

## **Toward a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature**

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### **Introduction**

The United States is a diverse country with constantly changing demographics. In 1980, the U.S. was 83.1 percent White, 11.7 percent Black and 6.4 percent Hispanic. Over a quarter of a century later, the U.S. Census documents that 75.0 percent of the population of the United States is White, 12.4 percent is Black or African American, and 15.4 percent is Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Department of

Census, 2008). The noticeable shift in demographics is even more phenomenal among the school-aged population. Racial/ethnic minority students consisted of 44 percent of the total public school population in 2007; this percentage is a 22 percent increase from 1972 as the percentage of White students in public schools showed a 22 percent decrease from 78 to 56 percent of the population (NCES, 2009).

The increase of ethnic-minority student presence is largely credited to the national growth of the Hispanic population, which exceeded the growth of all other ethnic minority group students in public schools (NCES, 2009). The racial/ethnic composition of the teaching force, however, is substantially less diverse

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than that of the student population. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes that knowledge of the changing demographic conditions in schools, though challenging, can aid such institutions in their response to this change (NCES, 2000). More specifically, while the process of schooling is fraught with challenges, a notable one is the preparation of teachers who can effectively teach students whose cultural backgrounds are different from their own (Banks, 2000; Gay, 2000; Gollnick & Chin, 2004; Irvine, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Riley, 1999).

Scholars have pondered over strategies to assist teachers in teaching about diversity (multiculturalism, racism, etc.) as well as interacting with the diversity found within their classrooms in order to ameliorate the effects of cultural discontinuity. One area that has developed in multicultural education literature is culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). CRP maintains that teachers need to be non-judgmental and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to be effective facilitators of learning in the classroom. For more than a quarter of a century, scholars have written extensively on the role that the intersection between school and home-community cultures does and should play in the delivery of instruction in schools (e.g., Gay, 2000; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995; Nieto, 1999, 2004). While CRP focuses on the importance of culture in schooling, it does not focus on race and racism as they relate to the sociohistorical pattern of schooling in the U.S. In an effort to understand and change how culture and race interact in the educational system, scholars (Chapman, 2008; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2004; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2008) have written about the relationship or connection among race, racism, and power as critical race theory (CRT). The plethora of literature on CRP, however, has not been presented as a testable theoretical model nor has it been systematically viewed through the lens of CRT. By examining the evolution of CRP among some of the leading scholars, we broaden this work through a CRT infusion which includes race and indeed racism as normal parts of American society that have been integrated into the educational system and the systematic aspects of school relationships.

### **Significance of the CRP Approach to Teaching and Learning**

*Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) by Coleman and his colleagues was the first major post-*Brown v. Board of Education* study to establish that the achievement of Black children was lower than that of White children. This racial gap in achievement has been documented as early as kindergarten/first grade and continues to grow as students matriculate through the public school system (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Entwisle & Alexander, 1992, 1994; Lee & Burkham, 2002; Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). By the time racial/ethnic minority students (particularly Black, Hispanic, and Native American students) reach high school, their

achievement significantly lags behind that of White and Asian students. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math results showed that across the 4th and 8th grades, White and Asian/Pacific Islander students continued to score higher, on average, than Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students (NCES, 2005).

The problem embracing the American educational system is how to ensure that all students, especially racial/ethnic minority students, achieve. However, how the problem is defined dictates the actions taken to address the issues. Moreover, theories which focus on the problem as originating within the schools will look to the schools for resolution. Theories which focus on home-community factors such as racial/ethnic heritage, family composition, and socioeconomic status as the causes of failure will look for solutions there. Theories and research which argue that students, especially those from status-oppressed minority groups, are sensitive to their treatment in school by teachers, administrators, and peers will look for answers in these social relationships. We believe, however, the latter focus has value in explaining differences in student outcomes. Educational processes and structures, especially those related to teaching or pedagogy, can make a difference in student achievement.

Examining this match, or more often the mismatch, between teaching styles and the home-community culture of students originated in the anthropology-of-education literature and has been given many designations. Early works that advocated connections between home-community and school cultures in developing viable teaching and learning environments described this phenomenon in a variety of ways: (a) *culturally appropriate* (Au & Jordan, 1981); (b) *culturally congruent* (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981); (c) *mitigating cultural discontinuity* (Macias, 1987); (d) *culturally responsive* (Cazden & Legget, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982); and (e) *culturally compatible* (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). For our purposes, we use the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* (coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1995), which places emphasis on the needs of students from various cultures. Ladson-Billings (1995) specifically defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

a pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant 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 current status quo of the social order. (p. 160)

Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy is a way for schools to acknowledge the home-community culture of the students, and through sensitivity to cultural nuances integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understandings into the teaching and learning environment.

