Chapter 1

Culturally Responsive Teaching to Empower Indigenous Student Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an example of culturally responsive teaching, CRT, in a private university in Puebla, Mexico. The university developed a program to integrate indigenous students into higher education programs promoting personal development and community growth. CRT has been used as a methodology that promotes inclusion in the classroom, helping students connect their cultural backgrounds in the new context. In the study, focus groups were conducted and students' narratives were collected based on their personal experiences during their stay at the university. Additionally, the CRT Survey was applied to a sample of professors who taught indigenous students in their courses.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the program *A Bet for the Future*, a project developed at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (UPAEP), a private university in Puebla Mexico, conceived to offer university education to indigenous students. After several years in operation, the Business School introduced Culturally Responsible Teaching (CRT) to empower indigenous students, and to create positive environments for their development, to increase retention. The participants were students from communities in the northern Sierra of Puebla, as well as other marginalized communities from the state of Veracruz. The program has proven to engage other students as well, and has resulted in better academic experiences.

Practices of with CRT were documented, and showed both the challenges the university and the indigenous students had to face, and the best practices that were carried out. The results from focus groups with students are presented in this paper, along with the results of a survey with professors who participated in developing the program.

Students' stories were be recorded in an attempt to establish the way in which CRT helped them obtain the required tools and allowed them to successfully obtain a university degree. In order to provide a more complete perspective, students who participated in the first generation (before CRT programs were in place) were also interviewed so as to determine their reasons for leaving the program and the difficulties they faced while trying to adapt to the new culture and to traditional pedagogies. The most relevant comments are included.

In the different sections of the chapter, CRT is defined and a brief bibliometric analysis on the subject is presented, to help understand the importance that the topic has had over the years. The population in Mexico is described, first, in a general manner, and later on, the most relevant ethnic groups in the state of Puebla and their characteristics are assessed.

The history of UPAEP is described along with its mission, leading values, and educational model, as a way to introduce the intention behind the creation of the program *A Bet for the Future*. Basic statistics of the program are included, along with its benefits and the introduction of CRT to provide better conditions for indigenous students. Results from the brief exploratory study reflect the current situation of the program, from students' perceptions and evaluations regarding the way professors use the methodology in their classes.

This study is relevant because it provides opportunities for indigenous students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education in Mexico, as well as in other countries. Opportunities to participate in formal education have historically been low. Adults in regions composed mostly by indigenous population have completed on average three years of schooling, while adults in municipalities

composed mainly by non-indigenous people have completed eight years (Jacob et al., 2015, in López, 2016). This population faces low levels of access to institutions and little acknowledgement of their distinctive cultural and epistemological traditions within the curriculum (Oyarzun, Perales & Mc Cowan, 2017). Most indigenous students who have had the opportunity to pursue graduate studies in Mexico have encountered educational programs that do not reflect their cultural identity or background.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance of students' cultural background and experiences in all aspects of learning. Unfortunately, attention to culturally responsive approaches to teachings has been left aside, being replaced by standardized pedagogy in most universities, and being, at best, limited to cultural celebration while ignoring academic expectations for students, and disregarding cultural understanding.

This has happened in part because standardized pedagogies have trivialized CRT, as they portray it as a fixed and homogeneous conception of ethnic groups, assuming that students who are part of a group naturally belong to it. To be effective in multicultural classrooms, course contents must relate closely to the cultural backgrounds of students. Teaching approaches that ignore student norms of behavior and communication result in student resistance (Hu, 2002), while teaching practices that are responsive to culture, prompt student involvement.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Before analyzing CRT, it is essential to contextualize the notion of culture. Culture can be defined as "the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1994); and, "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto 1996).

Hammond (2015) has suggested that culture is software to the brain's hardware. It is the operating system through which our brain processes information. Interactions between cultural groups and ideas, and educational practices are essential in understanding social change (Giorgetti, Campbell & Arslan, 2017). Culturally responsive practices provide a direct route to developing students' brainpower through a framework that includes awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community building (Hammond, 2015).

Culture encompasses many things, some of which are essential in learning environments. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns (Gay, 2002).

Culture determines the way in which people view the world, focus their attention, and value learning (Tileston & Darling, 2008, in Harding, 2014).

Regarding CRT, Nieto (2004) explained that it as a method based on inclusion and authenticity, and that it requires all actors, especially teachers, to learn about and respect themselves, one another, and all other people, and honor their diverse cultural characteristics. CRT is a branch of multicultural education (Gay, 2000), which can be defined as the use of cultural knowledge, previous experiences, knowledge structures, and performing styles of students from different ethnic groups to make learning experiences more relevant and efficient.

It is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Billings, 2009). Academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when classroom instruction is delivered through their own cultural and experiential perspectives (Gay, 2000).

According to Banks (2001), CRT supports that all students have equal access to school learning irrespective of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics. Over the last two decades, this pedagogy has been adopted in countless schools, classrooms and teacher education programs across North America to help marginalized students achieve academic success and cultural affirmation (Lim, Tan, Saito, 2019).

There are differences in the way CRT is conceptualized. There is a general agreement in that it uses students' cultural experiences and knowledge; supports students in maintaining their cultural identity, native language, and connections to their culture; provides multiple opportunities to demonstrate what students learn; incorporates different perspectives; and, empowers student sociopolitical consciousness (Civitillo, Juang, Badra & Schachnera, 2019).

