

56

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

MICHAEL VAVRUS

Evergreen State College

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an educational reform that strives to increase the engagement and motivation of students of color who historically have been both unsuccessful academically and socially alienated from their public schools. Specifically, culturally responsive teaching acknowledges and infuses the culture of such students into the school curriculum and makes meaningful connections with community cultures. Culturally responsive teaching is designed to help empower children and youth by using meaningful cultural connections to convey academic and social knowledge and attitudes.

This chapter presents an introductory overview of CRT, also commonly referred to as *culturally relevant* or *culturally congruent* teaching. Historical and theoretical roots of CRT are discussed. Specific knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions are examined, followed by a discussion of generic applications of CRT and future directions for CRT. The chapter concludes with bibliographic references and suggestions for further readings.

Introduction to CRT

CRT is a direct response to concern over an academic achievement differential and high school dropout rates based on race, socioeconomic class, and level of English-language ability. Demographically, this academic achievement gap is generally evidenced between (1) White

economically advantaged students and (2) students of color, immigrant children, and students from lower socioeconomic families. Examined from a school reform perspective, CRT is a concept that signals a need to expand the customary professional knowledge base for teachers in order to close this achievement gap.

CRT is best understood as a response to traditional curricular and instructional methods that have often been ineffective for students of color, immigrant children, and students from lower socioeconomic families. CRT calls attention to schooling norms where White middle-class values and expectations are privileged while other cultural, racial, and economic histories and community backgrounds are overlooked or degenerated. In contrast to assimilationist teaching, CRT values and incorporates as appropriate a student's culture into instruction. In this regard, CRT is not only interested in providing mainstream knowledge through different techniques, but it also involves transforming the actual perspectives, knowledge base, and approaches of a conventional classroom's curriculum and instruction.

As the nation's student body continues to grow more culturally and racially diverse, the demographic composition of teachers remains extremely homogenous racially with nearly 90% of all teachers identifying themselves as White. CRT recognizes that the cultural identity of most teachers is significantly different than their increasingly diverse student populations. The educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1921–1997) reminds educators that

public education is a form of cultural expression, which left unexamined by classroom teachers, can create a disconnect for historically marginalized students. Hence, CRT provides support to the cultural identities of struggling students while striving simultaneously to raise academic achievement.

CRT works to build an inclusive and welcoming classroom and school environments that can create culturally appropriate approaches to raising academic expectations for all students. This involves teachers proactively using cultural knowledge and experiences of diverse students to establish a caring school climate. The purpose is to make learning more culturally relevant and effective for this particular population of students. In this way, CRT holds the potential to validate and affirm the cultural frames of references of all students as a means to help students attain their academic goals.

CRT is a student-centered strategy that embraces a learning community model for the organization of a classroom. CRT incorporates into classroom teaching and school policies and practices the cultural knowledge and assets of historically marginalized students and their communities and families. This approach rests on an equity pedagogy designed to rectify educational conditions that have fallen short of facilitating the learning of many students from racially, culturally, and economically diverse groups. As an educational reform, CRT represents a growing shift away from equating student “seat time” in a classroom with learning and to evaluating teacher performance on the basis of student engagement and gains in academic learning.

A CRT goal is to actively engage all students in learning, a fundamental element of effective teaching. CRT recognizes that teacher effectiveness decreases when instruction is primarily teacher centered with an absence of student and community voices. CRT conceptualizes pedagogy as a two-way communicative process designed to decrease student passivity by placing student involvement at the center of teaching and learning. Rather than teachers defining their roles as just the transmitters of information, CRT calls on teachers to help students be active participants in the production and acquisition of knowledge. This requires teachers to acknowledge the conceptual and cultural resources or assets that culturally different students bring to their schools and then to affirm the backgrounds of all students. Without this acknowledgment and affirmation, teachers may be unable to utilize the background knowledge and experiences that students bring to their learning environments.

