

# Pedagogical Potential of Cultural Responsiveness

“Personal narratives and cultural stories are vital teaching content and methodology.”

Teaching is a contextual, situational, and personal process, a complex and never-ending journey. William Ayers (2001) describes three key phases of this journey:

A first step is becoming the student to your students, uncovering the fellow creatures who must be partners to the enterprise. Another is creating an environment for learning, a nurturing and challenging space in which to travel. And finally, the teacher must begin work on the intricate, many-tiered bridges that will fill up the space, connecting all the dreams, hopes, skills, experiences, and knowledge students bring to class with deeper and wider ways of knowing. (p. 122)

As such, teaching is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students, are included in its implementation. This basic fact often is ignored in teaching some Native, Latino, African, and Asian American students, especially if they are poor. Instead, they are taught from the middle-class, Eurocentric frameworks that shape school practices. This attitude of “cultural blindness” stems from several sources.

One of these is the notion that education has nothing to do with cultures and heritages. It is about teaching intellectual, vocational, and civic skills. Students, especially underachieving ones, need to learn knowledge and skills that they can apply in life, and how to meet high standards of academic excellence, rather than wasting time on fanciful notions about cultural diversity. Second, too few teachers have adequate knowledge about how conventional teaching practices reflect European American cultural values. Nor are they sufficiently informed about the cultures of different ethnic groups. Third, most teachers want to do the best for all their students, and they mistakenly believe that to treat students differently because

of their cultural orientations is racial discrimination. Fourth, there is a belief that good teaching is transcendent; it is identical for all students, settings, and circumstances. Fifth, there is the claim that education is an effective doorway of assimilation into mainstream society for people from diverse cultural heritages, ethnic groups, social classes, and points of origin. These students need to forget about being different and learn to adapt to U.S. society. The best way to facilitate this process is for all students to have the same experiences in schools.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter calls these assumptions into question. It begins by exposing the fallacy of cultural neutrality and the homogeneity syndrome in teaching and learning for Native, African, Latino, and Asian American students who are not performing very well on traditional measures of school achievement. It also debunks the notion that school success for students of color can be generated from negative perceptions of their life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and intellectual capabilities. Instead, instructional reforms are needed that are grounded in positive beliefs about the cultural heritages and academic potentialities of these students. A pedagogical paradigm that has these characteristics is presented. The conceptual explication of this paradigm includes a brief historical background, descriptive characteristics, two case examples of its theoretical principles exemplified in practice, and some suggestions for how teachers can begin their pedagogical transformation toward greater cultural responsiveness in working with students of color.

## FROM CAN'T TO CAN

Many educators still believe that good teaching transcends place, people, time, and context. They contend that it has nothing to do with the class, race, gender, ethnicity, or culture of students and teachers. This attitude is manifested in the expression, “Good teachers anywhere are good teachers everywhere.” Individuals who subscribe to this belief fail to realize that their standards of “goodness” in teaching and learning are culturally determined and are not the same for all ethnic groups. The structures, assumptions, substance, and operations of conventional educational enterprises are European American cultural icons (Pai et al., 2006). A case in point is the protocols of attentiveness and the emphasis placed on them in classrooms. Students are expected to pay close attention to teachers for prolonged, largely uninterrupted periods of time. Specific signs and signals have evolved that are associated with appropriate attending behaviors. These include nonverbal communication cues, such as gaze, eye contact, and body posture. When

they are not exhibited by learners at times, intervals, and durations designated by teachers, the students are judged to be uninvolved, distracted, having short attention spans, and/or engaging in off-task behaviors. All these are “read” as obstructive to effective teaching and learning.

Many students are admonished by teachers to “Look at me when I’m talking to you.” Direct eye contact as a signal of attentiveness may be perceived as staring, a cultural taboo that causes resentment among some Apache students (Spring, 1995), or disrespect for authority and challenge by some Latino, Asian, and African Americans (McCarthy, Lee, Itakura, & Muir, 2006). Other discontinuities in behavioral norms and expectations are not isolated incidents or rare occurrences in culturally pluralistic classrooms. They happen often and on many different fronts, simply because teachers fail to recognize, understand, or appreciate the pervasive influence of culture on their own and their students’ attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Decontextualizing teaching and learning from the ethnicities, cultures, and experiences of students minimizes the chances that their achievement potential will ever be fully realized. Pai and associates (2006) agree with this assertion and make the point even more emphatically, explaining that

how we teach, what we teach, how we relate to children and each other, what our goals are—these are rooted in the norms of our culture. Our society’s predominant worldview and cultural norms are so deeply ingrained in how we educate children that we very seldom think about the possibility that there may be other different but equally legitimate and effective approaches to teaching and learning. In a society with as much sociocultural and racial diversity as the United States, the lack of this wonderment about alternative ways often results in unequal education and social injustice. (p. 233)

Another common and paradoxical manifestation of the notion that good teaching is devoid of cultural tenets is the frequent declaration that “respecting the individual differences of students is really what counts in effective teaching, not race, ethnicity, culture, or gender.” Simultaneously, too many teachers plead ignorance of Latino, African, Native, and Asian Americans, and immigrant groups. It is inconceivable how educators can recognize and nurture the individuality of students if they do not know them. Ignorance of people different from us often breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fears, and the seductive temptation to turn them into images of ourselves. The individuality of students is deeply entwined with their ethnic identity and cultural socialization. Teachers need to understand very thoroughly both the relationships and the distinctions between these to avoid compromising the very thing they are most concerned about—that is, students’ individuality. Inability to make distinctions among ethnicity, culture, and individuality increases the risk that teachers will impose their notions on ethnically different students, insult their cultural heritages, or ignore

them entirely in the instructional process. Teachers don't seem to realize that the declaration, "It's treating students as individuals that counts," is a cultural value, or that culture, ethnicity, and individuality are not mutually exclusive. In reality, ethnicity and culture are significant filters through which one's individuality is made manifest.

To help prospective teachers enrolled in a multicultural teaching class begin to grapple with these distinctions and interrelationships, my teaching assistant and I asked them to complete a three-part project. In the first part they were to do a free-write on what race, culture, and ethnicity meant to them personally. Many divergent perspectives and much ambiguity were evident in these short essays on ethnicity and culture, but not race. Therefore, in the second phase of the activity the students were to construct a "dialogic mirror image" poem about their ethnicity, culture, and individuality. They were to ask a significant person in their lives to comment on these three dimensions of their being, and use the results to create a dialogue, in poetic form, between the significant other and themselves. After sharing the poems in small groups, the students as a whole class compiled a list of eight consensual points important for describing these three dimensions of a person's being. These points then were used as guidelines for individual students to create poster collages representing their ethnicity, culture, and individuality. The project culminated with a gallery walk of the posters displayed around the classroom, and the "artists" answering questions about their creations.

