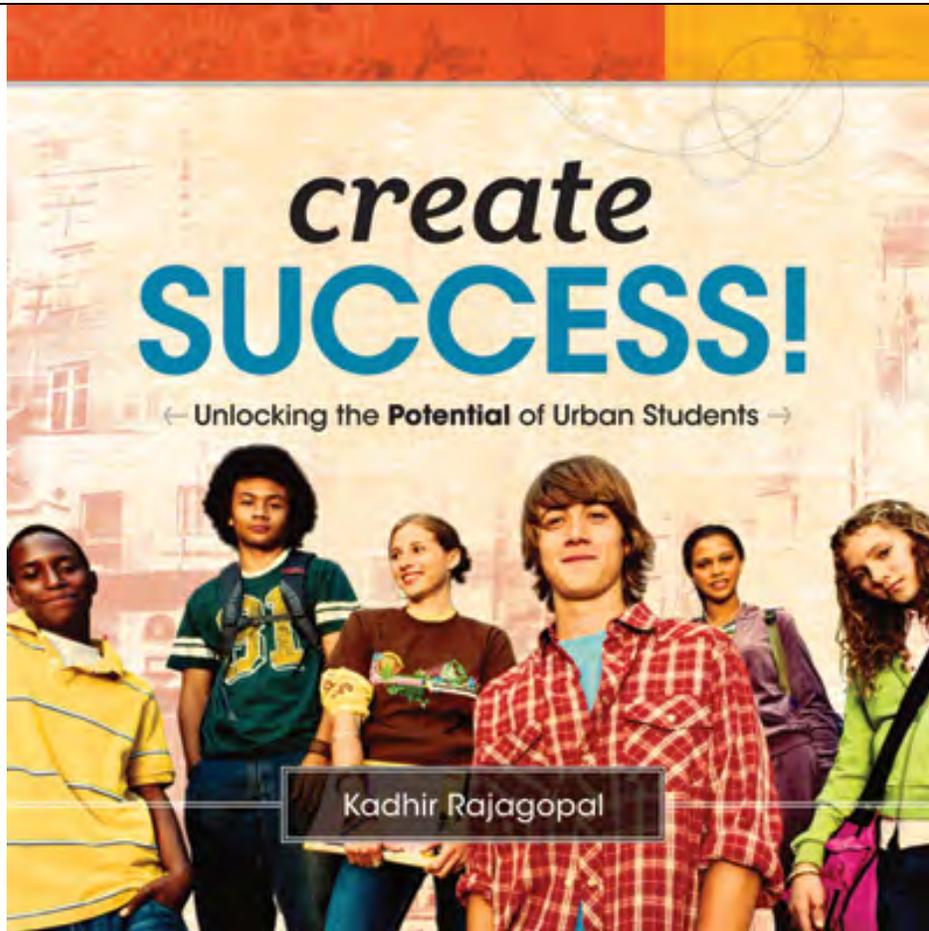


Books



Chapter 1. Culturally Responsive Instruction

The CREATE model asks teachers to provide culturally responsive instruction for their students. Culturally responsive (or relevant) teaching has been described as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). What does this mean? It means that teachers make standards-based content and curricula accessible to students and teach in a way that students can understand. To do this, teachers must incorporate relatable aspects of students' daily lives into the curriculum. Such familiar aspects include language (which may include jargon or slang), prior knowledge, and extracurricular interests such as music and sports. Once students feel comfortable with how a teacher talks and discusses academic material, they will feel comfortable enough to focus and try to learn the content.

A common misconception about culturally responsive instruction is that teachers must teach the "Asian way" or the "black way." People often get intimidated by the words *culturally responsive* because of the incredible number of cultures and mixes of cultures in today's classrooms. Too often, teachers subscribe to the misguided idea that students of different races need to be taught differently, and they waste an enormous amount of effort in the process. Another result is that teachers usually appear fake by simply trying too hard to impress students of different backgrounds.

The key point here is that we don't need a different teaching method or curriculum for students based on race. I teach the entire class in a way that all of my students can relate to and understand, using aspects of their cultures with which I am comfortable. I don't want to stray too far from my comfort zone and consequently appear fake to the students I'm trying to engage. For example, I like to incorporate hip hop music into my lessons because many of my students relate to this style of music and I am also comfortable with it.

