How Teachers are enacting Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy to Support the Transition of Newly Arrived Students in Ontario Schools

By

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Abstract

This is a qualitative research paper that looks at some of the ways a small sample of teachers are enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) to support the transition of newly arrived students in Ontario schools. My research combines a review of relevant literature to my topic and three semi-structured interviews with teachers who currently enact CRRP regularly throughout their teaching practice. My findings show that CRRP, while conceptualized in different ways by teachers, shares many of the same tenets, which center on the notion of connecting students’ cultural backgrounds to the curriculum and learning environment. Furthermore, my findings show that CRRP can be implemented in a variety of ways in one’s teaching practice to assist newly arrived students in their transition into a new academic setting. In addition, my collected data shows that the implementation of CRRP practices are perceived by educators to be an effective way to support newly arrived students academically because it increases student engagement. I conclude my research by outlining the implications of my research findings and making recommendations for further areas of research.

Keywords: culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, newly arrived students, transition and integration into new schools
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

1.0 Research Context

Federal and provincial laws guarantee individuals the right to be treated equal to all others within Canada (Canadian Bill of Rights, 1960; Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990). Included in an individual’s rights is equal access to education (Ontario Education Act, 1990). However, not everyone is receiving education in an equitable way. For example, the Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) own documents acknowledge that there are both individual and systemic biases within the education system that prevent all learners from receiving an equitable education (TDSB, 1999). One such bias takes the form of a lack of cultural diversity that can exist in schools, both within the learning environment provided by teachers and within the curriculum that is being taught to students (Eslinger, 2013).

This inequity can be demonstrated through research which shows that the majority of teachers in Ontario are white while the majority of students are not (Bernhard, Hyman & Tate, 2010; Eslinger, 2013). This fact supports further research that shows that the typical learning environment within Ontario schools and North America in general, is largely representative of Eurocentric values and norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Eslinger, 2013). Thus, educators in Ontario find themselves teaching to students who come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds that do not align with their own. The problem is that cultural disparity can lead to students of minority ethno-racial groups feeling disengaged which in turn leads to lower academic performances (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Bernhard et al., 2010; Eslinger, 2013). Therefore, the cultural disparity experienced by some students creates an unequal educational environment whereby minority students are disadvantaged due to their cultural differences (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For this reason, many educators and researchers
are promoting the use of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) to address this issue. CRRP, according to one researcher is a “pedagogy [that] builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and [that] teachers can enhance students’ success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice” (Irvine, 2010, p. 57).

1.1 Research Problem

One group that is greatly affected by the cultural disparity that can be found in schools are newly arrived students who have recently immigrated to Canada. According to Statistics Canada’s *Immigration and ethnocultural diversity in Canada: National household survey, 2011* (Chui, 2013), 19.1 percent of Canadians are visible minorities and of that 19.1 percent 65.1 percent, or almost 12.5 percent of the total population, were born outside of Canada. When looking specifically at the numbers of visible minority teachers in Canada they make up 6.9 percent of the total teaching workforce of 439,380 (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). This means that the majority of visible minority students, including newly arrived students, are taught by someone who is not a visible minority.

This is important given that most teachers in Ontario also associate with the dominant Eurocentric culture of Canada and tend to teach to those cultural norms (Ryan et al., 2009; Bernhard et al., 2010; Eslinger, 2013). The result is that a significant portion of the student population who are newly arrived to Canada are taught in an environment that does not reflect or support their cultural identity (Bernhard et al., 2010).
This then can become a major issue. Researchers, such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), have found that children who are not part of the dominant culture and who do not see themselves personally and culturally reflected in the classroom tend to perform at an academically lower level than those from the majority culture. Thus, by not making schooling culturally responsive and relevant to all students, teachers are creating a learning environment that does not equally support the academic success of every student (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007; Bernhard et al., 2010; Eslinger, 2013). The problem then lies in finding a way for educators to work against the cultural disparity that newly arrived students can find themselves in.

1.2 Research Purpose

Given the cultural disparity that newly arrived students can face and the outcomes this can have on the quality of their education, the purpose of my research is to understand how a sample of teachers in the Greater Toronto Area are working to support their newly arrived students both academically and socially through culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP).

1.3 Research Question

This research centers on the question: How are teachers enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy to support the transition of newly arrived students in Ontario schools?

Subsidiary questions include:
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- What academic challenges have these teachers observed from their newly immigrated students?
- How do educators conceptualize culturally relevant pedagogy in theory and practice?
- What range of resources and instructional practices do educators enact as CRRP for newly arrived students and why?
- What outcomes do these teachers observe from their enactment of CRRP?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

In order to better understand why I am doing research on this issue it is best that I mention a few things about myself. First, I am a white male with Canadian/British ancestry who is working to become an educator. I grew up in Ontario and went through the Ontario public school system. During my time at school, I can say that all of my teachers, except my grade two teacher, were white. I also remember that many of the students I went to school with were not white. This means that I was in learning environments where the teacher was potentially teaching the dominant European cultural norms of Canadian society to students who were not all reflected by those norms. Looking back now, I was not aware of how that benefited me and disadvantaged others. While I was aware that other students had cultural identities that differed from mine, I did not see how the school environment I found myself in benefited me academically and limited them.

While I was not aware of the educational outcomes of these differences, I did recognize and respect the existence of different cultures. I gained this awareness because at the young age
of five I had the opportunity to travel around the world for a year with my mother. Our trip took us through Europe, into parts of Africa and then across Asia. The experience left me with an understanding that the world is a culturally diverse place and that diversity is something to celebrate. In fact, the most memorable and enjoyable parts of my trip were in places that were culturally different from my own.

My enjoyment of diverse cultures led me to travel and live overseas for many years as an adult. As a result of that experience, I have come to see and experience some of the difficulties one can face while living in a culture that is different from your own. The most pertinent example comes from the time I lived and worked in South Korea for two and a half years. During my time there, I experienced firsthand the effects of living within a culture that did not reflect my own.

I have also witnessed firsthand the difficulties that transitioning from one culture to another can have on others. My wife is Korean and was born in South Korea. We moved from South Korea to Canada seven years ago and the transitioning process was difficult for my wife due to the differences in culture. It was hard to watch her struggle sometimes and her experiences made me more aware of how my own culture can be difficult for others to adjust to.

My interest in other cultures and my experience living in South Korea influenced my area of study during my post-secondary education. As a result, I graduated from the University of Toronto with an Honours B.A in East Asian Studies. During my studies, I focused on learning more about the problematic discourse of an East/West binary as well as discourse connected to Orientalism. I was specifically interested in understanding how those forms of discourse are affecting the shaping of a globalized society.
Therefore, I believe that my own lived experiences and education have led me to focus on understanding the role culture plays in education, particularly education that takes place within a pluralistic society such as Canada. As a future educator, it is my hope to learn how to effectively teach to all students, regardless of my own or my students’ background. I also hope to learn how to honour students’ identity and to support all students, especially those who are newly arrived to Canada and are facing cultural transitions.

1.5 Overview

This research paper reports a qualitative research study that involved a literature review and interviews with three teachers who have experience working with newly arrived students in large metropolitan school boards around the Greater Toronto Area. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy and focus on helpful methods for integrating minority students into the classroom. In chapter 3, I elaborate on my research methods and design. Following this, in chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the literature. Finally, in chapter 5, I briefly review my key findings and speak to the implication of those findings for the education community and for myself as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature that seeks to explore some of the issues newly arrived students face when transitioning into a new school and how educators can use culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) to address those issues. More specifically, I present literature that outlines some of the challenges newly arrived students face when transitioning into their school and social environment. Next, I seek to define what culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy entails by presenting literature that speaks to this topic. I then explore literature that supports ways in which CRRP can be used by educators to help newly arrived students transition into their new educational setting academically and socially. Finally, I highlight research that looks to outline some of the limitations and difficulties educators face with regard to implementing CRRP in their classroom.

2.1 Issues Facing Newly Arrived Students to Canada

In Ontario, around 25,000 non-English speaking immigrant youth under the age of 19 arrive each year (Bernhard, Hyman & Tate, 2010). Students in this group encounter a multitude of challenges when they arrive which can have an effect on their academic performance. This is significant because research shows that every passing year after the age of seven, newly immigrated students come up against increasing long term difficulties in successfully completing secondary and post-secondary education, which in turn affect their quality of life (Bohlmark, 2009; Corak, 2011). For example, research done in Sweden shows that the older students are when they immigrate, the more difficulties they encounter when trying to successfully complete
their education (Bohlmark, 2009, p. 387). These findings are backed up by research done in Canada using census data which shows that students who immigrate to Canada after the age of nine “face a distinct and growing increase in the risk that they will not graduate” (Corak, 2011, p. 6). For this reason, it is important to understand some of the issues newly arrived students experience and the effects that these issues can have on academic performance.

In this section I will explore literature related to this problem by focusing on four key underlying issues newly arrived students can encounter and the impacts they can have on academic success. These key issues are;

"access to quality child care and education programs that are culturally respectful; early academic disengagement leading to school drop-out; language proficiency and retention of the home language while learning English; and generational problems [differences in home culture and Canadian culture]" (Bernhard et al., 2010, p. 4).

Ultimately, how newly arrived students and their families negotiate some or all of these issues will affect the academic success and the social and emotional well-being of these students (Bohlmark, 2009; Corak, 2011).

2.1.1 Issues Involving Access to Culturally Respectful Child Care and Education Programs

When newly arrived students and their families first encounter the education system in Ontario, many are faced with the realization that the education system that they now find themselves in is culturally different from the one they came from (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Brubacher, 2013; Eslinger, 2013; Wong, 2015). This difference can be very challenging for both newly arrived students and their parents. However, studies show that while there is an acknowledgment by parents of the cultural differences observed in their child’s new education
settings, many parents try to make attempts to be open to those differences and to learn more about the education system (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Wong, 2015). Yet, as one researcher’s data shows, teachers and schools may not be making enough of an effort on their part to understand the cultural context that newly arrived families are coming from and thus are not making accommodations for those differences (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011).

An example of this can be seen in research that shows the conceptualization of what is seen as “normal” child development is culturally dependent (Rogoff, 1990). This means that “concepts such as ‘mature child,’ ‘healthy functioning’ and ‘optimal development’ are…not universal, but take their meaning from the values of a specific culture” (Bernhard et al., 2010, p. 5). In addition, curriculum, as well as instruments of assessment and observations made by teachers, tend to also be subject to the same cultural biases (Bernhard et al., 2010; Brubacher, 2013; Eslinger, 2013).

To compound this issue, Bernhard et al. cite multiple researchers who conclude that “there is little training for inclusion, diversity, and language-teaching in teachers' preservice programs…[therefore], teachers are often unprepared to deal with teaching new immigrants” (Brubacher, 2013, p. 18). The consequence of this is that newly arrived students can feel underrepresented in their learning environment because of cultural differences, leading to academic disengagement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cummins, 2004; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Irvine, 2010)

2.1.2 Issues related to Academic Disengagement

Academic disengagement is an important issue because it can lead to poor academic results which in turn can affect one’s economic future (Eslinger, 2013). While academic
disengagement can affect any student, newly arrived students, and particularly those from the Central and/or South America, Caribbean and East African countries face some of the highest dropout rates in Ontario (Bernhard et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand what can lead to issues of disengagement.