When the discussion is about culturally relevant pedagogy—one that “teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29)—the

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discussion is also about the connection between school and culture. For many years, scholars observed that not all students who enter schools come from the same culture—i.e., not all schools are a homogenous environment. Just as the student body is not homogenous, teachers may come from a culture quite different from that of their students, resulting in cultural clashes that can potentially lead to gaps in learning. For viable teaching and learning to take place, there must be connections between the home-community and school cultures. This connection demonstrates the value of cultural and social capital that students bring with them to school. Such intentional inclusion of students' backgrounds becomes a direct demonstration of the distinction between difference and deficiency. In other words, difference does not imply nor translate as deficit. Furthermore, acknowledging the home-community environments of students in teaching and learning supports tenets of critical race theory in its critical, constructive analysis of how race relations in the United States informs the study and implementation of education in schools. More directly, CRP and CRT can inform the delivery of pedagogy in America's schools.

### **Historical Evolution of CRP**

Before Ladson-Billings coined culturally relevant pedagogy, several authors discussed the concept. Au and Jordan (1981) maintained that knowing the difference between school learning and informal learning is important in facilitating academic success for students. As specifically related to CRP, they asserted: "The context of school learning is often different from that of informal learning and often unrelated to the child's culture. Bringing the relevance of the text to the child's own experience helps the child make sense of the world" (pp. 149-150). This illustrates the importance of the teacher as a bridge between home-community and school cultures.

Mohatt and Erickson, in their 1981 study of native Indians in Odawa, Canada, concluded that (a) student and teacher behaviors need to be taken into context because they are culturally patterned behavior, and (b) research needs to focus on understanding the effect of teachers' behaviors on students. The authors listed several factors that teachers must consider when dealing with the culture of Canadian Indian students, specifically behaviors that teachers should interpret based not upon the teachers' cultures but in the context of the students' cultures.

Macias (1987), in an examination of the Papago Indian tribe's early learning environment, found that when the home culture is radically different from that of the social mainstream, there is a way to introduce the mainstream that does not erode the child's appreciation of his or her own culture. Though beneficial when the ethnicity, race, or culture of the teacher matches that of the students, culturally competent teachers, regardless of race, can learn enough of the child's home-community cultural context to be able to properly interpret behavior and structure curriculum to be an effective facilitator of the student's learning.

Cazden and Legget (1981) noted that teachers need to recognize differences

in interactional style (preference for learning style and demonstrating what was learned) as well as differences in cognitive style (cognitive information processing). They stressed that the teacher should be actively involved in ascertaining the learning styles of his or her students. In 1982, Erickson and Mohatt examined the cultural organization of social classrooms where the teacher was of either a similar or different race/ethnicity from the students. They found that the learning environment in the class where the teacher and students were of the same culture was more beneficial for the students, as the teacher “developed adaptive ways of teaching” (p. 168).

Jordan’s 1985 work showed that the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) was an aspect of cultural continuity because it incorporated an educational environment compatible with the culture of the native Hawaiian children. Jordan found that continuities or discontinuities between the home-community and school cultures could affect the quality of learning that took place. Discontinuity has often been viewed as a deficit of the racial/ethnic minority children or as cultural deprivation (Jensen, 1969). Jordan, however, maintained that to deal with cultural difference, teachers need to get a feel for the students’ cultures and then make adjustments in teaching. Such adjustments would lead to the creation of a culturally compatible program. Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp (1987) further noted that cultural incompatibility is one explanation for school failure.

One significant point to note is that these earlier works were with populations where cultural differences were easier to see and accept because the White middle class teachers were immersed in different (new) cultures that were foreign to them. Because there were no White middle class students in these classes, the teachers needed to do something to ensure that their culturally homogenous students achieved. Hence, the focus had to be on teaching the culturally “different” (i.e., non-White, middle class) student. Too, these earlier works focused on the broader concept of culture versus the more defined concept of race. Nonetheless, it is important to include race and race consciousness in the multicultural classroom, especially in environments where race and culture could be dismissed as student deficiency.

