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Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices for Educators of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Students

By

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**Abstract**

Schools within the United States have grown tremendously over the last decade in cultural and linguistic diversity. Teachers have a responsibility to teach all students, regardless of their unique backgrounds or language abilities; however, English language learners and students of color are not receiving the same academic success as their White and English-dominant peers. Rochester City School District Regents exam data illustrates observable racial achievement disproportionality that suggests certain groups of students are not receiving an equitable education. To combat this disproportionality, a handbook and professional development plan was created for Rochester-area teachers at World of Inquiry School (WOIS) to increase their cultural responsiveness and better serve their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) is a pedagogy that reflects the need for cultural awareness and inclusion so that *all* students achieve equally, not just White or European American students. With the implementation of CRE, teachers at WOIS will seek to infuse instruction with culture, foster a climate of rigorous learning and mutual respect, and transform their thinking to expose biases that prevent certain students from achieving academically.

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# Chapter 1

**Problem Statement**

Over time, the need for Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has become more apparent as school communities across the country continually grow in cultural and linguistic diversity. Students coming from homes where English is not the dominant language are the fastest growing group of students in schools within the United States (Grantmakers for Education, 2013). In response to this increased diversity within our society and schools, Gollnick and Chinn (2017) state that the implementation of CRT is essential because it "encourages a culturally responsive curriculum in which diversity is integrated throughout the courses, activities, and interactions in the classroom" (p. 53). These authors claim culturally responsive teachers infuse curricula, assessment, and instruction with the cultures and discourse styles represented in their classroom to ensure that all "ethnic groups become an integral part of the total curriculum" (p. 53). These teachers relate content learning to students' varied life experiences and seek out methods of highlighting the diversity of their students as a strength that drives academic achievement. Unfortunately, not all teachers are culturally competent and as a result, large populations of students leave school each day feeling undervalued and underserved.

Rochester City School District (RCSD) serves over twenty-seven thousand students who make up six different racial or ethnic categories. These students are: American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, White, and Multiracial. Each of these students comes to school every day with diverse life experiences that greatly affect the way in which they learn and interact with others. If

teachers cannot find ways to be responsive to their students' unique life experiences, then student

learning, and therefore student success, is negatively impacted.

With 91% of students coming from economically disadvantaged homes and 13% of

students coming from non-English homes, Rochester area teachers grapple each day working to

mitigate the effects that poverty, language barriers, cultural intolerance, and emotional trauma

have on students' ability to learn and succeed in American schools (percentages based on

NYSEDs Student Information Repository System for the 2015-2016 school year). These teachers

are charged with the goal of ensuring *every* child achieves success, regardless of how exhausted

or unmotivated these students are due to their daily encounters with society's inequities. These

children face racial discrimination, cultural intolerance, emotional trauma, and economic

hardship daily. Because these burdens are not experienced by all students, some students come to

school physically, emotionally, and mentally ready to learn. Unfortunately, the majority of

students in the Rochester area come to school without one or all of these basic needs

appropriately fulfilled, leaving them overwhelmed and frustrated by their learning experiences. If

teachers are not able to understand their students' unique life experiences because they

themselves have never had similar burdens, they may need additional training in topics

surrounding implicit bias, privilege, and racial equity in order to maximize their ability to meet

the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

When students look differently, act differently, or think differently than their teachers,

learning can be obstructed. Because the majority of teachers who work with CLD students are

typically White and/or European American, this requires unique teacher preparation, part of

which must include Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). Culturally Responsive Teaching

(CRT), or Culturally Responsive Education, refers to a pedagogy that recognizes and

acknowledges students' differences as a benefit to learning and plans instruction that reflects and affirms the differences represented among all students of the classroom environment (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). When teachers are adequately trained in culturally responsive pedagogy, quality education is within reach of *all* students, including students of color and students from immigrant families.

**Significance of the Problem**

In order to see how students in the Rochester City School District (RCSD) were performing, the researcher looked at Regents examination results from the 2016-2017 school year for three assessments: the English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core (CC) assessment, the Algebra I CC assessment, and the Global History and Geography assessment. The researcher focused on the number of students of each racial demographic group that were part of the overall test-taking group and compared those percentages to the number of students that achieved mastery within each of the racial groupings (mastery is defined as a score of 85 or higher, or within the Level 5 range). These data, taken from RCSD's New York State Report Card, classified students into five major ethnic categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White, and Multiracial.  For most of the Regents exams, data for students who are American Indian or Alaska Native and Multiracial was unavailable, most likely due to the low number of students who took those exams.

In 2017, 2,279 students in the RCSD took the ELA CC Regents examination. Out of these students, 282 students (12%) received scores in the Level 5 range--the highest achievable level. Out of the 282 students who achieved mastery on this exam, 12 (4%) were Asian or Native

Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 108 (38%) were Black or African American,  88 (31%) were

Hispanic or Latino, and 74 (26%) of those students were White. Out of the total number of

students who took the ELA CC assessment, 127 (6%) were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other

Pacific Islander, 1,312 (58%) were Black or African American, 615 (27%) were Hispanic or

Latino, and 219 (10%) of those students were White. When these numbers are broken down into

percentages, there is an overt racial disproportionality between the number of students tested and

number of students who achieved mastery. Even though White students only made up 10% of the

total population tested, they make up 26% of the total number of students who achieved mastery.

Furthermore, Black or African American students made up 58% of the total number of students

tested but only make up 38% of the total number of students who achieved mastery (Appendix

A). In other words, if racial inequities did not exist, then Black or African American students,

who make up the majority of students tested, would also make up the majority of students who

scored at a Level 5, or mastery; however, that is not what the data shows.

The disproportionality between the number of students who achieved mastery and the

number of students tested in each group of students perfectly illustrates the racial inequities of

American society as well as our school systems which inadvertently hinder the academic success

of our students of color all the while furthering the academic success of our White students.

These data suggests that race and culture play a large role in students' ability to learn and

succeed in addition to their access to an appropriate and fair education.

Similarly to the ELA CC assessment, White students disproportionately outperformed

students of color in the Algebra I CC assessment and the Global History and Geography Regents

assessment. Out of 3,482 students who took the Algebra I CC exam, only 33 students achieved

mastery. Of those students, 9% were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 24% were

Black or African American, 15% were Hispanic or Latino, and 52% were White. White students made up 9% of the total population tested, but 52% of the total number of students who scored the highest while Black or African American students made up 59% of the total population tested, but only 24% of the total number of students who achieved mastery (Appendix A). The same data trends can be seen on the Global History and Geography exam results.

Along with race and culture, language also has a powerful impact on a student's ability to achieve. Data from the same exams above show an observable disproportionality between the passing rates of English Language Learners (ELLs) and the passing rates of Non-English Language Learners. ELLs are students, usually from immigrant families, whose native language and/or home language is something other than English. These students receive special services at school to help build their language proficiency in English. Non-ELLs refers to students who are native English speakers and whose dominant home language is English. Even though student achievement was previously compared via mastery designation, the achievement of ELLs will be compared using passing rate data. Because ELLs are still in the process of mastering standardized English, it is expected that the number of these students achieving mastery on a grade-level exam in English would be low; therefore, the researcher chose to look at passing rates when comparing the exam results of ELLs to non-ELLs.

In all three exams looked at by the researcher, the test scores of non-English Language Learners surpassed those of English Language Learners. Results from the ELA CC assessment indicate that 31% of non-ELLs passed the exam with a 65% or higher while only 18% of ELLs achieved similarly. Results from the Algebra I CC assessment show the same trend; 42% of non-ELLs passed while only 30% of ELLs passed. Global History and Geography exam results also show non-ELLs outperforming ELLs with 29% of non-ELLs and 17% of ELLs receiving a

passing score (Appendix A). This data not only illustrates a need for improved English as a New Language (ENL) services, but it paints a bleak picture of the quality of education ELLs are receiving in their general education classrooms, where most of the content-related instruction is taking place.

The one commonality between all the exam data analyzed so far is that White students and English-dominant students consistently outperform their culturally and linguistically diverse peers. If students of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds are to achieve at equally high rates, teachers must be open to the ideologies behind Culturally Responsive Education and make conscious efforts to incorporate Culturally Responsive Teaching practices into their daily instruction, assessments, and interactions with students.

**Purpose**

Before anything could be planned or created, the researcher chose to develop and release a survey that would seek to gauge the level of personal interest and need surrounding CRE from the perspective of the teaching staff within Rochester City School District.

The survey intended to uncover teachers' and staff members' levels of confidence surrounding their current knowledge and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogies. Staff members from World of Inquiry School (WOIS) No. 58 were selected to take a survey (Appendix C) due to the school's similarity in demographics with the overall population of RCSD. WOIS is a K-12 school made up of staff members who work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds on a daily basis.  In every culturally responsive teaching pedagogy listed in the survey, at least 22% of staff members reported that they felt *very confident*. The two CRE practices that staff members reported feeling the most confident in were

asking for student input when planning instructional activities, and relating academic material to students' life experiences. Respectively, 35 and 34 of 37 respondents stated they felt *very confident* in these areas. The two CRE practices that staff members reported feeling the least confident in were scaffolding student learning with culturally familiar examples, and writing learning targets that include language objectives. Only 23 and 24 respondents, respectively, reported feeling *somewhat confident* or *very confident* in these areas. This information is important for a PD facilitator to know because it helps direct the learning targets of the seminar.

