Reclaiming Sociopolitical Critique Within Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings articulated a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to develop students who can achieve academically, who demonstrate cultural competence, and who can understand and critique the existing social order. In the almost two decades since Ladson-Billings (1995) outlined her theory, many educators have misinterpreted, diluted, and turned CRP into a tool for assimilation rather than politicization.

In what follows, I argue that educators have largely misinterpreted and have a limited interpretation of CRP. I often hear teachers and teacher educators throwing the term around loosely, as if CRP has come to mean any attempt at repackaging/cloaking the colonial curriculum in more digestible, “multicultural” terms. However, I suggest we replace the co-opted version of CRP with the original anti-assimilationist, robust version that demands we help students “to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities” and whose teachers are “not reluctant to identify political underpinnings of the students’ community and social world” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 476-477). I offer examples of teachers who did in fact make their teaching culturally relevant.

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Dear Educators,

Below is a description of life at school on a typical day from the perspective of a student for whom the curriculum is designed. Curriculum is often thought of as lessons plans, a scope and sequence, scripted programs of study, standards, materials, or resources. Curriculum includes all those facets and far more that spans the explicit to the implicit, as reflected in the story below:

I arrive at school and cross the threshold. As I make my way to class through the hallways, I am treated as if I know and understand how to be free. I am trusted to walk freely and purposefully. I am neither silent nor silenced. I am neither still nor restrained. En route, images, sounds, and words filter through my consciousness. The pictures on the walls are all people who look like me. The people around me, workers, administrators, volunteers, classmates, and teachers look and sound like me. They affirm who I am and my potential. I am worthy. I am welcome. I am valued.

I arrive to my class. When class begins, again I am reminded of how great my people are and always have been throughout the ages. As founders of nations; makers of laws; builders of dreams; and pioneers of innovation, they are important people who did significant things. I recognize that my people participate in the whole spectrum of life and society: Leaders, followers, providers, healers, educators, artists, nurturers, warriors, workers—very hard workers, all for the greater good and advancement of society. My people construct(ed) the sacred and work(ed) to rid the world of the profane.

Despite the fact that not all of my people have the same beliefs, values, histories, or experiences, we are unified under a single identity, a unique destiny that sets us apart; and we benefit from the sum total of our individual efforts. Some of us took unfortunate turns here and there, but they were anomalies; minor exceptions to the general rule of our greatness, fortitude, ethics, and morality. Violence for the righteous is justified. My ancestors fought for freedom from tyranny and injustice; the result of which I am beholding and honored. We always win. And if we lose, we still win.

I learn the fullness of what it means to be an excellent human being. I am fortified by community expectations and societal aspirations. I am never truly alone in the success I experience. The totality of my awesome reality follows me through all my subjects of the day. I not only read about it, I hear it, and I see it. I breathe it. I live it. I find out that we will be taking field trips to places where I can even touch, smell, and revel in the wake of success of which I am a part. I use this reality to extend beyond my immediate sphere of knowledge. I grow. I thrive.

My opportunities to learn are unrestricted. Consequently, mistakes are rewarded as chances to grow, foster reason, and develop resilience. People around me manage my learning in relevant ways, so they do not have to manage me. When my learning is evaluated, expectations are high and I have been so well scaffolded for success that I barely even know that it’s happened. Questions assessing my knowledge do just that. They are tailor-made for my frames of reference and what I know to be real, true, meaningful, and authentic. Whatever I do not understand is not automatically assumed to be a fault all my own. Who I am, where I’m from, how I speak, how I dress, who my family is, and how I learn is an asset, not a liability. None of them are reasons I will not achieve my own greatness. In fact, the challenge only becomes more earnest to ensure that I never doubt I am capable.

At the close of the day, I have learned: It’s good to be me. It’s good to be one of my people. School is a good place to be.

The student’s experience above is neither fictitious, nor hypothetical. It reflects the actual curriculum in our public schools. The question is who gets to experience such an affirming and victorious curriculum? When we view curriculum in its expanded definition through the lens of culturally relevant teaching or culturally responsive pedagogy, we must recognize that everyone comes from a mighty story; a story neither about perfection or abject failure but encompasses the wonder of the complexity of human experiences. However, most students never have the opportunity to experience the mighty stories of their own culture(s) and those of others who are integral not tangential to the grand narrative presented in schools. Why would we not want a more full story for all?

To accomplish this type of curriculum, we must be attentive to and persistent in our application of sociopolitical critique. Sociopolitical critique expects students to question the grand narrative embedded in curriculum as everyone’s narrative and advocate for amplifying narratives of their own that reflect their mighty stories in which they are worthy, welcome, and valued. This effort is not just for a day, week or month but standard within curriculum implementation. We have crafted a consistent culturally relevant curriculum for some students but why would we not ensure this relevance for all?

~Vera Stenhouse
A recent conference presentation by Joyce E. King provided a stark and provocative reminder of the power of language in shaping cultural identity and academic excellence. King shared:

Excellence must prepare students for self-knowledge and to become a contributing problem-solving member of their own community and in the wider world. Children cannot be ignorant of or lack respect for their own unique cultural group and meet others in the world on an equal footing.

King had much to say about cultural and academic excellence; however, for now let us focus on the power of language. More often than not, when discussing culturally relevant pedagogy, references are made to meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students usually in the form of utilizing their culture and language to foster academic success. While understandable and warranted, there is yet even more to consider. What King reminds us is that how we speak is equally important as what we say, both of which have an effect on our ability to be fully human. Focusing on concepts related to Blackness and whiteness, illustrates this point. Specifically, King offered the following examples:

- Black Sheep
- Black Listed
- Black Balled
- Black Mail
- Black-hearted
- Black Devil
- Black and Evil
- Devil’s Food cake

In U.S. English, these terms are negative and disparaging. On the other hand, whiteness is associated with terms that are positive, wholesome, and good, such as:

- White as snow
- White is pure
- Little “white lie”
- Angel food cake (White)
- “That’s very white of you.”
- Is God white?

