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Culturally Responsive Social Emotional Learning for International Students: Professional Development for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study demonstrates how a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach builds the capacity of faculty and staff to create a social and emotional learning (SEL) environment that is conducive to success for international students. We propose a CRT–SEL model to address the increasing needs of mid-sized universities with emerging international students. The findings from 14 faculty and staff participants point to professional development strategies that can help reduce or remove barriers for working with international students. This study highlights the need to build upon the CRT and SEL tenets and align them with the existing support networks within the mid-size higher education institutions for classroom learning and off-campus activities to bolster international students’ overall success. The results also indicate the faculty and staff’s varying priorities and diverging trajectories.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching (CRT), CRT–SEL model, international students, mid-sized institutions of higher education (IHEs), social and emotional learning (SEL)

The total number of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education (IHEs) for the 2018–2019 academic year was 1,095,299, which comprised 5.5% of the total enrollment in U.S. IHEs (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). According to the Open Doors report, among the international students from the top 10 origins, nearly 70% speak a first language other than English (IIE, 2019). As international students with a wide variety of English language proficiencies are heavily recruited in U.S. IHEs (Redden, 2014), Harrison and Shi (2016) suggested that “it is no longer enough to understand the cultural nuances of interaction and difference, but faculty and students alike must become cognizant of the academic challenges” (p. 418) presented by having students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in mainstream higher educational settings, and acquire the knowledge to overcome these challenges.

Although the number of international students in the U.S. academic community is fast-growing, 70% of educators report that they received no professional training for teaching students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (PR Newswire, 2017). To ensure the success and retention of international students, IHEs have been working hard to improve support systems for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. These efforts include building advising teams, mentoring programs, learning communities, and resources and professional development for faculty members to become more effective in globalized classrooms (Center for Teaching and Learning [CTL], 2014). However, research has shown international students are still struggling not only academically but also socially and emotionally (Asgedom & Even, 2017). IHE has asked: How can institutions of higher education retain and ensure the success of international students on U.S. campuses? What are some best practices that could facilitate academic learning among international students? What professional development do IHE faculty and staff need that would enhance their efficiencies and capacities in working with international students?

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an instructional approach that recognizes the importance of students’ cultural situations in all aspects of social and emotional learning (Jones et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994), and aims to help culturally and linguistically diverse students to succeed in schools (Gay, 2000). By applying the CRT approach, international students are able to learn in an environment that fosters social and emotional support and develop social and emotional competencies, which facilitate their learning of life skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013; Jones et al., 2013). Growing evidence points to the vital importance for teachers at all levels to develop culturally responsive social emotional learning (SEL) skills (Donahue-Keegan, et al., 2019; Hammond, 2016). According to Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019), fostering the growth of culturally responsive SEL skills enhances teachers’ capacities to maintain their own health, well-being, and emotional resilience.

Benefits of culturally responsive SEL for teachers and international students include understanding the different perspectives of the issues, appreciating each other's strengths, and building empathy. Researchers argue that IHE faculty and staff equipped with the knowledge of the tenets and techniques of CRT, and the core competencies for SEL, will be able to better facilitate international students' academic achievement and overall development in IHE (Hammond, 2014; Massachusetts Consortium for Social-emotional Learning in Teacher Education [MCSLTE], 2013).

To address the challenges facing IHE, faculty and staff participated in professional development on culturally responsive SEL in two mid-sized IHEs, one in the Midwest and the other in the Gulf Coast area in the United States. We collected data using open-ended surveys and individual interviews with participants as well as reflections from researchers and professional development organizers. This research explored a CRT–SEL model we developed to provide the faculty and staff professional development for supporting international students. International students in the present study refer to students who hold an F-1 or a J-1 visa (IIE, 2019). The research participants worked with first-year international students. This was the students' first time studying overseas, and they were all English as additional language learners. The study spanned two years from the beginning of the professional development for faculty and staff to the completion of the data collection. With limited resources and funding, many mid-sized universities and colleges struggle with opportunities for professional training to support international students. The 14 participants of this study were faculty and staff members from different colleges representing media and arts, STEM, teacher education, etc. This study contributes to the existing literature by proposing a CRT–SEL model to address the increasing needs of international students in mid-sized IHEs. This study sought to address the following questions:

1. How can higher education faculty and staff create a culturally responsive social and emotional learning environment for international students?
2. What are some best practices that facilitate academic learning among international students through a culturally responsive social and emotional learning environment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

CRT and SEL Education

Ladson-Billings (1992) proposed that culturally responsive educators should foster social, emotional, intellectual, and political learning through the use of “cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382). Hollins (1996) supported Ladson-Billings' framework claiming that CRT pedagogies are specifically designed for students of color or students from diverse ethnic groups because CRT implements “culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate

social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content” (p. 13). Within the context of CRT, SEL plays an important role in influencing international students’ behaviors (Sciuchetti, 2017).

