

Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching

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Assessment C: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) Classroom Plan

Due by the end of Week 5

- **Complete Part 1 during Week 4**
- **Complete Part 2 during Week 5**

Overview

You have spent the past several weeks learning about culture and cultural diversity and their influence on education, examining and reflecting upon your own cultural identity, gaining a better understanding of your students' cultural identities in order to form strong learning partnerships, and exploring ways in which the neuroplasticity of the brain, the information processing strategies you use, and the classroom community all work together to impact teaching and learning.

In this final assessment, you will ask the same question that Hammond asks in the Epilogue of *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain*, "So, now what? What do we do tomorrow?" (p. 152). To answer these questions, you will complete both portions of the Culturally Responsive Teaching Classroom Plan: Culture and the Learning Environment (Part 1) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (Part 2).

In Week 4, you will spend time envisioning what your culturally responsive classroom looks like, sounds like, and feels like, as well as the routines, strategies, and learning opportunities that contribute to your culturally responsive classroom. You will also reflect on the current relationship between culture and your learning environment and select two culturally responsive teaching strategies to implement to further enhance, address, and develop a culturally responsive learning environment.

Before the end of Week 5, you will implement both of the culturally responsive teaching strategies that you selected and planned. You will then reflect on the implementation and how utilizing specific culturally responsive teaching strategies moved your classroom environment towards the vision that you created.

CRT Classroom Plan

Part 1: Culture and the Learning Environment (Complete during Week 4)

Cultural Element That Enhances Learning

An element of culture that contributes to teaching and learning in my classroom is their desire to collaborate through discourse and work collectively together through learning tasks and assignments. In my classroom, this looks like students acting as mentors to their peers when they experience a challenge on an assignment or need an idea restated to them in a unique way. In my classroom, this sounds like students making use of accountable talk stems to agree and disagree with the ideas and responses of their peers and sounds like students providing one another positive affirmations when one is feeling discouraged or overwhelmed by the task at hand. This element specifically contributes to teaching and learning in my classroom because students know they can rely on one another to clarify misconceptions they may hold and it reinforces my role as classroom facilitator, and not the keeper of knowledge.

According to Crego-Emley & Treuhaft-Ali (2017), teachers who prioritize higher-level conceptions of knowledge challenge their students to adopt a critical stance towards the curriculum to examine whose voices are silenced, omitted, and marginalized and whose voices and perspectives are overrepresented in the curriculum text selection. When we read texts together, I ask my students to discuss in table groups whose perspective a text prioritizes and how that might impact our overall perspective of the historical event. These opportunities for collaboration and discourse positively impacts classroom learning because students understand that the learning and knowledge gained from their peers during these activities can often act as supporting evidence for later assignments and tasks when students are forced to work independently. Cooperative learning groups also provide students with organic practice to engage in positive social interactions. In the long term, this equips students to build “cross-ethnic friendships and reduce racial stereotyping” and discrimination instruction” (Kransoff, 2016).

Furthermore, the culture of collaboration is beneficial to students in my classroom when I am unavailable to aid during station rotations. In my class, students offer to help their classmates through a challenging writing task or suggest resources in the classroom which might better equip the student to achieve success on a station rotation assignment. Because of their comfort in collaborating with one another and engaging in discourse, my students feel confident that they can find practical solutions to the many problems and challenges they experience and take a more active role as learners, rather than passively receiving information from the educator. According to Kransoff (2016), instructional practices are just as important as the multicultural curriculum designs in unit planning (p. 9).

A Culturally Responsive Teaching strategy that I plan to implement to further enhance the richness that this cultural element brings is to ask “students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction”(Kransoff, 2016). This practice will enable me to adjust my instructional practices based on the suggestions of the students and their needs. It empowers them to feel like critical partners in the educational process and will help them to feel confident communicating their needs to adults. The suggestions they provide will allow me to design more robust lessons which address their preferred modalities and address their specific and

self-stated academic needs. Using the station-rotation model in my classroom, I can implement this strategy naturally by adding a brief reflection question on the student exit ticket which asks them to provide me with a suggestion or feedback about the lesson. I will also solicit this information in conversations with students during our check-in conferences on Friday. The expected outcome that I hope to see because of implementing this strategy is that students will feel more confident in providing adults with specific feedback to address their individual learning needs while also allowing me to improve my classroom practice.

Cultural Element That Presents Challenges

While a considerable strength, my students' desire to engage in collaborative and team-based activities can at times present challenges in the classroom. Often, students are less likely to be engaged and focused on tasks which require them to work independently without the support or collaboration with their peers. This school year, this is particularly challenging as I am more limited in my ability to reshape the curriculum in my classroom to fit the unique needs of my learners and their learning styles. In past years, I have had creative freedom to design collaborative classroom activities to develop my students' capacity for critical thinking, problem solving, self-reliance, and ownership of their own learning. This has taken the form of inquiry and investigation projects about social issues impacting the neighborhoods where my students reside, and rich classroom discussions led by students and their passions and interests. However, this year has marked a major shift in how I am expected to deliver classroom instruction.

As of this school year, DCPS teachers are required to administer Required Curricular Tasks (RCTs) which are designed to measure student performance on various tasks which are embedded throughout the unit. Unfortunately, this means that educators have little room to deviate from existing structures and are instead forced to explicitly teach texts which present limited perspectives or assign independent classroom writing tasks which do not promote collaborative and cooperative student experiences, because deviation from the set materials may ill-prepare students to complete the RCT's. Per district guidance, I am expected to frequently administer district-created tests, quizzes, writing prompts, exit tickets, and text dependent questions throughout the unit, which are often confusing or poorly designed for my students who may require scaffolding of materials and language support. District RCT's are overwhelmingly independent in nature and do not provide students with the opportunity to work together. In these situations, my students might respond by groaning aloud or by placing their heads down on their desks in resignation. This is in direct conflict with findings from the Education Alliance at Brown University, which posits that curriculum that is designed in an emancipatory way is "integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered" (n.d.) liberates and empowers students to think critically about the world around them and the current systems in place which may be restricting their growth and development as learners.