In contrast to earlier works, Irvine (1990) focused on the racial aspect of culture. Irvine dealt with the lack of cultural synchronization, an anthropological and historical concept that recognizes “that Black Americans have a distinct culture founded on identifiable norms, language, behaviors, and attitudes from Africa” (p. 23), between teachers and students. Manifestations of this culture can be most vividly seen in lower-income Black communities “where racial isolation persists and assimilation into the majority culture is minimal” (p. 24). This distinct culture is “incongruous and contradictory” (p. 24) to European American culture. Therefore, cultural misunderstandings and cultural aversions can result among teachers, administrators, students, and parents within our nation’s classrooms. While culture and race share some similarities, we propose that focusing solely on culture negates the reality of race and racism in American society. Moreover, we expand the work on culture and race to be inclusive of more than just Black Americans.

### **Significance of Critical Race Theory**

Race must be considered in how culturally relevant pedagogy is enacted. The delivery of CRP is, in part, the acknowledgement of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how the world receives them. Therefore, the complexities of the social construction of race in the United States must also be explored. One of the central reasons for the development of CRP is to respond to school “settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 112). Some of this alienation can be attributed historically to racism with certain groups being categorized as biologically, culturally, and academically competent or inferior. A continuing and significant factor in explanations of academic and sociocultural deficiency, racism persists in being “endemic and deeply ingrained in American life” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued for a critical theory of race in education that was related to the one created in legal scholarship; thus emerged the concept of critical race theory (CRT) in education, which is used to analyze social inequity that is covertly demonstrated through racist practices within academic institutions. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000) critical race theory in education is defined as

... a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of [Black and Latino] students. Critical Race Theory asks such questions as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination. (pp. 40-42)

Critical race theory brings attention directly to the effects of racism and challenges the hegemonic practices of White supremacy as masked by a carefully (re)produced system of meritocracy. CRT is built on the five tenets of: (1) racialized power; (2) the permanence or centrality of race; (3) counter storytelling as a legitimate critique of the master narrative; (4) interest convergence; and (5) critique of liberalism. These CRT tenets and the themes that flow from them challenge the existing ways of knowing and doing. Using the analytical lens of CRT in education would certainly lead to reviewing the ways that, for instance, curriculum is designed, the delivery of instruction is executed, classes are composed and grouped, assessment is determined and processed, school funding is allocated, and redistricting lines are drawn (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lynn, 2004).

While the social construction of race is a complex factor that permeates the fabric of the American lived experiences, culturally relevant pedagogy does not explicitly problematize race. Yet, the theory and praxis of culturally relevant pedagogy should include a critical analysis of race and racism. CRP, like critical race theory, recognizes the value of lived experience by marginalized groups in understanding and making meaning of the world. In other words, the oral and written

master narrative, a reality that is created, interpreted, and accepted by those in power (Stanley, 2007), is not the only voice of truth. Nonetheless, CRP does not question or critically examine the structures that feed into the cultural incongruence perspective. This is where critical race theory updates the CRP framework. The broadness of race (and consequently racism) can be seen in the way that it focuses specifically on how privilege has been given and truncated in American society, something culture does not do. The history of the U.S. has informed us that race is very central to how people perceive and relate to the world. While CRT provides a framework and for some a tool of analysis for examining educational practices and structures that continue to subordinate groups of people, culturally relevant pedagogy offers a model of theory to practice and examples of how such instruction can be delivered. When CRT is related to CRP, the centrality of race to American culture is acknowledged.

In our evaluations of the literature, we have found some universal truths that we believe are applicable to any and all cultural groups and could lead to the development of a conceptual model of pedagogical strategies with wide application. Our presentation is not an exhaustive literature review, and we recognize that a limitation of this work is that we did not attempt to create a comprehensive review of all the research on CRP. Nonetheless, we did include the major scholars who influenced the evolution of CRP and therefore informed the development of our conceptual framework: Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephan, 2001; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Foster, 1997; Gay, 1994, 2000; Gordon, 1999; Irvine, 1990, 2001; Irvine & York, 1995; Irvine, Armento, Causey, Jones, Frasher, & Weinburgh, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995, 2001; Nieto, 1999, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2002; and Tatum, 1992, 1997. Their contributions are discussed in the next section of this paper. We reasoned that most of the work not included here has been launched from the works of the included scholars. Even so, our purpose here is to infuse the tenets of CRT into an overview of the literature that supports a conceptual framework for understanding and studying culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **Conceptual Framework of CRP**

