community college, you know seeing different careers, what they can be used for, what we can be interested in different fields and things like that. The other teachers don't take the time to do that type of thing.

ESL students at Edwards High School are eligible to become members of the International Achievers Club. The YMCA sponsors the club along with support from

Marshall. Throughout the school year, successful bilingual community members (from local businesses, banks, hospitals, colleges, radio stations) speak to students about the importance of education and setting goals. As immigrants, these “adult achievers” serve as vital role models to the ESL students who are facing many of the same challenges in a new country. Each month the club makes a visit to the workplace for a *Tour and Learn* experience.

Alvarez noted that many of his former students who are currently attending college have returned to his classroom as guest speakers. Their stories inform the ESL students that higher education can be a reality for anyone despite their cultural and/or linguistic differences. In addition, community members such as police officers have served as guest speakers. Law enforcement officers provided students with information related to their careers as well as current immigration laws. Alvarez said that he also considers himself to be a resource for his students by sharing the story of his life as an immigrant to this country.

Once culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez have made connections with students, their families, and communities the information obtained will be useful in incorporating culturally relevant and meaningful activities into the curriculum that meet the academic and social needs of their students.

The practices of culturally responsive teachers have characteristics that are inherent in the principles of sociocultural theory. This is the theory on which I based my conceptual framework in order to assess the effective practices of the two ESL teachers who participated in the study. The following section will provide an advanced analysis of

culturally responsive instructional practices and its similarities to the principles which serve as the foundation for sociocultural theory.

### **Analysis of Instructional Practice**

In order to address my first research question presented in Chapter IV, I based my analysis of Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez's instructional practices on the principles of sociocultural theory. As previously mentioned in Chapter II, I based my conceptual framework for the study on the principles of sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory is based on the notion that learning is socially mediated and rooted in specific cultural-historical contexts. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) asserted that learning occurs as individuals engage in culturally-meaningful activities with the assistance of more competent learners. The findings by Vygotsky are reflective of the same type of culturally responsive instructional practices that I observed in Marshall's and Alvarez's classrooms. For example, both teachers use cooperative learning groups daily in order for students to work collaboratively to devise solutions to problems that were presented through activities and assignments provided by the teacher. Additionally, Alvarez noted that he intentionally placed novice learners with more advanced learners in the same group to provide support for those students that were struggling academically or who were challenged in understanding the content. This presumes that the task is completed in collaboration, "transforming participation," as the learner gains competence and the ability to accept greater responsibility over the more cognitively-demanding portion of the task (Rogoff, 1995).

Vygotsky (1978, 1987) also contended that continuous assessment of the learner's performance is essential to ensure responsive assistance. Marshall and Alvarez used the culturally responsive practice of routinely using informal assessments to monitor student understanding. For example, at the end of the class period, both Marshall and Alvarez had students to respond to questions regarding the assignment/activity for the day. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) maintain that such an approach can help a teacher to sense which individuals have mastered an idea or skill, which individuals hold misconceptions, which are still at the starting block of proficiency, and which individuals need extra support to become proficient. These student responses to questions are not graded they simply provide a snapshot that allows more targeted instructional planning for the days to come.

Another principle of sociocultural theory is the significance of interactions between teachers and students that take place within the contexts or relationships. Scholars (Rodriguez et al., 2004) assert that relationships develop through interactions between people that occur over time and that continue based on previous interactions. Relationships are also built within larger social contexts. For example, teacher-student interactions and relationships are bound by the social organization of classrooms and schools (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Pianta (1999) proposes that broader contextual factors characteristic of schools, such as the formality of classroom instruction, limits the kinds of interactions that occur. He argues that the trust that is built between teachers and students while interacting outside of the typical classroom environment is essential to students' adjustment to school, their affect toward the teacher, and their engagement in

tasks related to school and academic performance. Marshall and Alvarez maintained that the culturally responsive practice of getting to know their students was a key component in addressing the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Both ESL teachers asserted that taking the time to know who their students are (e.g. educational background, family history, interests) can provide teachers with valuable information that can be beneficial in developing curricula that is relevant and meaningful for learners. Figure 2 is an illustration of the expansion of the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework based on data obtained during the research process.

Indeed, the culturally responsive instructional practices implemented by both Marshall and Alvarez reflect the principles of sociocultural theory in that these teaching practices emphasize the social nature of learning and the cultural-historical contexts in which interactions take place between the student and teacher in the school and in the classroom.

In addition to the culturally responsive instructional practices that I described in Chapter IV, both Marshall and Alvarez implemented three core strategies that were also beneficial in addressing the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. These core strategies will be discussed in Chapter V.



**Figure 2. Culturally responsive instructional practices based on learnings from the data.**

**CHAPTER V**

**ESL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL  
CHALLENGES FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS**

During this research study, the ESL teachers implemented effective strategies that were not previously mentioned in Chapter II as being characteristic of culturally responsive teaching. However, I felt that it would be beneficial for educators if those practices were highlighted as a part of this discussion. These strategies will also address my second research question. As a result of how the ESL teachers perceived the challenges of diverse learners through their practice, these three core strategies proved to be effective in meeting the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

Overall, Marshall and Alvarez perceive key academic and social challenges for students as: (a) adjusting to American schooling contexts, (b) acquiring academic English language skills, (c) lack of mainstream teachers' knowledge about the English language acquisition process, (d) mainstream teachers' lack of familiarity with effective instructional methods and ideas for diverse learners, (e) racial discrimination, and (f) becoming Americanized and (g) balancing school and employment.

Culturally responsive teachers, such as the ESL teachers who participated in this study, perceive and address the academic and social challenges of students through their practice by (a) creating a culturally inclusive learning environment; (b) collaborating with

mainstream teachers to develop effective instructional methods and ideas for diverse learners; and (c) building caring classroom communities.

### **Discussion of Academic Challenges**

Once more I draw on the voices of study participants to share their perspectives on how effective culturally responsive ESL teachers perceive and address the academic and social challenges of students through their practice, starting first with three academic issues that Mrs. Marshall (ESL teacher at Edwards High School) and Dr. Alvarez (ESL teacher at Grant High School) pinpointed.

#### **Adjusting to American Schooling**

Despite the increased enrollment of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students across the United States, we find that most of the values and expectations of American educators in schools are representative of the White middle-class culture (Yamauchi, 1998). While the expectations and cultural values of many teachers remain the same, the cultural values and expectations of their students do not. Mrs. Marshall provided an example of how one of her students struggled with a lack of familiarity with cultural norms in American society:

One of the Asian students had come into the classroom and I was talking with another teacher but the student didn't interrupt our conversation. The student just stood by the side the whole time and that was the point where I taught him that if he were just running an errand for a teacher or needed to ask a quick question, he could say "excuse me" to an adult. I explained to him that there are acceptable times to break into a conversation with an adult.

Mrs. Marshall continued by saying:

In his culture, you never, ever interrupted an adult or questioned an adult, or spoke until you were spoken to or acknowledged. I told the student that we did that type of thing in American culture and here's how we do it. I then practiced the same type of situation with the student a little and then he became comfortable.

In addition to taking advantage of teachable moments such as the situation regarding the Asian student, Mrs. Marshall explained how she helps her students to become more familiar with the cultural norms that are expected in school:

I have them [EL students] to initiate contact with teachers to get extra help for tutoring and that sort of thing. I start from the get-go with the students as they come into the school. I also teach them how to do things when they want to speak to a teacher when the teacher is talking to someone else. The student is standing there looking and they don't know what to do. Many of the mainstream teachers don't have the time to teach them to say, "excuse me" and that it's an acceptable thing to interrupt the teacher to ask for help. It sounds little, but it's a big issue for the students.

In order to familiarize students with American cultural norms associated with schooling, Mrs. Marshall takes the time to educate students, and even model acceptable behaviors so that they will have a clear understanding of what their mainstream teachers will expect of them in their classrooms.

For many students, the kinds of behaviors that are expected in school (e.g., sitting in one's seat and only speaking when called on) and types of discourse (e.g. "Class what is the title of this book?") contrast with home cultural and linguistic practices. To increase the success of students, it is imperative that teachers help students, who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse, to bridge this discontinuity between home and

school (Allen & Boykin, 1992). Moreover, a culturally responsive learning environment minimizes the students' alienation as they attempt to adjust to the different "world" of school (Heath, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Dr. Alvarez also expressed his concern regarding culturally and/or linguistically diverse students' unfamiliarity with American cultural norms and how that can have an impact on students' in school. Dr. Alvarez explained it this way:

They're attracted to a lot of things [in American culture] but they don't know the difference between what is right and what is wrong, because they are all still learning [about American cultural norms]. By the time they learn the difference between what is right and what is wrong [what is acceptable in American society and in school] it's too late, they end up in jail or get deported.

Dr. Alvarez commented that he helped his students become more familiarized with American cultural norms in schools by engaging in conversations with them about behaviors that are acceptable in the school setting and in society. He commented:

I'm always trying to talk with students about what is acceptable in school and what their teachers [mainstream teachers] are expecting them to be able to do in their classes especially regarding certain behaviors. A lot of the other teachers [mainstream teachers] will assume that all students know how to ask a teacher for help in class or know how to raise their hand and not yell an answer out in class, but that is not the case. Many of my students are new to this country and I have to teach them how to survive in the [mainstream] classroom and in school.

As data from Alvarez and Marshall indicate, with the increase of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in American public schools there is often a conflict between the cultural expectations of the students and educators who are not culturally responsive. Students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse must make some

adjustments when they first arrive in school and they must learn the routines of the classroom and the school. In the case of students whose experiences are not similar to that of the American White culture, the adjustment may be more challenging due to the differences in values and expectations in the home setting and the expectations of the culture of the school. If students experience difficulty in adjusting to cultural norms they may appear to become disinterested, unmotivated, and even defiant towards educators (Yamauchi, 1998).

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez assist diverse students, such as ELs, in adjusting to cultural norms which can be beneficial for students in understanding differing cultural values and expectations that are acceptable in institutions, such as American public schools. While this challenge definitely relates to social issues too, I have presented it as an academic challenge given that U.S. cultural norms so closely shape American academic norms, which data from the teachers support.

### **Acquiring Academic English Language Skills**

Another issue that Marshall and Alvarez perceive as a challenge for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students is acquiring academic English language skills.

*Academic language* is described by (Echevarria et al., 2008) as language used in formal contexts for academic subjects. Although not understood by many educators, age-appropriate knowledge of the English language is a prerequisite in the attainment of content standards. Students learn primarily through language and language is used to express their understanding (Echevarria et al., 2008).

The most important issue is the amount of time that it takes to acquire a second language for school. While it takes one to three years for ELs to develop conversational proficiency in English, they need five to seven years to develop academic English; that is, the English needed for reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the content areas (Collier, 1999; Cummins, 2001).

Most people underestimate, as Carrier (2005) notes, the amount of time it takes to fully develop academic language skills, so it is understandable that many educators dispute the five- to seven-year figure. Teachers often hear culturally and/or linguistically diverse students speaking to other students in the hallways, and socially in the classroom in reasonably accurate English. It appears as though these students have “learned” English well enough to comprehend all that is occurring in their mainstream classrooms, and to participate fully without any special modifications. However, when speaking about the language proficiency needed by culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, we are talking about the level of English required to understand academic content and to participate in activities and assignments.

Dr. Alvarez explained how the acquisition of academic language can be a challenge for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students:

I can tell you that students who have learned English in their native countries find it easier to learn English [academic language] when they come to America. However, for the kids that were born and raised here in the United States, they can speak a lot of English, but they struggle with reading and writing. Many of these students come to high school and they're not able to read or write in English. This can hold them back academically.

What Dr. Alvarez is suggesting is that many of the culturally and/or linguistically diverse students can speak the English language when they are engaging in social conversations, but they are unable to use English skills successfully in an academic manner (e.g. writing essays or stories, explaining concepts for core subjects, or something as simple as verbalizing their thoughts). These types of issues can impede student learning. Without proficient oral and written English language skills, students are hard pressed to learn and demonstrate knowledge of math reasoning, science skills, concepts in social studies, and so forth.

Mrs. Marshall also commented on the challenges that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students face in acquiring academic language:

In English class my students are expected to read and understand things in textbooks and materials that they aren't familiar with. They [students] are expected to be able to write persuasively, argue their points-of-view and take notes while the teacher is lecturing during class or be able to pull information from websites. They [students] must learn to express their thinking skills in English [make hypotheses and predictions, draw conclusions]. They have to learn how to do things like format an outline, and interpret charts and maps.