CRT is referred to as culturally responsive teaching, culturally congruent teaching, culturally appropriate pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses curriculum content, instructional strategies, and achievement assessment, as well as classroom climate (Gay, 2010). It also stresses the importance of moving beyond the isolated opportunities of tending to individual cultural differences in classrooms and schools, and towards recognition of how culture impacts teaching and learning (Civitillo, Juang, Badra & Schachnera, 2019).

Villegas & Lucas (2002) have proposed six specific characteristics for CRT:

1. Being socio-culturally conscious, recognizing there are multiple ways of perceiving reality.
2. Having an affirmative attitude towards students from diverse backgrounds.

3. Perceiving themselves as agents of change and assuming the responsibility of bringing about educational change.
4. Understanding how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction.
5. Making a conscious effort to know about the lives of students.
6. Using the knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.

The concept CRT has been the target of numerous researchers (Gay, 2002, 2013; Ware, 2006; Siwatu, 2007, 2011; Bishop, et.al., 2009; Wang, 2007; Brown, 2004; Santamaria, 2009; McCaughtry, et.al., 2006). According to the Web of Science Repository (WoS), scientific research on CRT has presented a steady growth since 1995. In 2018, eighteen articles were published (WoS, 2019). Evolution of publications on the subject is shown as follows (Figure 1):

Since 1995, 147 articles have been published; 21 of them are Open Access. The average references per element is 11.47, having been cited 1686 times in 1411 scientific articles. Around 88.5% of all publications have been developed in the last decade. Numerous universities conducted research in the area, including the University of North Carolina, the University System of Georgia, California State University System, New Mexico State University, and Arizona State University, among others (WoS, 2019).

Figure 1. Publications by year
Source: Data from WoS, 2019.
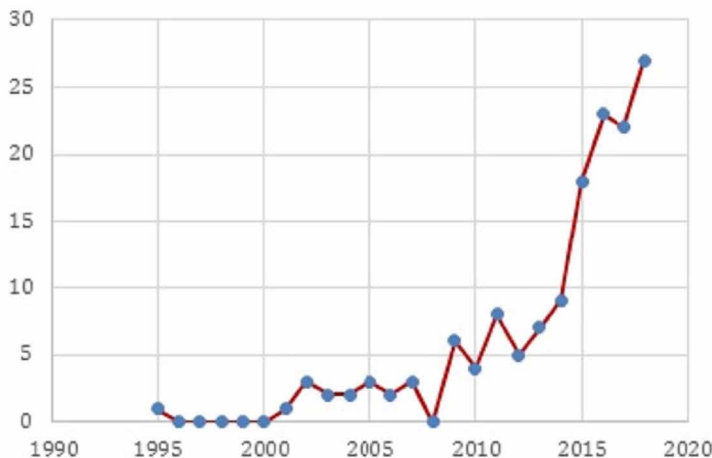
The US, Taiwan, England, Finland, New Zealand, China, South Africa, Turkey, Australia, and Brazil are among the countries that generate more scientific products on CRT. The subdisciplines more frequently analyzed are education, educational research, urban studies, psychology, linguistics, music, social sciences, sociology, and ethnic studies (Ibidem).

There are differences in the way CRT is conceptualized; nevertheless, there is a general agreement that it uses students' cultural experiences and knowledge; supports students in maintaining their cultural identity, native language, and connections to their culture; provides multiple opportunities to demonstrate what students learn; incorporates different perspectives; and, empowers student sociopolitical consciousness (Civitillo, Juang, Badra, & Schachner, 2019).

Learner populations, both rural and urban (Kieran & Anderson, 2018), are becoming increasingly culturally diverse around the globe, making it necessary to explore and describe how CRT is implemented (Civitillo, Juang, Badra, & Schachner, 2019). Each student's cultural references, worldview, and history are unique to the experiences this child has encountered. Furthermore, these experiences can be incorporated into the classroom to help students learn (Rogoff, 2003, in Harding, 2014).

University professors have a responsibility to promote the equalization of educational opportunities and improve academic achievement for diverse cultural and ethnic groups (Chous, Su, Wang, 2018). They need to recognize and integrate students' diverse cultural identities and experiences, consequently enhancing their learning motivation and performance (Gay, 2013). Using culturally responsive methods in teaching is considering culture as a strength, which can be used effectively to enhance academic and social achievement (Billings, 2009).

Classrooms are becoming more diverse, and no single teaching approach will engage all students at once; therefore, creating strategies to consistently deliver culturally-responsive programs will help attract learners with distinct backgrounds. CRT incorporates different ways of learning and engages students from non-dominant cultures. In this way, they can also learn how to translate the logical structures onto the curriculum, incorporating indigenous knowledge.

Research on particular needs of indigenous students have shown the need to create specific ways to include diversity in the classroom, and to reduce the asymmetries and inequalities among students so they can all have the same opportunities and become successful in their career paths, regardless of their place of origin or ethnic group. Creating classroom climates that are conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students is essential. One of the challenges is facilitating classroom dialogues on issues of race, ethnicity, and culture (Maingi, 2017). Building community among diverse learners is another essential element of CRT; and pedagogical actions are even more important than multicultural curriculum designs (Gay, 2002).