The second troubling feature of conventional educational ethos and practices with respect to improving the achievement of ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students is the "deficit syndrome." Far too many educators attribute school failure to what students of color don't have and can't do. Some of the specific reasons given for why Navajo students do poorly in school are representative of this kind of thinking. In a school district in which 48% of the students are Navajo, and one of every four Navajos leaves before graduation, the causes of school failure identified by the administrators were all "deficits." Among them were lack of self-esteem; inadequate homes and prior preparation; poor parenting skills and low parental participation in the schooling process; lack of language development; poor academic interests, aspirations, and motivation; few opportunities for cultural enrichment; high truancy and absentee rates; and health problems, such as fetal alcohol syndrome (Deyhle, 1995). Except for fetal alcohol syndrome, similar "deficits" have been attributed to underachieving Latinos, African Americans, and some groups of Asian Americans.

Trying to teach from this "blaming the victim" and deficit mindset sounds more like a basis for "correcting or curing" than educating. Success does not emerge out of failure, weakness does not generate strength, and courage does not stem from cowardice. Instead, success begets success. Mastery of tasks at one level encourages individuals to accomplish tasks of even greater complexity (Boykin, 2002; Kim, Roehler, & Pearson, 2009;

Ormrod, 1995). High-level learning is a very high-risk venture. To pursue it with conviction, and eventual competence, requires students to have some degree of academic mastery, as well as personal confidence and courage. In other words, learning derives from a basis of strength and capability, not weakness and failure. Ormrod (1995) refers to this as having self-efficacy, meaning that “students feel more confident that they can succeed at a task . . . when they have succeeded at that task or similar ones in the past” (p. 151). Conversely, “when students meet with *consistent* failure in performing a particular task, they will have little confidence in their ability to succeed . . . in the future,” and “each new failure confirms what they already ‘know’ about the task—they can’t do it” (p. 152, emphasis in original). This “learned helplessness” and “cumulative failure” are devastating to many different kinds of achievement possibilities—academic, school attendance, personal well-being, dropout prevention, and avoidance of discipline problems.

Therefore, a very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups—one that teaches *to and through* their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments. Culturally responsive teaching is this kind of paradigm. It is at once a routine and a radical proposal. It is routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans. That is, it filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. It is radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes.

These are rather commonsensical and obvious directions to take, particularly in view of research evidence and classroom practices that demonstrate that *socioculturally centered teaching* does enhance student achievement. This is especially true when achievement measures are not restricted solely to academic indicators and standardized test scores. Most of this research and practice have focused on African Americans (e.g., Chapman, 1994; Erickson, 1987; M. Foster, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1997; Hollins, 1996; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 2009; C. Lee, 1993; C. Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995) and Native Hawaiians (Au, 1993; Au & Kawakami, 1994; Boggs et al., 1985; Cazden et al., 1985; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

The close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement (i.e., between culture and cognition) are becoming increasingly apparent. So is the transformative potential of teaching grounded in multicultural contributions, experiences, and orientations. It is these

interactions, and related data, that give source and focus, power and direction to the proposal made here for a paradigmatic shift in the pedagogy used with non-middle-class, non-European American students in U.S. schools. This is a call for the widespread implementation of *culturally responsive teaching*.

If educators continue to be ignorant of, ignore, impugn, and silence the cultural orientations, values, and performance styles of ethnically different students, they will persist in imposing cultural hegemony, personal denigration, educational inequity, and academic underachievement upon them. Accepting the validity of these students' cultural socialization and prior experiences will help to reverse achievement trends. It is incumbent upon teachers, administrators, and evaluators to *deliberately create cultural continuity* in educating ethnically diverse students. To the extent that all this entails is done systematically and effectively, dilemmas like those described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Fordham (1996) may decrease significantly. Academically capable African American students (or any other ethnic group of color) will feel less compelled to sabotage or camouflage their academic achievement to avoid compromising their cultural and ethnic integrity or relationships with peers from ethnic groups who are not as successful. Nor will children like Amy and Aaron (described in Chapter 1) continue to have such painful experiences and memories of school.

## IDEOLOGICAL BEGINNINGS

The ideas on which culturally responsive teaching are based have been a major part of education for and about cultural diversity from its inception. Their persistence is not surprising, since multicultural education originated in the early 1970s out of concerns for the racial and ethnic inequities that were apparent in learning opportunities and outcomes, and that continue to prevail. Abrahams and Troike (1972) argued that if racial minority students are to be taught effectively, teachers “must learn wherein their cultural differences lie and . . . capitalize upon them as a resource, rather than . . . disregarding the differences . . . [and] thereby denigrating . . . the students” (p. 5). Educators also need to analyze their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, and regulations that have made it difficult for them to teach these children successfully. This is imperative because there is “no other way of educating . . . [racial-minority] students than to provide them with a sense of dignity in the selves they bring with them into school, and to build on this by demonstrating the social and linguistic and cultural alternatives around them” (p. 6).

Chun-Hoon (1973) suggested that teaching cultural diversity in schools offers intellectual and psychological benefits for both mainstream society and Asian Americans. It helps to circumvent dangers to open, democratic

communities by not homogenizing diverse peoples, and it assists Asian Americans in transcending the psychological colonization promoted by the mass media, which make them virtually invisible and totally silenced. Without these kinds of educational interventions, individuals of color and society at large are shortchanged, because “intellectual freedom can exist only in the context of psychic space, while psychic space can be created only between distinct and contrasting points of view” (Chun-Hoon, 1973, p. 139). Both “intellectual freedom” and “psychic space” are necessary to facilitate maximum academic and other forms of school achievement. Teaching students of color from their own cultural perspectives is one way to make this happen.

The strong convictions expressed by Abrahams and Troike and by Chun-Hoon about the potentials of using diverse cultural referents in teaching also permeate the thinking of educators who were instrumental in shaping the multicultural education movement. Early comments from several of them illustrate the similarity of these messages. Arciniega argued in 1975 that “educational processes are needed which enable *all* students to become positive contributors to a culturally dynamic society consistent with cultural origins” (p. 165, emphasis in original), to understand one another’s cultures, and to attain higher levels of academic achievement. One of the most powerful benefits to be derived from a culturally pluralistic educational paradigm is “the creative ability to approach problem-solving activities with a built-in repertoire of bicultural perspectives. This is what is involved when we talk about eliminating incongruities between the cultural lifestyles of ethnic minority students and current schools” (p. 167). Carlson (1976) advised educators to stop trying to avoid the realities of ethnic differences and the roles they play in U.S. education. He reasoned that “since it is a fact that ethnic differences exist in important dimensions . . . it must be acknowledged that they exist and that they affect learning and academic outcomes” (p. 28).