Robert B. Moore underscores King’s point regarding the significance of language and culture:

An integral part of any culture is its language. Language not only develops in conjunction with a society’s historical, economic, and political evolution; it also reflects that society’s attitudes and thinking. Language not only expresses ideas and concepts but actually shapes thought. (Moore, 1976/1979, p.5)

The ability of language to shape thought is critical to acknowledge, particularly when this reality is evident in the ways that Blackness and Whiteness is positioned through the ways we talk about ourselves and others. Language that discloses our perceptions, biases, and prejudices emerge in “discourses of Blackness”, as it reflects on the education of Black peoples. For example, King highlights the statement and responses to: Black children don’t learn because:

- “Their mothers don’t talk to them right.”
- “They have no culture.”
- “They don’t appreciate Bach and Beethoven.”
- “Their parents don’t value education.”
- “They don’t have bedtime stories.”

How do you think such talk would affect you after a lifetime? Such sentiments convey a message, shape beliefs, and establish a value system in direct opposition to cultural and academic excellence. After generations of hearing ways that undermine your identity as whole, human, and worthy, cultural and academic excellence becomes elusive and unexpected. What difference would it make in the educational and social success of children if the language that describes who they are and who their people are is anchored in a different sea of discourse? Consider King’s example of the Songhoy language of Mali, in West Africa as a case in point:

- Hari Bibi: BLACK WATER
- Wayne Bibi: BLACK SUN
- Labu Bibi: BLACK EARTH
- Ir Koy: OUR GOD, GOD IN US

The blackest water, is the most refreshing and pure; the blackest sun—at its highest point during the day when it is most intense and strong; the blackest earth is the most rich and fertile; and recognizing God in oneself as reflected in one’s Blackness is sacrosanct. After generations of hearing ways that fortify and advance your identity as whole, human, and worthy, cultural and academic excellence becomes embodied and an ingrained expectation. King and Goodwin (2004) state that:

the indigenous African worldview is embedded in African language, which is the key needed to unlock the stranglehold of external interpretations of African people’s history and culture.

In asking King specifically, “why language matters to our collective humanity,” she replied:

The language we use is a conduit for abducting or building up a human being, which is why it is crucial to understand that in order to become a contributing problem-solving member of one’s own community and in the wider world, self-knowledge and respect for one’s own unique cultural group allows us to meet others in the world on equal footing. Consequently, until the language of cultural and academic excellence is (re) claimed for all people, our individual and collective humanity remains partial and in jeopardy.

As King’s presentation modeled, it is essential to understand, as Hilliard and Sizemore (1984) observed: cultural excellence and academic excellence are not mutually exclusive. In fact, both are foundational to being and staying human.

References


For Further Reading


*This article was written by Joyce E. King with Vera Stenhouse, member of the GA NAME Leadership Team and editor of GA NAME’s newsletter, What’s the IDEA? Learn more about Joyce E. King in our Accolades section on page 18.
Moving Beyond Culturally Assimilationist Pedagogy
by Scott Ritchie

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Even under the conditions of the current testing regime, many teachers are enacting culturally relevant pedagogies that not only encourage academic success and cultural competence but also engage students in sociopolitical analyses so they may take meaningful action for social change in their communities.

Even under the conditions of the current testing regime, many teachers are enacting culturally relevant pedagogies that not only encourage academic success and cultural competence but also engage students in sociopolitical analyses so they may take meaningful action for social change in their communities.

Elementary teacher Mark Hansen in Portland, Oregon, used concerns of his students and local community members as the basis for his curriculum and pedagogy. When Mark found out that the historic African American housing project where his students lived—the Columbia Villa, Oregon's oldest and largest public housing site—would be razed and gentrified, he and his students turned it into an opportunity for inquiry and action. They learned about how historically, while built as a community for WWII shipyard workers, the economic and racial segregation of the community had led to drugs and gang violence, leading others to call its residents “Villa rats,” a humiliating name that the children disliked. In spite of these changes over time, this was the community students called home, and they did not want to lose it. Mark’s class read children’s literature about preserving community structures, interviewed parents and community members about their concerns, drew maps memorializing features of the community they wanted to protect, and wrote persuasive essays to government officials. Starting with where the students were and bridging to the formal curriculum, Mark engaged children in authentic and meaningful instruction that sustained cultural values and gave children a sense of efficacy to effect change. While the community was in fact razed and rebuilt as a mixed-income area, many neighborhood aspects that the students identified were preserved.

Jennifer Aaron’s elementary students in New York City’s Hamilton Heights neighborhood took action to improve their community, as well. This diverse group of immigrant children from multiple countries spanning five continents interviewed their parents and family members about issues or concerns in their neighborhood and ways they might confront those problems. The class took walks to inventory issues in the area surrounding the school and identified lack of green space, graffiti, litter, air quality, water quality, and uncurbed dogs as concerns they wanted to address, recognizing that all New York neighborhoods did not face these issues. They wrote letters to the parks department, sanitation department, and housing authority expressing their concerns, invited guest speakers to the classroom, and interviewed people from different organizations to determine the most appropriate way to take action. The class decided to engage in urban community gardening: they raised money and teamed up with a local community organization to learn about sustainable agriculture and take action that would beautify their neighborhood, add green space, and produce healthy food.

Middle school teacher Lisa Espinosa in Chicago recognized the undue influence of media depictions of people of color on her Latin@* students when she showed the documentary film Ethnic Notions to her class, and instead of critiquing caricatures and stereotypes of African Americans, her students laughed at them. She decided to raise their sociopolitical awareness of the connections between oppressed groups by developing an interdisciplinary unit on representations: how Native Americans, African Americans, and Latin@s have been represented in history books, the media, and society. Lisa’s students read books, critiqued photographs, and examined audio recordings and films presented both from outsider and insider perspectives.

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* The @ symbol is currently being used instead of Latino/a to represent both “Latino” and “Latina” (the masculine and the feminine forms of the word).
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They came to recognize that the dominant representations of minoritized groups offered a limited perspective, and that counterstorytelling through self-representation could serve as an antidote to deficit discourses and media images. Lisa taught her students photography skills and raised money to provide each student with a disposable camera for documenting the funds of knowledge of their South Side Pilsen community. Collaborating with a local coffee shop, Lisa arranged a photography exhibit to showcase students’ pictures and photo essays so the public could see students’ self-representations of their community.

