



# Culturally Responsive Teaching

A Guide to Evidence-Based  
Practices for Teaching All  
Students Equitably

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## About This Publication

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# Culturally Responsive Teaching

A Guide to Evidence-Based Practices  
for Teaching All Students Equitably

March 2016

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# Introduction

Students in the United States and its territories come from a large and increasing number of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families: diverse students made up 48 percent of the population in 2011, up from 39 percent in 2001. Teachers and school leaders, for the most part, do not reflect that diversity (U.S. Department of Education Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). In 2012, 84 percent of full-time public school teachers were White, 7 percent were Black, 7 percent were Hispanic, and fewer than 2 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander (Aud et al., 2013).

The contrast in the demographic composition of educators and their students is cause for concern because research shows that students' race, ethnicity, and cultural background significantly influence their achievement. (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). There is extensive evidence from achievement test scores, grade promotion rates, graduation rates, and other common indicators of school success that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Bennett et al., 2004; Conchas & Noguera, 2004; Sanders, 2000). Additional factors such as poverty and inadequate training or professional development opportunities for teachers compound this negative impact, as do systemic issues like biased assessment practices and institutional racism.

According to Scott (2000), if the essential intention of education is to positively impact students' lives by equipping them with critical knowledge and skills through culturally relevant, expert practice, then disparities in curriculum and instruction require that school districts shift their priorities and policies. Scott suggests that districts:

- Require each teacher to obtain proper certification, training, and professional development
- Increase teacher motivation to recognize diverse learners' strengths, as well as their needs

- Decrease dependence on packaged instructional materials and increase implementation of strategies and techniques targeted to the needs of specific student groups
- Integrate the use of technology into instructional practice to bridge the generational divide
- Recruit and retain high-quality teachers for schools in rural and remote areas

Addressing the unique needs of students from diverse backgrounds is one of the major challenges facing public education today because many teachers are inadequately prepared with the relevant content knowledge, experience, and training (Au, 2009; Cummins, 2007). Inadequate preparation can create a cultural gap between teachers and students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) that limits the ability of educators to choose effective instructional practices and curricular materials. Research on curriculum and instructional practices has primarily focused on White middle-class students, while virtually ignoring the cultural and linguistic characteristics of diverse learners (Orosco, 2010; Orosco & O'Connor, 2011).

A mandate for change requires that racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students have the opportunity to meet their learning challenges with the strength and relevance found in their own cultural frame of reference. Therefore, teachers must be prepared with a thorough understanding of the specific cultures of the students they teach; how that culture affects student learning behaviors; and how they can change classroom interactions and instruction to embrace the differences.

# Preparing Teachers To Be Culturally Responsive

Because culture strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process, better teacher preparation is a major factor in solving the problems of underachievement. Reasonably, teachers can only be held accountable for student outcomes if they are adequately prepared to be culturally responsive to their students' learning styles and needs.

Seminal studies of culturally responsive teaching, conducted over the course of the past 30–40 years have provided the evidence base for many of the innovative practices developed by Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, and Gloria Ladson-Billings. These “teachers of teachers” developed systems of instructional delivery based on what the research told them about racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. For them, cultural congruity had to be deeply embedded in any teaching practice; therefore, they recommended training teachers in instructional techniques matched to the diverse learning styles of their students. Gay (2002) made the case for preparing teachers with culturally responsive knowledge, attitudes, and skills during preservice education programs to improve the school success of diverse students. Through proper training, teachers learn to bridge the gap between instructional delivery and diverse learning styles and establish continuity between how diverse students learn and communicate and how the school approaches teaching and learning.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) encouraged teacher educators to critically examine their programs and systematically interweave throughout prospective teachers' coursework, learning experiences, and fieldwork the strategies that research has shown better prepares them to work successfully with diverse students. These researchers posited that helping prospective teachers develop the following six characteristics would prepare them to be culturally responsive.

1. **Socio-cultural consciousness:** A teacher's own way of thinking, behaving, and being are influenced by race, ethnicity, social class, and language. Prospective teachers must critically examine their own socio-cultural identities and biases in the context of the inequalities culturally diverse segments of society experience. They must recognize discrimination based on ethnicity, social class, and skin color and inspect and confront any negative attitudes they might have toward diverse student groups.
2. **Attitude:** A teacher's affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds significantly impacts student learning, belief in themselves, and overall academic performance. By respecting cultural differences and using curricular and instructional practices related to the cultures of their students, schools and classrooms become inclusive.
3. **Commitment and skills:** A teacher's role as an agent of change confronts barriers/obstacles to those changes and develops skills for collaboration. As agents of change, teachers assist schools in becoming more equitable over time.
4. **Constructivist views:** A teacher's contention that all students are capable of learning requires building scaffolding between what students already know through their own experiences and what they need to learn. Constructivist teaching promotes critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and the recognition of multiple perspectives.
5. **Knowledge of student's life:** A teacher's learning about a student's past experiences, home and community culture, and world in and out of school helps build relationships by increasing the use of these experiences in the context of teaching and learning.
6. **Culturally responsive teaching:** A teacher's use of strategies that support a constructivist view of knowledge, teaching, and learning assists students in constructing knowledge, building on their personal and cultural strengths, and examining the curriculum from multiple perspectives, thus creating an inclusive classroom environment.

# Effective Teaching Is Culturally Responsive

Researchers at the Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008) concluded that being an effective teacher means more than providing subject-matter instruction or focusing on one measure of student achievement. They found that cultural responsiveness is integral to the “essence” of effective teaching and described five qualities that distinguish effective teachers:

1. **Hold high expectations for all students and help all students learn**, as measured by value-added or other test-based growth measures or by alternative measures
2. **Contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students**, such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade, on-time graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior
3. **Use diverse resources** to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities, monitor student progress formatively, adapt instruction as needed, and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence
4. **Contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity** and civic-mindedness
5. **Collaborate with colleagues, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success**, particularly the success of high-risk students or those with special needs



# Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

Expectations play a critical role in student achievement. Some students are more vulnerable to low expectations because of societal biases and stereotypes associated with their racial and/or ethnic identity. Though educators do not intend to communicate low expectations, there is well-documented evidence that these societal beliefs have a tangible, negative effect on the performance and achievement of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students.

Over time, low expectations not only hinder learning but also negatively affect students' attitudes and motivation, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies. If they are to eliminate persistent disparities in student achievement, every educator must consciously and consistently demonstrate the same specific, observable, and measurable behaviors and practices to all students, regardless of the students' current academic performance (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2010).

Decades of research on the Teacher Expectations Student Achievement (TESA) Interaction Model have identified 27 specific, observable, and measureable teacher behaviors that communicate high expectations. These behaviors provide equitable response opportunities and effective feedback, and help develop caring relationships. The 27 teacher behaviors were found to communicate high expectations to all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, or cultural or linguistic context (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 2002; Montgomery County Public Schools, 2010).