Marshall added:

When I teach academic language I introduce content words, vocabulary words, process/function words such as how to ask the teacher for information or how to state a conclusion. I'm teaching them [students] information that will help them to be successful in their core subjects and outside of school as well.

In order for Marshall and Alvarez to help their students acquire academic language skills they both use culturally responsive practices through SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). Echevarria et al. (2008) maintain that sheltered instruction is an

approach that can extend the time students have for getting language support services while allowing them the opportunity to get a jump-start on the content subjects that are required for graduation (e.g. English, math, science, social studies). The SIOP classes at both Edwards High School and Grant High School are offered as elective classes comprised entirely of EL students. The SIOP model is not an additional or replacement instructional technique that teachers implement in their classrooms. Instead, as Echevarria et al. (2008) assert, it draws from and complements methods advocated for both ESL and mainstream classrooms. For example, some instructional practices include cooperative learning, connections to students' experiences, targeted vocabulary development, use of visuals and demonstrations, and use of adapted text (Short & Echevarria, 2004).

Marshall described how using SIOP in her classroom is useful for helping culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in acquiring the academic language skills:

When I use SIOP in my classes, there is a lot of student engagement and interaction with the teacher, and with other students and with the text or subject which can lead to discussions and students using their critical thinking skills. They [students] can learn language through social interaction and communication. I'm there to help them [students] connect the meaning and understand concepts from textbooks and from the class discussions. This can help them [students] improve their academic language skills for their mainstream classes.

Alvarez added how he used SIOP to assist his students in acquiring academic language skills:

When I use SIOP I modify the level of English used with students [based on their English language ability level] make the content understandable by using visual aids, modeling, demonstrations, graphic organizers, previews of vocabulary [that

will be used in core class subjects], adapted texts, cooperative learning, and allowing students to use their native language for understanding concepts or content. I make connections between the content being taught and students' experiences and prior knowledge. I focus on expanding students' vocabulary base. I also help students to learn how to do things like writing a report for social studies class and conducting research on the computer.

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez implement practices such as using the SIOP model to assist diverse students in acquiring academic language skills so that they will have the opportunity to flourish in mainstream classrooms. These practices are indicative of the principles that serve as the foundation for sociocultural theory.

### **Mainstream Teachers' Lack of Knowledge in the English Language Acquisition Process**

In addition to adjusting to American culture, both Marshall and Alvarez perceive that mainstream teachers' lack of knowledge of the English language acquisition process is an academic issue encountered by culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners that can hinder their learning.

If educators examine state learning standards and lessons for secondary school students, it becomes clear that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students must master new, content-specific vocabulary for core subjects (i.e., academic language), as well as understand the concepts they represent. This vocabulary is often very technical, and is less frequently used than the conversational English that these students are heard using with ease. In addition to this new and higher level vocabulary, culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, such as ELs, must learn to use higher level language functions such as analyzing, predicting, explaining, and justifying (Carrier, 2005).

Mrs. Marshall commented on the lack of knowledge that mainstream teachers have regarding English language acquisition and how it can have an impact on student learning:

There are still a few teachers that will do a straight lecture. They're primarily in classes like Advanced Placement [AP]; however, we do have some AP teachers that do visual learning activities and incorporate that. Therefore, some of the students [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] who are in those higher-level classes [AP] do have that [visual learning activities] but the instruction can't be at the level for AP because of the type of material and the rate at which you're expected to do the work and that sort of thing.

What Marshall is suggesting is that many teachers may assume that since a student is enrolled in a higher level course such as Advanced Placement, he/she must be capable of mastering that type of rigorous coursework without taking into consideration, any modifications needed for cultural and/or linguistic differences.

Alvarez also commented on the issue of mainstream teachers' lack of understanding the process of English language acquisition:

Many times the teachers [mainstream teachers] don't take into consideration the various levels at which students can understand the English language. For example, I see many differences in the learning needs of immigrant students and students who were born in this country [the United States]. Most of my students are immigrants. I would probably say 60 to 70% of my students are immigrants and 40 to 30% were born in the United States.

What Alvarez is suggesting is that many mainstream teachers do not take into consideration, when developing curricula, the large number of immigrant students who are new to this country may not have had the opportunity to attend school or they had limited access to education in their native country. As a result, the educational

background of immigrants may contrast greatly when compared to the educational background of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners who were born in the United States.

Alvarez added:

Many times teachers [mainstream teachers] will assume that just because a student can speak English very well, they can understand the content and concepts in a classroom and that they're proficient in English, but that's not true. There are students who can carry on a conversation very well with their peers or with the teacher, but these students are still struggling with understanding information in their core subject areas. When these students are unable to complete the work the teachers assume that they're simply being lazy, when many times, that's not the case. They [mainstream teachers] don't have a clear understanding about the process that it takes for students to acquire English language skills. It is a daunting task for the kids.

With an understanding about the English language acquisition process, teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez help their students by providing the additional support they need in order to be successful in mainstream classrooms. Mrs. Marshall explained it this way:

As an ESL teacher, I provide my students with the extra support they need not only in the content specific vocabulary, but also the academic sentence structures. I analyze my lessons and use word walls, among other techniques, to help my students [ELs] practice and acquire the vocabulary they will need to understand the pertinent points of the lesson [in the mainstream classroom]. I determine what kind of sentence structures are required to talk and write about concepts in the lesson.

Dr. Alvarez commented on how he assisted his students in the English language acquisition process:

I model sentence structures and post them on the walls in my classroom and encourage my students [ELs] to use them. I also point out to the students when we're reading in class, when the words that they've learned are written in the textbooks and materials that we use, to help them [students] to recognize them in their reading and use them in their writing.

Dr. Alvarez added:

By adding vocabulary and sentence structures as language objectives that support each lesson's content objectives for core subjects, I can make sure students [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] develop the specific language skills they need to be successful in the core subjects [English, math, science, social studies].

Indeed, teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez are aware that culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners are doing two jobs at the same time in the mainstream classroom: learning a new language while learning new academic content. These students are traveling between the two worlds of their ESL classroom and their mainstream classrooms. As a result, culturally and/or linguistically diverse students must work harder and need more support than the average native English speaking student who has an age-appropriate command of the English language. Therefore, it is imperative that mainstream teachers become partners with their students' ESL teachers to effectively support the language development and academic achievement of diverse learners.

### **The First Two Core Strategies**

Marshall and Alvarez used two effective core strategies that addressed the academic needs of diverse learners. Those strategies are: (a) creating a culturally inclusive learning environment and (b) collaborating with mainstream teachers to develop effective instructional methods and ideas. Through the use of these culturally responsive

instructional practices, Marshall and Alvarez were able to create classrooms that specifically acknowledged the presence of culturally diverse students and developed collaborative partnerships that provided educators with the opportunity to implement strategies that can result in student success.

### **Creating Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments**

Culturally responsive classrooms, Montgomery (2001) asserts, are settings in which the presence of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students is acknowledged and the need for these students to find meaningful and relevant connections between themselves and the subject matter and the tasks teachers ask them to perform. In culturally responsive learning environments such as Marshall and Alvarez's classrooms, teachers recognize the varied learning styles of their students and develop instructional practices that will accommodate these styles. The following are two methods that Marshall and Alvarez implemented to promote cultural inclusion in their classrooms.

### **The Culture of the Classroom Fosters the Development of a Community of Learners**

Culturally and/or linguistically diverse students bring a variety of experiences to the classroom that, if tapped, can serve as a foundation for explorations that enrich everyone's experience. In effective culturally inclusive classrooms, teachers and students work as a team to construct a culture that values the strengths of all individuals and respects their interests, abilities, languages, and dialects (Walqui, 2000). Alvarez explained how he created a culturally inclusive classroom this way:

I strive to create a classroom in which all of my students accept one another and respect the different backgrounds of their classmates. I initiate this by teaching students about different cultures and languages in a positive way. The positive

identification creates a foundation for communication among the students. When we do things like this in class, students respect one another and begin to understand other people's cultures and language differences.

Mrs. Marshall commented on how she created a classroom environment that is culturally inclusive:

I appreciate and accommodate all of the similarities and differences of the students' cultures in my classroom. I set some ground rules for the students and let them know that despite the differences among the people in the classroom, that everyone must be respected. The students have even taken the time to learn about each other's cultures and language differences. For example, there is one ESL student who is from the Philippines. He has taught the other students [Hispanic students] in the class his native language [Tagalong] and they have taught him their native language [Spanish].

Indeed, teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez create sociocultural learning environments in which students gain an understanding and respect for various cultures and languages.

### **Fostering an Interactive Learning Environment**

Culturally inclusive learning environments call for teachers to implement activities for interactive engagement in the learning process. Marshall and Alvarez implemented the use of cooperative learning groups. This culturally responsive instructional practice brings students together within a variety of collaborative learning activities. The use of this type of learning group allows students to see the benefits of bringing people together with different backgrounds in order to devise solutions to problems. The students use listening, speaking, reading, and writing together in order to accomplish common goals and in the process become accountable since their participation in the group will have an impact on group outcomes (Montgomery, 2001).

Marshall described the significance of using cooperative learning groups to create an inclusive learning environment:

When I use cooperative groups . . . I do it in different ways. Sometimes it's paired and sometimes it's teamed and sometimes it's just two groups. It works real well and they're [students] very open and work in different ways with each other. It gives them [students] the opportunity to engage in conversations that lead them to helping one another in finding solutions to problems.

As previously mentioned in Chapter IV, the cooperative learning groups that I observed in Marshall's classroom offered students the opportunity to work actively with one another. Marshall allowed the students to select their own group members or if they worked in pairs, the students were instructed to work in mixed-gender pairs. This allowed students to have a sense of autonomy in making those types of decisions.

Dr. Alvarez also commented on how he uses cooperative learning groups in his classroom to create an inclusive learning environment:

I like to place students in cooperative learning groups every day. I especially like to mix advanced learners with novice learners. When I put a more advanced learner in a group with someone that is struggling academically, they [advanced learner] can take the lead in the group and help the struggling student to understand content and concepts until they [novice learner] can grasp the content or concept on their own.

Dr. Alvarez added:

Cooperative groups also give students the opportunity to express their points-of-view and understand that there is no right or wrong answer when people are sharing their opinions about a topic or subject that we are discussing in class.

Indeed, when teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez implement cooperative learning activities they provide culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners with the opportunity to use their language skills in relevant, meaningful, and purposeful interactions. Collaborative work provides students with substantial and equitable opportunities to engage in open exchange and in-depth discussions. Walqui (2000) maintains that in collaborative groups, the teacher is no longer the figure of authority. Students work autonomously, taking responsibility for their own learning.

### **Collaborating with Mainstream Teachers to Develop Effective Instructional Methods and Ideas for Diverse Learners**

Collaboration can be beneficial for ESL teachers since it allows them the opportunity to work with mainstream teachers to develop instructional strategies/practices that will be helpful for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, particularly in core subject areas. A research synthesis for the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality NCCTQ (Goe et al., 2008) indicated that effective teachers collaborate with other teachers to ensure student success. Saifer et al. (2011) noted that teaming is a way for like-minded professionals to work together. This process begins by building a collaborative relationship. When two or more teachers collaborate, using culturally responsive instructional practices, powerful student learning and growth frequently occur. Along these lines, data suggested that both Marshall and Alvarez strive to collaborate with mainstream teachers in helping them develop more effective instructional practices for diverse learners, which thus benefits EL students.

Marshall describes how she collaborates with mainstream teachers in order to address the academic needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students:

I don't collaborate with mainstream teachers regarding specific lessons but in general I actually do *professional learning communities* (PLCs) with the English teachers weekly and especially because that's a class that requires students to take and pass an End-of-Course [EOC] test for that subject. We work together particularly with vocabulary ideas and other sorts of instructional ideas and methods.

Alvarez also commented on how he collaborated with mainstream teachers in order to develop lessons that will meet the academic needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students:

I do collaborate with mainstream teachers, but it has been a challenge for me. They say that I want them to add more work to what they already have to do. Many of the teachers feel that I've overstepped my bounds when I tell them what they need to do to help my students [ELs]. They [mainstream teachers] say, "He wants me to do this but he's crazy." "He doesn't know anything about this country." He doesn't know what he's talking about." "You know he's coming from another country—He doesn't know anything about American education."