To achieve this education which is truly "politically emancipatory" schools must critically examine existing structures such as curriculum, pedagogy, classroom learning activities, and materials and remove those which do not reflect the needs of the students and replace them with systems and practices which are demonstrated to empower children of color in their acquisition of knowledge. According to Crego-Emley & Treuhaft-Ali (2017) standardized and

scripted lessons, activities, and tasks have been proven to further limit the academic growth of children of color (para. 9). The element specifically challenges teaching and learning in my classroom because tasks which measure student success are often not designed to highlight my students' considerable strengths in cooperative learning through discourse. This is very much indicative of a larger problem within public education as it relates to teacher capacity to reshape the curriculum. According to Crego-Emley & Treuhaft-Ali (2017), the advent of No Child Left Behind brought educational reform in the form of "standardizing curricula irrespective of background, race, and class" (para. 2). While well-intentioned, this standardization of curricula prioritizes and centers Eurocentric perspectives, values, and individualist perspectives, which are often at-odds with the experiences and values of communities of color. In my classroom, I constantly feel conflict between the requirement to incorporate the one-size-fits-all approach of standardization and the actual needs of my diverse learners.

A Culturally Responsive Teaching strategy that I plan to implement to address the challenges this cultural element creates is to structure my students in heterogenous and cooperative groups for classroom learning and preparation for RCT tasks. According to Kransoff (2016), cooperative groups support students in "creative problem-solving" while also teaching them how to "work effectively with diverse peers" (p. 5). In these structured groups, diverse groups of students can support one another as they work to complete the necessary graphic organizers and outlines for writing tasks in addition to using technology like Quizlet to study for upcoming RCT quizzes and tests together. The Education Alliance at Brown University suggests that educators consider including various "cooperative learning strategies" and provide students the choice to work with others when preparing for assignments or tasks (n.d.). By allowing students to prep together before the RCT tasks must be administered, I am addressing their need for discourse and collaboration to solidify their conceptual understanding while holding them accountable to the current structures which are mandated by my district. As a result of implementing this strategy in my classroom, the expected outcome that I hope to achieve is that students will be able to continue aspects of collaborative learning which truly help them thrive while also meeting the demands of my school district. This should also remove some of the dread and concern of independent work in the classroom and should allow students to feel more confident when independent work tasks are assigned.

CRT Classroom Plan

Part 2: Culturally Responsive Teaching (Complete during Week 5)

In the past week, I implemented two Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies designed to support and capitalize on my students' needs and strengths related to cooperative learning and discourse in class discussions. The experience left me with many positive outcomes in my classroom and for the learning of the students which I serve. Moving forward, I will consider other means and methods to encourage students to provide me with feedback to improve the classroom learning environment. I will also consider how I can find meaningful ways to support students with independent learning tasks by properly scaffolding supports prior to the independent task by leveraging their collectivist strengths.

The first strategy I implemented was providing students with the opportunity to provide me with reflective feedback during independent work assignments so that I could better serve their needs in the classroom. In the past week, students were more likely to provide me with meaningful feedback and ideas about how I could improve the independent station work assignments when they were able to chat with me one-on-one in our weekly conference. Students had a plethora of brilliant ideas for how I could better support their instruction, including providing a recorded video of the instructions at each station, so that students could hear the directions as many times as they wanted. This was such an incredible use of technology to support student learning that I was a bit shocked that I had not considered implementing it before, particularly for the many students who benefit from repetition of directions. By asking my students for ways to improve the structure of the lesson, they exceeded my expectation for the vision of a culturally responsive classroom and the intended outcomes for the application of the practice. Another incredible suggestion was that students could use the speech-to-text feature on Microsoft Word when drafting their essays for RCT's.

This is a common accommodation which is typically used for statewide and local assessments at the end of the quarter, but it could provide many students with a practical way to translate their thoughts and ideas into writing in a way that feels very natural to them. Many already use Siri on their phones for transcribing text messages and for students with significant OT needs, this is a practical way for students to independently complete writing tasks without the use of a teacher scribe. Originally, I considered adding a suggestion box at the bottom of the exit ticket, but few students felt compelled to write suggestions in a box. While this was a simple method of data collection for me, it did not reflect the comfort and preferences of the students to verbalize their suggestions and I quickly changed course to conference individually with each of my students.

The second strategy I implemented was allowing students to collaborate in the brainstorming and organization part of their upcoming RCT for writing. I paired students using observational data and prior written exit ticket data to strategically place students with considerable writing strengths and knowledge with those who struggled more with the aspect of collecting textual evidence, citing accurately, and organizing their writing into an outline. One of the most beautiful moments that came from the lesson was when one of my scholars who received IEP supports for his Specific Learning Disability in writing suggested that his classmates take notes of the “text address” where they found the text evidence to support their claim on sticky notes. These sticky notes would help the students in their drafting when they were required to recall where the evidence was found in the text that best supported their claim for the opinion writing task.

This experience left the student feeling very empowered because he is normally not viewed as an expert by his peers. Having his classmates ask him for advice and use his work as an exemplar truly made him feel capable and like a valued member of the classroom

community. In this way, this practice also exceeded my expectations because it also strengthened the classroom community of learners and made students feel more confident in creating practical solutions to many of the problems they face in the classroom daily. Therefore, I can conclude that the use of this strategy moved my classroom closer to the vision for CRT in the classroom that I created at the beginning of this unit.

References

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