As demonstrated earlier, cultural differences in the learning environment can affect the level of engagement a student has in the classroom; however, academic disengagement for newly arrived student can start even before they have set foot in a classroom. For example, many schools in the Greater Toronto Area require proof of immigration status for both newly arrived students and their parents before being enrolled in a public school and this can be seen as an unwelcoming experience (Sidhu, 2008). In addition, newly arrived students are also asked questions about “home language, family goals, lines of family authority and emergency contacts” which can be interpreted as probing and invasive actions (Bernhard et al., 2010, p. 9). As a result, the school registration process can be very off-putting for newly arrived families and can be interpreted negatively, thus leaving students and parents feeling unwelcome. (Bernhard et al., 2010).

In addition, the levels of cognitive engagement and identity investment that students experience in their learning environment can affect the level of engagement they have in their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cummins, 2004; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Irvine, 2010). As Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999) have shown, learning happens best when pre-existing knowledge is utilized. Therefore, when classrooms make connections to student identity and build on prior knowledge, student engagement increases (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010; Irvine, 2010). However, newly arrived students and students from minority cultures find that many classrooms fail in connecting minority students’ cultural capital
to the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011). When students feel that their cultural background and identity are not represented in their learning environment their cognitive engagement drops (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010; Irvine, 2010).

Another major factor that can lead to academic disengagement is underdeveloped English language skills (Bernhard et al., 2010). Studies have shown that there is a clear link between language competency and academic success, yet many newly arrived students struggle in this area because they are not native English speakers (Tankanish, 2004; Cummins et al., 2007; Paez, 2008).

2.1.3 Issues Related to Language Proficiency and Retention of the Home Language While Learning English

The ability to understand the language of instruction is vital to academic success. An example of this can be seen in Statistics Canada’s *Readiness to Learn at School among Five-Year-Old Children in Canada* (Thomas, 2006) which shows that children aged five whose parents are born outside of Canada and whose native language is not English show lower receptive language skills in English (the ability to comprehend language) which are needed to understand and follow instruction; an integral part of education. Therefore, students who enter the education system not speaking English, speaking a different dialect of English or having low English proficiency are at a disadvantage (Cummins et al., 2007). In order to deal with this issue, the Ontario Ministry of Education makes it clear in their document *Supporting English Language Learners: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators* (2008), that it is integral that teachers work to support English language learners (ELLs) in developing proficient literacy skills so that they can “meet the rigorous challenges of the Ontario curriculum” in order to help them “take their place in a cohesive and productive society” (p.2).
This can be a real challenge for educators. While there is research showing that ELLs tend to quickly develop conversational English skills, the same research shows that academic language skills are much slower to develop leading to reading and writing abilities that fall below grade level (Ebe, 2011). In addition, ELLs are further challenged due to their need to not only learn a new language but also to keep up academically with their native speaking peers (Ebe, 2011). This situation puts tremendous stress on newly arrived students who can feel frustrated and challenged by the whole experience (Bernhard et al., 2010).

The development of English language skills for newly arrived students can have additional challenges because many students are expected by their family and community to maintain proficiency in their native tongue while simultaneously building up proficiency in English, which can become an overwhelming experience for students (Bernhard et al., 2010). Studies have shown that if students’ native language proficiency levels stagnate or drop they may find that they have a hard time communicating with their parents and family, yet, if their English proficiency does not develop then they may have a hard time communicating in the classroom (Bernhard, et al., 1998; Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al., 2001). This challenging situation can lead to issues affecting students’ sense of security because students may find that they are unable to clearly make themselves understood to their family or their teachers and peers. Children need to make themselves understood in order to help them regulate their emotions and learn to act in socially acceptable ways, but if they cannot communicate clearly then this important aspect of childhood emotional development might be lacking (Bernhard et al., 2010).

Issues connected to the development of both a student’s mother tongue and English language skills can be a challenge to face because students can feel pressure from both their educational environment and their home environment simultaneously. However, it is not just
language differences between home and school that can be challenging. Navigating the cultural difference between home and school can lead to added stress felt by newly arrived students.

2.1.4 Issues related to Differences in Home Culture and Canadian Culture

Currently, around 75% of new immigrants in Canada come from non-European countries (Ambert, 2011). However, the majority of schools and classrooms mostly represent Eurocentric values and norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Eslinger, 2013). This divergence between home culture and school culture can be a challenge for newly arrived students to transition into. Students who come from a cultural background that is different from the dominant culture of the school find that they can develop a split identity due to the need to fit into the culture of their home environment and the culture of their school environment (Rajiva, 2005). This split identity can lead to students feeling insecure which can lower their social and emotional well-being (Bernhard et al., 2010).

Therefore, when working with newly arrived students it is important that educators understand the issues and challenges that those students face in their transition process. However, understanding the issues is not enough. The next step is to address those issues in a way that leads to newly arrived students feeling welcomed, engaged and challenged by their educational setting. One effective research supported method is to implement culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy into one’s daily teaching practice.
2.2 What is Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy?

Before drawing on research that explores culturally responsive and relevant ways to deal with the issues described above, I will take the time to outline key components of CRRP by highlighting some of the discourse found in relevant literature regarding the conceptualization of CRRP. It should be pointed out however that some researchers refer to CRRP as culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). However, despite the differences in names, each term shares the same framework and theoretical tenants (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2011). Therefore, for clarity I will be using the University of Toronto’s Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS) terminology of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2011).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), states that CRRP “rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order” (p. 160). This pedagogical theory emphasizes addressing the needs of students through a cultural framework that promotes educational success while simultaneously supporting students’ cultural identity. In addition, CRRP also focuses on addressing the inequities that a dominant culture places on minority cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Another definition provided by Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2010) states that “culturally relevant pedagogy builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and teachers can enhance students’ success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice” (p. 57).
These two definitions of CRRP set out some of the characteristics that researchers see CRRP as having. Taking Ladson-Billings and Irvine’s definitions into account as well as others not presented here, Stairs, Donnell and Dunn (2012) have outlined some of the key characteristics that researchers have attributed to CRRP. For them, these characteristics are: having high expectations of all students, regardless of their cultural background; promoting intellectual rigour through the use of “high level teaching strategies;” explicitly addressing issues of power and privilege in society; demonstrating that all cultures are valuable by acknowledging and incorporating students’ cultures into the classroom and the curriculum; promoting opportunities for students to engage with and collaborate with each other; and being committed to these practices year round (p. 62).

Note that these characteristics do not just speak to the process of acknowledging the holidays, food, or music and art of other cultures (Irvine, 2010), but rather they focus on developing an understanding of how culture influences each student’s learning in order to “employ multiple representations of knowledge that use students’ lived experiences to connect to new knowledge” (Irvine, 2010, p.59). Ultimately, CRRP is the process of differentiating instruction in order to accommodate different culturally influenced forms of learning and acknowledging that cultural values affect each student’s learning profile (Abrams and Ferguson, 2004).

What follows in the next section is an exploration of the literature pertaining to some of the ways CRRP can specifically address issues related to the transition process of newly arrived students as well as ways to academically support them.
2.3 CRRP and its Role in Helping Newly Arrived Students Transition Academically and Socially

The importance of using CRRP is driven by the need to help successfully integrate newly arrived students into the dominant culture of the education system. However, when a lack of cultural recognition in the classroom is present it can lead to students feeling disconnected from their learning environment, causing them to disengage in classroom learning, thus lowering their academic potential (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010, Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Eslinger, 2013).

In order to show how this can look in practice, what follows are research based strategies that seek to support newly arrived students in addressing issues related to the cultural differences they experience between their home culture and school environment through the framework of CRRP. I will be specifically providing examples of how CRRP can help schools turn education into a culturally respectful practice; help increase student engagement; and develop English language proficiency while supporting home language use.

While some strategies presented in this section are not explicitly identified as acts of CRRP by the literature that supports them, they do align with the central tenants of CRRP and have been included in this literature review.

2.3.1 How CRRP Can Help Schools Turn Education into a Culturally Respectful Practice

As was shown earlier, research on the subject of teacher preparedness in supporting newly arrived students and their family in culturally responsive ways indicates that teachers and schools are not making enough effort to understand the cultural context that their students are coming from (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). Furthermore, one of the causes of this is the lack of
training teachers get regarding inclusion, diversity and language-teaching (Brubacher, 2013, p. 18).

As a means of addressing this issue and working towards creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the success of every student, the Ontario Ministry of Education has released documents that seek to support schools and educators in their role in educating newly arrived students, ELLs and minority students. An example of this can be seen in the Ministry’s *Supporting English Language Learners: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators, Grades 1 to 8* (2008) document, which taps into the CRRP framework by helping educators understand some of the supports these students need to succeed. The document states that teachers, in order to support their ELL students, should

“learn about their students’ backgrounds, experiences, and languages…use a variety of instructional, assessment, and evaluation strategies that are designed to facilitate the success of English language learners…[as well as] create a classroom environment which reflects and celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity of all students” (p. 19).

The suggestions made in the Ministry document tie into the CRRP tenet of demonstrating that all cultures are valuable through the acknowledgment and incorporation of students’ cultures into the classroom and the curriculum (Stairs, Donnell & Dunn, 2012).

An additional document from the Ontario Ministry of Education’s document, titled *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools* (2013), follows the same framework, recommending that teachers integrate “a student’s background knowledge and prior home and community experiences into the curriculum and the teaching and
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learning experiences that take place in the classroom” (p. 2). Both documents speak of the need for educators to incorporate students’ cultural identities into the learning environment as a means of fostering academic success.

However, in order for schools to successfully implement CRRP strategies, the Ministry believes that there needs to be a top down approach in which;

“it is the responsibility of school and system leaders to be responsive to the increasingly diverse nature of Ontario communities by ensuring that schools are inclusive and welcoming of diversity, as reflected in both school climate and the classroom learning environment” (ibid, 2013, p. 3).

Research by Leithwood et al. (2004) supports this notion, arguing that effective leadership is “the catalyst” to bringing about meaningful change within schools (p. 17). Additionally, Brown (2007) argues that “increased student learning can only be achieved if teachers receive consistent support from their school administrators” (p. 61). With this in mind, the Ministry’s 2013 document looks to help school leaders support the development of a CRRP mindset within their teaching staff by supporting a culture of professional development and reflective practices.