Forbes (1973) developed this theme further as it relates to teaching Native American students. He outlined an educational agenda centered in the focal values of Native American cultures and comprehensive components of learning. Forbes suggested that cultural values, and the sociocultural, religio-philosophical, and political behavioral styles resulting from them, should be the foundation of all curricular and instructional decisions. Native American students should be taught knowledge and skills for the continued survival and development of their tribal groups or nations; personality characteristics valued by particular Native American societies; means of functioning harmoniously with nature and with other people; and ways to achieve the highest levels of mastery possible in different spheres of life. All these skills were to be developed within the context of reciprocal relationships, mutual sharing, showing hospitality toward others, self-realization, and spiritual and character development of individuals and groups. Forbes

also expressed some ideas about the importance of community-building and “success” for Native American students, which later became core elements of culturally responsive teaching in general. He advised:

The individual should develop a profound conception of the unity of life, from the fact of his belonging to a community of related people in which he owes his existence and definition of being, to the total web of natural life, to which he and his people also owe their existence. . . . The individual should develop a realization that “success” in life stems from being able to contribute to the well-being of one’s people and all life. This means that the individual seeks to perfect behavior and skills which will add “beauty” to the world. To create “beauty” in actions, words, and objects is the overall objective of human beings in the world. (Forbes, 1973, p. 205)

Banks admonished teachers of racial minority students to stop conducting business as usual, or using traditional instructional conventions. Instead, they should “respect the cultural and linguistic characteristics of minority youths, and change the curriculum so that it will reflect their learning and cultural styles and greatly enhance their achievement.” Moreover, “minority students should not be taught contempt for their cultures. Teachers should use elements of their cultures to help them attain the skills which they need to live alternative life styles” (J. Banks, 1974, pp. 165–166). Cuban (1972) warned educators to avoid looking for simple, one-dimensional solutions to complex challenges in educating students of color. The mere inclusion of ethnic content into school curricula would not resolve these dilemmas. Some radical changes were needed in the instructional process as well. While ethnic content has the potential to stimulate intellectual curiosity and make meaningful contact with ethnically diverse students, it should be combined with instructional strategies that emphasize inquiry, critique, and analysis, rather than the traditional preferences for rote memory and regurgitation of factual information.

Aragon (1973) shifted the focus of reform needs to teacher preparation. He argued that the reason ethnic minorities were not doing well in school was more a function of teacher limitations than student inabilities. Teachers, rather than students, were “culturally deprived” because they did not understand or value the cultural heritages of minority groups. Educational reform needed to begin by changing teacher attitudes about non-mainstream cultures and ethnic groups, and then developing skills for incorporating cultural diversity into classroom instruction. These changes would lead to improvement in student achievement.

As early as 1975, Gay identified some specific ways to develop multicultural curriculum content and some important dimensions of achievement other than basic skills and academic subjects. Her conceptions of achievement encompassed ethnic identity development, citizenship skills



for pluralistic societies, knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity, and cross-cultural interactional competence as well as academic success. She suggested that content about cultural diversity has both intrinsic and instrumental value for classroom instruction. The instrumental value includes improving interest in and motivation for learning for diverse students, relevance of school learning, and establishing linkages among school, home, and community. Specifically, Gay (1975) suggested:

Ethnic materials should be used to teach such fundamental skills as reading, writing, calculating, and reasoning. Students can learn reading skills using materials written by and about Blacks, Mexican Americans, Italian Americans, and Jewish Americans as well as they can from reading “Dick and Jane.” Ethnic literature . . . can be used to teach plot, climax, metaphor, grammatical structure, and symbolism as well as anything written by Anglo Americans. . . . ethnic literacy, reflective self-analysis, decision making, and social activism . . . are as essential for living in a culturally and ethnically pluralistic society as are knowing how to read and having a salable skill. . . . Ethnic content serves the purpose of bringing academic tasks from the realm of the alien and the abstract into the experiential frames of reference of ethnically different youth. (pp. 179–181)

## QUALITATIVE ATTRIBUTES

Although called by many different names, including *culturally relevant*, *sensitive*, *centered*, *congruent*, *reflective*, *mediated*, *contextualized*, *synchronized*, and *responsive*, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical. Hereafter, they are referred to by my term of preference, *culturally responsive pedagogy*. It represents a compilation of ideas and explanations from a wide variety of scholars. Throughout this discussion, labels other than “culturally responsive” appear only when the scholars quoted directly use different terminology. The following eight descriptors comprise a “character profile” of culturally responsive teaching—that is, its distinguishing traits or qualities.

### Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Validating

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined 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. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and

cultural diversity in learning. It is contingent on a set of racial and cultural competencies amply summarized by Teel and Obidah (2008). They include seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students; challenging racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression; being change agents for social justice and academic equity; mediating power imbalances in classrooms based on race, culture, ethnicity, and class; and accepting cultural responsiveness as essential to educational effectiveness in all areas of learning for students from all ethnic groups. Culturally responsive teaching *is validating and affirming* because

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Thus, the study of different literary genres is replete with samples and examples from a wide variety of ethnic authors. The study of math concepts and operations (such as calculations, pattern, proportionality, statistics) in everyday life can engage students in explorations of the crafts, economics, architecture, employment patterns, population distributions, and consumer habits of different ethnic groups. Opportunities provided for students to practice and demonstrate mastery of information, concepts, and skills in language arts, social studies, and science can include a wide range of sensory stimuli (visual, tactile, auditory), and individual and group, competitive and cooperative, active participatory and sedentary activities in order to tap into the learning styles of different students. These approaches to teaching are based on the assumption that positive self-concepts, knowledge of and pride in one's own ethnic identity, and improved academic achievement are interactional. Furthermore, the cultural affiliation and understanding, knowledge, and skills needed to challenge existing social orders and power structures are desirable goals to be taught in schools.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Comprehensive and Inclusive

In a four-volume *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*, Banks (2012) and the contributing authors provide an extensive range and variety of topics, issues, groups, and perspectives that fall within the purview of educating for and about ethnic, racial, cultural, social, linguistic, and national diversity. Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by using cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. In other words, they teach the whole child. Hollins (1996) adds that education designed specifically for students of color incorporates “culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content” (p. 13). Along with improving academic achievement, these approaches to teaching are committed to helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success. Expectations and skills are not taught as separate entities but are woven together into an integrated whole that permeates all curriculum content and the entire modus operandi of the classroom. Students are held accountable for one another’s learning as well as their own. They are expected to internalize the value that learning is a communal, reciprocal, interdependent affair, and manifest it habitually in their expressive behaviors. These expectations and related behaviors are delivered to students in different but complementary ways, and at various levels of the educational enterprise. They involve teachers, counselors, administrators, and support staff; the classroom, the school, and the district; formal (policies, programs, and instructional practices) and informal (extracurricular activities, school image, community relations) dimensions of schooling; and teaching to and through cultural diversity across the entire school curriculum.