Alvarez continued by saying:

I provide teachers with copies of the vocabulary that my students are supposed to learn by grade level. Many of them [mainstream teachers] say that it's too much work and that I don't know what I'm talking about. Now, with the core classes, the mainstream teachers I'm supposed to work with them like a team player. I'm supposed to help them, to provide them with information and materials to help them work with my students. This is what I'm supposed to do or this is what I'm supposed to suggest that they do. Many of the teachers, they will tell you that they're using the same textbook that they were using when they were students themselves. As a result, sometimes the mainstream teachers are teaching information that is not related to the exams. I'm checking students' notes they're taking in preparation for quizzes and exams when they come to me for help and there's no relationship between the notes and the textbook or with the quizzes and tests. It's completely different. I have to assist the students in finding the information by going online [and using the computer] to look for the answers.

What Dr. Alvarez is suggesting is that it has been a challenge for him to work collaboratively with many mainstream teachers when developing instructional strategies that will be helpful for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in the core subject areas. While Alvarez has worked diligently to provide mainstream teachers with the support that they need for educating diverse students, they [mainstream teachers] appear to be adamant about continuing their “usual routine” of educating students with textbooks and materials that are outdated and do not address the academic needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners. Additionally, Alvarez’s comments indicate that many mainstream teachers may feel that he is not a competent teacher due to his ethnic background and therefore, they do not consider him to be an educator with expertise that would be beneficial for them when developing effective instructional strategies to enrich culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

Even though Marshall and Alvarez continue to encounter challenges with many mainstream teachers failing to provide the necessary accommodations and/or instructional practices that are most beneficial for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, they continue to work diligently with those teachers in an effort to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to thrive during their high school years and beyond.

As a result of the challenges that the ESL teachers encountered in collaborating with mainstream teachers in developing strategies for diverse students, both Marshall and Alvarez have suggested that educational leaders provide mainstream teachers with the opportunity to participate in professional development that informs them on how to address the educational needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students,

including ELs. Both teachers noted that training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) would be most helpful for mainstream teachers. Marshall made the following comment regarding professional development training for mainstream teachers:

I would put SIOP training as number one for mainstream teachers. We have some cultural awareness type of things that have been offered even by the school district. I think that those sorts of things, they're little things, but things in each culture, like words that you would use or actions that you would use when teachers are more aware of the things like that from other cultures—it heightens their own awareness of who they're dealing with [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] and where they're students are coming from.

Dr. Alvarez added:

The objectives of professional development for mainstream teachers should be related to modifying instruction for diverse students. In other words, SIOP. Listen, we already have students who are struggling. How do you help these students—do you ignore them? Do you put them in the back of the class? This is what always happens. When you go to observe my students in the class they are always in the corner of the classroom [the mainstream classroom].

Indeed, the recommendation that Marshall and Alvarez have made regarding SIOP training for mainstream teachers would allow all staff who are not familiar with the instructional practices that are most beneficial in meeting the needs of diverse learners the chance to explore effective practices that will allow all students to have a learning experience that is equitable to that of English speaking students.

### **Discussion of Social Challenges**

While four of the seven key challenges Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez identified clearly related to academic issues, the other two—while definitely affecting students' academic contexts and learning progress—also have some distinct social dimensions.

These issues, which I am framing as social challenges, related to the teachers' perceptions that their students face racial discrimination and difficulties advancing in school while also being employed.

### **Racial Discrimination**

Marshall and Alvarez agreed that racial discrimination is a social challenge that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students and their families encounter in the school and in the community. Marshall commented that:

I don't think that there are as many incidents as there were maybe 10 years ago, but an interesting type of discrimination exists on the school campus in which everybody's called Mexican no matter where they're from and so that is a big form of discrimination with kids, but I think it's like that at high schools everywhere.

An ethnic group identifies with each other through a common heritage, consisting of culture, and including a shared language or dialect. Therefore, if someone assumes that a culturally and/or linguistically diverse student belongs to an ethnic group to which they do not belong, they are blatantly disregarding their ancestry and that is perceived by many ethnic minorities as being disrespectful, and discriminatory. Dr. Alvarez added that discrimination existed at Grant High School as well. I've heard expressions made by the adults on our school campus such as: "All these Mexicans, they need to go to other schools." That is very discriminatory. Alvarez also explained that he has even experienced discrimination among his colleagues at his school. He commented:

Well, segregation is everywhere. I am even segregated myself by the teachers here at my school. As a teacher, even if I'm highly educated, many of the teachers

here at my school, they don't like me. I don't know if it's because of my ethnic origin, but most of the time they segregate me as a teacher and they're doing the same thing with my students [in the mainstream classrooms].

The racial discrimination that the students and Alvarez experienced is due in part to a lack of knowledge by Dr. Alvarez's colleagues at his school and other students on the Grant High School campus regarding various cultures and backgrounds of individuals. Saifer et al. (2011) note that during the past 20 years, U.S. public school districts have experienced dramatic increases in cultural and linguistic diversity. If you walk into any school or classroom in the nation, you will experience a cross cultural zone where ethnicity, class, gender, language, national origin, and other cultural factors are vibrant and alive in the sounds, smells, sights, and textures of the school building and its occupants. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers and educational leaders within the walls of our nation's schools, collaborate as a team to create schools in which all students, including those who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse, are made to feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated.

Marshall and Alvarez indicated that through conversations with students and their families, they educate them about various issues that can specifically affect people who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Dr. Alvarez explained it this way:

I try to help them [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students] by always talking to them about life in general. I always tell them that their life is changing and that they don't know what the future holds for them even though they are discriminated against not only here in school but also in society. I tell them to just be prepared, become educated. Because nowadays people will notice you if you are educated—especially if you were not born in this country [the United States]. If you were not born in this country and you are educated, you don't have conflict, you don't have any records to prove that you've done anything wrong

[illegal]—people will be more accepting of you [your cultural and linguistic differences].

Through these conversations that Dr. Alvarez is having with his students, he is suggesting that they continue to be hopeful that despite their cultural and language differences, all students will have the opportunity to become educated and should set goals in order to do so. In other words, success is not limited to a select group of individuals.

Mrs. Marshall helps students who have historically experienced racial discrimination by insisting that these students be placed in core classes with teachers who are sensitive to the needs of diverse students. Evidently, the principal of Edwards High School, Miss Goodwin allows Marshall to assist the school's student services office with placing EL students in their classes during the school year. Marshall explained it this way:

We [ESL teachers] just have more of a sensitivity with the students [ELs] and because you know, because I look over their schedules and help with scheduling and that sort of thing. And this is the first year that I can say that they're in a great place [placed with mainstream teachers who are sensitive to the needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students]. I look over scheduling and say this is a great teacher.

Indeed, the efforts made by Marshall to ensure that diverse learners are placed in mainstream classrooms with teachers who are sensitive to these students' needs, can have a positive impact on the educational experience for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

### **Becoming “Americanized”**

Alvarez and Marshall also perceive that their students encounter social challenges when they are becoming Americanized. *Americanized* means that an individual is absorbing or assimilating into the American culture and thereby adapting (and sometimes minimizing) or refraining from engaging in their native cultural traditions (Nieto, 2000). In other words, the students may begin wearing clothing that is more similar to that of their peers who were born and raised in America. These students might also begin to exhibit some behaviors that are considered by many educators to be unacceptable in the school setting (e.g. being disrespectful towards teachers and school administrators).

Marshall explained it this way:

I see a challenge for students becoming Americanized. It depends on when they come to the United States. If they've moved to the United States and this is their first school in the country, they're still in shock here for about two years or more because most of them come from cultures that have stricter expectations for behavior and schools. They [students] are astounded and appalled at how American kids treat people. Once they've been here four to five years and they get like this [begin to exhibit unacceptable behaviors such as being disrespectful or defiant towards adults] and then it's hard for their parents to deal with.

When speaking about students who become Americanized, this refers to behaviors that have an impact on individuals more so in a social context, particularly when culturally and/or linguistically diverse students are striving to be socially accepted by their peers. In other words, these students assume a persona or a physical appearance (e.g., changes in clothing, mannerisms) of being more American as opposed to being affiliated with their native heritage. Alvarez also commented on the social challenges encountered by

culturally and/or linguistically diverse students regarding their adjustment to American culture:

Well, I would say that the problem starts when they [students] want to be Americanized. They try to imitate things [the clothing and behavior of many American students] but obviously for the place where they're living and the people they become involved with, sometimes they're learning the wrong things. Because they live in neighborhoods with a lower socio-economic class, they can pick up bad habits. Unfortunately, they think that everything they're exposed to is acceptable because they really love this country and see a lot of different things they haven't seen before and have a lot of opportunities to do things that they've never been able to do before they moved to the United States. They're attracted to a lot of things, but they don't know the difference between what is right and what is wrong, because they are still learning. By the time they learn the difference between what is right and what is wrong, it's too late, they end up in jail or get deported.

Dr. Alvarez is suggesting that many culturally and/or linguistically diverse students are so ecstatic about living in a new country that they don't take into consideration that many of the characteristics that they perceive as being acceptable (due to their lack of knowledge about American culture) can result in young people being led down the wrong path to becoming Americanized and in the process also lose sight of the significance of still maintaining their cultural identity.

Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez both informed me that they address many of the social issues by talking with students and their families about things such as racism, discrimination, violence, privilege, prejudice, cultural norms in American society, school policies/procedures, and immigration laws. They also provide families with information regarding community resources such as counseling centers and agencies that provide

services for immigrants that can assist them in resolving problems that exist within the home and at school.

Saifer et al. (2011) maintained that one of the most important ways that teachers can let students know they are valued and respected is to have conversations with them about their home, family, and life in the community. These conversations are necessary to culturally responsive teaching, they help educators understand students' worldviews and develop relationships with them. Thus, teachers can use the information obtained through these conversations to assist students and their families in forming solutions regarding social issues. Additionally, in order for educational leaders to be sufficiently prepared to address the social challenges that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students encounter, such as becoming "Americanized," they must also gain a clear understanding of the social-emotional needs of diverse learners. This understanding can be initiated by school administrators having authentic conversations with students such as those that Marshall and Alvarez have had. From there, educational leaders can draw upon a more critically and culturally informed perspective when providing teachers with instructional leadership.

### **Students Balancing School and Employment**

In addition to racial discrimination, Marshall and Alvarez perceive a challenge for many culturally and/or linguistically diverse students as having the task of balancing school and employment. During interview sessions, Marshall and Alvarez shared information regarding students' families that moved to the United States and as a result

are not employed or under-employed due to language barriers. Marshall explained how these factors can have an impact on the education of students:

A lot of students and their parents are facing social challenges with their job opportunities. We've had several professional families who have moved here from India. In one family, the mother was a doctor but she had to work in housekeeping somewhere here when she moved to the United States because there's no way she's going to be able to practice medicine until she can speak English. I have parents of one of my students who moved here from El Salvador. Both of them were teachers who moved here [to the United States]. One parent works for McDonald's [restaurant] and the other parent works for a business doing something like filing papers and that sort of thing in a business-type job.

Marshall noted that when the adults in the household are impacted by situations such as parents who previously worked in professional careers and are suddenly under-employed, the children are significantly affected. This may mean that the children in the family must also seek employment in order to contribute financially to their household. As a result, students must learn how to balance completing daily assignments for school and maintaining employment in order to assist their family financially.

Alvarez shared a story about one of his students, Daniel. He talked about the two jobs the student has in order to assist his family financially, in addition to attending high school:

Students like Daniel find it difficult to get his school work completed. He is a cook at a pizza restaurant and he is also a cook in another local town at an Egyptian restaurant. He works to help his family out financially. Usually, when he has to go to work, he has told me that it keeps him from getting his assignments done.

When students like Daniel are unable to complete assignments for school due to work obligations, many mainstream teachers who are unaware of his family situation might not understand why assignments are missing or being turned in late. Marshall and Alvarez shared that they get to know their students and families so that they can offer their assistance in devising a plan that will allow these young people the opportunity to maintain employment and to also fulfill academic obligations for the school.

### **A Third Core Strategy**

In addition to addressing students' social issues, Marshall and Alvarez created learning environments within their classrooms that were caring and nurturing. As a middle school counselor I know how important it is for students to feel comfortable sharing information with an adult about personal issues as well as school-related concerns. When students know that an adult truly has a care and concern for them, it builds and strengthens the relationship with the educator and prompts students to engage in conversations that allow teachers the opportunity to get to know them better. As a result, educators can determine how they can best meet students' diverse academic and social needs.