Further actions that school leaders can put into place are the implementation and encouragement of policies that ask teachers to hold high expectations for all students; look for deficiencies not in students but in the learning environment if students are underachieving; help students to maintain their home culture while learning how to integrate into their new cultural environment; incorporate the cultural background and languages of students within the curriculum; and develop an open and caring school community in which all students are respected and treated equally (Chamberlain, 2005).
2.3.2 How CRRP Can Help increase student engagement

One of the main purposes of CRRP is to increase student engagement. As shown earlier, research demonstrates that cultural differences in the learning environment can affect the level of engagement a student has within the school and specifically within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cummins, 2004; Lewis et al., 2007; Irvine, 2010). While some of the practices suggested in the previous section can help to address this issue, there are other practices that teachers can specifically implement in order to increase the level of student engagement for their newly arrived students.

One of the first steps for teachers in addressing student engagement is to move “toward a true desire to listen to and accept others’ viewpoints and experiences” as part of developing a “cultural consciousness” (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 205). Once this is done, teachers can work towards developing an understanding of the cultural differences their students bring in comparison to the dominant culture and adjust their teaching practices in order to accommodate those differences (Brown, 2007). Those adjustments can take the form of teaching curriculum in a way that draws on the cultural capital and identity of students (ibid). An example of what this might look like can be seen in teaching students about shapes, measurement and fractions in math through the use of culturally diverse foods and recipes (Harding-DeKam, 2014). Another example can be seen in letting students use their native language to have conversations with other learners who speak the same language regarding subjects and concepts being taught in class. This action can allow students to have deeper conversations about a subject and therefore enrich cognitive development (Cummins, 2000; Schleifer & Ngo, 2005; Stairs et al., 2012).

Other areas that teachers can address when looking to increase the engagement of their newly arrived students is to have their parents and community members meaningfully involved
in the classroom throughout the school year (Booth, 2000). As research has shown, many parents of newly arrived and minority students feel that there is a lack of cultural understanding both from their perspective of schools and the education system but also of schools’ and teachers’ perspectives of them (Sidhu, 2008; Bernhard et al., 2010; Wong, 2015). This is significant because additional research has shown that increased levels of parent involvement in students’ education has a positive effect on “academic achievement, higher graduation rates, improved attendance, more commitment to homework, improved emotional well-being, more positive attitudes about school, and improved behaviour” (Wong, 2015, p. 3-4). Therefore, in order for teachers to increase student engagement they need to be actively engaging with parents and the community. Some ways of doing this are by inviting parents and community members to be classroom volunteers; have parents share their expertise and skills with the class; insure that parents know that they are welcomed into their child’s classroom; find ways to communicate with parents in their native language; develop open communication with parents in order to share student successes and concerns; and plan information sessions for parents of newly arrived students in order to help them understand the school system and the expectations placed on their children (Booth, 2000).

By engaging in students’ culture and language through the curriculum and learning environment, research has shown that the level of student engagement can increase which in turn can lead to greater academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Booth, 2000; Bernhard et al., 2010, Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Eslinger, 2013; Wong, 2015). Additionally, the involvement of parents in the educational environment in meaningful ways can support newly arrived students’ success by tapping into the CRRP tenants of promoting home culture and celebrating diversity (Stairs et al., 2012).
2.3.3 How CRRP Can Help to Develop English Language Proficiency While Supporting Home Language Use

In addressing issues related to English language proficiency, there are research supported practices that fall under the umbrella of CRRP which schools and teachers can implement. As the research shows, supporting English language development is fundamental to students’ academic success (Cummins et al., 2007; Paez, 2008; Bernhard et al., 2010; Brubacher, 2013). With this in mind, what follows are suggested practices to support ELLs and in particular newly arrived students.

When supporting ELLs with language acquisition, teachers should look to differentiate instruction by scaffolding learning through the use of visual aids displayed throughout the classroom in the form of lists, charts and images depicting class rules and expectation, as well as providing the use of graphic organizers to help students organize thoughts and ideas. Teachers should also try to model correct English usage, correct errors judiciously and keep language simple and clear while avoiding slang, idioms and other confusing figures of speech. Finally, teachers should look to scaffold by asking their ELL students to focus on the generation of work not the completion of it. This can take the form of asking them to choose answers to a question from a list or ask them to complete partially finished outlines or paragraphs (Gray & Fleischman, 2004). By scaffolding learning, educators are engaging CRRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995) through an understanding that language and cultural difference can prevent newly arrived students and ELL from fully engaging in language based tasks at the required grade level (Pawan, 2008).

An additional way to support students with English language acquisition and comprehension is through the use of culturally relevant texts. Culturally relevant texts are texts that “readers can connect to and can draw on their background knowledge and experiences to
make meaning” (Ebe, 2010, p. 194). When students read texts that do not draw on those aspects students show lower reading assessment score (ibid). However, when texts are culturally relevant to the reader, readers tend to show increased engagement with the text as well as increased reading proficiency (ibid). This is important because engagement, above all else, is the strongest predictor of reading achievement (Guthrie, Schafer & Huang, 2001).

As Ebe (2010) notes, some texts that are identified as a culturally relevant text might not be to students if certain aspects are not taken into account. For example, a book published in Spain may be in Spanish, but Latin American students might not be able to relate to that text due to differences in settings, events, and cultural context (ibid). As a way of insuring that texts have a high level of cultural relevance, Ebe has synthesized research on the issue to come up with a rubric to help identify the cultural relevance of a text in relation to a student’s cultural background. The factors outlined in the rubric that teachers and students should consider are; “the ethnicity of the character; the setting; the year the story takes place; age of the character; gender of the character; language or dialect used in the story; the genre and exposure to this type of text; [and] the reader’s background experiences” (ibid, p. 197). Thus, the more these factors relate to the reader’s identity and experiences the more culturally relevant the text is to that student (ibid).

By identifying culturally relevant texts and using them in the classroom, teachers work towards strengthening their students’ language acquisition, and specifically literacy skills, in a culturally responsive and relevant way (Souto-Manning, 2009; Ebe, 2010).

A further way to enact CRRP that takes into account a student’s native language is to try and test students in both their native language as well as in English (Paez, 2008). In doing so, teachers give students a fair opportunity to show their knowledge of a content and not have that
knowledge limited by language proficiency (ibid). However, this can be difficult if there is no one in the school who speaks the same native language as the student or other translators are unavailable or not covered by school budgets.

2.4 The limitations and Challenges of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CRRP is structured in such a way as to support culturally diverse learning, but putting it into practice can be difficult for a variety of reasons. One of the biggest obstacles is a lack of cultural understanding, not only of minority students’ culture but also of the interaction between dominant and minority cultures in our society. As Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) note, “In order for teachers to be culturally attuned to the identities of their students, they should be aware of their own identity, as well as how those identities may be divergent from the identities of their students” (p. 73). However, what research has shown is that many pre-service and in-service teachers have a lack of cultural awareness which hinders their implementation of CRRP (Barnes, 2006; Dutro, Kazemi, Balf & Lin, 2008; Young, 2010). While this limitation can cause unsuccessful attempts by teachers to implement CRRP it should be noted that this particular issue can be addressed through education and self-reflection (Stairs et al., 2012).

Another issue that research has highlighted is the lack of confidence teachers have in taking the time to implement CRRP while adhering to curricular requirements. For teachers who find themselves in a classroom that is made up of a multitude of cultures it can be perceived as a daunting task to learn about all those cultures and to address them in their lessons (Dutro, et. al., 2008). Additionally, some teachers feel that the incorporation of CRRP in their lessons takes up valuable teaching time for the actual subject that is being taught (Young, 2010). This strain
comes from the fact that many teachers find themselves in a situation where they are teaching students the necessary skills and knowledge to pass tests or achieve curricular goals in which CRRP is not a factor (ibid). Therefore, the role of preparing students to be evaluated takes primary concern over the social and ethical knowledge students need to have in order to live in a culturally diverse society.

To combat this issue, many teacher educational programs are starting to address the need for teachers to learn about CRRP and are encouraged to implement some form of CRRP into their teaching practice (Barnes, 2006). Yet, as research shows, there is a disconnect between theory and practice (Barnes, 2006; Garcia, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010; Young, 2010). One of the main reasons for this disconnect is that many pre-service teachers are not getting the needed experience of practice teaching in a culturally rich environment that is supported by CRRP (Garcia et al., 2010). This lack of experience leads to teachers not feeling comfortable implementing CRRP themselves, or if they do implement it, it is done in a way that does not fully resemble CRRP (Garcia et al., 2010).

While research shows that there are some limitations and challenges in implementing CRRP (Barnes, 2006; Dutro et al., 2008; Garcia et al., 2010; Young, 2010), there is additional research that shows the imperative to find ways to incorporate it none the less. With its documented benefits, all schools and teachers should be making efforts to overcome any obstacles in order to actively engage CRRP on an ongoing basis (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010; Irvine, 2010; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011; Stairs et al., 2012; Eslinger, 2013).
2.5 Conclusion

With an understanding of the theoretical framework of CRRP combined with efforts to authentically implement it into the educational environment, CRRP can be an effective tool to support newly arrived students academically and socially in their new school environment. When teachers take the position that students arrive as “blank slates, wiped clean for the inscription of new” knowledge and understanding, they are missing the picture (Abrams and Ferguson, 2004, p. 66). Rather, they should be seeing their newly arrived students as people who “bring with them their own physical, emotional, linguistic, academic, cultural, and personal traits” which helps to inform their understanding of the world they live in (ibid. p. 66). Therefore, in order to combat the academic and social issues faced by newly arrived students educators are now being encouraged to give attention to the learning needs of those students by paying close attention to the cultural contexts of both the student but also of the classroom learning environment (Gee, 2001; Guthrie, 2004).

It is my hope that this study of the relevant literature regarding my focus of research has brought to light the needed to use CRRP to support newly arrived students. In addition, by combining the findings made in this literature review with the findings of my semi-structured interviews presented in chapter four, I hope to contribute to the body of knowledge that seeks to understand how CRRP can be effectively implemented to meet the learning needs of culturally diverse students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my research methodology. I first begin by outlining the research approach and procedures I use as well as describing my instruments of data collection. I then provide relevant information about the participants in this research, offering details on sampling criteria as well as sampling procedures in recruiting participants. Next, I present information about my data analysis and ethical review procedures. Finally, I highlight some of the limitations and strengths of this research before concluding the chapter with a summary of the key methodological approaches used as well as explaining why these methods have been chosen to investigate my research questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

Overall, my research uses a qualitative approach and investigates how a small sample of teachers are enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy to support the transition of newly arrived students in Ontario schools. My research approach combines a review of the relevant literature related to my research topic (see chapter 2) and findings from semi-structured interviews with three teachers.