Ladson-Billings (2009) observed these values being exemplified in actual instruction in the elementary classrooms she studied. She saw expectations expressed, skills taught, interpersonal relations exhibited, and an overall esprit de corps operating where students were part of a collective effort designed to promote academic and cultural excellence. They functioned like members of an extended family, assisting, supporting, and encouraging one another. The entire class was expected to rise or fall together, and it was in the best interest of everyone to ensure that each individual member of the group was successful. By building an academic community of learners, the teachers responded to the sense of belonging that youths need, honored their human dignity, and promoted their individual self-concepts. Students engaged in caring relationships, shared resources, and worked closely together and with the teacher to attain common learning outcomes. Educational excellence included academic success as well as

cultural competence, critical social consciousness, political activism, and responsible community membership. A strong belief in the right of students to be part of a mutually supportive group of high achievers permeated all these learning processes and outcomes (M. Foster, 1995, 1997; Irvine & Foster, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Lipman, 1995). Other dimensions of the inclusive nature of culturally responsive teaching include (1) addressing students across the entire educational spectrum, from preschool to graduate studies; (2) targeting both minority and majority students, but for different reasons and in different ways; and (3) developing cultural border-crossing skills for navigating different living and learning contexts for native and immigrant students.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Multidimensional**

*Multidimensional* culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments. For example, language arts, music, art, and social studies teachers may collaborate in teaching the concept of protest. It can be examined from the perspective of their respective disciplines, such as how protest against racial discrimination is expressed by different ethnic groups in poetry, song lyrics, paintings, and political actions. The students and teachers may decide to simulate time periods when social protest was very prominent, analyzing and role-playing various ethnic individuals. Within these simulations, coalition meetings can be held in which individuals from different ethnic groups express their positions on the issues of contention in various genres (e.g., rhetoric, sit-ins, songs, political slogans, visual and performing arts). Part of the challenge is for students to understand the major points made in these different forms of expression and to see whether any consensus and collaborative action can be achieved across ethnic groups. Students also can help teachers decide how their performance will be evaluated, whether by written tests, peer feedback, observations, ability to extrapolate information about ethnic protest presented in one expressive form and transfer it to another, or some combination of these.

To do this kind of teaching well requires tapping into a wide range of cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives. Emotions, beliefs, values, ethos, opinions, and feelings are scrutinized along with factual information and physical behaviors to make curriculum and instruction more reflective of and responsive to ethnic diversity. However, every conceivable aspect of an ethnic group’s culture is not replicated in the classroom. Nor are the cultures included in the curriculum used only with students from that ethnic group. Culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on those elements of cultural socialization that most directly affect learning. It helps students clarify their ethnic values while correcting factual errors

about cultural heritages. In the process of accomplishing these goals, students are held accountable for knowing, thinking, questioning, analyzing, feeling, reflecting, sharing, and acting.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Empowering**

Because culturally responsive teaching is empowering, it enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners (Rajagopal, 2011). Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act. In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained. Teachers must show students that they expect them to succeed and commit themselves to making success happen. These can be high-risk endeavors. Culturally responsive teachers are aware of the risks involved in learning and the need for students to have successes along the way to mastery. They plan accordingly and create infrastructures to support the efforts of students so that they will persevere toward high levels of academic achievement (Tomlinson & Javrus, 2012). This is done by bolstering students' morale, providing resources and personal assistance, developing an ethos of achievement, and celebrating individual and collective accomplishments. However, empowerment also has some other dimensions, in addition to academic ones, that fall within the purview of culturally responsive teaching. These include cultural, social, civic, and moral development dimensions. This broader view of teaching to empower culturally diverse students is somewhat analogous to Ginsberg's (2015) notions of enhancing meaning and engendering competence. They encompass learning experiences that address the human desire to be effective at what is valued, and that benefit students as whole human beings, not just with regard to their academic achievement.

The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) project is an excellent example of how this empowering process operates in practice (Mehan et al., 1996; Swanson et al., 1995). Low-achieving Latino and African American students are encouraged to enroll in Advanced Placement classes. The accompanying instructional interventions are reinforced by what Mehan and associates (1996) call a system of "social scaffolding." These are social and personal supports that buffer students as they are being taught high-level academic skills and how to take ownership of their own learning. They include students'

- explaining their problem-solving techniques to one another in small groups,
- displaying insignia (e.g., emblems, signs, pins, badges, logos) that identify them as AVID participants,
- spending time together in a space specifically designated for AVID,

- learning the “cultural capital” of school success (test-taking strategies, self-presentation techniques to fit teaching styles, study skills, note-taking, time management), and
- being mentored in academic and social skills by other students who have successfully completed the program.

Shor (1992) elucidates further on the nature and effect of empowering education. Although his explanations do not derive explicitly from concerns about improving the school achievement of marginalized students of color, they are nonetheless apropos. He characterizes empowering education as

a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other. . . . The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, to develop strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change. . . . The learning process is negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher, and mutual teacher–student authority. In addition, . . . the empowering class does not teach students to seek self-centered gain while ignoring public welfare. (pp. 15–16)

Implicit in these conceptions of education for empowerment are ideological mandates as well as parameters for the substantive content to be taught, the instructional processes to be used, and the behavioral outcomes expected of students. Within them students are the primary source and center, subjects and outcomes, consumers and producers of knowledge. Classroom instruction embodies and unfolds within a context of what Shor (1992) calls “an agenda of values” that emphasize participatory, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, inquiring, interdisciplinary, and activist learning.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Transformative**

Culturally responsive teaching defies conventions of traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color. This is done in several ways. It is very explicit about respecting the cultures and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian American students, and it uses these as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning. It recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process. For instance, the verbal creativity that is apparent among some African Americans in informal social interactions is recognized as a storytelling gift and used to teach them writing skills. This can be done by having the students verbalize their writing

assignments, recording and transcribing them, and then teaching technical writing skills using the transcriptions of their own verbalized thoughts. The tendency of many Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino students to study together in small groups can be formalized in the classroom, providing more opportunities for them and other students to participate in cooperative learning.

Culturally responsive teaching makes academic success a nonnegotiable mandate for all students and an accessible goal. It promotes the idea, and develops skills for practicing it, that students are obligated to be productive members of and render service to their respective ethnic communities as well as to the national society. It does not pit academic success and cultural affiliation against each other. Rather, academic success and cultural consciousness are developed simultaneously. Students are taught to be proud of their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds instead of being apologetic or ashamed of them. Culturally responsive teaching also circumvents the tendency toward learned helplessness for some students of color in traditional public schools, where their achievement levels decrease the longer they remain in school (Holliday, 1985).

The features and functions of culturally responsive pedagogy meet the mandates of high-quality education for ethnically diverse students proposed by J. Banks (1991). He contends that if education is to empower marginalized groups, it must be transformative. Being transformative involves helping “students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action” (p. 131). Students must learn to analyze the effects of inequities on different ethnic individuals and groups, have zero tolerance for these, and become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice, and power balances among ethnic groups. They practice these ethics and skills in different community contexts—classrooms, schools, playgrounds, neighborhoods, and society at large. Therefore, the transformative agenda of culturally responsive teaching is double-focused. One direction deals with confronting and transcending the cultural hegemony nested in much of the curriculum content and classroom instruction of traditional education. The other develops social consciousness, intellectual critique, and political and personal efficacy in students so that they can combat prejudices, racism, and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Emancipatory**

Culturally responsive pedagogy is *liberating* (Asante, 1991/1992; Au, 1993; Erickson, 1987; Gordon, 1993; Lipman, 1995; Pewewardy, 1994; Philips, 1983) in that it releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing. Central to this kind of teaching is making authentic knowledge

about different ethnic groups accessible to students. The validation, information, and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating. This freedom allows students to focus more closely and concentrate more thoroughly on academic learning tasks. The results are improved achievement of many kinds. Among them are more clear and insightful thinking; more caring, concerned, and humane interpersonal skills; better understanding of interconnections among individual, local, national, ethnic, global, and human identities; and acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared, critiqued, revised, and renewed (Chapman, 1994; M. Foster, 1995; Hollins, 1996; Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2009; C. Lee, 1993; C. Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995).

Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes, and Swartz (1990) provide another explanation for why education grounded in multiculturalism is emancipatory for teaching and learning. According to them, it

utilizes an inclusive and representational framework of knowledge in which students and teachers have the capacity to produce ventilated narratives. . . . By collectively representing diverse cultures and groups as producers of knowledge, it facilitates a liberative student/teacher relationship that “opens up” the written text and oral discourse to analysis and reconstruction. (p. 103)

In other words, culturally responsive pedagogy lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools. It helps students realize that no single version of “truth” is total and permanent. Nor should it be allowed to exist uncontested. Students are taught how to apply new knowledge generated by various ethnic scholars to their analyses of social histories, issues, problems, and experiences. These learning engagements encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning (Crichlow et al., 1990; J. King & Wilson, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). These revelations about knowledge and their attendant skills constitute the heart of the intellectual and cultural liberation facilitated by culturally responsive teaching. They are analogous to Freire’s (1980) notions that critical consciousness and cultural emancipation are the gateways to each other. To them can be added that the freedom to be ethnically expressive removes the psychological stress associated with and psychic energy deployed in “covering up” or “containing” one’s cultural inclinations. This reclaimed psychoemotional energy can be rechanneled into learning tasks, thereby improving intellectual attentiveness and academic achievement.

Cooperation, community, and connectedness are also central features of culturally responsive teaching. Students are expected to work together



and are held accountable for one another's success. Mutual aid, interdependence, and reciprocity as criteria for guiding behavior replace the individualism and competitiveness that are so much a part of conventional classrooms. The goal is for all students to be winners, rather than some winning and others losing, and for students to assume responsibility for helping one another achieve to the best of their ability. In her studies of effective African American teachers, M. Foster (1989, 1994, 1995) found that these values and behaviors were demonstrated in their classrooms. The teachers were personally affiliated with and connected to the African American cultural community. They taught the students values, knowledge, and skills for participating in the larger society as well as their own cultural communities. They also drew on community patterns and norms to structure and operate their classrooms, and they incorporated the students' cultural and communication styles into instructional practices.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Humanistic**

As such, it is ultimately concerned with the human welfare, dignity, and respect of the various individuals and groups who comprise the United States and the world. While its primary constituency is individuals and groups whose humanity has been, and often still is, denigrated by mainstream peoples, policies, and practices, others are considered benefactors as well. This means that culturally responsive teaching has value for majority and minority students, for both similar and different reasons, and that these benefits are direct and indirect, individually and collectively. A benefit for all students across ethnic, racial, and social groups is acquiring deeper and more accurate knowledge about the cultures, lives, experiences, and accomplishments of diverse peoples in U.S. society and humankind. This knowledge is needed to correct factual distortions and errors, some of which have perpetuated impressions that ethnic and racial minority groups have been on the sidelines of the construction and development of the United States when, in fact, they have been (and continue to be) active participants in and significant contributors to every phase. These contributions have not been limited to the United States.

Culturally responsive teaching helps students acquire knowledge of self and others, and the attendant values that come with having a better and more accurate understanding of who diverse people are and how they came of be as individuals, groups, and nations. It thus develops the idea that interdependence is an inherent attribute of humanity; when people know, respect, and relate to each other, all groups and individuals are better off. Culturally diverse people also need to be culturally responsive to each other. This involves: being open, receptive, and respectful to the viewpoints, thoughts, experiences, and perceptions of self and others, including a willingness to critique them; learning from and relating to members of one's

own and other cultures, races, ethnicities, and social classes; exploring and honoring the differences of self and others; recognizing that people view the world and life through different lenses; and actively promoting equality and social justice (Goodman, 2013; Williams, 2017)

### Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Normative and Ethical

A part of the 2011 policy statement of the American Evaluation Association (AEA) on the need for cultural competence in education evaluation captures the essence of culturally responsiveness as normative and ethical. Its message is applicable to other aspects of the educational enterprise as well. The statement said, in part,

Evaluations cannot be culture free. Those who engage in evaluation do so from perspectives that reflect their values, their ways of viewing the world, and their culture. Culture shapes the ways in which evaluation questions are conceptualized, which in turn influence what data are collected, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how data are interpreted. (AEA, 2011)

Undoubtedly, some features and forms of culture are always embedded in teaching and learning. This presence and its influence are not exceptional, unusual, or abnormal—given that countries create schools to assist their preservation and perpetuation by teaching youth the nations' cultural heritages, values, and behavioral expectations. Yet an apparent contradiction is commonly associated with this reality in the conception and conduct of U.S. mainstream education. One part is the denial that programs and practices routinely implemented in schools reflect *anybody's* culture; the other part is the failure of these procedures to reflect *everybody's* culture. Culturally responsive teaching corrects this misconception and exclusion by making explicit how and why mainstream educational policies and practices are shaped by and reflective of the Eurocentric culture, perspectives, and experiences of the powerful, privileged, and demographically dominant ethnic group. In other words, what is commonly thought of as cultureless mainstream U.S. schooling is, in reality, *Eurocentric culturally responsive education*.

Educational discourse about equity and social justice recommends extending similar rights and opportunities to students from other ethnic groups, especially those discriminated against, oppressed, and marginalized (that is, minority groups of color). They deserve parallel rights and opportunities like those received by majority group students. Since culture and education are inseparably linked, and different ethnic groups have different cultures, it is both the normal and the right thing to do to incorporate cultural diversity into educative processes intended for ethnically, racially, and socially diverse students. In effect, then, the recommendation is for *ethnically diverse (or*

*minority groups*’) *culturally responsive education*. Ideologically, this is not an unusual or exceptional proposal; rather it is simply the right, necessary, and honorable thing to do given the customary or regular purposes, designs, functions, and deliveries of education in U.S. schools

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING PERSONIFIED

Two stories are presented here to illustrate how the attributes of culturally responsive teaching operate in practice. Neither alone is a complete portrait. Each provides a capsule view of one or a few dimensions of this style of teaching. Together, they come closer to creating a complete picture. It is helpful to consider them both separately and together in visualizing the move of culturally responsive teaching from theory to practice. Doing so is consistent with a major feature of the paradigm itself—that is, the importance of dealing simultaneously with general issues and particular cases in teaching African American, Latino American, Asian American, and Native American underachieving students. The stories deal with critiquing and symboling.