Although efforts to reform teacher education programs have customarily focused on teachers' competence in the subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, the crucial need for teachers who care for and about students has been earning recognition (Morris & Morris, 2002). Sheets and Gay (1996) called for "culturally responsive discipline, whose primary purpose is for teachers to create caring and nurturing relationships with students,

grounded in cooperation, collaboration, and reciprocity rather than the current teacher controlling-student compliance patterns” (p. 92).

### **Building Caring Classroom Communities**

During my observations in Marshall and Alvarez’s classrooms, I noticed that the teachers and the students had a wonderful rapport with one another. Both teachers set the tone for a caring classroom community by greeting students with a smile and a welcoming comment when they walked through the classroom door. The teachers also expressed admiration for students’ bilingual abilities and frequently greeted students by saying “hello” in their native language. Prior to beginning the lesson in both Marshall and Alvarez’s classrooms, the teacher prompted students to briefly talk about their school day or any issues, concerns or current events in the news they might want to discuss with the teacher and classmates. If students felt uncomfortable discussing issues/concerns in the presence of their classmates, Marshall and Alvarez invited them to return to their classrooms during their lunch period or dependent upon their availability, during the teacher’s planning time. This type of interaction between teacher and student can build strong relationships, and the teachers’ efforts to build caring communities help to address both students’ academic and social challenges.

Monzo and Rueda (2001) found that interacting with students in a manner, such as Marshall and Alvarez do, is a significant way to establish trust. They suggest that teachers try to relate to students as “friends” and foster more reciprocal types of interactions. Listening to what students have to say emerges as an important way to develop a close relationship with students. In order to demonstrate how the ESL teachers

participating in this study developed strong trusting relationships with their students, I felt that the voices of their students needed to be heard to affirm how those relationships have been essential in Marshall and Alvarez creating caring and nurturing learning environments. Therefore, I have included comments of students for both Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez regarding the relationships that were established with their ESL teachers and how those relationships have an impact on student learning. Student data speak to “how” the teachers “address” both the academic and social challenges they perceive their students having.

Lizette, an ESL student, described her relationship with Marshall and how she felt comfortable talking with her about various topics:

Our relationship is awesome! We communicate, we talk like we’ve known each other for a long time. Like, I trust her. It’s not like other teachers you know—she’s just a teacher and you’re supposed to teach me and that’s all. We talk to each other. We talk about how our day was, what’s new about my career choices, what I plan to do in the future, things like that.

Lizette continued by saying, “She [Marshall] makes us feel more at ease in her class. It’s not boring. She makes us feel welcome. We want to go to her class.”

Similarly, one of Alvarez’s students, Martin, commented on his relationship with the teacher. Martin described it this way:

He [Alvarez] can relate to me. That’s important because he can be there for you anytime. If you got problems with anything or something like that, he’s always there like he can be there for you and try to help you through everything. If you get along with your teacher it’s important. If like one of your family members like your aunt or something, you know them really well, you always try to talk to them and stuff like that, so I feel comfortable talking to him [Alvarez]. If it was a teacher I didn’t get along with, I wouldn’t tell him nothing. It depends,

it depends, if I don't like the teacher, obviously I'd do what they want me to do sometimes. If it's a teacher that I get along with and I can talk to [them] easily and [the teacher] cares about me, well obviously, I'm going to show the same respect as he does too [show] respect. He [Alvarez] cares about every student.

Indeed, in relationships such as those that Marshall and Alvarez have established with their students, it is evident that students trust and appreciate teachers who show respect, and a true care and concern for them.

Gay (2000) wrote that “caring is a foundational pillar of effective teaching and learning, [and] the lack of it produces inequities in educational opportunities and achievement outcomes for ethnically different students” (p. 62). Rogers and Renard (1999) maintained that “students are motivated when they believe that teachers treat them like people and care about them personally and educationally” (p. 34); and Cothran and Ennis (2000) declared that students are more likely to cooperate with teachers who are caring and respectful. These types of interactions can result in the development of strong teacher-student relationships.

One of Marshall's students, Felix, described how the teacher shows respect for cultural and linguistic differences among students in the classroom:

She [Marshall] shows respect. Sometimes we have Hispanic parties. We bring chips and all that. We just hang out. We talk about our culture and how different our cultures are. Everyone in our class is from Mexico except for one student—he's from the Philippines. We can teach him about Mexican culture and he can teach us about Philippine culture. We talk about like our countries and where we're from—like how we live and everything. The student from the Philippines talks about how he speaks Tagalong [the native language for the Philippines]. He doesn't teach us how to speak his language but we teach him Spanish.

Indeed, culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez are educators who believe that by encouraging students to engage in conversations with one another and discussing their cultural and/or language differences, they become more familiar with one another and as a result, begin to evolve as a community of learners within the classroom.

One of Alvarez's students, Zaviera, commented on how the teacher shows respect for cultural and language differences among students in the classroom:

He [Alvarez] shows us respect. He never says something that can [offend you] because you are Mexican or whatever, he says we are all the same and we are all here for learning, we are all Hispanic. He doesn't say that, you are Mexican, you are Salvadorean.

Zaviera continued by saying:

He encourages the other students to respect each other. Because when we have like different events for different cultures in the ESL classroom, you know when it was Halloween, we celebrated the *Day of the Dead*. Some students didn't know that it's a Mexican tradition so they got to learn about it.

Martin, another one of Alvarez's students commented:

He [Alvarez] respects the different cultures and languages [of students]. He's always like no matter if he's from Spain and stuff like that but he always cares about other cultures and stuff from different countries that are Hispanic and stuff like that. He tries to do the same holidays for us, like Mexicans. He did the Day of the Dead for Mexico, Cinco de Mayo and stuff like that.

Martin added:

He [Alvarez] teaches students about different cultures. We have students in class from countries like Mexico, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. He teaches about different cultures about the celebration of the Day of the Dead,

Independence of Mexico. He tries to give us knowledge about our own country and stuff like that.

Indeed, teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez understand that culturally responsive teaching is built on a foundation of knowledge and understanding of their students' family and community culture, which is crucial to the process of teaching and learning. Learning all about different cultures represented in the classroom can seem like a daunting task; however, the success of teachers like Marshall and Alvarez indicates that it is well worth the effort.

Research supports these views. Wentzel (1997, 1998), for example, has proven that when secondary-school students view their teachers as supportive and caring, they are more likely to be motivated academically, to participate in classroom activities, and to behave in a manner that is socially responsible. Likewise, a study by Davidson (1999) reveals students' willingness to work with teachers who convey interest in their well-being. This reciprocity is particularly evident in the responses of the culturally and/or linguistically diverse student participants whose home worlds were very different from their school worlds. Martin, one of Dr. Alvarez's students, described it this way:

He's really a cool teacher. I get along really, really good with him. When I repeated the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I had to take that class [the ESL class] and at first I didn't get along with him [Dr. Alvarez]. I felt like he was kind of tripping—you know like he was always going against me and everything like that. I couldn't do anything cause' then he'd really be on me—you know beside me, watching everything I was doing. After that I pretty much understood what he was doing—and we're cool like that. He was trying to make me do my work. I appreciate what he was doing. He's been there for me. He's like a father figure to me. He's always there for me. He's always telling me to do my work and stuff like that.

Indeed, culturally-responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez understand that children do not perform well academically or socially in environments where adults are continuously critical, constantly accentuating the negative, and not accepting children for who they are despite their differences. Therefore, teachers and educational leaders must build trusting relationships with students and foster warm and caring environments where all learners can flourish.

### **Links to Conceptual Framework/Sociocultural Theory: Analysis of Students' Academic and Social Challenges and Teachers' Responses**

I selected sociocultural theory to inform my conceptual framework for this research study since this theory is founded on notion that learning is based on social interaction and is rooted in cultural-historical contexts. The instructional practices that I observed in Marshall's and Alvarez's classrooms were reflective of the principles of sociocultural theory. Both teachers used these practices in addressing the issues they perceived as being academic and social challenges for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners.

As sociocultural theory indicates, teachers who have gained knowledge about students through social interaction and by building positive teacher-student relationships have been particularly relevant to teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez, in making appropriate educational decisions and determining how to best address the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners. These decisions have also led culturally responsive teachers to make appropriate educational decisions such as developing units of study and lessons that are relevant and meaningful that draw on students' prior knowledge and interests.

As scholarship and data from this study demonstrate, culturally diverse students such as ELs in U.S. public schools frequently face different barriers that view native language and background knowledge as deficits rather than as assets, despite substantial evidence that bilingual proficiency and bi-literacy are positively related to academic achievement of students (Genesee et al., 2005; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). Students, such as the culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in Marshall and Alvarez's classrooms, have the tendency to learn best in a classroom that supports their culture, language, and real-life experiences. This tenet is true of ELs as it is of their peers and classmates in today's U.S. schools. Indeed, sociocultural factors such as those pinpointed in the data from the teachers and school community members at Edwards High School and Grant High School related to the academic and social challenges that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students encounter, influence behaviors, values, beliefs, cognitive processes, and assumptions and each one of these factors has a direct impact on learning (Tinajero et al., 2010). Goldenberg, Rueda and August (2006) define sociocultural influences as "factors that make up the broad social context in which children and youth live and go to school" (p. 250). In order for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs, to truly benefit from the educational opportunities that are offered by U.S. public schools, classroom curricula, such as the curricula implemented by Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez, must acknowledge and value children's home cultures. Therefore, homes, communities, families as well as cultural knowledge must be incorporated into the curriculum. By incorporating that which is

familiar to culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, teachers with the support of educational leaders, can promote high levels of achievement.

Additionally, the data obtained from this study with regard to the specific academic and social challenges of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students can be helpful for teachers and educational leaders in creating learning environments that help to address issues/concerns that have an impact on teaching and learning. The caring relationships that I observed in Marshall's and Alvarez's classrooms suggests that students have emotional and social needs as well as the academic needs that must be met through culturally responsive instructional practices. Valenzuela (1999) has extended this theory to include the notion that caring for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse involves recognizing their social position in society, being willing to discuss the issues that are of concern to them, and validating the wealth of knowledge they bring to the classroom, including language and experiences.

Culturally responsive teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez seem particularly concerned with the emotional and social welfare of students. They believe it is important for students to have someone in the school they can confide in, fostering a sense of trust. Likewise, sociocultural theory suggests that the benefit of teachers establishing a sense of confidence with students is the students' willingness to share their issues or concerns with teachers. Although teachers may not be in the position to help students resolve all of their problems, it can be comforting for students to know that there is an adult they can talk to with a sense of trust. While Marshall and Alvarez were also aware of the

challenges students experienced and the need to offer them emotional support, their primary concern was to prepare students academically.

The benefits of building trusting relationships were found in students' willingness to share their concerns or issues with Marshall and Alvarez. In fact, during interviews, both ESL teachers shared comments regarding students who had confided in them about personal issues/concerns. While Marshall and Alvarez may not have been able to assist the students with all of their issues/concerns they presented to them, these teachers felt it was important for the students to have someone in the school with whom they felt they could talk. Marshall and Alvarez also revealed through interviews about using personal disclosure as a means of establishing a sense of shared experience with students. For example, Alvarez discussed how he shared stories with his students about the time that he immigrated to the United States, an experience that many of his students could relate to as newcomers to America. One of Marshall's students even commented on how the teacher shared a story about how she had skipped class when she was a high school student. Sharing these types of familiar experiences allowed students to feel more comfortable with Marshall and Alvarez and develop greater trust in them. When teachers share personal stories that their students can relate to (e.g. skipping class when they were in high school, coming to the United States as an immigrant) in an effort to get to know students better, students realize that teachers can relate to the same situations that they have encountered. This conveys a message to students that their teacher is human too. He/she can truly understand what students are talking about when they want to speak

with them about personal issues or concerns as a teenager, thus establishing a sense of trust between the student and teacher.

During interviews, Marshall and Alvarez indicated that sometimes students simply wanted to talk about what they were feeling and thinking, providing some sense of comfort. Both ESL teachers also indicated that they believe that getting to know students is particularly significant to understanding their academic performance, behavior, and motivation. Likewise, sociocultural theory indicates that when teachers know who their students are, they can interact with them more easily. For example, sociocultural theory maintains that when teachers and students interacted with one another in a manner that resembled interactions within the home and community (e.g. casual conversation) students were more at ease and often initiated interactions spontaneously with teachers who used this interactional strategy (Monzo & Rueda, 2001). Marshall and Alvarez also indicated through interviews, that they were informed about family problems as well, but this source of knowledge had the tendency to be both students and parents, whom they met through home visits or during parent-teacher conferences.