There are a few reasons why I have chosen to use a qualitative research method. Firstly, as a candidate for a Master’s Degree in Teaching at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), I am expected to write a qualitative research paper as part of my graduating requirements. This is the foremost reason why I have chosen this research method. However, there are other very valid reasons for conducting this research as a qualitative study.
In social research, one of two research paradigms is typically adopted: quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative approaches typically take large amounts of data that may have the potential to offer a broad generalized perspective of social phenomenon while qualitative methods look to gain insight into the subjective “meaning of social events for those who are involved in them” (Esterberg, 2002, pg. 2-3). Furthermore, qualitative research seeks greater insight into the subjective lived experiences of an individual or a small group of individuals (Patton, 2002). Thus, given the nature of my research question and my interest in knowing firsthand accounts from a selection of teachers’ lived experiences, I believed that a qualitative research approach could provide me with valuable research data.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

For this study, the primary instrument of data collection was the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). As multiple handbooks on qualitative research state, one of the most important ways to collect data in qualitative research is through interviews (Creswell, 2013; Esterberg, 2002; Patton, 2002). Interviews help researchers gain insight into their research topic through a process of coding, theme identification and meaning making (Esterberg, 2002). I have chosen for my research to conduct semi-structured interviews because this interview method allows a researcher to design questions that generate responses in line with the research questions while still being flexible enough to probe unforeseen issues and themes raised by the participants. This is because semi-structured interview questions are designed to be more open-ended (Patton, 2002), giving space for interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002; Patton, 2002), adding as much or as little detail as
they want. In addition, it gives researchers an opportunity to ask follow-up questions in relation to new ideas or unforeseen issues that emerge through the interview process.

3.3 Participants

In this section I review the sampling criteria I put into place in order to help recruit appropriate interview candidates. In addition, I expand on the sampling procedures I used for recruitment. Lastly, I provide relevant biographical information about each teacher participant interviewed.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In order to fulfill the sampling criteria for this research each participant interviewed…

- Conscientiously implemented CRRP in their day to day teaching practice;
- Demonstrated leadership, commitment, and/or expertise in the area of CRRP (e.g. led and/or participated in professional development in this area, graduate degree related to CRP, participated in curriculum or resource development in this area etc.);
- Worked in a school context with a high concentration of newly arrived students;
- Must have had experience working with a minimum of 4 newly arrived students who have lived in Canada for a year or less;

Foremost, in order to fulfill the sampling criteria, participants had to be seen as conscientiously implementing CRP practices in their day to day teaching practice, preferably in the classroom but also around the school as well. In addition, potential participants were expected to have experience with at least one of the following criteria; leading and/or participating in professional
development in relation to CRP, having a graduate degree related to CRP, or having experience with curriculum or resource development in this area.

Secondly, potential participants needed to have experience working in schools that had a high concentration of newly arrived students to ensure that participants were working in a context whereby they enacted CRRP to support newly arrived students. Furthermore, participants were expected to have experience teaching a minimum of four newly arrived students. Setting the minimum at four students ensured that each participant had the potential to share a variety of different experiences, offering a broader perspective on what aspects and techniques of CRRP were useful in assisting their students’ adjustment into the academic and social atmosphere of their classroom.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures/Recruitment

In order to find participants to make up my research sample, I contacted parents within my community and asked them to forward a letter stating my research interest to their child’s teacher. I requested that those teachers share my letter with any colleague they thought might be interested in participating. I also contacted the Toronto District School Board Toronto International Student Programs, the Peel District School Board Peel Schools for International Students and the York Region District School Board International Education Services to see if they knew of any teachers who met my sampling criteria. Finally, I spoke with professors within my school to see if they knew of any teachers who focused on implementing CRRP in their daily teaching practice.

Therefore, my sampling procedure and recruitment used purposeful and convenience sampling strategies that are common to qualitative studies. Purposeful sampling is a process in
which one looks for individuals who meet specific sampling criteria so that they can better help researchers form an understanding of the research question(s) that is/are being explored (Creswell, 2013; Emmel, 2013). In addition, convenience sampling involves finding a sample group in which a researcher can easily gain access to and collect information from (Creswell, 2013). In my case, as a teacher candidate that has worked and continues to work in and around schools with in-service teachers, gaining access to this purposeful sample group is convenient for me. While this may weaken the validity of my findings (ibid, 2013) and potentially provide me with “information poor cases” (Emmel, 2013, p. 42), I am confident that through the combination of a review of the relevant literature in combination with purposeful interviews I was able to generate sufficient and useful data pertaining to my research topic.

When approaching my sample groups I kept in line with the ethical standards and principles of academic research laid out by the Nuremberg Code. The code states that, “the essential ethical principle of research with humans is that participants freely volunteer to participate in the research” (Seidman, 2013, pg. 64). In addition, participants were given information about the research being conducted so as to determine whether they would be interested in participating or not (ibid, 2013).

For that reason, I provided details about my research as well as what I intend to do with my findings to potential participants. I also provided my information to the organizations and individuals I contacted during my recruitment process so that potential participants could feel free to contact me, ensuring that participants volunteered under their own will without feeling pressured or obliged to do so.
3.3.3 Participant Bios

Through my recruitment and sampling criteria, I was able to find three participants to interview. All three were teaching in large metropolitan school boards and had experience enacting CRRP in their regular teaching practice as well as experience working with newly arrived students.

*Lydia (Pseudonym)*

At the time of the research Lydia was a high school teacher working out of her school’s English and ESL Department as the department head. She had a combined fifteen years of teaching experience both in her native country in Eastern Europe and in Ontario. During that time, Lydia had taught multiple grades from elementary to secondary. Lydia graduated from York University’s Urban Diversity program where she became aware of CRRP through the program’s focus on making education more meaningful and relevant to the growing number of students in Ontario who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. CRRP spoke to her because of her own experiences of being a newly arrived immigrant to Canada before attending university.

*Gloria (Pseudonym)*

Gloria also graduated from the same teacher education program at York University, but in a different year. Gloria had seven years of teaching experience and had taught kindergarten and a split grade 2/3 class. While at York University, Gloria became interested in CRRP because as a self-identified person of colour, she felt that her own educational experience did not reflect the tenants of CRRP and thus she regularly felt culturally underrepresented in her learning environment. Therefore, her passion towards CRRP was driven by her desire to make
sure none of her students felt the same way she did while she was in school. Gloria’s passion and commitment to CRRP had not gone unnoticed by her school board. She had been asked to open up her classroom to other educators by hosting demonstration classes so that others could see how CRRP can be meaningfully implemented within the classroom environment.

Alison (Pseudonym)

At the time of the research, Alison was a kindergarten teacher with nine years of teaching experience. She had taught a grade 3/4 class, a grade 4/5 class and kindergarten. Alison had been recognized by her school board for her teaching and had been asked to hold demonstration classes for other kindergarten teachers. She had also been part of a curriculum writing team and developed inquiry kits for use by teachers in her school board. Alison was relatively new to CRRP and had been enacting it for almost two years. While Alison also graduated from York University, her program focused on Primary/Junior Early Childhood Education training. During her teacher training, she did not recall learning about CRRP. Alison’s first encounter with CRRP was at an open classroom event on CRRP that Gloria was holding. It was at this event that she became interested in learning more about CRRP. Alison considered Gloria to be a kind of mentor to her with regard to learning more about CRRP and they are in regular contact. While Alison had limited experience with CRRP, I have included her as an interview participant because she currently works in a school with a high number of newly arrived students. She also provided a perspective of someone who is currently learning more about CRRP as a means of professional development.
3.4 Methodological Reflexivity

Originally, I was interested in understanding how teachers were specifically helping newly arrived Korean students transition into Ontario schools through the use of CRRP. This focus was driven by my own personal connection to Korea. However, by having such a narrow focus on one particular cultural group, I found it very hard to find participants who could speak to working directly with Korean students. I found that teachers who contacted me to participate in my research had little experience working with Korean students but were able to speak to using CRRP to support all their learners. For this reason, I changed my original research question in order to broaden my research focus to look at how teachers are helping all newly arrived students, not just Korean ones, through the use of CRRP.

While my final analysis looks at all newly arrived students, I was still interested for my own purposes on collecting information specifically about newly arrived Korean students. Therefore, in my interview protocol I included a few questions that inquired about the effects of CRRP on Korean students. Ultimately, what I found was that teachers used the same approaches and saw the same positive effects with their Korean learners as they did with other learners.

3.5 Data Analysis

I performed data analysis on each semi-structured interview in order to generate an understanding of the common themes and divergences within my data. To do this I first transcribed each interview. Next, I went through the interview texts individually using an open coding technique, looking for any themes or categories that emerged in relation to my research topic. The importance of using an open coding method was so that I approached the interview
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data without any predetermined codes or categories which lead to a more open and less
prescriptive view of the data (Esterberg, 2002).

Once I developed themes using open coding for each set of data I reread the data using
focused coding. Focused coding is a rereading of the texts in order to identify parts of the data
that are related to the themes I identified (Esterberg, 2002). During this process, I used my
research questions as an interpretive tool to help me formulate overall themes and subthemes.
Next, I looked at all the interview data side by side and synthesized themes and observations as
well as made note of any divergences in the data. The final stage involved making further
meaning of the data collected by reading it against the existing research in this field (chapter 2).
I report the findings from this process in chapter 4.

3.6 Ethical Review Procedures

My research followed a set of ethical review procedures that were outlined in an
informed consent form (See Appendix A) which all participants were given to sign. The consent
form clearly stated the extent to which participants’ personal information and well-being would
be protected.

According to Irving Seidman in, Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for
Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences, there are “eight major parts of informed
consent” (pg. 64). Those parts are;

- An invitation to participate
- An outline of the potential risks
- An outline of the rights of the participant
- An outline of the possible benefits of such a study
- An outline of the steps used to maintain the confidentiality of participants
- An outline of the way in which the results of the research will be disseminated
- Special conditions that will be made for children under 18 (this is not relevant for this study)
- Information on how to contact the researcher, research supervisor and ethical committee overseeing the study (Seidman, 2013).

In relation to Seidman’s eight major parts of informed consent, the consent form clearly stated that participation in this research project was strictly voluntary. In order to ensure this, I provided my contact information to potential candidates thus giving them the choice to freely contact me or not during the recruitment stage of the research. The consent form also clearly stated that potential interview subjects had the right not to participate or to stop participation at any point before, during or after the interview process.

I also stated that there were no known potential risks in participating. Furthermore, in order to mitigate any unforeseen risks I provided participants with a list of my interview questions. This was to ensure that participants were not caught off guard by any of my questions. In addition, participants were informed that they would be given pseudonyms and that any identifying marks related to their school or their students would be excluded.

Finally, the consent form outlined how the data collected from their interview would be used in the research. Therefore, participants were offered the opportunity to read the transcript of their interview and make any clarifications or retractions they wished pertaining to their answers given. Participants were also be notified that all data, including audio recordings,
would be stored on my password-protected computer and would be destroyed after five years. Finally, participants were informed that only I and course instructor had access to this data.

3.7 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

While I chose to conduct this study using a qualitative research approach, there were some inherent limitations that still existed. As stated earlier, qualitative research deals with a small sample size and can be subjective (Esterberg, 2002; Patton, 2002). Because I was limited to only a handful of perspectives, I am unable to tie my findings from this research to a generalized perspective of how all teachers enact CRRP. This means I had to take into account that the experiences of my research subjects may not reflect the experiences of others in similar situations. Nevertheless, these perspectives I feel were able to inform me on the ways a select group of experienced individuals went about implementing CRRP in their teaching practices.