Cultural branching helps ethnically diverse students build bridges between their pre-existing knowledge and what they are expected to learn. It also encourages educators to explore, implement and assess the use of students' home culture and beliefs within the classroom from a theoretical and practical perspective (Jabbar & Mirza, 2017).

According to scholars who have studied this method of teaching, culturally responsive teachers are grounded in pedagogical practices, teaching conceptions and social relationships that enhance social justice, because these teachers relate the curriculum to students' backgrounds, establish connections with families, understand students' cultural experiences, establish connections with local communities, create shared learning experiences, and recognize cultural differences as strengths on which to build programs.

Those who practice CRT understand that education is not apolitical and, as a result, they help students understand their roles as change agents in society. These teachers inspire, motivate, and instill values and knowledge; they nourish racial pride and the need for equality (Bassey, 2016), as culturally responsive methods provide teachers with the critical understanding of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities develop, and how these construct impact learning.

In CRT empathy has been found to improve teachers' capacity to respond to students in the classroom. Professors' knowledge of students and communities need to be connected in order to develop efficacious habits and trends that represent their disposition to teach, and to learn from multicultural environments (Warren, 2017).

Efforts to prepare culturally responsive teachers are fairly recent; there is the unfortunate possibility that prospective teachers may graduate without being exposed to the practices of culturally responsive teaching during their coursework and field experiences (Oginga, 2011). Professors need to understand that cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness, respect and recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in different ways. Acquiring detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups is essential (Gay, 2002).

Around the world, efforts are being made to ensure indigenous students are at school, engaged in learning, and making sound progress. Academic leaders are setting high expectations for teachers and taking responsibility for monitoring indigenous students' academic progress to ensure that expectations are being met and that any needed interventions are put in place in a timely manner (OECD, 2017).

Some examples of CRT being used to integrate students from cultural minorities across the globe have been collected to further illustrate its importance. In Canada, it has been used to maintain traditions of aboriginal communities (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017), and to understand the academic challenges that indigenous students of the Northwest territories face in Eurocentric educational systems (Amprako, 2017);

in the United States, in programs to increase participation of Native Americans (McCarthy & Lee, 2014); in Australia, as part of projects emphasizing aboriginal learning styles (Vass, 2018).

Other analysis included the neglect of young indigenous children in the northern territory in order to integrate CRT with systemic support: in Taiwan, the effects of implementation of an online CRT course for English learning process; and, in New Zealand, CRT was used as support for Maori students (Savage, Hindle, Meyer, Hyds, Panetito & Sleeter, 2011; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanaugh & Teddy, 2009; Averill, Anderson, Easton, Maro, Smith & Hynds, 2009).

In Brazil, studies were conducted using CRT with a group of indigenous people of Terena ethnicity as related to resistance in an attempt to mitigate environmental problems resulting from highway constructions (Gioppo, Soares Marques & Vertelino Marques, 2016); and, in Mexico, to introduce Mayan girls to science (Hamlin, 2013).

Private and independent efforts have been carried out in Mexico to provide better opportunities for indigenous groups. CRT helps them succeed in education while valuing their culture, their personal stories and their languages. Among the efforts are affirmative action programs in mainstream universities, intercultural courses, and autonomous institutions (Oyarzun, Perales & Mc Cowan, 2017).

According to Villegas & Lucas, (2007), successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly students from historically marginalized groups, demands a new way of looking at teaching that is grounded in an understanding of the role of culture and language in learning.

INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN MEXICO

Mexico has one of the most diverse indigenous populations in Latin America. The population is composed 62% by Mestizo, which are Amerindian/European; 21% mostly Amerindian; 7% Amerindian, and 10% that constitute others, which include Afro-Mexicans, 1.2% (Martínez, 2018), and also people from diverse European descent (World Atlas, 2018).

Amerindians lived in Mexico before the arrival of the Europeans. Indigenous groups in Mexico have their own language. Sixty eight linguistic groups have been identified. The ten largest are: Náhuatl, Maya, Zapoteco, Mixteco, Otomí, Tezttal, Tzototzill, Totonaca, Mazateco and Chol (Heat, 2016). Afro-Mexicans live mostly in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Veracruz, and are descendant of African slaves brought by Spaniards during the colony (Martínez, 2018).

Indigenous populations in Mexico are concentrated mostly in the southern and south-central region of Mexico, specifically the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. The official number of indigenous people varies from source to source. The National

Institute for Statistics and Geography estimated that in 2010, 6.5% of Mexicans belonged to an indigenous group, while the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples suggested that in 2013, it reached 10.5% (Despagne, 2013), while other sources suggest that in 2018, it was 13% (Roldán, 2018). It was only in 1992 that an amendment to the Mexican Constitution was done to declare the country as being officially multicultural and plurilingual.

One of the most important challenges to integrate minorities is education inequality and low quality education. Indigenous groups in Mexico live in poverty. Many of them live in geographically isolated areas when compared to their non-indigenous counterparts. These groups present high levels of poverty, high food insecurity (Roldán, 2018), low levels of adequate infrastructure, access to affordable flooring material, clean water and sanitation, basic shelter services, school, health clinics, or medical insurance (The United Nations Report, 2017; Roldán, 2018).