Findings from the data obtained from the study indicate a number of sociocultural factors impacting relationships that were established between the teachers and students. For instance, familiarity with the culture and language of students allows teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez, the opportunity to interact with students in ways that are familiar to them. This affords students the use of their own resources to negotiate within a linguistically-and-culturally-different context.

Knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences provides teachers and educational leaders with an avenue to relate to students. With this shared knowledge, conversations can focus on activities and events that extend outside the school walls, providing educators with valuable information that can assist them in addressing the academic and social needs of diverse learners.

### **Implications for Effective Instructional Practices for ELs: Developing an Integrated Framework**

Based on the research findings, an integrated instructional framework that includes components from differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs at the secondary level can effectively meet the academic and social needs of diverse learners. As I discussed in Chapter II, differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs particularly, have similar characteristics. All of these practices are student-centered, promote practices that are responsive, meaningful, and relevant in meeting the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of learners, promote instruction for students, promote the implementation of cooperative learning groups, and support the use of students' native languages as a tool for learning.

In addition to the similarities among differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs, there are distinct differences. Again, unlike other instructional practices mentioned, instruction for ELs has a specific focus on English language development (Tinajero et al., 2010). Additionally, culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, and effective teaching practices for ELs promote sociocultural consciousness among teachers.

Differentiated instruction, however, does not explicitly encourage sociocultural-centered teaching practices. It is crucial that all teachers develop culturally responsive sensitive language-appropriate instructional practices, similar to that of effective ESL teachers, such as Marshall and Alvarez, so that all students can succeed, which requires multiple strategies. It should be noted that both Marshall and Alvarez incorporate components of differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching practices with culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Thus their practice is integrative. This lends to the idea that developing an integrative culturally responsive instructional framework that helps advance both theory and practice that can benefit all students.

As illustrated in Table 4, I suggest that educational leaders who collaborate with teachers and support them in incorporating an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework can create a culturally competent learning environment in which educators will have the opportunity to better provide all students, including culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, with the opportunity to receive a high-quality, equitable education. This can be accomplished by incorporating the three core strategies that were implemented by Marshall and Alvarez to address the academic and social challenges for culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners.

**Table 4****Sociocultural Factors that Influence an Integrated Culturally Responsive Instructional Framework**

<b>Academic Challenges for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Students</b>	<b>Social Challenges for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Students</b>
Adjusting to American Schooling	Racial Discrimination
Acquiring Academic English Language Skills	Becoming “Americanized”
Mainstream Teachers’ Lack of Knowledge in the English Language Acquisition Process	Students Balancing School and Employment
<b>Core Strategies to Address Academic Challenges for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Students:</b>	<b>Core Strategies to Address Social Challenges for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Students:</b>
Creating Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments	Building Caring Classroom Communities
Collaborating with Mainstream Teachers to Develop Effective Instructional Methods and Ideas for Diverse Learners	

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapters IV and V, I shared the perspectives of two ESL teachers at the high school level that demonstrated culturally responsive instructional practices. Through classroom observations and in-depth interviews with both teachers, I was able to conclude that they did in fact implement effective instructional practices that were culturally responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. The practices of the two ESL teachers, Marshall and Alvarez, can provide educational leaders and mainstream teachers with greater insight into what effective culturally responsive teaching looks like. It is particularly important for school leaders to have a clear understanding of what effective culturally responsive teaching looks like since they have the responsibility of evaluating the practices of mainstream teachers as well as ESL teachers. They also have a duty to create learning environments that are responsive in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and their families. Therefore, it is imperative that school administrators be able to determine if in fact culturally responsive practices are being incorporated throughout the entire school community.

In this chapter, I address my third research question: *How can lessons learned from ESL teachers inform the practices of educational leaders?* in three sections. The

first section shows how the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level can inform the practices of educational leaders in light of the data. This section will reveal the responses from the study participants on how school administrators can support the academic and social development of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. Section two will provide recommendations for educational leaders on how to assist teachers in maintaining and creating culturally responsive learning environments for all students and in doing so embrace the rich opportunity that ethnic diversity is now providing them. At the conclusion of this chapter in section three, I return to my conceptual framework to discuss new insights I have gained as a result of conducting this study.

### **A Return to the Research Questions**

One way the practices of ESL teachers can inform the practices of educational leaders is to provide them with a picture of what effective culturally responsive instruction looks like. Marshall and Alvarez are educators who have the most diverse population of students in their schools and the practices that they are using have proven to be successful in meeting the academic and social needs of those learners and their families. Not only do many of these young people have the challenge of understanding unfamiliar course content—they also have the overwhelming task of acquiring a second language. As a result, school leaders can encourage those teachers who are already implementing effective culturally responsive practices to continue to do so and they can also encourage mainstream teachers who are not using culturally responsive practices to develop those skills through the information they have obtained from this study. As

mentioned in Chapter II, culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2000) as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as vessels for teaching them more effectively. 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, appeals to students more, and are learned more readily and easily. As a result, the academic achievement of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

The integrated culturally responsive instructional framework includes components of: differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs. While there are differences inherent in these instructional practices, common elements are numerous. When Mrs. Marshall and Dr. Alvarez implemented many of the components of these practices in their daily teaching they developed an instructional framework for their classrooms that placed the individual characteristics of students at the center of teaching and learning. These same instructional methods can be used by mainstream teachers in their classrooms. This is the same integrated culturally responsive instructional framework that I proposed in Chapter II for educators to use with culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. This framework incorporates elements of differentiated instruction, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching but is also sensitive to the specialized needs of ELs.

### **Principals' Lack of Knowledge about Culturally Responsive Teaching**

During interview sessions with both teachers, I asked them in their opinion, if they believed that the administrators had a clear understanding of the curriculum and instruction that has been specifically developed for ELs. I posed this question to the teachers in an attempt to get their perspectives regarding the practices of the educational leaders in their school. This question was significant since school administrators have the responsibility of evaluating all teachers within the school. Marshall stated:

I think they [school administrators] have a general understanding. I think that Miss Goodwin [principal at Edwards High School] has been in it [working in school administration] the longest and knows the most. Some of the younger ones' [younger school administrators] don't have a clue. They'll come in here [in my classroom] and look around and don't know what they're looking at and they don't know what they're looking for.

Marshall continued:

How can you evaluate someone in 25 or 40 minutes, just looking. You don't know by looking around the classroom what the goals are. You don't know what our standards are, you don't know. There's just a whole lot that goes into it [the instruction of EL students]. There are probably some principals that have been here [in the school district] a long, long time that don't understand instruction for ELs. I don't think that it's real high on their priority list because there's so much other stuff going on.

Marshall is voicing her concerns that many school administrators have not received the appropriate training regarding effective culturally responsive instructional practices for diverse students, including ELs. As a result of the lack of preparation needed to observe and/or evaluate ESL teachers sufficiently, many educational leaders do so under the assumption that effective teaching practices for ELs should look similar to the

instructional practices and curricula developed for courses in mainstream classrooms such as English, social studies, science and math; however, that is not the case.

The lack of knowledge on the part of many educational leaders can be problematic since these individuals need to be well-informed of all instructional practices and curricula that are being implemented in classrooms in order to ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality, equitable education that is comparable to that of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners' English speaking peers.

Alvarez also provided his opinion regarding the same question:

No, I don't believe that our administrators have a clear understanding of the curriculum and instruction for ELs. I can tell you that because last year they [school administrators] accused me of using inappropriate instruction when the students were taking the state exams. They [the principal and district-level administrators] gave me a suspension of one day without pay.

Alvarez continued:

When they [one of the school administrators] came to my class that I was teaching, you know I was following my curriculum. The person that was observing me thought that I was teaching something that came from the state test. They reported me to the administration and they gave me a one-day suspension with no pay. During that observation, all of the students in the room were ninth graders. They [the school administration] wouldn't even let me explain anything. I was later informed by a representative from central office administration that I was training my students for the writing test. However, the tenth graders take the writing test, not the ninth graders.

Alvarez added:

If the [school] administration had known what the ESL curriculum was—they would have known that I was teaching the ninth graders what they were supposed to know.

Dr. Alvarez's comments suggest that school administrators are lacking the sufficient training that is required for them to effectively evaluate the instructional practices of ESL teachers.

During interviews with Miss Goodwin (principal of Edwards High School) and Mr. Crane (principal of Grant High School), I asked them both the following question: What characteristics exemplify a culturally responsive ESL teacher at the high school level? Goodwin provided the following response:

I mean she's [referred to Marshall by her first name] got it going on. You know, she's the pulse of the campus, she makes it [education of ELs] happen. She knows the teachers [mainstream teachers] that work with the kids [ELs]. She knows the teachers [mainstream teachers] that don't work with the kids. She has a network with the community. Whereas, we've got this YMCA [program]. We take them [ESL students] on trips once a month. As a matter of fact, they [ESL students and Marshall] went down to the courthouse today with the YMCA. We try to do things for those students [ELs] and that's because of [referred to Marshall by her first name] background with people all over the community.

Crane provided the following response to the same question:

Well, I think that we're dealing with such an influx of Hispanics in our area . . . I think that the biggest thing is having someone who knows the culture and what's going on first and foremost. Now whether it's the teacher [Alvarez] or the teacher assistant [ESL teacher assistant], you've got to have somebody where you're serving the majority of your kids [ESL students] in that arena. Whether it be Hispanic, whether it be Asian, whatever is your largest population of kids [culturally and/or linguistically diverse students], the cultural things that your eye may have to learn, they [ESL teacher] already know.

Based on the responses of Goodwin and Crane, they both have a vague idea as to what constitutes culturally responsive teaching. However, it is apparent that there is a dire need for educational leaders to become more informed regarding culturally responsive

instructional practices. Clearly, both administrators are challenged in understanding specifically, what teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez “do” regarding their instructional practices and curricula in order to address the academic and social needs of diverse learners. If principals do not possess the knowledge that is required to implement such culturally responsive practices within their school communities, they will not be capable of encouraging mainstream teachers in their schools to do the same.

Based on Marshall’s and Alvarez’s responses to the interview question, there are concerns that some school administrators are challenged in understanding the culturally responsive teaching and learning that takes place in their classroom as well as understanding the curriculum that has been specifically developed to meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. Thus, it is imperative that school administrators understand what effective culturally responsive instruction looks like in mainstream classrooms and in the ESL classroom. In order to ensure that effective culturally responsive instruction is being implemented properly in the classroom setting, educational leaders must have the knowledge on how to effectively identify those characteristics.

Scholars such as Nieto (1999) and Valenzuela (1999) assert that U.S. Public schools have long played a role that was instrumental in attempting to assimilate culturally and/or linguistically diverse students through educational structures, policies, and practices. In doing so, school districts have primarily valued White middle-class norms. This phenomenon has resulted in the failure of schools to acknowledge and affirm the knowledge, experiences and assets of culturally diverse students which has

contributed to the marginalization and disengagement of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students and families in schools, even as racial and ethnic minorities are on the brink of becoming the nation's largest majority. Jensen (2001) noted that the nation's White population decreased from 76% in 1990 to 69% in 2000, and African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans are predicted to collectively comprise over half of the population in the U.S. by 2044. Therefore, the United States and its schools are more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse than ever before.

Scholars (Cooper, 2009; Riehl, 2000; Shields, 2000; Shields & Sayani, 2005) note that demographic changes, deepening cultural gaps in schools, and large amounts of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students and families that are disconnected from the schooling process reveal the need for educational leaders who consider cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a deficit. Research shows that even well-intentioned educators, who regard themselves as caring about culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, can devalue or unknowingly minimize students' culturally relevant knowledge, home culture, and language (Hidalgo, Siu, & Epstein, 2004; Moll, 2005; Nieto, 1999). Additionally, educators who consciously manifest a color-blind approach, typically do not understand how White privilege functions in schools. Therefore, they fail to acknowledge and prevent discriminatory practices (Evans, 2007; Rosenberg, 2004; Shields, 2000; Shields & Sayani, 2005).

