Intervention in School and Clinic

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Educating All Students:

Creating Culturally Responsive Teachers, Classrooms, and Schools

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The dramatic demographic shift in the United Sates is more apparent in the public schools than anywhere else. But this change in the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the student population is not the problem. The problem lies in the way educators have responded to that change. A positive or negative response could affect the self-esteem and academic success of students from these varied racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, many researchers (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Erickson, 1987; Gay, 2002; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1990) over the past few decades have challenged schools and educators to find creative ways to work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds to ensure that they receive a high quality and equitable education (Phuntsog, 1999).

As a result, educators are trying to develop a closer fit between students' home cultures and the culture of the school. The result is a modified system that has been referred to in the literature as *culturally compatible* (Jordan, 1985), *culturally congruent* (Au & Kawakami, 1994), *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings, 1990), and *culturally responsive* teaching (Erickson, 1987). The term *culturally responsive teaching* (CRT) will be used in this article.

Researchers (Gay, 2000, 2002) have asserted that the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds would improve

if educators were to make the effort to ensure that classroom instruction was conducted in a manner that was responsive to the students' home cultures. In addition, they have asserted that modifying the way that classrooms are structured and transforming the policies and practices of the school are critical aspects of the enhancement of learning for all students. The following paragraphs describe how teachers can prepare themselves, their classrooms, and their schools to be more culturally responsive.

Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers

Gay (2002) reported that part of the responsibility of teacher training programs is to prepare preservice and inservice teachers to work effectively with students from CLD backgrounds. Gay identified five important areas (i.e., developing a culturally diverse knowledge base, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, building effective cross-cultural communications, and delivering culturally responsive instruction) that need to be addressed when preparing teachers to work with the diversity in their classrooms. Specific examples of what teachers can do in each of these areas to increase their culturally responsive pedagogical skills are illustrated in Table 1.

Culturally Responsive Teachers

Culturally responsive teachers believe that culture deeply influences the way children learn (Stoicovy, 2002). When teachers are given the responsibility of teaching students from CLD backgrounds, their attitudes must reflect an appreciation of the cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of each of their students (Sparks, 1994). This is often very difficult, especially when students exhibit cultural characteristics that are so different from the teacher's. Educators generally agree that effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Gary Howard's (1999) book title sums up the predicament: *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know.* This applies as much to the student population as it does to subject matter. Yet, too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach students from CLD backgrounds. Part

TABLE 1. Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers

Important aspect[a]	Examples
1. Develop a culturally diverse knowledge base.	(a) Understand the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups. (b) Look at one's own attitudes and practices (Montgomery, 2001). (c) Know ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication and learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns (Gay, 2002). (d) Know how to use multicultural instructional strategies and add multicultural content to the curriculum (Gay, 2002).
2. Design culturally relevant curricula.	(a) Be able to identify the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials. (b) Make changes as necessary to improve the overall quality of the curricula. (c) Be conscious of the power of curricula (formal, symbolic, media/societal) as an instrument of teaching, and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity.
3. Demonstrate cultural caring and build a learning community.	(a) Use *cultural scaffolding*—that is, students' cultures and experiences—to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement. (b) Create reciprocity in the classroom, in which students and teachers become partners to improve student learning. (c) Build communities among learners in which the welfare of the group takes precedence over the individual. (d) Emphasize *holistic* or *integrated* learning. Rather than making different types of learning (cognitive, physical, and emotional) discrete, culturally responsive teachers deal with them in concert.
4. Build effective cross-cultural communications.	(a) Be able to decipher students' cultural codes (the way students' intellectual thoughts are coded) to teach them more effectively.
5. Deliver culturally responsive instruction.	(a) Be able to multiculturalize (match instructional techniques to the learning styles of students from CLD backgrounds) your teaching. (b) Develop rich repertoires of multicultural instructional examples to use in teaching students from CLD backgrounds.

Note. CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse.
[a](Gay, 2002).

of the knowledge teachers must have includes understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups (King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Smith, 1998). Culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for successful teaching and learning (Gay, 2002).

What, then, are the characteristics of teachers who successfully meet the needs of students from CLD backgrounds? In an attempt to capture an inclusive definition of CRT, teacher educators identified what they believe to be the salient characteristics that make up culturally responsive teachers. Culturally responsive teachers use the best of what we now know about good teaching. Cruickshank (1990) summarized that body of literature by indicating that effective teachers are identified by (a) their character traits, (b) what they know, (c) what they teach, (d) how they teach, (e) what they expect from their students, (f) how their students react to them, and (g) how they manage the classroom.

