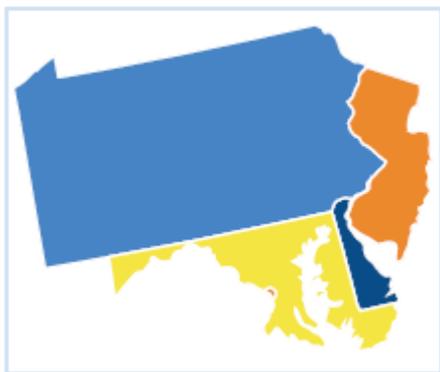


## Teaching Diverse Learners Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy



Students from historically marginalized backgrounds experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers who are white, more affluent, or whose native language is English.<sup>i</sup> To address this disparity, states and districts expend considerable resources on efforts to improve student achievement.<sup>ii</sup> Against this backdrop, educator interest in using **culturally responsive pedagogy** as one important approach to improving students' outcomes has increased. Culturally responsive pedagogy aims to address social barriers believed to contribute to disparities in student outcomes.<sup>iii</sup> These social barriers include but are not limited to lower educator expectations for academic outcomes and deficit-based mindsets about students from historically marginalized backgrounds.

### HOW IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY DEFINED?

Culturally responsive pedagogy uses students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as resources to support learning. Supporters of the approach view pedagogy as sociopolitical—meaning that students actively participate in making sense of and critically examining the content they learn.<sup>iv</sup> For example:

- ❖ Students might spend time understanding how power and perspective shape historical narratives. Those studying U.S. history might explore who did or did not benefit from America's westward expansion by reading histories of settlers and displaced indigenous people.
- ❖ Students might spend time applying the content they have learned to understand issues affecting their local community more deeply and propose solutions based on their lived experiences. Those studying mathematics might apply their knowledge of percentages and interest rates to understand the issues associated with payday lending. Ultimately, like other instructional approaches, culturally responsive

pedagogy requires rigorous exploration of content delivered in a way that is relevant to students.

### WHAT PRACTICES ARE CONSIDERED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE?

Researchers and educators have pointed to a set of culturally responsive practices that, when implemented as part of an overall approach focused on empowering and improving outcomes for students from historically marginalized backgrounds, could improve student outcomes:<sup>v</sup>

- ❖ Foster a welcoming environment by acknowledging the contributions of all students and soliciting feedback from students on improving relationships, classroom culture, and instruction. For example, at the end of instructional units, a teacher may provide a survey to students to solicit feedback on what worked well and what needs improvement.
- ❖ Build relationships with students and collaborate with families to support student learning. To help build these relationships, teachers may conduct home visits near the start of the school year to meet with families and discuss students' academic goals and then

continue to have conversations about their academic progress consistently during the year.

- ❖ Employ methods that connect the classroom to the real world such as inquiry-based approaches and visual representations. For example, students studying water pollution may explore pollution challenges faced by their own local watershed.
- ❖ Engage students in learning by building on their experiences and provide multiple options for how students can interact with instructional content. To introduce a unit on rhetorical literary devices, a teacher may ask students to analyze their favorite song to identify similes and metaphors.
- ❖ Provide formative and responsive feedback to students about their progress. For example, a teacher may meet with students individually to provide positive and constructive feedback on ways to improve their writing. The teacher may also share this feedback with their students' families.
- ❖ Use consistent spoken and body language with all students to avoid unconscious bias in verbal or nonverbal cues. A teacher randomly draw from popsicle sticks with student names when asking questions. This ensures all students have an equal chance of participating in whole class discussion.
- ❖ Promote collaborative teaching and learning with student-to-student and student-to-teacher dialogues to encourage students' participation. For example, a teacher might plan "turn and talks" during a math lesson to help students discuss their understanding of the content using appropriate terminology.
- ❖ Support students' sociopolitical consciousness by exploring social justice and community issues. For example, a music teacher might partner with a local community organization to create interactive lessons which help students to analyze how songs can reflect popular protest movements.

Culturally responsive educators understand the ways schools might reinforce barriers believed to cause disparities in student outcomes. By using culturally responsive pedagogy, these educators seek to reduce the impact of these barriers and the ways that unconscious bias might influence their interactions with students.

## HOW EFFECTIVE IS THIS APPROACH?

Little rigorous evidence of its efficacy exists because most studies of culturally responsive pedagogy lack a comparison group. But three studies of culturally responsive pedagogy using experimental or quasi-experimental methods have found some positive outcomes. Collectively, they found improvements in most outcomes examined, such as student academic achievement and improvements in classroom behavioral management.<sup>vi</sup> Further rigorous and well-designed research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy.

## WHAT ARE CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS, DISTRICTS, STATES, AND EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN IMPLEMENTING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY?

To fulfill its promise, culturally responsive pedagogy should involve changes at multiple levels:

- ❖ Classrooms: Educators might first explore the role of their unconscious biases in their expectations of students.<sup>vii</sup> They may also need to build their knowledge of and skill in using approaches which affirm the culture of their students and improve their students' outcomes. Teachers might consider ways to get to know their students better as a first step.
- ❖ Schools and districts: Many teachers do not feel prepared to teach students from historically marginalized backgrounds and desire additional training to help them do so.<sup>viii</sup> Moreover, schools and districts may consider revising policies and practices to support the learning of all students, like requiring the use of language arts curriculum which integrates texts from multiple cultural and geographic regions instead of focusing mostly on the Western canon.<sup>ix</sup> Schools and districts may also provide professional development to help educators understand their unconscious bias and develop their knowledge of culturally responsive instructional strategies. Finally, schools and districts may examine student disciplinary policies to ensure all students are treated fairly and rethink how administrators engage with families and communities when making decisions that have school- or district-wide implications.

❖ States could also consider adjusting educators' certification, training, and professional development requirements to include culturally responsive pedagogy.<sup>x</sup> States could explore how coursework or professional development sessions on culturally responsive pedagogy could fulfill certification or recertification requirements.

❖ Educator preparation programs: Like schools and districts, educator preparation programs may need to consider ways to help teachers feel better prepared to teach students from historically marginalized backgrounds. This might include coursework that helps educators understand their own unconscious bias; the importance of building relationships with

students, their families, and their communities; and specific, culturally responsive instructional strategies. These programs could begin requiring students to conduct observations in the classrooms of teachers who are using culturally responsive pedagogy.

## ENDNOTES

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