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Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education: What Professors Need to Know

Patricia Larke

While culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was meant from its inception to address the needs of students at the elementary and secondary school levels, it has great potential for use in higher education, too. The underlying premise of culturally responsive teaching is to provide equitable educational outcomes for all students. Like elementary and secondary schools, higher education classes are becoming more and more culturally, linguistically, economically, and ethnically diverse (CLEED), according to Larke and Larke (2009). And as higher education classes become more diverse, professors must develop more teaching strategies that are inclusive of the changing student populations on their campuses, in order to deliver their courses more effectively. Therefore, this chapter discusses several topics of the culturally responsive teaching presentations that were presented at the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute. More specifically, the chapter will address:

1. the need for culturally responsive teaching in higher education;
2. culturally responsive teaching itself;
3. D2 and E2 approaches to implementing culturally responsive teaching; and
4. understanding the so-called C's of implementing culturally responsive teaching.

Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education

The need for CRT in higher education has been impacted by three areas. These areas are demographic changes, historic tradition, and global society.

Demographic Changes

There has been an increase in college enrollment over the past thirty years. In fact, during the years 1999 to 2009, the enrollment increased 38%, from 14.8 million college students to 20.4 million (NCES, 2011). This increase is a direct result of a rise in the numbers of students of color and females. Since 1976 the number of Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders has increased. During the same period, 1976–2009, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students in-

creased from 3% to 12%, while both Asian/Pacific Islanders and African Americans increased 5%. At the same time, enrollment of White students fell from 83% to 62% (NCES, 2011). According to Pollard (2011), there is a gender gap in college enrollment and graduation. Pollard notes a “feminization” in higher education, in that “women are more likely to enroll in, and graduate from college than men.”

Historic Traditions and Global Society

The delivery of instruction in higher education has been and continues to be predominately in the lecture-style format. While this may be the norm, many professors are using more technology to enhance their instruction (Jakee, 2011). Yet, the fact remains that teaching in academia cannot remain in a one-size-fits-all model grounded in Western ideology. Educating students to live and work in a global society is the vision of higher education institutions. With the advancement of technology, learning about other countries and people is no longer regulated to a page in a textbook; instead, with online web resources such as Google Earth, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, students have access to information about people on any continent within seconds, 24 hours a day. As a result, the workforce is comprised of people who are able to communicate in several languages, are technologically skilled, and can engage in culturally appropriate practices that enhance the quality of the business product.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an instructional pedagogical strategy whose main purpose is to address the needs of all students. It was first introduced by Ladson-Billings in 1992 and further expounded in her 1994 work, *The Dreamkeepers*. Gay's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (2000), provided deeper insights to helping educators understand and apply tenets of culturally responsive teaching in their respective classrooms and schools. Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995) state that culturally responsive pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they “challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Gay, 2000, p.160).

Gay (2000; 2011) states that using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits of teaching enhances their learning. To endorse CRT, educators must develop a cultural diversity knowledge base, design culturally relevant cur-

ricula, demonstrate cultural caring while building learning communities, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and be able to develop cultural congruity in classroom instruction. She further states that these components are not optional, nor can they be done in isolation. It is within this conceptual framework that CRT can be applied to teaching in higher education. Three components of CRT that are most applicable to higher education are: cultural competence, critical consciousness, and academic success. Cultural competence uses cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits of teaching. Critical consciousness helps students develop a broader perspective of the sociopolitical consciousness in order to critically analyze societal relationships. Academic success entails improving the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students by teaching them through their own cultural and experiential filters (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Implementing CRT is a complex process that involves both teaching skills and professional practices. Teaching involves assembling a set of specific practices, activities, resources, and materials during a designated allocation of time for one or several educational purposes. CRT professional practices are shown in behaviors such as thoughts, interpretations, choices, values, and commitments of specific instruction.

D2 and E2 Approach to Implementing CRT

To teach culturally responsively in higher education requires a so-called D2 and E2 approach. First, instructors should develop a multicultural education knowledge base (D1) before they are able to design a course (D2) to incorporate the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. Second, professors should engage students (E1) and evaluate their course content and student progress (E2). Each of the D2 and E2 components will be discussed in the next section.

Develop a Knowledge Base

First, instructors must develop a knowledge base and become aware of the issues of diversity. Diversity is more than race, gender, or religious differences. Culturally responsive teaching and diversity issues are integral components of the discipline of multicultural education.