These teachers position their students’ lives and communities as a starting place for their teaching rather than solely relying on one-size-fits-all curriculum standards or myopic textbooks. They challenge the epistemological foundations of teaching and learning (Tippins & Ritchie, 2006) by viewing students as active co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients (Freire, 1970/2005). But perhaps most importantly, they address the missing piece of culturally relevant pedagogy—a critique of the existing social order—so that students may see the need to effect meaningful, culturally sustaining change (Paris, 2012) that transforms their world to make it more equitable, inclusive, and just.

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New Teacher’s Survival Kit
By Crystal Alexander

It’s good to know that a box of Kleenex can save you a gazillion trips to the restroom.
Sweeping is fun, and some kids really just like brooms.
Sub days can be rough, and you gotta move a clip or two.
Cell phones are “hip”,
and “hip” is no longer cool.
“We have better things to do,
than to be at school.
Don’t we?”

Call kids by groups, let’s not all run at once--
Let them draw, because,
they’ve been told not to--
since age two,
and it’s fun.

PowerPoints are boring, overdone, misused--
Prezis aren’t any better, but an interactive flipchart might do.
We can type, we can Skype-- born digital natives,
don’t you hate it--
when you can’t work that DocCam?
Yeah, I’ve tried ten times, too.

Centers are fun, seatwork is boring,
but sometimes they really do just wanna do worksheets.
As long as you don’t forget,
to let them create something neat
along the way.

The year goes on, and as you know,
Parent Conferences are the best.
And when Jump Rope for Heart comes along,
and you send the kids who paid, don’t punish the rest.
Not every family has five dollars, even if it’s only five.

Remember, teaching isn’t about staying alive.
It’s not a day-to-day struggle to quiet a classroom,
because learning can be loud.
And, one day, those rowdy students will make you very proud.

Come inside and look at their faces, at each and every one of their eyes--
Some might roll, and some might sigh,
but that’s not what they’re saying, on the inside.
“Don’t give up on me--
Not now. Not yet.
Don’t just sit at your desk, before my dreams are ever dead.”

Crystal Alexander is a Early Childhood preservice teacher at the University of West Georgia preparing to be a middle school reading and language arts teacher.
A REAL TEACHER

From the time I was a young adult, I thought school was not for me. The early years from first to eighth grade I went to parochial school where corporal punishment was legal and administered without a second thought. High school was messy. All the teenage growing pains, an abusive home life and the freedom of finally going to a public school made for a pretty mixed up time in my life.

Absenteeism was my middle name and before long I completely dropped out of high school. I had convinced myself that academics was lame and I was better with my hands than my head. Before completely dropping out, I attended Brooklyn Automotive High School in New York. My grades seemed to confirm my thoughts about myself. Morning academic classes were very difficult. I couldn’t seem to focus. But, in the afternoon shop classes, I was fine. In fact, I loved every minute. Taking cars apart and putting them back together I enjoyed. Before long, however, I completely dropped out and ran the streets hanging out with my hoodlum friends.

After realizing how difficult it was to find a job without a high school diploma, I went to the local vocational high school with the hope of getting by Graduate Education Degree (G.E.D.). After taking the entrance exam to find out my strengths and weaknesses, I was told my scores were high enough to take the actual test. And, to my surprise, I passed.

Academically, college was no different than high school. As a student, I tried but couldn’t stay focused coupled with too much drama in my life, and after the first year, I dropped out.

Now fast forward over a decade later, I was married with three children and suffering the devastation of losing my sight. What would I do now? I was blind, no light, no images, nothing. And then hope. Along came some intense training and the acknowledgement of all my other senses. And, I could still use my hands, so I was really excited when I heard I could get a job in a workshop operating a sewing machine. When I was young, my mother showed me how to sew on her machine and since it was mechanical, I learned how to use it. After a few years in the workshop, the job became quite boring. There simply was no challenge and I became restless. It was then I heard about massage therapy. I became interested but there was only one problem: I had to go to school again. I had not been in an academic classroom for almost twenty years.

After much encouragement from my visually impaired friends, and one in particular, Ehab, I went to an open house at the Atlanta School of Massage. Ehab was a blind massage therapist who had attended the school, made a name for himself, and had become quite successful. I felt it was worth a try.

From the moment I stepped inside the school during open house, something felt different. For the first time since I lost my sight, no one was telling me what I could not do because I was blind. The instructors embraced me totally. I was pumped. For the first time I could remember, teachers were paying attention to me. It was also clear to me that becoming a therapist would not be easy and the certification required a lot of anatomy and physiology. I knew right away that all the days and nights I spent in the gym were not going to help me now. Nevertheless, I was determined. And, I met her—my Anatomy and Physiology teacher who was also the dean of students. She was a snappy talking woman who seemed to know every student and everyone went to her with whatever it was they needed. This was a real teacher. I became her eleventh blind student.

For the next year she taught and tested me on every bone, muscle, and system in the entire human body. Many nights, when my transportation was late, she stood outside with me and we would talk about our children, life, and where I wanted to go in this profession. For the first time in my life, I really wanted this education and she really wanted me to have it. I would listen to her lectures over and over again via a tape player. Whenever we were in class she would use me to illustrate different anatomical structures. I was her model prop, and she used me as a tool to teach myself and others. If I spoke out the wrong answer during class, I could feel her look at me as if I should have known better. I heard her speak with pride when she told stories of other students in her past and I wanted to be someone she was proud of. She never doubted me once.

When I was not in her class, she would stick her head in the door of my other classes and remind that teacher that I was there and not to let me get lost in the material. The best part was, they didn’t need to be reminded. It seemed like the whole school including almost all of my 22 classmates embraced me. I went to lunch with them, study groups, Saturday classes, and community events.

I found out years after graduation that she would challenge her new students by telling them about me and because of my success she would not accept any excuses for anyone not doing well. I was glad to have become a student that she talked about with pride.