TESA researchers have found that teachers communicate high expectations by:

1. **Welcoming students by name as they enter the classroom.** Making the effort to accurately remember and correctly pronounce each student's name is a gesture of respect of both the student and his or her culture. In many cultures, the giving of names is loaded with symbolic significance, and to mispronounce that name is to diminish it and its bearer (Ladson-Billings, 2009).
2. **Using eye contact with high- and low-achieving students.** To be equitable in the classroom, the teacher needs to be sensitive to the cultural norms and interpretations of even such simple behaviors as making eye contact and the messages this gesture sends about teacher expectations (Cooper, 1979).
3. **Using proximity with high- and low-achieving students equitably.** Although it has been observed that teachers unconsciously favor those student perceived to be most like themselves in race, class, and values, culturally relevant teaching means consciously working to develop commonalities among all students (Ladson-Billings, 2009).
4. **Using body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important.** Nonverbal behavior can be the most immediate part of a teacher's overall reward system, as well as one of the most subtly motivating or discouraging forces available to teachers in their interactions with students. Students almost always notice nonverbal behavior, especially when others are receiving it, while it is often unperceived by the teacher using it (Marzano, 2007).
5. **Arranging the classroom to accommodate discussion.** An inviting classroom uses the arrangement of desks to enhance interpersonal relationships between the teacher and student and among students themselves. Students must be able to relate in a positive way to their peers so that they communicate with one another. This permits a sense of connection and collaboration (Shade, Oberg, & Kelly, 2004).
6. **Ensuring bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.** The lack of relevant and culturally appropriate pictures, posters, and other instructional materials—as well as drab and institutional colors on the walls—creates an environment that is uninviting to learners. The physical environment of schools reflects the expectations that educators have of the capabilities of their students (Nieto, 2000).



7. **Using a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning.** For children of color and families of immigrants, initial assessment of their acceptance in the school community depends on whether or not they see pictures, symbols, or other visual representations that remind them of their homes, communities, and values. An inviting classroom focuses on the use of color, physical arrangement of space, lighting, and sound to attract students to the learning process (Shade et al., 2004).
8. **Learning, using, and displaying some words in students' heritage language.** Cross-cultural literacy awareness benefits both students and teachers in building a community of learners. Students' native literacy and native cultural backgrounds should be considered rich resources instead of obstacles (Schwarzer, Haywood, & Lorenzen, 2003).
9. **Modeling the use of graphic organizers.** Graphic organizers can be used to incorporate student insights and knowledge. Some students respond better to the inclusion of their social iconography, such as music, decals, graffiti, and TV imagery. This is particularly true for students learning English as a second language or those who are more attuned to aural and visual learning styles, rather than to reading and writing. It is precisely those kinds of representations that effective graphic organizers can include (Hill, 2003).
10. **Using class building and team building activities to promote peer support for academic achievement.** Before launching into collaborative learning tasks, students should engage in team-building activities that are designed to foster social cohesiveness. The objective is to create a social-emotional climate conducive to developing a sense of solidarity and intimacy among group members. This enables students to feel comfortable in future group activities that may require them to express personal viewpoints, disagree with others, and reach consensus in an open (nondefensive) fashion (Cuseo, 2000).
11. **Using random response strategies.** Accomplished teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse learners use a variety of approaches that allow students to confront, explore, and understand important and challenging concepts, topics, and issues in meaningful ways. Using random response strategies creates a caring, inclusive, safe, and linguistically and culturally rich community of learning where students take intellectual risks and work both independently and collaboratively (Trumbull & Pachero, 2005).
12. **Using cooperative learning structures.** Much information about different cultural and ethnic heritages cannot be attained through reading books. Only by knowing, working with, and personally interacting with members of diverse groups can students really learn to value diversity, utilize it for creative problem-solving, and develop an ability to work effectively with diverse peers (Johnson & Johnson, 2000).
13. **Structuring heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning.** Because cooperative learning groups encourage positive social interaction among students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, they have great potential to facilitate building cross-ethnic friendships and to reduce racial stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice. When students work cooperatively, they have the opportunity to judge each other on merits rather than stereotypes (McLemore & Romo, 1998).
14. **Using probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer.** Questions that probe should reflect different levels of cognitive complexity; techniques should vary from rephrasing the question, to asking a related question, to giving a hint, clue, or prompt, to using scaffolded questions (Pierce & O'Malley, 1992).
15. **Acknowledging all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions.** Differential treatment has been tied to race. Students of color, especially those who are poor and live in urban areas, bear the brunt of differential teacher behaviors—even receiving praise that is less supportive of student learning. Acknowledgement of all student responses should be affirming, correcting, or probing (Shade et al., 2004).

16. **Seeking multiple perspectives.** Educators need to be explicit in structuring opportunities for students to hear varying perspectives. Validate all perspectives with responses such as: “That’s one idea. Does anyone else have another?” “That was one way to solve the problem. Who did it another way?” or “Who has an alternative view?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).
17. **Using multiple approaches to consistently monitor students’ understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content.** Teachers should strive to have a wide repertoire of ways to assess student learning—ways that will be good matches to students’ learning styles. They also need a variety of ways to teach and to assess how all students think, problem solve, communicate, and work with others (Saphier & Gower, 1997).
18. **Identifying students’ current knowledge before instruction.** A culturally responsive, student-centered curriculum is rich and meaningful because it takes into consideration the experiences, realities, and interests of the students. All lessons must be relevant to the students’ lives. Key to teaching a diverse population is the belief that all students come to school equipped and prepared with basic experiences and fundamental knowledge (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997).
19. **Using students’ real life experiences to connect school learning to students’ lives.** Strengthening student motivation is the major reason to make classroom connections to students’ lives: all learners are much more interested in information that relates to their personal situations. Teachers can recognize the students’ world outside the classroom by posting a poem, quote, joke, song, or picture every day that demonstrates an awareness of and respect for students’ backgrounds. They can also engage students in content-based projects, surveys, free-writing exercises, and storytelling that enable students to directly connect school with their communities (Landsman, 2006).