After self-assessing levels of confidence, staff members were given a list of specific CRT strategies and asked to check which culturally responsive teaching practice they felt most confident utilizing and which they would like to learn more about. Respondents stated they felt most confident in making an effort to get to know students' families and backgrounds, and least confident in learning words in students' native languages or presenting new concepts using student vocabulary. Respondents reported wanting to learn more about how to spend time outside of class learning about the cultures and languages of students, and allowing students to work independently, selecting their own learning activities.

**Summary**

Although staff members report an overall confident attitude in respect to many of the teaching practices that make up Culturally Responsive Education, the assessment data taken from the RCSD Report Card suggests that the overall teaching staff of the district could benefit from additional training in cultural responsiveness. The fact is that the exam results of culturally and linguistically diverse students in comparison to the exam results of their White, English-dominant peers show visible disproportionality. Looking beyond test scores, these data expose a

deeper problem that exists in schools as well as society as a whole. People of color and people of

diverse cultures experience systematic discrimination that people who are White and/or English-

dominant cannot fully understand. Unfortunately, the inequities of society trickle down into the

school system and as a result, our culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse students do not

receive an equitable education. For this reason, the researcher decided to present information to

his colleagues in the form of a PD seminar and a quick-reference handbook.

These products will reflect the goals of Culturally Responsive Education and promote

teaching practices that are socially equitable so that *all* students, regardless of their gender,

ethnic origin, or family background, achieve to their fullest potential.  The PD and

accompanying handbook will contain research-based strategies and data-informed resources for

teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students to use when planning instruction,

supplemental activities, and assessments. All of the learning included in the final products of this

project will be collected and presented for the main purposes of weakening the influence of

societal inequities on the learning potential of our students from diverse backgrounds. It is the

researcher's hopes that educators of the Rochester City School District will apply this learning to

their daily instructional practices so that students of color and students of non-English

households can experience the same educational success experienced by their White, English-

dominant peers.

# Chapter 2

**Introduction**

Disproportional racial achievement is clearly evident in the student assessment data examined in the first chapter. These data suggest that students of color and English language learners within the Rochester City School District are underperforming in comparison to their White and European American peers. To address this problem, the researcher has completed a literature review of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices that will help educators better serve their culturally and linguistically diverse students. The research described in this literature review will be applied to the creation of a handbook that will share the classic and modern research surrounding CRE and provide teachers will practical knowledge they can immediately apply to their instruction and interactions with students. The handbook will accompany a series of professional development sessions that seek to improve the quality of education for culturally and linguistically diverse students within the RCSD—this includes students of color and students whose home and/or native language is something other than English. As observed in the RCSD Regents exam data, these are the students who are being underserved by their teachers and school; and as a result, are drastically underperforming.

In order to organize the key components of CRE, this chapter is broken into three main parts; Part I: Responsive Instruction and Planning, Part II: Responsive Classroom Climate, and Part III: Responsive Teacher Leadership. These components of CRE were not taken directly from any one researcher or expert, but rather adapted from and based on a number of CRE components published by various CRE experts. Although this literature review seeks to educate teachers on culturally responsive teaching practices and the beliefs and goals behind CRE, it is

not enough to supply teachers with a manual of techniques. CRT practices require a shift in awareness, a personal dedication toward social equity, and an unwavering desire to affirm students' cultural differences and validate the richness those differences bring into the classroom environment. Villegas and Lucas (2002) believe that it is from a combination of all this, that will enable teachers to create long-lasting positive change in the lives of their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Researchers Gollnick and Chinn (2017) explain that multicultural education, similar to CRE, focuses on other demographic groups than just students of color and English language learners. These authors point out that "European American students also belong to racial and ethnic groups and need to understand that their race and ethnicity have been privileged in schools" (p.260). White, European American students experience cultural validation every day because formal American schooling has been a reflection of the White, English-dominant society. In order to ensure all students' cultures and backgrounds are validated, teachers must make a conscious effort to plan and employ learning tasks that build bridges between students' cultures and the content material. This can only happen when teachers effectively plan for culturally responsive instruction that is meaningful and strategic.

**Part 1: Responsive Instruction & Planning**

According to Gollnick and Chinn (2017), responsive instruction emphasizes the need to place students at the center of teaching and learning. Designing instruction that is truly student-centered begins with effective planning. If students do not see themselves or their cultures reflected in the curriculum, they are not able to connect meaningfully with their learning. Effective planning involves incorporating texts that reflect the diversity of the classroom,

examining and analyzing appropriateness of materials and curricula, revising irrelevant curricula so that it meets students' interests, and providing differentiated instruction so that students can learn at their own pace.

Researchers Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that when selecting texts, teachers should look to include voices that reflect their students' personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Teachers can expand the way students think about a certain topic by presenting that topic from multiple perspectives. When teachers incorporate texts that reflect the diversity of the classroom, students are more likely to make thoughtful connections between the text and their life experiences. Through strategic use of culturally relevant texts, teachers can help students improve their literacy skills as well as content knowledge.

The growth of literacy skills and the acquisition of content knowledge do not happen independently. Culturally responsive teachers find ways for students to pick up on new content-related information while also practicing their literacy. Himmel (2012) provides an overview of language objectives and how teachers of ELLs can best utilize them in content-area instruction. Even though much of Himmel's (2012) research was written for the purpose of improving literacy skills and content knowledge of ELLs, the information contained within the article can be applicable to all students. In discussing the advantages of language objectives, Himmel (2012) states that "everyone can benefit from the clarity that comes with a teacher outlining the requisite academic language to be learned and mastered in each lesson" (para. 9). For literacy and content knowledge to grow interdependently, learning goals are categorized into content objectives and language objectives. Content objectives are used to identify the learning goals for a particular lesson, while language objectives identify the academic language needed for students to express their completion of the learning goals. Language objectives support the linguistic development of

all students because they direct students toward the appropriate academic language needed to express their learning of the lesson. Language objectives involve all four language modalities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) but also can involve specific content-related vocabulary, language functions, or even language learning strategies.

Himmel (2012) indicated in her research that language objectives are most powerful when they are specific and concise. For example, Himmel (2012) utilizes language objectives in a Grade 3 Science lesson on States of Matter by instructing students to "orally describe characteristics of liquids, solids, and gases to a partner" (para. 13). The accompanying content objective, which requires students to distinguish between and provide examples of liquids, solids, and gases, is supported by a language objective that contains clear instructions for how students will prove their learning. Another useful example of language objectives that properly support their content objective is evident in the examples Himmel (2012) wrote for a Grade 9 ELA classroom learning about informative and explanatory texts. Himmel (2012) writes: "Students will be able to draft a conclusion paragraph for their expository essay" through the use of "transition phrases (e.g., as a result) in writing" (para. 16). When language objectives are written appropriately for the content objectives of the lesson, students can easily see what they are learning and how they are expected to express that learning linguistically. For students who do not utilize Standard English at home or who are new to the English language in general, language objectives are especially helpful. However, Himmel (2012) warns that language objectives are only effective when they are supported by tasks that encourage their use.

Effective culturally responsive teaching requires that the materials and curricula that make up or influence the lesson's tasks must be examined and analyzed for appropriateness. According to Gay (2002) "culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the

multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and

make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality" (para. 6). One problem of formal

school curricula mentioned by Gay (2002) is the excessive attention placed on the achievements

of the same few big-name individuals while ignoring the accomplishments of influential groups,

especially if those groups are made up of a minority population. Gay (2002) further explains that

even if a particular group is not ignored, the curricula may focus heavily on their struggles while

completely ignoring the plight of other similar groups.

Because of the curricula's unequal regard for certain culturally relevant events or people,

Gay (2002) urges teachers of culturally diverse students to revise curricula that chooses to avoid

or dim controversial topics, such as the construction of racism, the brutalities of imperialism, and

the historical atrocities of indigenous groups. Before CRE can take place, curriculum, textbooks,

materials and assessments must be analyzed and revised to include better and more accurate

representations of cultural diversity. In response to the need for a revised curricula, researchers

Gollnick and Chinn (2017) discuss their ideas behind a curriculum that values equality. These

experts claim that the main problem with the current curricula of the United States is that "the

existence of nearly half the population is not validated in the curricula of most schools" (p.81)

and for this reason, students' motivation and acceptance is limited. Students would be more

motivated and feel more valued if they could see themselves or at least their communities in the

activities, films, and books utilized in class. Seeing ordinary working people, for example,

depicted as valued members of society helps students and their families "see themselves as

desirable and integral members of their school community rather than as second-class citizens

who must learn the ways of the more economically advantaged to succeed in school" (p.81).

Because textbooks and school curricula tend to place focus on the experiences of middle-class

members of society, they spotlight the economically privileged white males who are painted as the heroes of our political system. Culturally responsive teachers should understand that a white-washed curriculum does not reflect the lives of our culturally and linguistically diverse students. In order to make the curriculum culturally appropriate for these students, teachers should look at the lessons within the curricula through the lens of multiple perspectives. These perspectives may include the working class and the people in poverty instead of the same White leaders or heroes typically emphasized in historical events.