For international students to learn in a socially and emotionally supportive and positive environment, educators should acquire more knowledge of how to enhance the core features of SEL and adhere to culturally responsive social skills instruction by incorporating international students’ home culture into the curriculum (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2011). This includes integrating social skill instruction that focuses on awareness of cultural differences and providing in-class regulations and educational expectations that align with culturally appropriate behaviors (Sciuchetti, 2017).

In addition to enhancing academic attainment, these pedagogies are beneficial to international students for developing their own identities, connecting with their heritage, and bonding with their ethnic groups, which help them develop a sense of belonging, share responsibilities within the community, and enhance SEL competencies (Gay, 2000; Glass et al., 2015). CRT incorporated into SEL environments allows a nurturing learning context for international students’ “academic, psychological, social, emotional, and cultural well-being” (Sobel & Taylor, 2011, p. 25).

CRT and SEL in Higher Education

While studies have been focused on K–12 school professional development for public school teachers who work with international students (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), fewer current studies on how professional development for educators in IHEs retain and ensure the success of their international students have been found (Conley, 2015; Paolini, 2019). Previous research focusing on SEL in higher education shows SEL is associated with positive outcomes for academic performance and adjustment to university life (Parker et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2012); higher retention rate (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013); and benefits beyond graduating from colleges, for instance, achieving career goals, building positive interpersonal relationships, and maintaining better mental and physical health (Conley, 2015; Jordan & Ashkanasy, 2006). Although studies have provided evidence about the benefits of CRT and its contributions to positive SEL environments (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2011) that are conducive to international students’ academic achievement and career success as well as their overall social and emotional well-beings (Sobel & Taylor, 2011), research has also indicated the lack of training and skill sets among IHE faculty and staff to effectively instruct and work with international students (PR Newswire, 2017; Yeh et al., 2020).

CRT and SEL for International Students

There is an increasing amount of research on mental health promotion and prevention of mental health problems in higher education due to the growing population of college students encountering social and emotional struggles in

daily life (Conley et al., 2013, 2015). International students, unlike their domestic student counterparts, have limited access to the U.S. cultural norms as well as social and emotional knowledge prior to arriving in the host country. Many international students find it challenging to actively participate in academic forums and adjust to the new college life overseas (Pentón Herrera, 2020). As a result, students develop negative emotions that hinder their learning, such as anxiety, loneliness, and lack of motivation and confidence. Researchers propose that the more integration of SEL and CRT into the curriculum, the more students are exposed to inclusive learning environments that lead to more equal participation in academic discussions and positive SEL (Hastings & Jacob, 2016; Herrera & Javier, 2020).

The approach of CRT has been widely used in schools with the emphasis on building relationships with diverse students and their families to develop a rich understanding of lived experiences and diverse cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2002a). CRT encourages educators to utilize students' "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles," which allows their learning to become relevant and effective (Gay, 2002a, p. 29).

To integrate SEL into CRT instruction in IHEs, educators need to learn ways to establish trust with their international students; apply diverse assessment tools and approaches that are appropriate for international students' language proficiency levels; evaluate instructional content that meets international students' needs; provide different forms of feedback; and develop positive relationships among school, home, and local communities (Gay, 2002a; Sciuchetti, 2017).

Culturally responsive and SEL educators are those who acquire the knowledge to create a learning environment that offers international students the opportunity to develop academic skills and knowledge based on their own cultural backgrounds, their unique cultural practices, values, and norms with evidenced-based instructional strategies (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Sciuchetti, 2017). According to the TESOL International Association [TESOL IA] (2010), it is crucial for educators to understand and be comfortable with international students' cultural communities and be knowledgeable regarding ways to draw on the linguistic, cultural, and sociocultural resources they bring to the curricula to utilize resources to support their academic development. Within the culturally responsive learning environment, international students become active agents in their learning due to the authentic context within which they are able to relate their previous cultural experiences and knowledge to their academic writing and content-based learning in school (TESOL IA, 2010).