In retrospect, I learned that real teachers believe in their students even when students don’t believe in themselves. Even more so, when leadership believes, then everyone believes.

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Community Organization Spotlight

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)* www.splcenter.org/ is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. Using litigation, education and other forms of advocacy, SPLC works toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality. The SPLC is internationally known for tracking and exposing the activities of hate groups. Areas of focus include: Children at Risk; Hate and Extremism; Immigration justice; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Rights.

The SPLC was founded to ensure that the promises of the civil rights movement became a reality for all. Since our founding by civil rights lawyers Morris Dees and Joseph Levin Jr. in 1971, SPLC has won numerous landmark legal victories on behalf of the exploited, the powerless and the forgotten. SPLC is based in Montgomery, Ala., the birthplace of the modern civil rights movement, and has offices in Atlanta, Georgia, New Orleans, Louisiana, Miami, Florida, and Jackson, Mississippi.

SPLC employs a three-pronged strategy to battle racial and social injustice:

- SPLC tracks the activities of hate groups and domestic terrorists across America, and launches innovative lawsuits that seek to destroy networks of radical extremists.
- SPLC uses the courts and other forms of advocacy to win systemic reforms on behalf of victims of bigotry and discrimination.
- SPLC provides educators with free resources that teach school children to reject hate, embrace diversity and respect differences.

SPLC’s innovative Teaching Tolerance* program produces and distributes – free of charge – documentary films, books, lesson plans and other materials that promote tolerance and respect in U. S. schools. This program reduces prejudice, improves intergroup relations and supports equitable school experiences for U. S. children. Resources include a magazine, film kits, publications, and professional development.

Go to http://www.tolerance.org/ to access free printer-friendly versions of resources.

Mr. Darnell Fine

Darnell Fine is a middle school humanities teacher at Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School (ANCS) in Atlanta. Darnell was recently honored with a prestigious award, the Culturally Responsive Educator Award from Teaching Tolerance. We asked Mr. Fine to reflect on his educational history and his philosophy about being a culturally responsive educator.

Mr. Fine’s Educational Autobiography

I attended Avondale High School (AHS), a school closed in 2011 as part of an effort to save the Dekalb County district 12 million dollars. AHS is the school where I learned to be a critical thinker. English teachers like Ms. Aziz and Ms. Woods (still educators in Atlanta) taught me to examine and question the world around. I did catch a lot of flack from Administration for writing editorials in the newspaper about racism in Avondale Estates and our school’s ridiculous “Dress for Success” policy.

Anyway, with the help and support of my teachers, I was accepted into Brown University. While attending Brown University, I was an active member of WORD!, a performance poetry group created to provide a space for marginalized voices to express their experiences. I also worked at the Third World Center at Brown, a place that cultivated my political ideology with readings by Frantz Fanon and other “radical” thinkers. I received my BA in Africana Studies with a “minor” in Undergraduate Teacher Education Program (UTEP)/History.

My first experience on the other side of education was in Georgia at Breakthrough Atlanta (a sort of summer enrichment program for youth from low-income backgrounds). I served as Dean of Students. Following this experience, I taught in other institutions as an extension of my teaching practicum, but didn’t enter into the classroom full-time until 2008.

My first actual teaching job began at Atlanta Charter Middle School. I began as a Social Studies teacher. Then, a merger happened and our school philosophy started to shift, and I became a Humanities teacher at Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School.

What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?

Culturally responsive pedagogy means building on the knowledge students bring from home. At the heart of culturally responsive pedagogy is the practice of teaching students to have an affective connection to what they are learning. This means a culturally responsive pedagogy is constructivist in nature. Culturally responsive pedagogy is the move away from skill-drill work-sheets used to memorize facts for tests. Instead, students learn by creating, becoming active in the learning process, and utilizing their strengths and the skills they bring from home. As such, a culturally responsive pedagogy must emphasize meaningful connections to real-life contexts and push students to use the knowledge they learn in class. Culturally responsive pedagogy creates authentic learning activities that encourage students to bridge their learning with their out-of-school experiences.

What does culturally responsive pedagogy look like in action, in your classroom specifically?

My teachers would probably view my classroom as “chaotic,” but my students are never listless. In my classroom, students excel in instructional activities catered to their learning styles and are engaged by a curriculum relevant to their own real-life experiences. During our Christopher Columbus trial, one class of 6th graders critiqued conquest and colonization in Latin America. Students related their own experiences with racism in Atlanta to the Spaniards’ treatment of the Tainos, building an affective connection to what we were learning. During an analysis of Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” my 7th graders constructed their knowledge by writing protest letters in the hallway, videotaping Socratic seminars outside, and drawing artistic representations of their knowledge.

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plex topics and ideas. I teach my students skills so that they can make a difference in their own lives as well as others. I challenge them to become critical thinkers that question and construct their own forms of knowledge in order to create a more just and democratic society, not to predicate “success” on A’s and B’s or whether a standardized test deems them worthy of moving on to the next grade level. In whatever capability I embark on, whether it’s developing close relationships with families, working on committees, or promoting student learning beyond the confines of school, I seek to establish a level of trust and respect for my students and the worlds they come from.

In my own class, students are grouped heterogeneously, so they can enrich and support each other by sharing their diverse funds of knowledge. With cooperative learning groups, each student is assigned a role and each student is affirmed for the role that they play in the group, be it facilitator, writer, speaker or timekeeper. More importantly, each student’s opinions are valued and shared.

I always start the year by establishing a “culture of kindness.” I promote my classroom as a safe space, placing a premium on kindness and emotional sensitivity. At the end of each class, students recognize other students who perform acts of kindness. With a culture of kindness and mutual respect in place, I am able to learn about my students’ lived experiences as they construct new understandings of the worlds they navigate.

This mainly happens during “Open Forum,” where students are free to express their interests and beliefs. I dedicate the last 15 minutes of class on Thursdays for students to express their individual, distinct personalities by dancing, singing, sharing stories, or reading their original works. One student’s Open Forum topic regarding 1980’s hip hop extended to him spray painting the back of my classroom with graffiti. Not only does my class’s culture of kindness and Open Forum promote a learning environment that reaffirms diversity and community, but such activities also allow me to reconnect with my students in a variety of ways.