An additional limitation was related to who I interviewed. According to the ethical guidelines that I was working within, I was only allowed to interview teachers and thus could not interview other relevant subjects such as students and parents. I was also limited to a single research method, and was prevented from including classroom observations. Observations would have allowed me to see how participating teachers were implementing CRRP and also take note of the children’s interactions related to the teacher’s teaching methods. However, I did not have the ethical approval for such observations. This therefore limited the number of varied research methods and perspectives that are represented in my research.

While there are methodological limitations to my research there are also strengths. Firstly, by using purposeful sampling I gained access to participants who were experienced,
knowledgeable and had first-hand experience regarding my research topic (Emmel, 2013; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Furthermore, by conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers I was able to collect data that was more in depth due to the use of open ended questions (Patton, 2002). Teachers were given the space to express what mattered to them most regarding the research topic and data was collected using participants’ own words.

In addition to generating data for my own research, qualitative interviews, which are much like conversations (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), offered a space for participants to be reflexive of their own practices. This in turn opened the possibility for my participants to gain further insight into their own pedagogical methods and practices.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported that I chose to conduct my research using a qualitative approach which involved a review of literature related to my topic of research and three semi-structured interviews with teachers. Interview subjects were found through purposeful and convenience sampling and provided with informed consent forms that outlined the ethical considerations of this research. Next, in chapter 4, I report my research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss my research findings in relation to my research question, which enquires about the ways teachers are enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy to support the transition of newly arrived students in Ontario schools. As described in the previous chapter, my research findings have been extrapolated from semi-structured interviews that I conducted with three teachers (Lydia, Alison and Gloria) teaching in the GTA. The interviews took place in the autumn of 2015 and pseudonyms are used in order to protect their identity.

My research findings have been divided into four main themes that speak to my research question and in some cases these themes have been further divided into related sub-themes. The themes that have structured this chapter are as follows: (1) Teachers’ theoretical conceptualizations of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) centers on the idea of regularly presenting curriculum in a meaningful and engaging way by relating to the cultural background of students and drawing on their daily lived experiences; (2) When working with newly arrived students to Canada, teachers are aware of the cultural difference that these students may face when integrating into their new school and classroom environment and draw on school and community resources to address those issues in a culturally responsive way; (3) Teachers enact CRRP in ways that affect their classroom environment and their instructional practice; and (4) Teachers rely on a variety of text and community based resources to support their teaching practice but feel that there should be more made available. Finally, I close the chapter by reviewing my finds and providing a preview of my next chapter.
4.1 Teachers’ theoretical conceptualizations of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) centers on the idea of regularly presenting curriculum in a meaningful and engaging way by relating to the cultural background of students and drawing on their daily lived experiences

When asked to describe what CRRP meant to each participant I was given a variety of answers. However, each answer centered on the notion of engaging in a daily practice in which curriculum was presented in a meaningful way by relating it to students’ cultural background and daily lived experiences.

For Lydia, CRRP is grounded in a “daily practice in which you create a sense of awareness and respect for every single student in your class regarding and with respect to the identity of the student.” For her, teachers must then find ways to connect students’ identities to the curriculum in meaningful ways in order to fully engage them in learning. Furthermore, it is something that should be “addressed constantly and never left out.”

Alison’s description of CRRP spoke to the idea of drawing on students’ identities and cultures as a way of guiding one’s teaching practice. She talked about the importance of “making that connection for children [by] finding out more about their background and bringing it into [her] classroom.” Interestingly, for Alison, engaging students in lessons by connecting to their cultural backgrounds drew similarities to inquiry based learning because when implementing CRRP in a multicultural classroom environment you are exposing students to a variety of cultures which can lead to new insight and understanding. By seeing culture through an inquiry lens, Alison’s view of CRRP speaks to Irvine’s (2010) notion that CRRP requires teachers to “employ multiple representations of knowledge that use students’ lived experiences to connect to new knowledge” (p.59).
Gloria’s description of CRRP also connected to the idea of “bringing in the student’s culture” and “making lessons authentic and relevant to them” on a regular basis. However, for Gloria CRRP went beyond that. Besides connecting students’ culture to curriculum, CRRP also means having high expectations for her students regardless of their cultural background as well as developing critical consciousness within her students so that they can learn to challenge “normative ideas…advocate for one’s self…and challenge certain ideologies.” By incorporating these three aspects Gloria wants her students to “be advocates for themselves so that they can be critical of certain things that are happening out there and be able to voice their opinion.”

Out of my three participants, Gloria’s understanding of CRRP also connected to the idea of social justice. According to many scholars, social justice is an integral part of CRRP theory (Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Stairs, Donnell & Dunn, 2012). As outlined in research done by Stairs, Donnell and Dunn (2012), many scholars agree that one of the aspects of CRRP is to make students aware of issues of power and privilege based on culture and race. While Gloria’s understanding of CRRP spoke to this, Lydia and Alison did not explicitly draw connections to social justice. In expanding on her understanding of CRRP, Lydia spoke to issues of empowerment but her notion of empowerment was centred on students feeling empowered due to aspects of their culture being reflected in their learning.

What this shows is that the way in which my participants viewed CRRP did differ in some ways but were also similar in others ways, both to each other and to the body of literature on CRRP. Speaking to this issue, Saint-Hilaire (2014) states “that the ideology, dimensions and principles of multicultural education are not truly and completely reflected in the research done under its umbrella” (p. 600). However, as Stairs, Donnell and Dunn (2012) have shown, while theories and practices may differ there are some common characteristics that are represented
among the multiple perceptions of CRRP. Some of the characteristics they outlined were having high expectations for all students and teaching through methods that promote intellectual rigor. These characteristics of CRRP are meant to promote a growth mind set and challenge all students, regardless of their learning levels. Other common characteristics were connecting students’ culture and identity to the curriculum and building communities. These characteristics look to promote a positive self-identity by having all students reflected in the curriculum and promoting a sense of community. The final characteristics Stairs, et al. highlighted were connected to issues around social justice, such as making explicit issues of power and privilege, promoting cultural values and showing a sustaining commitment to CRRP values throughout the year. What should be pointed out here is that one characteristic is not valued or highlighted more so than another, the idea is that these characteristics permeate throughout the various perceptions of CRRP and are thus used to understand the parameters of CRRP (Stairs et al., 2012).

When comparing the characteristics that Stairs, et al. highlight to my data, one can see that each participant did incorporate many of these characteristics as part of their culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy; however, all participants fell short of making explicit connections to all. This might only be because of my method of data collection being exclusively interview based. If I was given the opportunity to observe my participants’ classroom teaching I may have noted more aspects of their teaching practice that expressed a greater connection to the multiple characteristics of CRRP.
4.2 When working with newly arrived students to Canada, teachers are aware of the cultural difference that these students may face when integrating into their new school and classroom environment and draw on school and community resources to address those issues in a culturally responsive way.

During my interviews I asked participants to discuss issues they observed newly arrived students facing, they spoke foremost of understanding that these students may be coming from very different cultural backgrounds to the ones found in their new schools. As research has shown, there are great challenges that newly arrived students face when transitioning to a new school. What follows is a presentation of my data that spoke to this issue and the ways that teachers went about addressing it.

4.2.1 Teachers are aware of the fact that newly arrived students might not be familiar with school settings and routines.

While discussing the process of helping newly immigrated students adjust to their new school and classroom, first and foremost my participants spoke of the need to understand that students can come from situations in which their cultural background and schooling experiences may be vastly different from the ones here in Canada. Therefore, because of these differences a student’s integration into a new school and classroom can be difficult at first.

As Lydia explained, for some newly arrived students, “they don’t recognize the setting, they don’t have friends, they don’t know the building, they don’t know where the classroom or the washroom is, and so it’s really confusing for a newcomer.” Alison spoke to similar issues. As she pointed out, newly arrived students can be unfamiliar with “the different ways that Canadian schools function” or the “different routines that we follow.” She gave some examples.
of this, referring to lining up as a class or even walking in a class line. She also talked about students not being familiar with non-verbal cues like “making eye contact to let the person know you are ready, or you’ve heard them.” Similarly, Alison mentioned that routine social cues like how we say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ with different gestures or body language are unfamiliar to some newly arrived students.

In response to this issue both Lydia and Alison spoke of taking the time to be cognisant of a newly arrived student’s differences and addressing these differences when needed. In some cases, it was just a matter of being aware of those differences and respecting them, such as when Alison talked about the varying ways people might say yes or no. When encountering such an issue Alison spoke of adjusting the way she may physically say no, for example “moving…[her head] from side to side.” However, in other cases she spoke of a need to help students understand their new cultural environment and the expectations that come with that environment. When Alison talked about some students not understanding the social expectations of lining up, she took that as a teaching opportunity to express the expectations that are in place in such a scenario.

In Lydia’s case, she spoke about being aware of the fact that students might not understand the school layout or what amenities are typically found in a school setting. As a means of addressing this issue she facilitated school orientation opportunities for newly arrived students. Lydia described that at her school students, who are familiar with the school and ideally share the same cultural background as the newly arrived student, are asked to help orient that student to their new surroundings.

The data shows my participants’ understood that some of their newly arrived students faced cultural differences in the Ontario educational environment that were different from their
previous environment. Furthermore, all of my participants found it vital that they understand and address those differences in order to reduce the challenges those students faced while integrating into their new schools. As Brubacher (2013) states, for many newly arrived students one of the main challenges they face is adjusting to structure and culture of a new schooling system (p. 18). What can compound this problem is a lack of teacher training which can leave educators unprepared to support newly immigrated students through that cultural transition (Bernhard et al., 2010). However, because my participants were culturally responsive to this challenge, they made efforts to address issues that came up due to cultural differences. For example, my participants adjusted the cultural and social cues used in the classroom to match their students’ and made explicit efforts to help newly arrived students understand and adjust to their new educational setting.

4.2.2 Parents play an important role during a student’s transition period by helping teachers to better understand the student and where they are coming from

When I asked my participants how they help newly arrived students adjust to their new classroom setting, Gloria was the only participant to speak directly to the role parents play in that process. The first thing Gloria mentioned in relation to this question was how she would seek to contact that student’s parents in order to better understand the student. Gloria indicated that her goal in communicating with the student’s parents would be so that she could gain insight into what that student was like, identify their areas of strength and weakness, better understand their cultural background and learn about their language proficiency in their native language. By gaining insight into these characteristics of the student, she could adjust her learning environment to better meet the needs of that student.
While Alison did not speak directly to the role parents play in this transition period, she did talk about the importance she places in bridging the home/school connection. The example she gave in relation to this was how she invited parents into her classroom “to help with different social and cultural activities.” She specifically spoke of a situation in which a Chinese student’s parent came in and taught the whole class how to make dumplings. She described how that experience was enjoyed by all the students and herself. An experience like this would have given the student the sense that their cultural background was validated in the classroom and thus would perhaps make that student feel more included in the classroom environment.

It should be noted that while Lydia did not mention the role of parents in a newly arrived student’s transition this could be expected because at the time of the interview she was working predominantly with international high school students who were living with host families from Canada. Therefore, most of her students’ parents were overseas and were unable to play a significant role in their day to day school life.