The National Research Council’s Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education notes that teachers who are aware of the relationship between student learning and cultural variations in communications are apt to enhance necessary supports for the development of children and youth. Learning stems from a complex relationship among social, biological, and emotional elements in which intersections with an individual’s cultural orientation must

be taken into consideration. CRT helps in this developmentally appropriate learning process by making connections for students between schooling norms and the familiarity of home and cultural background. To reach this objective, CRT works to transform traditional educational norms of practice so that disparity is reduced between the cultural lives of students and their experiences with public schooling. Ultimately, it is the interaction between a teacher and a student that becomes a key learning site that can determine the degree of success for culturally diverse children and youth in public schools. For CRT, this involves purposefully incorporating aspects of the cultural perspectives of this targeted population into the everyday practices and instructional activities of the classroom. In this way a school can use multicultural frames of reference to help determine its policies and practices.

For effective CRT, teachers would need to expand and apply their multicultural knowledge, skills, and dispositions so that opportunities for student gains in academic achievement and a willingness to complete public school are improved. Preservice and inservice teaching education is the primary avenue by which teachers can learn how to create conditions of cultural expression that are more congruent with the backgrounds of their culturally diverse students and their families. Through CRT preparation, educators can better grasp how student cultural backgrounds affect learning and student development. This can lead to a multicultural commitment on behalf of educators, a professional disposition that is widely recognized as a foundational attitudinal component for the successful development of CRT.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations

CRT developed out of tensions within a society that aspires to unified democratic ideals and goals while being demographically composed of a culturally and linguistically diverse multicultural population. The following section addresses CRT in a historical and democratic context specific to the United States. The emerging recognition of the costs of marginalizing students of color in the educational process is examined. CRT is further discussed in relation to multicultural education and critical pedagogy. The final section concludes with a presentation of the tensions around the concept of culture and its subsequent implications for CRT.

Historical Foundations

Amidst the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared separate schools for Black and White students unconstitutional, and President Lyndon Johnson’s signing into law the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which ended legalized Jim Crow racial segregation in public facilities and housing, public awareness was growing about the cultural discontinuity for

African American children and other students of color with mainstream public schools. Whereas some educators and policy makers described these differences as cultural deficits or disadvantages on the part of students of color and their families, educational reformers influenced by the aims of the civil rights movement turned their attention to what they identified as deficiencies in the structure and curriculum of public schools. These civil rights activists contended that public schooling skewed advantage toward White middle-class students and ignored or punished the cultural orientations of students of color.

The civil rights movement helped to usher in the concepts and approaches of the modern reform movement of multicultural education. During the past 35 years, the multicultural education reform movement has advocated for a deeper understanding of the prospects to transform traditional schools into ones with a more democratic, inclusive, and civic face. Multicultural educators have consistently stressed the need for teachers to expand their cultural competence in relation to their own dispositions, knowledge base, and performance skills. Imbedded within this expectation is a desire to have a teaching force with a deeper understanding of the relationship of the school curriculum to a pluralistic society with particular attention to the needs of students of color. The legacy of the civil rights movement highlighted the need for a teaching force that can understand and interact effectively with diverse cultural groups outside the standard school boundaries and is able to provide curricular opportunities reflective of this diversity within schools.

CRT developed out of both the social cauldron of the civil rights movement and multicultural education reform efforts to expand democratic opportunities for all students and their families. Emerging conceptually in the 1980s, CRT came of age during the 1990s in an effort to meet the multicultural goal to have teachers who hold the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions that are sensitive and responsive to the conditions of people historically placed on the margins of society's political and economic activities. Nevertheless, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, students of color continued to constitute disproportionately high percentages among the estimated 1.2 million students who drop out of high school every year. Currently in the United States, approximately 68% of those who begin ninth grade graduate at the end of what would be their twelfth grade. Furthermore, for African American, Native American Indians, and Latino students, graduation rates hover around 50%, whereas for males in those groups the figure ranges from 43 to 48%. Researchers have found that by the age of 8, disparities between the cultural values and patterns of communication of the home and the school can diminish the desire of young people to learn and to believe in their own capacity to learn. Some students come to see schooling as detrimental to their own language, culture, and identity. In this historical and contemporary context CRT is looked to as a potential solution to this seemingly entrenched racialized differential.