This study intends to support IHE educators in meeting the needs of international students by providing CRT professional development to faculty and staff and by building their awareness and skillsets in creating positive SEL environments in IHE settings. The research that accompanies the professional development will add to the literature and inform the IHE communities and

decision-makers about the important roles of CRT and SEL in working with international students. The present study also fills in the gap in the literature by investigating to what extent educators and administrators create a culturally responsive social and emotional learning environment for international students particularly in IHE.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The frameworks of CRT (Gay, 2002a; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and SEL (CASEL, 2020; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019) support and guide this study in each step, from naming the issue, setting the purposes, asking the research questions, and designing the study to understanding the results. We drew from previous studies that utilized a CRT–SEL model to develop the professional development for higher education setting. Social-emotional learning is described as follows:

An integral part of education and human development, and the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, 2020)

The five core competencies of SEL (Figure 1; CASEL, 2020) include the following:

1. Self-awareness: The ability to understand your emotions and thoughts and how they influence your behavior.
2. Self-management: The ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
3. Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
4. Social awareness: The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
5. Responsible decision-making: The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (CASEL, 2020)

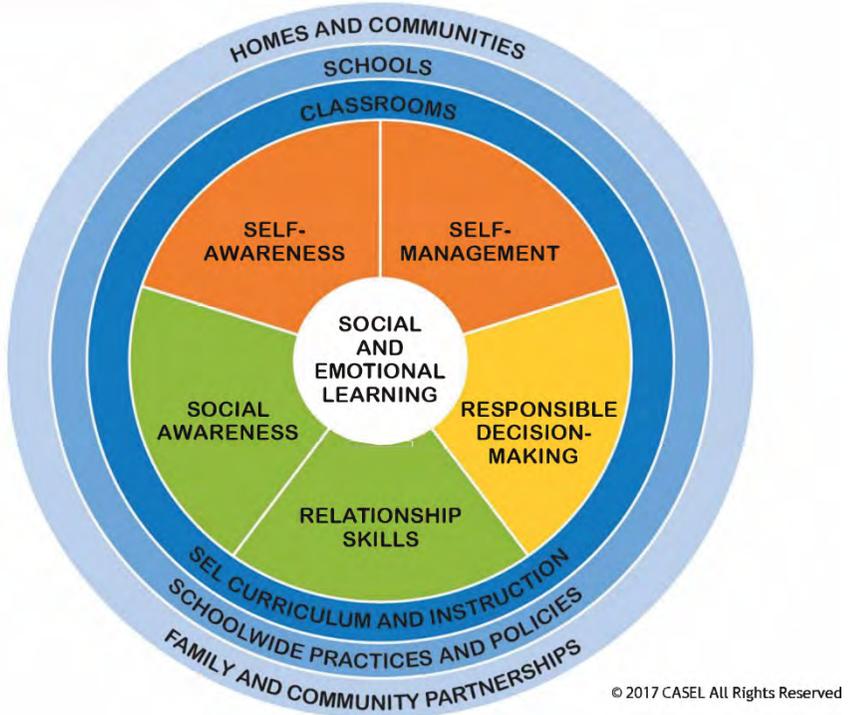


Figure 1: The Five Core Competencies Domains of SEL. From “CASEL’s widely used framework identifies five core competencies,” by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020 (Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>). Copyright 2020 by the CASEL.

Research over the years demonstrates that SEL competencies can be taught, modeled, and practiced and lead to positive student experience, better management of stress and emotions, positive learning outcomes, and long-term success in careers (CASEL, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

We believe that the major CRT tenets and CRT educators foster and promote (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Sciuchetti, 2017) SEL as reflected in the framework (Figure 1; CASEL, 2020). CRT professional development for IHE personnel advances their capacities in theory and practice of culturally responsive SEL and enhances their knowledge of being mindful of their own and their students’ physical and emotional well-being in the classroom, with the academic gain and success of international students as the ultimate goal.

Ladson-Billings (2014) elaborated on the three foundational tenets of culturally relevant educators: Academic success refers to “the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences” (p. 75); cultural competence refers to “the ability to help students

appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture” (p. 75); and sociopolitical consciousness refers to “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (p. 75). Gay (2002b) claimed that CRT uses “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them effectively” (p. 106). Culturally responsive educators encourage students to see beyond classrooms into the communities and societies they live in, to unpack unequal distributions of power and privileges, and to take social actions to promote social justice (Gay, 2002b; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). CRT also teaches students of color cultural competences about themselves and each other (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). CRT values cultural diversity in classrooms as an asset rather than as a deficiency. Paris and Alim (2014) held that CRT should embrace linguistic and cultural flexibility and cultural pluralism toward more inclusive and more democratic schools.

Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) provided a guiding framework for integrating SEL/CRT principles and practices into teacher education programs to encourage “equity-minded teachers who can capably support all students to engage successfully in academic rigor as well as develop strong social-emotional and civic skills” (p. 150).

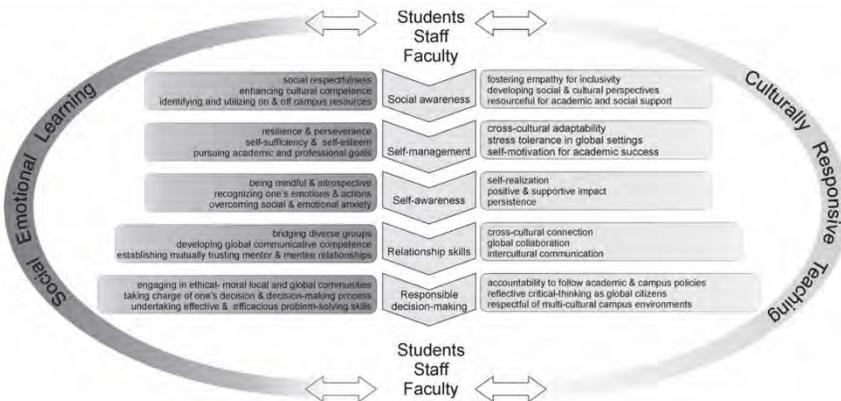


Figure 2: Model of Culturally Responsive Social Emotional Learning Skills for International Students.

Figure 2 represents a guiding model for the culturally responsive SEL professional development that we designed and implemented. It illustrates how SEL skills, core competencies, and the main CRT tenets align with and support each other. This model is built upon and inspired by previous literature on CRT (Gay, 2002b; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Robinson-Ervin et al., 2011); SEL (Asgedom & Even, 2017; Hammond, 2014; Keene, 2018); and the integration of CRT and SEL in teacher education programs (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019;

Markowitz, 2019) with IHE international students and the needs of IHE faculty and staff in mind. By purposely selecting CRT principles and techniques that are relevant to IHE international students (Figure 2), we hoped to develop IHE personnel's culturally responsive SEL skills, which will, in turn, benefit international students' learning in the classrooms and on the campuses.

This study drew on the concepts of CRT and SEL and developed a holistic approach to the professional development model of culturally responsive SEL skills for international students. This model is based upon two years of research and professional development with the faculty and staff who interacted with international students in both institutions. We proposed this model and applied it at the same time for the current research.

Cultural responsiveness nurtures resilience and builds stamina for students to navigate the diverse society they are in (Hammond, 2016). Based on CRT theoretical framework (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1998), we developed workshops featuring understanding cultural and linguistic diversity as assets, applying culturally mediated instruction, and reshaping curricula with educators as facilitators, using multiple forms of assessment methods, applying approaches for students with different learning styles, and integrating skills that help develop international students' social and emotional competence.

METHOD

This article is an extension of a previous longitudinal study using a similar cultural awareness model but with a revised theoretical framework and an extension to a wider ethnic population (Yeh et al., 2020). We designed the instrument and semistructured research questionnaire following the emergent design approach of Patton (2014). We chose emergent design to continue with an ongoing longitudinal study. This design allowed flexibility to continue collecting data and explore the CRT–SEL model emerging from the previous study. Further, this design approach created space to interview faculty and staff who were not part of the previous research. The deductive approach guided the survey instrument design with closed and open-ended questions to identify participants and collect data. Further, we conducted a semistructured interview by “bringing the results to life through in-depth elaboration” (Patton, 2014, p. 230). The survey also assisted as an instrument to identify information-rich participants for the longitudinal study. The longitudinal study had inherent elements of a qualitative design as suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2016) with “significant latitude to adjust course as needed” (p. 92).

Context and Participants

We recruited participants from the workshop attendees because they had been working with international students and volunteered to attend the workshop. Participants in the Midwest college undertook three face-to-face CRT professional development workshop series during the first semester (15 weeks) while their international students attended their classes. Throughout the semester,

we asked participants to incorporate the knowledge and skills learned from the training into their classrooms. In these three series, the first workshop emphasized introduction to CRT approach and practices; the second workshop focused on CRT and intercultural communication in an SEL environment; and the third workshop centered on challenges and strategies that addressed international students' anxiety in learning. Ten (six faculty and four staff) out of 25 attendees agreed to participate in this research project. Three staff participants served a dual role as faculty too. These participants provided unique insight into the collaborative role of the faculty and staff with the international student's academic success and social and emotional well-being.