Hip hop is something my students (and many students) relate to and understand. You don't have to be African American, Latino, or from any particular cultural background to listen to a specific type of music or like a specific musician. When I teach complicated mathematical concepts, I tend to make analogies to cars, animals, sports, or other topics that will pique student interest. I try to capture their attention and find interests that are common to as many kids as possible. I don't teach by race. I teach to their collective culture. I find what appeals to

most of my students—that I am also comfortable using—and then exploit these commonalities. Any teacher can do this. Any teacher of any race or gender has something in common with or can find something that relates to most of his or her students. Remember, though: Put it in their language, but don't come off as fake.

According to Crystal Kuykendall, a former executive director of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, "culture determines how children perceive life and their relationship to the world. Because culture also influences how and what children learn, educators can use culture to improve self-image and achievement. Not only must teachers show an appreciation of cultural diversity, they must also incorporate teaching strategies that are congruent with the learning styles of their students" (1989, pp. 32–33).

Culturally Responsive Relationships

This has been repeatedly confirmed; if educators do not have some knowledge of their students' lives outside of paper-and-pencil work, and even outside of their classrooms, then they cannot accurately know their students' strengths and weaknesses (Delpit, 1995). This theme is also echoed by Pedro Noguera, who concludes that, in order to engage urban students, teachers must adapt their teaching to the way in which those students learn rather than the reverse (expecting students to adapt their learning to the way in which they are taught). Therefore, teachers need to know how to make ideas and knowledge meaningful to urban students and how to use students' culture and interests as tools to teach them (Noguera, 2003).

The CREATE model requires that teachers make a concerted effort to learn about their students' individual cultures and interests: language, sports, music, and so on. To achieve this, consider using surveys and questionnaires, or build relationships by informally talking to students and asking about their interests.

We must teach the way students learn, rather than expecting them to learn the way we teach.

—Pedro Noguera

During the first week of school, I begin building relationships with my students by using surveys and questionnaires to learn about some of their interests, I make time to talk with each of them, and I encourage them to share information about themselves. I have my students describe what a "good teacher" does in the classroom, and I then ask them to tell me what I can do to be the best teacher for them. Finally, I encourage them to share their negative experiences with previous math classes and give me ideas about how they would like to be taught. As a result of talking to students and learning about their individual needs, I successfully convince them that I am an ally and willing to listen to them on their own level. This communication tends to make students feel hopeful because they recognize that their teacher is willing to adapt his or her teaching to their needs. I make an assertive effort to talk to students with a history of failure, behavioral challenges, or suspensions from other teachers' classrooms, as well as to students at risk for future failure.

We must keep in mind that education, at its best, hones and develops the knowledge and skills each student already possesses, while at the same time adding new knowledge and skills to that base.

—Lisa Delpit

Early in the school year, I make sure to develop a connection with the most challenging students and gain a clear understanding of what may cause them to lose interest or emotional stability in the classroom. During the first few weeks, I strive to learn about all of my students, but I focus on the most challenging students so I can develop positive relationships with them and adapt the curriculum and my instruction to their way of learning. Usually, the most challenging students develop into the best leaders in my class—if I can engage them, I am usually able to engage the rest of the class.

Culturally Responsive Curriculum

After teachers have gained an understanding of where students come from, they can incorporate learning styles, culture, background, prior knowledge, vocabulary, music, and sports into the curriculum. Keep in mind that the CREATE model does not ask teachers to *replace* the mandatory standards-based curriculum. Instead, it asks the teacher to *integrate* the traditional curriculum with material that is relevant to students' lives. Urban educators must question their teaching practices and develop culturally relevant teaching strategies to hook their students. To this end, teachers must use the cultural capital available in their classrooms to capture attentions, engage students, and make the academic curriculum relevant. The goal is for students to have increased access to the standards-based content they will need to take and pass district and national tests.

Students must be ... allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own 'expertness' as well.

