

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)

Descriptive Characteristics

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.

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. It is culturally *validating and affirming*. Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching has the following characteristics:

- 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 each others' 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), individual and group, competitive and cooperative, active participatory and sedentary activities in order to tap into the learning styles of different ethnic 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

Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382). 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 each others' 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.

Ladson-Billings (1994) 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 each other. 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 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).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Multidimensional

Multidimensional culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, 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 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 genre (e.g., rhetoric, sit-ins, songs, political slogans). Part of the challenge is for students to understand the major points made in these different forms of expressions and to see whether any consensus and collaborative action can be achieved across ethnic groups. Students can also 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 to make curriculum and instruction more reflec-

tive 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. Cultural 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. 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. This is done by boosting students' morale, providing resources and personal assistance, developing an ethos of achievement, and celebrating individual and collective accomplishments.

The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) project is an excellent example of how this empowering process operates in practice (Swanson et al., 1995; Mehan et al., 1996). 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 each other 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),
- 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 non-negotiable 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, 1994, 1995a and 1995b; Lee, 1993; 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 revela-