Gay (2002), Villegas and Lucas (2002), and Ladson-Billings (2001), in particular, have more recently listed the characteristics of culturally responsive teachers who

they believe are able to plan and deliver culturally responsive instruction and therefore meet the needs of all of their students. Ladson-Billings (2001) offered three propositions relevant to the teacher's ability to create a context in which all students can be successful, and Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) cited four motivational conditions that students and teachers continuously create. Gay (2002) expanded on those previous frameworks by identifying five essential elements of CRT, and Villegas and Lucas (2002) expanded even further the works of Ladson-Billings (2001) and Gay (2002) by identifying six traits they feel are integral to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. Table 2 offers a closer look at each of these frameworks and lists the characteristics or traits that these authors have identified as essential to culturally responsive teachers.

From the teacher characteristics identified by these researchers, we see that the knowledge of cultural diversity that educators need goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways (Gay, 2002). Teachers must develop a knowledge base for CRT by acquiring detailed, factual information about the cultural particularities of specific

TABLE 2. Frameworks for Culturally Responsive Teachers

Framework	Culturally responsive teachers . . .
Ladson-Billings (2001) identified three propositions relevant to culturally responsive teachers.	1. focus on individual students' academic achievement (e.g., clear goals, multiple forms of assessment); 2. have attained cultural competence and help in developing students' cultural competence; and 3. develop a sense of sociopolitical consciousness.
Gay (2002) identified five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching.	1. develop a cultural diversity knowledge base; 2. design culturally relevant curricula; 3. demonstrate cultural caring, and build a learning community (Harriott & Martin, 2004); 4. establish cross-cultural communications (Harriott & Martin, 2004); and 5. establish congruity in classroom instruction.
Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six characteristics that define culturally responsive teachers.	1. are socioculturally conscious, that is, recognize that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order; 2. have affirming views of students from CLD backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to overcome; 3. see themselves as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools responsive to all students; 4. understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction; 5. know about the lives of their students; and 6. use their knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.
Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) cited four motivational conditions that students and teachers continuously create.	1. establish inclusion, creating learning atmospheres in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another; 2. develop attitude, creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice; 3. enhance meaning, creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values; and 4. engender competence, creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value.

Note. CLD = culturally and linguistically diverse.

ethnic groups. In addition, they must develop caring, consciousness, communication, and a sense of community within their classrooms (Harriott & Martin, 2004).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

CRT has been defined many times and in many ways, but Nieto (2004) defined it as a method that "necessitates inclusion and authenticity" (p. 353), emphasizing that all people, especially teachers, should learn about and respect themselves, one another, and all other people in honor of their many diverse cultural characteristics. Gay (2002) defined CRT as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. CRT is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have a higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when classroom instruction is delivered through their own cultural and experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Classrooms

Because school administrators, mentors, and teacher educators are faced with increasingly complex social, political, and moral issues, their challenge is to prepare teachers who are highly qualified to implement practices and deliver sound programs in the classroom (Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). Views about learning have changed with the demographic changes over the past several decades, and those changing views have influenced the way teachers teach and what students do in their classrooms (Kozleski, Sobel, & Taylor, 2003). Today's classroom is more responsive to the needs of students from CLD backgrounds.

Montgomery (2001) defined *culturally responsive classrooms* as those that "specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and the need for these students to find connections among themselves and with the subject matter and the tasks the teacher asks them to perform" (p. 4). Montgomery identified five guidelines for teachers to follow when preparing their culturally responsive classrooms: (a) Conduct a self-assessment to determine the knowledge base of self and others' cultures, (b) use varied culturally responsive methods and materials in the classroom, (c) establish classroom environments that respect individuals and their cultures, (d) establish interactive classroom learning environments, and (e) employ ongoing and culturally aware assessments.

One of the most important aspects of a culturally responsive classroom is the teacher's belief that students from CLD backgrounds want to learn. The second is that the instructional strategies and teaching behaviors used by the teacher can engage the students and lead to improved academic achievement. Finally, every teacher should strive to develop instructional programs and activities that prevent failure and increase success in all of their students (Montgomery, 2001). Figure 1 offers a list of culturally re-