## **Recommendations for Educational Leaders**

### **Effective Ongoing Professional Development**

In order for educational leaders to allow teachers to continue their use of effective culturally responsive instructional practices and to help mainstream teachers to develop effective culturally responsive instructional practices for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in their classrooms, they must initiate ongoing professional development opportunities for their staff.

#### **Combine culturally responsive instructional practices with SIOP. I**

recommend the culturally responsive instructional practices that the ESL teachers use is paired with instructional methods from the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. Similar to culturally responsive teaching, the SIOP model is based on the principle that English language acquisition is enhanced within social and cultural contexts through instruction that is meaningful for students and through social interaction such as collaborative learning groups (Minaya-Rowe, 2004).

During the interview sessions, both ESL teachers were asked what type of professional development, if any did they think mainstream teachers needed to be able to serve the ELs they encounter daily in school and in the community and what should the objectives of such professional development be? Marshall stated:

SIOP is number one. I would put SIOP training as number one. We have some cultural awareness types of things [professional development] that have been offered even in the school system. I think that those sorts of things, they're little things, but things in each culture like words that you would use or actions that you would use, and when teachers are more aware of some of the things like that from other cultures it just heightens their own awareness of who they're dealing with and where their students are coming from.

Alvarez commented on this same question regarding the professional development needed for mainstream teachers. He noted that:

The type of professional development for mainstream teachers would need to focus on how to teach the novice EL students [ through the use of SIOP]. They [mainstream teachers] need to know how to differentiate instruction for the novice learners, that's what I mean. There are some methods that have been developed because the state of North Carolina required me to take that class. I took the class and now I have a clear understanding of diversity. If I had to take the class, then why don't *all* teachers have to take the same class? All colleges should provide a class like that, it helps any teacher who has EL students, not necessarily immigrants. It's helpful for the EL students when teachers know how to teach diverse learners and how to teach differently, how to use differentiated instruction.

Alvarez continued by saying:

The objectives of professional development should be how to modify instruction for diverse learners, whether they're EL students or not, it's for everybody. We [ESL teachers and mainstream teachers] have students that already struggle. How do you help these students? Do you ignore them? Do you put them in the back of the class? Unfortunately, this is what usually happens. When my teacher assistant goes to many of the mainstream teachers' classrooms to observe my students—they are usually placed in the corner of the classroom because many mainstream teachers have not been trained on how to provide instruction for diverse students. Of course, we document all of this.

Based on the perspectives shared by Marshall and Alvarez, there is a need for mainstream teachers to receive training that would be helpful for them in developing instructional practices that meet the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners. Both teachers noted that training in SIOP would be beneficial not only for the mainstream teachers but especially beneficial for students. This year at my school, our principal provided training for the entire instructional staff in SIOP. She indicated

that the training was needed due to the increasing diversity in our student population. It should be noted that through the use of the SIOP model, ESL teachers use content objectives for core subjects and language objectives for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students. This ensures that the classroom activities are addressing the content knowledge and language development needs of their students. Other characteristics of SIOP include: modifying speech when working with students, using adapted textbooks, using the student's first language on occasion (when needed for understanding) and displaying visuals in the classroom that help students make connections to prior knowledge and real-life experiences (Title III/LEP Handbook – Weston Public Schools, 2011<sup>5</sup>). For example, during an observation in Dr. Alvarez's classroom, the teacher and students were discussing the topic of immigration. This topic can be applied to a core subject such as social studies. During the discussion in the ESL classroom, Alvarez incorporated some of the ESL students' life stories of how their families emigrated to the United States from countries such as the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Guatemala. Thus, when the topic of immigration is added to the curriculum in the mainstream social studies classroom, the students will gain more from a social studies unit based on the same topic when the mainstream teacher can draw on those immigrant students' personal experiences as newcomers to the United States. Therefore, if mainstream teachers use the SIOP model as a part of their instructional practices they would still teach content knowledge to culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, but these teachers would be

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<sup>5</sup> Title III/LEP Handbook – Weston Public Schools is a pseudonym. The full citation was provided to the dissertation committee chair. The reference was amended to protect the anonymity of the reference.

more aware of student differences and make accommodations that address the academic and social needs of all learners.

Marshall and Alvarez also indicated that as ESL teachers they would even benefit from ongoing professional development in SIOP. Marshall stated:

ESL teachers also need ongoing training in SIOP because we have a lot of people that are coming in [that are being hired by the school district] that are lateral entry teachers. Training in SIOP is just a good place to start with their training.

Indeed, when ESL teachers such as Marshall and Alvarez participate in ongoing professional development they enhance their expertise in effective instructional practices that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners.

When I interviewed the principals for both high schools, their perspectives regarding professional development opportunities for their staff were somewhat similar. I asked both principals what type of professional development opportunities they promoted for teachers. Goodwin, the principal at Edwards High School gave this reply:

Right now most of our professional development is tied up in this PLC [Professional Learning Communities] stuff that we're doing. We started with *Keep Learning on Track*, which allowed us [the staff] to talk about grades and different things which showed what group [of students] was not performing in different areas. And now, we've had to go over to this PLC, which is a systems model and they're incensed on assessments.

Goodwin continued:

We offer a wealth of professional development. I don't necessarily do one thing [one type of professional development] for the whole staff, because we all get

on this bus. I've got 30 year people, I've got 15 year people, I've got five year people. So I need to say [to them] you need to do this and you need to do this. So in the summertime when the Mr. Solomon [the LEP Program Manager for the Weston Public Schools] is asking for somebody to come in and go to some ESL training or whatever and I'm picking the people that I feel are not up to snuff and all that kind of stuff saying I need you to go over here [to professional development training]. So, I would send people to something like SIOP training so they will be more culturally aware of their students. It's not just for teachers, my administrators have also been to SIOP training.

Mr. Crane, principal at Grant High School, responded to the same question regarding professional development opportunities that he promoted for his staff. He stated:

Professional development now has definitely gone by the wayside because of funding. What we have done [for professional development training] is basically provided training off the model for technology instruction. Because there is no money, I took some of the at-risk funds to cover some of the staff development. The money was used for national conferences and state conferences, we try to pay for that type of staff development. I feel like they [staff members] go out to these conferences and they will get other information that will be helpful.

Crane continued:

One of the things that my foreign language Professional Learning Community (PLC) did the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, they had a luncheon where everybody [staff members] was asked to bring their national [food] dish from their heritage . . . and so the majority of the teachers did participate. They had pictures related to their heritage and talked about their descendants. I think the rationale for having the luncheon was that we're a very diverse staff and we're very diverse within ourselves. For example, I've got a little bit of Cherokee Indian heritage and my dad's family members are of Scottish descent. During the luncheon we kind of celebrated our diversity. I'm not saying that I'm the driver behind it, but by starting some of these conversations, it has gained some momentum.

Crane added:

Technology is the big thing with the [school] district. When I say that, I mean that we're trying to do most of our PLCs related to technology. However, the district is also pushing Common Core Essential Standards. When you look at the big picture, there's not a lot of time for other staff development opportunities.

All together, the perspectives that were shared through the interviews with the principals regarding professional development opportunities that they promoted for their staff members, revealed that the decisions that are made as to what type of training is made available at the school-level are not made by principals, those decisions are superseded by district-level and/or state-level administration. For example, the Common Core Essential Standards that Crane spoke about during an interview session for this study, required instructional staff to participate in numerous professional development training sessions during the entire 2011-2012 school year. For example, high school teachers were required to complete a total of 18 hours of professional development directly related to the Common Core Essential Standards.

The *Common Core Essential Standards*, also known as *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS), were adopted by the state of North Carolina in June 2010. These new standards are being implemented to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Additionally, NCDPI maintains that common standards will

provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve the ability of teachers to serve the needs of students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012).

The Common Core Essential Standards are designed to ensure that all students, including ELs will receive a high-quality education that will provide them with the skills and knowledge to prepare them to be successful in pursuing a postsecondary education and in the world of work. Additionally, the Common Core Essential Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do inform teachers how to figure out the knowledge and skills their students have so that teachers can develop the best lessons and learning environments for their classrooms. This will be particularly beneficial for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, such as ELs, since effective teaching and learning practices for these students is based on students' prior knowledge and experiences that are connected to the content/concepts in the curriculum.

**Incorporate effective instructional practices that promote cultural connections for students.** The implementation of the Common Core Essential Standards presents a challenge for educators to create the link between what students should know and what each student must learn—keeping in mind that each student has a unique learning style, cultural self, motivation to learn, educational background, a set of emotional needs and knowledge base (Saifer et al., 2011). If standards come with unrealistic expectations that all students of the same age group will be at the same place at the same time in their learning, then they are counterproductive. However, Saifer et al. (2011) maintain that if educational leaders encourage teachers to utilize the standards as

an aid in moving students along the continuum and facilitating learning at a high level, standards can be helpful for teaching and learning, particularly for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students.

Based on their perspectives, both principals also acknowledge the need for professional development opportunities related to instructional practices that are responsive to culturally and/or linguistically diverse students in their schools.

Unfortunately, they are limited to promoting teacher training opportunities that are aligned with priorities of the district-level and/or state-level administration.

### **Rationale for Culturally Responsive Professional Development**

During interviews with the principals of both high schools, it was revealed that due to mandates established by district-level and/or state-level administration, and due to a lack of funding, professional development opportunities for their school staff members were limited. However, based on the stories shared by the ESL teachers, it was revealed that training in culturally responsive instructional practices is something that cannot be ignored by educational leaders. The ESL teachers expressed concern that many mainstream teachers needed additional training in order to effectively address the academic and social needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

Although Marshall and Alvarez revealed in interview sessions that they had collaborated with many mainstream teachers to develop instructional strategies for culturally and/or linguistically diverse students—they indicated that there was still a significant need for formal training in culturally responsive practices.

Bazron et al. (2005) assert that an increasing body of research demonstrates the significance of addressing the needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students and their families. Unfortunately, the culture of many schools in the United States is largely congruent with middle-class European values (Boykin, 1994), prompting many schools to disregard or downplay the strengths of diverse students and their families. After conducting a study involving Mexican high school students, Valenzuela (1999) defined this approach as *subtractive schooling*. For example, during that study it was noted that schools ignored students' knowledge of the Spanish language or even considered it as a deficit.

This cultural disconnect frequently leads to poor self-esteem, discipline issues, and poor academic performance for ethnic minority students. Part of the problem is that teachers who are unfamiliar with students' diverse backgrounds often times misinterpret cultural difference as unacceptable behavior (Osher, Cartledge, Oswald, Artiles, & Coutinho, 2004). Several statistical studies have determined that compared with their White peers, minority students are suspended from school more often and for longer periods of time (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000), punished more severely (Office for Civil Rights, 1992), and disproportionately referred for special education services (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

As a middle school counselor working in a school with a majority of the teaching staff that is White and female and an administration with no ethnic minority representation, I witness this type of disparity on a daily basis. Many Black and Latino students, particularly male students, are more frequently referred to administrators for

infractions and are systematically assigned to in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension. At the same time, I have also noticed that many White students that commit the same types of infractions are usually subjected to an administrative conference and are issued a “verbal warning” that future referrals to the administration will result in harsher consequences. Additionally, a disproportionate number of Black and Latino students, when compared to White students, have been referred to our guidance office staff for screening through the Student Assistance Team process in order to determine if they will qualify for special education services. For example, there was a situation last year in which one of the White female sixth-grade teachers assumed that one of her culturally and linguistically diverse female students needed to be referred for special education services—without reviewing the student’s cumulative record. However, after I had the opportunity to review the student’s records and consulted with the LEP Coordinator for our school, it was determined that the student had been struggling academically due to ESL services that she qualified for but had not received during the first two quarters of the school year. Perhaps, if mainstream teachers and school administrators receive in-depth training in culturally responsive practices, situations such as the ones previously mentioned, can be avoided.

It should be noted that research has also identified ways in which schools can educate culturally and/or linguistically diverse students effectively. For example, studies of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in San Diego, California, indicate that rather than tracking ethnic and language-minority students into lower-level classes, having high expectations and providing a “scaffold” of support helps

children of color to succeed (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). AVID provides students with direct instruction in the “hidden curriculum” of the school—which courses to take, which teachers to seek out, the significance of tests, how to study, and so forth (Bazron et al., 2005).

Another approach, supported by research, is creating an environment that allows teachers and students to connect with one another. For example, the Project STAR experiment in Tennessee found that culturally and/or linguistically diverse children disproportionately benefited from reduced class size in first grade; these advantages persisted over time (Finn, Gerber, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001). Likewise, a six-district, experimental study of the Child Development Project found that building a sense of community in the classroom resulted in even more benefits for culturally and/or linguistically diverse children than for White students (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000).