Children of indigenous origin attend school for fewer years and have lower levels of academic achievement when compared to the rest of the population (Gándara & García, 2013). School leaders and teachers have not always been effectively prepared to teach indigenous students, and sometimes they lack the necessary resources to help indigenous students develop their capabilities and confidence. Some teachers and schools are successfully supporting Indigenous students.

Indigenous education has long been an important topic in Mexico. Historically, there have been several government efforts to integrate indigenous groups and to provide better living conditions but most efforts have not been successful. In Mexico, schools have played a fundamental role in assimilation and acculturation of minorities, but they have also tried to create one single culture and use one single language, rather that providing the means to create a multicultural state (Despagne, 2013).

In higher education, the situation becomes critical. The attendance to this level is low, not only for minority and disadvantaged groups, but also for mainstream population, since only 3 out of every 10 people between the ages of 19 and 23 are able to attend higher education. According to the Ministry of Education, the general coverage in 2013 attained a level of 29.2% (SEP, 2018). Heat (2018) has suggested that the extreme low attendance of indigenous peoples in higher education is due to lack of schools in rural areas, poor test scores and low academic achievement due to language barriers, as Spanish is a second language for most indigenous children. The indigenous population is underrepresented because of the isolation and dispersion of these communities (López, 2016).

Since the turn of the century, discourses of ethnicity, interculturalism, and decolonization in education have moved to the center of the academic and educational debate in Latin America (Hamel, 2016). An important challenge to truly advance towards equity and equality of indigenous students attending higher education is the academic aspect. In compulsory education, indigenous students usually obtain

the lowest academic achievement when compared with non-indigenous students. This is, in part, because of the lacked of trained education professionals who want to work in remote areas (López, 2016).

Lakhani (2017) has stated that Mexico's indigenous youngsters do not go to university because of the social and economic conditions they live in, not because they do not want to; and that there is little acknowledgement on how to create programs to incorporate them. They experience discrimination because of their low economic standing. Indigenous groups retain their forms of organization in defense of their culture and livelihood; some collapse because of poverty, and others believe they have to reject their ethnic identity to integrate into society to improve their living conditions (Minority Rights, 2018).

The state of Puebla, which is small in terms of territory, and high in population density, is divided in 217 municipalities, all of them with indigenous populations (INAFED, 2019). It has significant social and ethical diversity. As a whole, the state is rather poor, yet it has important industrial developments. Puebla occupies the 5th position in indigenous populations in the country with 1,094,923 people from different indigenous groups, which represents 18% of the state population (Miranda, 2019). The most common language groups in the state are Náhuatl, Tututnakú, Mixteco, Mazateco, Otomí and Tepehua.

THE UPAEP UNIVERSITY IN PUEBLA, MEXICO

UPAEP (Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla) is a private Catholic university located in central Mexico, and founded in 1973. It offers undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs, both online and on campus. Its mission is to: *"Create currents of thought and develop leaders that will transform society"*.

The university has received the distinction of Changemaker Campus because it promotes social innovation and changemaking in higher education and beyond, and for its commitment to transform the field of higher education through collaboration and thought leadership. Its educational model is inspired by the phrase *Duc in Altum,* which means "get out into the deep" and is an invitation to face new challenges searching for the common good by living and reinforcing the value of education and its potential in transforming social structures in a culture of full respect to human dignity and peaceful coexistence. Programs are flexible, interdisciplinary and intercultural, and they promote global thinking. They constitute a response to the value proposition and the building blocks to the construction of the common good.

In the educational model, all formative processes are oriented towards empowering students to reach their full potential as human beings, and to help improve society. The student is the agent of his/her own education, while faculty members function as

mediators in the teaching-learning process. Transformational leadership is achieved through learning moments and encounters that are authentic significant experiences.

At UPAEP, the promotion of human dignity, freedom, solidarity, subsidiarity, congruence, respect, love, and justice are the leading values. The common good is an endeavor that designates what the community wants to become as one, what is collectively valued, what the community expects, and what it can accomplish. It is also a shared hope and a real effort to promote justice, freedom and solidarity.

It is based on social innovation as a methodology that allows creating and escalating solutions to specific problems. This methodology is integrated in academic offerings, guiding decisions of institutional leadership, organizational strategies, culture and operation, and creating an education proposition that is pertinent, challenging, professionalizing, and humanizing.

The university is located in the state of Puebla, a state with a large indigenous population. Since its foundation, 45 years ago, UPAEP has considered integrating indigenous students as part of their calling. Different efforts have been established, particularly scholarships, although the first efforts were not as successful as expected because it was difficult for the students to fully integrate, and to succeed in their studies. It was not until 2006 that a formal program was developed to ensure that indigenous students would be well prepared to start higher education, that all their needs would be met, and that by studying they would improve their life conditions and also those of their communities. This program was called: *A Bet for the Future*.

CRT at UPAEP has been designed to help empower youth from rural regions by employing meaningful cultural connections to convey academic and social knowledge and attitudes while creating an environment in which their experiences have meaning to them and are valued by other students. Empowering indigenous students has been a goal in Mexico's higher education for quite some time (Wooten, 2008). Part of the program is directed towards educating teachers and professors about culturally responsible pedagogy and how it is used in the classroom, so that they can help students do better.