In developing our conceptual framework of CRP teaching behaviors, we used Gay's (1994, 2000), Ladson-Billings' (1994), and Nieto's (1999) principles of culturally relevant teaching to flesh out five themes: identity and achievement, equity and excellence, developmental appropriateness, teaching the whole child, and student-teacher relationships. Initially we developed a list of 35 broad themes of culturally relevant pedagogy. After grouping similar concepts among the authors, we were left with five major themes. We used these five themes of CRP to guide the discussion. Additionally, we also incorporated CRT to show the importance of race and racism. The five themes of CRP, along with the specific, definitive concepts that are aligned with each theme are presented in Figure 1.

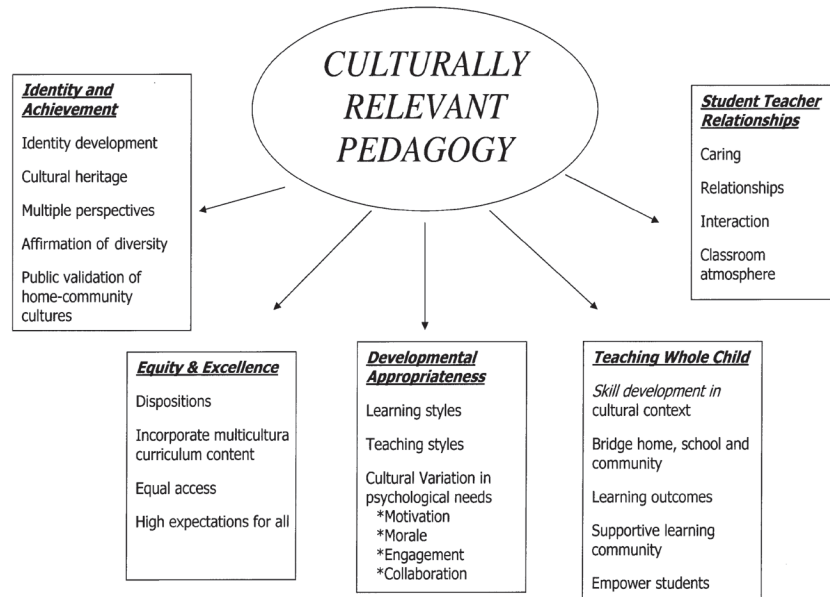


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Figure 1  
The Principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy



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### ***Identity and Achievement***

The following concepts are aligned with identity and achievement: identity development, cultural heritage, multiple perspectives, affirmation of diversity, and public validation of home-community cultures which includes the social and cultural capital that students bring to school with them. In addressing the theme of identity and achievement, both student and teacher identities are considered. As such, identity is defined as a cultural construct. If culture is defined as the ways in which persons perceive, believe, relate to, and evaluate the world around them (Goodenough, 1981), then how people see themselves can be viewed through these same lenses. Language, behavioral expressions, interpretations of actions, and societal expectations are all culturally borne and implemented. Culture includes ethnicity and race, as well as gender, class, language, region, religion, exceptional-ity, and other diversities that help to define individuals. Participating as a member of these microcultures makes each individual a multicultural being. In addition, these microcultures help shape a person's multicultural identities. As Tatum (1997) pointed out:

The parts of our identity that do capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of oth-



ers' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets us apart as exceptional or 'other' in their eyes. (p. 21)

Teachers should realize that students who are racial or ethnic minorities see, view, and perceive themselves and others differently than those who are of the majority group. Because race is visual and has all too often been viewed as the determinant of intelligence (for example see the works of Arthur Jensen), teachers should understand their own biases when they see their class. As part of American culture, racism prevails in American life. As such, race is not to be ignored in the picture of identity development.