Democratic Foundations

Recent court decisions point to the expectation that an adequate education should include the preparation of economically productive citizens who can actively participate in a democratic society. These decisions find that an adequate education is constitutionally defined in relation to access and opportunity for learning. Like these court cases, the preeminent educational philosopher and practitioner John Dewey (1859–1952) had located the purpose of schooling in the larger context of a democratic society. He conceived of a democratic community founded upon goodwill that can result when individuals empathetically see across their self-interests and biases—be they cultural or racial—and work toward common learnings and understandings. In this context, Dewey warned against one group acting under the guise of benevolence by dictating to others what was in their best interest. Similar to Dewey, CRT literature promotes honoring and incorporating multiple cultural perspectives rather than defaulting to dominant monocultural schooling norms of Euro-Americanism.

Democratic Citizenry

CRT is representative of both Dewey's democratic ideal and a manifestation of the schooling goal to educate young people to be informed and active democratic citizens. CRT strives to enact the Deweyian concept of democratic goodwill by teaching across and to significant cultural differences. Like contemporary CRT theorists and practitioners, Dewey chastised traditional schooling arrangements that dismiss the importance of an individual's relationship to the conditions of teaching and learning. To create a learning experience, Dewey contended that educators should account for how learning environments positively interact with the needs, abilities, and aspirations of individual students. Because he saw education as fundamentally a social process, Dewey recognized that personal experiences of students must be incorporated into the curriculum for learning to have a lasting effect. From a Deweyian standpoint, CRT as a learner-centered pedagogy acknowledges the importance of student's prior and current experiences for the long-range goal of the development of citizenship competencies.

Low-Status Students

A democratic goal of CRT is to close the disparity of academic and social opportunities observed primarily between students of color and White students. Prominent educational researcher Linda Darling-Hammond observes that structures of inequality in public education as evidenced in the distribution of funding, qualified teachers, courses, and instructional materials have been a part of U.S. history since the founding era. Research indicates that teachers need to recognize this condition of inequities in order to begin closing the achievement gap for those

students habitually assigned “low status” and inferior academic competence. The Learning First Alliance finds that when schools support the academic progress of students, their engagement with school increases. Low-status students, according to researchers, are among those who lack opportunities to receive the equitable benefits of pedagogical approaches designed to help students acquire meaningful and engaging academic content that can help them meet school district and state learning standards, stay in school through graduation, and develop into active democratic citizens.

Low-status students include individuals whose academic rights have been historically marginalized by institutions and people in privileged positions. This discrimination continues to be experienced by many students of color, immigrant children, and students from low-income families. Based on her extensive research, Elizabeth Cohen found that from a democratic perspective, low-status students working, for example, in small learning groups often are limited in their participation and have their ideas disregarded by other students. When low-status/historically marginalized students become disengaged in learning, teachers often see this as a discipline problem rather than a status problem that needs teacher intervention and support in order that such students can demonstrate academic competence. It is within this democratic context to help all students that CRT is situated.

Multicultural Education Foundations

CRT is an expression of multicultural education. Through multicultural educational approaches a culturally responsive teacher is theorized as contributing to the elimination of models of cultural deficiency by attending to the learning needs of low-status students with the expressed purpose to educate citizen-students who work to the ideals of a democracy. To varying degrees, CRT is viewed as an enactment of the reform goals and dimensions of multicultural education as articulated by James Banks.

Banks theorized a multidimensional concept of equity and schooling with five interactive dimensions of multicultural education. For Banks, each enacted multicultural dimension by culturally responsive teachers holds the theoretical potential to meet the broad goal to develop an educated democratic citizenry. He conceptualized the multicultural dimension *content integration* as an instructional approach where a culturally responsive teacher presents subject matter content from a variety of cultural perspectives. The dimension *knowledge construction* is when culturally responsive teachers can reveal to students how subject matter is constructed from particular racial and social class perspectives in contrast to dominant models that privilege Euro-American knowledge bases over those from culturally different groups. *Prejudicial discrimination reduction* entails for the culturally responsive teacher creating school and classroom opportunities for students to

learn to develop more democratic attitudes and behaviors. The *equity pedagogy* dimension finds a culturally responsive teacher focusing not only on equality of learning opportunities but also consciously implementing strategies that assist those culturally diverse students who struggle academically. The final dimension, an *empowering school culture and social structure*, calls on the culturally responsive teacher to support efforts to restructure schools organizationally and culturally in order to increase for all students educational equity and cultural affirmations.