According to Gollnick and Chinn (2017), not all students can be taught in the same way because "their cultures and experiences influence the way they learn and interact with their teachers and peers" (p.18). Because students come from all types of backgrounds, their diverse needs, skills, and experiences must be recognized and validated.  A useful way to offer students differentiated instruction is to allow them to work independently, selecting their own learning activities.

Numerous studies suggest phycological, behavioral, and academic benefits when children and students are allowed more choice in their lives at home and at school (Kohn, 2014). When teachers are faced with a classroom full of diverse learners, they must prepare a menu of items that review or teach the same content, but in different ways. Differentiated instruction in CRE involves modifying instruction and customizing instructional activities that lend themselves to each of the learning styles and cultural backgrounds present in the classroom. Instead of prescribing the menu items to each student, teachers can loosen their control and allow students to choose for themselves. When given a menu of options to choose from, students will more than likely select the activities that best suit their needs and their learning preferences. If students are indecisive or need help choosing an activity, then the teacher can step in; but the key to allowing

student choice is relinquishing control from the teacher and onto the student. By doing this, students take ownership over their learning and feel more comfortable in the classroom, which can indirectly improve motivation and engagement. A similar strategy that will also improve engagement and motivation involves asking for student input when planning instructional activities (Shafer, 2016). Some of the ways that a culturally responsive teacher can welcome student input is to regularly elicit student feedback, include authentic student representation on school committees, and invite students to take part in the teacher discussions regarding their own learning. When teachers seek to uncover students' interests, hobbies, values, etc., they can better tailor instruction to meet the preferences of their students.

Most of the strategies mentioned above are utilized during the planning stages of CRE. Equally important though, are the strategies employed during instruction and during learning activities. Infusing instruction with culture and promoting critical engagement with the materials are core practices of CRE. These practices involve culturally responsive scaffolding. Scaffolding in general, is the technique used by teachers to help students build new learning on top of background knowledge. Scaffolding can look very differently depending on the teacher and students; however in its most basic form, teachers supply students with temporary supports that are incrementally removed while the responsibility is slowly shifted off of the teacher over to the student (Great Schools Partnership, 2015). Culturally responsive scaffolding involves learning with culturally familiar examples, supplementing curricula with lessons that include international current events, encouraging cross-cultural comparisons, utilizing open-ended and higher-order questioning, and facilitating real-world connections between students and the content (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Gay (2002) explains the use of cultural scaffolding as stretching the intellectual boundaries of culturally and linguistically diverse students through the application of their own cultures and life experiences. Culturally responsive teachers use culturally familiar language and analogies to build bridges between what students already know and what they need to know. Teachers can make the content come alive for students through the strategic use of culturally and linguistically familiar examples. Interactions with local and family resources can also enhance student learning. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), seeking out the expertise of community members can be an effective way for teachers to help their students make connections between their learning at school and their lives at home. Lazar, Edwards, and McMillon (2012) suggest the use of parents' stories and family interviews to increase the cultural authenticity of instruction. Getting to know students through their parents allows teachers to learn about their students from the people who know them best. Students can practice their listening and writing skills by interviewing their parents about family routines, activities, literacy practice, etc. This activity serves as culturally relevant practice for students but also helps inform teacher instruction.

While family and community members can serve as cultural tools to improve culturally poor curricula, another method of infusing instruction with culture involves supplementing curricula with lessons about international current events. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) reveal the academic benefits of including current events in Social Studies classes in which students learn about historical events, policies, etc. through the exploration of current events related to the topic. Although these authors discuss this strategy through the purpose of "queering the curriculum" (p.124) it can easily be applied to teachers looking to culturally diversify the curriculum. When students compare and contrast historical events with current events through a

critical lens, they are drawing upon an array of knowledge and skills. In these discussions, students utilize inquiry to enhance their critical thinking skills, gain political awareness and improve their engagement with the material.

Academically rigorous learning activities should promote critical engagement with instructional materials as mentioned above. Instead of asking students to recall basic information, critical engagement encompasses critical thinking, problem solving, cooperative learning, and appreciation for multiple perspectives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In order for students to critically engage with instructional materials, culturally responsive teachers must employ open-ended and higher-order questioning techniques to help students make real-world connections with the content. One way of doing this is having students participate in an interrogation of the curriculum. Culturally responsive teachers promote the use of critical thinking by charging students with the responsibility of addressing inaccuracies, omissions, and/or exaggerations of various texts by looking at them from multiple perspectives. Teachers must utilize strategic questioning to help students examine the materials and text within curricula.  In their examinations, students should be encouraged to make cross-cultural comparisons.

If the lesson involves reading a passage dealing with the struggles of a nondominant cultural group, teachers can challenge students to think about other cultural groups who may have had similar experiences and groups who have had different experiences. *Why did these experiences differ? How do the people of these different groups differ? With whom do you more closely identify in relation to the cultural groups mentioned?* These are questions that can stimulate thought and interest in students when attempting to critically engage with materials or texts. If teachers foster healthy and supportive classroom climates, these questions can be done in

small groups, pairings, or even as whole class discussions. Regardless of how it is being done, infusing instruction with culture is a necessity of CRE.

**Part II –Responsive Classroom Climate**

Culturally responsive instruction thrives in a classroom climate of collaborative learning, social-emotional support, and mutual respect among students and between student and teacher. In addition to the components mentioned, a culturally responsive classroom climate includes a culture of high expectations for all, activities that support social and emotional safety, cooperative and collaborative learning, and student voice (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017).

When discussing the importance of cooperative and collaborative learning, Gay (2002) claims that the need for community is an essential part of culturally responsive teaching; and it is necessary for successful cooperative and collaborative learning to take place. Culturally and linguistically diverse students—typically students of color—are raised in a community where the cultural norm is that the well-being of the group outweighs the well-being of the individual. Culturally responsive teachers utilize this mentality in their groupings of students, planning of discussions with students, and overall interactions with students. When students are grouped, teachers should employ diverse grouping strategies. Mixed-language and mixed-cultural pairings have several benefits, one being the cultural enrichment that comes from working with someone who comes from a background different than your own. In classrooms where there are English language learners of varying home languages, culturally responsive teachers may choose to create groups of mixed-languages so that students can have more opportunities to learn from each other. When teachers foster a classroom climate that values diversity and inclusion, students

will see the benefits in their differences and hopefully those differences will enhance their learning.

Cooperative and collaborative learning is essential for students to critically engage with the materials as previously mentioned by researchers Villegas and Lucas (2002). Part of critical engagement includes looking at texts from multiple perspectives. The incorporation of multiple perspectives cannot be done authentically when students from the same cultural or linguistic background are paired together.  Mixed-language and mixed-cultural groupings give students a wider knowledge base to call upon. Because these students have different strengths to offer, their combined knowledge and abilities can help them more successfully grapple with challenging topics. Peer tutoring and student-led discussions are other forms of cooperative or collaborative learning that can enrich or deepen students' understanding of content material.

Pairing students heterogeneously by home language or cultural background also allows for an increased bank of life experiences from which students can pull in order to make meaningful connections with the material. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) stress the important of acknowledging and building on students' life experiences as well as their histories and the histories of their families.

In order for teachers to help their culturally and linguistically diverse students to build bridges between their background knowledge and new material, teachers must relate academic material to students' experiences. Taking content information and relating it to students' unique experiences requires teachers to learn about their students. Villegas and Lucas (2002) state that "to engage students in the construction of knowledge, teachers need to know about students' experiences outside of school" (para. 27). In addition to knowing more about students' lives outside of school, teachers can benefit from knowing about their students' past learning

experiences in school and how those experiences shaped their views of school. Some students may claim that they hate school because they had bad experiences with a teacher or did not like their teaching style. Other students may not see a purpose to school because they have adults in their lives who are living examples that schooling does not always guarantee a clear path to success.

When teachers take the time to get to know their students beyond the superficial level of favorite color or food, they are better able to customize materials and instruction that cater to students' personal interests and learning preferences. When teachers embed learning activities in contexts that are culturally familiar and personally interesting, students are not only more motivated and engaged, but they are better able to process and grapple with difficult concepts. Teachers get to know their students in authentic ways every time they give opportunities and space for student voice. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) strongly believe that incorporating student voice in instruction is a key principle of culturally responsive teaching because it allows students to comprehend content matter through their own lived experiences. Multicultural teachers not only seek to incorporate the voices of their students in learning but also the voices and experiences of students' families and communities. Before reading a passage or listening to a lecture or dialogue, culturally responsive teachers elicit student voice by encouraging students to speak from their own realities. For example, if students are preparing to read an essay about racial segregation, teachers can offer dialogue prompts that allow students to frontload any experiences they have had related to the topic; teachers could ask students about where they sit in the cafeteria, if their friend group is made up of individuals who look like them, etc. These are all discussion prompts that allow students to make a personal connection to an historical event. This way, when the reading or lecture challenges them by introducing new content information,

students are less likely to give up because their teacher has helped them feel personally invested in the topic.