The Gulf Coast university adapted the CRT professional development model from the Midwest college and offered a hybrid professional development that included one face-to-face workshop combining the three domains into one workshop. The workshop was offered as part of the university's cultural awareness certification program. This one-time workshop included interactive sessions to provide insights into the international student population on campus, cultural awareness, and CRT practices. The workshop had more than 20 participants including students (10), faculty (four), and staff members (seven). All the students who participated in the cultural certification program chose not to participate in the follow-up study. Two faculty members chose not to participate in the study due to conflicts of interest. Only two staff members chose to participate in the study. These participants signed the consent forms and were invited to voluntarily participate in the Canvas eLearning community. Both universities have small and emerging international programs. Even though participants were faculty and staff, they had different areas of specialization and work with limited international student populations.

Data Collection

A qualitative method of inquiry utilized a postworkshop open-ended survey and 30-min follow-up individual interviews with participants after they attended the training, as well as reflections from four researchers who led the workshops. The systematic focus on the details, experiences, and perceptions of participants (both faculty and staff) in two institutions provided a holistic view with rich context and in-depth understanding of how they created a positive SEL environment for international students.

The data collected in this study investigates the extent to which educators establish relationships with their international students and build SEL environments through the CRT approach. The data also explore what best practices and strategies could facilitate international students' adjustment to U.S. academic environments. The first set of data was the faculty and staff postworkshop questionnaires that consisted of open-ended questions obtaining information on their knowledge of CRT, what they learned during the workshops, what challenges they encountered while interacting with international students, and what strategies they applied to solve any problems.

Data Analysis

We analyzed all qualitative data (i.e., an open-ended questionnaire and interviews) based on Miles et al.'s (2020) a priori and in-vivo coding. The a priori coding is a deductive analysis generating the "first cycle" of coding from research questions and literature review (Miles et al., 2020, p. 64). Terms such as "knowledge," "skills," "behaviors," "social," "culture," and "emotion" were used to highlight phrases from the transcripts. In vivo coding refers to inductive coding that was used during and after the process of data collection. Four researchers coded separately and had virtual meetings to discuss the coding process to make sure the analyses obtained equal depth to capture the critical local components and avoid "force-fit the data into preexisting codes" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 74). Moreover, we applied Patton's (2014) method for in-depth analysis "recognizing process, outcomes, and linkages" of data (p. 564). This approach was added after a discussion between the two research teams. We coded and analyzed these data to offer "making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions" (Patton, 2014, p. 570).

The initial coding was based on research questions and the research teams at both institutions shared data with each other after initial coding. This phase also served for member checking and triangulation of data as the teams were able to share and analyze data over a period of one year. We based the simultaneous analysis and follow-up by each team upon Miles et al.'s (2020) suggestion that triangulation methods should have "different foci and different strengths, so that they can complement each other" (p. 294). As such, each team analyzed its data and shared them with the other team to check data sources, methods, and analysis to present the final findings.

Positionality

As researchers and international faculty members, we would like to acknowledge and add a statement on reflexivity and positionality. We were not participants of this study. All four researchers are females and were international students before gaining faculty positions at mid-sized IHEs. Collectively, our experience ranges from 10 to 30 years within U.S. higher education. One researcher serves as staff and faculty at their institution providing the team an insight into the collaborative role of the two. Our positionality has unique insight to create a bridge between international students' culturally responsive SEL and academic success. While creating surveys and interview questions, we explored our positionality and passion for the success of international students. In particular, Patton's (2014) reflexivity approach guided the research process: "reflexive relationship is bidirectionally interactive and interdependent.... origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews" (p. 70).

RESULTS

SEL Embedded with CRT

The data from both of the universities indicate the willingness for the faculty and staff to work with the students and assist them with SEL support. Both groups shared that they realize a multitude of needs for international students from different countries. From their entrance to their graduation, students' requirements change and follow a trajectory of varied needs. These needs are assorted and rapid at the beginning of their first term at the university and gradually move toward academic requirements. The faculty and staff understand this cycle of ebb and flow that changes with terms and stages of higher education (Montgomery, 2017). The interview participants shared some strategies to manage these ebbs and flows of queries, needs, anxieties, pressures, and necessities. Three aspects emerged from the data—namely, the balancing act of SEL, responsible decision making, and relationship skills.