Critical Pedagogy Foundations

The concept of pedagogy in its contemporary usage is a perspective that envisions effective teaching as a process rather than a set of discrete techniques. Congruent with CRT, pedagogy as currently defined situates effective teaching more as two-way communication between teachers and students in contrast to the direct transmission of information to students by teachers. A teacher, then, practices approaches to teaching and learning that build relationships with and among students and focuses ultimately on how and to what extent students are learning. This definition of pedagogy mirrors research that finds achievement improves through active student participation in the learning process.

More specifically for CRT, *critical pedagogy* offers ways to look at teaching and learning that can bring to the forefront such concepts as ideology, hegemony, resistance, power, knowledge construction, class, cultural politics, and emancipatory actions. The underlying concepts of critical pedagogy are theorized as necessary for teachers and their students to understand seemingly intractable conditions of social and educational inequities. CRT uses a critical pedagogy philosophical orientation to differing degrees when conceiving and implementing curriculum and instruction.

Identifying Dominant Practices

Unraveling issues of political dominance and oppression is a task that critical pedagogy attempts to undertake. Such work necessitates a knowledge base that analyzes how and why a dominant ideology supports a particular kind of political and economic arrangement that directly affects public school goals, policies, and practices in ways that can undermine the academic achievement of students of color. CRT theorists and practitioners find critical pedagogy as an approach where culturally responsive teachers can acquire a knowledge base that helps explain the existence of inequalities that can negatively affect the academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Freire noted that when inexperienced teachers from mainstream cultures find themselves working with culturally different students, students’ language, values, and behaviors may be so different from their teachers’ that the culture of those students may be deemed by teachers as strange and

dangerous. Advocates for CRT contend that culturally responsive teachers must not retreat from such differences but should become themselves students of these differences as a means to know and help each of their students socially and academically.

Praxis

The concept of praxis has direct theoretical relevance to critical pedagogy and CRT. Freire (1970) explained that the discovery of oppressive conditions “cannot be purely intellectual but must involve *action*; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include *serious reflection*: only then will it be a praxis” (p. 52, emphasis added). When applied to teaching, praxis requires teachers to alter traditional norms of teaching and learning. Freire postulated that it is necessary to reduce the perceived distance and contradictions between students and teachers in order that both groups can share collaboratively in the teaching and learning process. Hence, praxis requires culturally responsive teachers to become a learner along with their students. At a minimum, this can involve culturally responsive teachers learning with and from their students about various cultural communities and backgrounds from which students come. Thus, the idea of praxis reminds culturally responsive teachers that it is not enough to only identify unequal, racist, and undemocratic situations. By means of a pedagogy that is critical and imbedded with the concept of praxis, culturally responsive teachers are theoretically expected to work with their culturally diverse students and communities to help overcome inequities that may exist under mainstream arrangements of schooling.

Cultural Complexities

The concept of culture is complex, and efforts to narrow its meaning can have negative implications for student learning under CRT. Multicultural educator Sonia Nieto (2000) defines culture as “the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion” (p. 138). Culture defined as such is not a static entity that a culturally responsive teacher can easily identify because culture is interactive, affects a person’s life, and is continually changing.

Cultural tensions underlie the emergence of CRT. Debates exist among scholars and practitioners who approach the racialized achievement gap as a function of cultural deficiencies. Others contend that the academic achievement differential is based on a lack of acknowledgment of the cultural assets held by culturally different students. This debate has led to an examination of the theoretical concept of learning styles as a means to better understand the learning needs of all students. The following sections describe these varying perspectives and their relationship to CRT.