When students choose to share their experiences with their teachers, the message is sometimes lost because some teachers will ignore the meaning behind the message and focus completely on the students' linguistic structure—whether spoken dialogue or in writing. Culturally responsive teachers understand when Standard English is appropriate or necessary and when it is not. These teachers understand and value the art of code-switching because they support the use of non-traditional discourse styles in instruction and in their interactions with students, families, and community members. Culturally responsive teachers believe cultural values are illustrated through various communicative styles. Gay (2002) challenges the passive-receptive style of communication typically present in mainstream schooling by claiming that culturally and linguistically diverse students would benefit more from active, participatory, and dialectic styles of communication. According to Gay (2002), for many groups of color the functions of speaker and listener are constantly shifting. African Americans and Native Hawaiians have specific names for these forms of communication in which the listener and speaker share  a dialogue, fluidly providing feedback, prompts, and side commentary to each other. These students' unique communicative styles only become a problem when schools choose not to value these types of communication.

Gollnick and Chinn (2017) state that schools today mostly legitimize the voice and language of the dominant culture. The dominant culture in today's schools typically consists of students who speak Standard English and identify as middle class European Americans. Because their voice is not validated, many students from oppressed groups or language minority groups become silent, disruptive, or absent from the learning process altogether. The voice of schools in

the United States today does not fully represent the voice of its students and it is the responsibility of culturally responsive teachers to recognize this incongruence and challenge it. Teachers and students together can challenge the notions that a child's success in school depends on their ability to adopt the voice of the school. The best way for teachers and students to do this is to promote shared dialogues in which all communicative styles are equally respected.

Far too often, students' attempts to engage in dialogue with their classmates and their teachers are ignored and/or rejected (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). In doing this, teachers inadvertently halt any further learning by students. Researchers of CRE tend to suggest that dialogue is often suppressed because teachers either reject the communication style offered by their students, or are uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the issues raised by their students. Gay (2002) boldly states that "uninformed and unappreciated teachers consider [these communication styles] rude, distractive, and inappropriate and take actions to squelch them" (para. 17). When uninformed teachers silence their students, they contribute to a culturally destructive classroom environment. Rather than violate or reject their students' cultural values, a culturally responsive teacher seeks to understand and affirm the cultural norms held by their students. In addition to honoring students' life experiences, teachers who seek to foster a culturally responsive classroom climate must ensure the physical classroom environment is culturally appropriate.

When it comes to symbols, icons, and images in schools, culturally appropriate imagery must be present (Gay, 1995). Schools typically display classroom banners or posters that depict the skills, morals, and core values of the school and student population. Gay (1995) refers to this type of imagery as symbolic curriculum. Gay (2002) states that these symbols come in the form of bulletin boards, images of historic leaders, and famous quotations. Culturally responsive teachers use the power behind symbolic curriculum to promote positive values and imagery

surrounding ethnic and cultural diversity. Every time students walk through the halls or observe

the walls of their classrooms, they are subconsciously learning important lessons from the

imagery displayed.

Eventually, students begin to "expect certain images, value what is present, and devalue

that which is absent" (Gay, 2002, para. 7). Messages of leadership and power should be gender-

inclusive and depict accomplishments from various cultural groups, especially those

representative of the student population. Positive representation within cultural imagery in

classrooms should seek to educate and motivate students. Images of culturally familiar faces in

positions of success can be a motivating tool for students of color who set low expectations for

themselves. Students sometimes do not see a successful future for themselves because society

and the media within it are so heavily saturated with positive, successful depictions of

individuals from the culturally dominant society. Society and media highlight the

accomplishments of White members of society while completely ignoring the accomplishments

of culturally or linguistically diverse members of society. Culturally responsive teachers see the

problems this causes; therefore, seek to instill a culture of high expectations in their classrooms

for *all* students.

Essential to the core principles of CRE is the belief of culturally responsive teachers that

all students can learn (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017).  According to Irvine (1990), and Pang and

Sablan (1998), "teachers' attitudes toward students significantly shape the expectations they hold

for students learning, their treatment of students, and what students ultimately can learn" (as

cited by Villegas & Lucas, 2002, para. 13). Teachers who embrace cultural differences tend to

set higher performance expectations for students and hold these students accountable for the

expectations set. These same teachers build on the cultural resources of their students rather than

try to replace them or stomp them out. When culturally responsive teachers create and maintain a classroom culture of high expectations, all students are expected to participate, learn, and grow academically. When students witness their teachers explicitly validating their languages, experiences and culture, they are more likely to rise to the rigorous learning expectations of the classroom environment because their teacher has helped them feel valued and supported as members of the learning community (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Students benefit from feeling supported by their teachers but they must also feel socially and emotionally supported by their peers. Creating an atmosphere of mutual support is sometimes the most difficult part of culturally responsive teaching because children and adolescents—at any age—can be unpredictable and emotionally unstable. Unfortunately, teachers are not always prepared to address confrontation when students' emotions hamper their willingness to treat each other with mutual respect. Most culturally responsive teachers begin the school year with community building circles in an effort to help foster mutual respect and understanding. These circles are similar to the typical get-to-know-you games played during the first week of school but they serve a higher purpose than getting students acquainted with each other. Community building circles are used for building relationships but also to get students used to the protocol of sitting in a circle and sharing the talking space with each other (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). The underlying skills that community building circles teach are most helpful when it comes time to address a conflict or restore a hurt relationship. Culturally responsive teachers believe in a restorative justice approach to dealing with discipline and conflict resolution. This type of approach seeks to separate the student from the infraction, and allow the necessary time and space for the students and/or adults involved to share their points of view in an effort to repair the harm that was done. Teachers who are comfortable with CRE can

use restorative practices to address bullying, cultural insensitivity and destructive behaviors, or other controversial topics that many teachers may choose to avoid due to discomfort.

Instead of avoiding unfamiliar topics, culturally responsive teachers strive to educate themselves through interactions with students, families, and community members, as well as independent learning. The engagement between families, community members, and teachers is not only beneficial for students but it is fundamental for the success of a culturally responsive classroom (Lazar, et al., 2012).

**Part III – Responsive Teacher Leadership**

Responsive teacher leadership refers to the expectation that culturally responsive teachers will act as agents of change by spreading their commitment for CRE to future teachers, colleagues, and community members. In order to appropriately lead others in the realm of CRT, teachers and other school professionals that want to make positive changes in the lives of their culturally and linguistically diverse students must first acknowledge and analyze their own cultural awareness and cultural competency. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) state that a culturally responsive teacher must "analyze oppression and power relationships in schools and society to understand racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism" (p. 260). In doing this, educators can better serve as models of social justice and equity in the classroom.

Sadly, many teachers claim color-blindness; meaning, they do not see race or skin color in their students and they treat all students as equals. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) argue that this creates a problem because by claiming to be color blind, teachers are preserving white privilege and ignoring or denying the existence of racial inequities. Teachers as leaders of CRE must challenge and address culturally destructive behaviors of individuals whenever present. Villegas

and Lucas (2002) urge that although schools have historically served to preserve and perpetuate

social inequities, teachers must believe that schools can also be sites for social transformation.

As agents of change, culturally responsive teachers are challenged with simultaneously spreading

awareness of how schools perpetuate society's inequities while also advocating the belief that

schools can change. Social transformation is possible through the constant responding to

prejudice, bias, and stereotypes by individuals of the dominant culture; however, these

individuals must notice their own implicit bias first.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) state their strong belief in the six strands that make up the

culturally responsive teacher. The first strand focuses on sociocultural consciousness. This strand

highlights the need for educators to understand how the different ways people think, behave, and

act are influenced in large by factors such as race or ethnicity, social class, and language (as cited

in Banks, 1996). Before teachers can move beyond their own cultural boundaries, they must

reflect on the social and cultural groups to which they are members and examine how those

groups identify with race, social class, language, and gender (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Because

the way we think, act and behave are deeply influenced by these factors, it is important to

question the extent of our membership to these groups and how our membership has created

experiences that impacted our personal and family histories. An important question to ask

yourself is: *How does where you come from affect the way you view the world?* The ability to

answer this question lies in your understanding of American society, the institution of schools,

and how the connection between society and schools perpetuates the already existing social

inequities.

Gollnick and Chinn (2017) express that even though many teachers have good intentions,

their bias is present in their interactions with students and in their instructional or disciplinary

decisions. Even though teachers' biases are typically subtle and unintentional, culturally responsive teachers seek to constantly recognize and understand the root of the biases present in their thoughts and behaviors. Through conscious recognition and critical reflection, teachers can make positive changes in their messages to students. On the contrast, when teachers are unable to acknowledge and understand their bias, implicit or not, students suffer academically; not *all* students suffer, though.