My classroom isn’t inundated with propaganda about achieving high standardized test scores and getting grades. Neither of these things promotes critical thinking or challenges students to question the world in a dialogical encounter with others. They do not push students to construct their own knowledge and interpretations of the world. In my classroom, culturally responsive pedagogy can be seen when my students read a novel and ask, “Whose story isn’t being told?” Or when my students wonder, “How does this relate to me as a global citizen?” Success is measured by my students’ application of what they learned to real-life contexts. Or when students produce exhibitions or larger-projects synthesizing their knowledge of com-

Check out a video of Mr. Fine’s classroom and learn more about his Teaching Tolerance Award at www.tolerance.org/ttawards-2012.
Citizenship education is essential to the preservation of democracy because it helps young Americans realize their roles as future citizens. Democracy’s survival depends upon our transmitting the political vision of liberty and equality that unites Americans to each new generation. For Black, Latino and low-income Americans, participating in America’s democracy has always been contingent upon access to quality education. The continuation of unequal education has led, not only to an “achievement gap” but also to a “civic empowerment gap”. The civic empowerment gap acknowledges the difference in civic participation among racial and class groups. Black, Latino and low-socioeconomic status students are less likely to receive quality citizenship instruction due to high-attendance in low-performing schools, tracking in lower-level social studies classes (Kahne & Sporte, 2008), schools’ emphasis on reading and mathematics (Grant, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008), or likelihood of dropping out before citizenship instruction is available (Conklin, 2011; Dejaeghere, 2009).

Not only do Black American, Hispanic, and low income students need more citizenship education; they require a culturally relevant citizenship education (Hess, 2008; Irvine 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). The following are suggestions for ways that teachers of all subjects can use culturally responsive pedagogy to close the civic participation gap:

1. Teaching history critically: Culturally relevant citizenship education seeks to create a counter narrative for Black American students. Teachers can teach history in a culturally relevant fashion by teaching history from an Afro-centric or Feminist lens instead of teaching from the Eurocentric lens reflected in most textbooks. Inquiry lessons are important tools for teachers to allow students to construct their own ideas about history without the teacher forcing a dominant discourse as singular or absolute.

1. Increasing classroom discussion of controversial issues: Students need the opportunity to discuss their experiences as they relate to controversial topics. Controversial issues are authentic and contemporary, they help students think about “what we should do” instead of what is happening, they deal with a specific issue that can possibly end or be solved, they are issues that affect the public at large, and they are not fundamentally constitutional issues (Hess, 2009). Some relevant controver-

drial topics impacting Black and Latino youth might include the Trayvon Martin case and “Stand your ground laws”, voter identification and Black and Latino enfranchisement, Arizona’s book bans, or access to birth control and women’s reproductive rights.

2. Encouraging Participatory Writing: Participatory writing is defined as the unpaid writing that citizens do as a part of the process of self-government (Stotsky, 1999). Participatory writing is varied, and includes formal speeches, petitions, memos, agendas, and newsletters for political or civic groups. Civic writing can also be informal such as letters to friends, Facebook posts, blogs, or letters to neighbors supporting or opposing candidates for public office. Teachers can teach civic writing by presenting students with letters and asking them to critique those letters for honesty, accuracy, courtesy and concern for the common good. Then, teachers could allow students to begin their own civic writing by sending letters about important issues to public officials.

1. Emphasizing everyday people as agents of social change and the importance of Imagination: Parker (2003) discusses the importance of imagination in social movements and references imagination as essential in social change movements. In the 1950s the reality for most Black Americans was of a long future of legalized inferior treatment. However, their ability to imagine the possibility that “little Black boys and Black girls joining hands with little White boys and White girls as sisters and brothers” moved them to act. Students should know that the current reality of America does not have to be its future.
Closing the Civic Empowerment Gap for Black and Latino youth through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

By Adrianne Pinkney continued

Bibliography


Adrianne Pinkney is a doctoral student at Emory University. Adrianne is interested in researching how minoritized and low-income youth are prepared to assume their roles as active citizens.
Soon after South Africa’s first open and fully democratic election in 1994, Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared South Africa a “Rainbow Nation”. This metaphor was used to reflect the country’s newfound regard for its heritage of cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity. Since then the process of school desegregation has resulted in dramatic changes in student diversity in majority of the five provinces. Recent data reveals that many formerly all white schools in South Africa have higher percentages of students of color, especially African students (Chisholm & Sujee, 2006).

In spite of this progress, however, attention must be called to the differences between desegregation and integration. Legal desegregation, in this case, is merely a school composition initiative with an extant possibility (and likelihood) for re-segregation. School integration is the rejection of a monocultural framework, an authentic regard for multiculturalism and anti-racism, and a commitment to be culturally responsive to all students for their benefit.

In the case of South Africa, to what extent do culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse students feel “at-home” in the curriculum of desegregated, post-apartheid schools? How is culturally responsive pedagogy framed within the current context of South Africa? Critics of the national curriculum, Curriculum 2005/Outcomes Based Education, find fault in the Eurocentric body of general knowledge that the curriculum outlines (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). In addition, the curriculum privileges the rhetoric of teacher autonomy but fails to provide teacher’s with sufficient resources, including curricular materials like textbooks, to carry out their work (De Waal, 2004). These problems are subsumed under much larger issues; namely, the limited numbers of teachers of color and the “add-on” approach to the preparation of all teachers for diversity, are major impediments to integration.

Carrim and Soudien (1999) report that the South African teachers in their study made little if any significant adjustments to their curriculums or teaching to address the needs of their diverse students. Their understanding of cultural responsiveness tended to mirror an “add-on” and “food, festivals, and fun” approach. Ball (2000) found, however, that South African teachers could begin to identify as culturally responsive teachers if they “actively engage in social processes” (p. 507) within equity and social justice-based teacher education courses.

Teachers matter to the future of South Africa. Given teachers importance to the continued development of the young democracy, South African teachers are surely worthy of investment. Like the U.S., South Africa must make the necessary steps to deliver on its promise to re-dress past inequalities. Helping teachers develop the tools necessary to reach diverse groups of students must become a top priority.

