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Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all

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Culturally Responsive Teaching

AT A GLANCE

Culturally responsive teaching has been found important to improve the school success of ethnically diverse students. Educators generally agree that effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. As Howard (1999) stated, “We can’t teach what we don’t know.” As Gay (2012) noted, this statement applies to knowledge both of student populations and subject matter. Part of this knowledge includes understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups. Yet, too many teachers seem to be inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students. Educators opine that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students. The purpose of this capsule is to present sample studies on culturally responsive teaching so that we a better idea of what has been researched so far.

Introduction

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). The primary goal of culturally responsive teaching is to redress the achievement gap between minority and white students. This approach reframes the traditional understanding of this gap, by shifting focus away from perceived student deficits and towards the ways in which schools have failed these students. Based on the implicit or taken-for-grantedness of culture, culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to respond to differences in students' communication and learning styles, by altering their own teaching techniques and methods of classroom management. Classroom strategies include cooperative learning, text talk, warm demander pedagogy and varied culturally sensitive curriculum content.

Culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns. Additionally, detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups (e.g., African, Asian,

Latino, and Native American) needs to be acquired. Educators opine that this makes schooling more interesting and stimulating for, representative of, and responsive to ethnically diverse students. However, some teachers have misperception that their subjects (particularly math and science) and cultural diversity are incompatible, or that combining them is too much of a conceptual and substantive stretch for their subjects to maintain disciplinary integrity. Culturally responsive teaching deals with both using multicultural instructional strategies and adding multicultural content to the curriculum (Gay 2012). Aceves and Orosco (2014) noted that utilizing CRT practices value students' cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build upon rather than as a barrier to learning.

Dimensions of Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching rests on six dimensions:

1. Culturally responsive teachers are *socially and academically empowering* by setting high expectations for students with a commitment to every student's success;
2. Culturally responsive teachers are *multidimensional* because they engage cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives;
3. Culturally responsive teachers *validate every student's culture*, bridging gaps between school and home through diversified instructional strategies and multicultural curricula;
4. Culturally responsive teachers are *socially, emotionally, and politically comprehensive* as they seek to educate the whole child;
5. Culturally responsive teachers are *transformative of schools and societies* by using students' existing strengths to drive instruction, assessment, and curriculum design;
6. Culturally responsive teachers are *emancipatory and liberating from oppressive educational practices and ideologies* as they lift "the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools" (p. 38).

Three lines of research on culturally responsive teaching was found: (i) focusing on teachers - their attitudes and beliefs towards CRT and their readiness to teach CRT, and (ii) focusing on students – their perceptions about CRT, impact on CRT on student learning, and (iii) frameworks and instruments for measuring culturally responsive teaching.

Studies on Culturally Responsive Teaching with Focus on Teachers

Bonner, Warren, Jiang (2017) conducted a study to explore the perceptions of urban teachers regarding the instruction of diverse students and their ability to effectively implement culturally responsive teaching. The results of the study revealed teachers' strong commitment to CRT, understanding of behaviors which constitute CRT, a strong sense of efficacy in teaching diverse students, and anticipation of positive outcomes through proactively addressing diverse students' needs.

McKoy and MacLeaod (2017) conducted a study to investigate the impact of an in-service program on cooperating teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. The results of the study suggested that participants rated familiarity and importance of culturally responsive teaching higher than they did prior to the workshop. Sixteen of the 18 participants indicated that the workshop had changed their understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

Aceves, and Orosco (2014) suggested an innovation configuration (IC) matrix that can guide teacher preparation professionals in the development of appropriate culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content. The researchers opine that the use of this tool to evaluate course syllabi can help teacher

preparation leaders ensure that they emphasize proactive, preventative approaches instead of exclusive reliance on behavior reduction strategies. The IC included in the Appendix of this paper is designed for teacher preparation programs, although it can be modified as an observation tool for PD purposes. This source also provides a table of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

| Relevant Themes of CRT | Emerging Evidence-Based CRT Practices | Recommended CRT Approaches and Considerations |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| Instructional engagement | Collaborative Teaching | Problem-Solving Approach |
| Culture, Language, and Racial Identity | Responsive Feedback | Child-Centered Instruction |
| Multicultural Awareness | Modeling | Assessment |
| High Expectations | Instructional Scaffolding | Materials |
| Critical Thinking | | |
| Social Justice | | |

Alaca and Pyle (2018) conducted a study with six kindergarten teachers on their understandings of and approaches to culturally responsive education (CRE) in their classrooms. Teachers generally reported believing that CRE is important in kindergarten, and the practices they implemented fell into two categories: structured components of their classrooms and spontaneous accommodations of instruction. Teachers reported finding it challenging to access the resource they need to effectively practice CRE and to maintain ongoing communication with other school personnel and families.