As research has shown, finding ways to meaningfully involve parents in their child’s education is very important because of the strong correlation between parent involvement and academic success (Wong, 2015). Additionally, by connecting with students’ parents in order to link the cultural background of those students to the learning environment, Gloria and Alison were able to make their teaching practice more culturally responsive and relevant for those learners.

4.2.3 A school’s community can help with the integration process of newly arrived students into the school environment
While Gloria did not speak to the role of parents in helping newly arrived students with the transition process, she was the only participant to highlight the ways in which the school community could play a role in that transition. For her, the most significant way this took place was through the involvement of extracurricular activities such as joining clubs and sports teams. As she stated, she and the school staff encourage newly arrived students to engage in extracurricular activities as a means of connecting them to the larger school community. From her observations of this process Lydia, too, noted that newly arrived students who participate in clubs and school teams start to integrate into the larger school community. As she stated “they get to talk to each other and [established students] welcome the new students into the mainstream and into the new setting basically.”

Another thing that Lydia pointed out was that participation in clubs and school teams gave “some leadership opportunities to the new students.” However, while participation in clubs and teams was noted as helping newly arrived students integrate into the school community, Lydia did express that some students found getting involved in clubs and school teams difficult because of cultural and language differences. One way that she addressed this was by starting what she called a conversation club in which newly arrived students and mainstream students were brought together to share their cultural backgrounds and engage in conversation.

These efforts by the school community connect to research that speaks to the need of school leaders to be the facilitators in creating a culturally responsive and relevant environment for all students (Leithwood et al., 2004). While Lydia did not speak directly to the role administration played in her school’s attempts to engage newly arrived students in extracurricular activities, it is evident through her comments about school staff’s encouragement of such that this was a school wide initiative. As the Ontario Ministry of Education’s document...
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools (2013) states, it is the responsibility of schools and school leaders to ensure that “schools are inclusive and welcoming of diversity” (p. 3). As demonstrated by the data, in Lydia’s school this seems to be the case.

4.2.4 Teachers connect with professional support workers both within and outside of the school as a means of aiding newly arrived students’ transition

When speaking of aiding newly arrived students through their transition period, both Gloria and Lydia talked about seeking the assistance of professional support workers, both within and outside of the school. In Gloria’s case, she looked for support from other colleagues who may have had experience working with students with a particular cultural background that she was not immediately familiar with. Gloria also noted that as a kindergarten teacher she would gain information from the Early Years Department, which is a part of the TDSB that oversees pre-school and kindergarten programs throughout the board.

Lydia also mentioned looking within the school for support, like connecting with her school’s guidance office. As she stated, her school’s “guidance office is very well equipped for the needs of…[the school’s] diverse community.” In addition to resources at the guidance office, settlement workers also have a role to play. The school can call on settlement workers that speak the native language of most of the cultural groups represented in her school. This can aid in official communications between the school, students and parents. This ties into the communal aspect of CRRP (Stairs et al., 2012) insuring that important information can be accurately transmitted between teacher/school and student/parents.
4.3 Teachers enact CRRP in ways that affect their classroom environment and their instructional practice

When I asked my participants about the ways they enact CRRP in their teaching practice, there were two main areas stood out from my data. Those areas were the ways that CRRP influenced their classroom environment and their instructional practice. What is important to note here is that teachers looked to not only enact CRRP in the way they taught but also in the learning environment that they created.

4.3.1 Teachers work to create a safe classroom environment through enacting CRRP

For Lydia, creating a safe environment for students came from boosting cultural awareness in order to make students feel comfortable to express their identity within the classroom. As Lydia explained, this was done through “celebrations and activities that…[allowed students to] address their identities.” In addition, she facilitated student led presentations that “explore[ed] and present[ed] to the class their cultural background and family.” Lydia found that these presentations allowed students to express their identity to their peers, one of the characteristics of CRRP, and boost cultural awareness amongst students as a means of promoting a “safe environment.”

Similarly, Gloria expressed the importance of developing a safe classroom environment so that students could have “courageous conversations” in relation to their identity and the prejudices that they faced because of that identity. Furthermore, for Gloria, a safe classroom environment meant that students should be able to express themselves culturally within the classroom and one of the main ways to do so was by encouraging the use of their mother tongue (L1) within the classroom.
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Celebrating cultures and sharing cultural identity within the classroom are some of the integral parts of CRRP theory (Stairs et al., 2012). Moreover, as expressed by Lydia and Gloria, in supporting these activities they felt that the classroom environment became a safe space for students to express themselves.

4.3.2 Encouraging and supporting dialogue is an important part of enacting CRRP within the classroom environment

Gloria was the only participant to speak directly of the need to encourage students to engage in dialogue as a means of better understanding her students of those students better understanding their peers. She called this dialogue “having meaningful conversations.” Gloria felt that having meaningful conversations was important to have because it connected to the social justice aspect of CRRP. As Gloria expressed:

“Students do come with a lot of bias, and they do come with a lot of knowledge that we think they don’t have and it is just a matter of us being able to just listen to that knowledge and understand where it is coming from.”

For her, having open dialogue within the classroom leads to important teachable moments.

Research related literature supports this notion. Souto-Manning (2009), in reference to Ira Shor and Paulo Freire’s work, states that dialogue has “the potential to transform and recreate relationships, fostering political and critical consciousness” (p. 53). In addition, it is through dialogue that “educators come to recognize children’s intelligences and cultures in the classroom” (ibid, p. 71).
Additionally, by providing space for students to voice and express their ideas and opinions, Gloria was tapping into her students’ background knowledge and understanding; one of the fundamental tenants of CRRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 2010; Stairs et al., 2012).

4.3.3 Teachers enact CRRP in their teaching practice through the use of culturally relevant texts

All three participants said that when enacting CRRP the inclusion of culturally relevant texts was important to their teaching practice. Alison spoke to the fact that one of the ways she enacts CRRP is through the choice of texts that she shares with her class. For her, books that have differing cultural content connect to students’ various identities and also expose new cultures to her students. Unfortunately, at the time of the interview, I did not collect data regarding specific examples of texts she had used.

Gloria believed that enacting CRRP meant choosing culturally relevant texts “so the children can see themselves in the text and make connections…[leading to] enriched conversations.” As an example, she spoke of a lesson in which she read a book about different languages and then asked students to share whether they spoke a different language other than English. She followed this reading up with a note she sent home to parents asking them to write how they would say hello in their native language. She then created a classroom discussion in which students explored the different ways people say hello. For her, the use of this book opened up an opportunity for students to explore cultural diversity by bringing their different languages to the classroom and sharing them with others.

Lydia shared a similar view. In her classroom, she had her students create multi-lingual books. For her, creating these books allowed students to share their identity. Lydia also pointed out that in the case of ELLs it is a way to improve their English language skills because they
create the text using their native language but they also gain from the process of translating that text into English. Lydia explained that, for the students, creating these books is “something that they are very proud of.”

In addition to the creation of multi-lingual books, Lydia also incorporated culturally relevant texts in her reading program, similar to my other participants. As part of her novel studies she chooses books that are not only set in North America but globally as well. She felt very supported in her incorporation these kinds of texts because her school library was well equipped with culturally diverse materials ranging from fiction and non-fiction books that represent a range of cultures to a large collection of books written in a variety of different languages that are represented in her school.

As my findings show, all three participants felt that the inclusion of culturally relevant texts within their teaching practice was an important way to reflect the identity of their students within the classrooms and to explore cultural diversity. Interestingly, as research has shown, the more connections a text has to the lived experiences of its reader the better that reader can relate to and comprehend a text (Guthrie, Schafer & Huang, 2001; Ebe, 2010). Therefore, culturally relevant texts that reflect students’ cultural diversity can promote stronger student engagement; it is also a means of helping students to reach high academic standards by building up their literacy skills, which is also a major component of CRRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 2010; Stairs et al., 2012).

4.3.4 Within the classroom, teachers enact CRRP in their teaching practice through visual displays that reflect the cultural diversity of their students and support language acquisition
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My research findings have shown that it is important for teachers to reflect cultural diversity and support learning by ensuring there are visual representations of their students’ lives and values incorporated into daily instructional practice. As Gloria mentioned, it was important that her classroom had spaces that display works of art that are “representative of [people of] colour.” She also had posters and images of “role models that are people of colour.” In addition to these displays, Gloria had displays that represent different languages. For example, she had a written display of how to say ‘welcome’ and ‘hello’ in different languages, as well as displays of her students’ names written in their mother tongue. As she stated, she believed that it was important to have “those multi-lingual signs or those labelling in different languages” as a way of incorporating the culture of her students within the visual space of her class but also as a way of supporting their learning. Alison similarly had many multi-lingual labels in her classroom and displays representing multiple languages for the same reason.

In addition, Lydia also acknowledged the importance of labelling or representing things within the classroom in various languages. For her, this validated students’ first language but also functioned as a tool to support ELLs who are struggling with English vocabulary. In addition to labels and images, Lydia also incorporated lots of visual presentations and encouraged her students to also make visually rich presentations. For her, images help students who might not understand what is being said better comprehend the subject matter. In Lydia’s class, many of these presentations are done with the aid of technology, such as Power Point presentations and videos.

4.3.5 The use of cultural artifacts that reflect the identities of students within the classroom promotes aspects of CRRP because artifacts can tie cultural identity with curriculum
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When enacting CRRP in the classroom, Gloria believed that artifacts play an important role. For her, cultural artifacts are physical items that have connections and meaning within a culture. Therefore, by bringing in these artifacts to the learning environment and using them to help teach a lesson, Gloria felt that she was helping to make connections between students’ cultures and their learning. She gave an example of a patterning lesson that she taught to her kindergarten students. In that lesson, she brought in “different beads and talk[ed] about how beads in certain parts of the world represent different things or are considered to be valued.” She then showed jewelry and textiles from different cultures that contained bead work and used those items to understand patterning. For her, this was a way of conducting a math lesson through the use of culturally relevant artifacts that her students could identify with.

While my review of the literature related to CRRP did not speak specifically to the use of culturally relevant artifacts, Gloria’s attempts to connect the learning environment to her students’ cultural identity through the use of such artifacts is a fundamental part of CRRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010; Irvine, 2010).

4.3.6 Teachers enact CRRP in their teaching practice by encouraging the use of students’ first language as a means of promoting cultural identity and fostering academic achievement

As mentioned earlier, all three participants felt that it was important to have students’ first language represented both in the texts they used but also in the visuals that were displayed in classroom rooms. In addition to those methods of honoring students’ first language, my research showed that all three teachers actively supported students speaking their first language in the classroom both to promote cultural identity but also academic achievement.
Alison believed that it was important to honor students’ first language by encouraging them to use it to talk to peers who shared the same language but also to share it with those who did not speak that language. An example she gave of sharing one’s first language with others was through a counting activity she implemented in the classroom. When students lined up to leave the classroom, in order to ensure all thirty-two of her students were there, she had a student count everyone using their first language. She modelled this activity at first by doing it in English and in French (the two languages she was familiar with) and then had other students try. Throughout the year, students would participate in this activity and as a result, “other students who did not speak the language picked it up and got involved.” In the case of students who did not know how to count to thirty-two in their first language, Alison would contact the parents in order to ask them to help their children learn how to. This not only allowed students to validate their first language in class and share it with other students but also led to parents actively teaching their first language to their children.