20. **Using “wait time” to give students time to think before they respond to your question.** A period of silence following a teacher’s question provides students with an uninterrupted period of time to think about what has been asked and to formulate a response. Pausing after the response before affirming, correcting, or probing gives other students time to consider their reactions, responses, and extensions (Stahl, 1994).
21. **Asking students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction.** Teachers solicit and use student feedback to alter and improve their teaching. Individual discussions with students help teachers modify instructional practice to meet student needs by adapting materials, varying cues, changing the sequence of instruction, adjusting timing and transitions from one activity to another, or developing more appropriate expectations (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992).
22. **Providing students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion.** By providing anonymous samples of strong student performances, teachers can effectively communicate to students the criteria for successfully fulfilling a learning goal. Collaboratively examining a variety of successful products with peers and with teacher guidance helps students begin to create a mental model of what success looks like in terms of the learning goal or standard (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).
23. **Giving students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance.** Immediate feedback helps students begin to ask relevant questions about the work, make decisions, and learn to self-evaluate during the process rather than after they have submitted their work for grading. While students are engaged in various stages of completing their assignment, teachers are free to conference individually with students and to work with small groups. During this time, students have the opportunity to learn from each other how to develop and revise text (Cole, 1995).
24. **Providing multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard.** The re-teach and reassess policy creates an environment of learning that promotes effort and persistence. Giving students the opportunity to master a skill over time and with repeated attempts can change their ideas about how and why they succeed in class. If we offer our students the opportunity to try again and really work with them to achieve, their perceptions of how and why they achieve might change from a belief in innate ability to the importance of persistence and effort (Guthrie, 2008).
25. **Explaining and modeling positive self-talk.** When the teacher explains to students the importance of positive self-talk and shares personal examples of how positive self-talk leads to positive outcomes, the students are asked to reconsider the nature of intelligence. They begin to think of their minds as muscles that get strengthened and expanded—becoming smarter with hard work. This diminishes the fear that their academic difficulties reflect an unalterable limitation (Aronson, 2004).
26. **Asking higher order questions equitably of high- and low-achieving students.** Classroom questioning has an extremely important role in equitable classroom practice. Posing questions during lesson instruction is more effective in producing achievement gains than instruction carried out without questioning students. Students will perform better on test items previously asked as recitation questions than on items they have not been exposed to before. Oral questions posed during classroom recitations are more effective in fostering learning than are written questions. Questions focused on student attention to salient elements in the lesson result in better comprehension (Cotton, 1998).
27. **Providing individual help to high- and low-achieving students.** One-on-one meetings are the ultimate confidence builders for students and are especially effective as follow-ups to instruction when students practice a strategy. A teacher’s undivided attention to each child conveys caring about their learning and interest in helping them understand and improve.

# Teacher Skills and Student Success

Other researchers have found evidence of particular, high-quality teaching skills that are successful with all students. Although researchers have used different terms in describing these skills, they have consistently identified the same ones. Figure 1 summarizes

the skills identified by researchers Delpit (2006), Ladson-Billings (1995), and Sleeter (2008) in three seminal studies (as described by Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009).

Figure 1: **Research-based, high-quality skills for teaching all students equitably**

Delpit	Ladson-Billings	Sleeter
See students' brilliance: Do not teach less content to poor, urban children but instead, teach more!	Believe that students are capable of academic success.	Hold high expectations for students' learning, regardless of how they are doing now.
Ensure that all students gain access to "basic skills"—the conventions and strategies that are essential to success in American society.	See teaching pedagogy as art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming.	Engage students academically by building on what they know and what interests them.
Demand critical thinking, regardless of the methodology or instructional program being used.	See yourself as a member of your students' community.	Relate to students' families and communities and regard them in culturally accurate ways.
Provide the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of the competence and worthiness of the children and their families.	See teaching as a way to give back to the community.	Envision students as constructive participants in a multicultural democracy.
Recognize and build on children's strengths.	Believe in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" or pulling knowledge out.	
Use familiar metaphors, analogies, and experiences from the children's world to connect what children already know to school knowledge.	Maintain fluid teacher/student relationships.	
Create a sense of family and caring in the service of academic achievement.	Demonstrate connectedness with all of the students.	
Monitor and assess children's needs, and then address them with a wealth of diverse strategies.	Develop a community of learners.	
Honor and respect the children's home culture.	Encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another.	
Foster a sense of children's connection to community—to something greater than themselves.	Believe knowledge is not static but meant to be shared, recycled, and constructed.	

Source: Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009

To be particularly successful in teaching all students equitably, Ladson-Billings (1995) also emphasized the importance of:

- Believing knowledge must be viewed critically
- Being passionate about knowledge and learning
- Scaffolding, or building bridges, to facilitate learning
- Ensuring that assessment is multifaceted and incorporates multiple forms of excellence

# Teacher Caring and Community Building

A critical component of culturally responsive teaching is creating equitable classroom climates that are equally conducive to learning for all students. Instructional practices are as important as—if not *more* important than—multicultural curriculum designs in implementing culturally responsive teaching. However, culturally responsive instructional practices are not simply technical processes of applying any “best practices.” Teachers need to know how to use *cultural scaffolding* in teaching diverse students to help them use their own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement.

In culturally responsive teaching, the teacher redesigns teaching and learning so that students work with each other and with their teacher *as partners* to improve their achievement. Teachers have to care so much about diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it. This is a very different conception of caring than the often-cited notion of “gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,” which research has shown can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students make their own way and move at their own pace (Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1975).

Culturally responsive caring is *action oriented* in that it demonstrates high expectations and uses imaginative strategies to ensure academic success for racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Culturally responsive caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity. It requires that teachers use their knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of their students. This is “what binds individuals to their society, to their communities, and to each other” (Webb, Wilson, Corbett, & Mordecai, 1993, pp. 33–34).

To build a genuine community of learners, teachers must believe in the intellectual potential of all students and unequivocally accept responsibility to facilitate its realization without ignoring, demeaning, or neglecting students’ ethnic and cultural identities. Academic success for diverse students is built on a base of cultural validation and strength. Some students grow up in cultural environments where the welfare of the group takes precedence over the individual and where individuals are taught to pool their resources to solve problems. It is not that individuals and their needs are

neglected; they are addressed within the context of group functioning. When the group succeeds or falters, so do its individual members.

These ethics and styles of working are quite different from the typical ones used in schools, which give priority to the individual and working independently. Culturally responsive teachers understand how conflicts between different work styles may interfere with academic efforts and outcomes, and they understand how to design more communal learning environments.

The positive benefits of building communities of cooperative learners have been validated by Escalanté and Dirmann (1990) in high school mathematics for Latinos; by Sheets (1995) in high school Spanish language and literature with low-achieving Latinos; by Fullilove and Treisman (1990) in first-year college calculus with African, Latino, and Chinese Americans; and by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) in elementary reading and language arts with Native Hawaiian children.

And, contrary to the tendency in conventional teaching to make different types of learning (cognitive, physical, emotional) discrete, culturally responsive teaching deals with them in concert. Personal, moral, social, political, cultural, and academic knowledge and skills are taught simultaneously. For example, students are taught about their cultural heritages and positive ethnic identity development along with math, science, reading, critical thinking, and social activism. They also are taught about the heritages, cultures, and contributions of other ethnic groups as they learn about their own.

Culturally responsive teachers help students to understand that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone. The positive effects of teaching such knowledge and skills simultaneously for African, Asian, Latino, and Native American students are documented by Escalanté and Dirmann (1990); Foster (1995); Krater, Zeni, and Cason, (1994); Ladson-Billings (1994); Sheets (1995); and Tharp and Gallimore (1988).