—Lisa Delpit

In his book *The School and Society*, educational philosopher John Dewey argued that the development of curricula should be based on students' own interests (Dewey, 1889). Education, he felt, should be a child-centered process. Dewey believed strongly in connecting curriculum to the interests and activities of students. He felt that effective education required teachers to use students' interests to guide them toward an understanding of the sciences, history, and the arts. Dewey also urged teachers to connect each child's life experiences and interests to the existing curriculum. As a result, students would be able to understand and succeed in the traditional curriculum.

Dewey's philosophy has contemporary echoes as well. Robert Moses is a civil rights activist and founder of the Algebra Project, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising the academic performance of every child in America, a cause Moses describes as a modern-day civil right for minorities. One of the underlying principles of the Algebra Project is that "people talk" is used to relate math concepts to students. This principle implies that mathematical concepts in general, and algebra in particular, are discussed in language that is natural and intuitive for students before those students are exposed to the technical terms found in textbooks. Analysis of schools using the Algebra

Project has shown improvement in test scores; supporters, however, point to the more important result: the perception that inner-city kids are neither interested nor proficient in math has been effectively shot down (Cobb & Moses, 2001).

In my own classroom, I am culturally responsive because I teach in a way that every student can understand. I use student-centered stories, vocabulary, and language. Student-centered stories and language are critical to hooking students' attention and making them receptive to learning the curriculum and textbook vocabulary. I constantly try to find ways to infuse hip hop, sports, and other student interests *without seeming fake*. It is important that you connect to your students, but it is even more important to be sincere and be yourself. Students have an innate ability to know when you're not being yourself.

For example, I use "street language" to explain the concept of isolating the variable in algebra. I say to students, "X is like a dog that wants his own block or neighborhood. Solving for X implies that it must be alone in its own neighborhood. X's neighborhood is separated from the other neighborhood by the equals sign, which acts as a gate. So there are two different neighborhoods. Any number on X's block is like an enemy. In order for the number to leave X's block, it must change its operation when it crosses the equals sign (or gate). Therefore, if the problem is $X + 4 = 6$, then the positive 4 must leave the block and become a negative 4. $6 - 4$ is 2, so $X = 2$, and X is alone. The goal of solving for X is to get X (or the dog) alone."

Student-centered vocabulary and language are keys to hooking students' attention and ensuring that they will be receptive enough to learn the curriculum and textbook vocabulary. Try to find ways to infuse hip hop, sports, and other student interests *without seeming fake*. Make honest connections, but be sincere and be yourself.

Once students understand the story and the concept of isolating the X, I go back and teach the academic vocabulary. At this point, X becomes a *variable*. The students are more prepared and willing to learn because they already have a sense of confidence that comes from an increased level of comfort with the material.

Let's consider another example of culturally responsive teaching. English teachers can use a variety of methods to teach similes, including examples with familiar sports stars and relatable situations that involve similes and metaphors. For instance, "Kobe flies like an eagle to the basket, and the crowd is frozen in anticipation." It's also possible to use hip hop lyrics to teach literary elements, such as theme and tone. Many lyrics easily lend themselves to interesting and engaging lessons on mood or character analysis. Once the teacher hooks students' attention and makes sure they understand the relevant concept, he or she can then incorporate the standard textbook, which may include more traditional literature by Shakespeare, Faulkner, or Salinger. Students will likely be more willing to analyze a Shakespearean conflict if they already understand the concept from exposure to lessons that dealt with hip hop or stories that directly relate to their lives.

Within the confines of standard textbooks, teachers can often find multiple opportunities to connect a theme with their students' lives. For example, there are many Shakespearean themes—such as jealousy and greed—that students can easily relate to if the connection is made clear. The tension between the Montague and Capulet families in *Romeo and Juliet* is similar to the tension that might arise if two lovers belonged to rival gangs or came from different cultures. Though it is an unfortunate situation, students in many urban settings can relate to the tensions that often lead to violence because of animosity between gang "families." Examples that build on experiences and situations such as this will usually get the attention of students in inner-city environments.

