

Session 6

The Classroom Mosaic: Culture and Learning

Developed by Linda Darling-Hammond, Kim Austin, Ira Lit, and Na'ilah Nasir
With Contributions From Luis Moll and Gloria Ladson-Billings
Stanford University School of Education

I. Key Questions and Learning Objectives

Key Questions

- What role does culture play in learning?
- How can teachers develop culturally responsive practices?

Learning Objectives

- **Multicultural education**—Teachers will become familiar with some of the causes of inequality in education, as well as the sources of diversity in classrooms. They will understand the importance of multicultural education and the different forms multicultural education can take in schools.
- **Culturally responsive teaching**— Teachers will reflect on and consider the relationship between culture and learning. Teachers will understand that culturally responsive teaching involves a genuine respect for students and belief in their potential as learners. Teachers will understand the importance of connecting to students' experiences and will explore how to create culturally responsive, caring environments.
- **Congruity between home and school**—Teachers will consider the impact of school culture and home culture on students' learning. They will evaluate how to make the classroom a place where students feel comfortable, see themselves represented, and engage with curriculum materials that reflect their home cultures.

II. Session Overview

[I]n the words of a wonderful Native Alaskan educator: ‘In order to teach you, I must know you.’ I pray for all of us the strength to teach our children what they must learn, and the humility and wisdom to learn from them so that we might better teach.

—Lisa Delpit (1995, p. 183)

All of us make sense of the world through our different cultural experiences. Culture shapes how we communicate, what we do in our work and play, how we interact with one another, what customs we follow, and how we view the world. The ways in which we learn cannot be separated from these cultural contexts. We all bring a set of cultural understandings, perspectives, and expectations to school with us. Sonia Nieto defines culture in the following way:

Culture consists of the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion. Culture includes not only tangibles such as foods, holidays, dress, and artistic expression, but also less tangible manifestations such as communication style, attitudes, values, and family relationships. These features of culture are often more difficult to pinpoint, but doing so is necessary if we want to understand how student learning may be affected (Nieto, 2000, pp. 139-140).

Much of what we know about learning has been based on research in psychology and sociology. However, the picture is incomplete without an understanding of anthropology, whose major focus is culture. As other sessions in this course have demonstrated, there are many kinds of differences among students—learning styles and preferences, strengths in specific intelligences, and prior experiences—these all play a role in learning and are affected by home and community life.

Culture is such an everyday experience for us that we often do not notice it—just as a fish does not notice the water it lives in. Over the past 25 years we have begun to understand the important role that culture plays in learning. The relationship between culture and thinking is so close that it is often impossible to disentangle one from the other. Our experiences, rooted in our cultures, shape what we perceive and how we make sense of it, as well as how we communicate with others.

Schools themselves have a culture—a set of norms and ways of working, thinking, talking, valuing, and behaving. When the culture of the school reflects the culture of the home or community, the classroom is more familiar to children. When school reflects different ways of thinking, knowing, and valuing, children must cross boundaries, making the learning process more complex. School can be a more foreign experience, and more mysterious or intimidating, for students whose home or community context is substantially different from what they experience in school. If the school does not incorporate aspects of students’ home and community life in the learning process, students may feel alienated by the classroom environment. In addition, if teachers do not understand the cultural norms that guide their students’ thinking and behavior, they may misinterpret or miss entirely what students understand.

The question of this session is not simply, “How does culture affect learning?” but also, “How can we make cultural knowledge a source of understanding in the classroom?” In this session, we focus on the relationships among culture, learning, and classroom practices. We first discuss some of the ways the culture of schools can create unequal opportunities for education, we then describe several aspects of multicultural education, and in the final sections we describe culturally responsive teaching and outline strategies for building on cultural differences in the classroom.

Culture, Inequality, and Schooling

As we move into the twenty-first century, the demographics of the United States continue to evolve rapidly, and schools reflect these changes. In 2000, more than 35% of public school students were students of color. In most large cities and some states, such as California, “minority” students have become the majority in public schools—a trend that will characterize the entire nation by 2020. With growing immigration, mainstreaming, and awareness of student differences, schools represent a greater range of ethnic groups, languages, socioeconomic status, and abilities than ever before in our history.

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However, too many schools in the United States do a poor job of educating low-income and “minority” students. On many achievement measures, students of color perform significantly less well than White students, and in some communities the achievement gap is growing rather than shrinking. A growing body of research illustrates that the vast differences in learning opportunities within and across U.S. schools are the single greatest source of differences in achievement among students. Studies have found that students from different groups who take similar courses and have access to equally rich curricula and equally well-qualified teachers perform similarly (Darling-Hammond, 1997). However that kind of equal access is rare.

The reasons for these inequalities range from the policies that govern school funding, curriculum offerings, staffing, and tracking systems, to factors that depend much more on teachers’ knowledge, skills, and expectations for their students. Students of color are still largely segregated in American schools: More than two-thirds attend schools that are predominantly “minority” and primarily in central cities. Those who attend integrated schools are often segregated in separate tracks. Not only do funding systems allocate fewer resources to poor urban districts than to their suburban neighbors, but schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students receive fewer instructional resources than other schools within these districts (Kozol, 1991). Tracking systems exacerbate these inequalities by allocating fewer and lower quality materials, less qualified and experienced teachers, and lower quality curricula to the many low-income and minority students assigned to lower tracks (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Oakes, 1985).

Joel Spring (1997) suggests that the culture of schools can undermine the cultures of some students. He describes several ways in which schools can “deculturalize” students. These include the segregation and isolation of minority students, forced change of language, a curriculum whose content and textbooks reflect only the culture of the dominant group, a setting in which dominated groups are not allowed to express their culture, language, or customs, and the use of teachers exclusively from the dominant group.