The Program: A Bet for the Future

A Bet for the Future is promoted by the university and managed by volunteers who believe they can make a difference. It is a community development program that crystalizes the mission of UPAEP to create currents of thought and to find and empower leaders that can transform society in the search for truth, while integrating faith, science, and life, based on the university's mission and vision. It is based on the belief that all students can succeed in an environment in which social relations are equitable.

This program was developed in 2006 to grant scholarships to high school students from marginalized communities, with little or no resources, so that they could pursue university studies. Candidates for the program are required to have knowledge of their social environment, have successfully graduated from high school, and have previous experiences in developing social projects. These are young people who demonstrate entrepreneurship traits; critical thinkers who have a call for service and are committed to themselves and to their community. Each participant is an example and living testimony of the ideal of transformational leadership.

The project was supported on the principles of transformational leadership, starting with a personal dream and a life project, an assignment they developed throughout their university studies. Students were selected based on their interest in making a difference in their communities. As part of the selection process, they were asked to create a project based on their life plans and on specific needs in their communities.

Although the project was created by the university, it is managed by volunteers who believe they can make a difference. Its main target is to transform the lives of young adults and their communities. Transformation starts with a dream and a life project that becomes the constant throughout the program. It is based on personal and communitarian development, as well as the creation of networks to promote social leadership in students. Candidates for the program were proposed by different organizations and by their own communities because they were identified as community leaders, and because they were working or were interested in working in a community development project.

In the first call for scholarships, only 33 students from 11 different municipalities in five different states in central and southern Mexico were selected (out of the 100 students who responded to the call). Fifteen ONGs have taken part in the program: 800 donors, 70 tutors, 37 volunteers in fundraising, and over 120 million pesos have been invested in living expenses and tuition, accompaniment and preparation programs.

The program has different activities for students through their four years of studies. In the first year, individual and personalized follow-up is essential in order to help the students embrace change. Students are leaving their homes for the first time and moving to a larger city with a different culture, and they are starting their professional studies, which can be daunting.

During the second year, students develop their abilities to work in teams, and to develop a proactive and responsible attitude. The life plan of each student is developed during the third year. Ideas, plans and projects that each student presented as a project for their candidacy start to develop, integrating personal and professional plans. The support team helps create a realistic plan for entering the labor market, supporting the student in every step of the way.

In their last year of the program, students are encouraged to solve specific problems in their community, transforming their lives and the lives of others. Throughout the four years, students receive continuous support. They are introduced to all their professors so that they can identify them and incorporate CRT practices in their classroom to promote integration.

Academic accompaniment starts even before the participants arrive at the university. A prep course based on Arts, Reading and Writing, Information Systems and English is delivered, helping students reach the same level of comprehension as other students who are not from marginalized communities. Accommodations are made available by the university, providing a safe space in which they interact with other students from different communities.

In 2018, 38 students (21% of all those admitted to the program) had an opportunity to participate in exchange programs in the US, Europe and South America, which has helped expand their possibilities. A couple of students traveled for international internships and landed jobs abroad. 52% of alumni are working in their communities, 31% in social organizations that favor rural communities and marginalized populations, and, the remaining 17% work in businesses.

For indigenous students, the first year is critical. It is the period in which students will feel lonely, and will have problems adapting, regardless of the support systems in place. It is in this period of time when student's attitudes, identity and goals are most influenced (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Participants in the program live together in one building that was constructed with the help of different donors. The building has three floors. The ground floor and first floors are for female students only, while the second is for male students. This program has attracted more female participants, and many of them are the first woman in their families to pursue a university degree. The operating team, as well as the accompaniment crew, provides group support in each floor. It is required that all students meet at least every fortnight. Each student is responsible for his/her participation in different dynamics in their immediate community space. This has helped ensure a culturally safe environment that provides support at all times with personal and formal support systems.

Table 1. Students in the program

Generation	Students	Graduates (cumulative)
2013-2014	48	30
2014-2015	54	39
2015-2016	58	45
2016-2017	59	51
2017-2018	60	64

Source: The President's Annual Report 2017-2018.

The program has faced numerous obstacles but has proven able to tackle them. One of such was adequate funding; in response, additional funding projects have been developed. Perhaps the most relevant one has been how to fully integrate students who have always lived in their communities of origin and for whom moving to the city of Puebla, the capital of the state, is an enormous change.

Most of the participants are leaving their families for the first time, and have to learn how to depend on themselves. When the program started, students were placed in a home away from the university campus. Professors and personnel from the university would be constantly looking out for them, helping them in every way that they could, but it was difficult task because students did not know their way around the city, which made it even more difficult for them. They were not familiar with university settings, the type of instruction, the technology used, and other aspects that made it difficult for them to achieve good grades and to feel at ease.

Many of them felt lonely and homesick, and for a long time they kept missing their traditional familial and social context and it became harder for them to integrate with their classmates. Academic achievement was an additional issue. Most students had problems during the first semesters and needed tutoring. Furthermore, some courses were given exclusively in English, which for them was a third language as all of them were bilingual: they had their language of origin and they were fluent in Spanish.

