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## A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

*Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg*

**Research has shown that no one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners. The key is helping students relate lesson content to their own backgrounds.**

To be effective in multicultural classrooms, teachers must relate teaching content to the cultural backgrounds of their students. According to the research, teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication provokes student resistance, while teaching that is responsive prompts student involvement (Olneck 1995). There is growing evidence that strong, continual engagement among diverse students requires a holistic approach—that is, an approach where the how, what, and why of teaching are unified and meaningful (Ogbu 1995).

To that end, we have developed a comprehensive model of culturally responsive teaching: a pedagogy that crosses disciplines and cultures to engage learners while respecting their cultural integrity. It accommodates the dynamic mix of race, ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and family that contributes to every student's cultural identity. The foundation for this approach lies in theories of intrinsic motivation.

Before we outline our framework for culturally responsive teaching, we will address the bond of motivation and culture, and analyze some of the social and institutional resistance to teaching based on principles of intrinsic motivation. Understanding these relationships provides a clearer view of the challenges we must overcome if we are to genuinely transform teaching and successfully engage all students.

### Motivation Is Inseparable from Culture

Engagement is the visible outcome of motivation, the natural capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal. Our emotions influence our motivation. In turn, our emotions are socialized through culture—the deeply learned confluence of language, beliefs, values, and behaviors that pervades every aspect of our lives. For example, one person working at a task feels frustrated and stops, while another person working at the task feels joy and continues. Yet another person, with an even different set of cultural beliefs, feels frustrated at the task but continues with increased determination. What may elicit that frustration, joy, or determination may differ across cultures, because cultures differ in their definitions of novelty, hazard, opportunity, and gratification, and in their definitions of appropriate responses. Thus, the response a student has to a learning activity reflects his or her culture.

While the internal logic as to why a student does something may not coincide with that of the teacher, it is, nonetheless, present. And, to be effective, the teacher must understand that perspective. Rather than trying to know *what to do to* students, we must work with students to interpret and deepen their existing knowledge and enthusiasm for learning. From this viewpoint, motivationally effective teaching *is* culturally responsive teaching.

## Locked in Mid-Century

Most educators with whom we have worked would agree that there is a strong relationship between culture and motivation, and that it only makes sense to understand a student's perspective. Why, then, do we have such difficulty acting this way in the classroom?

One major reason is that we feel very little social pressure to act otherwise. The popular media and structural systems of education remain locked in a deterministic, mechanistic, and behavioristic orientation toward human motivation.

If one were to do a content analysis of national news broadcasts and news magazines for the last 40 years to identify the most widely used metaphor for motivation, “the carrot and the stick”—reward and punish, manipulate and control—would prevail. As a result, our national consciousness assumes there are many people who need to be motivated by other people.

The prevailing question, “How do I motivate them?” implies that “they” are somehow dependent, incapable of self-motivation, and in need of help from a more powerful “other.” In this sense, the “at-risk” label acts to heighten our perception of students as motivationally dysfunctional, and increases our tendency not to trust their perspective. The fact that an inordinately high number of “at-risk” students are poor and people of color should cause us to reflect on how well we understand motivation. Thoughtful scholars have suggested that this label now serves as a euphemism for “culturally deprived” (Banks 1993).

Secondary education is influenced a great deal by the practices of higher education, and both levels tend to follow the precepts of extrinsic reinforcement. Teaching and testing practices, competitive assessment procedures, grades, grade point averages, and eligibility for select vocations and colleges form an interrelated system. This system is based on the assumption that human beings will strive to learn when they are externally rewarded for a specific behavior or punished for lack of it.

Schools and colleges successfully educate a disproportionately low number of low-income and ethnic minority students (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 1995). Because the importance of grades and grade point averages increases as a student advances in school, it is legitimate to question whether extrinsic motivation systems are effective for significant numbers of students across cultures. We can only conclude that, as long as the educational system continues to relate motivation to learn with external rewards and punishments, culturally different students will, in large part, be excluded from engagement and success in school.

## Changing Consciousness About Motivation

It is part of human nature to be curious, to be active, to initiate thought and behavior, to make meaning from experience, and to be effective at what we value. These primary sources of motivation reside in all of us, across all cultures. When students can see that what they are learning makes sense and is important, their intrinsic motivation emerges.

We can begin to replace the carrot and stick metaphor with the words “understand” and “elicit”; to change the concept of motivation from reward and punishment to communication and respect. We can influence the motivation of students by coming to know their perspective, by drawing forth who they naturally and culturally are, and by seeing them as unique and active. Sharing our resources with theirs, working together, we can create greater energy for learning.

Intrinsic systems of motivation can accommodate cultural differences. Theories of intrinsic motivation have been successfully applied and researched in areas such as cross-cultural studies (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988); bilingual education (Cummins 1986); and education, work, and sports (Deci and Ryan 1985). Ample documentation across a variety of student and regional settings suggests that noncompetitive, informational evaluation processes are more effective than competitive, controlling evaluation procedures (Deci et al. 1991, Deci and Ryan 1991).