Students develop a wide range of coping mechanisms in response to institutional pressures that send them signals that they do not belong. Among the responses students may adopt are an oppositional relationship to school (“The school does not include me, therefore, I will not invest in school”) or, conversely, a disassociation from their own racial/ethnic group—the phenomenon Signithia Fordham identifies as “racelessness.” Fordham observes that in some settings African American students “enter school having to unlearn or, at least, to modify their own culturally sanctioned interactional and behavioral styles and adopt those styles rewarded in the school context if they wish to achieve academic success” (Fordham, 1988, p. 55).

This kind of trade-off between achievement and identity is not inevitable, however. An “equity pedagogy”—one that makes knowledge accessible to all students—can be built by teachers who connect the diverse experiences of their students to challenging curriculum goals, and who marry a deep understanding of their students and their learning to a wide array of strategies for bringing knowledge to life. As we discuss in the next section, “multicultural education” represents an attempt to address all of the issues that influence achievement by considering the content of materials and the nature of instruction, in light of the specific needs, perspectives, and backgrounds of the students.

Multicultural Education

Inequities in schooling can be addressed in part by taking into account the range of experiences, histories, and cultures that students bring to the classroom. James Banks describes five ways scholars and teachers have thought about multicultural education, each of which reflects an aspect of educating for and about cultural diversity. They are: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowerment of school culture. Taken together, they form an integrated whole (Banks, 1993).

Content integration is “the extent to which teachers use examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline” (Banks, 1993, p. 5). Curriculum materials and textbooks can serve to marginalize students of color when they fail to represent students’ lives and histories or when they represent them in a superficial manner. However, curriculum materials and teaching examples across subject matters can be selected to reflect the language, history, and values of a diverse range of peoples and perspectives. Content integration occurs not only in history or

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literature classes, but also in science classes when scientists and inventors from many cultures are discussed, or in mathematics class, when teachers draw on examples from students' experiences outside the classroom. When classroom materials reflect students' own experiences, students feel validated and can better connect to the learning at hand.

Knowledge construction occurs when "teachers help students to understand how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by the racial, ethnic, and social-class positions of individuals and groups" (Banks, 1993, p. 6). Banks gives two examples of this in his discussion of how mainstream U.S. history typically describes the settlement of the West and the experience of slavery. Early historians created the impression that Europeans "brought" civilization to the West (as though no other people were living there), as well as the impression that slaves were happy, contented, and loyal to their masters. More accurate histories that represent the experiences of people from various vantage points allow students to see the world from different perspectives. Although many blatant stereotypes and racist depictions have been eliminated from textbooks today, current textbooks continue to give little attention to different groups of color (Gay, 2000). When teachers seek out materials that reflect multiple perspectives, students can learn to think critically about how text and other media represent a particular point of view.

Prejudice reduction involves "interventions to help students to develop more positive racial attitudes and values" (Banks, 1993, p. 6). Researchers have found that many young children have developed an awareness of racial differences as early as the age of three, and that racial attitudes are formed early in life (Lasker, 1929; Minard, 1931; Phinney & Rotheram, 1987; Ramsey, 1987, all cited in Banks, 1993).

Similarly, teachers' attitudes about race and ethnicity are developed before they enter their first classrooms (Zeichner, 1995, cited in Nieto, 2000). Teachers' *expectations* for their students' achievement appear to be a more significant factor in how students actually perform than other variables, such as class or race (Nieto, 2000). The assumptions people make about race and ethnicity can come from what they have been told, what they have read, and what they have seen on TV. Beverly Tatum suggests that these assumptions can come also from what people have *not* been told: "Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information ... we all have prejudices, not because we want them, but simply because we are so continually exposed to misinformation about others" (Tatum, 1999, p. 5).

In addition to teaching in ways that counter this lack of information and misinformation, another aim of multicultural education is to encourage teachers and students to reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and practices in their lives and in the classroom. As Nieto suggests, being antiracist and antidiscriminatory is not about assigning blame or feeling guilt, but "paying attention to all areas in which some students are favored over others: the curriculum, choice of materials, sorting policies, and teachers' interactions and relationships with students and their families" (Nieto, 2000, p. 306).

Equity pedagogy includes the areas discussed above and more. According to Banks, an equity pedagogy exists "when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse, racial, ethnic, and social-class groups" (Banks, 1993, p. 6). An equity pedagogy includes approaches and interventions designed to help students of low-status populations increase their academic achievement. As we discuss in the following section on culturally responsive teaching, teaching for equity means having high expectations and believing in the potential of *all* students, documenting and understanding how different populations learn, and putting into practice culturally responsive approaches.

Banks' fifth dimension—developing an *empowering school culture*—involves "restructuring the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment" (Banks, 1993, p. 7). An increasing body of research illustrates that students of color, as well as others, are succeeding in many new small schools featuring structures that foster more cooperative modes of learning, less departmentalization and tracking, a more common curriculum for students, stronger relationships between teachers and students that extend over multiple years, greater use of team teaching, and participation of parents, teachers, and students in making decisions about schooling (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For example, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues found that when schools clustered students and teachers together in ways that allowed them to work for longer periods of time with a smaller group of students, teachers were able to understand better how their students thought and learned and got to know them as people (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Falk, 1995). Such structures also provided the time required to develop complex performances and a setting for more challenging forms of learning. [See Session 13, Creating Classrooms and Schools That Support Learning.]