### Critiquing

The setting is a teacher education class. The students are studying the philosophical foundations of culturally responsive pedagogy. The principle under analysis is “K–12 education is a free, public, and equal access enterprise for all students in the United States.” Students are expected to engage in critical, analytical, reflective, and transformative thinking about the issues, ideas, and assertions they encounter. The instructor invites them to “think about” what this principle means within the context of ethnic and cultural diversity. The students respond to this invitation as follows:

*Student 1:* What does “educational freedom” really mean for Native American students? If freedom means the right to learn without undue obstructions, how much freedom did they have when early missionary educators took them away from their families and communities, and forced them to “look” like European Americans, accept their religion, and ascribe to their values? Where is the freedom in this? And what about today? How unrestricted are the opportunities for Native Americans to learn, practice, and celebrate their cultural heritages in modern schools?

*Student 2:* I’m concerned about Filipinos and other immigrant or first-generation, U.S.-born students who may not be fluent in English. What does freedom to learn and the right to equal educational opportunities mean for them? Where is the equality when teachers

in schools don't speak Tagalog, Thai, Cambodian, Spanish, or some other languages, and these students have to try to function in a language system that is alien to them? Do they have opportunities for educational mastery comparable to children who are competent in the language of instruction? People may say, as they often do, that "these children are now in the United States and they must learn to speak English." I'm not opposed to this, but I am still left wondering, What about the possibility of loss of language? How might this loss affect students' cultural affiliation and sense of identity? How does having to learn in an unfamiliar language affect achievement level? What is the connection between "freedom to learn" and "equalizing opportunities"? Where do bi- or multilingualism and cultural diversity fit into the equal opportunity equation?

*Student 3:* It seems to me that public education as the "great equalizer" really meant Anglicizing all students from non-European origins. I think schools have done much more to homogenize culturally diverse students than to make the educational experience a true amalgamation of contributions from all the different ethnic groups and cultures that make up the United States. If this had happened years ago, there would be no grounds for current appeals for ethnic studies, women's studies, multicultural education, and bilingualism to be included in school programs.

*Student 4:* I don't think there is much equality in never seeing your own ethnic group's contributions represented in textbooks, or having them depicted in biased and stereotypical ways. Imagine what African American students must have felt being told over and over that they are descendants of slaves, chattel, unintelligent buffoons, who were treated almost like animals. Or Native Americans being portrayed as uncivilized heathens and murdering savages. Or, for that matter, the ego inflation potential of the notion of "manifest destiny" for European Americans. These seem to me far, far removed from educational freedom and equality. They sound more like "psychological and cultural imperialism." Can students from diverse ethnic backgrounds perform to the best of their intellectual ability under these conditions? I think not.

*Student 5:* The whole idea is a hustle, a myth. Education has never been free and equal in this country. Children who have the least have always had to make the greatest sacrifices, pay the highest prices, and get the lowest benefits. Look at the desegregation experiment. Who were on those buses going where? Look at the condition of city schools compared with suburban ones. Where are the best teachers assigned? The best buildings and materials? The best programs? Where is the most money for education being

spent? If true equality had existed from the beginning, we would not have the kind of achievement disparities we currently have.

*Student 6:* I think we need to take a closer look at who came up with these ideas, and what did *they* mean by them. Their conceptions probably were quite different from ours. If we knew this, we would be better able to make better sense of them conceptually, and decide whether to continue to accept them on blind faith or to revise them so that they are more appropriate for today's realities. I guess I am proposing here that we do what one of my other professors means by "positionality analyses."

*Student 7:* (*Laughing in response to the comments made by Student 6*) Girl, we know who *they* be. *They* most definitely ain't *us*. If we had made glib statements like that, *you* wouldn't be wondering what *we* meant, 'cause *we* would have told you explicitly and up front what was what.

*Several other students:* Uh-huh (*and other signs of endorsement of Student 7's comments*).

*Instructor:* This is good. You are questioning, critiquing, deconstructing, evoking a variety of points of reference, seeking out specific cultural grounding of applicability of general pedagogical ideas. Continue to "think about."

## Symboling

The kindergarten class Lois teaches comprises immigrant and first-generation U.S. students from many countries, as well as a mixture of different native ethnic groups. Consequently, there is a lot of ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity present. Looking into her classroom provides a glimpse of how culturally responsive teaching can be accomplished through the use of visual imagery and symbols. The school year has been in session for a little more than 4 months. Lois has established some clear routines with her students for embracing and celebrating one another's cultural diversity. As we take a quick tour of this classroom, we witness the following:

Attached to the entrance door is a huge welcome sign brightly decorated with the children's own art. The sign reads "Welcome to Our Academic Home." This message is accompanied by a group photograph of the members of the class and "welcome" in different languages (Spanish, Japanese, German, French, various U.S. dialects, etc.). Stepping inside the room, one is bombarded with an incredibly rich and wide range of ethnically and culturally diverse images. Maps of the world and the United States are prominently displayed on the front wall, under the heading "We Come from Many Places." Strings connect different parts of the world to the United States. They represent the countries of origin of the families and/or ethnic groups of the students in the class. A display in

another corner of the room is labeled “Our Many Different Faces.” It includes a montage of close-up facial photographs of the members of the class. These are surrounded by pictures of adults from different ethnic groups in ceremonial dress for various rites of passage (e.g., marriage, adulthood, baptism) and occupations (clergy, doctors, construction workers, dancers).

The room’s “Reading Center” is a prototype of multicultural children’s literature—a culturally responsive librarian’s dream! Many different ethnic groups, topics, and literary types are included. Books, poems, comics, song lyrics, posters, magazines, and newspapers beckon the students to discover and read about the histories, families, myths, folktales, travels, troubles, triumphs, experiences, and daily lives of a wide variety of Asian, African, European, Middle Eastern, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander groups and individuals. Audio- and videotapes, DVDs, and CDs are liberally sprinkled among these items, including music, books on tape, storytelling, and television programs. Others look like student productions. In the midst of all these media materials, a video camera and a tape recorder stand in readiness for use. Another curious item captures the attention. It is a pile of tattered, well-used photo albums. These resources invite students to explore the past, to reflect on the present, to imagine the future.

The extent and quality of this collection of materials prompt the question, “Lois, how did you come by all of this?” She credits parents for the accomplishment. At the beginning of the academic year, she gets the parents of the students to make a contractual agreement to donate two books or other forms of media to the class collection. One of these books is to be about their own ethnic group and the other about some other group, and the books should be ones that they either use with their children at home or would like their children to learn about in school. The families are given credit for their contributions by having each item stamped “Donated by \_\_\_\_\_.” When the collection becomes too large to be easily accommodated in the classroom, or the students “outgrow it,” some of the items are donated to the school library or community agencies. This is a class project, with the students deciding which items they will keep and which they will give away. Only one stipulation is attached to the gifts. The recipients must agree to acknowledge the donors with the credit line “Donated by the Kindergarten Class of Room \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School.”