Gollnick and Chinn state that "because many white students share the middle-class culture of the teacher, they also share the cultural cues that foster success in the classroom" (p.264). Bias comes in two forms: explicit and implicit. Explicit bias is easily observable because it is expressed directly and the individual is consciously aware of it. Implicit bias is more difficult to uncover because it is expressed indirectly and the individual is usually unaware of their bias. An example of explicit bias is when a person directly expresses that they prefer people who are White over people who are Latino; this is observable and expressed explicitly. Implicit bias is when a person riding the bus chooses to sit further away from a person who is Latino than a person who is White; this is implicit because it is not as easily observable and it operates subconsciously. Because of the nature of implicit bias, it can be very dangerous for students of color or students of immigrant families who have culturally ignorant teachers.

Teachers are models for their students in regards to academic skills like problem-solving or critical thinking; but, teachers are also models for their students in other ways. Villegas and Lucas (2002) propose a third strand to their collection of culturally responsive teaching practices that asks teachers to "develop the commitment and skills to act as agents of change" (para. 15). Because schools and society are interconnected, teachers who view themselves as agents of change understand that they are key players in a larger battle for social justice and that their

every action either supports or challenges society's existing inequities. Teachers determined to

be agents of change commit to spending time outside of the classroom learning about the

cultures and languages of their students.

Teachers have many options when it comes to increasing their cultural competency and

expanding their awareness of culture and language. Visiting students' places of worship is a

powerful tool for teachers to build relationships with their students' outside of class, meet family

and community members, and deepen their understanding of the cultural norms and values their

students hold. Whether teachers plan a visit with their student and their family, or just go alone,

there are general guidelines that will help ensure a respectful visit ("Entering Houses of

Worship," 2014). One of the general guidelines include asking in advance if your presence is

appropriate for all or certain parts of the services. For example, there may be a prayer or a

portion of the services in which it is culturally inappropriate to take part in; research and asking

cultural members first will help good intentioned teachers avoid culturally destructive behaviors.

Other ways for teachers to spend time outside of class learning about their students'

culture and language is to attend cultural festivals and community rallies. Every year in

Rochester, the city prepares for a weekend-long celebration of Latinx (gender-neutral form of

Latino) identity at the Puerto Rican Festival. This gathering of thousands of people includes

cultural performances of local artists and local dancers as well as home-cooked food reflective of

the culture's Caribbean heritage. In addition to cultural celebrations, Rochester has hosted

various rallies and protests such as the immigrant rights rally that took place after new detentions

by I.C.E., Black Lives Matter protests that highlighted police brutality against people of color, a

rally to protest the separation of children from their families at the border, and more. All of these

gatherings are culturally significant venues for teachers to meet students, colleagues, community

members, and either join in for the cause or observe and learn. Even though dedicated teachers

seek to educate themselves outside of the classroom, teachers can also learn from their students,

in the classroom. Watson (2018) introduced a strategy for students to create their own

vocabulary lists for themselves, but this can easily be modified into an activity for students to

create vocabulary lists for their teachers. Watson (2018) encourages teachers to have students

create their own vocabulary lists as a way for them to take ownership of their learning. Students

typically skim a text, highlight words they do not know, and create their own vocabulary words

based on the words they chose to highlight in the text. This tool, created to improve student

vocabulary, can be modified and flipped onto the teacher in several ways.

One way to use this idea is to help teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse

learners learn words in students' native or cultural languages by having students create a

vocabulary list for the intention of teaching their teacher. Students can think of words they use

with their friends in school or with their families at home that they do not think their teacher will

know the meaning of. Students can work together to compile a master list of cultural words,

which their teacher will study and apply to their daily instruction. When applicable, teachers

should use their cultural vocabulary terms in context when teaching new content or reviewing

challenging concepts. With strategic use by the teacher, these terms can help students connect

their life experiences with content material as well as provide a model for strategies to learn new

vocabulary. A second way to use Watson's (2018) technique is for teachers to create their own

vocabulary list based on the terminology and words they hear from students' daily

communications with each other. Teachers can either find out the meanings on their own, or

model inquiry strategies by asking students to help provide the meanings. Since they are the ones

using these words in their daily speech they should be able to give clear definitions and

examples. Students can challenge their classmates' answers if they use a particular term differently than described. These conversations open up opportunities to discuss words with multiple meanings, vocabulary in context, etc. At the very minimum, teachers who utilize this strategy will show their students that their cultural and linguistic diversity is valued. While this may be one specific example, there are endless other ways for teachers to be a model of positive change for their students.

**Conclusion**

In his research, Hollie (2018) asserts his philosophy of applying four focus words in his daily instruction and interactions with students. These focus words include: *validate*, *build*, *affirm*, and *bridge*. To *validate* students' culture or language means making legitimate everything that the institution and mainstream media has made illegitimate. To *affirm* these cultural differences means making positive everything the institution and mainstream media have made negative. To *build* refers to the use of instructional strategies and activities that relate students' home culture and language to the school culture and language. Lastly, to *bridge* means allowing the opportunities for the appropriate use of cultural or linguistic behaviors in school.

These four words, like the strategies and techniques mentioned previously, are key to implementing CRE. Hollie's (2018) research, as well as the research of other experts mentioned, will be incorporated in the creation of a reference handbook intended to spread the key practices of CRE. The handbook will accompany a PD in which the themes presented will be explored through independent and collaborative learning among colleagues.

# Chapter 3

**Introduction**

After a detailed review of Rochester City School District assessment data, the  handbook, *Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Teaching*, was created to accompany a series of professional learning seminars in which teachers and school staff members reflect critically on—and seek to improve—their teaching practices and interactions with students. The problem identified by the assessment data suggests severe disproportionality between students of color and White students, and language minority students and English-dominant students.

The goal of the handbook and PD is for staff members to gain a general understanding of CRE, which includes: an overview of some of the major instructional practices and beliefs of CRE, what it means to foster a culturally responsive classroom climate, and how to reflect on your own cultural awareness as it relates to the biases and stereotypes of a society that lacks social equity. This product and professional learning plan intend to address the social inequities illustrated by the RCSD exam data and offer teachers at WOIS opportunities to grow as competent teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**Description of the Product**

The handbook itself is divided into five sections similar to the previous chapter; an introduction and a conclusion with three major sections in the middle. The handbook supplies educational information, visual examples, classic research, new research and infographics regarding culturally responsive instruction and planning, culturally responsive classroom

climate, and culturally responsive teacher leadership. These three major chunks make up the bulk of the handbook.

The handbook will serve as the source of information for teachers to examine during the professional learning seminar. The PD delivered to teachers will consist of independent learning and collaborative learning for the purpose of gaining background knowledge and forming meaningful discussions in order to synthesize the chosen CRE learning strategies through multiple perspectives. At the start of each PD session, participants will sit in a circle formation as used in community building circles. Participants will participate in a reading and greeting, independent learning, small group collaborative learning, and whole group discussions. The first session of the four-part PD will focus on the learning agenda and activity outline for each of the following sessions. Participants will follow a modified version of the other sessions in which participants examine RCSD assessment data and discuss potential reasons for the racial achievement disproportionality illustrated by the graphs. Participants will then review a very brief explanation of CRE and discuss some of the basic principles with their group members. Because this first session is merely an introduction to the other three sessions, participants will be strongly encouraged to attend all sessions in order to make best use of the learning offered. The other three sessions following the first will all follow the same format, similar to the one followed in the first session.

Teachers will utilize the handbook, a note-catcher, and discussion prompts to read practices from the book and have accountable conversations surrounding their own implementation of culturally responsive education. During these conversations, teachers will have collaborative discussions in order to critically engage with the material and each other. The note-catcher will allow the PD participants to synthesize their learning in an organized and

meaningful way. The information recorded on their note-catcher will be specific to the learning objective they chose for themselves. Teachers will work within their small learning communities to follow the discussion prompts for their chosen learning objective based on the accompanying reading passages from the handbook. After sharing their findings with their group members, teachers will conclude the session by evaluating their progress with each of the learning objectives and create an action plan that lists steps for how they plan to apply the culturally responsive teaching practice(s) that are connected to their chosen learning objective. Because teachers are only choosing one individual learning objective for each session, there will be other learning objectives not addressed during the PD. Teachers who wish to continue their learning outside of the PD hours can use their copy of the handbook as a reference throughout the school year as needed. CRE is a vast and ever-growing pedagogy that cannot be completely covered in just one handbook or one series of PDs; therefore, dedication to CRE requires independent learning outside of work hours.

The product in conjunction with the series of professional development sessions will not single-handedly solve the problem of racial achievement disproportionality as seen in Chapter 1 of the handbook. The product and PD will attempt to ignite the start of a long journey toward creating a district of culturally responsive teachers. This journey begins with World of Inquiry teachers with hopes that the learning will disperse throughout other schools within the district. Learning will disperse through word of mouth and informal conversations, at first. But with time, the PD and handbook will reach the hands of other Rochester-area teachers and slowly RCSD will be able to better serve its population of students of color and English language learners.

**Justification for Components**

The components of the handbook were chosen based on a review of various classic and modern literature surrounding CRE. In their literature, researchers and experts of the subject have suggested specific principles and values that exist at the core of all culturally responsive instruction. Villegas and Lucas (2002) illustrate some of these values in the quote below:

> [Culturally responsive teaching] practices include involving all students in the construction of knowledge, building on students' personal and cultural strengths, helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, using varied assessment practices that promote learning, and making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students (p.27).