In order for teachers to be culturally attuned to the identities of their students, they should be aware of their own identities, as well as how those identities may be divergent from the identities of their students. Nieto (1999) acknowledged that "by reconnecting with their own backgrounds, and with the sufferings as well as the triumphs of their own families, teachers can lay the groundwork for students to reclaim their histories and voices" (p. 3). This interest convergence, as defined by CRT, acknowledges "the legitimacy of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum" (Gay, 2000, p. 29). CRT clearly lets students know that individually and collectively their voices are heard, that they matter, and their presence and contributions are valued. Once this is accomplished, then it is possible to hear, acknowledge, and accept the legitimate voices of people of color as they exist in the society in which we live. Furthermore, even teachers who have not been aware of their own unique identities need to recognize the diversity of cultural heritages within the classroom. The reality of today's classrooms is that a teacher will encounter students with identities different from his or her own (e.g., a middle class White woman teaching a class of Native American/American Indian students), or, the classroom itself will be culturally diverse (i.e., composed of Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and White students).

Critical race theory adds that cultural awareness does not and should not include colorblindness or race-neutral policies. Liberalism does not mean that teachers should be colorblind or race neutral because these two approaches ignore the centrality of race and racism within American society. Colorblindness would devalue the experiences and realities of students of color by denying that race preferences and racism exists. Instead, teachers need to be aware of the White power and privilege system in American education. When teachers acknowledge that the system is racist, they can move forward to not only avoid socially reproducing the racism, but also to rethink the system, recognize their actions in it, change them if need be, and embrace all cultures as equally important.

Identifying variation of cultures within the classroom is key to becoming a teacher who practices culturally relevant pedagogy. Thus, by embracing the reality of diversity through such an identification is critical in creating an environment for equitable learning. Additionally, embracing diversity is not just acknowledging or

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seeing it, but also affirming it as an asset. Embracing diversity and affirming it as an asset begins to diminish the idea that the non-White model is wrong or inferior. It forces one to understand that non-White is as important or is as significant as White; all races are valuable. As Delpit (1995) explained,

... rather than think of diverse students as problems, we can view them instead as resources who can help all of us learn what it feels like to move between cultures and language varieties, and thus perhaps better learn how you become citizens of the global community. (p. 69)

Therefore, home-community cultures are used as learning tools for both students and teachers. In addition, students feel validated as their cultures are publicly acknowledged as valuable.

### ***Equity and Excellence***

We addressed the following concepts related to the theme of equity and excellence: dispositions, incorporation of multicultural curriculum content, equal access, and high expectations. Simply stated, equity involves giving students what they need. It is not the same as equal opportunity. More specifically, equal opportunity does not acknowledge that students have needs that require differentiation. Giving children what they need means believing (a) difference is good, (b) differentiated instruction is essential for some, and (c) CRP practices can enhance learning. In treating students equitably, teachers accept students through affirmations of their cultural capital (Gay, 2000). Claiming to be color-blind is not an equitable approach to teaching and learning, and is certainly not a disposition conducive to CRP practices. In fact, teachers can no longer pretend not to see racial and ethnic diversity. The notion of equity as sameness only makes sense when all students are exactly the same. Various children have different needs; addressing those needs dictates that some teaching methods may not be applicable. Therefore, when teachers do not see diversity, they truly do not see the students at all and therefore greatly limit their abilities to meet students' diverse educational and social needs (Gay, 1994).

Equity and excellence also includes the incorporation of multicultural content in curriculum and instruction. Students may not see themselves in a positive light in the traditional material that is usually presented in schools. As Banks et al. (2001) concluded:

In curriculum and teaching units and in textbooks, students often study historical events, concepts, and issues only or primarily from the point of view of the victors. The perspectives of the vanquished are frequently silenced, ignored, or marginalized. This kind of teaching privileges mainstream students—those who most often identify with the victors or dominant group—and causes many students of color to feel left out of the American story. (p. 198)

The teachers in Foster's (1997) and Ladson-Billings' (1994) studies implemented this idea that the content of the curriculum needs to be inclusive of all cultures

represented in the classroom. However, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) warned that the acknowledgement of racial, ethnic, or cultural difference should not be reduced to simplistic, symbolic, and meaningless tasks such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, dancing and singing songs, and reading folktales; instead it should incorporate “bringing both student and faculty from a variety of cultures into the school (or academy environment)” (p. 61). They also admonished teachers and administrators that recognition of cultural diversity must also be inclusive of the maintenance and sustenance of high expectations of both students and teachers.