A growing number of educational models, including constructivism and multiple intelligences theory, are based on intrinsic motivation. They see student perspective as central to teaching. Unfortunately, educators must often apply these theories within educational systems dominated by extrinsic reinforcement, where grades and class rank are emphasized. And, when extrinsic rewards continue to be the primary motivators, intrinsic motivation is dampened. Those students whose socialization accommodates the extrinsic approach surge ahead, while those students—often the culturally different—whose socialization does not, fall behind. A holistic, culturally responsive pedagogy based on intrinsic motivation is needed to correct this imbalance.

## An Intrinsic Motivational Framework

We propose a model of culturally responsive teaching based on theories of intrinsic motivation. This model is respectful of different cultures and is capable of creating a common culture that all students can accept. Within this framework, pedagogical alignment—the coordination of approaches to teaching that ensure maximum consistent effect—is critical. The more harmonious the elements of teaching are, the more likely they are to evoke, encourage, and sustain intrinsic motivation.

The framework names four motivational conditions that the teacher and students continuously create or enhance. They

are:

1. *Establishing inclusion*—creating a learning atmosphere in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another.
2. *Developing attitude*—creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice.
3. *Enhancing meaning*—creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values.
4. *Engendering competence*—creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value.

These conditions are essential to developing intrinsic motivation. They are sensitive to cultural differences. They work in concert as they influence students and teachers, and they happen in a moment as well as over a period of time.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching

Let us look at an actual episode of culturally responsive teaching based on this motivational framework. It occurs in an urban high school social science class with a diverse group of students and an experienced teacher.

At the start of a new term, the teacher wants to familiarize students with active research methods. She will use such methods throughout the semester, and she knows from previous experience that many students view research as abstract, irrelevant, and oppressive work.

After reflecting on the framework, her teaching goal, and her repertoire of methods, she randomly assigns students to small groups. She encourages them to discuss any previous experiences they may have had in doing research as well as their expectations and concerns for the course. Each group then shares its experiences, expectations, and concerns as she records them on the chalkboard. In this manner, she is able to understand her students' perspectives and to increase their connection to one another and herself (*motivational condition: establishing inclusion*).

The teacher explains that most people are researchers much of the time, and she asks the students what they would like to research among themselves. After a lively discussion, the class decides to investigate and predict the amount of sleep some members of the class had the previous night. This experience engages student choice, increases the relevance of the activity, and contributes to the favorable disposition emerging in the class (*motivational condition: developing attitude*). The students are learning in a way that includes their experiences and perspectives.

Five students volunteer to serve as subjects, and the other students form research teams. Each team must develop a set of observations and questions to ask the volunteers. (They cannot ask them how many hours of sleep they had the night before.) After they ask their questions, the teams rank the five volunteers from the most to the least amount of sleep. When the volunteers reveal the amount of time they slept, the students discover that no research team was correct in ranking more than three students.

Students discuss why this outcome may have occurred, and consider questions that might have increased their accuracy, such as, "How many hours of sleep do you need to feel rested?" Collaborative learning, hypothesis testing, critical questioning, and predicting heighten the engagement, challenge, and complexity of this process for the students (*motivational condition: enhancing meaning*).

These procedures encourage and model equitable participation for all students.

After the discussion, the teacher asks the students to write a series of statements about what this activity has taught them about research. Students then break into small groups to exchange their insights. Self-assessment helps the students to gain, from an authentic experience, an understanding of something they may value (*motivational condition: engendering competence*).

This snapshot of culturally responsive teaching illustrates how the four motivational conditions constantly influence and interact with one another. Without establishing inclusion (small groups to discuss experiences) and developing attitude (students choosing a relevant research), the enhancement of meaning (research teams devising hypotheses) may not have occurred with equal ease and energy; and the self-assessment to engender competence (what students learned from their perspective) may have had a dismal outcome. According to this model of teaching, all the motivational conditions contribute to student engagement.

## Norms, Procedures, and Structures

Although the above event actually occurred, it may sound like a fairy tale because everything worked smoothly. In reality, teaching situations often become fragmented by the competing needs and interests of a diverse student body. All too often, we use educational norms and procedures that are contradictory. The result is that we confuse students and decrease their intrinsic motivation. For example, consider the teacher who uses cooperative learning yet gives pop quizzes; or who espouses constructivist learning yet grades for participation; or who abhors discrimination yet calls mainly on boys during class discussions.

In an effort to help educators avoid such errors of incoherence, we have compiled educational norms, procedures, and structures that are effective from a motivational as well as multicultural perspective (see fig. 1). Together, they provide an integrated system of teaching practices for our model of culturally responsive teaching. They are categorized

according to the motivational conditions of the framework:

*Norms* are the explicit values espoused by the teacher and students. *Procedures* are learning processes that carry out the norms. *Structures* are the rules or binding expectations that support the norms and procedures.