One common strategy for both universities' groups of participants was having small mentoring groups to provide support to the international students. Faculty and staff formed these groups to provide support and resources as applicable to the needs of their international students. For example, the faculty members created a group with their teaching/graduate assistant to provide academic support to the students. This support is generally part of the academic term and supports the students with assignment loads and accessing other resources (such as writing centers) from the university. The faculty members also formed mentoring groups with students' support from the class. For example, they asked the students in the class to form informal groups for a class project and ensure that each group has an international student. One faculty member stated "to form smaller working and mentoring groups of faculty and students to enrich the experience of the visiting students." These class groups created space for co-working on a project as well as learning strategies to complete assignments with the best possible approach.

Staff working at the international office followed a similar approach. They provided social support to the students by forming groups based on nationality or common interests. These formal and informal groups provided avenues for social interaction between international students. For example, they held badminton championships and coffee hours to encourage international students to participate in a weekly informal activity. These activities also encouraged domestic students to participate and have cultural interactions beyond classrooms.

The other approach followed by some faculty members was to recognize the need to broaden the curriculum and include the Global South perspective. The faculty members are limited to their subject areas and have specific requirements for their coursework. At the same time, some faculty members are able to add context from other countries. For example, a faculty member at the Gulf Coast university was teaching philosophy and research. The coursework provided opportunities to include readings beyond the textbooks from the United States to broaden the knowledge base of all students. At the same time, the readings

provided a good opportunity for international students to share their perspectives and add insider knowledge to the class discussion. The faculty member shared:

I try to use stories and examples from different cultures and incorporate them in my class. For example, I use Asian, African authors and philosophers along with Native American authors. I try to bring more readings from the Global South—their educational systems and perspectives. I have taught for more than 9 years and more than 100 international students. There is always something new to learn and add to my experience.

It is not always possible to make changes according to the origin of these international students. The syllabus has limitations of topics to be covered every semester. However, including readings from other cultures is one approach for creating a culturally inclusive classroom. Many participants discussed the limitation of adding STEM-related culturally relevant material to the existing curriculum. One participant highlighted that the Gulf Coast college had a structure outside representing currency from many countries. However, once you entered the classrooms, the curriculum highlighted only the achievements of the Global North. One more faculty member alluded that the strategy of inclusive readings encouraged students to actively participate in class discussions. The new students, during their first term at a school, may not feel part of the class discussions. One of the faculty members shared their concern

... that their knowledge and experience are not valued. These concerns can be approached with mentoring groups and addition of readings from different cultures. SEL strategies were applied by faculty to create SEL networks within the classrooms in the form of small discussion groups.

The Balancing Act of SEL

The second aspect emerging from the survey and interview data is about the skills conducive to all the international students. The faculty members shared their concerns with culture and its interpretation. In the age of viral videos and hashtag movements, the faculty members had concerns about their skills to incorporate cultural aspects in their curriculum and class discussions. Some of the concerns shared were about cultural differences. A faculty member asked, “How do I include and support international students but not single them out or exclude domestic students?” These faculty members were also concerned about the interpretation and misinterpretation of culture. A faculty member from the Gulf Coast university said, “Culture is complex and awareness helps while working with multilingual and diverse students. The skills of interpreting culture and integrating material in course work can be a challenging and rewarding experience.”

All these concerns were shared by participants from both universities. At the same time, a staff member shared skills that went beyond the university’s campus. The staff member belonged to a local organization that developed international

networks for young professionals in the local community. This work was an extension of the work with the university. The staff member revealed:

My work with this local community organization leads me to be welcoming and mindful of my practices. Cultural integration is very important. The example of Cinderella in different world cultures was interesting for me. We teach our young professionals to interact in a diplomatic manner—have a deep understanding of international issues. And how to have a meaningful conversation in a global cultural context.

The key here is the willingness to balance the need for integrating the cultural aspects with the opportunities. The interesting aspect to note here is that neither the faculty nor the staff members were resistant to accepting the importance of incorporating CRT and SEL. The concerns emerged from the use of social media and attracting negative reviews from the students.