Cultural Deficits/Differences/Assets

At various points throughout U.S. history, population groups who were not of Anglo- or Western European origins have been considered to be culturally deficient, disadvantaged, or deprived. The cultural deficiency model that was articulated in the 1960s and cyclically reemerges over time has led, CRT scholars contend, to discriminatory schooling conditions for students of color and those from low-income families. The cultural deficiency perspective assumes that children and youth who are culturally different from mainstream society need an education that assimilates them into dominant norms and behaviors and away from the cultures of their families and communities. From this point of view, minority students are constructed as culturally disadvantaged by presumed deficits located within their cultural histories, beliefs, and conduct. Theorists who support a cultural deficiency standard tend to blame culturally different groups for their lack of economic and political gains and believe that a democracy must have a unified culture that is built on Anglo-European values.

Theorists countered the monoculturalist’s cultural deficiency model by emphasizing cultural and ethnic differences. CRT emerged from this debate about an apparent lack of cultural congruence between the public school and the home life of students of color. Culturally responsive teachers who practice under a cultural difference model have been encouraged to learn about the various cultures of their students as assets rather than deficits and to incorporate those cultures into curriculum and instruction. A challenge for culturally responsive teachers, however, is avoiding a common tendency to stereotype students of color according to their ethnic or racial identification. This essentialized labeling can lead to narrow and simplistic understandings of the complexities of culture and what it means to students of color in the myriad settings in which they live and attend school. Additionally, some multicultural scholars question whether it is possible to attain culture congruence between the public school and the lives of culturally diverse students. To overcome these issues, researchers Luis Moll and Norma González call for application of “funds-of-knowledge” approach that documents cultural knowledge from home visits. The funds-of-knowledge strategy can help culturally responsive teachers learn more about their students, apply this new cultural knowledge to the curriculum, and discover the heterogeneity within cultural groups.

Learning Styles

Although a popular construct, learning styles is a somewhat indeterminate concept in order to grasp the social-psychological dynamics of subject-specific learning. Approached from a CRT perspective, learning styles research indicates that teachers should know how to (1) incorporate the cultural context of teaching and learning

into the curriculum by using the prior learning of students and including students' own personal cultural perceptions, (2) utilize affect in building interpersonal relationships with students, and (3) adjust teaching approaches that conflict with student learning styles. Nevertheless,

research on learning styles using culturally diverse students fails to support the premise that members of a given group exhibit a distinctive style. . . . Clearly, learning-styles research is a useful beginning in designing appropriate instruction for culturally diverse students, and not an end in itself. (Irvine & York, 1995, p. 494)

Yet, when learning styles are conceived in the context of instruction being culturally congruent, learning gains may accrue to marginalized students of color. The theoretical tension here is to recognize that individual students may have preferred learning styles that may or may not be attached to their cultural backgrounds.

Learning styles used simplistically can stereotype children of color and further stigmatize non-Western cultures. Research suggests that developmental learning needs of students from outside the dominant culture cannot necessarily be comprehended by teachers without analyzing students' experiences with the curriculum and how they locate themselves with a classroom's specific learning environment. Learning styles approaches that either negate or abridge cultural orientations and differences can be counterproductive to the achievement of children and youth living in subordinated cultures. Hence, the challenge for CRT is to identify those situation-specific cultural variables that may contribute or detract from student learning and to build a teaching and learning program around such knowledge.

Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions

CRT requires teachers to acquire particular knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in order to effectively meet the social and academic needs of culturally diverse students. The following three sections focus on these competencies.

Knowledge Base

Culturally responsive teachers hold a knowledge base that emerges out of historical and theoretical foundations similar to what has been discussed above. This includes a grounding in a multicultural perspective of U.S. history and a comparative grasp of the difference between expressed democratic ideals and actual institutional practices. Specifically, culturally responsive teachers need to be aware how the concepts of White privilege and property rights can be manifested in contemporary political, economic, and educational systems through various forms of

biases and racism, including color blindness. Underlying this foundation is an understanding that citizenship rights have not always been able to be exercised equally by all groups of people and the subsequent economic effect that this has had on schooling, housing, and employment opportunities for populations of color. These studies also include the historic opposition and resistance by people of color to acts of oppression, especially as pertains to access to educational opportunities such as rigorous academic courses taught by qualified teachers.