Critical race theory adds that equity and excellence clearly focus on realizing that race is a significant factor in inequality. Some would argue that it is the “central construct for understanding inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995 p. 50). Too, multiculturalism in the curriculum can turn racism on its head and use race as the springboard for equality. In particular, multiculturalism is not simply stating that some cultures are different, which in American society has also meant deficient, wrong, or bad. CRT debunks the belief that equity and excellence are solely defined as the property interest of Whites and highlights the exclusionary practices of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It uses counter storytelling as a legitimate critique of the mainstream master narrative. The focus will not be on cultural inclusions during a specific time of year (such as Black History Month), but interweaving the acknowledgement and inclusion of culture throughout the entire academic process. More explicitly, Whiteness should not be the only determinant of entry into high-level courses and programs because equity and excellence are not the exclusive ownership of Whites. Thus, the practice of CRP serves to recognize that equity and excellence are and should be enjoyed by students of color as well.

#### ***Developmental Appropriateness***

The theme of developmental appropriateness includes the following concepts: learning styles, teaching styles, and cultural variation in psychological needs (motivation, morale, engagement, collaboration). As such, developmental appropriateness acknowledges the importance of knowing where children are in their cognitive development. It also involves knowledge of children’s psychosocial development. While there is a global developmental appropriateness for children, as conceptualized by theorists such as Elkind, Erickson, and Piaget, their theories have usually been applied to the very young learner. Thus, we recognize the importance of student age in development, but we also believe that the process should carry on through the higher grades as it moves from considering *is this appropriate for a student at a certain age to how does diversity of culture impact developmental appropriateness*. In addressing developmental appropriateness, the teacher should be interested in what is culturally appropriate or relevant for the culturally diverse students in her or his classroom. Knowledge that students bring with them to school must be acknowledged, explored, and utilized (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

CRT adds that developmental appropriateness must also focus on where the

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student is when he enters school and whether it can be a direct remnant of racism. Students of color may already believe that the educational system is stacked against them, leading them to a defeatist relationship with the educational process. The student may have already learned lessons that devalued her or his worth based solely upon race, ethnicity, or culture. More than 70 years ago, Woodson (1933) made this apparent in *The Mis-education of the Negro*. Part of developmental appropriateness is taking students where they are and getting them to where they need to be with innovative teaching methods and assessments.

Not only does developmental appropriateness focus on the implementation of activities designed to meet the cognitive, emotional, social and psychological needs of students, it also integrates teaching styles and student learning styles. In this arena, teachers should realize that the psychological needs of students may vary and that students do have different motivations to learn. The key is generating teaching styles that incorporate the vast differences in culturally-based learning styles and learning preferences of students.

Developmental appropriateness also means that teachers are cognizant of the dominant and sometimes racist, non-inclusive ideology that has been institutionalized and legalized in American education. Critical race theory forces teachers to critique liberalism and challenge the dominant ideology. This includes the development and use of diverse assessment opportunities which begins with high standards and expectations for all. CRP teachers have to advocate for and perform a paradigm shift in assessment.

While teachers must practice in the context of this standardized curriculum, they can also embrace the opportunity to incorporate or cultivate additional views of achievement that will allow those who do not experience achievement through the standard curriculum to obtain success through these additional methods, ones that recognize and value who children are and how they learn best. When teachers respond to developmental appropriateness, they, in effect, cultivate students who want to learn instead of the students who will just engage in rote memorization and regurgitation. Good pedagogy is more than just teaching the content information; what is important is to teach students so that they are able to learn and to transfer such learning in various environments.

### ***Teaching the Whole Child***

Closely related to developmental appropriateness is teaching the whole child, a theme that includes the concepts of skill development in a cultural context, home-school-community collaboration, learning outcomes, supportive learning community, and empowerment. When attempting to achieve the goal of practicing CRP, teachers must remember the needs of the total child. Influences from initial cultural socialization experiences in the family and community shape the academic identity of students who enter our classrooms. These cultural influences affect how students and their families perceive, receive, respond to, categorize, and prioritize

what is meaningful to them. Therefore, teachers should be sensitive to how culture, race, and ethnicity influence the academic, social, emotional, and psychological development of students.