Lois is a strong believer in “representative ethnic imagery.” She is very conscientious about ensuring that the visual depictions of ethnic groups and individuals in her classroom are accurate, authentic, and pluralistic. She explains that she wants students to readily recognize who the ethnic visuals represent rather than having to wonder what they are supposed to be. She also wants the students to be exposed to a wide variety of images within and among groups to avoid ethnic stereotyping. To assist the students with this identification, all of the pictures of ethnic individuals displayed throughout the classroom include personal and ethnic identities. These read, “My name is

\_\_\_\_\_ ; I am \_\_\_\_\_ [ethnic group]." Lois justifies this protocol by saying simply, "Students need to know that it's OK to recognize other people's ethnicity and to expect others to acknowledge theirs. Ethnicity is an important feature of our personal identities."

Two other permanent culturally pluralistic displays exist in this stimulating, intellectually invigorating, and culturally diverse classroom. One is entitled "We Can Do Many Things." Here are images, samples, and symbols of the contributions and accomplishments of different ethnic groups, such as crafts, arts, science, technology, medicine, and music. They include children and adults of different ages, famous and common folks, profound achievements and regular, daily occurrences. For example, there is one photograph of three students who have been especially helpful to classmates from other ethnic groups and another of six great-grandparents who are 75 years of age or older. The master tape representing different ethnic groups' contributions to music includes excerpts from operas, jazz, rap, spirituals, movie soundtracks, country, pop, and children's songs. The names of other individuals are accompanied by miniature samples of their contributions. There is the athlete with a little basketball, but it's refreshing to see that she is a member of the 1996 U.S. Olympic team, and Venus and Serena are there with their little tennis rackets. Some kernels of corn appear next to Native Americans, and a little make-believe heart operation kit is connected to African Americans.

The other permanent display is a multicultural alphabet streamer. Different ethnic groups and contributions are associated with each of the letters in the alphabet. For example, "Jamaican" and "Japanese American," as well as "jazz," appear under the letter *J*, and "lasso" and "Latino" appear under *L*.

The tour of this classroom also offers a glimpse into how Lois incorporates the ethnically diverse symbols into her formal instruction. Small groups of students are working on different skills. As Lois circulates among them, activities in the reading and math groups are riveting. It is Carlos's turn to select the book to be read for storytime. He chooses one about a Japanese American family. Lois asks him to tell the group why he made this choice. Carlos explains that he had seen Yukiko (a classmate) at McDonald's over the weekend, and he wanted to do something nice for her by reading "her" book. He also said he saw some other people like those in the book, and he wanted to know more about them because they don't look like people where he lives.

Before Lois begins to read the story, she tells the students a little about this ethnic group, like the proper name, its country of origin, some symbol of its culture (they eat a lot of different kinds of noodles), and where large numbers of its members live in the United States. She asks if anyone can find Japan and California on the maps. She helps the group locate these places. As the students return to their places and settle down for the story, we hear Lois asking, "If we wanted to go to the places where there are a lot of Japanese Americans, how would we get there? Who would like to go?" Several hands pop up quickly at the thought of such an imagined journey. Incidentally (maybe

not!), the book Carlos chose to read is about a little boy taking his first airplane ride with his parents to go visit his grandparents, who live far away. Once this “context setting” is completed, Lois proceeds through a dialogic reading of the book. She pauses frequently to probe the students’ understanding of associated meaning prompted by the narrative text, to examine their feelings, and to predict upcoming developments in the story.

In math, the students are practicing bilingual counting. They already know how to count in English and to associate the number with the appropriate word. On this occasion, they are learning to count to 10 in Spanish. Under Lois’s supervision, the students go through an oral exercise using the Spanish words for the numbers. One student points to the words as the others say them aloud. After some giggling and gentle consternation about their pronunciation, Lois compliments the students’ efforts, while sympathizing with their concerns and reminding them that people who are learning a language do not sound like those who are native speakers. Tamika reminds everyone that Rosita speaks Spanish at home and announces, with conviction, “I bet she can say those words real good.” Lois asks Rosita if she would like to give it a try. After a little encouragement from other members of the group, she agrees. Lois tells the group that Rosita is now the teacher and the other students are to practice saying the words as she does. After this is done, the students are asked to sit quietly, listen, and observe another native Spanish speaker counting. This is presented in the form of a videotape, using a motif similar to *Sesame Street*.

Symbols are powerful conveyers of meaning, as Lois’s classroom attests. Her students are inundated with positive images of and interactions with ethnic and cultural diversity. They learn about and celebrate their own and one another’s identities and abilities, while simultaneously being invited to extend the boundaries of their knowledge and skills. All of this occurs in a warm, supportive, affirming, and illuminating classroom climate, in which the use of culturally diverse referents in teaching and learning is habitual. This type of instruction is very conducive to high levels of many different kinds of achievement for students from all ethnic groups.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

Implicit in these mandates, attributes, and personifications of culturally responsive pedagogy are some key roles and responsibilities for teachers. Diamond and Moore (1995) have organized them into three major categories: *cultural organizers*, *cultural mediators*, and *orchestrators of social contexts for learning*. Gentemann and Whitehead (1983) combined these tasks into the single role of *cultural broker*. As *cultural organizers*, teachers must understand how culture operates in daily classroom dynamics, create learning atmospheres that radiate cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate



high academic achievement for all students. Opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes on a regular basis. These accommodations require the use of various culturally centered ways of knowing, thinking, speaking, feeling, and behaving.

As *cultural mediators*, teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in critical dialogue about conflicts among cultures and to analyze inconsistencies between mainstream cultural ideals/realities and those of different cultural systems. They help students clarify their ethnic identities, honor other cultures, develop positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships, and avoid perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes, and racism. The goal is to create communities of culturally diverse learners who celebrate and affirm one another and work collaboratively for their mutual success, where empowerment replaces powerlessness and oppression.

As *orchestrators of social contexts* for learning, teachers must recognize the important influence culture has on learning and make teaching processes compatible with the sociocultural contexts and frames of reference of ethnically diverse students. They also help students translate their cultural competencies into school learning resources. Spring's (1995) definition of a cultural frame of reference can be helpful in achieving these teaching–learning synchronizations. He defines it as “those elements that cause a cultural group to interpret the world . . . in a particular manner” (p. 5), or the filter through which impressions of, experiences with, and knowledge of the outside world are ordered and made meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, culturally responsive pedagogy simultaneously develops, along with academic achievement, social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community-building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring. It uses ways of knowing, understanding, and representing various ethnic and cultural groups in teaching academic subjects, processes, and skills. It cultivates cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and between students and teachers. It incorporates high-status, accurate cultural knowledge about different ethnic groups into all subjects and skills taught.