As the program started developing, three distinct components were developed: academic accompaniment, emotional support and project development. Academic accompaniment starts before the participants become students at the university, helping them level up with other students. It allows students to upscale their reading and writing skills, to obtain knowledge about the areas in which they will be studying, and even language courses, specifically English, since many of the course materials are offered in that language. Parallel to this effort is training of university professors in CRT. Initially this effort was rooted in the Business School, but later extender to other faculties and schools. Professors were sensitized about the communities of origin of the students, their living conditions, and the potential problems they would face in and outside of the classroom. They were trained on the specific activities and methodologies they could incorporate into their practice.

The emotional component is essential in making the transition from the community to the university easier because students on the scholarship program face numerous problems when entering a private university away from home. For some, reaching this point is a dream come true, but settling in is not an easy task (Montaudon, Muñoz & Fernández, 2018). Many of them feel lonely, as they used to live in close quarters with all their family members, even sharing a bed with siblings or other relatives. They do not get used to new food easily; they prefer their own products

and methods of cooking, and so on. In order to prevent this, there is a group of psychologists and sociologists available for students at all times. This component was established after the first few years in which desertion was high.

The projects are developed throughout the university program. These are developed on –site, so that eventually the students will return to their community and lead the project, making it grow and become sustainable on the long run. Accompaniment for the projects helps strengthen the students' leadership, it promotes the creation of networks that will help the project develop, and it ensures the student that he/she will receive help and support when needed (Montaudon, Muñoz & Fernández, 2018).

METHOD

In order to determine the effectiveness of CRT in the program *A Bet for the Future*, two different studies were conducted. The first one was based on indigenous students' perceptions of the use of CRT in their classrooms. For that purpose, three focus groups were arranged with students from the program. Focus groups were used because they provide insights into how people think, offering a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. A group of individuals is invited to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction (Smithson, 2000; Morgan, 2002). Participants were encouraged to tell their stories about how they integrated into their life as graduate students, the difficulties they faced, the support they received, and other aspects, allowing them to present their own personal narrative.

For the second study, a sample of 28 professors who have taught, or are currently teaching students from the program *A Bet for the Future*, was selected out of the population of 30 professors who have participated, using a 95% confidence level with a 5% error margin.

The Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey (Rhodes, 2017) was used and sent electronically. It is a 17-item online survey, which is a useful tool for examining the praxis of culturally responsive teaching in adult classrooms. The survey includes the analysis of different standards that teachers need to develop. The survey is based on Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching. It is constructed on the integrated use of four elements: establishing inclusion, developing attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. Each element, or criteria, has corresponding norms and practices that adult educators can use in creating or evaluating their praxis, and participants report their frequency of use of 17 teaching practices on a 5-point Likert scale with levels of: never, rarely, sometimes, usually, and always (Rhodes, 2017).

ANALYSIS

The analysis of the personal narratives offered valuable insights of students and their overall experiences in the *A Bet for the Future* program. In the three focus groups 32 students and alumni participated. Participation was strictly voluntary, based on an invitation by one of the leaders of the program. The groups were founded on developing trust among members, so members from their support system were present during the focus groups.

Two focus groups dealt with current students after CRT had been implemented in numerous courses at the business school. The last one was based on alumni and students who dropped out for different reasons.

For the current students groups, the themes for discussion in the focus groups were related to the expectations about the courses in which the students participated, how they felt in the courses, the university in general, and the connections with other students and professors. They were asked if they believed their learning experiences were relevant, if they felt empowered, if they believed they had equal opportunities as other students, whether they felt that their cultural identity was respected, and how it was introduced into the courses in which they participated.

For the group of alumni and people who had dropped out, the topic leaned towards the benefits they found in the program, the problems they faced, the challenges, and the reasons for dropping out.

A collection of personal comments from the students based on CRT are presented as follows:

Students perceptions before the introduction of CRT; includes students who dropped out of the program.

It was the first time that I left my community. I thought I was in the same state, I felt I was on an adventure.

It was very hard for my family, they kept asking me to stay, and later on to come back, and it was emotionally draining.

It was very hard leaving my home

I could not adapt to the food or the people

I missed my family very much

I was very self-conscious

Even the smell of food was something I missed

I did not feel appreciated in the classroom, nobody spoke to me

The professor always put me on the spotlight

One of the professors was not able to pronounce my last name, it was rude

I was not able to understand the courses

Some of the homework, classwork and exams were too difficult

I was the only minority student in one of my classes. I felt vulnerable

I felt that my high school diploma was worthless. I was lagging behind other students so much. I needed constant tutoring

I was not having any time left. Everything was about schoolwork, remedial courses, and language courses. I felt lost.

I did not want to speak or ask anything in class, I did not want other students to laugh at me.

Sometimes I just did not want to attend classes

I felt overwhelmed by everyone wanting to know how I was doing and if I understood in my classes.

Comments from current students and alumni, after CRT:

Professors made me feel that my culture was valuable.

I got to explain my peers about my community; some of them became interested and are planning on visiting.

The projects in class made other students interested in participating with my community.

Through the courses I was able to understand that being different makes me important.

I was surprised to see that some of my professors knew where my community was.

Students from other countries wanted to know more about my community and my family.

As part of one course I had to present information about my origins, my family and my community.