Culture resides in the individual (Goodenough, 1981). While a student can be guided in many ways by cultural group identification, his or her ways of believing and perceiving can also be influenced by individual understandings and conceptualizations. In other words, teachers cannot solely base an individual's behavior on what s/he believes his or her group culture to be, for those beliefs may be stereotypical. Teaching the whole child will require not only that teachers recognize, understand, and intentionally acknowledge cultural group behaviors, but also observe and interact with students as individuals. Thus, it is crucial for teachers to learn about all of their students, especially those who are culturally different from the teachers themselves. Additionally, students' recognition of teachers' desires to learn about them beyond the classroom can have tremendous power to motivate and invite learning. The CRP practice of teaching to the whole child expands teachers' knowledge base of instructional strategies and also heightens their cultural sensitivity and recognition of the definitive link between culture and schooling. Moreover, through the lens of CRT, CRP supports the child as an integrated human being where culture and schooling are key to his/her development.

Furthermore, the whole child is nurtured from his/her home and community before s/he enters the school setting. Children bring with them to school culturally-based ways of doing, seeing, and knowing; in response, culturally relevant teachers find ways to scaffold those cultural experiences in order for the students to gain additional meaning and ultimately be successful. By so doing, the culturally relevant teacher emphasizes the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) or cultural capital (Gordon, 1999; Bourdieu, as cited in Lareau, 2001) developed in students' homes and communities, thereby encouraging academic achievement. Not only are ethnic minority students able to see their cultures in the classroom, but also other students comprehend the value of various cultures.

### ***Student-Teacher Relationships***

Our last CRP theme, from Figure 1, addresses the relationship between the students and the teacher in the classroom. This theme includes the concepts of caring, relationships, interaction, and classroom atmosphere. According to Nieto (1999), "the nature and the extent of the relationships between teachers and their students are critical in promoting student learning" (p. 167). The teacher is an important significant other in the lives of students because of the amount of time spent in schools. Students need to know teachers care and teachers should recognize and respect their students for who they are as individuals and as members of a cultural group. Too, students want to be recognized for their different ways of knowing that are reflective of their own cultures. With this recognition, positive responses from both students and teachers to diversity enhance the student-teacher relationship.

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Students see teachers as real and teachers broaden their knowledge base of how students respond to the world around them.

Understanding the synergistic linkages between culture, communication, and cognition is crucial to successful student-teacher relationships (Gay, 2000). According to Gay (2000), “communication is strongly culturally influenced, experientially situated, and functionally strategic. It is a dynamic set of skills and performing arts whose rich nuances and delivery styles are open to many interpretations and instructional possibilities” (p. 109). We communicate with others as a means of expressing thoughts, sharing our experiences, and creating and accessing knowledge, both general and situated. Awareness, appreciation, and acceptance of different discourse patterns and styles of verbal and nonverbal communication, those which go beyond speaking and writing, help to bridge the gap between the home-community and school culture. In other words, CRP teachers’ knowledge and translation of different cultural communications styles can avert misinterpretations of behavior, demonstrations of disrespect, and conflicts in schools (Irvine, 2001, 1990).

Ladson-Billings (1994) defined student-teacher relationships as ones that are “fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. [Culturally relevant teachers] demonstrate a connectedness *with* all their students and encourage that same connectedness *between* the students” (p. 25). Teachers should not only recognize students’ individual value and importance, but they should also consciously recognize what their students have in common. Together, students and teachers need to build classroom community, making it a safe place in which to nurture everyone’s cultural identity. Foster (1997) concluded that teachers need to expand their individual classrooms to be inclusive of the entire school community through collaborations with colleagues as well as the surrounding community. This outreach will strengthen student-teacher interactions in the classroom community because CRP teachers accept that the community is a vital partner in students’ learning.

Providing caring interpersonal relationships is a hallmark of CRP teachers (Gay, 2000). Caring is demonstrated through patience and persistence with learners. These teachers facilitate learning, validate learners’ knowledge construction, and empower learners’ individual and collective learning capacity. In doing so, these teachers maintain high standards for excellence and equity. More specifically, CRP teachers are “demanding but facilitative, supportive and accessible, both personally and professionally” (Gay, 2000, p. 48). The culturally relevant teacher simply does not accept failure, but begins where students are and works hard to help them succeed. As one teacher in Foster’s (1997) book affirmed: “In order to teach well... you have to think about students as if they belonged to you. If teachers showed the same concern, interacted with their students and treated them as if they were their own children, schools would have more success with greater numbers of students” (p. 98).