This honoring of a child’s first language was reflected in my interview with Gloria. As she stated, “I think it is very important to incorporate…[a student’s] language into the classroom any way that you can.” One way she promoted this was through the way she greeted her students in their first language. She felt that in doing so she helped to validate a student’s language which made them “feel safe.” In addition to this, Gloria also encouraged students to continue speaking their first language in the classroom during appropriate times (seeking help from other students, group work, free time, recess) and at home in order to build proficiency in that language.

However, Gloria did mentioned that some parents of English language learners were worried that by supporting the use of a child’s first language in the classroom and at home, it
would impede their acquisition of English. While Gloria acknowledged their concerns, she did encourage families that it was okay because as she argued, these children are living “in a predominantly English speaking setting [where] they are going to pick up the English language as well.”

Lydia believed it was important to support the use of a student’s first language in the classroom. However, unlike Alison and Gloria, Lydia talked about a student’s first language as a tool to better engage with lessons and curriculum. She supported students’ use of their first language as a means to gain understanding and knowledge of a subject or a topic and then transferring it into English. It was her pedagogical belief that combining a student’s first language in the learning environment helped students to succeed in English, which is supported by researchers such as Jim Cummins (Cummins, 2000; 2004; 2007).

However, as an ESL teacher, Lydia felt that using one’s first language in class should only be done to a certain degree. In her class, one of the main goals was the proficient acquisition of English. Lydia felt that if students over relied on their first language they would stay within a comfort zone that would make English language acquisition more difficult. As she stated, without limiting the degree in which students could use their first language in the classroom, students “would rely on that [language] pretty much as often as desired because it’s a comfort zone. We want to challenge them we want them out of their comfort zone. We don’t want them to ignore their culture or their language but we want them to use it in a context that will be beneficial for them.”

By allowing students to use their native language to express ideas and develop understanding, my participants followed research guided practices that show when students are able to think and work in their native tongue, deeper understanding about a subject can take
place which can enrich cognitive development (Cummins, 2000; Schleifer & Ngo, 2005; Stairs et al., 2012). However, as Lydia pointed, the goal is to have students becoming more proficient with the English language so this process should be a scaffolded one in which students gradually work towards the goal of relying less on their native language and more on English to work and communicate in the class (Gray & Fleischman, 2004).

4.4 Teachers rely on a variety of text and community based resources to support their teaching practice but feel that there should be more made available

In order to effectively implement CRRP all three of my participants relied on a variety of sources to support their teaching practice. Specifically they referred to curricular and research related sources, professional development sources and guidance from other teacher practitioners who were engaged in CRRP.

When I asked Lydia what sources she used to support her enactment of CRRP said she first of spoke to her reliance on Ontario Ministry of Education and Peel District School Board documents that support teachers who are working with culturally diverse student populations and English language learners. Gloria and Alison also mentioned using Ontario Ministry of Education documents as well as Toronto District School Board documents to assist them. Unfortunately, during my interviews my participants did not mention which specific documents they worked with.

In addition to the use of Ministry and Board document, Gloria also mentioned two other published resource that she used in combination with ministry and school board documents. The first one is a book by Stacey York (1991) called Roots & Wings: Affirming Culture in Early
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*Childhood Programs.* This book is described by the publisher as offering over one hundred activities to support an anti-bias and multicultural education programming. The second resource is a book edited by Ann Pelo (2008) titled *Rethinking Early Childhood Education.* The publisher of this book describes it as an anthology of stories about social justice teaching with young students. Part of its focus draws connections to issues of social justice and culturally responsive teaching.

In addition to working with curricular and research related documents, Gloria and Alison pointed to the value of attending professional development (PD) opportunities such as workshops and lunch-and-learns as a means of better informing oneself on new developments and insight into pedagogical practice. In fact, it was through such a workshop that Alison first learned about CRRP.

It was also at workshops that Alison began meeting other teachers who were implementing CRRP into their daily practice and she began to network with some of them in order to improve her own understanding of how she could enact CRRP within her own teaching practice. Gloria also spoke to the benefits of networking with other teachers who enacted CRRP in their daily practice because it could add to one’s own understanding of CRRP. Attending demonstration classes were also seen by Gloria as a means of “being able to…[see] how CRRP can actually evolve in a classroom.”

While my participants talked about a variety of resources, there was concern over the overall lack of both teaching resources and PD resources available within some schools. For instance, Gloria noted that her library lacked culturally relevant teaching resources. As she stated, “I have to say that many of my diverse resources I have bought on my own.” When discussing PD resources Alison mentioned that there was an overall lack of teacher training
resources available within her school board and that she would like to see more. As a way of compensating for this Alison had a teacher mentor that she worked with and she also attended what few workshops were offered.

While a lack of resources were seen as obstacles for these two teachers they were able to overcome those obstacle by finding their own resources or seeking others to assist them. It should be noted however that in contrast to Gloria and Alison’s experiences with challenges, Lydia felt that her school contained an abundance of resources that she could use to help her teaching practice and also felt her school board was well equipped to help teachers work with a culturally diverse student population.

I find it important to note that Gloria and Alison felt that there was a lack of resources available to them. Furthermore, both work within the same schoolboard, while Lydia worked in another board. This may point to a lack of resources at a board level or it could be reflective of their schools. Either way, both participants acknowledged that they would like to see more resources made available, however, I did not collect data pertaining to what exact resources they wished to see.

4.5 Conclusion

When looking at how my participants enacted CRRP in their teaching practice it becomes clear that there is no standard approach to CRRP. While I was able to highlight similarities between the approaches my three participants used, I also found divergences. However, those divergences did not seem to take away from the overall effect CRRP was
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perceived to have in helping not only newly arrived students, but all students, adjust to their learning environment.

Furthermore, as demonstrated by my participants, CRRP is something that needs to take place consistently and throughout the year in order for it to have a meaningful impact. This means that within a school teaching and learning are driven by a teacher’s understanding of students’ cultural identities by finding ways to support and teach to those identities, both through the curriculum and through the classroom environment. As a result of implementing CRRP practices, my participants noted that positive results were observed both in student engagement and academic achievement.

The data shows that all participants described how CRRP could promote student self-worth and engagement. As Lydia explained, she felt that CRRP helped students feel “empowered” because their learning was connected to their culture. Gloria noted that she felt when students saw their culture reflected in a lesson the overall effect was that students felt “validated” and knew “that they had a voice.” Furthermore, she spoke to the belief that validating student identity and giving them a voice helped to increase the level of student engagement.

Finally, Alison talked about how she felt CRRP allowed students from various backgrounds to better understand where everyone was coming from and this helped to build understanding and trust amongst the students, leading to a positive learning environment.

Importantly, the beliefs and sentiments of my participants regarding CRRP reflect the positive outcomes that research associates with CRRP. As research shows, a lack of cultural recognition in the classroom can lead to students feeling disconnected from their learning
environment, causing them to disengage in classroom learning, thus lowering their academic potential (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Cummins, 2004; Lewis et al., 2007; Irvine, 2010; Parhar & Sesoy, 2011). However, when CRRP is effectively implemented it can engage and motivate students, which in turn promotes academic growth (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2010; Irvine, 2010).

With this in mind, I believe that my research findings support the positive role CRRP can have in helping newly arrived students transition into Ontario schools. Therefore, by examining the ways in which teachers view and implement CRRP in their practice in Ontario, this research adds to the growing field of research that looks to support students from cultural and linguistic minority groups in order to insure that they can succeed academically not only in the Ontario schooling environment but in any schooling environment.

In my next chapter, I speak more specifically to the implications of my findings. I also propose recommendations for teachers, schools and school boards, and identify areas for future research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I briefly review my key findings and speak to their implications. When speaking to the implications I look at how my findings relate broadly to the educational community and more specifically to my teaching practice. I follow this up with recommendations for the Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards, schools and teachers based on what I have learned. Finally, I make suggestions for areas for further research in relation to my research topic and conclude the chapter by reviewing why this research is important.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

Through an analysis of my interview data in connection with relevant literature, I found that educators see CRRP as a process of regularly presenting curriculum in a meaningful and engaging way to all students by working to make connections to the cultural background of those students as well as drawing on their daily lived experiences.

In order to do so, my data shows that one of the first steps to implementing CRRP for newly arrived students is to understand that students can come with cultural differences that may make integration into an Ontario classroom difficult. Therefore, when working with newly arrived students, educators must take the time to understand and acknowledge those difficulties while addressing them through practices connected to the main tenants of CRRP.
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Additionally, my data shows that educators who understand that cultural differences between their students and the learning environment can lead to unequal academic settings shape their classroom environment and their instructional practice around the main tenets of CRRP as a means of making curriculum more culturally relevant to all learners. The data also shows that as a result of implementing CRRP strategies teachers have noted positive results in student self-worth and engagement.

Final, my findings speak to how educators rely on a variety of text and community based resources to support their teaching practice. However, the same data also shows that there needs to be more made available. Furthermore, there needs to be a broad range of resources that not only speak to the pedagogical theory of CRRP but also resources that outline specific actions teachers can take to make subject matter more culturally responsive and relevant.

These findings are significant because they show that CRRP is an effective teaching strategy that helps newly arrived students successful integrate into their new classroom settings by assisting them academically and socially. This is important given the large numbers of newly arrived students who enter the education system in Ontario. Without a clear understanding of how to help these students to succeed in their new learning environments, educators risk not meeting the educational needs of those students and potentially failing them academically. Therefore, it is imperative that educators not only understand the issues newly arrived students face but that they also understand how to address those issues.
5.2 Implications

In this section, I speak to the broader implications of my research in relation to the Ontario Ministry of Education, Ontario school boards, educational leaders and teachers. Next, I speak to the specific implications for myself as a future teacher.

5.2.1 Broader Implications

Research shows that in Ontario, classrooms are made up of students from multiple cultural backgrounds. However, the curriculum does not always reflect those backgrounds. Therefore, schools and school boards need to find ways of representing diverse learners within the education system in order to fully engage students who feel underrepresented in their learning environment. As research shows, when students are disengaged in their learning it affects them academically and can lead to poor academic performance. This is especially true with newly arrived students who find that there is little cultural connection between their own identity and their new learning environment.

In Ontario, the Ontario Ministry of Education looks to ensure that all students receive a high level of education that is designed to prepare them to be upstanding citizens and productive members of society. However, my findings show that the education system in Ontario is designed to meet the educational needs of a mostly Eurocentric society. As a result, the Ontario education system is unable to meet the academic needs of all its learners. This is because education happens within a cultural context and when students do not fall within that cultural context they become disassociated with their learning environment, leading to negative academic outcomes. As my research shows, learning happens best when students can see themselves and
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their cultural identity reflected in their learning. However, the current education system is not set up to do this.