After the spring holidays I brought back some delicacies prepared by my mother so that others could have a taste of my homeland, I was proud to show them to my classmates.

I was able to participate just as any other student. I felt that I was at the same level as everyone else.

It was interesting to see that the course included contents about indigenous minorities in Mexico, I saw myself reflected in that course.

I believe I was treated with respect in all my courses.

Other students wanted to help me, I made very good friends.

History and traditions of indigenous communities such as mine was included in one of the courses I took.

I understood that my community and my culture are valuable to others.

In the new economic and social context, in which inclusion is important, I feel my cultural background has a new meaning and value.

As it can be observed, the most relevant aspect of the student perception after CRT was introduced and the program was tweaked to offer students tailor made activities, is that they considered their culture to be of value at the university. Students felt integrated and valued; they felt identified with the programs they studied because their cultural background was part of some of the topics. They felt as one of the groups and not a part of a minority. The full stories helped understand that the preparatory courses that are offered before immersion in the university program are working, and that at the same time are helping create strong networks and a sense of community, helping accelerate learning processes of indigenous students through

scaffolding and preparing them for the university. When comparing this group to the group of alumni who did not experience CRT, and with students who dropped out, the importance of emotional content stands out.

For the second part of the study, professors that took part in the CRT training and that have been teaching students from indigenous minorities participated in a survey. Answers of the CRT survey are presented (Table 2):

The answers were arranged based on the aspects that needed to be developed, things that needed to be improved, and those that could be potentialized (Table 3).

The results showed that the highest scores in the survey were related to the use of class materials and images that are appropriate for working with indigenous students, as well as eliciting pre-reading and pre-listening activities with minority groups so that they can fully comprehend the content of the courses. In this sense, professors are doing a good job when it comes to the use of rubrics to provide better assessments of the student's progress. These activities should continue and increase.

There are important things to develop; perhaps the most important is language. Professors do not know the languages of the indigenous students (there are many), and they cannot use specific words to help students better develop. This limits the

Table 2. Professor answers of the CRT survey

Q	Question	Average
Q1	I include lessons about the acculturation process	3.44
Q2	I examine class materials for culturally appropriate images and items	4.06
Q3	I ask students to compare their culture with the culture in Puebla, Mexico and abroad	3.72
Q4	I make an effort to get to know my student's backgrounds	3.72
Q5	I learn words in my students native languages	2.93
Q6	I use mixed language and mixed cultural pairings in group work	3.27
Q7	I use peer tutors or student-led discussion	2.86
Q8	I use surveys to find out about my students classroom preferences	2.82
Q9	I elicit students' experiences in pre-reading and pre-listening activities	4.24
Q10	I encourage students to speak their native languages with their peers	2.82
Q11	I have students work independently, selecting their own learning activities	3.10
Q12	I spend time outside of class learning about the cultures and languages of my students	2.79
Q13	I include lessons about anti-immigrant discrimination or bias	3.31
Q14	I supplement the curriculum with lessons about international events	3.72
Q15	I ask for student input when planning lessons and activities	3.27
Q16	I encourage students to use cross-cultural comparisons when analyzing material	3.44
Q17	I provide rubrics and progress reports your students	4.03

Table 3. Answer analysis

Aspects to develop	Aspects to improve	Aspects to maximize
Low scores (1-2.99) **Never, rarely**	**Medium scores (3-3.99)** **Sometimes**	**High scores (4 -5)** **Usually, always**
I learn words in my students native languages	I include lessons about the acculturation process	I examine class materials for culturally appropriate images and items
I use peer tutors or student-led discussion	I ask students to compare their culture with the culture in Puebla, Mexico and abroad	I elicit student's experiences in pre-reading and pre-listening activities
I use surveys to find out about my students classroom preferences	I make an effort to get to know my student's backgrounds	I provide rubrics and progress reports to students
I encourage students to speak their native languages with their peers	I use mixed language and mixed cultural pairings in group work	
I spend time outside of class learning about the cultures and languages of my students	I have students work independently, selecting their own learning activities	
	I include lessons about anti-immigrant discrimination or bias	
	I supplement the curriculum with lessons about international events	
	I ask for student input when planning lessons and activities	
	I encourage students to use cross-cultural comparisons when analyzing material	

possibility of encouraging students to use their own language in specific course settings. Peer groups to help students are required, as is mentoring. Little is done in terms of asking indigenous students about their classroom preferences. Additionally, it is important to deepen the knowledge of the culture and the context in which the students were raised, so that activities can be designed with a greater degree of significance by incorporating more pertinent elements that they can identify with, giving them a sense of belonging.

The aspects that need to be improved in order to provide better opportunities for academic success and integration of indigenous students include the creation of course materials about the acculturation process, comparing the indigenous students culture to that of Puebla, Mexico, and the rest of the world; supplementing the curriculum with lessons about international events and the local perspective; including lessons about anti-immigrant discrimination or bias; encouraging students to use cross-cultural comparisons when analyzing materials; asking for students input

when planning lessons and activities; creating working groups using mixed language and mixed cultural pairings, and allowing students to work more autonomously deciding their own interests.

FURTHER STUDIES

Numerous opportunities for further research emerge, and comparing the results with those of students from indigenous groups in other regions in the world would be interesting. After documentation on this project started, the *A Bet for the Future* program realized the importance of documenting different experiences that the students had, especially the challenges they faced inside the classroom and how they overcame numerous problems.