Solving for X (In a Culturally Responsive Classroom)

$$X + 4 = 10$$

$$X (+ 4) = 10 (- 4)$$

$$X = 6$$

The left side of this equation is X's neighborhood. X is the top dog in his 'hood and doesn't like anyone else on his turf. Solving for X implies that X must be alone in its own neighborhood. When a number leaves the X dog's block, it must change its operation. A positive number will become a negative number, for example.

Creating Similies (In a Culturally Responsive Classroom)

The crowd fell silent and was frozen in anticipation. Kobe Bryant soared *like a bird* over the court. *Like an eagle*, he flew over LeBron James and dunked the ball. The basket was a big nest, and nothing could stop him.

Relevant vocabulary will hook students' attention so they can eventually learn and understand academic vocabulary, the textbook, and the real world. Grab students' attention with their own language and stories before presenting academic language. Each population is different, though, and it would be a mistake for teachers to assume that *all* urban kids relate to gangs, basketball, or hip hop. The key here is that each teacher makes an effort to learn more about his or her students, puts himself or herself in their shoes, and figures out what it takes to make learning more accessible.

Be creative! Teach in a way that relates familiar experiences to your students, and make the learning process as easy for them as possible. The textbook is just one resource (of many) you can use to achieve this end.

Culturally Responsive Delivery

Another aspect of culturally responsive instruction that has been effective in urban schools concerns the delivery of instruction to students. Though it is critical to make the curriculum accessible and relevant to students, it is also important that the content be delivered in an engaging and interesting way. All too often, a teacher has a brilliant idea or lesson, but the delivery is so boring or didactic that students get turned off and miss out on the experience.

The CREATE model asks teachers in urban classrooms to make a focused effort at establishing an interactive dialogue with students, instead of delivering a one-way lecture. Lectures often cause students to lose interest, and when their interest is lost, students are more prone to act disruptively. Effective teachers use a conversational approach and personally interact with many different students during the lecture portion of the class.

Research has shown that students typically retain the most information during the first 10 minutes of a lecture, so it is important to put limits on the amount of class time consumed by lectures. In fact, a traditional lecture may not improve student understanding at all, since it forces learners into passive roles. In order for learners to process and understand the relevant information, they need to be cast in more active roles within the classroom. Breaking the lecture into smaller chunks, and incorporating group discussions and activities into the curriculum, are ideal ways to accomplish this (League for Innovation in the Community College, 2006).

In urban settings, culturally responsive delivery of instruction requires continual interaction with students and frequent feedback. This highly interactive pedagogy can be conducted in a variety of ways, including question-and-answer techniques—the most powerful method I use to keep my students engaged and involved.

Institutions that are culturally responsive and that systematically affirm, draw on, and use cultural formations of African Americans will produce *exceptional academic results* from African American students.

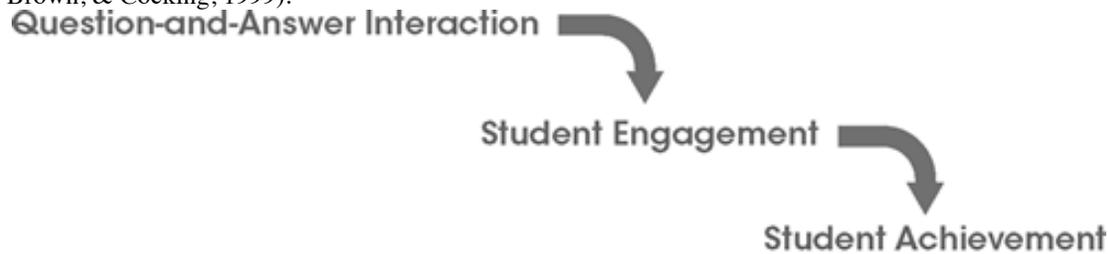
—Theresa Perry

It has long been understood that questions are effective educational tools when asked before, during, and after a learning experience. The question-and-answer instructional style, then, has a significant impact on learning because questions are major vehicles for frequent interaction and academic feedback. One of the major factors that determine the extent of a positive effect and influence on students is the frequency with which teachers pose questions; the most effective teachers ask approximately three times as many questions. Dialogues that comprise question-and-answer exchanges allow for frequent academic interaction and provide numerous opportunities for students to be actively involved and receive immediate feedback. Students also feel an enhanced sense of self-esteem when they receive praise for positive input (Brophy & Good, 1986).