CRT informs and can be infused into CRP where student-teacher relationships are concerned in various ways. In order to form better relationships with students, teachers should consider and value their students’ counterstories, for their perceived

realities of lived experiences can unveil the historic and continuing presence of racism and its effects on students' and families' lives. In other words, through counterstories, teachers are provided a vehicle by which they can see what has, in some cases, been consciously invisible to them before. Additionally, educational theory reminds us of the importance of relating disciplinary content to students' lives. However, CRT cautions teachers to more closely examine and scrutinize the programming of educational systems, curricular development, and resulting barriers to equal education access and opportunity that could occur because of the permanence of racism in our society. CRT also requires that teachers of CRP question students' learning and placement in programs or classes (i.e., academically gifted, exceptional children, etc.) that have been historically defined by the dominant culture. Additionally, CRT informs these teachers to maintain high expectations of all students no matter what the placement is and to negate the belief that students who are not in the highest academic programs are "less than." In other words, teachers who are in tune with their students are knowingly and sometimes unknowingly aware of the tenets of CRT and work hard to "make it right" for all children, not just those perceived to be more privileged than others.

## **Conclusion**

One of the major concerns in the education of students has been how to address the race/ethnicity-based achievement gap between mainstream and minority children. This gap has persisted among various groups throughout the history of the NAEP assessment and is likely to persist as the U.S. becomes increasingly more culturally diverse. Thus, a goal of educational research is to find a way to teach all students regardless of their ethnicity, race, cultural background, or community of origin. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a promising area of research in determining the actual effects of the mismatch of the culture of particular populations within the educational system and the effects of schooling on the learning outcomes of these children. It could be that CRP is an effective way to address these issues.

In this article, we integrated selected writing on culturally relevant pedagogy to address overlap and divergence within the conceptual and theoretical literature. We have taken the CRP literature that was couched in culturally specific domains (e.g., Foster's work on African Americans and Nieto's work on Hispanics) and brought it together in one location. Our aim was to collect and categorize the themes that are evident across major works on CRP. Through our investigation of CRP, we became critically aware that culture does not always take into account the permeating thread of racism in the fabric of American life. We acknowledged that the delivery of CRP includes knowledge of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how the world receives them. Therefore, the complexities of the social construction of race in the United States must also be explored because people in American society are often viewed in terms of racial characteristics. As such, we extended CRP by



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integrating the tenets of CRT to incorporate the significance of race and racism within the discussion of culture.

What we have presented here is a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy that is grounded in over a quarter of a century of research scholarship. By synthesizing the literature into the five areas and infusing it with the tenets of CRT, we have developed a collection of principles that represents culturally relevant pedagogy. We believe that culturally relevant pedagogy is distinguishable based on the principles of teaching to the whole child, equity and excellence, identity and achievement, developmental appropriateness, and student-teacher relationships. Even though we believe that working independently on any one of these areas is a necessary step toward adopting a culturally relevant pedagogical style, the combination of these elements is what truly makes one engaged in and a more comprehensive practitioner of CRP. While culturally relevant pedagogical behaviors are factors that help students, Foster (1997) and Ladson-Billings (1994) found that not all culturally relevant teachers use similar techniques within their classrooms. The common thread among the teachers was their philosophies of teaching; the observed behaviors were manifestations of their teaching philosophies.

The reasoning behind the development of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) included the knowledge that some categories of students were not receiving quality education when they should have been. This 2001 national educational reform legislation provides a structured guidepost in responding to needs of students who most frequently fall within the persistent achievement gap in America's public schools. Critics maintain that while implementation of NCLB appears to have improved student achievement and narrowed the achievement gap (Sack, 2005), these gains mask continued inequities in the education of culturally diverse students.

Despite its shortcomings, NCLB has focused attention on the ideal that every child is entitled to learn. Unequivocally, CRP also focuses on the fact that every child is entitled to learn. As such, one way to assure that each child learns is for teachers to deliver instruction that is relevant to all of the diverse population that inhabits our schools. In light of the NCLB initiative, this CRP framework, one that is inclusive of the tenets of CRT, is valuable because it is useful for pre-service teachers as well as in-service teachers. However, it must be explicitly taught and modeled in our schools of education by teacher educators. Therefore, teacher educators must be knowledgeable of the framework in order to teach it to their students and demonstrate it in their professional practice as well as in professional development offerings in our nation's school systems; for such intentional pedagogy is a clear, indisputable signal that we must and can prepare teachers with responsive tools and strategies to make sure that *all* students learn.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> The authors' names are listed in alphabetical order, but they share first author status for the article.

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