Teacher inservice and preservice education for CRT includes in-depth multicultural education in combination with contemporary research on effective teaching. A knowledge base steeped in constructionist theory and practice is vital to counter a transmission approach that is problematic for implementing a student-centered pedagogy like CRT. CRT necessitates a background in learning theory and human development that is based in social psychology and analyzes individual students within cultural and social contexts. Important is an understanding of the rationale behind democratic classroom management approaches that are welcoming, participatory, and inclusive of cultural diversity. Critical is a research background on heterogeneous cooperative learning and its value in regular application for students who come from population groups who have been historically marginalized in public schools and are likely candidates to exit school before twelfth grade.

Ideally culturally responsive teachers will have had a preservice field experience that can provide them with the experiential knowledge of a working in a culturally diverse setting. This kind of field experience is most effective before a student teaching internship when combined with critical reflection that is connected to issues of equity and effective teaching research. Providing preservice teachers with well-designed experiences with culturally diverse populations in communities and K-12 schools continues to offer the possibility of expanding multicultural understandings that appear necessary for culturally responsive teachers.

Culturally responsive teachers are well informed about their subject matter and are regularly investigating sources that can increase the multicultural perspective of their teaching disciplines. Teachers also learn about the communities and cultures from which their students originate and try to incorporate those orientations and resources into daily instruction. Culturally responsive teachers are lifelong learners of culture and its implications for teaching and learning in their particular settings. Therefore, CRT is enhanced by foundational academic knowledge in the study of culture.

Culturally responsive teachers have not only a knowledge base conducive to investigate local cultures, but they also need to have explored their own personal knowledge about their cultural and racial identity formation. With an understanding that their teacher identities are not fixed but subject to socialization, culturally responsive teachers can

learn how their own socially constructed histories can potentially both enhance and impede learning in a culturally diverse classroom. This knowledge can be effectively gained through autobiographical or autoethnographical research based on appropriately structured multicultural writing prompts.

Skills

Building on their knowledge base, culturally responsive teachers need specific skills to create interactive group curricular experiences from an antiracist orientation that works toward prejudice reduction among students. Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate a proficiency to create a welcoming and inclusive classroom. This positive learning community environment permeates all classroom interactions under CRT and is conducive for student discussions on subject matter topics that allow for multiple viewpoints.

Culturally responsive teachers have the ability to implement a constructionist orientation to teaching and learning that allows students to have their voices and cultural backgrounds incorporated into curriculum and instruction. Effective CRT regularly uses cooperative learning, especially with well-designed heterogeneous group work. Culturally responsive teachers consider frequent use of heterogeneous cooperative learning central to the maintenance of an engaged classroom learning community. In this context, culturally responsive teachers know how to create assignments that permit small groups of students to collaborate on academic projects that are based on problem-solving skills. Paramount under a constructionist approach to CRT is the ability to design detailed lesson and unit plans that make visible links among target learning goals, student/community cultures and interests, learning activities, and assessment.

CRT emphasizes high academic expectations in a curriculum that makes meaningful connections for students between academic knowledge and application. Culturally responsive teachers have the ability to effectively communicate these expectations regularly and compassionately to individual students who have historically struggled academically and/or experienced social alienation from their schools. The skill of active listening is imperative for culturally responsive teachers' effectiveness in conversations with individual students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Within their schools, skilled culturally responsive teachers advocate for their students of color by making a concerted effort to challenge negative attitudes and help ensure that all students are honored in the school, particularly those traditionally underserved.

The skill of critical reflection is practiced regularly by culturally responsive teachers. Through critical reflection, teachers' social definitions about the parameters of their professional work can be reexamined in the context of multicultural education reform goals. This skill constantly demands the willingness of teachers to reexamine the

degree of their own cultural encapsulation and to use personal and public insights of cultural encapsulation to make culturally responsive contributions to student learning and school improvement activities.

Dispositions

Culturally responsive teachers exhibit their culturally responsive dispositions by classroom behaviors that create thoughtful and supportive learning environments and encourage self-directed learning by all students. Therefore, CRT values demographic diversity as an enriching social context and supports a just and caring society for children and youth. Culturally responsive teachers embrace diversity as an asset to a school, affirm the cultural backgrounds of students, and believe in high achievement goals for all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, or class.