With these many principles in mind, the researcher created a survey that requested teacher interest and ability levels regarding several of the most widely used practices or strategies of CRE.

Teachers selected which practices they were most confident using, least confident using, and which ones they wanted to learn more about. Because the participants were so varied in their responses, the researcher chose to include all of the strategies listed in the survey with the intention of placing extra focus on the ones highlighted by the survey results. For example, 24% of respondents recorded that they felt most confident in making an effort to get to know students' families (Appendix B). For this reason, a separate section focusing on connections with families was not a priority for the handbook. Instead, the handbook chose to focus on other aspects of culturally responsive teaching. In Chapters 2 and 4, extra emphasis is placed on the strategies of: 1) spending time outside of class learning about the languages and cultures of students, and 2)

allowing students to work independently selecting their own learning activities, because for both

strategies the majority of respondents (14%) stated a desire to learn more.

## Intended Outcome

The intended outcome of the PD sessions is to introduce an anchor text (the handbook) as

a tool for teachers to gain an overview of CRE through inquiry and collaborative learning. The

learning objective for each session encourages teachers to find and apply strategies that will

improve their cultural responsiveness inside and outside the classroom. One intended outcome

for teachers who wish to become culturally responsive educators is to embody CRE inside the

classroom but also to spread CRE so that it reaches out farther and farther, benefiting students

outside of the classroom, in all areas of society. As stated in previous chapters, social

transformation is possible and school can be the grounds in which it takes place. Teachers cannot

be culturally responsive unless the need for social equity is acknowledged and understood. This

involves understanding one's own culture as it relates to their sense of identity and how a

particular cultural identity can affect their ability to function in society. Using CRE as a tool to

influence real social transformation is a long-term intended outcome of the work being done at

World of Inquiry and every other school working to improve their cultural responsiveness.

The short-term intended outcome, through the dissemination of the handbook and the

application of the PD materials, is for teachers at World of Inquiry School No. 58 to improve

their relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse students. In doing this, teachers will

help to build an overall climate of cultural and linguistic diversity where differences are

validated and affirmed not just through words but through assertive daily actions. When students

believe they are socially and emotionally supported by their teachers and classmates, they are

able to reach further toward their achievement potential. In response to the need for social-emotional supports in the classroom, Hammond (2015) states: "too often though, we ignore the quality of our interactions with students and instead focus primarily on the curriculum. In culturally responsive teaching, relationships are as important as the curriculum" (p. 72). Many frameworks of CRE focus on "reframing and repositioning student-teacher relationships as the key ingredient in helping culturally and linguistically diverse dependent learners authentically engage. Even for high achieving students of color, positive relationships help them reach their fullest potential under less stress" (p. 72). Whether the culturally responsive changes that take place are small or large, the only acceptable outcome for WOIS is that culturally and linguistically diverse students receive greater access to an equitable education.

# Chapter 4

**Introduction**

As stated in Chapter 1, ELLs are the fastest growing group of students in schools within the United States. With this continual growth of culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers in urban areas like Rochester are making efforts toward becoming more culturally competent and responsive. Unfortunately, not all teachers are successfully meeting the needs of this new growing population which was discovered in the RCSD Regents assessment data from Chapter 1. Students of color (Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino students) and students whose native or home language is something other than English (ELLs) are experiencing disproportional achievement in comparison to their White and/or English-dominant peers. This suggests a need for the adoption of a pedagogy that reflects and values culturally and linguistically diverse students. CRE—which connects students' unique life experiences to content, promotes diverse curricula, and values students' cultures and discourse styles—is the proposed solution for this concern. Additional training in CRE will help teachers better meet the needs of all students, but especially students of color and ELLs. From the survey given to teaching staff at WOIS, it was gathered that teachers have varied abilities and experiences in regards to CRE, but are open to learning more in order to become culturally responsive teachers.

**Research Conclusions**

For CRE to make a school-wide positive impact at WOIS, teachers are going to need to be open-minded and willing to do make conscious changes in the way they think, teach, and interact with students. Culturally responsive teachers possess a level of sociocultural

consciousness that requires an understanding of how thoughts and behaviors are influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status or ethnicity. With a strong sense of sociocultural consciousness, teachers are able to recognize their biases or stereotypes and act on them in an appropriate and responsive way; this is immensely important in situations involving student discipline. Transforming the way you think about culture and race can be a tough obstacle for teachers to hurdle, but it is essential to CRE.

CRE cannot exist without a classroom climate that affirms and validates cultural and linguistic differences. Teachers can transform their own mindsets but they must also transform the climate of learning. Classrooms of culturally responsive teachers consist of mutual respect among teacher and learners, accountable discussions where differences in perspective are honored, and rigorous expectations that hold all students responsible for high achievement. This type of environment is created and fostered by culturally responsive teachers who constantly and explicitly value the diversity present in their classroom.

Teachers and students who mutually value cultural and linguistic diversity must be accompanied by curricula and instruction that reflects those values.  For CRE to make positive impacts in classrooms at WOIS, teachers will need to address and update their current instructional practices. Effective planning, the infusion of instruction with culture, and the promotion of critical engagement with materials are all key principles of CRE that cannot be ignored. Traditional curricula and instructional practices are a reflection of a traditional society where oppression and racism prevailed openly and blatantly. Culturally responsive teachers must be able to examine instructional materials for cultural appropriateness and make culturally responsive revisions where needed.

**Implications for Student Learning**

The implementation of CRE at WOIS has the potential to transform student learning in a multitude of ways, all of which having a positive effect on their social, emotional, and academic welfare. Culturally responsive teachers who build learning communities that reflect the core principles of CRE are not only helping students academically, but also social-emotionally. When students feel valued by their teachers and peers, they are more likely to experience academic success. Instead of students' culture being a barrier to their learning, culturally responsive teachers use their students' cultures as doorways or bridges in which meaningful connections between the content material and students' life experiences are carefully constructed. Not only do students of color and ELLs benefit from CRE, White students and students from English-dominant households can also reap the rewards of CRE.

**Implications for My Teaching**

As a teacher of culturally and linguistically diverse students, I've always made efforts to get to know my students and show that I value their diverse backgrounds, but I've never had formal training in CRE. With this additional knowledge and skills, I plan to make CRE a daily practice. Oftentimes, teachers attend PDs where the immediate enthusiasm for applying new teaching strategies is high but after a while the hype slowly dies down. CRE cannot be treated as a strategy to use and forget, but rather a pedagogy that lives and thrives within the heart of the school community every single day. In my own classroom, CRE will influence the way I think about my students, the way I address unexpected behaviors, the way I teach material, the way I organize group discussions, and the way I interact with the world in general. Culturally

responsive teachers are charged with being agents of change that challenge inequities in all

aspects of society, not just in schools.

**Final Thoughts**

Teachers are expected to be life-long learners who constantly seek new and better ways

to meet the needs of their students. As the world evolves, so should our teaching practices.

Although it may be an uncomfortable adjustment at first, CRE is necessary for all schools to

discover and apply to their learning communities so that achievement is experienced by all

students. Although it focused on RCSD, the exam data presented in Chapter 1 is representative

of many urban cities within the United States. The problem of racial achievement

disproportionality exists in schools because of the social inequities that still exist in society.

Teachers of culturally diverse students should challenge every inequity they are confronted with

and model activism for their students and colleagues. Students need to know that society can be

transformed and that they are not alone in their plight. CRE may just seem like a pedagogy but it

is much more than that; it is a bridge to a future that accepts and affirms the differences among

us all.

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**Appendix A**

**RCSD Regents Assessment Data**

*Figure 1.1* [percentages rounded to nearest whole number]

**ELA Common Core Exam Data
2016-2017**

| Category | % of students tested | % of students achieved mastery |
|---|---|---|
| Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander Students | 6% | 4% |
| Black or African American Students | 58% | 38% |
| Hispanic or Latino Students | 27% | 31% |
| White Students | 10% | 26% |
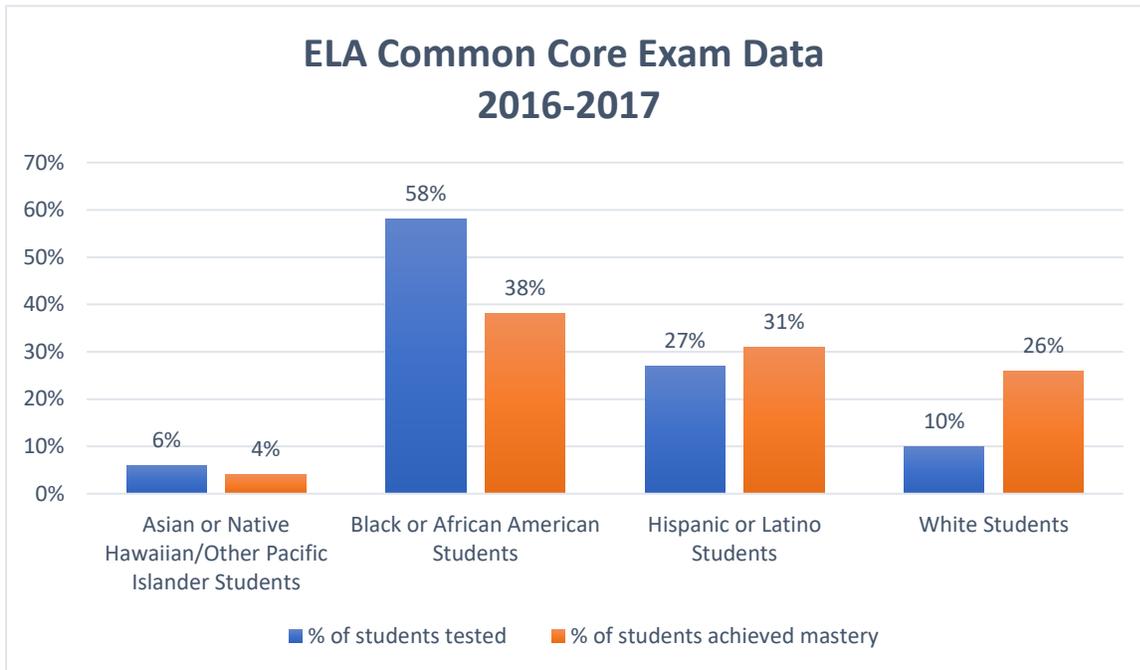
*Figure 1.2* [percentages rounded to nearest whole number]