## Figure 1. Four Conditions Necessary for Culturally Responsive Teaching

### 1. Establish Inclusion

*Norms:*

- Emphasize the human purpose of what is being learned and its relationship to the students' experience.
- Share the ownership of knowing with all students.
- Collaborate and cooperate. The class assumes a hopeful view of people and their capacity to change.
- Treat all students equitably. Invite them to point out behaviors or practices that discriminate.

*Procedures:* Collaborative learning approaches; cooperative learning; writing groups; peer teaching; multi-dimensional sharing; focus groups; and reframing.

*Structures:* Ground rules, learning communities; and cooperative base groups.

### 2. Develop Positive Attitude

*Norms:*

- Relate teaching and learning activities to students' experience or previous knowledge.
- Encourage students to make choices in content and assessment methods based on their experiences, values, needs, and strengths.

*Procedures:* Clear learning goals; problem solving goals; fair and clear criteria of evaluation; relevant learning models; learning contracts; approaches based on multiple intelligences theory, pedagogical flexibility based on style, and experiential learning.

*Structure:* Culturally responsive teacher/student/parent conferences.

### 3. Enhance Meaning

*Norms:*

- Provide challenging learning experiences involving higher order thinking and critical inquiry. Address relevant, real-world issues in an action-oriented manner.
- Encourage discussion of relevant experiences. Incorporate student dialect into classroom dialogue.

*Procedures:* Critical questioning; guided reciprocal peer questioning; posing problems; decision making; investigation of definitions; historical investigations; experimental inquiry; invention; art; simulations; and case study methods.

*Structures:* Projects and the problem-posing model.

### 4. Engender Competence

*Norms:*

- Connect the assessment process to the students' world, frames of reference, and values.
- Include multiple ways to represent knowledge and skills and allow for attainment of outcomes at different points in time.
- Encourage self-assessment.

*Procedures:* Feedback; contextualized assessment; authentic assessment tasks; portfolios and process-folios; tests and testing formats critiqued for bias; and self-assessment.

*Structures:* Narrative evaluations; credit/no credit systems; and contracts for grades.

Based on Wlodkowski, R. J., and M. B. Ginsberg. (1995). *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Teaching in a way that respects diversity is challenging, of course. Consider the following case example. The *norm* that Mr. Clark, a U.S. history teacher, is aiming for is "sharing the ownership of knowing." The topic is the notion of cultural pluralism, and, later, the roles that our socioeconomic backgrounds play in our lives. Clark uses the *procedures* of collaborative learning and critical questioning to facilitate student comprehension of the concepts of "melting pot," "social class," and other terms.

Clark asks the class to first brainstorm words that are associated with culture. Students volunteer "language," "ethnicity,"

“gender,” “religion,” “food preference,” and so forth. In pairs, students then talk to their partner about ways in which they believe they are culturally similar and distinct from each other.

After 15 minutes, the teacher asks students to note three observations about the concept of culture. The most prevalent response is that “we were surprised at how much we have in common.” Clark indicates that he sees this as well. He asks the class, “If we have such commonality, why do some groups of people in the United States have such difficulty becoming economically secure?” Note what happens as students struggle over whose perceptions are the most accurate.

*First student: Some have more difficulty because of discrimination, because people have prejudices against people whose skin is a different color from theirs.*

*Second student: I don't think it's that simple. Look how many people of color are doing well. We've got generals, mayors, and corporation executives. There's a black middle class and they are economically secure.*

*Third student: Yeah, that might be so, but it isn't as many people as you think. The newspapers just make a big deal about minorities succeeding.*

Clark's ground rules (*structure*) for this conversation endorse honesty in offering opinions and forbid putdowns, so the tone of this exchange is respectful. Interest in the topic intensifies as a result of the exchange. Clark acknowledges the different points of view and asks the class: “What questions might provide insights or clarify the differences between these viewpoints?” The class breaks into small groups after which Clark records the suggested questions. Some that emerge:

1. Which ethnic groups are most economically successful? Least successful?
2. What proportion of each ethnic group is lower income, middle income, upper income?
3. Are more people of color economically successful today than 20 years ago? 100 years ago?
4. What is the relationship of educational opportunity to income status?
5. Do middle- and upper-class African Americans and Latinos encounter more discrimination than do European Americans?
6. Is there a difference in the quality of family and community support among middle- and upper-income African Americans, European Americans, and Latinos?

As a result of the discussion, students begin to see how the viewpoints about race and socioeconomic backgrounds are part of a broad and complex picture. The difference of opinion has become a stimulus for deeper learning. Students then divide into three groups: one to conduct library research of relevant documents and studies; one to read and analyze relevant biographies and autobiographies; and one to interview community members who represent different cultures.

## A Holistic Approach

For culturally different students, engagement in learning is most likely to occur when they are intrinsically motivated to learn. This motivational framework provides a holistic and culturally responsive way to create, plan, and refine teaching activities, lessons, and assessment practices.

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