High consensus exists among CRT scholars and practitioners that in order for teachers to be culturally responsive, they must develop and hold a multicultural commitment to the values of equity and cultural diversity. This involves a sociocultural disposition based in a critical consciousness about the world around them. Such teachers hold a transformative attitude toward educational inequities when conceiving and implementing curriculum. They are able to articulate an antibias/antiracist multicultural philosophy of education that informs their work. Importantly, culturally responsive teachers recognize when their own professional dispositions may need to be adjusted and are able to develop plans to do so.

Applications

Current research indicates that CRT is used across all disciplines. In its application CRT uses a transformational approach to teaching and learning. This involves changing the structure of the curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse racial and cultural groups.

Common elements exist when culturally responsive teachers have transformed the traditional curriculum. This transformative process includes helping students recognize strengths and significance of their cultures, families, and communities, and to see their own lives and perspectives as subjects worthy of study; studying subject matter concepts from the point of view of students' cultures in comparison to the way concepts are presented in textbooks; and providing opportunities for community members to witness the accomplishments of students through meetings, presentations, and exhibitions and, therefore, potentially increasing community support for the school.

Case study research suggests that culturally responsive teachers hold (1) a positive image of themselves and their students, (2) democratic and inclusive culturally sensitive social relations with their students and their students' communities, and (3) a conception of knowledge as socially

constructed and capable of transformation. Culturally responsive teachers act to transform their classroom curriculum in traditional school settings so that they can more thoroughly provide students access to academic knowledge connections relevant to their own lives, a primary goal of CRT. Case study research also highlights and reflects other common characteristics of culturally responsive teachers: regards students as competent; provides students challenging content built on students' prior knowledge; uses students' cultures to understand themselves, others, and the curriculum; and develops a positive student-centered learning community.

Future Directions

As long as a racialized achievement gap exists, the calls for CRT or a similar pedagogy will likely remain as a potential solution. In local school districts, however, where expectations exist for teachers to follow a standardized teacher-centered curriculum, CRT may be perceived as unrelated to academic achievement. Therefore, for CRT to be a sustained pedagogy, local school districts would need to focus on effective teaching research and provide teachers with inservice training and planning time that can enable CRT, especially when it comes to making significant associations with culturally diverse communities and modifying curriculum to reflect the particular cultures of the students.

CRT is at a stage where accessible and verifiable databases of culturally appropriate teaching materials and unit plans need to be more widely available in order for teachers to make culturally responsive modifications based on their local situations. Teacher preparation programs can aid in this process by providing future teachers with the foundational knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for CRT. Thus, a multicultural education strand can be most effective when it is a central emphasis for preservice and inservice teacher education and is infused across all aspects of a training curriculum.

The intersections between race and class remain significant and subject to debate among scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. The CRT research, however, is generally silent on economic diversity among students, particularly those from low-income families. The largest demographic group of young people in this category numerically are those who identify as White whereas proportionately the highest percentage of poor students are of color. Although research exists on what has been called a "culture of poverty," it remains unclear from a CRT perspective how this segment of U.S. society that composes nearly 20% of all children can be conceptually incorporated into this model. Questions remain as to the extent that poverty conditions constitute a culture as generally defined and understood. Yet, recalling the broader and more complex definition of culture suggests that for teaching to be effective, all learning is culturally bound and,

therefore, CRT has room to expand its focus and extent of inclusiveness.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive teaching is an educational reform that grew out of the civil rights movement and the emergence of multicultural education. CRT is a democratic, student-centered pedagogy that incorporates and honors the cultural background of historically marginalized students and attempts to make meaningful links to academic knowledge for student success. As an aspect of an educational reform movement, CRT has been called on to help reduce the academic achievement gap.

CRT is essentially based on effective teaching research with an infusion of cultural knowledge and skills. CRT challenges dominant modes of schooling that have limited democratic opportunities and the exercise of citizenship rights for significant populations of color. With a multicultural commitment, culturally responsive teachers understand that their work can have a lasting effect to the development of active democratic citizens.

