

## Culture in our classrooms

### About the documentary

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.<sup>1</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest created this 30-minute documentary in collaboration with Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) to connect research to practice in fostering positive school climates, trust between students and staff, and support of evidence-based strategies for implementing culturally responsive practices in middle school settings.

The documentary focuses on the ways schools and districts can implement practices that incorporate students' backgrounds and cultural references into relationship building and instruction. The program grounds the research evidence with examples from practice through narratives about the real-life experiences of students and their educators, families, and communities in Minnesota. REL Midwest researchers Orrin Murray, PhD, and Jameela Conway-Turner, PhD, discuss research concerning the outcomes of culturally responsive practices related to student engagement, motivation, behavior, and academic achievement.

### Intended audience

The audience for the documentary includes the general public, parents, educators, and students. Though the program focuses on Minnesota, schools in other states and regions can benefit from learning more about the implementation of culturally responsive practices.

### What is Culturally Responsive Teaching?

Culturally responsive teaching promotes the following practices:<sup>1</sup>

- Positive perspectives on parents and families
- Communication of high expectations
- Learning within the context of culture
- Student-centered instruction
- Culturally mediated instruction
- Reshaping the curriculum
- Teacher as facilitator

*This isn't something that you do on the first day of school or the first week of school and—boop!—you're done, you got it. Culture is mutable. It's always changing... Your work to understand and be responsive to the culture of the students that are coming into your class doesn't end.*

– Orrin Murray, PhD, Principal Researcher,  
REL Midwest

*Integrating culturally responsive practices into teaching really is a way to incorporate equity, because we know that it is a strategy that helps all students, and especially helps students that are racially and culturally diverse. A lot of it is related to teacher–student relationships and understanding your students, understanding their cultural backgrounds and what motivates them.*

– Jameela Conway-Turner, PhD, Senior  
Researcher, REL Midwest



Scan the QR code to  
watch the documentary.

<sup>1</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. John Wiley & Sons.

## ? Discussion questions

Viewers may use the following questions as a starting point for a discussion of how educators can effectively engage students and strengthen relationships by adopting culturally responsive practices in their teaching.

- Why are culturally responsive practices relevant for students in middle schools?
- How would students at your school benefit from the incorporation of culturally responsive practices in their classrooms?
- How do culturally responsive practices align with the goals of your school?
- How are students' cultures and backgrounds incorporated in your school/classroom?
- How can you [encourage](#) the implementation of culturally responsive practices among your school's staff?
- What types of supports and trainings would help educators in your school/district facilitate culturally responsive practices?

## Related REL resources

- Explore this [resource roundup](#) of materials related to culturally responsive practices.
- Watch REL Mid-Atlantic's [webinar](#) describing the research on effective strategies to promote culturally responsive instruction.
- Read REL Pacific's [blog post](#) on addressing equity through student and family voice.
- Read REL Midwest's [report](#) and [infographic](#) on measuring the use of culturally responsive practices in Wisconsin.

## About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven Midwest states to conduct applied research and provide training, coaching, and technical support to create a more evidence-based education system. To learn more, visit the [REL Midwest website](#) and follow [@RELMidwest](#) on Twitter.