# Teachers Cultivating Cross-Cultural Communication

Porter and Samovar (1991) explained that culture influences “what we talk about; how we talk about it; what we see, attend to, or ignore; how we think; and what we think about” (p. 21). Montagu and Watson (1979) added that communication is the “ground of meeting and the foundation of community” (p. vii) among human beings. Without this “meeting” and “community” in the classroom, learning is difficult to accomplish for some students. In fact, determining what ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students know and can do, and also what they are capable of knowing and doing, is often a function of how well teachers can communicate with them. Intellectual thought is culturally encoded (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1985), meaning that students express themselves in ways that are strongly influenced by their cultural socialization. To teach diverse students more effectively, teachers need to decipher their codes of communication by thoroughly understanding the interactive relationships among individuals and groups in the areas of culture, ethnicity, communication, and learning.

Culturally responsive teachers not only understand the linguistic structures of their students but also the contextual factors, cultural nuances, discourse features, logic and rhythm, delivery, vocabulary usage, role relationships of speakers and listeners, intonation, gestures, and body movements. Research reported by Cazden and colleagues (1985), Kochman (1981), and Smitherman (1994) indicated that the cultural markers and nuances embedded in the communicative behaviors of highly ethnically affiliated Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and African Americans are difficult to recognize, understand, accept, and respond to without corresponding cultural knowledge of these ethnic groups. There are several other more specific components of the communication styles of ethnic groups that should be part of the preparation for and practice of culturally responsive teaching.

In mainstream schooling and culture, a passive-receptive style of communication and participation predominates, but many racially and ethnically diverse learners use an active-participatory style. For example, in mainstream communication the speaker plays the active role and the listener is passive.

Students are expected to listen quietly while teachers talk and to talk only at prescribed times when granted permission by the teacher. Their participation is usually solicited by teachers’ asking convergent questions that are posed to specific individuals and require factual, “right answer” responses. This pattern is generally repeated from one student to the next (Goodlad, 1984; Philips, 1983).

In contrast, the communicative styles of most racially and ethnically diverse groups are more active, participatory, dialectic, and multimodal. Speakers expect listeners to engage with them as they speak by providing prompts, feedback, and commentary. The roles of speaker and listener are fluid and interchangeable. Among African Americans, this interactive communicative style is referred to as “call-response” (Baber, 1987; Smitherman, 1977); for Native Hawaiians, it is called “talk-story” (Au, 1993; Au & Kawakami, 1994). Among White American females, the somewhat similar practice of “talking along with the speaker” to show involvement, support, and confirmation is described as “rapport talk” (Tannen, 1990).

“Communal communication styles” can be problematic in the classroom for both teachers and students. Uninformed and unappreciative teachers consider them rude, distractive, and inappropriate and take actions to squelch them. Students who are told not to use them may be, in effect, intellectually silenced. Because they are denied use of their natural ways of talking, their thinking, intellectual engagement, expectations, and academic efforts are diminished.

Ethnic groups engage in tasks and organize their ideas differently. In school, students are taught to be very direct, precise, deductive, and linear in communication. That is, they are expected to stick to the point when talking and writing, avoid using too many embellishments, stay focused on the task, and build a logical case from the evidence to the conclusion, from the parts to the whole. When issues are debated and information is presented, students are expected to be objective, dispassionate, and explicit in reporting carefully sequential facts. The quality of their communication is determined by the clarity of

the descriptive information they provide, the absence of extraneous detail, and how easily the listener (or reader) can follow the logic and relationship of the ideas (Kochman, 1981). Researchers and scholars call this communicative style “topic-centered” (Au, 1993; Michaels 1981, 1984).

Many African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans use a different approach to organizing and transmitting ideas: they use topic chaining in their communication. Their approach is highly contextual, and they devote time to setting a social stage prior to the performance of an academic task. This is accomplished by the speakers’ (or writers’) providing a lot of background information; being passionately and personally involved with the content; using innuendo, symbolism, and metaphor to convey their ideas; weaving many different threads or issues into a single story; and embedding their story with feelings of intensity, advocacy, evaluation, and aesthetics.

There also is the tendency among these diverse ethnic groups to make the work conversational (Au, 1993; Fox, 1994; Kochman, 1981; Smitherman, 1994). To the mainstream teacher, their thinking appears circular and their communication sounds like storytelling. To someone who is unfamiliar with it, this communication style “sounds rambling, disjointed, and as if the speaker never ends a thought before going on to something else” (Gay, 2000, p. 96). These (and other) differences in ethnic communication styles have many implications for culturally responsive teaching. Understanding them is necessary to avoid violating the cultural values of ethnically diverse students in instructional communications and to better assess their intellectual abilities, needs, and competencies. Ethnically diverse students need to learn style and code-shifting skills so that they can communicate in different ways with different people in different settings for different purposes. Competency in multicultural communication is an important goal and component of culturally responsive teaching.



