

## Teachers

The role of **teachers** in segregated, desegregated, and integrated schools

### **Introduction and Background:**

The manner in which teachers engage in their work can have a large influence on a student, school, and school system's *academic* outcomes, culture of *belongingness*, collective *commitment* to dismantling racism, and appreciation of *diversity* ([the ABCDs of RIDES](#)). This section focuses on teachers, the adults who likely have the most contact with students each school day. While the work of teaching exists in an ecosystem with culture, curriculum, leadership, systems and policies, and family partnerships, this section attempts to identify specific practices and mindsets that teachers can develop to equip themselves with the foundation necessary to effectively teach all students, especially in intentionally diverse and integrated schools. This section will focus on the mindsets, actions, and choices that occur alongside curriculum, culture, classroom management, and content pedagogy.

### **Historical and Theoretical Overview:**

Beginning with school desegregation in the 1960s, researchers began studying ways in which the nation's largely white teaching force<sup>1</sup> could best teach Black students in newly integrated schools. The foundation of several related theories emerged from these studies: **multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy** are three of the most salient today. Critical studies and asset-based instruction/funds of knowledge are theories developed subsequently with similar goals in mind. While these theories have differences in terms of underlying assumptions and paradigms, each is grounded in a shared notion of education aimed at achieving a social justice end.

### **Focus on Integrated Inclusion and Representation: Multicultural Education (Banks)**

In the 1980's, James Banks (1981) developed a framework for multicultural education that situated schools in a multicultural, social context. According to his theory, educational equity required that all dimensions of a school be transformed, including systems and policies, teachers, curriculum, and school culture (Banks, 1981; 1989). Banks criticized reform efforts that "tokenized" people of color by creating special units of study or a focus on one or two famous people of color (1989). To counter these tokening theories, Banks developed a theory that necessitates a full integration of key equitable practices into all dimensions of school life. Banks outlines 5 key dimensions of equitable, multicultural practice: 1) content integration; 2) knowledge construction; 3) equity pedagogy; 4) prejudice reduction; and 5) empowering school culture and social structure (Banks 2016).

### **Focus on Practice: Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay)**

Although Culturally Responsive Teaching is built on the work of a number of researchers, the work of Geneva Gay is most often cited in this field. In 2000, Gay defined culturally responsive teaching "as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). According to Gay, students of color will learn better when they are taught "through their own cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Prior to desegregation, approximately 40,000 Black teachers worked in schools teaching Black students. Desegregation led to the elimination of many of these positions, and the "whitening" of schools (Anderson).

and experiential filters” ([Gay 2001](#)). Gay’s work focuses on the *skills* and *practices* teachers need in order to effectively teach students of color.

### *Focus on Pedagogy: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings)*

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), spearheaded by Gloria Ladson-Billings, takes a pedagogical stance towards equitable teaching. According to Ladson-Billings, CRP is a pedagogy “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 16–17). CRP analyzes the attitudes and dispositions necessary for adults to effectively teach students of color. While CRP is deeply integrated into classroom practice, the focus of CRP is less on practices and more on mindsets.

### **Approaches and Strategies:**

- *Develop Cultural Competency*
  - In order to teach students of color through their own lived experiences, teachers must develop their own deep understanding of students’ cultural backgrounds. According to Gay, the most important aspects of culture for teachers to learn are communication styles, cultural values, traditions, learning styles, and relational patterns (Gay 2001). Each of these aspects directly impacts the teacher-student relationship and has direct implications for teaching and learning. However, the cultural awareness required to effectively teach ethnically diverse students must go beyond mere awareness and respect; rather, teachers must also have cultural knowledge that is sufficiently detailed to make learning engaging for, representative of, and responsive to ethnically diverse students. This knowledge can be gained, in part, by studying the contributions ethnic minorities have made to various content areas.
- *Use Culturally Congruent Instructional Practices*
  - Understanding elements of diverse cultures is the first step to understanding how instructional practices can be modified to be culturally congruent. Cooperative group structures and peer learning are effective for students who come from communal cultures, while autobiographical case studies can help foster positive ethnic identity in multiple academic contexts (Gay 2001). Additionally, research has highlighted several strategies, such as incorporation of music, music and movement, and dramatic elements, that improve the academic achievement of African-American students ([Allen & Butler, 1996](#); [Emdin, 2010](#)). Finally, routinely integrating multicultural examples into instruction has been shown to positively increase the academic achievement of students of color (e.g. Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, & McMillen (1985); Foster (1989); García (1999); Lee (1993); Lipka and Mohatt (1998); Moses and Cobb (2001); Tharp & Gallimore (1988)). These examples can range from using ethnic architecture in geometry to integrating novels by people of color into a study on genre (Gay 2001). By regularly using multicultural examples, teachers help connect students’ prior understandings and schema with new knowledge.
- *Teach Critical Consciousness*
  - New research suggests that Black students who are taught to name and challenge racial oppression are more likely to succeed academically ([El-Amin, et al 2017](#)). In a study of 5

northeastern urban schools, researchers found three promising practices that help develop Black students' critical consciousness: 1) teach the language of inequality; 2) create space to interrogate racism; and 3) teach students how to take action. By implementing these practices, schools (and teachers) are able to integrate Black students' socio-political realities, which in turn can lead to stronger engagement in school through a feeling of solidarity towards social justice (El-Amin, *et al* 2017).

