Facilitator’s Guide

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A Primer

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What is the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Primer?

This protocol allows teacher educators and professional development facilitators to help educators and prospective educators examine their assumptions about effective teaching of students of different races and ethnicities. It also allows them to increase their mastery of the knowledge base and research about culturally relevant teaching. This tool encourages inquiry and discussion about specific instructional practices that cut across content areas.

The Primer addresses five questions:

- What is the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy?
- Why is culturally relevant pedagogy important?
- What is the theory behind culturally relevant pedagogy?
- Does culturally relevant pedagogy reinforce stereotypes about students of color because it categorizes and labels students based on race and ethnicity?
- Does culturally relevant pedagogy address content standards in subject areas?

Why is this Primer necessary?

The five questions are asked by teacher educators, pre- and inservice teachers, professional development facilitators and school leaders. Often, well meaning but uniformed educators assume that culturally relevant pedagogy is simply acknowledging ethnic holidays or including popular culture in the curriculum, like rap music and colloquial speech. In addition to these myths and misunderstanding of culturally relevant pedagogy, inaccurate beliefs about culturally relevant pedagogy include:

- Only teachers of color can be culturally relevant.
- Culturally relevant teachers are more concerned about personal relationships with their diverse students than effective classroom management.
- The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is to help diverse students “feel good” about themselves.
- Culturally relevant teachers attend to learning styles (e.g., by addressing African American male students’ need for kinesthetic activities or allowing Asian students to work alone).
- Culturally relevant pedagogy is not helpful for teaching white students.

These and other misperceptions about culturally relevant pedagogy often result in ineffective instructional practices and counterproductive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships. Cursory or partial mastery of the knowledge base
of culturally relevant pedagogy also leads to inaccurate conclusions about the effectiveness of adopting culture-based instructional strategies.

How might the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Primer be used?

The Primer can be used in undergraduate and graduate college courses in multicultural education, urban education and school leadership. It also can be used in courses in content fields, such as social studies, literacy, science and mathematics methods. The Primer also is appropriate for professional development activities for inservice teachers and administrators — or by individual teachers who encounter it online and wish to expand their own understanding of the subject. Ideally, college faculty and professional development facilitators can use all or parts of the modules or use components of the Primer as supplements to their own instructional plans. The Primer is organized by a question followed by an extensive answer. Embedded in the answers to these frequently asked questions are resources that may include video of expert commentary, text of examples of effective practice, written articles or summaries of articles, bibliographies, further learning exercises or Web-based information. Each resource is introduced by a short annotation which, when clicked, will take the user to the relevant material.

Recommended discussion questions and activities for Question 1

**QUESTION 1**  What is the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Before the class or in-service participants visit the Web site, divide the group into teams of 4-5 members. Assign each group a question related to the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy from the list below. More than one group can be assigned to a question. If more than one group is assigned a question, compare their responses to assess levels of agreement — or disagreement.

- What are some personal characteristics and traits of a culturally relevant teacher?
  
  Note: During the discussion look for examples in which culturally relevant teachers are stereotyped as having a distinct personality profile.

- What are the instructional behaviors exhibited by a culturally relevant teacher?

- What are a culturally relevant teacher’s attitudes and dispositions toward students?

- How does a culturally relevant teacher interact with diverse students’ families and communities?

Every group should answer question 5.

- Would your responses to the any of these questions differ if you were simply describing an effective teacher? Explain.
Recommended discussion questions and activities for Question 2

**QUESTION 2** Why is culturally relevant pedagogy important?

Some believe that culturally relevant pedagogy is important only because of the growing numbers of diverse students in this country. However, there are other reasons why educators should embrace this type of pedagogy. Before the participants read the resources and materials related to this question in the online Primer, ask them to respond in writing to this question:

Imagine that you taught in an all-black school in an urban setting or an all-white school in a rural setting. What reasons would you provide to convince your colleagues that culturally relevant pedagogy is important?

After they read the online Primer, ask the students if they would change their initial response to the question.