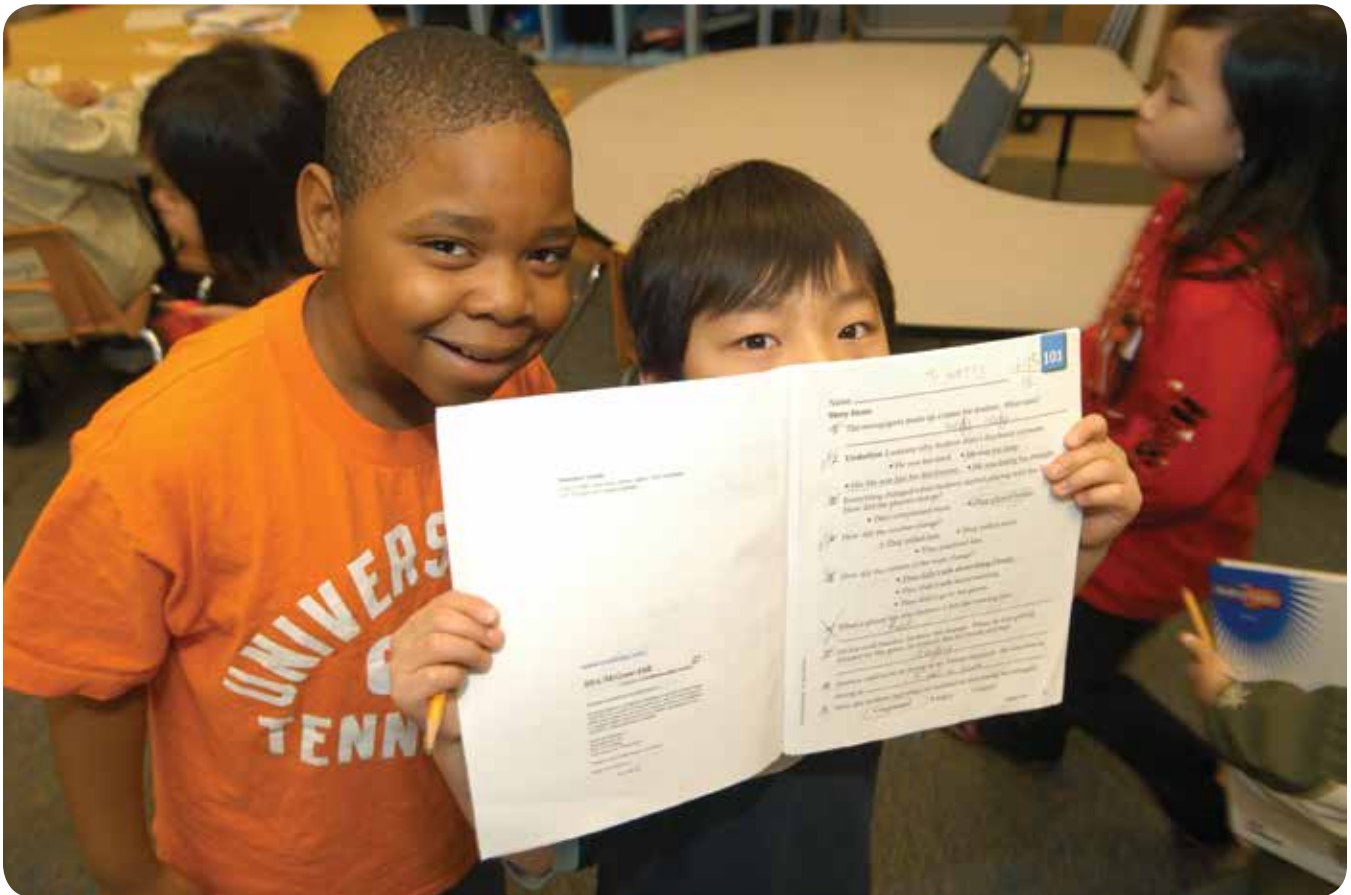
# Considering Cultural Diversity when Designing Instruction

Gay described culturally responsive teaching as the use of diverse students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. Gay's experience shows that when academic knowledge and skills are taught within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2010).

Fostering high expectations for the achievement of all students requires teaching and learning to happen in a "culturally supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement" (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2004). Research bears out that the academic achievement of diverse students improves when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters

(Au & Kawakami, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hollins, 1996; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching deals as much with using multicultural instructional strategies as with adding multicultural content to the curriculum (Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994; King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Pai, 1990; Smith, 1998).

Matching instruction with learning style requires that the teacher's knowledge of cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that diverse groups have different values or express similar values in various ways. Teachers must acquire detailed, research-based information about the cultural particularities of specific groups they teach. There are many teachers and teacher educators who think that their subjects (particularly math and science) are incompatible with culturally responsive teaching practice or that using these practices creates too much of a conceptual





and substantive stretch for their subjects to maintain disciplinary integrity. This is simply not true. There is a place for cultural diversity in every subject taught in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Pre-eminent teacher educators like Gay, Nieto, Freire, and Ladson-Billings have spent years training teachers across content areas to recognize and be responsive to diverse students' needs. Over the course of many years observing teachers in their classrooms, these experts report that teachers who use culturally responsive teaching practices, regardless of the content they are teaching, consistently demonstrate that they:

- value students' cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build on rather than as a barrier to learning;
- build on their students' personal experiences and interests as the basis for instructional connections that facilitate student learning and development;
- apply interactive, collaborative teaching methods, strategies, and ways of interacting that support their students' cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences;
- integrate the interactive, collaborative teaching methods with evidence-based practices.

(Harlin & Souto-Manning, 2009; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Nieto, Bode, Kang, & Raible, 2008; Santamaria, 2009)

Researchers have validated many of the culturally responsive approaches that innovative teachers have implemented to establish cultural matches, intersections, or bridges between curricular content, instructional practice, and student learning style. Innovative teachers recognize that cultural characteristics provide the criteria for determining how instructional strategies should be modified. For example, topic-chaining communication, a circular communication style that omits explanations about the relationships between topics, is very conducive to a storytelling teaching style. Cooperative group learning arrangements and peer coaching fit well with the communal cultural systems of African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Latino groups (Gay, 2000; Spring, 1995).

Autobiographical case studies and fiction can crystallize ethnic identity and affiliation issues across geographic, generational, and temporal boundaries. Motion and movement, music, frequently changing

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tasks and formats, novelty, and dramatic elements in teaching improve the academic performance of African Americans (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Allen & Butler, 1996; Boykin, 1982; Guttentag & Ross, 1972; Hanley, 1999).

Culturally responsive teachers understand that while learning styles explain how individual students engage in the process of learning, they are not the basis for judging students' intellectual ability. Like all cultural phenomena, learning styles are complex, multidimensional, and dynamic, and there is room for individuals to move around within the characteristics of particular learning styles. Students can also be taught to cross learning styles although core structures and specific patterns are discernible in particular groups (Shade, 1989).

# Teachers Recognizing Key Dimensions of Cultural Learning Diversity

Culturally responsive teachers learn to recognize the internal structure of ethnic learning styles, which include at least eight key dimensions (configured differently for various groups):

- Preferred content
- Ways of working through learning tasks
- Techniques for organizing and conveying ideas and thoughts
- Physical and social settings for task performance
- Structural arrangements of work, study, and performance space
- Perceptual stimulation for receiving, processing, and demonstrating comprehension and competence
- Motivations, incentives, and rewards for learning
- Interpersonal interactional styles

(Gay, 2010)

According to Gay (2010, 2013), these dimensions provide different points of entry and emphasis for matching instruction to the learning styles of students from various groups. To respond most effectively to them, teachers need to know how the dimensions are configured for different student groups, as well as the patterns of variance that exist within the configurations. Another powerful way to establish cultural congruity in teaching is by integrating ethnic and cultural diversity into the most fundamental and high-status aspects of the instructional process on a habitual basis. An examination of school curricula and measures of student achievement indicates that the school subjects or skills with the highest stakes and status are math, science, reading, and writing.

Further analysis of teaching behaviors reveals that a high percentage of instructional time is devoted to giving examples, scenarios, and vignettes to demonstrate how information, principles, concepts,



and skills operate in practice. These make up the pedagogical bridges that connect prior knowledge with new knowledge, the known with the unknown, and abstractions with lived realities. Teachers need to develop rich repertoires of multicultural instructional examples to use in teaching diverse students (Gay, 2010).

The process begins with understanding the role and prominence of examples in the instructional process, knowing the cultures and experiences of different ethnic groups, harvesting teaching examples from these critical sources, and learning how to apply multicultural examples in teaching other knowledge and skills—for instance, using illustrations of ethnic architecture, fabric designs, and recipes in teaching geometric principles, mathematical operations, and propositional thought. Another example is using diverse literature in teaching the concept of genre and reading skills such as comprehension, inferential thinking, vocabulary building, and translation (Gay, 2010).