Motivation and empowerment are two areas of study that have started to be documented. Different surveys are in progress but the results have not been made available yet. Interest has been attracted towards more understanding on the reasons behind the initial wave of students who dropped out.

Since students who are not minority (or can be considered the dominant culture) participate in the same groups as indigenous students, their opinions about CRT in their classes is also considered valuable, and opens the possibilities of new avenues of research, especially since another minority group is formed by exchange students that come to study at UPAEP from all five continents.

At UPAEP, research is being conducted on the academic programs with the largest number of students coming from *A Bet for the Future* program. The contents of the courses are being reviewed in order to incorporate additional aspects of CRT. This will help determine whether professors are well prepared to use CRT in their courses or if additional training and sensibilization is required.

Another study that might be relevant would consider analyzing the impact of each specific CRT technique to determine which ones are most valuable for indigenous students at UPAEP. This will help develop more effective learning models. In this sense, UPAEP is starting to analyze what universities in other countries are doing with respect to CRT.

Currently, the university is conducting a study to analyze the way in which other universities have introduced CRT in order to identify best practices that can help universities in regions with indigenous populations create better conditions and better opportunities for their students.

CONCLUSION

Most often than not, classrooms in Mexico have not been a space that promotes dialogue, where the knowledge of indigenous people is valued (Campo & García, 2018); there has been a failure to address the inequality of indigenous education, and, that is a shame. If valued, students would be able to learn in more natural culture conditions, making it easier for them to succeed.

Although CRT has provided a fertile ground for indigenous students to make the most out of their courses, the fact that the program itself has been improved and perfected every year cannot be forgotten. Different CRT practices have been introduced in the three distinct stages of the program, including tutoring, emotional support and project development.

Indigenous students face challenges in most educational systems. It is necessary to reduce difficulties by implementing new strategies, such as the CRT, to reduce some of the most visible barriers. Education has proven to be one of the greatest catalysts for indigenous communities to improve their difficult social and economic realities, which is the main objective of the program that has been presented.

Scholarships provide valuable opportunities; but initially dropouts were not uncommon. For some students, the adaptation process and the cultural differences they face created added stress. In an attempt to reduce desertion, it was determined that CRT methods should be used to fully integrate and engage students, giving them significant experiences. Initially, the program focused on providing the economic aspects of schooling, such as tuition, accommodations and the accompaniment program.

A Bet for the Future has become an emblem at UPAEP. The fundamental goal of preparing indigenous students at the university is to promote their own development while fostering a positive impact in the wider community to enable its social progress. UPAEP is highly committed to improving the conditions of these communities in the long run by making higher education accessible, by providing a supportive environment for populations that have been traditionally denied access to this level of education, and also by strengthening the university presence in the indigenous community.

The university has been present in the community, and this is an advantage because it will enable faster and deeper partnership to identify more prospective students, and also to contribute in solving the community's problems. The program has excelled in attracting indigenous students; and, the preparatory courses to gradually introduce students into a new social and academic life away from their homes is currently working well.

It may not be realistic for every teacher to meet Indigenous students' needs based on language, culture and identity, but there are many actions that can be taken to help teachers become more confident and competent in establishing positive relationships with indigenous and foreign students.

Still, there is great concern when it comes to finding the best ways to respond to the students' cultural needs in order to help them develop a sense of belonging to the UPAEP, to make the feel at home, and help them develop greater self-confidence. This will help increase retention.

A culturally responsive teaching model requires four motivational conditions: establishing inclusion, developing attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. These requirements closely relate to the program *A Bet for the Future,* and contribute to the CRT and learning by incorporating cultural heritage to the curriculum, thus creating a bridge between school and home. By December 2018, 47 students had successfully graduated from the program.

The university still has a long way to go. Currently, only 30 professors are teaching using CRT, and this is an institution with a faculty of over 1000 members; but so far it is on the right path. In 2019, the UPAEP was recognized for its vision on CRT and service-learning in the Latin-American Congress of Educational research.

Teachers need to participate actively in improving the educational system so that it becomes inclusive. They have the responsibility to reflect critically on the impact of cultural practices in their classrooms and in society as a whole. Teachers are the direct link between the institution and the students. This places them in a pivotal position to facilitate change. CRT requires a student-focused perspective on classroom instruction. Traditional policies and practices need to be questioned and redefined. By becoming culturally responsive in their practice, teachers work towards social inclusion.

For culturally diverse students, engagement in learning is most likely to occur when they are intrinsically motivated. CRT provides such motivation in a holistic and culturally responsive way to create, plan, and refine teaching activities, lessons, and assessment practices. It is responsibility of those teaching to promote student engagement, monitor their progress and provide feedback in culturally inclusive learning environments.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Business School: A high-level educational institution which students study subjects relating to business and commerce, such as economics, finance and management.

Culturally: Relating to the habits, traditions, and beliefs of a society.

Empower: To give someone official authority or the freedom to do something.

Indigenous: Naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving for another place.

Responsive: Saying or doing something as a reaction to sometime or someone, especially in a quick or positive way.

Student: A person who is learning at a college or university.

Teaching: The job of being a teacher.