Özüldoğru (2018) conducted a study to determine the level of prospective teachers for culturally responsive teaching and explore students' opinions about their culturally responsive teaching and the impact of undergraduate education on their culturally responsive teaching readiness. The results of the study suggested that prospective teachers felt highly ready for culturally responsive teaching. While gender did not have impact on their readiness, department variable had. It was also found that their personal readiness was significantly higher than their professional readiness. This study also concluded that undergraduate education lacked practice in terms of preparing prospective teachers for culturally responsive teaching.

Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, Kawakami (2016) conducted action research to examine a graduate level course on Ethnicity and Education. Eighteen teacher participants enrolled in a Master of Education program. Course instructors analyzed teacher participants' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. A teaching plan, a post-course questionnaire, a focus group interview, and a follow up questionnaire were used to collect data. The study generated three themes: 1) Doing culturally responsive activities; 2) Moving towards culturally responsive teaching as a perspective; and 3) Being a culturally responsive teacher. This article suggests ways teacher educators might re-conceptualize culture-based courses to deepen teacher perspectives rather than merely enhance teaching activities which support culturally responsive teaching and learning.

Studies on Culturally Responsive Teaching with Focus on Students

Mackay and Strickland (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore how one middle school teacher and his students in two summer school English classes interacted with and responded to novel technology-based instructional approach that sought to connect the students' lives outside of school to the classroom. The findings suggest that involving the students within this culturally responsive teaching approach using student-created videos informs the contribution of both the teacher and the students for connecting home and school contexts with a CRT framework.

Hubert (2013) conducted a case study to examine students' perspectives of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in mathematics instruction has on students' attitude and interest toward mathematics. Five students that participated in a culturally relevant mathematics intervention were interviewed. The students in the study held positive views of CRP and preferred the method over traditional mathematics instruction. Six themes were developed from the results of the interviews: (1) home-like classrooms; (2) ethic of caring; (3) participation opportunities; (4) technology use; (5) confidence; and (6) motivation. In addition, all students that participated in the study experienced an improved attitude and/or interest toward mathematics.

Choi (2013) conducted a case study with eighth grade students instructed using culturally relevant instruction and described the performance outcomes. The findings of the study suggested that newcomer ELLs successfully navigated the mandated social studies curriculum and increased student achievement.

Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, and Day-Vines (2018) examined the association between student behaviors and the observed use of a teacher self-reported efficacy in using culturally responsive teaching and proactive behavior management practices. The results of the study suggested a statistically significant association between observations of culturally responsive teaching and proactive behavior management practices with observed positive student behaviors in classrooms.

Chen, D., & Yang, X. (2017) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies in an adult ESL classroom. Prior research indicated that ESL students were not interested in instructions that ignore or isolate their home culture or targeted language culture. Three adult students from Asian Countries with intentions to improve their English learning participated in the study. The results of the study showed that implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies increased the frequency of students' classroom participations. The instructions employing culturally responsive teaching strategies were more likely to increase students' involvement in communication and enhance their communication skills.

Frameworks and Instruments for Measuring Culturally Responsive Teaching

Some other studies suggested frameworks and instruments for measuring culturally responsive teaching. Some are presented below.

- Dickson, Chun and Fernandez (2016) developed an instrument to measure students' perceptions on culturally responsive teaching.
- Aguirre and Zavala (2013) conducted a study to analyze the development and impact on educational decisions, visions and mathematics instruction over time. A finding from this research was the development of a lesson analysis tool to help support pedagogical design and mathematics instruction that is culturally responsive.

- Hammond (2013) suggested framework for culturally responsive teaching(https://crtandthebrain.com/wp-content/uploads/READY-FOR-RIGOR_Final1.pdf) and a quick and easy school visit observation guide (<https://crtandthebrain.com/wp-content/uploads/CRT-Walk-Through-Observation-Guide.pdf>)

Highlights of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Buffalo Public Schools

Recently, Buffalo Public Schools Department of Curriculum Assessment & Instruction (CAI) held a number of events to support CRT in the District, some of which are:

- Urban Forum
- My Brother's Keeper Program
- Parent & Family Dialogue
- Mathematics Awareness Month Competition
- Global Scholar Program
- Social Justice Brave Space
- Our Story Project in Different Locations

More detailed information about the events could be obtained from the CIA website and Newsletter.

Conclusion

As the discussion above suggests, teachers seem to be familiar and aware of culturally responsive teaching and have a positive attitude towards it, although it seems that the pre-service programs do not always prepare them for this type of instruction. A challenge for some to engage into culturally responsive teaching can be the availability of resources. Some teachers seem to be more personally than professionally prepared to engage into culturally responsive teaching.

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