Research indicates that culturally relevant examples have positive effects on the academic achievement of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, and McMillen (1985) and Tharp and Gallimore (1988) demonstrated these effects for Native Hawaiians; Foster (1989), Lee (1993), and Moses and Cobb (2001) for African Americans; García (1999) for Latinos and limited-English speakers; and Lipka (1998) for Alaska Natives.

Lipka and his colleague Mohatt's research and practice using cultural examples to teach math and science to Yup'ik students in Alaska underscore the importance and benefits of these strategies for improving school achievement. They noted that "important connections between an aboriginal system of numbers and measurements and the hunting and gathering context from which it derived can be used as a bridge to the decontextualized abstract system often used in teaching mathematics and science, . . . can demystify how mathematics and science are derived . . . [and] visualize . . . ways in which everyday tasks and knowledge can be a basis for learning in formal schooling" (Lipka, 1998, p. 176).

Demmert and Towner (2003) further defined culturally based education programs for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students as the recognition and use of heritage languages; pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural

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characteristics and adult-child interactions; pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent with the traditional culture, as well as contemporary ways of knowing and learning; curriculum based on traditional culture that places the education of young children in a contemporary context; strong Native community participation in the planning and operation of school activities; and knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community.

# Teachers Creating an Equitable Classroom Climate

Teachers must be intentional about eliminating bias and creating a culturally responsive classroom climate. Each of us has biases that influence how we talk and relate to students and colleagues. Research suggests six strategies that teachers should implement to create an environment in which all children have equitable opportunities to learn (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008; New York University, 2008).

## **Teachers acknowledge their own biases and inequitable actions when they:**

- Participate in professional development on harassment and equity issues.
- Treat others with respect regardless of their race, national origin, sex, or disability.
- Improve their communication skills by listening and adjusting to the communication style of others, continually checking for understanding, respecting differences, and using language that builds trust and positive relationships.
- Remember that differences in communication style can lead to misunderstandings. In some cultures, a “thumb’s up” sign means everything is okay, but in others it is a rude sexual sign.
- Are honest if they are unfamiliar with another culture.
- Pay attention to how others respond to what they do and say. Ask if there are times when others may view their behavior as disrespectful or harassing.
- Do not assume that others enjoy comments about their appearance, hearing sexually or racially oriented jokes, or welcome being touched without their permission. Remember that students may not tell them if they are offended or feel harassed by what they say or do.

## **Teachers make an effort to learn about their students’ cultural backgrounds when they:**

- Plan classroom activities that help students learn more about their cultural backgrounds.
- Include activities such as family history projects, selecting readings about the cultures of students in their classroom.

- Ask families or community members for information about the cultural background of students.
- Plan family nights or cultural events that encourage discussion and learning about others in their school.

## **Teachers examine curriculum and learning materials for bias when they ask:**

- Does the curriculum provide for a balanced study of world cultures?
- Does the curriculum teach students about the contributions of men and women from different cultural backgrounds? Do classroom learning activities promote appreciation for non-European cultures?
- Does the curriculum include information about the past and present experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds? Of both women and men?
- Are issues and perspectives of minority groups included?
- Do textbooks and course materials avoid sexual, racial, and cultural stereotypes?
- Are opportunities to explore the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds included?
- If the curriculum contains biased information or stereotypes, is this pointed out and are students provided with more accurate information?
- Do classroom displays and instructional materials include positive representations of diverse international and domestic cultures?

## **Teachers build caring, cooperative classroom environments when they:**

- Immediately confront any biased or discriminatory behavior in the classroom or school.
- Create a safe, comfortable classroom environment in which students feel comfortable talking about harassment.
- Teach students how to treat each other with respect.

**Teachers build relationships with families and communities when they:**

- Create a representative team of school administrators, teachers, school counselors, parents, and students to guide and implement approaches to prevent harassment.
- Build partnerships with community members, youth organizations, and other service providers.
- Invite local community groups to make presentations and conduct workshops for teachers and students.
- Create and distribute a directory of diverse local consultants throughout the district.
- Develop strong linkages with families and community members. For example, producing a handbook for parents may help reduce concern for their child and build support for your school's harassment prevention program.

**Teachers identify curricular bias by looking for these practices:**

- Invisibility—Overlooking certain groups that implies they are less valuable or important.
- Stereotyping—Limiting the opportunities for a certain group based on rigid perceptions of their ability or potential.
- Imbalance or selectivity—Providing one viewpoint or selective information that leads to misinterpretation or an incomplete understanding of an event, situation, or group of people.
- Fragmentation or isolation—Placing information about people of color, women, or other protected groups in a box or chapter that is separate from the main body of text.
- Linguistic bias—Using masculine words such as he and mankind exclusively, or using patronizing terms such as needy or less fortunate to describe a group of people.



# Conclusion

The best practices for culturally responsive teaching described in this paper are based on research findings, theoretical claims, practical experiences, and personal stories of educators researching and working with underachieving African American, Asian, Latino, and Native American students. A wide variety of techniques for incorporating culturally diverse contributions, experiences, and perspectives into classroom teaching can be extracted from the work of scholars like Gay, Nieto, Freire, and Ladson-Billings.

What all the models and incentives have in common are the tried and true practices that research has shown to be effective with all students.

Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) synthesized the research into a list of best practices that effective culturally responsive teachers use to support their students. The researchers organized the best practices into the following categories:

- Modeling, scaffolding, and clarification of challenging curriculum
- Using student strengths as starting points and building on their funds of knowledge
- Investing in and taking personal responsibility for students' success
- Creating and nurturing cooperative environments
- Having high behavioral expectations
- Reshaping the prescribed curriculum
- Encouraging relationships among schools and communities
- Promoting critical literacy
- Engaging students in social justice work
- Making explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society
- Sharing power in the classroom

Researchers have also recommended specific activities as culturally responsive best practices for teaching racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Synthesized from the work of Banks and Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999, these specific activities include:

**Acknowledge students' differences as well as their commonalities.** While it is important for teachers to note the shared values and practices of their students, it is equally incumbent upon teachers to recognize the individual differences of students. Certainly, culture and language may contribute to behaviors and attitudes exhibited by students. For example, some cultures forbid children to engage in direct eye contact with adults; thus, when these children refuse to look at the teacher, they are not being defiant but practicing their culture. However, for teachers to ascribe particular characteristics to a student solely because of their ethnic or racial group demonstrates just as much prejudice as expecting all students to conform to mainstream cultural practices. Moreover, because each student is unique, learning needs will be different. Recognizing these distinctions enhances the ability of the teacher to address the individual needs of the students. The key is to respond to each student based on their identified strengths and weaknesses, and not on preconceived notions about the student's group affiliation.