In total, Bazron et al. (2005) assert that perhaps the most powerful approach is making classroom instruction more congruent with the cultural value systems of a diverse student population. Research studies have shown that culturally responsive education—described by Gay (2002) as using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and learning styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more meaningful, relevant and effective for them—can strengthen student connectedness with schools and teachers, decrease behavior problems, and enhance learning (Kalyanpur, 2003).

The culturally responsive instructional practices that have been highlighted here are similar to the strategies that were used by both Marshall and Alvarez. However, it must be noted that in order for these instructional practices to be successfully implemented by staff, professional development training on how to effectively deliver those strategies must be provided by the educational leadership of the school.

### **Professional Learning Communities: A Resource for Educators**

Saifer et al. (2011) maintain that an effective professional development strategy that many schools have adopted is the professional learning community (PLC) approach. This approach was mentioned during interviews by the principals and the ESL teachers participating in this research study as one of the ways in which staff members collaborated with one another in order to address the learning needs of students. However, it was also indicated by the school principals that due to a lack of funding and staff development training mandated by district-level and/or state level administration that professional development focusing on culturally responsive instructional practices might not come to fruition at their schools (Saifer et al., 2011). It should be noted that if educational leaders incorporate professional learning communities in order to promote culturally responsive instructional strategies, funding would not be an obstacle since training for staff would be held on the school campus during planning time or after school (when faculty meetings are usually scheduled) to take place without the need for a consultant/facilitator that must be compensated for their services. However, participation in training will require time and commitment from the entire staff.

Effective professional learning communities means that teachers work in professional learning teams in which they use an inquiry cycle to participate in powerful conversations about best practices. Such reflective practice opens the door to both improved teaching practices and improved schools, while keeping staff members concentrated on high academic achievement for *all* students. This type of ongoing, team-based, on-the-job staff development aids teachers in increasing their skills in collaboration as they incorporate new teaching strategies into their repertoire (Saifer et al. 2011; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2012).

Saifer et al. (2011) maintained that effective professional development should include a continuum of activities, from workshops to study groups, in order to meet the distinct learning needs of teachers. Customarily, workshops are less effective than teacher networks and ongoing study groups. Staff development activities created for educators in the same school, grade, or subject area are especially effective since all staff members can collectively engage in and collaborate on the implementation of what they learned. These activities are more effective if the focus or content is on developing expertise in a subject, content, or pedagogical focus area that is targeted to a specific school and student context. This can include instructional practices that address the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically-diverse students. Educators need opportunities in their professional development to actively participate in the meaningful analysis of teaching and learning. This type of learning has a greater impact for teachers if it is longer, sustained over a period of time, and intense. The final stage of professional development learning is teacher cohesiveness, communication among teachers, and

activities that align with standards and assessments, teachers' goals, and school improvement efforts (Sather, 2009).

Other models of continuous professional development that promote collaboration among teachers include action research, lesson study, critical friends group, faculty study group, reviewing student work products, and data teams (Saifer et al., 2011). A common element among these models is the need to examine teaching practice with attention to improving student learning. Which of these models educational leaders and their staff members select is dependent upon the goals of the group. Each of these models can provide an avenue to develop professional development opportunities that would provide educators with the tools that will allow them to move closer to culturally responsive teaching.

### **Professional Learning Communities: Supportive and Shared Leadership**

The school change and educational leadership literature clearly acknowledges the role and influence of the school principal on whether change will take place in the school (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2012). Change such as implementing culturally responsive instructional practices on a school-wide basis. It appears that transforming a school organization into a learning community can be accomplished only with the sanction of the educational leaders and the active nurturing of the entire staff's development as a community. Therefore, a look at the principal of a school whose staff is a professional learning community would be a perfect starting point for describing what these learning communities look like and how the principal takes on the relationship as a colleague with the staff (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2012).

Lucianne Carmichael, the first resident principal of Harvard University's Principal Center and a principal who nurtured a professional community of learners in her own school, discusses the position of authority and power traditionally held by principals, in which the staff perceives them as having wisdom and being competent (Carmichael, 1982). Carmichael (1982) maintains that principals have internalized this "omnicompetence." Other members of the school staff reinforce it, making it challenging for principals to admit that they themselves can benefit from participating in professional development opportunities, or to acknowledge the dynamic potential of staff contributions regarding decision making. Furthermore, when the position of the principal is so thoroughly dominant, it is difficult for staff members to propose divergent views or ideas related to the school's effectiveness.

Carmichael (1982) proposes that the notion of principals' omnicompetence be "ditched" in favor of their participation in their own professional development training. Kleine-Kracht (1993) concurs and recommends that school administrators along with teachers must also be learners, "questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions" (p. 393) in the quest for school improvement. The customary pattern that "teachers teach, students learn, and administrators manage is completely altered . . . [There is] no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else, but rather the need for everyone to contribute" (p. 393).

I am pleased that Carmichael proposes that the principal must reverse roles and become a learner along with the teachers in order for the school community to achieve a common goal. This sense of shared leadership evens the playing field for everyone

involved in the decision-making process. I think that this type of collaboration would play out well for educational leaders and teachers should they decide to develop and implement an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework into their curricula. This new relationship that is forged between educational leaders and teachers, leads to shared and collegial leadership in the school, where everyone grows professionally, and learn to perceive themselves as working towards a common goal as a team (Hoerr, 1996).

Louis and Kruse (1995) identify the supportive leadership of principals as one of the necessary human resources for restructuring staff into school-based professional learning communities. These scholars refer to these principals as “post-heroic leaders who do not view themselves as the architects of school effectiveness” (p. 234). Prestine (1993) also defines characteristics of principals in schools that undergo transformation: a willingness to share authority, the capacity to facilitate the work of the staff members, and the ability to participate without dominating.

Embracing the strengths and addressing the diverse learning needs of an increasingly multicultural and multilingual student population demands the transformation of current school practices. Through the implementation of professional learning communities, teachers and the administrators of the school can work collaboratively to develop innovative instructional methods and curricula, that are responsive in meeting the academic and social needs of all students, particularly culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs.

### **The Principal as Change Leader**

Even though school leaders are in a position in which they can initiate change within their schools, any principal who has attempted this task will inform you that it is a demanding process. In her article, “Culturally Responsive Schools: Leadership, Language, and Literacy Development,” Virginia Juettner (2003) describes her attempt as a principal to promote school-wide cultural responsiveness. Her journey reveals significant areas to consider if educational leaders hope to create change that will be long-term.

According to Juettner (2003), being an effective leader of change can include:

- Creating culturally responsive policies for all stakeholders (e.g. students, families, and members of the community);
- Fostering a school-wide culture of respect, understanding for others, and responsibility for oneself and one’s actions;
- Encouraging knowledge and understanding of the languages and cultures that are representative of the community;
- Promoting curricula and instructional practices that are based on students’ cultures and languages as the foundation for teaching and learning;
- Providing opportunities for ongoing teacher research and the meaningful evaluation of student learning; and
- Ensuring that the cultural and linguistic diversity of students is present throughout the school building.

Juettner's concept of transforming a school into a culturally competent learning environment that is responsive in meeting the needs of diverse students is strikingly similar to the components aligned with the integrated culturally responsive instructional framework that I proposed in Chapter II. The framework that I proposed has components from differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching and effective teaching practices for ELs, all of which address the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse learners, including ELs.

This principal's vision of what constitutes a culturally responsive school is in alignment with the five core beliefs of exemplary schools that are focused on reaching and teaching all students, as developed by Scheurich (1998). At the school level, principals and school staff live the vision of successfully reaching and teaching all children in a caring environment. This whole school vision develops a system, which sets high performing expectations for all students and staff. The vision also impacts the areas of professional development, parental involvement, and community outreach (Scheurich, 1998).

Scheurich (1998) maintains that in order to incorporate culturally responsive practices principals must guide the staff in cultivating the five foundational beliefs, as well as instill the commitment that all children will succeed at the highest levels. All invested participants must be willing to accept the negative mainstream assumptions regarding low-socioeconomic status children of color. Moreover, they must also be committed to imparting this shared vision throughout their professional

development/professional learning communities, parental involvement, and community outreach. The five core beliefs of exemplary schools developed by Scheurich (1998) are:

1. creating child- or student-centered schools;
2. believing that all children can be successful at high academic levels without exception;
3. demanding that all children be treated with respect, appreciation, and care;
4. embracing the racial and ethnic culture of every child, including his/her first language; and
5. emphasizing that the school exists for and must serve the community.

In addition to taking the lead in creating a school culture that was responsive in meeting the needs of diverse learners, Juettner (2003) added that she also encountered the challenge of bridging the cultural gap between White, middle-class teachers (teaching a predominantly White middle-class focused curriculum) and the school's culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Over a period of time, she discovered that the principal must be an instructional leader who provides the opportunities and avenues for inviting the instructional staff, students, families, and members of the community to share the responsibility of developing a culturally responsive school. This can be initiated by school principals such as Miss Goodwin at Edwards High School and Mr. Crane at Grant High School. I advised in this study, that through the incorporation of professional learning communities that will allow staff members the opportunity to move into the role of leaders as they work with the principal as a united team to develop and implement practices that will benefit all students in the school community regardless of race,

ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. In essence, the teacher and the educational leader will reverse their roles. The principal will relinquish some of their authority to become a learner within the school community and the teachers will be empowered in their new role as key decision makers.

### **Recommendations for Leadership Preparatory Programs**

#### **Create College Preparatory Programs that Promote Culturally Competent Leadership**

It is my recommendation that leadership preparatory programs at colleges and universities include coursework that would highlight culturally competent leadership. It is my belief that school leaders must be up to the task to accept the challenge of working in schools regardless of the location, student population, and access to resources. Some of my fellow classmates who have graduated from the educational leadership program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro have been hired as principals in local school districts. However, many have also fallen victim to the “powers that be” (i.e., district-level administration) when it comes to providing a high-quality, equitable education for all students. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions of higher learning require future school leaders to complete coursework that is related to the following: (a) Creating Culturally Competent Schools; (b) Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices; (c) Community and Family Involvement in Education; (d) and Professional Development Opportunities that are Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive.

**Create Preparatory Programs that Require a Practicum Experience across Varied Demographics**

I would also recommend that educational leadership programs require students to complete their practicum experience in two schools that are at both ends of the spectrum. In other words, these future educational leaders would be required to complete the practicum at one school that has been designated as having a high-minority population with 50% or more students qualifying for free or reduced price meals. The other practicum would be completed in another school in which the majority of the students are White and come from middle-class to upper-middle class families. The rationale for this recommendation is that future educational leaders cannot predict where they will serve in the capacity as administrators. They must be equipped with the skills to effectively manage relationships and be prepared to meet the needs of students and families regardless of the school's demographics.

**Create Leadership Programs that Inform Educational Leaders about Varied Cultures, Particularly the Home Communities of Students**

I would also recommend that community-based learning be incorporated as a means of informing educators about other cultures especially the communities in which students live. Cooper (2007) maintains that community-based learning affords educators with the opportunity to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own. Additionally, Cooper, He, and Levin (2011) assert that cultural immersion experiences, a type of community-based learning, are valuable for all educators, particularly for those who work in urban settings. They describe how experiential learning opportunities allow

teachers and administrators the opportunity to learn from communities in which they serve.

### **The Principal's Role in the Implementation of a Culturally Responsive Integrated Framework**

By defining the challenges of educating students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds as an opportunity for teacher-educator learning rather than as problems, educational leaders can begin to shape thinking and collaborative efforts (e.g., professional learning communities) among the members of the school community in a positive manner. Furthermore, if educational leaders incorporate different elements of practices such as differentiated instruction, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching practices for ELs, schools can have the opportunity to develop an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework for teaching that would afford all students, including ELs, with the chance to receive an equitable, high-quality education. These types of instructional practices would also prompt educational leaders and their staff members to promote a climate within the school community that acknowledges, appreciates, and respects individuals who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

### **Final Thoughts on Research and Reform**

I began this study wanting to learn about the effective practices of culturally responsive ESL teachers at the high school level. I wanted to know if the practices of these teachers addressed the academic and social needs of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students, including ELs.