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Some worry that a multicultural curriculum will divide rather than unite students. However, far from encouraging separatism, acknowledgment of diverse experiences helps teachers and students create new associations and understandings of one another. A communication that is, in John Dewey's words "vitaly social or vitaly shared" is one that allows one person to experience the perspectives of another, and by that connection to develop understanding and appreciation for that person's experience and understanding of the world. Crossing cultural boundaries is essential to social learning. This is true for learning across disciplines, for learning across communities and cultures, for learning across ideas and ideologies, and for learning across the many groups of individuals—parents, teachers, staff, and students—who make up a school. Educative institutions can actively strive to construct and incorporate diversity, rather than trying to suppress it.

Doing so requires a conscious effort on the part of both teachers and students to understand and embrace diverse perspectives. Lisa Delpit reminds us that "we all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply 'the way it is'" (Delpit, 1995, p. 151). Educators must develop a keen awareness of the perspectives they bring and how these can be enlarged if they are to avoid what Edmund Gordon calls "communicentric bias—the tendency to make one's own community the center of the universe and the conceptual frame that constrains thought" (Gordon, 1990, p. 19). This bias can limit teachers' understanding of their students and students' understanding of others.

Multicultural education means more than simply incorporating diverse curriculum materials:

Curriculum and materials represent the *content* of multicultural education, but multicultural education is above all a *process*. First, it is ongoing and dynamic. No one ever stops becoming a multicultural person, and knowledge is never complete. This means that there is no established canon that is frozen in cement. Second, multicultural education is a process because it involves primarily relationships among people. The sensitivity and understanding teachers show their students are more crucial in promoting student learning than the facts and figures they may know about different ethnic and cultural groups (Nieto, 2000, p. 315).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Although the impediments to equitable teaching practices may seem daunting, researchers and practitioners have found a number of ways to put equity pedagogy into practice. For instance, Eugene Garcia reviewed a number of studies that documented culturally diverse schools with strong academic achievement. In terms of instruction, he found that many of the classrooms emphasized communication between teachers and students, family-like social settings where students interacted with each other, thematic units selected by students with their teacher, and a strong commitment to communication with parents. In these classrooms, work in pairs and small groups was more common than individualized activities and large-group instruction. Teachers' relationships with their students and their expectations for their success were central:

Significantly, these teachers 'adopted' their students. They had high academic expectations for all their students ('everyone will learn to read in my classroom'), and also served as advocates for them. They rejected any conclusion that their students were intellectually or academically disadvantaged (Garcia, 1993, pp. 82-83).

Researchers who have studied teachers who succeed with a range of diverse students have coined the term "culturally responsive teaching" to describe their practice. Such teachers make all children's lives and communities central to the learning process. They emphasize experiential and activity-based approaches to learning, draw connections between school and communities, and help students develop competence. Culturally responsive teaching involves a stance toward teaching and learning that takes into account cultural differences in learning, including differing learning styles, differing interaction and communication styles, values, attitudes, behaviors, and language differences. Rather than a set of specific techniques, teachers' practices develop over time as teachers learn from their students' experiences and develop ways to incorporate diverse perspectives. The following elements are central to culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994):

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- Respect for students and belief in their potential as learners,
- Caring environments and personal connections with students and families,
- Cultural congruity between home and school, and
- Active teaching and a wide range of authentic assessments that tap into students' learning.

Culturally responsive teachers not only carry out certain practices, but perhaps more importantly, possess certain expectations and beliefs about their students. Each of these aspects is discussed below.

Respect for Students and Belief in Their Potential as Learners

Underlying all aspects of culturally responsive teaching is a classroom atmosphere that is respectful of all students and that holds high expectations of them as learners. Respect for students is reflected in the nature of the activities given to children, when teachers provide challenging, complex, and relevant tasks. Respect is also conveyed directly to the children themselves when teachers hold high expectations for achievement for all students and support students in attaining them. These expectations can be conveyed in a variety of ways—encouraging students, giving them status in the classroom by seeking out and recognizing their strengths, building on what they already know, and providing the assistance they need to succeed at challenging tasks. The consequence, then, is two-fold: students engage in academically rigorous work, and, in doing so, they come to see themselves as learners and thinkers.

There are many ways to convey to students that they have strengths and skills of value to the whole class. Suggesting that students get coaching on a computer task from Juan or seek Donna's help with illustrations conveys information about their competence. Providing praise for specific accomplishments and concrete feedback for revising assignments helps students to see both their strengths and how they can improve. Creating activities that require every student's participation sets up a situation in which each student develops a valuable set of understandings to share with the class. [See Session 7, Learning in a Social Context, for further discussion of "distributed expertise."] Having activities in which students can demonstrate their knowledge by designing their own assessments or by giving a presentation sends the message that students are not just learners but also potential teachers. Each of these instances demonstrates a respect for students' varied abilities and a belief in their potential for high-quality work. For each student to have an experience of competence, teachers must be prepared to provide the scaffolding and support needed for success. For students who struggle in some areas, teachers must be alert to opportunities to discover their abilities and interests and incorporate them into individualized work or group assignments.

Caring Environments and Personal Connections

Research suggests that effective teachers form and maintain connections with their students within their social contexts. Such teachers do not shy away from issues of race and culture. With students of varying language backgrounds, they allow the use of multiple languages; they strive to become familiar with students' dialects and home languages, even though they instruct in standard English; and they celebrate their students as individuals and as members of specific cultures, asking students to share who they are and what they know with the class in a variety of ways (Garcia, 1993; Irvine, 1992; Strickland, 1995).