Beyond Coffee: Differences Between Staff and Faculty Members

An unintended consequence of this study emerged from face-to-face interviews. The workshop and study were inherently designed to provide the same material to all the participants. The data analysis process led the researchers to address the commonalities and differences between faculty and staff members' approaches. The faculty members specified, in their workshop surveys and interviews, the need to have specific support material for their classes that complements their subject material. The faculty members were driven by the need to enrich their course material and sought specific examples that could help them with their unique population of international students. The faculty members' interviews generally led to their coursework and what could be added to their classroom. One faculty member added:

I do make additional efforts for international and all diverse students that I have in my class. But there is this limitation—I cannot do too much related to culture. So it would be good to have some specific CRT examples that would support the faculty with their specific subject. It is important to have CRT. That is not an issue. But my priority is always the course content.

However, staff members were open to any and all CRT and SEL practices and strategies that could be incorporated in their daily work and beyond. A staff participant from the Gulf Coast university shared:

We try to create an atmosphere—with all international students. It does not matter what their college is or what is their level of education—they can be an undergrad or masters, or doctoral students. We have an international coffee hour and we encourage all the students to participate. This informal event is more geared towards providing a social emotional balance to a very exhaustive academic life for the international students.

The priorities of the faculty and staff members at a glance seemed different and were intriguing for us. We used a pragmatic lens to understand the source of the two diverging trajectories. The faculty and staff members are part of the higher educational system that attracts the international students. Both groups have their specific roles within the higher educational system. The faculty and staff members from both universities have common and divergent approaches for working with the international students. In their own way, it is the yin and yang factor of complementing each other's role to provide support to the students. The academic and social life of an international student needs equal substance for their success in a higher educational setting. One faculty participant shared:

Small-small things such as phrases can become an issue—very minor issues but they can provide an interesting space to discuss openly in class. Sometimes these differences are not minor. Human rights can be complicated. Students' discussion can provoke conversations that lead to divergent conversations. These conversations are good to have in a class but I try to keep the conversation civil and respectful so that no one is offended.

The same faculty member added that the curriculum could provoke class discussion that may culturally offend a student and lead to a social and emotional crisis. A similar instance was shared by a faculty from the other institution about including a culturally sensitive movie (from an Asian country) for a class discussion. The faculty added a statement at the beginning of the class that the purpose of adding a movie to the class discussion was not about offending students from a particular Asian country but rather to have an open discussion. The faculty met students prior to the class and asked them about their thoughts and followed up again after the class discussion. The faculty member shared that the informal conversation with these students helped to understand students' perspectives and provide them social and emotional support. The students were also encouraged to provide their insider perspective on the movie and share sources that were relevant to the class discussion.

The data collected from two mid-sized universities with emerging international student programs are novel, in the sense that these universities do not have a structured and high budget resources to support them from the outset. The faculty and staff have to collaborate to create support mechanisms within the limited resources. These results and the following discussion can be generalized and applied by IHEs with small and emerging international programs. These strategies are novel for the mid-sized higher institutions where faculty and staff can focus on each individual international student and provide feedback to each other.

DISCUSSION

The primary findings of the study suggest that CRT and SEL continue to strengthen foundations of learning partnerships between faculty and students. The findings are particularly pertinent for mid-sized institutions of higher education

that do not have a large population of international students and have limited resources. The international students' trust grows for faculty and staff who build a positive learning environment for international students by giving them adequate time to answer questions or present their thoughts in the classroom and office (Sciuchetti, 2017; Sobel & Taylor, 2011). Professional development workshops provided a deeper understanding to the faculty and staff about culture and how students felt while trying to fit in a new environment. Both mid-sized institutions of higher education have been hosting international students on their campuses for the last 50 years. Several academic and social activities have been an integral part of the institutional mission. The professional development workshops we offered are just one aspect of the larger ongoing institutional commitment to international students. These workshops were able to create a space for faculty and staff to work collaboratively with a nuanced CRT and SEL approach for international students.

The professional development workshops created an environment for faculty and staff to connect the five intersecting themes of CRT and SEL. The authors created a model to illustrate the overlapping roles of faculty and staff to support international students through social awareness, self-management, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Both IHEs, even with limited resources, were implementing a plethora of activities to support international students. For example, the Midwest college implemented a mentor-mentee program along with a buddy program. Similarly, the Gulf Coast university offers an informal coffee hour along with a living learning community for international students. The data from interviews from both institutions suggest that the students were able to ask questions one on one with their faculty mentors when they met for coffee or lunch dates. Some mentors encouraged informal off-campus activities such as trips to museums, shows, or movies together, which generated organic and vibrant conversations and social support networks. This further gave students a deeper understanding of the U.S. culture and colloquial phrases, helping boost their confidence in interacting with their faculty and peers in the classroom.