References


Morgan Faison is a doctoral student in the Division of Educational Studies at Emory University. She is passionate about supporting classroom teachers as they learn more about issues of social justice in education.
Drugs
By Skylynn J.

You have ruined my life!
You have taken something that was supposed to be mine!
Being sold on every corner, you're such an easy access.
It's so much easier to find something bad with no quality
then to find something good and classy.
You take addiction to a whole new meaning,
not caring about anyone's children, family, or feelings.
   Conceited, only thinking about yourself,
       a serial killer that can't go to jail.
   You turn good looks just straight ugly,
       and ruin lives with a little bit of money.

You can never be wiped out.
   You're just invincible!
First used as a medicine to heal the sick,
   but now all you do is make me sick.
With hundreds of patients in your waiting room a day,
   hundreds of lives thrown away.
Making women sell themselves on corners.
   Making men turn their lives over.
Little kids, being exposed to this kind of life,
   showing them they cant do anything right.
Trying to make sense of this hopeless cause,
   trying to understand where their families gone.

But me? Oh no!
   I will never be one of your victims,
and the hard way is how I learned that lesson.
   I have better things to do with my life.
       Me? I'm going somewhere.

But I just have one request for you before I go.
   Can you leave my dad alone?
Ronald is his name, you should be familiar with him.
You and alcohol put together can make him do some crazy things!

That's the reason why I can't see him,
   and he can't see me.

I HATE YOU!
Because you took what was supposed to be my spot in his life!
   He loved you more than he loved me,
       his own daughter.
   But that's ok, cause I see
       you don't care about me.

And even though I know you won't,
can you and your little friend alcohol just go and die?
Because I just wanted to be the one he loves.
But I don't even know how to compete with you,
       Drugs....
HB 244
Teacher and Leader Evaluation Bill

HB 244 describes a new process for evaluating teachers, principals, and assistant principals to be implemented no later than the 2014-2015 school year. Instead of the current two categories for evaluation results (Unsatisfactory or Satisfactory), it establishes four categories (Ineffective, Needs Development, Proficient, Exemplary).

In addition, it will prioritize improvements in student achievement (value-added assessment) rather than whether individual students are meeting a set grade-level standard. The Professional Standards Commission (PSC) may release this data only if they keep private the identification of the individual educators. Teachers will not receive credit on the salary scale if they receive an Unsatisfactory or Ineffective score in one year or for the second year in which they receive a Needs Development rating. Educators evaluated as Unsatisfactory, Ineffective and/or Needs Development at least twice during a five year period will have to meet with the Professional Standards Commission and will not be allowed to renew their teaching certificate until they have addressed all of the claimed deficiencies. The bill sets certain requirements for the weighting of different issues in the overall score, including 50% for required standardized tests. Each district will need to develop assessment methods for student achievement in courses in subjects like history and science that do not presently involve state or national standardized tests; these new tests will need to be approved by the Department of Education.

HB 244 also sets new requirements for multiple classroom observations by trained evaluators, which will be followed by individual pre-evaluation, midyear, and summative evaluation conferences. Evaluated educators must have access to the observation reports within five working days and then have ten more working days to request an additional conference (an appeals process of sorts added thanks to lobbying by teachers). The results of these evaluations will be the primary basis for determining decisions such as dismissal, probation, rehiring, promotion, and placement. The Georgia Department of Education is still in the process of making a series of decisions that will affect the actual implementation of HB 244.

HB 380
Fulton County Schools Pension Board Bill

HB 380 gives the Fulton County School Board a number of ways to control the board of a pension plan to which some of the school employees belong, including by removing the right of pensioners to decide who should be on the Pension Fund Board. (It is relevant that the school district that does not allow their employees to participate in the Social Security program.)

Additional Education Bills

PASSED

HB 70: Special Needs Waiver Bill

HB 70 allows a local school board to waive, on a case-by-case basis, the requirement that students with severe medical needs attend a public school for a year before becoming eligible for a scholarship (voucher) to a private school.

HB 115: Revision of the Process for Suspending or Removing Members of Boards of Education

HB 115 allows the State Board of Education to deliberate in executive session when considering the fate of a local school board that received a negative report from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). It also prevents the use of public funds for litigation expenses in most cases of board member removal.

*These bills represent only a select group of the total education bills that were passed or did not pass during the 2013 legislative session.
**Additional Education Bills**

**PASSED**

**HB 283: Revisions to Title 20** (the basic law for public education)

HB 283 addresses many of the issues raised by testimony before the Governor’s Education Finance Commission over the past couple of years. Much of it involves “housecleaning,” such as replacing the name “vocational education” with “career, technical, and agriculture education” and updating in small ways the formulas for determining QBE payments, FTE counts, and the number of school counselors. Future charter school approvals will legally be an agreement between the petitioners, the local board of education, and the Georgia Board of Education. Children who attend a charter pre-school will receive preference for their application to attend the regular grades of that school. Some limits were placed on annual grants to charter systems. Schools no longer have to notify the DOE or state colleges and universities about the existence of openings for teachers. School districts must develop a technology plan to expand and pay for high speed bandwidth and training for it (to enable more online education). The Office of Student Achievement shall have the power to establish a nonprofit corporation to raise money for their activities, as long as they submit an annual report with the names of donors and the amounts of each contributions.

**SB 243: Private School Scholarship Tax Credit Bill** (added as an attachment to HB283)

An early version of this bill would have allowed thirty million more dollars in annual tax credits for donations funneled through non-profit Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs) to private school scholarships (vouchers) for students otherwise unable to afford the tuition. After much struggle between the House and Senate, the final version of SB 243 increases the cap from $51.5 million to $58 million and drops the requirement to grant a cost-of-living increase each year. Owners of interests in certain kinds of corporations may receive up to $10,000 in tax credits in exchange for annual donations to SSOs. The bill adds some new restrictions on the process, including forbidding donors from asking that the scholarship go to a particular student and requires that students must attend at least six weeks of a public school before they can be eligible for a voucher. An amendment to exempt religious schools from this regulation was eventually stopped. Because some SSOs probably have not distributed all of the money they were supposed to give to scholarships, the bill requires new forms of open records reporting.