Culturally responsive classrooms are caring places where it is acceptable to take risks, and where the classroom is a "safe space," making school a haven from outside stresses. When teachers share some of their personal lives or take risks publicly and make examples of their mistakes, they are modeling behavior that communicates that the classroom is a safe space to share and to learn. [See Session 5, Emotions and Learning.] Teacher and researcher Geneva Gay (2000) describes how, during the early part of a class, she talks about herself and shares mistakes she has made in the past. In doing so, she creates a climate of sharing and demonstrates how competence, her own included, develops over time.

Setting clear norms for respectful and caring behavior at the beginning of the year, as well as consistent routines that make the classroom a predictable, pleasant place, can communicate this feeling of safety. For instance, some teachers establish a check-in time at the beginning of the day or class to provide an opportunity for students to make the transition from home to school, to acknowledge students' experiences and feelings, and to learn more

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about their students. Teacher Allison Rowland (2002) takes the first five to 10 minutes of each class for students to check in about their lives. She asks her students if they have anything to share, discourages side conversations, and encourages quieter students by prompting them with questions. Rowland describes the benefits of such a practice:

The time devoted to check-in is not fluff. Check-in provides many 'teachable moments': how to deal with disappointing a friend, the hurt and injustice of stereotypes and labels, the ramifications of selfish or irresponsible behavior, what it means to be part of a community. It is an opportunity to help students develop as caring, sensitive people. The benefits of check-in time permeate every part of the class by deepening the understanding I have of the students, they have of me, and they have of each other. Academic discussions about sensitive issues such as race, religion, gender roles, and stereotypes become much safer forums for sharing and learning (Rowland, 2002, p. 187).

Rowland illustrates the importance of a personal connection between students and teachers. Such relationships are often forged in the time spent outside of formal classroom instruction, including interactions during lunchtime or at community events outside of school hours. These relationships can form the basis for the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom, and can inspire and motivate student learning. In this conversation with some eighth-grade students, Gloria Ladson-Billings illustrates how everyday, caring exchanges can influence students' experience of school:

'What is it that you like about the class?'

'The teacher!' they responded in unison.

'What do you like about the teacher?' I probed.

'She listens to us!'

'She respects us!'

'She lets us express our opinions!'

'She looks us in the eye when she talks to us!'

'She smiles at us!'

'She speaks to us when she sees us in the hall or in the cafeteria!'

Their responses seemed so ordinary. They were describing simple acts of human kindness, yet it was apparent that much of their school experiences had been devoid of such kindnesses (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 68).

Caring can be communicated by the time teachers dedicate to their students, their patience, how well they prepare for class, and the effort they put into making classes interesting (Nieto, 2000). Caring can also be communicated when teachers show an interest and call on their students' particular linguistic skills or cultural knowledge in genuine ways. Teachers may learn about students' lives and interests through conversations, journals, parent meetings, or even home visits to better understand and appreciate the broader, more complex cultural and individual features that help define them.

The beginning of the year provides an ideal opportunity for teachers to get to know their students by asking them to describe their communities, what they like to do outside of school, what their school interests are, and how they feel about school itself. A simple questionnaire can serve the dual purpose of learning about students' lives and interests and collecting some data about literacy levels. There are also many times during the course of a lesson when it is natural to make connections to students' experiences; for instance, Ladson-Billings describes the literature teacher who suggests during a discussion "You have your own video of your entire life in your head.

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Every time you read, you can get an image of how the story connects with your life” (Ladson-Billings 1994, p. 109). Kathleen Hayes-Parvin, a featured teacher in this session’s video, connects to her students’ cultures and ethnic backgrounds through a “memoir” and “family history” unit. Students become ethnographic researchers to learn about their own culture. Similarly, in William Dean and Jeff Gilbert’s Latin American history class, also in this session’s video, students compare their own community experiences with those of a character in a text they are studying.

A teacher may take into account what students bring to the classroom by individualizing reading lessons around the particular interests of a student, decorating classroom walls with students’ favorite heroes, or basing writing assignments on community issues that students care about (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teacher Susan Park opens up her class with the question, “What does ‘success’ mean to you?” Rather than textbooks, she and her mentor teacher draw on excerpts from novels, newspapers, magazines, and video clips that relate to students’ lives (Park, 2002). For her class of first-generation Mexicans, teacher Claudia Narez developed a unit entitled “Our life in community” to tap into the rich culture her students represent and provide an opportunity to talk about discrimination and racism. As Narez writes:

I believe that teaching culturally relevant curriculum is not merely throwing a few good ‘ethnic books’ into my Spanish classes; it is also the cultivation of culturally relevant ideas, conversations, and critical thinking about the way we live and experience culture in our communities (Narez, 2002, p. 139).

In each of these cases, students’ home culture and language are not only acknowledged and brought into the classroom, but embedded in the curriculum in authentic ways. These are all examples of the ways teachers can help their students to develop a sense of *belonging*, by encouraging them to make personal connections to the material they encounter in the classroom, as well as to their teacher and each other. As Nieto observes, “When students feel connected to school, they identify as *learners* and they have a far greater chance of becoming successful students” (Nieto, 2000, p. 299).

Cultural Congruity Between Home and School

Cultural congruity between home and school is another element of culturally responsive teaching and equity pedagogy. This involves making the classroom a place where students feel comfortable, see themselves represented in the curriculum and classroom environment, and engage with materials that provide connections to their home and community experiences. Such congruity may serve to support learning in multiple ways—by increasing students’ interests in learning and by offering a bridge to help students move from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Many children, particularly those from mainstream backgrounds, come with experiences that prepare them to be successful in school. They are used to the modes of communication often used in classrooms—questions about specific facts, requests for opinions, and expectations for certain kinds of behavior. However, these expectations are not widely shared in all homes and cultural contexts.