Culturally responsive teachers have unequivocal faith in the human dignity and intellectual capabilities of their students. They view learning as having intellectual, academic, personal, social, ethical, and political dimensions, all of which are developed in concert with one another. They scaffold instruction and build bridges between the cultural experiences of

ethnically diverse students and the curriculum content of academic subjects to facilitate higher levels of learning. These teachers use a variety of approaches to all aspects of the educational process, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment, embedded in multicultural contexts. They consider critical and reciprocal dialogue and participatory engagement as central to the acquisition and demonstration of learning. Academic success is a nonnegotiable goal for everyone and the responsibility of all participants in the teaching–learning process. In their interpersonal relationships with students, culturally responsive teachers are warm, supportive, personable, enthusiastic, understanding, and flexible (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997), yet rigorous in demanding high-quality academic performance from both themselves and their students.

Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. It is anchored on four foundational pillars of practice—teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies.

If the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy is to be realized, then widespread instructional reform is needed, as well as major changes in the professional development, accountability, and assessment of teaching personnel. It requires teachers who have (1) thorough *knowledge* about the cultural values, learning styles, historical legacies, contributions, and achievements of different ethnic groups; (2) the *courage* to stop blaming the victims of school failure and to admit that something is seriously wrong with existing educational systems; (3) the *will* to confront prevailing educational canons and convictions, and to rethink traditional assumptions of cultural universality and/or neutrality in teaching and learning; (4) the *skills* to act productively in translating knowledge and sensitivity about cultural diversity into pedagogical practices; and (5) the *tenacity* to relentlessly pursue comprehensive and high-level performance for children who currently are underachieving in schools. Hopefully, then, schooling experiences like those of Amy and Aaron, described in Chapter 1, will be historical memories, not everyday occurrences, and their children will have more successful stories to tell about their learning encounters and academic achievement.

## PRACTICE POSSIBILITIES

Educators need to be explicit and transparent about the ethics and ideologies that anchor their culturally responsive practices. These can be presented as policy statements—declarations of commitment to desirable and intended courses of action. They indicate general behavioral expectations and directions that mirror values and beliefs. Thus, policy statements about

culturally responsive teaching and learning can be considered as the first phase in converting ideological claims and beliefs into behaviors. Novice culturally responsive teachers may be uncertain as to how to craft a policy statement for related teaching and learning. Excerpts from six different policy statements about diversity and equity in education are presented below as starters to help teachers develop their own policies of envisioned expectations, classroom dynamics, and behavioral outcomes. To make this exercise more meaningful, the readers may consider their beliefs about cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity and education that they began to clarify after engaging with Chapter 1, and make them the focus of their policy statements.

### **Excerpts from Sample Policy Statements on Cultural Diversity and Equity in Education**

“Culturally competent teaching is increasingly necessary if educators are to connect with their students. And to connect, educators need to acquire new teaching strategies that match students’ ways of understanding and interacting with the world. These approaches will help increase student performance as measured by grades and tests, enhance student access to more rigorous curriculum, and advance student attainment to high school completion and beyond. Culturally competent teaching, in other words, will play a major role in closing the achievement gaps that exist among race, gender, language, and social class groups. . . . As we learn about the cultures that students bring to school . . . and how to connect these experiences and cultures to what educators teach, we must also reflect on the culture that permeates schools and how it advantages or disadvantages certain students.” (National Educational Association; nea.org)

“We all want children to grow up in a world free from bias and discrimination, to reach for their dreams and feel that whatever they want to accomplish in life is possible. We want them to feel loved and included and never to experience the pain of rejection or exclusion. But the reality is that we do live in a world in which racism and other forms of bias continue to affect us. Discrimination hurts and leaves scars that can last a lifetime, affecting goals, ambitions, life choices, and feelings of self-worth. . . . How can we best prepare children to meet the challenges and reap the benefits of the increasingly diverse world they will inherit? We can raise children to celebrate and value diversity and to be proud of themselves and their family traditions. We can teach children to respect and value people regardless of the color of their skin, their physical abilities, or the language they speak.” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Rajagopal, 2011, p. 3).

“Teachers in a multicultural society need to hold an attitude of respect for cultural differences, know the cultural resources their students bring to class, and be skilled at tapping students’ cultural resources in the teaching-learning process. While these attributes have always been needed, organizing schools to provide culturally responsive teaching may be a powerful tool in advancing the goals of No Child Left Behind [and its successor, Every Student Succeeds Act—ESSA]. By reducing alienation of minority students and improving their motivation to learn, students and teachers work more effectively together to improve achievement. . . . Cultural understandings (political, historical, literary, technological, financial, medical, legal, and others) . . . [should not be] transmitted accidentally, but by design.” (ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools; [ericdigests.org/2005-1/teaching.htm](http://ericdigests.org/2005-1/teaching.htm)).

“Multicultural education values cultural pluralism; . . . rejects the view that schools should seek to melt away cultural differences; . . . affirms that schools should [promote] the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through . . . the preservation and extension of cultural alternatives; . . . recognizes cultural diversity as a fact of life in American society; and affirms that . . . it is a valuable resource that should be preserved and extended.

To endorse cultural pluralism is to endorse the principle that there is no one model American. . . . It is to see [differences among the nation’s citizens] as a positive force in the continuing development of a society which professes a wholesome respect for the intrinsic worth of every individual. Cultural pluralism is more than a temporary accommodation to placate racial and ethnic minorities. It is a concept that aims toward a heightened sense of being and of wholeness of the entire society based on the unique strength of each of its parts.” (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1973)

“PTAs [Parent/Teacher Associations] everywhere must understand and embrace the uniqueness of all individuals, appreciating that each contributes a diversity of views, experiences, cultural heritage/traditions, skills/abilities, values and preferences. When PTAs respect differences yet acknowledge shared commonalities uniting their communities, and then develop meaningful priorities based upon their knowledge, they genuinely represent their communities [and] gain strength and effectiveness. . . . The recognition of diversity within organizations is valuing differences and similarities in people through actions and accountability. These differences and similarities include age, ethnicity, language and culture, economic status, educational background, gender, geographic location, marital status, mental

ability, national origin, organizational position and tenure, parental status, physical ability, political philosophy, race, religion, sexual orientation, and work experience.” (National PTA; [pta.org/members/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4483](http://pta.org/members/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4483))

“We believe that the responsibility for student success is broadly shared by District staff, administrators, instructors, communities and families. We are focused on closing the opportunity gap and creating learning communities that provide support and academic enrichment programs for all students. Additionally, we believe that it is the right of every student to have an equitable educational experience within the Seattle Public School District.

The concept of educational equity goes beyond formal equality—where all students are treated the same—to fostering a barrier-free environment where all students, regardless of their race, class or other personal characteristics such as creed, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, economic status, gender, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, pregnancy status, marital status, physical appearance, the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, have the opportunity to benefit equally. This means differentiating resource allocation, within budgetary limitations, to meet the needs of students who need more supports and opportunities to succeed academically. A student whose history and heritage are appreciated and celebrated will learn better and be more successful than if that student is forced to overcome a cultural barrier.” (Seattle Public Schools; [seattleschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=627&pageId=15155](http://seattleschools.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=627&pageId=15155)).