Multicultural Education (ME)

What is multicultural education? Multicultural education is a field of study whose major aim is to create equitable educational opportunities

for students from diverse racial/ethnic, social class, cultural, and religious groups (Banks & Banks, 2004). Multicultural education is a philosophical concept and an educational process. It is a concept built upon the philosophical ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity that are contained in, for example, the Declaration of Independence. It recognizes, however, that equality and equity are not the same thing: Equal access does not necessarily guarantee fairness (Grant, 1994). Sonia Nieto (2000) identifies seven components of multicultural education. Understanding these components is important when discussing diversity in education. She says that multicultural education is:

- Antiracist education—paying attention to all discriminatory practices (in the curriculum, educational choices, relationships, etc.);
- Basic education—central to the curriculum;
- Important for all students—not just for students of color, but for everyone;
- Pervasive—permeating the entire curriculum, not just a subject, a month-long project, or merely an item to be covered;
- Education for social justice—learning how to think and behave in ways that ensure fairness, and that people have the power to make changes;
- A process—ongoing and dynamic; no one stops becoming; and
- Critical pedagogy—a transformative process to think in multiple ways that leads to action.

There are theories that undergird the discipline of multicultural education as well as *-isms* that are essential in understanding CRT. A few are discussed below.

Cultural Pluralism Theory

Cultural pluralism theory states that no one chooses their ancestry, that each person has something valuable to contribute to society, and that people should be viewed in an egalitarian mode rather than an inferior or superior mode (Kallen, 1956). First of all, when viewing students of color, or any students in your class, realize that they cannot choose their ancestors; students who come to your class did not choose their race or culture. The theory also states that each person has something of value to contribute to society, and that everyone should be viewed in an egalitarian mode rather than an inferior or superior mode. Therefore, when students come to your program/course, they come seeking the knowledge that instructors have to offer. When instructors value students, they accept their language, culture, history, and ancestors.

Empowerment Theory

Paulo Freire's concept of empowerment aligns well with CRT. According to Freire (1974 as cited in 2000) empowerment is knowledge gained that enhances one's strength, competence, creativity, and thus freedom of action, and knowledge of social relations that dignifies one's own history, language, and culture to enable people to act, grow, and become. Providing students with knowledge to empower them is essential to CRT.

ME-Isms and Levels of Prejudice

Within multicultural education is embedded an understanding of the *-isms* (Larke, 2010). These *-isms* are racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and religionism. Also, providing information about Allport's levels of prejudice is beneficial both to students and instructors.

Wineberg's definition of racism fits well with CRT. According to Wineberg, racism is a system of privilege and penalty based on one's race. It consists of two facets: (1) a belief in the inherent superiority of some people and in the inherent inferiority of others; and (2) the acceptance of the way goods and services are distributed in accordance to these judgments (Wineberg cited in Nieto, 2000). The definition expands racism to include both privilege and penalty, which are often overlooked when the term is used or implied.

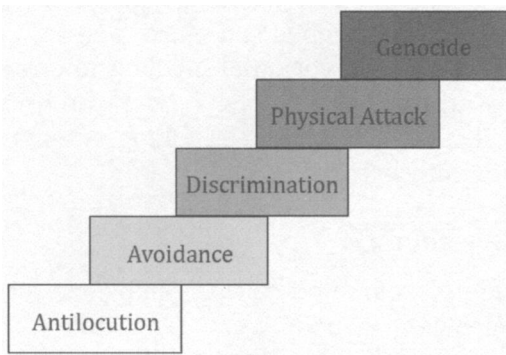
The other *-isms* of sexism, classism, ageism, and religionism are self-explanatory. For example, sexism is discrimination based on sex, classism is discrimination based on class, ageism is discrimination based on age, and religionism is discrimination based on religion.

Gordon Allport (1954) introduced levels of prejudice in his seminal work in the 1950s, and this theory is still prevalent today. While most people do not perceive themselves as prejudiced, Allport defines behaviors such as ethnic jokes and avoidance of specific people as prejudice. What follows is a brief discussion of Allport's five levels of prejudice.

The first is antilocution, or participating in ethnic jokes. Often, negative things are said in the privacy between friends. This supports social positionality: People see themselves as better than others by making such statement as "those people" or "our group." This supports the notion that "I don't like those people, either...so I am like you." Therefore, people justify participating in ethnic jokes, even when the joke is about their own ethnic group. The second level is avoidance—when people avoid others because they do not want to be associated with a particular group. For example, parents will say to their children, "I don't want you to talk to those children," or people will say that you should avoid a cer-

tain type of group. The third level is discrimination, and perhaps this level is most familiar to students. Discrimination is prejudice plus action. Many legal actions have been filed because of discrimination in housing, education, and employment. There are also some other areas such as colorism; that is, discrimination based on skin phenotype—someone who has a lighter complexion against someone who is darker.

Figure 3. Allport's Levels of Prejudice



The fourth level is physical attack. People are attacked because of who they are and who they represent; for example, gay bashing, and attacks on Middle Easterners after 9/11. The fifth and final level is genocide. This is the most extreme level of prejudice. Examples of this are the Klu Klux Klan's activities in the United States during the 1900s, the Holocaust during World War II, and today, incidents in Darfur, Sudan.