Different cultures have different norms for social interaction. Some students may be uncomfortable working alone because their experience is that tasks are usually communal, while others may be uncomfortable working in groups because that has not been part of their experience. Some children may not be comfortable being singled out and praised for their abilities. For instance, some research has found that American Indian students did not perform as well in classrooms that emphasized individualized, public performances and competition (Phillips, 1993, cited in Nieto, 2000). Indian values of harmony, cooperation, and sharing suggested that cooperative learning might be a more effective approach. Others have found that some immigrants are uncomfortable with the relative informality of U.S. schools, the friendliness of the teachers, and the expectation that students ask questions and speak in front of the class, rather than listening to lectures and memorizing information (Nieto, 2000). Some researchers observed that Asian American communities often perceive schooling as a very formal process and expect teachers to demonstrate a certain kind of authority in the classroom (Chinn & Wong, 1992).

Examples of cultural misunderstandings abound. Nieto describes the new teacher who did not understand that many Puerto Rican children wrinkle their noses to signify nonverbally that they do not understand something. When her students did not respond verbally to her question, “Do you understand?,” she assumed wrongly that they understood (Nieto, 2000). Similarly, Shirley Brice Heath discovered that African American children in the

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South did not answer obvious, factual questions to which they assumed the teacher knew the answer. This kind of questioning (“What color is the dish?” “How many fingers do I have?”), common in many White, middle-class homes, was not part of their experience where questions were used only when the asker genuinely did not know the answer. The result was that teachers assumed the children who did not respond to obvious questions were slow or less-able learners (Heath, 1983). Awareness of the range of communication and participation styles can provide a basis for building communication and understanding among teachers, students, and parents.

Research provides many examples of culturally specific practices that have been found to make a positive difference for student achievement. For example, Katherine Au found that when teachers incorporated communication patterns that resemble how Hawaiian families tell stories at home, they were able to raise the reading achievement levels of their native Hawaiian students (Au, 1980). Teacher and researcher Carol Lee demonstrated significant learning gains when she drew on and incorporated the linguistic styles and strengths her African American students brought to the classroom (e.g., irony, double entendre, satire, and metaphorical language) (Lee, 1995). By making students’ tacit knowledge explicit, she helped them to make connections between their own language and the literature they were analyzing.

Cultural congruity does not just refer to being aware of differences in communication and interaction styles. Teachers can also work with the content of the curriculum itself to make it more congruent with students’ home experiences. Anthropologists Luis Moll and James Greenberg demonstrated how the activities children experience at home can be accessed and built on for academic instruction. They studied how households accumulate and share “funds of knowledge,” based on the work-related activities of family members, their schooling experiences, and other life experiences (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). For example, families who have members who are farmers or ranchers possess a particular body of knowledge (e.g., about different soils, plant cultivation, and water management). Other families might possess knowledge about mechanics, carpentry, or midwifery. Such knowledge is distributed, available, and accessible among social networks of families with similar areas of expertise. These funds of knowledge can be seen in the common events and activities of a household.

When teachers in Moll and Greenberg’s study visited local households and met with parents and children, they developed a sense of the knowledge base that exists in the house, while also forging relationships with families. The work of the teachers was to reflect on this knowledge and to determine how to use it pedagogically—how to take advantage of it in their instruction. One teacher developed a unit on construction and building, based on her students’ interests and her observation that knowledge about construction was a prominent fund of knowledge in the students’ homes. Students conducted initial research on the history of dwellings and different ways of constructing structures, built model houses, and wrote brief essays describing their research and explaining their models. Parents were invited to speak to her class as experts on construction, tools, and architecture. Involving parents as resources in school activities (not just as teachers’ aides)—as we also see in this session’s video of Kathleen Hayes-Parvin’s classroom—defines them as intellectual partners with teachers and students in achieving the goals of schooling.

Another way teachers can use the idea of funds of knowledge is by relating it to the literature that children are reading. Students can conduct research on a particular theme in literature, analyze the text, and then connect that text to the text of their lives and the text of their family experiences. In this session’s video, the students at East Palo Alto High School are learning how to analyze and talk about text while building on their own and their families’ experiences. Creating this connection between text and life experiences helps students to think about and analyze the literature.

Every lesson that the teacher organizes does not have to have a connection to the household, just as everything that the teacher introduces does not have to have immediate relevance for the children. But creating some strategic connections beyond the classroom walls makes it clear to teachers and learners that they bring to school a worthwhile intellectual and cultural resource, including their families and their experiences. Personalizing instruction in this way hooks students into the classroom, engages them in their schoolwork, and encourages inquiry.

Active Teaching and Authentic Assessment

Finally, culturally responsive teachers tend to use an active, direct approach to teaching: demonstrating, modeling, explaining, giving feedback, reviewing, and emphasizing higher-order skills, while avoiding excessive

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reliance on rote learning, drill and practice, or punishment. Culturally responsive teachers recognize that all students need meaningful contexts for learning, but all students also need practice in skills that will help them succeed as learners (Delpit, 1995). Although culturally responsive classrooms tend to feature participation and cooperative learning strategies, teachers do not shy away from instruction that makes information and expectations clear.

One study of bilingual teachers found that successful teachers of students with limited English proficiency used “active” teaching behaviors that were related to achievement gains, including the following (Tikunoff, 1983, cited in Garcia, 1993):

- Communicating clearly when giving directions and presenting new information,
- Pacing instruction appropriately,
- Promoting students’ involvement,
- Communicating clear expectations for success on tasks,
- Monitoring students’ progress, and
- Providing immediate feedback.