References and Further Readings

- Adams, D., & Hamm, M. (1998). *Collaborative inquiry in science, math, and technology*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Banks, J. A. (2004). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 3–29). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Banks, J. A. (2006). *Race, culture and education: The selected works of James A. Banks*. New York: Routledge.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school* (expanded ed.). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Cohen, E. G. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (2004). Equity in heterogeneous classrooms. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 736–750). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1998). Color blindness, history, and the law. In W. Lubiano (Ed.), *The house that race built* (pp. 280–288). New York: Vintage Books.
- Darder, A., Baltodano, M., & Torres, R. D. (2003). Critical pedagogy: An introduction. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 1–21). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). What happens to a dream deferred? The continuing quest for equal educational opportunity. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 607–630). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

- Dewey, J. (1974). *Education and experience*. New York: Collier Books. (Original work published 1938)
- Dilworth, M. E., & Brown, C. E. (2001). Consider the difference: Teaching and learning in culturally rich schools. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 643–667). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach* (expanded ed.) (D. Macedo, D. Koike, & A. Oliveira, Trans.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Gallego, M. A., Cole, M., & Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. (2001). Classroom cultures and cultures in the classroom. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 951–997). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hamilton, D., & McWilliam, E. (2001). Ex-centric voices that frame research on teaching. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 17–43). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
- Haynes, M. H., Ben-Avie, M., & Ensign, J. (2003). *How social and emotional development add up: Getting results in math and science education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Irvine, J. J., Armento, B. J., Causey, V. E., Jones, J. C., Frasher, R. S., & Weinburgh, M. H. (Eds.). (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Irvine, J. J., & York, D. E. (1995). Learning styles and culturally diverse students: A literature review. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 486–497). New York: Macmillan.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). “Yes, but how do we do it?” Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In J. Landsman & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Landau, B. M. (2004). *The art of classroom management: Building equitable learning communities* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Learning First Alliance. (2001). *Every child learning: Safe and supportive schools*. Washington, DC: Association of Super- vision and Curriculum Development.
- Lomawaima, K. T. (2004). Educating Native Americans. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 441–461). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moll, L., & González, N. (2004). Engaging life: A funds-of-knowledge approach to multicultural education. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 699–715). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Murrell, P. C., Jr. (1999). Responsive teaching for African American male adolescents. In V. C. Polite & J. E. Davis (Eds.), *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education* (pp. 82–96). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (1998). Affirmation, solidarity and critique. Moving beyond tolerance in education. In E. Lee, D. Menkart, & M. Okazawa-Rey (Eds.), *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K–12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development* (pp. 7–18). Washington, DC: Network of Educators of Americas.
- Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3W ed.). New York: Longman.
- Orfield, G., Losen, D., Wald, J., & Seanson, C. (2004). *Losing our future: How minority youth are being left behind by the graduation crisis*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Ovando, C. J., Collier, V. P., & Combs, M. C. (2003). *Bilingual & ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill. (With particular attention to Chapter 5, “Culture.”)
- Powell, R. (1997). Then the beauty emerges: A longitudinal case study of culturally relevant teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13(5), 467–484.
- Rebell, M. A. (2002). Educational adequacy, democracy, and the courts. In T. Ready, C. Edley, Jr., & C. E. Snow (Eds.), *Achieving high educational standards for all: Conference summary* (National Research Council; pp. 218–267). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Rosenhall, L. (2007, August 16). Tests show racial achievement gap: State results shed new light on wealth vs. poverty debate. *Sacramento Bee*. Retrieved August 25, 2007, from <http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/328207.html>
- Saifer, S., Edwards, K., Ellis, D., Ko, L., & Stuczynsk, A. (2005). *Classroom to community and back: Using culturally responsive, standards-based teaching to strengthen family and community partnerships and increase student achievement*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94–106.
- Strong American School. (2007). *Get the facts*. Retrieved August 25, 2007, from <http://www.edin08.com/EdSays.aspx#120>
- Vavrus, M. (2002). *Transforming the multicultural education of teachers: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Vavrus, M. (2006). Teacher identity formation in a multicultural world: Intersections of autobiographical research and critical pedagogy. In D. Tidwell & L. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Self-study and diversity* (pp. 89–113). Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Zeichner, K. M., & Hoeft, K. (1996). Teacher socialization for cultural diversity. In J. Skula, T. J. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 525–547). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.