Levels of ME Awareness

As indicated from the definition of multicultural education and *-isms*, ME and CRT are more than food, fashion, and fun. There are levels of diversity awareness, according to Banks (2004). The first level is the contributions approach. In this approach, teachers introduce heroes and “sheroes,” food, fashion, and fun, folklore, or a list of people of note. For example, the math and science classes may introduce a picture of a female of color mathematician or scientist. The second level is the additive approach. With this approach, the course, the instructor gives extra credit to students for diversity information, but the information is not a part of the “canon” or tested information. The third level is transformation. In this level, knowledge is inclusive and presented from multiple viewpoints. The last level is social action, in which the knowledge that is presented changes the views of society. For example, engineering

courses help students to design buildings that are structurally sound, environmentally safe, culturally affirming, and economically feasible to reflect the culture of the community.

Develop and/or Revise Courses

Instructors should develop course materials to enhance the three tenets of CRT: cultural competence, critical consciousness, and academic success. Modifying their syllabi, developing lectures, and changing required readings are necessary. Revision of the syllabus is a place to start. Culturally responsive teaching is professional work that involves taking action intentionally and skillfully, in a timely manner, under conditions that are changeable and problematic. CRT involves taking actions to structure the setting in which learning occurs.

Syllabus Development and/Revision

A syllabus is required for teaching a course on college campuses, and it must include information that meets the guidelines of the institution. This section will detail how to incorporate CRT components into a syllabus. Section 1 of a syllabus contains course information such as course name and number, date/time/location of the course, course credit hours, and instructor's contact information. In section 2 there is course catalogue information. Changing course catalog information often requires completing paperwork and following the guidelines according to the institution's course revision committee—any changes in course description must be approved by the institution's course committees. Section 3 includes information about objectives and learning outcomes for the course. This is an opportunity to provide specific learning outcomes that integrate culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education issues. Section 4 is critical for making CRT changes, for it includes the list of reading materials for the course. Within the last decade, new texts, articles, and audio-visual materials that are inclusive of diversity issues have been developed in many disciplines, from the sciences to the liberal arts. Instructors should check with the institution's librarian for any new listings in this area. Sections 5, 6, and 7 contain logistical information on courses; the weighting of assignments is particularly important when determining grades. Instructors should give considerable thought in section 9 regarding what to include about CRT and MEI (multicultural education issues). This section can be developed once instructors complete their e-research activity (see Table 1). The last section includes information about an institution's policies and federal and state policies, if applicable.

Table 1. Developing a CRT/MEI Course Syllabus

Syllabus Section	Syllabus Information	Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Multicultural Education Issues (MEI)
1. Course Information	Course Number, Section, Date/Time/Location, Credit, Professor Name/Contact Information	
2. Course Description	Use information in college catalogue; make sure any changes are approved by respective committees	Add any MEI or CRT changes to course description
3. Course Objectives/ Learning Outcomes	What should students learn from the course?	Add MEI or CRT to learning outcomes and objectives
4. Required Texts/ Readings	Select texts and readings that support CRT and MEI issues	Add new readings and texts that incorporate CRT and MEI
5. Course Expectancies	How will the students be assessed? List exams, e-folios, papers, etc.	Will any CRT and MEI be included in the assessments?
6. Assignments, Grading Scale, and Due Dates	Find out the college/university's policies regarding letter and numeric grades; decide the weight of CRT and MEI assignments	CRT and MEI should never be an extra credit assignment, but an equally weighted assignment
7. Due Dates and Assignment Information	Be explicit about class requirements	
8. Lecture Topics, Reading Assignments	Identify topics, readings, resources for the course	Highlight CRT and MEI issues
9. University/ Department Policies	Always include policies such as diversity policies, plagiarism, American Disabilities Act, etc.	

CRT Lesson

To design a CRT lesson, begin first with a topic that responds to an issue of diversity. Look at your class syllabus and identify any topic that is applicable to a diversity issue. After identifying the topic, conduct a literature search on the topic. Look for readings and other materials to support your topic. Once the topic has been identified, develop a lecture to support the topic, and write objectives and other appropriate information for the lesson such as reading list, guiding questions, etc. Three critical questions to think about are:

1. What are the objectives and learning outcomes?;
2. What is the delivery system?; and
3. Is the information accurate and authentic?

Design a class project to support the topic with the appropriate grading rubrics. In designing your project develop ways to enhance student engagement. Select projects that are “life-changing” and projects that involve the use of technology and support reflective practices (getting students to think and write about their learning).