One way to both make expectations clear and provide opportunities for diverse learning styles is through authentic assessment. Authentic tasks represent knowledge in ways that resemble real-world applications and allow students to integrate what they have learned. In addition, meaningful performances in real-world contexts provide opportunities for a diverse body of students to demonstrate the many strengths and intelligences they possess. For instance, in some schools, student learning is assessed through culminating events in which students produce mathematical models, literary critiques, scientific experiments, social science research, artistic performances, debates, and oral presentations. When students are prepared through critique and coaching, these exhibitions motivate them to put forth intensive effort and develop high levels of understanding (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Sizer, 1992). The opportunity to revise in response to feedback allows all students to develop competence.

The criteria used to assess such performances represent the various aspects of proficiency in conducting the task and are openly expressed to students and others in the learning community, not kept secret as many traditional tests might (Wiggins, 1989, cited in Darling-Hammond, 1997). For example, a research report might be evaluated for its use of evidence, accuracy of information, evaluation of competing viewpoints, development of a clear argument, and attention to conventions of writing. Students can then develop the capacity to assess their own work against specific standards; revise, modify, and redirect their energies; and take initiative to promote their own progress (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Review and revision help students examine how they learn and how they can perform better, and make expectations for high-quality work clear. In addition, providing opportunities for others in the learning community—groups of faculty, visitors, parents, or other students—to see, appreciate, and learn from student work signals to students that their work is important enough to be a source of public learning and celebration. Such exchanges encourage a two-way relationship with the school community that is essential to a multicultural approach to learning.

Conclusion

Dealing with diversity is one of the central challenges of twenty-first century education. It is impossible for teachers to succeed with *all* students without exploring how students’ learning experiences are influenced by their home languages, cultures, and contexts; the realities of race and privilege in the United States; the ongoing manifestations of institutional racism within the educational system; and the many factors that shape students’ opportunities to learn within individual classrooms. To teach effectively, teachers need to understand how learning depends on drawing connections to what learners already know, supporting students’ motivation and willingness to take risks, and creating a climate of trust between and among adults and students.

II. Session Overview, cont'd.

The culturally responsive teacher seeks to become knowledgeable about the social history of his students—and the resources represented by their families and communities—as another tool in his teaching kit. Such knowledge can facilitate personal connections between curriculum and students. But culturally responsive teaching is also a constant awareness that we are involved in a cultural activity when we are teaching. This means going beyond the classroom walls, figuring out what else is out there that can be used to help students learn and develop, and expanding the resources that we are using for instruction. Can you teach well without being culturally aware? Perhaps you can in situations where your own cultural assumptions and referents happen to match those of the students you are teaching. But if you teach in a context that is different than the one in which you grew up, or that includes a wide range of cultures, you will encounter teaching puzzles that can only be answered by deepening your understanding of your students' experiences.

Culturally responsive teaching includes elements of teaching described in several of the other sessions in this course. In this session, we have discussed developing caring classroom environments [see Session 5, Emotions and Learning], building on students' strengths [see Session 2, Development and Learning, and Session 4, Multiple Intelligences], fostering both individual and collaborative learning [see Session 7, Learning in a Social Context], and the importance of clear and constructive feedback around authentic assessment [see Session 8, Cognitive Apprenticeship]. However, culturally responsive teaching cannot be summed up by listing a specific set of teaching practices; rather, it encompasses a sensitivity to individuals, as well as culture and language, that influences the smallest interaction with a student and also underlies the larger decisions a teacher makes about the materials and topics she teaches. This sensitivity is built over time, through experiences with students, other teachers, parents, and community members.

Cultural awareness can be built in part by continually asking questions about one's own practice: "How can I build a climate of respect, inclusion, and high expectations? What do I know about the cultures and languages represented in my classroom? How can I (and my students) learn more about these differences? In what ways might my teaching mesh with or conflict with students' home cultures? What tools can I (and my students) use to consider materials, assessments, and the culture of school itself through a broader, cultural lens?" And "How can I think about assessing my students' learning in ways that allow them to develop and share their competence?" In asking these questions, cultural "backgrounds" are placed in the foreground as valuable sources of learning for teachers and students.

III. Additional Session Readings

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IV. Session Activities

Getting Started

Answer one of the following questions in a free-write, pair-share, or small-group discussion.

1. Consider your current teaching situation.
 - In what ways does your teaching take into consideration your students' family and cultural backgrounds? Give specific examples.
 - In what ways might you augment your instruction, curriculum, or assessment to incorporate more of your students' families and cultures?

To the Facilitator: These activities can be used as session warm-ups or as activities that occur after video viewing.

OR

2. In pairs or groups, reflect on the following question: What is the difference between culturally responsive pedagogy and just "good teaching"? If you like, frame your discussion in terms of where culturally responsive pedagogy and good teaching converge or diverge. [Note: a Venn diagram, two overlapping circles, may assist you here as you describe 1) "good teaching," 2) the overlap of culturally responsive pedagogy and "good teaching," and 3) culturally responsive pedagogy.]

Discussion of Session Readings

To the Facilitator: You may want to select questions from the Other Learning Activities and Assessments section to launch a discussion of the session readings. The questions used for the Checking for Understanding activities may be a particularly helpful resource.

Session Video

Culture is part of who we are and everything we do—where we grew up, the social groups we are part of, the way we talk, or dance, and think. If our experience shapes our learning and if culture shapes our experience, cultural connections are extremely important in the classroom. This video shows how teachers can take advantage of students' experiences and build bridges among the many cultures that are represented in their classrooms, including the culture of the school itself.