**DID NOT PASS**

**HB 123: Parent and Teacher Empowerment Act (Parent Trigger Bill)**

HB 123 would have allowed parents to ask a school board to change the school their children attend once over 50% of the parents at that school have signed a petition. One version also would have allowed teachers to have a secret ballot on changes they would propose. The idea came from Parent Revolution, a California non-profit that sent two of their employees to Georgia to raise support for the bill. The Annenberg Foundation (http://annenberginstitute.org/pdf/ParentTriggerPolicyBrief.pdf) has put out a useful study of the issue, including possible alternatives that would avoid the problems of this bill.

**HB 327: Flexibility and Accountability Bill**

Rep. Brooks Coleman called HB 327 “the jewel in the crown” of the work done for almost two years by the Governor’s Education Finance Study Commission. He and other supporters plan to do all they can to ensure that some version of it passes next year. According to the bill, once the Department of Education (DOE) finishes its plan to establish standards for evaluating schools and districts on a scale of 1 to 100, these grades will be used to divide districts into three categories: Category III will be for all charter systems; Category II, for districts rated at 80 or above; and Category I, for those below 80. This is the accountability segment of the bill. The prizes for scoring 80 or above, as for becoming a charter school or a charter system, is to be allowed to ignore a number of the laws, regulations, and policies passed by the state legislature or the DOE. The four main “flexibility” prizes are freedom to ignore regulations about class size, certification of teachers, the amount of money paid to the teachers, and the number of hours and days of class time. The systems in Category I will have the right to work with the DOE to develop an improvement plan if they wish to improve so much that they will eventually end up in Category II and be rewarded with flexibility.
Defining Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)

You will notice that CRP includes other related terms:

- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
- Culturally Relevant Teaching
- Culturally Congruent Teaching
- Culturally Synchronized Teaching
- Culturally Mediated Teaching
- Culturally Relevant Critical Teacher Care (CRCTC) (Roberts, 2010)

Scholars, researchers, teachers and other educators (some of whom are listed in this resource section and throughout the newsletter) use the above terms interchangeably, or select a particular way of saying it for specific reasons. Each term has a deep history and purpose designed to counteract and expand the understanding of people’s experiences and address issues of hegemony. CRP is most commonly associated with the significance of culture in enhancing positive teaching and learning experiences towards achieving successful academic and social outcomes. Another essential aspect of CRP is developing an awareness of systems of injustice that effect educational outcomes. This awareness and call to action is referred to as developing critical consciousness, attending to sociopolitical contexts, or fostering agency that allows people to fully participate in society. CRP is relevant to curriculum, pedagogy, policies, procedures, and aesthetics. CRP is responsive to the myriad of human experiences in critical ways, not just select populations. CRP not only relates to efforts in the classroom, but also school, community, and society. CRP is not a series of strategies and activities but a manifestation of an educator’s thinking about self, knowledge, and community.

WEB SITES

The Teaching Diverse Students Initiative: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center - is a website dedicated to helping educators enhance the learning opportunities and the quality of teaching experienced by students of color. The Initiative has developed a suite of tools and myriad resources to enhance teacher effectiveness and student opportunities to learn. Interactive multimedia professional development resources led by prominent researchers in the field of Multicultural Education are offered http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/taxonomy_vtn/voc/1/o/1

Education.com and Learn NC (UNC School of Education)

Two websites that provide broad reference articles about the history, origins, and definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. http://www.education.com/reference/article/culturally-relevant-pedagogy/  
http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4474

BOOKS

THE seminal text in the field of culturally responsive pedagogy. An essential read which serves as an anchor text in helping us understand culturally responsive teaching, issues surrounding it, and the urgency with which its incorporation needs to take place.  
(Also see second edition (2010)) http://www.amazon.com/Culturally-Responsive-Teaching-Multicultural-Education/dp/0807750786/ref=pd_sim_b_1

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Clashes and Confrontations (2010) by Lisa Scherff & Karen Spector (Editors)

This book goes beyond where others on CRP tend to stop. The book takes a close look at the various contexts and assumptions that the authors believe once undergirded CRP, then, attempts to move the theory forward into the new millennium. These authors take the reader along with them as they reflect on their teaching journeys, admit that their CRP praxes were laden with blind spots, and show us how they have come to find deeper meaning and connection for students’ lived experiences—in both in-and-out of school contexts.  
http://www.amazon.com/Culturally-Relevant-Pedagogy-Clashes-Confrontations/dp/1607094207

Teaching with vision: Culturally responsive teaching in a standards-based classroom (2011) by Christine Sleeter and Catherine Cornbleth

This collection of stories features examples of teachers’ challenges and practices as they strive to maintain their vision for culturally responsive teaching within high stakes environments.

ARTICLES


THE foundational articles which initiated a closer examination of, and our current discussions about, culturally relevant pedagogy.

Examining Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy in a Preservice Social Studies Education Course by Paul G. Fitchett, Tehia V. Starker, & Beth Salyers

A recent study which suggests that a comprehensive culturally responsive, social methods course inspires efficacious attitudes toward teaching diverse learners and content. Urban Education (May 2012) vol. 47 no. 3 pp. 585-611

VIDEO

Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy by Teaching Tolerance

Education experts Jackie Jordan Irvine, Geneva Gay and Kris Gutierrez explain how to make culturally relevant pedagogy a reality in your classroom.  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGTvJluRaZ8
Accolades

Congratulations to Joyce E. King

*Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) 2013 Researcher of the Year

*Recently voted President-Elect of The American Educational Research Association (AERA), “the national interdisciplinary research association for approximately 25,000 scholars who undertake research in education. Founded in 1916, AERA aims to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good” (www.aera.net).

King holds the Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair of Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership; and is a professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University. Her prolific research and scholarship includes Editor of Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century. New York: Routledge/Washington, DC: AERA, 2005. Her research interests involve the role of cultural knowledge, curriculum change, and global education.

We are thankful for your wisdom, work, will, and enduring commitment to educational excellence.