Table 2. Designing CRT Lessons

Using E-Research to Identify Culturally Responsive Teaching Activities to Transform Courses			
Issues	Websites	Lecture	CRT Projects
Identify three CRT issues that you would include in your course.	Find two websites to support each of the CRT issues.	Identify a lecture topic and write outline. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective/Learning Outcomes • Readings • Outline of Lecture 	Develop one CRT project for your course. Write a paragraph description. Include a grading rubric.
Issue A	Website A		
Issue B	Website B		
Issue C	Website C		

Engaging students

Student engagement is vital to the implementation of CRT. This engagement is critical to their learning process. The development of projects, papers, and other class projects that require students to reflect and use their cultural frames of reference is essential. Studies support

that when students are engaged in the learning process, the quality of their work increases. CRT understands the pedagogy of place (POP), as noted by Raymer (2001). POP states that learning occurs when students connect subject matter to their own lives and surroundings, and critically reflect upon both the connection and the new materials being studied. In other words, assignments are connected to students' lives. POP notes that learners come to understand themselves as inheritors, inquirers, and contributors of knowledge in overlapping webs of social, cultural, natural, scientific, and technical understanding. Students see themselves as contributing, not just absorbing. Like CRT, POP helps learners understand themselves as both products of and creators of interconnections among people and places. These learners see themselves as connecting with others in the world, while weaving critical reflection, active engagement, and real-world application into the learning process and educational environment. Students see the connection to the real world. Part 3 of this book contains several examples in which faculty share their teaching experiences with courses that they developed or revised.

Evaluation

Evaluation is integral to the CRT process. CRT projects and assignments must be included in class evaluation and grading. The evaluation of CRT projects should not be rewarded as extra credit. In section there are explanations about the effects of evaluation and how it is used to improve course ratings and student achievement. This section discusses how an action plan can be a useful evaluation tool.

An action plan is a list of goals and activities that can enhance culturally responsive teaching. This involves three components: goals for the instructor, goals for the students, and goals for the department or program. The goals should involve activities that can be done immediately, short-term goals and activities that can be done over time, or long-term goals. One way to provide an incentive to keep the long-term goals and reflect upon the short-term goals is to make two copies of the completed action plan. Take one copy and place where it can be seen often as a reminder, and place the second copy in a stamped self-addressed envelope and ask a colleague to mail the envelope after six months. This process will help to keep instructors accountable to their goals for culturally responsive teaching. See Table 3 for an example of an action plan.

Table 3. CRT Action Plan

Culturally Responsive Teaching It Is Not by LUCK, but by Design Action Plan			
Goals	Yourself	Students	Program/Department
Short-Term Goals	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Long-Term Goals	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

Understanding the C's of Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching

For CRT to be implemented in higher education, instructors should respond to critical questions in the following six C's. They are: commitment, co-responsibility, communication, cultural understanding, courage, and change.

Commitment

What level of commitment do you bring? Is it lip service, just talk? What action plans do you have to change your courses? Do you foster a caring commitment? Caring means to know, to act, and to respond in ways to enhance personal development and academic achievement for all students. Being thoughtful, kind, and compassionate in your actions will ensure that programs and projects are responsive to class, race, gender, and religious inequalities.

Co-Responsibility

This means professors, students, and departments working together. All must share the responsibility of making it safe to discuss controversial topics and making the activities academically enriching for students. Class evaluations provide vital information.

Communication

What messages do you send to your students about diversity? How do culturally, linguistically, economically, ethnically diverse (CLEED) stu-

dents know that you want them in your classes or programs? What do you know about students other than their names?

Cultural Understanding

Is your knowledge of cultural issues accurate and up to date? What have you read lately about diversity in your discipline? What do you know about rural students and students of color, or international students? Do you believe in the color-blind deficit mentality that “I don’t see color, and I treat all my students the same?”

Courage

How do you find the strength to make efforts? The reality is that many classrooms support classism, racism, and sexism in subtle but powerful ways because many of these issues have been part of the fabric of life in many countries. Note that, for some discipline such as science, math and even education engaging in culturally responsive teaching is not rewarded with tenure and promotion. Sometimes, engaging these issues can produce lower student evaluations, which are used for tenure and promotion and merit decisions.

Change

How do you alter, adjust, and transform your courses and programs to accommodate differences (e.g., racial, sexual, religious)? Change requires moving out of one’s comfort zone.

Conclusion

Historically, instructional delivery on college campuses has been—and continues to be—via the lecture. The premise of this chapter has been not to debate the quality of the lecture style, but to share how CRT can enhance the quality of college teaching. CRT is an effective pedagogical tool that can enhance teaching in college courses. CRT includes three areas: cultural competence and understanding, critical consciousness, and academic success. These are the same areas that embody teaching and optimal student learning outcomes. Note that if CRT is to work effectively, instructors will have to develop, implement, and evaluate its effectiveness.

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