- *Use Inquiry Discussion Pedagogy*
  - Students are more likely to feel valued and heard when their opinions are solicited in class. In an inquiry-based class, teachers use open-ended questions to invite students to share and co-create new knowledge in the classroom setting ([Blankstein & Noguera 2015](#)). The teacher's role in such a classroom is one of facilitator, as she incorporates and builds on disparate student ideas while maintaining the lesson focus. In an inquiry discussion format, multiple viewpoints are welcomed and are seen as learning opportunities. In order to be well-executed, the teacher must create good, engaging questions and facilitate in an unbiased manner (Blankstein & Noguera 2015). Teachers may also support quieter, more introverted students by offering opportunities to share thinking in written work, small group discussions, and/or in one-on-one conversations outside of class.
- *Attend Equity-Focused Professional Development*
  - The National Equity Project has developed several opportunities for educators to build their reflective capacities and mindsets for equity. [Teaching with a Cultural Eye](#) is specifically tailored for teachers, and focuses on supporting teachers with the skills and mindsets necessary to effectively build relationships with students and families of color. Their [Intro to Equity](#) webinar provides an opportunity for educators to critically consider what equity means for them, and to further refine their personal "why" when it comes to equity.
- *Culturally Responsive Information Processing - Ready 4 Rigor*
  - [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain](#) along with the Ready 4 Rigor framework was developed by Zaretta Hammond as a way to support teachers with implementing evidence-based practices that equitably support diverse learners in culturally responsive ways. Hammond's resources are focused on practitioners and are useful for novice through veteran teachers.

### **Systemic Focus:**

Teachers are critical actors in the pursuit of integrated schools. Yet, teachers do not work in a vacuum. School policies and culture impact teachers' ability to implement changes in pedagogy and practice. For example, a teacher implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in a tracked classroom can have a positive impact on their students, but this impact will be stifled by the negative effects of tracking. Moreover, school leadership support can help teachers develop and grow in powerful ways through formative observations and feedback and ongoing professional development. Yet, these supports must be aligned to an individual teacher's equity goals. Finally, effective parent partnerships can directly support teachers in learning about and valuing the diverse cultures their students bring to the

classrooms. Creating synergy between and among these different levers is the most powerful way to achieve equity and integration in schools.

Stakeholder Groups in RIDES Systemic Map	Strategies with a lens for diversity, equity and inclusion	A* B* C* D *A-academics *B-belongingness *C-commitment to dismantling racism *D-diversity
Curriculum	<a href="#">Teaching with a Cultural Eye</a>  <a href="#">The Effects of Music and Movement Opportunity on the Analogical Reasoning Performance of African American and White School Children: A Preliminary Study</a>  <a href="#">Urban Science Education for the Hip-Hop Generation</a>	A; D
Students	<a href="#">Critical consciousness: A key to student achievement</a>	A; B; C
Family and Community Partnerships	<a href="#">Teaching with a Cultural Eye</a>	A; C
Leadership	Martell C. C. (2013). Race and histories: Examining culturally relevant teaching in the U.S. history classroom. <i>Theory &amp; Research in Social Education</i> , 41, 65–88. doi:10.1080/00933104.2013.755745	A; D
Culture	<a href="#">Teaching with a Cultural Eye</a>	A; C
Systems & Structures	<a href="#">Critical consciousness: A key to student achievement</a>	A; B; C

**Implications:**

In order for teachers to effectively develop the practices and mindsets necessary to teach in an integrated school, school leaders and other stakeholders must be willing to talk openly about race and equity within the classroom setting and outside. Schools cannot simultaneously take a colorblind or colormute approach to reform efforts and expect to achieve racially equitable results. Instead, school and district leaders must create a culture where race is acknowledged openly, and all stakeholders are engaged in the work of tackling racial inequities head-on. In doing this, teachers and school systems will be better equipped to improve students’ academic success, sense of belonging, committed efforts to dismantle racism and oppression, and diversity ([the ABCDs of RIDES](#)).

### **Conclusion:**

Several related theories exist for teaching ethnically diverse students in integrated schools: **multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy**. While these three theories are the most salient, critical studies and asset-based instruction/funds of knowledge developed subsequently with similar goals in mind. Though different in terms of underlying assumptions and paradigms, each is grounded in a shared notion of education aimed at achieving a social justice end.

### **References:**

Aronson, B., Laughter, J. (2016). "The Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Education: A Synthesis of Research Across Content Areas." *Review of Educational Research*. 86(1). Pp. 163-206.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>

Banks, J. (2015). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. Wiley. 9th Ed.

Banks, J. (2016). *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*. Wiley. 6th Ed.

Boggs, S.T., Watson-Gegeo, K., and McMillen G., (1985). "Speaking, relating, and learning: A study of Hawaiian children at home and at school." *Language in Society*. 18(4).

Delpit L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: New Press.

Dover A. G. (2013). Teaching for social justice: From conceptual frameworks to classroom practices. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 15, 3–11. doi:10.1080/15210960.2013.754285

Gay, G. (2001). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Teachers College Press.

Gay G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gay G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43, 48–70. doi:10.1111/curi.12002

Gutstein, E. (2003). Teaching and learning mathematics for social justice in an urban, Latino school. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 34, 37–73.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*. Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings G. (1995a). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 43, 159–165. doi:10.1080/00405849509543675

Ladson-Billings G. (2006). "Yes, but how do we do it?" Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In Landsman J. G., Lewis C. W. (Eds.), *White teachers diverse classrooms: Creating inclusive schools, building on students' diversity, and providing true educational equity* (pp. 33–46). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Martell C. C. (2013). Race and histories: Examining culturally relevant teaching in the U.S. history classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 41, 65–88. doi:10.1080/00933104.2013.755745

Moses R. P., Cobb C. E. (2001). *Radical equations: Civil rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Sleeter C. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 47, 562–584. doi:10.1177/0042085911431472