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Abstract

This article presents a summary of skills, knowledge, and attitudes required by teachers and prospective teachers to become considered Culturally Responsive. Best practices from the literature on Culturally Responsive Teaching are summarized in four categories: awareness of self;; acknowledgement of the broader context; necessary attitudes; and required abilities.

Keywords

Culturally responsive teaching, CRT, attitudes, ability, cultural therapy

Disciplines

Educational Methods | Special Education and Teaching | Teacher Education and Professional Development

Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes of Culturally Responsive Teachers

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Abstract

This article presents a summary of skills, knowledge, and attitudes required by teachers and prospective teachers to become considered Culturally Responsive. Best practices from the literature on Culturally Responsive Teaching are summarized in four categories: awareness of self; acknowledgement of the broader context; necessary attitudes; and required abilities.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, or CRT, is a combination of best teaching practices that take in to account a child's cultural background, experiences, and strengths, and uses that information to: (a) arrange the classroom environment; (b) plan for and deliver instruction and, (c) to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment (Author, 2005). It has been implied in the literature that CRT may address issues such as achievement gaps between different ethnicities and White students (Donahue, Voekl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005; Utley & Obiakor, 2001); the need for more social justice in our educational systems (Bell, 1997); and the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education and gifted education programs (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Banks, 1999; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Utley & Obiakor, 2001). The ultimate goal of CRT however, is to increase student achievement and learning.

With the emphasis placed upon achieving proficiency by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (PL 107-11-, January 2002) and increasingly

stringent state standards, CRT is thought to be one way to address the individual needs and strengths of students so that they may achieve at a high level as required by NCLB. The increase of students from diverse backgrounds in our public schools with and without disabilities, coupled with the regrettable fact that most of the current teaching workforce is white, middle class women, make it imperative for culturally responsive teaching to be part of our overall best practice routines (Howard, 1999; Council for Exceptional Children, IDEA 1997, 1999; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio, 2005; Utley & Obiakor, 2001). Just as an effective teacher takes time to plan and reflect upon lessons, he or she should also incorporate skills that provide students with a classroom climate that encourages learning through making all children feel valued, able, and secure. Gay (2002) believes that culturally responsive teachers possess knowledge, skills and attitudes that are responsive to their students' cultures. Regardless of terminology variations, scholarship in the field generally agrees upon the types of skills, attitudes and knowledge that are necessary for teachers to become adept at CRT (See Table 1).

Following is a literature based summary of skills, knowledge and attitudes that must be taught to all teachers to develop cultural responsiveness.

Awareness of Self

Prospective and practicing teachers must first reflect upon their own backgrounds and culture before they can understand cultures different from their own. Bennett (1995) referred to this process as cultural consciousness. He advocates for a form of cultural therapy which assumes that when teachers become aware of their own culture and how it has shaped their attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, they will become more effective teachers. Noel (1995) lays out a sequence of steps necessary for effective multicultural education and includes awareness of self and how community and background affects individuals as the first step. Gay (2002) lists developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity as an essential element in Preservice teacher education programs. Ladson-Billings (1995) lists as one of her three criteria for CRT, a development of a Sociopolitical or Critical Consciousness. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004), proposed 5 components of culturally responsive classroom management which included recognition of one's own ethnocentrism as the first step. Howard (1999) refers to this process as honesty. He believes that White teachers need to confront the historical issues of White oppression, privilege and power before they can develop a healthy White identity. This, in turn, will lead to what Howard (1999) refer to as empathy. The Council for Exceptional Children's Common Core of Knowledge and Skills in Multicultural Education and Special Education lists having a knowledge of one's own identity and how that identity develops as one of

their core knowledge indicators of multicultural competence (Utley & Obiakor, 2001). Although the language changes, the field agrees upon the necessity of examining one's own culture, background, and biases before CRT can occur.

Acknowledgement of the Broader Context

A second ingredient thought to be essential for teachers to become skilled at CRT involves learning and acknowledging that there is a broader social, economic, and political context of CRT. Weinstein and her colleagues (2004) discussed the fact that teachers need to be aware that there are often discriminatory practices of the larger society reflected in education. Bennett (1995) believes that prospective teachers should understand multiple historical perspectives which will, in turn, inform their teaching and allow them to develop intercultural competence. Noel (1995) labels this idea as engaging in a confrontation with outside perspectives. This awareness of the historical, social and political issues that perhaps have contributed to the problems that necessitate the use of CRT is essential to develop the attitudes necessary to implement CRT practices.

Necessary Attitudes for CRT

The third component evident in the literature involves the attitudes teachers bring with them in to the classroom. This attitudinal aspect has been referred to as caring (Gay, 2002; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004), empathy and advocacy (Howard, 1999), emotions and feelings (Noel, 1995), and connectedness (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It describes a teacher who feels deeply about his or her convictions regarding social justice and equity for all students and who is willing to bond with students and their families to provide a

classroom environment that is safe, secure, and culturally validating. Ladson-Billings (1995) has described this as a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence. Because this attitude of caring is so difficult to define and detect, it is difficult to teach. Garmon (1998) believes that only teacher candidates who are particularly open to new ideas and perspectives will benefit from teacher education programs that promote CRT and multicultural perspectives.

Required Abilities

Although not always found in multiple sources, other abilities thought necessary for CRT abound. Other abilities that are considered relevant to teachers' development of CRT include: (a) an ability to develop students academically (Ladson-Billings, 1995); (b) an ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004); (c) an ability to include ethnic and culturally diverse content into the curriculum and respond to the ethnic diversity of students in the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2002); (d) an ability to combat racism in the schools and classrooms (Bennett, 1995); and (e) an ability to communicate with ethnically diverse students and learn about their individual cultures (Utley & Obiakor, 2001).

It is widely agreed upon that CRT skills, knowledge, and attitudes are imperative for

teachers to address the needs of our changing society. CRT is viewed as a possible remedy to the problems of achievement gaps between minority students and the White majority; the problems of disproportion; the need to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching population; and as the socially just and ethical way to provide an equitable education for all students (Gay, 1997; 2002; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003; Campbell-Whatley, 2003). Students in our schools are changing and teachers need to change with them. Teachers cannot teach in the same ways they did 50 years ago because the classrooms have changed and will continue to change if predictions are correct. The focus today is on achievement and equity. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (PL 107-11, January 2002) is but one factor that has forced schools to examine the achievement of all of their students and to increase the achievement of those who are falling behind. Other factors include the realization that too many students are not achieving at the same levels as their peers and that there is a disproportion in the numbers of students who are being referred to special education and gifted programs, as well as a lack of social justice that is believed to be systemic in our schools. As examined here, CRT is believed to be a possible remedy to these problems. Future research needs to continue to operationalize the teaching behaviors of CRT and to evaluate their effects on student achievement.

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Table 1
Skills, Knowledge, & Attitudes of CRT

Author	Skills	Knowledge	Attitudes
Bennett, 1995	Combat racism in the schools	Understand multiple historical perspectives	Cultural Competence
Gay, 2002	Include ethnically diverse content into curriculum and respond to diversity	Develop knowledge base about cultural diversity	Caring
Howard, 1999	Advocacy	Honesty	Empathy
Ladson-Billings, 1995	Develop students academically	Develop sociopolitical or critical consciousness	Connectedness
Noel, 1995	Engage in confrontation without outside perspectives	Awareness of self and how community and background affect individuals	Emotions and Feelings
Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004	Use culturally competent classroom management	Awareness of discriminatory practices in education	Caring