Background on Teachers

Kathleen Hayes-Parvin teaches sixth-grade language arts and social studies at Birney Middle School in Southfield, Michigan. She has been teaching for 12 years. She received her master's degree in special education, with an emphasis in learning disabilities, and her bachelor's degree in English, both from Marygrove College. Ms. Hayes-Parvin is contributing author of *Trends and Issues in Elementary Language Arts* (2000) published by the National Council of Teachers of English. She is also a writing project teacher consultant for the National Writing Project Network.

Ms. Hayes-Parvin's classroom is featured in the first segment of this video. Her project on family memoirs connects learning inside and outside the classroom by bringing families and their stories into the school. Students become researchers to learn about their ethnic and national identities, their family heritage, and what it means to be an American. Students learn about social history, while their teacher learns more about them—knowledge that will allow her to draw connections to their lives throughout the school year.

IV. Session Activities, cont'd.

William Dean teaches ninth-grade humanities at East Palo Alto High School, East Palo Alto, California. Mr. Dean is a 30-year veteran of teaching, a National Board-certified teacher, and a mentor for National Board candidates. He holds master's and bachelor's degrees in English education, both from Rutgers University.

Jeff Gilbert has 13 years of teaching experience and holds a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in history, both from Stanford University. During the 1999-2000 school year, Mr. Gilbert was site coordinator for Hillsdale High School's Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation process. Mr. Gilbert is currently pursuing National Board certification.

Haydee Rodriguez, a student teacher at East Palo Alto High School when this video was filmed, is now a humanities teacher there. Ms. Rodriguez has her master's degree in education from Stanford University and her bachelor's degree with distinction in social studies from San Diego State University. She was awarded the Stanford Teacher Education Program Student of the Year award and the Santa Clara Council on Social Studies Student Teacher of the Year in 2002.

The second video segment features a ninth-grade humanities course, which is taught in two separate classes by William Dean and Jeff Gilbert, who plan their curriculum together. Student teacher Haydee Rodriguez, who is conducting her practice teaching in Jeff Gilbert's classroom, is part of this planning team. Their students are studying Latin American literature and history through a story called "The Boy from Next to Heaven." Students work in teams on projects that prompt them to compare their cultural experiences with experiences portrayed in the text. Such "culturally relevant" classrooms validate students' experiences and use them as a springboard for the curriculum. This helps students to feel more connected to the classroom and to each other. It also helps teachers to learn more about their students so that they are more successful in their teaching.

Discussion of Session Video

To the Facilitator: You may want to pause the tape at the following points to discuss these questions. If you are watching a real-time broadcast on the Annenberg/CPB Channel, you may want to consider the questions as you watch and discuss some of them afterward.

1. Creating a Safe Space for Learning and an Atmosphere of Respect (Kathleen Hayes-Parvin)

Video Cue: *The Learning Classroom* icon fades out at approximately 8:45 into the program.

Audio Cue: Ms. Hayes-Parvin says, "We create an opportunity for kids to write and express themselves where they're not made fun of. If there are stories that are too personal and too painful, we just ask people to focus on a different aspect of their history."

- What are some ways you can (or do) make your classroom a place where students feel safe sharing personal experiences?
- How can (or do) you encourage your students to respect one another's contributions?

IV. Session Activities, cont'd.

2. Defining Success and Having High Expectations for Students (Kathleen Hayes-Parvin)

Video Cue: *The Learning Classroom* icon fades out at approximately 15:30 into the program.

Audio Cue: Ms. Ladson-Billings says, "And a big part of culturally relevant teaching is about having this vision of success that is an inclusion vision. It's saying all of the kids, no matter where they're from, no matter what their circumstances are, have the potential to be successful in this classroom. And it's really my job to help them attain that success."

- How do you define success in your classroom?
 - What are some of the challenges you experience in helping all of your students reach these expectations?
- Describe something you have tried that led to a "turnaround" or a surprising success for a student you were concerned about.

3. Building Bridges Between Home and School Cultures (William Dean and Jeff Gilbert)

Video Cue: *The Learning Classroom* icon fades out at approximately 22:15 into the program.

Audio Cue: Mr. Gilbert says, "And we don't want to have them feel somehow that that's not important, because they need those skills. But we also need them to know that when they go to college or they need to be successful here, they need to learn a different culture."

- What are some of the ways you have used (or might use) to learn about your students' interests and experiences?
- How might you answer Mr. Gilbert's questions about your own students' home or community cultures?
 - What stereotypes might your students encounter?
 - What are the norms and expected behaviors students encounter outside of school, at home, or in their community?
 - To what extent are they alike or different from what is expected in the school or classroom?

4. Teachers Make Connections to Their Students' Experiences; Students See Themselves Represented in the Classroom (Luis Moll)

Video Cue: *The Learning Classroom* icon fades out at approximately 26:30 into the program.

Audio Cue: Mr. Moll says, "So for example, in the East Palo Alto school, they were doing a very nice job of relating the analysis of text and talking about text, learning how to talk about text while building on the students' experiences and their families' experiences as additional content to help them develop those strategies of talking about text."

- What are some of the ways you might (or do) make connections to your students' personal experiences in your classroom?
 - How do you find this influences your teaching?

V. Other Learning Activities and Assessments

To the Facilitator: These activities and assessments are for you to choose from according to your group's needs and interests. Many of the activities offered here would work equally well as assignments both inside and outside of class. You may want to use class time to prepare for and/or reflect on any activities assigned as homework.

Applications

1. Journal

- a. Think of a time when race/culture became an issue in a class you were teaching or observing, or in which you were a student. You may describe a time when race/culture posed challenges to teaching or learning, or you may describe an instance of culturally responsive pedagogy. Answer the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - How did the race/culture issue become an issue of teaching/learning?
 - How was it resolved or addressed, or how could it have been resolved or addressed?
- b. Reflect on some of the strategies you currently use to get to know your students (e.g., who they are, what they are interested in, where they come from, what their family life is like). Brainstorm some additional strategies you can use to better know your students.