**Algebra I Common Core Exam Data
2016-2017**

| Category | % of students tested | % of students achieved mastery |
|---|---|---|
| Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander Students | 5% | 9% |
| Black or African American Students | 59% | 24% |
| Hispanic or Latino Students | 28% | 15% |
| White Students | 9% | 52% |

*Figure 1.3* [percentages rounded to nearest whole number]

**Global History and Geography Exam Data 2016-2017**

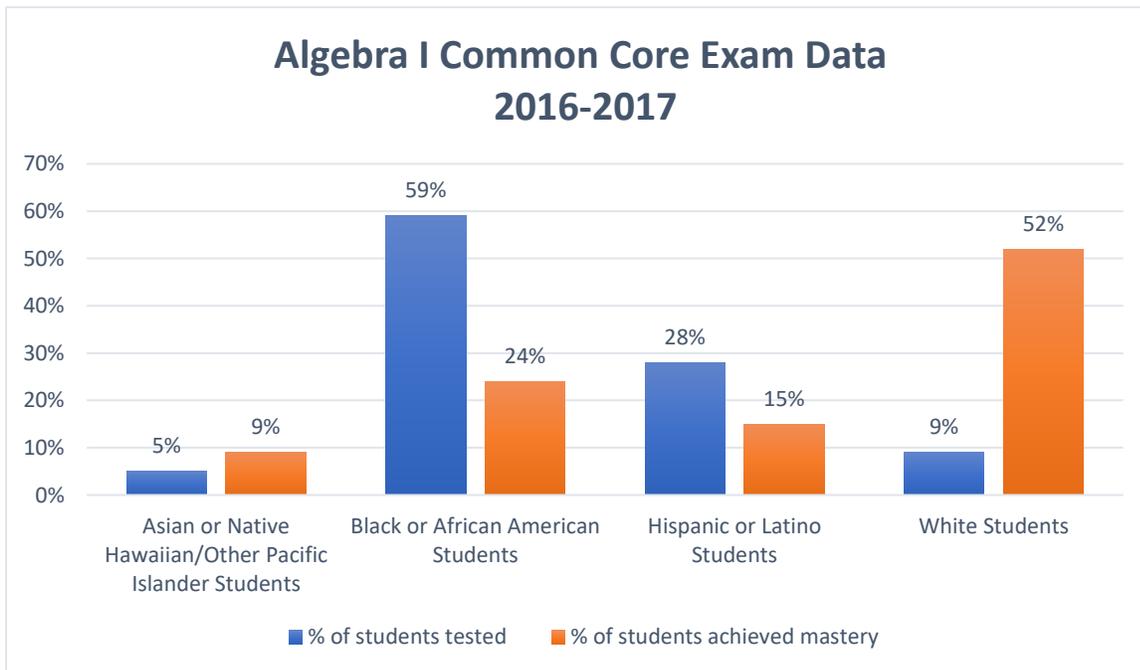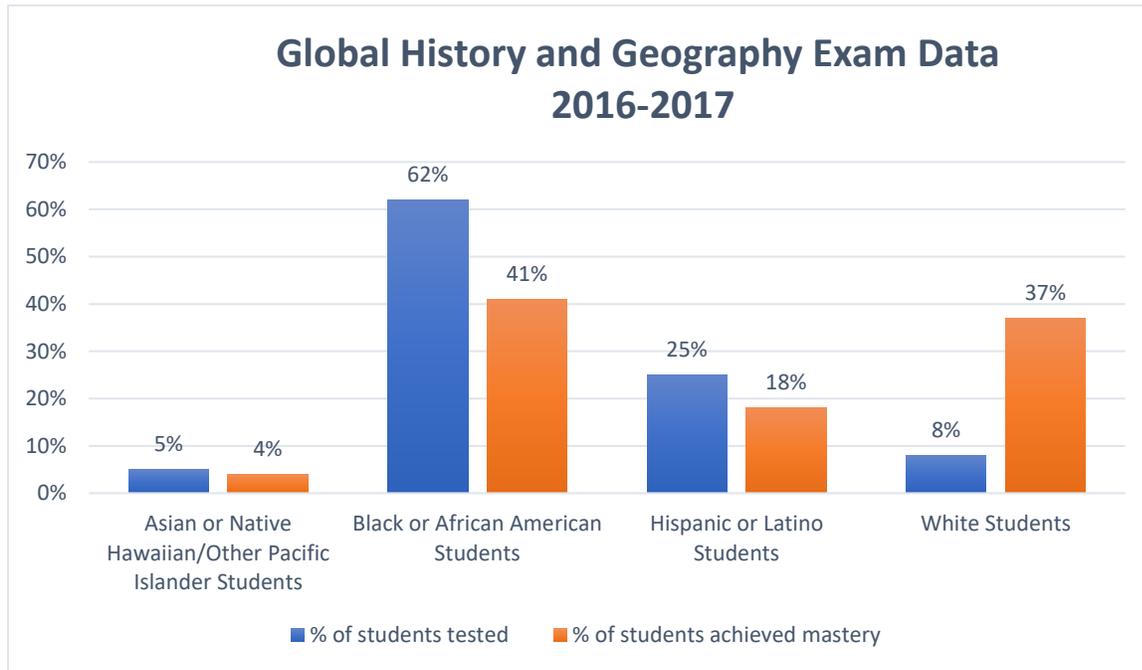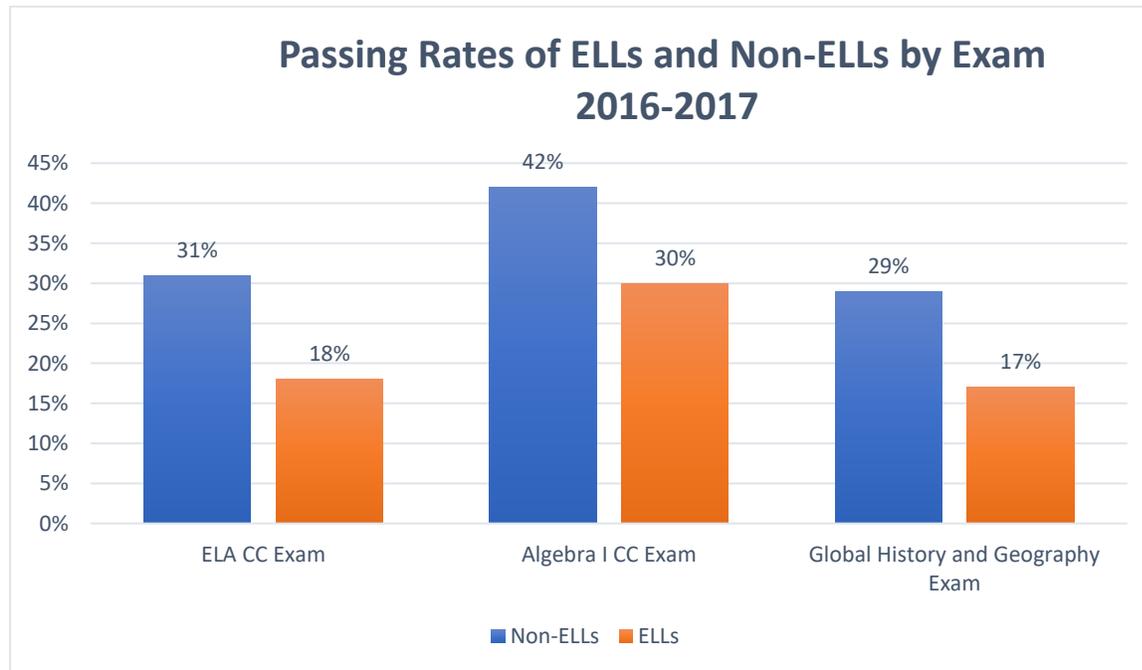| Group | % of students tested | % of students achieved mastery |
|---|---|---|
| Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander Students | 5% | 4% |
| Black or African American Students | 62% | 41% |
| Hispanic or Latino Students | 25% | 18% |
| White Students | 8% | 37% |