What I did learn by conducting this study was that culturally and/or linguistically diverse students require more than a one-size-fits all curriculum due to the differences they bring to school. Students vary in every facet: race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, educational background, family history, and of course, gender. In order to provide these diverse learners with a high-quality and equitable educational experience, teachers and educational leaders, must create learning environments that provide a curriculum that pulls from a variety of effective instructional practices such as those practices I proposed in an integrated culturally responsive instructional framework.

Building upon this study, I see a need for researchers to investigate the need for school administrators to receive sufficient training in culturally responsive instructional practices as well as information regarding the criteria suggested to create culturally competent schools that are responsive in meeting the needs of diverse learners. In addition, school reformers can take away insight from this study to introduce new ideas or concepts to school leaders in an effort to prompt these leaders to initiate new ways of teaching and learning within the school community. It is my hope, that the lessons learned from this research study will inspire educational leaders to provide the support needed for teachers in their schools to incorporate effective instructional practices that will result in academic success for all learners.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—TEACHER**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **ESL Teacher**

**Questions:**

1. What is your educational/professional background?
2. What motivated you to become an ESL teacher?
3. As an ESL teacher, what is the most important instruction you can give ESL students?
4. What practices have been most effective in the instruction of ELs? What practices have been least effective in the instruction of ELs?
5. Do you believe in bilingual education?
6. Do you speak a language other than English? If so, what are the benefits of being bilingual?
7. If you do not speak a language other than English, have you considered learning other languages for professional or personal reasons?
8. What are some of the social and academic challenges that ELs encounter in the school and in the community. How can you as the ESL teacher, help students to overcome these challenges?
9. What are some issues/concerns that you have regarding immigrant ELs (i.e., students and families) adjusting to American culture?

10. What type of interaction do you have with ELs and their families? Have these interactions been beneficial for you and the students? Why, why not?
11. What, if any, are some issues/concerns that you have regarding the instruction of ELs in mainstream classrooms as well as the expectations teachers in mainstream classrooms have for ELs?
12. What type of professional development, if any, do you think mainstream teachers need to be able to serve the ELs they encounter daily in school and in the community? What should the objectives of such professional development be?
13. Do you have any issues/concerns that you have related to standardized testing for ELs? If so, please describe.
14. In your opinion, do you believe that the administrators have a clear understanding of the curriculum and instruction that has been specifically developed for ELs? Please elaborate.
15. How does the administration of your school support the academic and social development of ELs?
16. Do you collaborate with mainstream teachers to develop lessons that will meet the academic needs of ELs? If not, why?
17. In your opinion, what exemplifies a culturally responsive ESL teacher?
18. How can school leaders create learning environments that are responsive in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students?

**APPENDIX B****FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—TEACHER**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **ESL Teacher**

**Questions:**

1. Given what I shared with you about my observations of your teaching practices, can you please share your thoughts and reactions?
2. As a culturally responsive ESL teacher, have there been instances when you had to revise your lesson plans in order to address a topic of interest for students (i.e., in order to address a teachable moment)? Please explain.
3. As a culturally responsive ESL teacher, do you feel that you provide usable information for your students that can be related to real-life experiences? Please explain.
4. As a culturally responsive ESL teacher, do you feel that you provide usable information for your students that can be incorporated in the mainstream classroom (e.g. academic English for understanding content/concepts)? Please explain.
5. As a culturally responsive ESL teacher, do you feel that you have adequately prepared your students for academic and social successes through your practices as an educator? Please explain.
6. Given what I shared with you about my ideas for developing an integrated culturally responsive framework that both ESL and mainstream teachers could use, please share your reaction, opinions and/or suggestions for making such a framework teacher-friendly.

**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - STUDENT**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **EL Student**

**Questions:**

1. What grade are you currently in?
2. Were you born and raised in the United States? If not, where were you born and raised and how long have you lived in the United States?
3. What have been the biggest academic and social challenges for you in school and in your community?
4. Describe your relationship with your current ESL teacher.
5. Describe what you like most about your ESL teacher?
6. Describe what you like least about your ESL teacher?
7. What has been the most helpful thing that your ESL teacher has taught you?
8. Is there anything you would like your ESL teacher to do differently? If so, please explain.
9. How are you motivated to learn in the ESL classroom?
10. What instructional strategies have your ESL teacher used that have been most helpful for you in understanding course content in the ESL classroom and in your core classrooms?

11. What strategies have your ESL teacher used that have been most helpful for you in learning and understanding the English language?
12. How does your ESL teacher acknowledge and show respect or disrespect for the cultural and linguistic differences among students in the classroom?
13. How important is it to you that your ESL teacher be able to relate to you both culturally and socially?

**APPENDIX D****INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—LEP PROGRAM MANAGER**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **LEP Program Manager**

**Questions:**

1. How long have you been involved with the ESL program in this school district?
2. What is your educational/professional background?
3. How many students are currently participating in the ESL program in the school district?
4. What different types of ESL programs are offered for EL students in the school district (e.g., self-contained, immersion)? Are these programs offered at all levels (e.g. elementary, middle, high)?
5. What is the ethnic background of students in the ESL program for this district.
6. How has the ethnic background of EL students in the school district changed in recent years?
7. What ethnic groups of students and their families are moving to the county and enrolling in schools?
8. Is the population of EL students increasing or decreasing in this county? On what grade level is it increasing or decreasing?
9. How many teachers in the county are currently serving as ESL teachers?

10. How many teachers in this district are certified in ESL?
11. Do you think that ESL teachers need to be certified in ESL in order to better serve EL students?
12. Are the number of ESL teachers increasing or decreasing in this county?
13. What are some issues/concerns of ESL teachers at the high school level regarding ELs and their families adjusting to American culture and the school community (e.g. attendance issues, parenting issues, understanding school policies, not feeling welcomed in schools, language barriers)?
14. What are some instructional issues/concerns of ESL teachers at the high school level regarding curriculum and instruction (e.g. the availability of school-related literature/materials in students' native languages; providing interpreters for parents/guardians at conferences; instruction of core subject area content by mainstream teachers for ELs)?
15. What characteristics exemplify an effective ESL teacher at the high school level?
16. What characteristics exemplify a culturally responsive ESL teacher at the high school level?
17. What must school administrators do in order to support the academic and social development of ELs at the high school level?
18. How can the practices of ESL teachers translate into effective instructional practices in the mainstream classroom for ELs?

**APPENDIX E****INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—CURRICULUM COORDINATOR**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **Curriculum Coordinator**

**Questions:**

1. What is your educational/professional background?
2. How many students in your school qualify for ESL services?
3. What role do you play in ensuring that the instructional needs of ELs are being met by the staff in your school? Please elaborate.
4. Are all students who qualify for ESL services receiving the appropriate services at your school? Please elaborate.
5. Does your school use a team problem-solving model to address student achievement or behavior problems and provide early intervention and support for ELs? Please elaborate.
6. If you have a problem-solving team, do you include ESL teachers and other staff members on the team who have a background in cultural differences and second language acquisition issues? Please elaborate.
7. Are teachers at your school encouraged to use assessments that are unbiased, and culturally sensitive? Please elaborate.
8. Are all professional development opportunities culturally sensitive and inclusive? If not, please explain.

9. Do professional development opportunities teach staff members the distinction between the second language acquisition process and language differences and learning disabilities? If not, please explain.
10. How do mainstream teachers and ESL teachers in your school design curriculum that is culturally relevant and meaningful for ELs?
11. How does administration of your school support the academic and social development of ELs?

**APPENDIX F**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—PRINCIPAL**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: **Principal**

**Questions:**

1. What is your educational/professional background?
2. How does the administration of this school support the academic and social development of EL students?
3. How do you ensure that the instructional needs of EL students are being met by the staff in your school?
4. Are all students who qualify for ESL services currently receiving the appropriate ESL services?
5. Do the administrators of your school have a clear understanding of the curriculum and instruction that has been specifically developed for EL students?
6. Do you recruit qualified school personnel who represent the cultural and ethnic makeup of the current student population?
7. What characteristics exemplify an effective ESL teacher at the high school level?
8. What characteristics exemplify a culturally responsive ESL teacher at the high school level?
9. How do you ensure that the school building is welcoming to students and families that are culturally and linguistically diverse?

10. Do ESL teachers and mainstream teachers collaborate to ensure that the best instruction is being provided for EL students?
11. What type of professional development opportunities do you promote for teachers?
12. What is your definition of a culturally competent school leader?

**APPENDIX G**  
**OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL**

<b>Length of Activity:</b>	
<b>Descriptive Notes:</b>	<b>Reflective Notes:</b>
	<b>Sketch of Classroom:</b>

**APPENDIX H**

**RUBRIC FOR TEACHER OBSERVATIONS**

**Observation Rubric**

**Teacher's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Teaching Practices</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Points</b>
Student-centered instruction (e.g., The teacher implements curriculum and instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners by honoring each student's learning needs/preferences)	Consistently implements student-centered instruction	Occasionally implements student-centered instruction	Rarely implements student-centered instruction	____ / 3
Culturally relevant and meaningful instruction (e.g., The curriculum design and materials reflect and connect with students' real-life experiences and perspectives)	Consistently provides instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful for students	Occasionally provides instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful for students	Rarely provides instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful for students	____ / 3
Uses prior knowledge and experiences of students for instruction	Consistently uses prior knowledge and experiences of students as a catalyst for understanding	Occasionally uses prior knowledge and experiences of students as a catalyst for understanding	Rarely uses prior knowledge and experiences of students as a catalyst for understanding	____ / 3
Promotes critical thinking  (e.g., The teacher challenges students with content that promotes higher-order thought processes – hypothesizing, predicting, comparing, evaluating)	Consistently promotes critical thinking among students	Occasionally promotes critical thinking among students	Rarely promotes critical thinking among students	____ / 3
Content is representative of diverse populations	Consistently provides content/materials that are representative of diverse populations	Occasionally provides content/materials that are representative of diverse populations	Rarely provides content/materials that are representative of diverse populations	____ / 3

<b>Teaching Practices</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Points</b>
Promotes collaborative learning (e.g., Students work in small collaborative groups as they develop content knowledge and devise solutions to problems)	Consistently promotes collaborative learning activities	Occasionally promotes collaborative learning activities	Rarely promotes collaborative learning activities	___ / 3
Uses examples and illustrations related to student interest	Consistently uses examples and illustrations related to student interest	Occasionally uses examples and illustrations related to student interest	Rarely uses examples and illustrations related to student interest	___ / 3
Provides high-quality, equitable education  (e.g., The teacher adheres to the policies of the school and district to ensure that they are promoting educational equity for all students through their practices)	Consistently provides high-quality, equitable education for students	Occasionally provides high-quality, equitable education for students	Rarely provides high-quality, equitable education for students	___ / 3
Teacher is socioculturally conscious  (e.g., The teacher educates students on how to critically examine texts and materials in schools to become informed about inequities found in institutions and in society)	Consistently implements content that promotes sociocultural consciousness among students	Occasionally implements content that promotes sociocultural consciousness among students	Rarely implements content that promotes sociocultural consciousness among students	___ / 3
Focus is on English language development(e.g., The teacher uses the home language as a tool for instruction to develop intellectual potential and to promote academic achievement)	Consistently focuses on English language development during instruction	Occasionally focuses on English language development during instruction	Rarely focuses on English language development during instruction	___ / 3

<b>Teaching Practices</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Points</b>
Validates the significance of languages other than English	Consistently validates the significance of languages other than English during instruction	Occasionally validates the significance of languages other than English during instruction	Rarely validates the significance of languages other than English during instruction	____ / 3
			<b>Total Points</b>	____ / 33

**Comments:**


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**Scores:** 22 – 33 = (Consistently implements teaching practices)  
21 – 12 = (Occasionally implements teaching practices)  
11 or below = (Rarely implements teaching practices)

**APPENDIX I****LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ACCESS for ELLs: Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners

AG: Academically Gifted

ASCD: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

AVID: Advancement Via Individual Determination

CCSS: Common Core State Standards

CRT: Culturally Responsive Teaching

DI: Differentiated Instruction

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

EL: English Learner

EOC: End-of-Course

ESL: English as a Second Language

HAG: Highly Academically Gifted

IRB: Institutional Review Board

LEP: Limited English Proficient

ME: Multicultural Education

NCCTQ: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

NCDPI: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

OWDL: One-Way Dual Language

PLC: Professional Learning Community

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

TWDL: Two-Way Dual Language

W-APT: WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test

WIDA: World-Class Instructional Design Assessment