**Validate students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.** Teachers should, to the extent possible, use textbooks, design bulletin boards, and implement classroom activities that are culturally supportive of their students. When the school-assigned textbooks and other instructional materials perpetuate stereotypes (e.g., African Americans portrayed as athletes) or fail to adequately represent diverse groups (e.g., books contain no images or perspectives of Native Americans, Latinos, or other non-European individuals), teachers must supplement instruction with resources rich in diversity and sensitive in their portrayal of people from different backgrounds. By using images and practices familiar to students, teachers can capitalize on the strengths students bring to school. The more students experience familiar practices in instruction and are allowed to think differently, the more they feel included and the higher their probability of success. For example, in some communities, members work together in a supportive manner to accomplish many tasks in their daily lives. Reflecting these home practices in an instructional approach, such as the use of cooperative learning (Putnam, 1998), increases the likelihood of success for these students.

**Educate students about the diversity of the world around them.** As the “village” in which students live becomes more global, they are challenged to interact with people from various backgrounds. When students are ignorant about the differences in other groups, there is a greater probability of conflicts. Particularly in the classroom where student diversity is increasing, students need skills to relate to each other positively, regardless of cultural and linguistic differences. Teachers need to provide students with learning opportunities (e.g., have students interview individuals from other cultures; link students to email pals from other communities and cultures) so that they might become more culturally knowledgeable and competent when encountering others who are different. Furthermore, students will develop an appreciation for other groups when they learn of the contributions of different peoples to the advancement of the human race. A word of caution, this requires teachers to conduct active research and planning so that they don’t inadvertently reinforce cultural stereotypes.

**Promote equity and mutual respect among students.** In a classroom of diverse cultures, languages, and abilities, it is imperative that all students feel fairly treated and respected. When students are subjected to unfair discrimination because of their differences, they can feel unworthy, frustrated, or angry, which often results in low achievement. Teachers need to establish and maintain standards of behavior that require respectful treatment of all in the classroom. Teachers can be role models, demonstrating fairness and reminding students that difference is normal. Further, teachers need to monitor what types of behaviors and communication styles are rewarded and praised. Oftentimes these behaviors and ways of communicating are aligned with cultural practices. They must take care not to penalize a student’s behavior just because of a cultural difference.

**Assess students’ ability and achievement validly.** The assessment of students’ abilities and achievement must be as accurate and complete as possible for effective instructional programming to occur. This can only be accomplished when the assessment instruments and procedures are valid for the population being assessed. In today’s schools, students have different cultures and languages that might predispose them to different communication practices and even different test-taking skills. Hence,

assessment instruments should be varied and suited to the population being tested. When this does not occur, invalid judgments about students’ abilities or achievement are likely to result. Further, tests that are not sensitive to students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds will often merely indicate what the students don’t know (about the mainstream culture and language) and very little about what they do know. Thus, the opportunity to build on what students know is lost.

**Foster a positive interrelationship among students, their families, the community, and school.** When students come to school they bring knowledge shaped by their families and community; they return home with new knowledge fostered by the school and its practitioners. Students’ performance in school will likely be affected by the ability of the teacher to negotiate this home-community-school relationship effectively. When teachers tap into the resources of the community by inviting parents and other community members into the classroom as respected partners in the teaching-learning process, this interrelationship is positively reinforced. To further strengthen their bond with students and the community, teachers might even participate



in community events where possible. Moreover, everyone benefits when there is evidence of mutual respect and value for the contributions all can make to educate the whole student.

**Motivate students to become active participants in their learning.** Culturally responsive teachers encourage students to become active learners who regulate their own learning through reflection and evaluation. Students who are actively engaged in their own learning ask questions rather than accept information uncritically. Students who self-regulate the development of their knowledge set goals, evaluate their own performance, utilize feedback, and tailor their learning strategies. By examining their learning patterns, these students may come to realize that reviewing materials with visual aids enhances retention, or that studying with a partner helps them process information better. It is important, therefore, that teachers structure a classroom environment conducive to inquiry-based learning that allows students to pose questions to themselves, to each other, and to the teacher.

**Encourage students to think critically.** A major goal of teaching is to help students become independent thinkers so that they might learn to make responsible decisions. Critical thinking requires students to analyze (i.e., examine constituent parts or elements) and synthesize (i.e., collect and summarize) information and to view situations from multiple perspectives. When teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in this kind of reasoning, students learn how to think “outside the box.” More important, these students learn to think for themselves. Students are less likely to accept stereotypes and to formulate opinions based on ignorance. To foster these skills, teachers might devise “what if” scenarios, requiring students to think about specific situations from different viewpoints.

**Challenge students to strive for excellence as defined by their potential.** All students have the potential to learn, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background, ability or disability. Many students often stop trying because of a history of failure. Others, disenchanted with a low-level or irrelevant curriculum, work just enough to get by. Teachers have a responsibility to continually motivate all students by reminding them that they are capable and by providing them with a challenging and meaningful curriculum. Low teacher expectations will yield low student performance. It is important to

engage students in activities that demonstrate how much they can learn when provided with appropriate assistance. As students progress, teachers need to continually “raise the bar,” giving students just the right amount of assistance to take them one step higher, thereby helping students strive to fulfill their potential.

Assist students in becoming socially and politically conscious. Teachers must prepare students to participate meaningfully and responsibly not only in the classroom but also in society. Meaningful and responsible participation requires everyone to critically examine societal policies and practices and to work to correct injustices. Students must be taught that if the world is to be a better place where everyone is treated fairly, then they have to work to make it so. This is their responsibility as citizens of their country and inhabitants of the earth. To foster this consciousness, teachers might have students write group or individual letters to politicians and newspaper editors voicing their concerns about specific social issues. Students might also participate in food or clothing drives to help people who are less fortunate.

## Limitations

Although the literature has identified what culturally responsive practices look like, there is a lack of experimental and quasi-experimental research that ties culturally responsive practices to student outcomes (see Demmert & Towner, 2003; Savage et al., 2011). There are some programs, however, that suggest culturally responsive practices have an impact. One example cited by Demmert and Towner (2003) is the Kamehameha Early Childhood Education Program and research from the Kamehameha Schools (Hawaii). Other nonexperimental research shows positive outcomes when culturally responsive practices are used (see, for example, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative). The lack of experimental studies points more to the difficulty in conducting such studies in public schools than to the validity of culturally responsive practices.



# Appendix A: Educational Equity

*The goal of equitable education is not to help students learn to adapt to the dominant culture of the school. Instead, the goal should be to help students develop a positive self-image and to learn how to embrace differences in others (Ladson-Billings, 1995).*

Equity is the social, academic, and legal responsibility of every school. Equitable school practices afford all students the opportunity to achieve educational excellence. Court rulings mandate that the needs and rights of every student must be accommodated, yet persistent problems of bias, prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, harassment, and complacency still bring inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes. Providing an equitable educational experience for all children means recognizing and addressing inequitable power structures; recognizing and optimizing the learning style of each child; adapting teaching strategies to meet differing learning needs; and maximizing the strengths that each student brings to the classroom because of the differences in student socioeconomic circumstances, gender, language, culture, and race.

