

## Services for Black Youth

### Course

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#### Culturally Relevant Pedagogy [5:59]

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#### About

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an empowering and multidimensional approach rather than a simple celebration of diversity or set of steps to follow.

#### Transcript

In the mid-1990s, researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, or CRP—teaching that empowers students by valuing and incorporating elements of their cultures in the classroom. Since then, a variety of terms have been used to describe similar educational reform frameworks; for example, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. All of these share a focus on culture: what CRP scholar Geneva Gay defines as "a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others."

For many students of color, the dominant culture of the classroom—which restricts movement, emphasizes thoughts over feelings, and rewards individual success—is very different from the culture they experience at home. While cultures do vary within the Black community, scholar A. Wade Boykin identified common features of what he called the Black Cultural Ethos. In contrast to the culture of the school, Boykin describes African American culture as emphasizing movement, emotional expressiveness, interdependence, and spoken communication, among others. The differences between a students' home culture and school culture can lead to disengagement on the students' part, and misconceptions about the student's intelligence or motivation to learn on the teacher's part. On the other hand, when teachers understand students' preferred cultures and incorporate them into the curriculum, student engagement and learning improves. This, in a nutshell, is culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has several defining characteristics. First, it is **VALIDATING**: it recognizes that cultures vary, and affirms that all cultural heritages are legitimate and should be included in the curriculum.

Next, CRP is **COMPREHENSIVE**, focusing not only on academic achievement but positive racial and ethnic identity development—we'll discuss this more in the next lesson. CRP is also **MULTIDIMENSIONAL** in that it focuses on all aspects of the schooling experience and takes an asset-based approach that taps into students' strengths and prior experiences.

CRP is also **EMPOWERING AND TRANSFORMATIVE**. It supports both personal and academic growth, and sets high expectations for all students. Finally, CRP is **EMANCIPATORY**: it helps students of color understand what it means to be Black, Latino, Asian, or Native American in the United States, and instills in them a sense of pride in their culture and intellectual history.

It's also helpful to consider what culturally relevant pedagogy is **NOT**. CRP is not simply a celebration of diverse cultures. It's also not a simple set of steps that teachers can follow to get to know their students better. CRP alone will not bring about equity in schools, but must be partnered with discussions of and actions against racism and other forms of oppression and injustice that underlie achievement gaps.

Finally, CRP is not a one-size-fits-all approach; student cultures are highly diverse even within racial groups, and it's important to remember that cultures shift over time. For that reason, educators and librarians who want to implement CRP need to start by identifying and learning about the various cultures represented among the youth they serve. The best way to do this is by speaking directly to the youth themselves, as well as their families! This listening-and-learning is not just a preliminary step, but should be continuously practiced.

Educators with culturally relevant practice believe that all students can succeed. They see themselves as part of the wider school community, and also encourage the development of a community of learners in their classrooms. Librarians can also embody these traits, whether in a school or public library setting.

Librarians have many opportunities to enact culturally responsive pedagogy.

First, let's consider your programming. How are your programs planned? Do you give Black youth in your school or library community a voice in program development and assessment? Do you work with their families to develop programming that bridges the gap between the school or public library and the community, and bring in community members of color who might serve as mentors and role models for Black youth?

When designing and implementing instruction for Black youth, set high expectations for students. This goes for formal lessons in school as well as informal instruction in public library spaces, for example Makerspaces. Identify the strengths that students enter your library or classroom with, and build on them. For example, many Black children and teens are excellent oral storytellers; capitalize on that skill by designing instruction that gives them the opportunity to record a spoken narrative. Create learning experiences that are culturally relevant and meaningful for students.

This can include popular culture. Researcher and teacher Ernest Morrell and others have pointed out that blogging, Twitter, Facebook, video production, and even hip-hop all share a focus on writing and can be powerful tools for engaging students in academic concepts and in their local communities. Librarians can create opportunities for Black youth to not just consume popular culture, but to create it as well.

More general ideas for librarians who want to implement CRP include creating a welcoming and caring environment in the library, which we'll talk more about in later segments, and establishing warm, personal, and positive relationships with Black youth. Librarians should also look for opportunities to serve in leadership roles so they can more effectively advocate for and with Black youth and their families.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a rich and complex framework, and we've only scratched the surface of it here. For more information about CRP, check out the annotated bibliography included with these lessons.

In our next segment, we will discuss racial identity development and what it means for librarians working with Black youth.

## References:

Boykin, Alfred W. "The Triple Quandary and the Schooling of Afro-American Children. In *The School Achievement of Minority Children: New Perspectives*, edited by Ulric Neisser, 57-92. Erlbaum, 1986.

Boykin, Alfred W. "Harvesting Talent and Culture: African-American Children and Education Reform. In *Schools and Students at Risk: Context and Framework for Positive Change*, edited by R. J. Rossi, 116-138. Teachers College Press, 1994.

Gay, Geneva. *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. Teachers College Press, 2000.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teaching of African American Children*, 2d ed. Jossey Bass, 2009.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32 (1995): 465-91.

Activities

## Further Learning about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

### Context:

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is "teaching that empowers students by valuing and incorporating elements of their cultures in the classroom." The dominant culture of a classroom shapes the lived experience of students. With expectations and emphases that may be different from the home, family, and cultural lives of students of color, students' performance or a teacher's understanding of their motivation can be negatively affected. The following qualities characterize CRP, it is:

- validating,
- comprehensive,

- multidimensional,
- empowering and transformative, and
- emancipatory.

Librarians can enact the dynamic approach that is reflective of CRP through programming, instruction, interactions with students, and opportunities for students to consume and create culture.

**Instructions:**

As recommended in this lesson, read about the suggested resources in the Annotated Bibliography. Select a resource, or a few, to read and share with a colleague, possibly to learn more deeply about a topic you identified in the exercise from Lesson 1. A few resources are available online and others can be borrowed from the public library.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Annotated Bibliography.](#)

MLA CITATION

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