Congratulations to Darnell Fine

Winner of the Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Every year, Teaching Tolerance hears from teachers who are going the extra mile to support students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These teachers deserve to be recognized—which is why we created the Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching.

[Taken directly from http://www.tolerance.org/ttawards-2012]

Learn more about Darnell Fine’s work, students, and commitment to Culturally Responsive Teaching on page 9, GA NAME’s Georgia Educator Spotlight feature.

Check out Alyssa Hadley Dunn’s latest book!

Teachers Without Borders? is the story of four Indian teachers who came to the United States in the face of tremendous personal and professional odds to teach in urban schools. Their experiences are brought to life in this groundbreaking empirical study through interviews with their principals, district representatives in charge of recruitment and orientation, recruitment agency personnel, and union representatives, as well as in-depth classroom observations and student commentary. This well-researched work raises an essential question: If international teachers face daily exploitation, a lack of personal and professional support, and a lack of pedagogical and cultural preparation, are they able to give urban students the high-quality multicultural education they need and deserve?

Book Features:
An engaging case study that tackles competing discourses about immigration, globalization, and teacher quality.
• The voices of international teachers highlighting the successes and challenges of their experience and comparisons to teachers in other cities across the country.
• An examination of the differences in student and teacher expectations and how these influence teaching and learning.

[Book description taken directly from Teachers College Press at http://store.tcpress.com/0807754110.shtml]
Submission Guidelines

Submit to

ganame2010@gmail.com Subject
line: Newsletter Submission

Your submission will be reviewed and considered for the newsletter and subject to editorial edits by Newsletter Team members. The content will be vetted by several factors including alignment with chapter/national mission, quality of the representation of ideas, language bias, and length.

Format

Submissions should follow the following format:

Include title of article, name of author(s), any affiliation(s), and contact information for lead contact person (email/phone)

Indicate section of newsletter for submission (See Sections for Submission.)

250-600 typewritten words (for written submissions)

12 point font (Times New Roman or Old Century Schoolbook)


Use of citations/References where appropriate (Include Reference list)

Prior permission must be secured for use of visual images.

Sections for Submissions

News Watch
Features commentary on current/timeless educational issues. Commentary must first include the various perspectives on the issues followed by the author's position and supporting argument.

Doing the Work:
Educator, Community, Research

Spotlight on educators/teaching, organization in the community, or researcher(s) doing critical work on matters related to education.

Visual Art

Visual commentary on educational issues in the form of graphic art/cartoons.

Additional Arts representation

Arts-based commentary offered through including but not limited to poetry, monologues, written music/lyrics, and so forth.

Book/Multimedia Reviews

Reviews of books, videos, film, plays, and other media that inform and supplement understanding of ideas, concepts, and issues. Reviews should connect practice and theory.

Resource Highlights

Detail resources for birth-5 and families, P-16+ educators, and students relevant to Multicultural Education

International/Global

Address issues in global/international education that affect local and national education trends in the U.S.

Content

Submissions should address the following considerations:

♦ Must speak to excellence and equity in education.

♦ May offer issues, concerns, or problems but must include solutions and problem solving ideas/initiatives or critical questions for further inquiry.

♦ Links to the genres of multicultural education within or across your content area/sphere of influence.

Upcoming Submission
Due Dates

June 15th
September 15th
December 15th
March 15th

Upcoming Themes:

♦ Mentors/Mentoring
♦ School-to-Prison Pipeline/Criminalization of Education/Youth
♦ Education Politics
♦ Student Perspectives on Education
Upcoming 2013 Events

Thursday April 18th, 2013 @7pm.
Author's discussion and book signing:
Teachers Without Borders? The Hidden Consequences of International Teachers in U.S. Schools
by Dr. Alyssa Hadley Dunn
@ Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History
101 Auburn Ave. NE. Atlanta, GA 30303
Authors’ and Writers’ Lounge, 3rd floor
Free and open to the public.
Free parking available in reserved spots. Additional paid parking available.
From 5 Points MARTA station, walk ~15 minutes or take #3 Auburn Ave, #16 Noble, or #10 Peachtree.

Friday April 19, 2013 @6:30 (Light reception @6pm)
Film screening and discussion:
Precious Knowledge (http://www.preciousknowledgefilm.com/)
@ Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History
101 Auburn Ave. NE. Atlanta, GA 30303
Auditorium, 4th floor
Free and open to the public.
Free parking available in reserved spots. Additional paid parking available.
From 5 Points MARTA station, walk ~15 minutes or take #3 Auburn Ave, #16 Noble, or #10 Peachtree.

Saturday April 20th, 2013 @8am-5pm
2013 Alonzo A. Crim Center’s Sources of Urban Educational Excellence Conference (http://education.gsu.edu/cuee/)
Theme: Wisdom, Work, Will: Advancing Educational Excellence
Keynote: Dr. Adrienne Dixson, Assistant Professor of Critical Race Theory and Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (http://education.illinois.edu/people/addixson)

Have an event you would like to add to our calendar? Email ganamecalendar@gmail.com with the information!

CALL FOR PROPOSALS DUE MAY 8TH
GO TO: www.nameorg.org for details

Announcing NAME’s 23rd Annual International Conference
Nov. 6-10, 2013
Oakland City Center Marriott,
Oakland CA

Conference Theme: Erasing the Shadows, Embracing the Light: Re/visioning Multicultural Education

In the light – no closets, no basements, no margins, no shadows – a vocal and activist-oriented majority, is demanding attention and justice. Our communities challenge those in power, calling on all to reconsider who belongs, whose voices count, how to engage in teaching and learning, and how to embrace a multicultural democratic society: Who are we? How did we get here? Where are we going? What constitutes “the public?” Today individuals and communities critique those systems of power that dismiss their rights and offer a vision and a powerful hope for the future. A better world, better schools, and better classrooms are possible.

Multicultural social justice-oriented educators and community activists foster diversity in education — in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and stewardship of schools and communities. We especially encourage the submission of proposals that explore creative and culturally responsive practices for multicultural education. Teachers and students are reframing the purposes of education to better serve the needs of students, families, caregivers, community activists, and advocates.