Therefore, in order for the Ministry of Education to meet its goal of providing high quality education for all it must find ways to actively address the role that cultural differences between learning environment and students can have on academic outcomes. One of the biggest factors in creating a cultural disconnect between schooling and students is the curriculum. At the moment, the Ontario curriculum is not designed in a way that actively promotes the cultural identity of all students. Until this happens, many students will find the education process difficult. That is why more direct policies need to be implemented to insure that curricular expectations are designed in such a way as to take into account the multiple cultural identities that exist within Ontario schools.

Similarly, boards of education across Ontario must also implement policies to ensure that all schools are making an effort to actively address the learning issues that cultural differences can have on student success. These policies need to address the importance that culture has on learning and to insure that students are not being limited in their education because of cultural differences.

When looking at the role teachers play, it is important to note that teachers teach the way that they have been taught to teach. What this means is that teachers do not know all about teaching. Instead, they rely on the training they received and the support they get from the Ministry of Education, school boards and educational leaders. Therefore, if teachers are not being taught about the importance of CRRP then there is little chance that they will begin to implement CRRP into their practice. Therefore, it is important to ensure that educators are being made aware of the role culture plays in education. Only when teachers are made aware of these
issues and are provided the proper tools and resources can they begin to change their practices in order to better meet the needs of all their students.

5.2.2 Specific Implications

After conducting my research on how to help newly arrived students transition into Ontario schools using CRRP, I can say that I will be taking my findings into account as I move forwards as an educator. Specifically, I must first begin to reflect on my own cultural identity as a means of understanding how it affects my teaching. Next, in order to ensure that I am meeting the educational needs of all my students, I must make conscientious efforts to learn about and understand the cultural background of my students. I will be doing so by talking and listening to my students, contacting parents and beginning an open dialogue with them, connecting with cultural support workers and community leaders, as well as seeking out professional development opportunities connected to CRRP in order to better inform my teaching practice.

In addition, not only will I ensure that my teaching practice aligns with the tenets of CRRP, I will also be making effort to ensure that the people I work with and the education environment that I find myself in, are aware of the importance of CRRP. As my research has shown, CRRP is not just a classroom issue; it is a whole school issue.

5.3 Recommendations

As my findings show, in order for the effective implementation of CRRP to take place, teachers need to be supported by the Ministry of Education, school boards, and by educational leaders such as principals. While the Ministry of Education has created many documents that speak to the need to support students culturally, there is more still that can be done. Specifically,
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each curriculum document should explicitly state the need to connect overall and specific learning expectation to students’ identities. Furthermore, the curriculum as a whole needs to be adjusted so that it can better represent the cultural differences that are present in schools. For example, in the Social Studies curriculum document, one of the strands grade two students are expected to learn about is Heritage and Identity: Changing Families and Community Traditions. While this strand is open to the exploration of different cultural traditions there is no explanation as to how learning about different cultures is beneficial. Additionally, there is nothing in the document which explicitly states that teachers should make an effort to represent all the cultural traditions of their students within that strand. The problem is that the current curricular format does not hold teachers accountable to teaching about all the cultures within their classroom, school or community.

A further example can be seen in the Ministry of Ontario’s Language curriculum. While there is a brief mention regarding the educational importance of having students seeing themselves in the texts that they come in contact with, there is no specific mention of insuring that one’s language program is culturally relevant to all learners within the class.

However, as my data shows, in order to engage all of our students we need to be making explicit connections between the cultural backgrounds of all our students and the learning that is happening within schools. Because the curriculum documents are what guides learning in the classroom, there needs to be a more explicit effort by the Ministry to ensure that its curriculum documents provide teachers with an education framework which is more culturally responsive and relevant.

While changing the curricular guidelines is a big first step, real change will not take place unless all school boards put into place mandates insuring that teachers are making a consciences
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effort to represent all cultures in the learning environment. Yet expecting teachers to do this on their own is asking too much. School boards need to insure that all teachers are aware of the importance of CRRP. This can be done by ensuring that all new teachers entering school boards have the proper educational background to implement the tenets of CRRP. Additionally, school boards need to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to learn about CRRP and how to incorporate it into their teaching practice.

Once teachers are educated on the role of CRRP and its implication, it is then up to school principals to ensure that teachers are making active efforts to incorporate CRRP as part of their teaching and to support teachers when needed. This support can take the form of providing professional development opportunities for all staff, including office staff; working to ensure the ongoing involvement of parents and other community members in the education of students and to develop within the school a culture of openness, caring and community spirit.

Finally, teachers need to be aware that the cultural environment that they create in their classroom can have an effect on their students’ learning. As multiple studies have shown, students can be perceived by teachers as being incapable of learning or succeeding in education. However, many times it is the cultural context in which learning happens that is the problem, not the cognitive abilities of students. Therefore, as part of teacher training and everyday practice, teachers need to start reflecting on their own cultural identity and how that plays out in their teaching practice. Only then can teachers begin to change the cultural construct of their learning environment as a means of ensuring that all learners feel represented and reflected in their school.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

After conducting my research on how to support newly arrived students through the use of CRRP I believe that the next step for further research in this area should look specifically at strategies teachers can use to connect their teaching and the learning environment to a multitude of cultural identities at once. While my research looked at this in a broad sense, I believe it would be beneficial to understand better how to enact CRRP in relation to different cultural groups. At the moment there is research that speaks to using CRRP to support certain underrepresented minority groups such as aboriginal groups, people of African heritage and Asian people, however, these identifying labels cover large groups of people. Yet within these groups there are large differences. For example, given my own educational background I know that there are many cultural difference between those that are classified as East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean). Research that speaks to helping East Asian students does not take into account the cultural difference that each group has to each other. Developing CRRP strategies designed to help Chinese students might not work with Japanese students, and vise versa. Therefore, I believe the next step should be to conduct research that focuses in on specific cultural groups in order to find ways that can support them directly. While there may be overlap in recommendations and practices, this research will also bring to light specific practices that are beneficial to specific groups.

Additionally, I believe the education community in Ontario would benefit from research looking at how school boards and schools account for cultural identity in their hiring practices. As my data shows, the majority of teachers in Ontario are white with Eurocentric cultural values while nearly half of all students come from differing cultural backgrounds. The benefit of this type of research would be to see how hiring practices could be changed in order to ensure that
the cultural diversity of the teaching population mirrors the cultural diversity of the student population.

Finally, further research should look into teachers’ experiences with particular professional development (PD) opportunities focused on CRRP. This research would highlight how PD can shape teachers’ understandings of CRRP and provided examples of how this type of PD might change teaching practices. Additionally, this research could also speak to the strengths and weaknesses that such PD has and provide recommendations to better support teachers’ PD on this topic.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In conclusion, we live in a pluralistic society that attempts to view everyone equally. However, the reality is that everyone is not equally represented. This is also the case within education. When newly arrived students enter the educational system in Ontario, they face huge transitions. Many of those transitions are culturally related. As multiple studies have shown, when a student does not feel represented in their learning environment they tend to become less engaged in their learning and therefore less successful. In order to ease newly arrived students’ transition and promote positive meaningful engagement, some teachers are looking to CRRP to addressing those issues. As shown in my research, meaningful implementation of CRRP can help not only new students but all students to more meaningfully engage with the curriculum and therefore increase their learning opportunities. For this reason, it is important that we find ways of helping all students to see themselves reflected in their classrooms, schools, community and curriculum. Only then can we begin to meet the educational needs of all.
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:

Dear ________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the ways in which teachers in Ontario are using culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy to support newly arrived students academically and socially as they integrate into their new classrooms. I am conducting this research for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for my program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a paper on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final research paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only person who will have access to my assignment work will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.
Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Researcher name: Trevor Crowe

Trevor Crowe  
Teacher Candidate, Master of Teaching Program  
OISE/University of Toronto  
Trevor.crowe@mail.utoronto.ca 647-237-0612

Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald-Vemic

angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Trevor Crowe and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________

Name (printed): _______________________

Date: ___________________________
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study aims to learn how a select group of teachers in Ontario enact culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy for newly arrived students. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask you questions concerning your professional background, your belief and values in relation to education, your teaching practices, as well as questions related to different kinds of support or challenges that are related my study. I want to remind you of your right to choose not answer any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Interviewee Background information

Can you tell me a bit about your teaching background?

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What grades and subjects have you taught?
3. Have you taught in different schools? Which schools?
4. Can you describe the school community/communities that you are currently working in?
   o (Diversity, urban/rural, socioeconomic status?)
5. Approximately what percentage of students are newly arrived immigrants? How many newly arrived students have you worked with?
6. Do you fulfill any other role in this school besides classroom teacher (e.g. advisor, coach, councilor, leader, cultural support worker etc.)?
7. As you know I am interested in learning how teachers enact culturally responsive pedagogy for newly arrived students. Can you tell me a bit about how you came to be interested in culturally responsive pedagogy?
8. How long have you been using culturally relevant pedagogy (CRRP) as part of your daily teaching practice?
9. What experiences and factors have contributed to your interest in this instructional approach? (personal, professional, educational)
10. How did you learn about culturally responsive pedagogy? (probe re: own experience of schooling, teacher training, professional development, books/resources)
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Section B: Beliefs and Values (Why)

1. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?
2. What role does CRRP play in your teaching philosophy/philosophy of education?
3. In your view, why is CRRP an important pedagogical approach? What is the value / what are the benefits? Who benefits from CRRP? What are the limitations?
4. In your experience, what do you believe are some of the greatest challenges that newly immigrated students confront when they begin school in Canada?
5. How do you think CRRP can respond to those challenges?
6. More specifically, in your experience, what are some of the greatest challenges and/or needs that confront newly immigrated students?

Section C: Teacher Practices (What/How?)

1. Generally speaking, what are some of the ways that you implement CRRP in your teaching?
   a. Can you give examples of selection of resource materials, lesson plan designs, student/teacher interactions, community/parent consultation, and assessment
2. More specifically, what does CRRP look like in the context of supporting the academic and social well-being of your students?
   a. Can you give me an example of a lesson that you have conducted wherein you applied CRRP to meet the academic and/or social needs of your newly arrived students?
   b. What were your learning goals?
   c. What opportunities for learning did you create / modify for your students?
   d. How did your students respond? What outcomes did you observe?
   e. How did your native Canadian students respond?

Section D: Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

1. What resources and factors support your commitment to enacting CRRP broadly speaking? And CRRP for newly arrived students?
2. What are the obstacles or challenges you face when using CRRP?
   a. What are the specific obstacles or challenges related to your newly arrived students?
   b. How do you respond to these challenges?
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3. What kind of feedback have you gotten about your teaching practices and from whom have you received feedback?

4. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to CRRP?

5. What recommendations do you have for the school system more broadly in terms of how it can further strengthen instructional commitment to CRRP to meet the needs of our diverse students?

Thank you for your time and considered responses.