2. Field Assignments

- a. *Consider your school culture.* Your school has a particular culture. Take a walk around your school and make some observations and recordings. Imagine what the first day at your school would be like for a student who just arrived in this country. How would you describe the culture of your school? To what extent does it incorporate or connect to students' home cultures? For example, consider the following:
 - What are the values of the school?
 - Which languages are used?
 - What are some of the expectations for students?
 - What types of assessments are valued?
 - What clubs or activities are prominent?
 - How are students recognized for their achievements?
 - In what ways does the school culture encourage competition, collaboration, or community?
 - How does the school culture reflect—or seem at odds with—the home cultures and communities of different groups of students?

To the Facilitator: Take this as an opportunity to—as anthropologist Clifford Geertz says—“make the familiar strange.” Encourage learners to take a good step back from their own settings and to look at their school with new lenses. The following instructions are an extension of this assignment.

V. Other Learning Activities and Assessments, cont'd.

- b. *Map social groups.* Use the mapping technique described below to learn more about your students' perceptions, stereotypes, and views of others. Mapping social groups reveals how behavior, language (verbal and nonverbal), sexuality, dress, music, religion, and social activities all affect how students view one another and how they interact inside and outside the classroom.

Laurie Olsen (1997) created the following "school mapping" assignment for use with her high school students:

In this task, you will think about how Madison High students arrange themselves socially. Throughout the school day, students find themselves in many social groups. It is your job to observe (notice) what these groups are, describe them, and try and understand why people choose to be part of the groups they are in. Begin by brainstorming the 'types' of students there are at Madison. You will then work together to create a large map of the school campus, and draw the different groups onto the map to show the class where everyone is. You will also be explaining the map to the rest of the class when you have completed the project. You will each have a paper due which describes the different groups and analyzes why the school divides itself the way it does (Olsen, 1997, p. 37).

3. Create an Action Plan

Evaluate and revise a lesson. Redesign one of your lesson plans to take into account what you have learned about culturally responsive teaching. In your reflection, answer the following questions:

- What did you do to incorporate culturally responsive learning into your original lesson plan?
 - What did you change?
 - What else did you consider?
 - How was your lesson transformed?
 - What principles of culturally responsive teaching were applied?
 - What other principles of learning did you use?
 - How would you apply culturally responsive teaching to your practice in general?

Checking for Understanding

1. Short-Answer Questions

- a. According to Banks (1993), there are five ways of putting into practice multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Give a brief (one- to two-sentence) explanation of each.
- b. Describe at least three features of a culturally responsive classroom.

V. Other Learning Activities and Assessments, cont'd.

2. Essay Question

Describe a day in a classroom where culturally responsive teaching is evident. (This can be from a real classroom you know or a classroom you invent.) Illustrate this classroom with specific examples and details.

- What is on the classroom walls?
- What are students studying?
- What materials are used?
- How are students assessed?
- What is the relationship between the teacher and her students like?

3. Reflective Essay

Write a reflective essay on what you learned about culturally responsive teaching in this unit.

- What ideas stand out for you as the most useful and helpful?
- How do you think these ideas might impact your own teaching?
- What questions remain for you about these issues?

Long-Term Assignments

Curriculum Case Study

Consider your case study learning problem in light of what you are learning about culturally responsive instruction. (Note: If your curriculum case is on a unit you plan to teach in the future, answer in the form of what you project for that unit. You may have to anticipate some of your students' reactions.)

- How did your students' cultural backgrounds and the culture of the classroom factor into your curriculum case? You may want to consider your selection of materials, development of assignments or assessments, the teaching strategies you used, and/or the students' interactions and responses.
- Consider how any of these issues might have affected the outcome of the case (either positively or negatively):
 - respect for students,
 - setting high expectations,
 - building a caring environment,
 - building bridges between home and school cultures,
 - viewing knowledge through a critical lens, and
 - developing assessments that offer students a range of ways to demonstrate what they have learned.

To the Facilitator: You will find other learning activities on the course Web site at www.learner.org/channel/courses/learning-classroom. You will want to look ahead to assign learners the reading and any homework for the next session.

VI. Web Sites and Organizations

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence: <http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/>

Located at the University of California Santa Cruz, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) conducts studies on culture and learning. The Web site includes resources such as articles, project reports, videos, and book recommendations. Also included is an explanation of CREDE's five standards for effective pedagogy; these standards and their indicators are listed on the site.

Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation: <http://www.facing.org>

Facing History and Ourselves works with teachers to consider ways of bringing material in the classroom related to diversity, racism, and prejudice. Included on the Web site are study guides, book and video recommendations, and information about professional development opportunities.

George Lucas Educational Foundation: <http://gledf.org/classrooms.html>

The George Lucas Educational Foundation Web site provides feature articles and interviews related to school-community partnerships. See, in particular, articles and expert interviews on home visits under the "Involved communities: Parent involvement" section of the Web site.

National Urban Alliance: <http://www.nuatc.org/>

The National Urban Alliance (NUA) is an organization that guides K-12 school leaders in achieving high standards for all students. NUA consultants base their recommendations on research in culture and cognitive development.

Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/>

Teaching Tolerance is a project at the Southern Poverty Law Center that produces a free magazine with classroom strategies and curriculum ideas that focus on diversity and tolerance. The Web site includes an online version of the magazine, classroom resources and activities, and information about grants for teachers developing anti-bias projects in their classrooms.

VII. References and Recommended Readings

Note that recommended readings are marked with an asterisk ().*

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