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Classroom activities

- Explicit, strategic instruction (Montgomery, 2001; Navarro, n.d.)
- Interdisciplinary units (Montgomery, 2001)
- High expectations for all students (Navarro, n.d.)
- Instructional scaffolding (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005; Gay, 2002; Montgomery, 2001)
- Journal writing (Montgomery, 2001)
- Open-ended projects (Montgomery, 2001)
- Book corner (Montgomery, 2001)
- Cooperative learning groups (Harriott & Martin, 2004; Navarro, n.d.)
- Guided and informal group discussions
- The Internet (Montgomery, 2001)
- Care for students (Gay, 2002; Navarro, n.d.)
- Daily observation of students' social and learning behaviors in all classroom situations
- Portfolio assessments (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Montgomery, 2001)
- Teacher-made tests tied to the instructional program
- Student self-assessment (Montgomery, 2001)
- Teacher self-evaluation (Montgomery, 2001)
- Engaging with individual students (Navarro, n.d.)
- Explicit instruction in the "hidden curriculum" (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005; Gay, 2002)
- Wait time for students from CLD backgrounds adjusted to enhance classroom participation and development of critical thinking skills (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999)
- Acknowledgment of students' differences as well as their commonalities (Banks & Banks, 2004; Chamberlain, 2005; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994)
- Motivation of students to become active participants in their learning (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994)
- Encouraging students to think critically (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994)
- Interactive teaching styles (Irvine & Armento, 2001)
- Good use of "teachable moments" (Irvine & Armento, 2001)
- Culturally familiar speech and events (Irvine & Armento, 2001)
- Primary sources of data and manipulative materials (Irvine & Armento, 2001)

FIGURE 1. Culturally responsive classroom activities.

sponsive classroom activities that can help increase student success.

For real reform to occur in today's schools, a complete transformation must take place. It is not enough to have teachers change their teaching and classrooms to reflect their students' diversity; the schools that they teach in must also become culturally competent educational systems. Some researchers, as discussed in the following section, have suggested how to accomplish this.

Culturally Responsive Schools

When teachers engage in CRT, they usually do it in spite of the systems that surround them (Kozleski et al., 2003). To bring about a true transformation of the current educational system, we need a better understanding of culturally responsive practices and their potential for improving student learning outcomes (Elmore, 2000). Old assumptions and practices must be changed and schools reinvented (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000).

If this transformation is to become a reality, school districts and university faculty must partner in professional development efforts by mentoring, supporting, and evaluating teachers' abilities to practice culturally responsive and differentiated instruction (Sobel, Taylor, & Anderson, 2003). School administrators and faculty must be willing and ready to transform the current curriculum to one that addresses all of their students' needs.

Chamberlain (2005) and others have proposed these tips for educators wanting to transform their schools into culturally responsive learning environments: (a) Implement and encourage policies that view diversity as an asset for schools; (b) provide staff development on best practices for teaching students with and without disabilities from CLD backgrounds; (c) provide teachers with ongoing opportunities to collaboratively explore best practices in culturally responsive pedagogy; and (d) resist political pressures for exempting students from taking tests, and resist pressure to teach to the test.

In addition, Bazron, Osher, and Fleischman (2005) recommended that schools can serve students from CLD backgrounds better if they (a) set high expectations and provide a "scaffold of support" rather than tracking them into low-level classes; (b) give students direct instruction in the "hidden curriculum" of the school (which courses to take, which teachers to seek out, test importance, how to study, etc.); (c) create environments that allow students and teachers to connect with one another, both in and out of the classroom; and (d) help to build a classroom community.

As Smylie (1995) stated, increased student learning can only be achieved if teachers receive consistent support from their school administrators. A teacher's willingness and knowledge regarding how to best meet the needs of his or her students from CLD backgrounds means nothing without that support.

Conclusion

A substantial body of research supports the use of culturally responsive pedagogy, but even with what we do know, there is much more to learn and do regarding CRT. We do know that the U.S. education system has not been culturally responsive to students from CLD backgrounds. Historically, these students were expected to check their cultures at the school or classroom door and learn according to the norms of European Americans. This was not fair to those groups of students, but neither is placing a teacher in the classroom who is unable (or unwilling) to change his or her teaching style and classroom to facilitate students' mastery of the curriculum.

If we are to remove from students the burden of having to learn under unnatural cultural conditions, all teachers will need to become culturally responsive to students from CLD backgrounds throughout their instructional processes (Gay, 2002). To make sure that teachers are adequately prepared when they enter today's classrooms, teacher preparation programs should continue to build on the knowledge bases (D. F. Brown, 2003; E. L. Brown & Howard, 2005; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003) that contain the special knowledge, skills, processes, and experiences essential for preparing teachers to be successful when teaching students from CLD backgrounds (Stoicovy, 2002) and then use that knowledge to prepare teachers for today's classrooms. Beyond that, school administrators must gain a better knowledge of CRT practices, recognize the benefits these practices have for all students, and support teachers in their efforts to transform their teaching, classrooms, and schools so that they will be more responsive to the students they serve.

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