The CRT and SEL framework illustrated bridging faculty and staff activities toward supporting international students through a holistic approach for mid-sized IHEs. After the professional development workshop, both groups of the participants were more geared toward using the traditional activities on campuses while applying their new skills of CRT and SEL. While faculty and staff continue to participate in mentor-mentee programs and continue one-on-one relationships with their mentees, they focused more on the practice of self-awareness, which helped students maintain calm behavior and eased their anxiety of speaking in class or in groups (Dresser, 2013). The participants were able to inculcate self-management to international students and give them more time to think through the questions and responses. These continued conversations have helped international students to learn more English phrases or usage for classrooms or social settings. As international students continued to participate and partner with domestic students in projects or events, a sense of belonging as part of the college community and self-confidence enhanced (Glass et al., 2015).

The postworkshop survey suggested that faculty and staff found that in order to build relationships with international students they had to first build trust, and it took them more than one interaction or meeting (Hollins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Sciuchetti, 2017). Meetings build a level of trust through resourceful academic and social support, which is critical for mid-sized IHEs with limited resources. The faculty and staff shared in interviews that international students adjust to the cultural norms of the target language classroom when given more time to think about the questions or discussion topics. Additionally, incorporating readings from the Global South into the curriculum fostered respectful multicultural campus environments and bridged the diverse groups in the classrooms. Further, according to the participants, they have observed that international students were able to make responsible decisions and show an improved adjustment interacting in both the classroom environment and social settings (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Additionally, social and emotional growth of international students has proved to impact creativity and critical thinking skills and has motivated these students to not give up easily and stay patient and persistent with their goals (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). This study aligns with Ladson-Billings's (2014) concepts of academic success and cultural competence. Lastly, the study highlights the need to build upon the CRT and SEL tenets and align them with the existing support networks within the institutions of higher education for classroom learnings and off-campus activities to bolster students' overall success. Figure 2 incorporated elements from the current and the previous longitudinal study. The data from the 14 participants confirm the alignment of CRT and SEL tenets for international students.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

This study indicates that there are possibilities for future studies to build upon our current realm of knowledge. The primary limitation of this study was the purposive inclusion of faculty and staff working with international students at two mid-sized higher education institutions. Hence, the study has limitations that generalize and expand upon the experiences of all international students. Additionally, the percentage of international students was small at both mid-sized institutions, which limits the scope of the data interpretations. Lastly, the professional development workshops were dependent upon the funding from the universities. The scope of the current study was limited to the number of workshops funded by the organizations.

Future implications of the study include suggestions to expand the research to more mid-sized IHEs with similar sets of international student populations and diverse faculty members. This study highlights limitations of resources for professional development workshops for mid-sized universities. It requires time and commitment from both faculty and staff to attend and actively participate in a CRT and SEL dialogue. Furthermore, this study illustrates the need to expand to a content-based approach for English language learning students who are in STEM education. While the present study is framed as exploratory study by investigating participants' perspectives, a future study could be designed as a

program evaluation to investigate the efficacy of the CRT–SEL model with longitudinal data.

CONCLUSION

The highlight of this study is our proposed model proposed to create an inclusive approach based on the tenets of CRT and SEL. The model is based upon two years of research with the faculty and staff teaching the international students. This model provides a visual approach for future research as well as professional development for higher education professionals. The findings of the study indicate the limited support and resources that are consistent with the previous literature (Conley, 2015; Paolini, 2019). This study introduces a new model to recognize international students and their specific needs that can be approached by merging and extending our current knowledge of CRT and SEL. The workshops on both campuses led faculty to incorporate changes to their curriculum and add readings from the Global South. The faculty also embraced the approach of developing strong social-emotional and culturally responsive tenets both inside and outside the classrooms. The staff applied their skills through social activities on and off campus to build upon cultural pluralism. The divergent yet symbiotic approaches of faculty and staff nurtured the international students' resilience and built perseverance for academic and personal success (Hammond, 2016). We are planning to continue our CRT–SEL longitudinal study and expand it to other mid-sized institutions with emerging international student programs. The limited resources available to these institutions provide an opportunity to apply this CRT–SEL model where faculty and staff can collaborate and bridge the gap between academic and overall well-being of the students.

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