Recommended discussion questions and activities for Question 3

**QUESTION 3** What is the theory behind culturally relevant pedagogy?

An explanation of socio-cultural theory is a topic covered in most teacher-preparation programs, and most participants will have some knowledge of the theory’s basic principles. However, the significance and relevance of the theory is best illustrated when participants realize how their own learning and teaching is influenced by their socialization and cultural experiences. Many white teachers are particularly reluctant to explore this issue because they believe that culture is something that only people of color have or that being white is to be culture-less.

Ask students to write about their cultural tradition. For example:

- What is your racial/cultural background?
- Does your name have any particular meaning to you and your family? (A name is often the bearer of cultural and personal identity.)
- When you think about your roots, what country(ies) other than the United States do you identify as a place of origin for you and your family?
- What language(s) did your ancestors speak?
- Are there any celebrations, ceremonies, rituals or holidays that your family celebrates that reflect your culture? What are they? How are they celebrated?
- Can you think of one piece of advice that has been handed down through your family that reflects values held by your ancestors?
After answering any or all of the above questions, ask participants to respond to this question:

Did this exercise cause you any anxiety? Why or why not? What do you think such anxiety represents?

**Recommended discussion questions and activities for Question 4**

**Question 4** Does culturally relevant pedagogy reinforce stereotypes about students of color because it categorizes and labels students based on race and ethnicity?

Stereotypes are based on inaccurate or incomplete generalizations about a group that are ascribed to individual members associated with that group.

Ask students to identify up to three stereotypes about a cultural group of which they are a member (e.g., Native American, Asian, white, Muslim, Christian, Jew, etc.). Then have them describe how this stereotype could influence the opinions or actions of teachers and administrators.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>Possible Classroom or Schoolwide Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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**Recommended discussion questions and activities for Question 5**

**Question 5** Does culturally relevant pedagogy address content standards in subject areas?

The Primer provides a few examples about the connection and compatibility of the content standards with the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Below are links to the standards of the professional associations in science, reading, social studies and math. Participants in similar content areas should form groups with 4-5 members. The objective of each group is to read the standards and identify the language in the
standards that resonates with the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy listed in Question 1 in the Primer.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Relevant Principle</th>
<th>Referenced in Content Standards</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involving students in the construction of knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building on students’ interests and linguistic resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapping home and community resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding students’ cultural knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Using interactive and constructivist teaching strategies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives</td>
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National Science Education Standards-Principles and Definitions
www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=4962&page=19

International Reading Association
www.reading.org/resources/issues/reports/professional_standards.html

National Council for the Social Studies download pdf file at:
www.socialstudies.org/standards/teacherstandards

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
http://nctm.org/execsummary.aspx

What does the research say about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?

In considering this question, one should not confuse the research on multicultural curricula with the research on culturally relevant pedagogy. There is currently more research on the former than the latter. Gay (2000) summarized some of the research on the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching practices. In the areas of reading and writing, she concluded that these instructional practices increased students’ of color interest and enjoyment of literature; and expanded their vocabulary, sentence patterns, decoding abilities, comprehension, reading rate and fluency. Further, Gay indicated that the Webster Grove Writing Project, which was organized around African American cultural characteristics and contributions, led to gains in African American students’ confidence, development and organization of ideas, and clarity...
of thinking. Additionally, Tharp (1988) and Au and Mason (1981) found culturally congruent methods increased reading scores.

Goldenberg, Rueda and August (2008), however, found that some of this research does not present convincing evidence and thus cannot be used to draw definitive conclusions.

Click here for an *Education Week* article about culture-based teaching
http://lnk.edweek.org

Questions for Discussion

In the context of culturally relevant pedagogy, consider the following questions:

- How should effectiveness and student outcomes be defined?
- Is student learning defined only by paper and pencil standardized tests?
- How important are other outcomes like greater student engagement, higher attendance, lower dropouts rates, more parental involvement or higher graduation rates?
- Should the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy be determined by experimental and quasi-experimental methods rather than qualitative methods?

Additional references regarding the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy

http://edr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/36/3/148


Northwest Regional Educational Lab (NWREL) . Office of Planning and Service Coordination, Portland, OR.