Besides focusing on matters of culture and identity, educators must address the deeply ingrained inequities of today's schools by asking themselves profoundly troubling questions related to equity, access, and social justice. These questions often go unanswered or even unasked but the answers tell us a great deal about what we value because the questions examine the sociopolitical context of education and school policies and practices. Who is taking calculus and other academically challenging courses? Are programs for students who are bilingual or in special education placed in the basement or in classrooms farthest away from the school entrance? Who is teaching the children; for example, are highly effective teachers teaching children in low-income districts? How much are children worth: Do we value some children over others? Until we confront these broader issues and do something about them, we will only be partially successful in educating young people for the challenging future (Nieto, 2000).

The classroom teacher has the primary responsibility of providing each student with an opportunity to learn to their fullest potential. A skilled teacher accomplishes this by teaching each student how to learn and pursue lifelong learning, apply what they learn to acquire greater awareness of themselves and others, and develop attitudes and skills that make them responsible and contributing citizens. A culturally responsive teacher creates a supportive, responsive, and enriched learning environment that allows every student to feel comfortable examining their attitudes and sharing their ideas.

The instructional dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. When the tools of instruction (i.e., books, teaching methods, and activities) are incompatible with—or worse, marginalize—the students' cultural experiences, there is likely a disconnection from school (Irvine, 2001). For some students this rejection of school may



take the form of simply underachieving; for others, rejection could range from not performing at all to dropping out of school completely.

Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes and uses the students' culture and language in instruction, and ultimately respects the students' personal and community identities. Using a constructivist instructional approach to learning encourages learners to construct knowledge using their strengths, both personal and cultural. It emphasizes the unique strengths of each learner and contends that each student has the capacity to succeed in scholastic endeavors.

The Region X Equity Assistance Center identifies seven key components that are essential to educational equity and effective school practices. These are:

1. **Access:** Ensure each student has an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of the educational process, including learning facilities, resources, and extracurricular and curricular programs.
2. **Instruction:** Use instructional practices that promote positive images of diverse groups.
3. **Materials:** Review textbooks, audiovisuals, and other materials to minimize bias in content, graphics, pictures, and language.
4. **Assessment:** Consider differences in students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds when assessing students and align culturally responsive assessment results with school curricula, instruction, and systemic improvement goals.
5. **Interactions:** Adjust the ways you relate to students to ensure that you respect their cultural backgrounds.
6. **Attitudes:** Examine and acknowledge your own biases or prejudices that may be unintentional but could result in treating students differently because of their race, sex, ability, ethnicity, or other factors.
7. **Language:** Monitor language for subtle or overt biases that can create stereotypes or prejudicial attitudes.



# Appendix B: Considerations Beyond the Classroom

## School Culture

The National School Climate Council defines school climate as “the quality and character of school life” that is based on “patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.” Key aspects of a positive school climate include safety (social, emotional, and physical), respect, and engagement. For a culturally responsive school climate, respecting and valuing students’ home culture is key, as well as fully integrating students’ culture and language into the curriculum (Klump & McNeir, 2005).

Two important equity issues involving school climate are discipline disparity and harassment/bullying. According to a 2012 report by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students are disciplined more often than their White classmates “who commit similar infractions and who have similar discipline histories” (p. 29). Racial disparities in school discipline also exist in Northwest states, but the pattern of disparity varies. For example, Montana and Idaho were shown to have the smallest suspension gap between African American and White students, but were among eight states in the nation with the highest suspension rates for Native American students (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion for students of color result in a substantial loss of instructional time. A summary of the literature (Nishioka, 2012) discusses school or classroom characteristics that are associated with lower suspension rates for students of color. Leaders of the U.S. Department of Education (2014a, 2014b) have issued new guidance on how school leaders can ensure that discipline policies are drafted and applied in a manner that does not discriminate against racial or ethnic groups.

## Family Involvement and Engagement

Decades of research consistently links family involvement and engagement to higher student achievement, better attitudes toward school, lower dropout rates, and increased community support (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). Despite these findings, schools have struggled to engage effectively with diverse families, an issue that speaks more to the mismatch between school and home cultures than to the families’ interest in being involved. If schools want to engage with diverse families successfully, they need to reevaluate traditional models of engagement that are beyond fundraising and newsletters and include families in the ways they wish to be involved (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Ferguson, 2008).

A literature review by SEDL (Ferguson, 2008) found several crosscutting practices that schools should do to foster school-family connections:

- Create a welcoming environment that fosters family-school relationships and transcends context, culture, and language
- Identify misconceptions that teachers and families hold about the motivation, practices, or beliefs of each other that lead to mistrust
- Direct resources and programmatic efforts to help families adopt effective strategies to support student learning
- Understand the effect of home context on student performance, including home culture, parenting practices, home crises, or significant events
- Create structures—policy, leadership, procedures, processes, and aligned resources—that encourage family involvement
- Understand the effect that beliefs, self-efficacy, knowledge, perceived abilities, and previous experience have on the roles families create and use to support their children’s education

Ultimately, for culturally responsive involvement, schools need to consider families as partners in their children’s education. For this to occur, the partnership needs to be built on a foundation of mutual respect and trust.

## District Funding

Data on district funding across the country have confirmed that high-poverty schools receive less money than more affluent schools within the same district and across districts (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Hall & Ushomirsky, 2010; U.S. Department of Education Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). Although research is not conclusive about the correlation between funding disparities and student achievement, there is “broad agreement about the clear need for additional resources to deliver rigorous academic standards to students living in high-poverty districts” (U.S. Department of Education Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013, p. 18). School and district leaders need to understand how to allocate resources to meet the most pressing needs of their district. An ECS Education Leadership Policy Toolkit (Anthes et al., n.d.) provides some guidelines for doing this.

Lack of access to effective teachers and of high-quality curriculum and coursework are two ways resources are distributed inequitably. For example, data from a biennial survey of 7,000 districts with 72,000 schools showed that 3,000 of these schools didn’t offer Algebra II classes. Distribution of effective teachers is another major issue. Schools that primarily serve Black students are twice as likely to have teachers with only one or two years of experience, as compared with schools in the same district with mostly White students. This impacts student achievement as indicated in a recent brief from the Institute of Education Sciences (Max & Glazerman, 2014). The brief analyzed three studies and found that on average, disadvantaged students receive less effective teaching in a given year than nondisadvantaged students. This average disparity in teaching effectiveness “was equivalent to about four weeks of learning for reading and two weeks for math” (p. 1).



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