*Figure 1.4* [percentages rounded to nearest whole number]

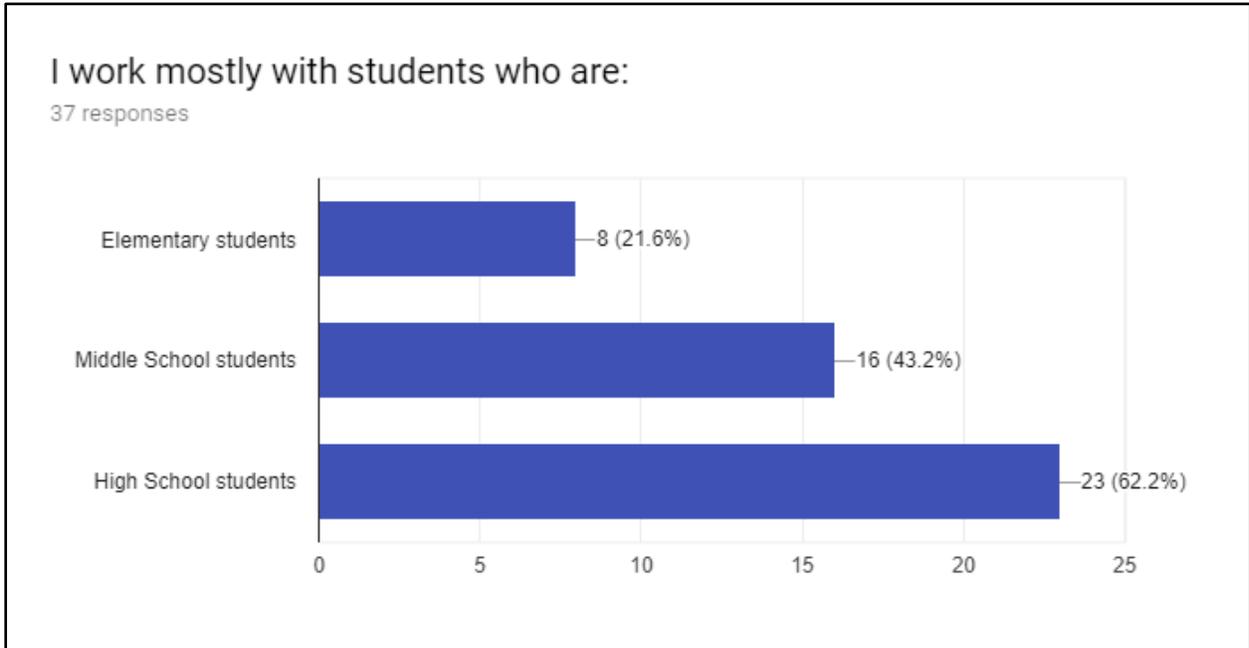**Passing Rates of ELLs and Non-ELLs by Exam 2016-2017**

| Exam | Non-ELLs | ELLs |
|---|---|---|
| ELA CC Exam | 31% | 18% |
| Algebra I CC Exam | 42% | 30% |
| Global History and Geography Exam | 29% | 17% |

**Appendix B**

**Data Analysis of WOIS CRE Survey**

## I work mostly with students who are:

37 responses

| | |
|---|---|
| Elementary students | 8 (21.6%) |
| Middle School students | 16 (43.2%) |
| High School students | 23 (62.2%) |

(horizontal axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)

## I work with students who are:

37 responses

| | |
|---|---|
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 6 (16.2%) |
| Black or African American | 34 (91.9%) |
| Hispanic or Latino | 31 (83.8%) |
| Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific ... | 24 (64.9%) |
| White | 31 (83.8%) |
| Multiracial | 31 (83.8%) |

(horizontal axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40)

2. Out of the Culturally Responsive Teaching practices listed below, which strategy are you most confident utilizing?

37 responses
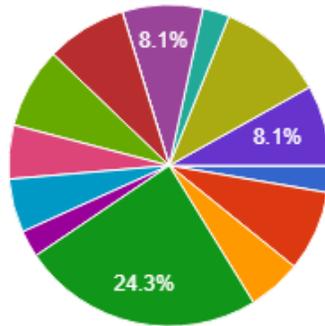


- Bring in guest speakers
- Elicit students' experiences in pre-r...
- Ask students to compare their hom...
- Make an effort to get to know stude...
- Use mixed-language and mixed-cul...
- Examine class materials for approp...
- Encourage students to use cross-c...
- Spend time outside of class learnin...

△ 1/2 ▼

3. Out of the strategies listed below, which would you like to learn more about?
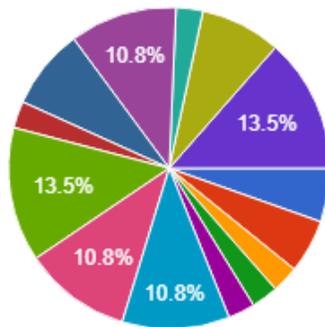
37 responses



- Bring in guest speakers
- Elicit students' experiences in pre-r...
- Ask students to compare their hom...
- Make an effort to get to know stude...
- Use mixed-language and mixed-cul...
- Examine class materials for approp...
- Encourage students to use cross-c...
- Spend time outside of class learnin...

△ 1/2 ▼

**Appendix C**

**WOIS CRE Survey**

# Section 1 –

**I work with students who are...** [please check all that apply]
- □ Black or African American.
- □ Hispanic or Latino
- □ White
- □ Multiracial
- □ Asian or Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander.
- □ American Indian or Alaska Native.

**I work mostly with students who are....** [please check all that apply]
- □ Elementary students
- □ Middle school students.
- □ High school students.

# Section 2 –

**Question 1: How confident are you with these CRT practices?** [place a check mark in the appropriate box]

| | Very confident | Somewhat confident | I'm not sure of my confidence level | I don't feel confident | I'm not sure what this is |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I can write learning targets that include language objectives. | | | | | |
| I can incorporate texts that reflect the cultural diversity of my students. | | | | | |
| I can create learning expectations that are academically rigorous for all students regardless of their background or native language. | | | | | |
| I can support students to be activists of the world they live in. | | | | | |
| I can relate academic material to students' life experiences. | | | | | |

| | Very confident | Somewhat confident | I'm not sure of my confidence level | I don't feel confident | I'm not sure what this is |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I can infuse instruction with the cultures of my students. | | | | | |
| I can examine class materials for appropriate images and themes. | | | | | |
| I know how to communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. | | | | | |
| I can foster meaningful and supportive relationships with families and involve them in their child's education. | | | | | |
| I can support the use of non-traditional discourse styles in my instruction and interactions. | | | | | |
| I can scaffold student learning with culturally familiar examples. | | | | | |
| I can revise curricula to be relevant to students' interest and culture. | | | | | |
| I can assess curricula to determine relevance to students' interest and culture. | | | | | |
| I can ask for student input when planning instructional activities. | | | | | |

# **Section 3 –**

**Question 2: Out of the CRT practices listed, which strategy are you most confident utilizing?** [please check only one response]

- □   Bring in guest speakers.
- □   Elicit students' experiences in pre-reading and pre-listening activities.
- □   Ask students to compare their home culture with American culture.
- □   Make an effort to get to know students' families and background.
- □   Use mixed-language and mixed-cultural pairings in group work.
- □   Examine class materials for appropriate images and themes.
- □   Encourage students to use cross-cultural comparisons when analyzing materials
- □   Spend time outside of class learning about the cultures and languages of students.
- □   Use peer tutors and/or student-led discussions.
- □   Learn words in students' native languages or present new concepts using student vocabulary.

☐  Supplement the curriculum with lessons about international current events.

☐  Use student surveys to learn about students' classroom preferences.

☐  Ask for student input when planning lessons or activities.

☐  Allow students to work independently, selecting their own learning activities.

**Question 3: Out of the CRT practices listed, which would you like to learn more about?**
[please check only one response]

☐  Bring in guest speakers.

☐  Elicit students' experiences in pre-reading and pre-listening activities.

☐  Ask students to compare their home culture with American culture.

☐  Make an effort to get to know students' families and background.

☐  Use mixed-language and mixed-cultural pairings in group work.

☐  Examine class materials for appropriate images and themes.

☐  Encourage students to use cross-cultural comparisons when analyzing materials

☐  Spend time outside of class learning about the cultures and languages of students.

☐  Use peer tutors and/or student-led discussions.

☐  Learn words in students' native languages or present new concepts using student vocabulary.

☐  Supplement the curriculum with lessons about international current events.

☐  Use student surveys to learn about students' classroom preferences.

☐  Ask for student input when planning lessons or activities.

☐  Allow students to work independently, selecting their own learning activities.

**Question 4: In what ways can WOIS help you make CRT an everyday practice?** [please check all that apply]

☐  professional development opportunities

☐  a quick reference guide (poster and/or one-page document)

☐  a handbook of strategies and practices

☐  daily or weekly email reminders (quotes, tips, FAQs)

☐  training students to be CRE advocates

☐  informational video(s)