If you lecture us for more than a minute straight, you'll lose us!

We need to be involved, please!

Academic discussions driven by question-and-answer exchanges also provide students with opportunities to receive immediate feedback they can use to control for mistakes, correct errors, develop as learners, and benefit from a more efficient learning process (Hannel, 2009). Questions must be specific and goal-oriented, and teachers must continually keep students focused on the established learning goals. Presenting too much information can cause cognitive overload or result in superficial learning. A step-by-step lesson driven by questions and answers provides opportunities for elaborate feedback in digestible chunks that does not become overwhelming or ignored (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999).



Get personal with your questions: Ask students by name.

These interactions are especially important for low-achieving students (or those with low self-efficacy) because they allow these students to improve learning and performance through a scaffolding process that encourages a step-by-step approach to problem-solving, allowing teachers to help students build from their existing skill levels (Graesser, McNamara, & VanLehn, 2005). For students new to or unfamiliar with a specific task, this process provides an avenue toward understanding while reducing potential frustration. High-achieving or more motivated students also benefit from the process by receiving feedback that challenges them, such as hints, cues, and prompts.

Create an interactive environment in your classroom with a continuing dialogue and conversation that runs at least two ways. Don't simply

call on a few cream-of-the-crop kids whom you are confident will know the answer. Engage as many students as possible, especially the target population!

In the classroom, the CREATE model asks that teachers use questioning as a vehicle to keep students engaged during instruction. Make it a 30-way conversation, where you fire questions at all kids and everyone is in the "hot seat" and involved. In my classes, I ask a question every few seconds and have students teach back the step or concept I just covered. I do not wait for hands to go up voluntarily, and I try to keep everyone involved. By the end of a 15-minute lecture, I will have elicited at least 25 different responses, and I will have rewarded those students with points toward their grades (publically awarded on the whiteboard).

It is important that teachers use interaction that is more personal than general. I especially call on the target population (students who struggle and act out loudly and students who stay "under the radar") because I am aware that they will be the first ones to drift off or get lost. I avoid general questioning and instead call on individual students randomly. If only cream-of-the-crop kids are questioned or volunteer answers, teachers may mistakenly assume that everyone is listening. When a lesson favors students who are more attentive or already know the material, the target population can easily get lost, frustrated, or caught up in daydreaming. Unfortunately, these students won't reveal their confusion or boredom right away. Instead, those feelings will eventually manifest themselves as discipline issues or poor achievement on tests.

As I explain a concept or solve a problem in class, I make sure to ask three or four questions every step or two of the way. I also make a point to call on struggling students more frequently to ensure they are still engaged and following along. This interaction *must* occur logically and personally. For example, I might say, "John, tell me the next step in this problem." After John is done, I immediately call on another student to reiterate the same point or continue to the next step. I choose students to teach back to the class every concept I introduce and every step of a problem. I make every effort to interact with as many students as possible, but I focus my attention on the target population. Therefore, if I ask 10 questions, 7 will be directed toward students in the target population. If they can understand the material and stay engaged, then there is a good chance the rest of the class will also follow along.

In addition to question-and-answer techniques, I occasionally divide the class into teams and have them play math-related games. Playing games not only lightens the atmosphere, but it also helps students collaborate with one another. Even mildly competitive games encourage students to pay attention and be involved. There are many ways to conduct an interactive dialogue with students and keep them actively involved in the learning process. Remember that the key is to maintain an *interactive* lecture and to get personal with your questions.

Key Points

Relationships

- **Learn** about your students' individual cultures.
- **Adapt** your teaching to the way your students learn.
- **Develop** a connection with the most challenging students.

Curriculum

- **Teach** in a way students can understand.
- **Use** student-centered stories, vocabulary, and examples.
- **Incorporate** relatable aspects of students' lives.

Delivery

- **Establish** an interactive dialogue to engage all students.
- **Stay** within your comfort zone and don't come off as "fake."
- **Continually interact** with students and provide frequent feedback.
- **Use** frequent questioning as a vehicle to keep students involved.
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