

*Since you decided to use culturally relevant pedagogy as a tool to inform your curriculum project. Here is an example of how you can write a theme for your chapter 2: Literature review focused on culturally relevant pedagogy. Notice there is a paragraph introducing the subsection of this theme, and then there is a paragraph for each subsection. You must also add a paragraph at the end to conclude and make a transition to the next theme.*

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

It is critical for California teachers to work well in multicultural classrooms.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) illustrates how teachers can use culturally relevant pedagogies to help students learn in engaging curriculum that reflects and validates their identities as well as connect them with the global community. Ladson-Billings describes three components of culturally relevant pedagogy as academic achievement, cultural competency and sociopolitical consciousness (2001).

#### **Academic Achievement**

(Rephrase what the Academic Achievement indicators are on page 60.)

#### **Cultural Competency**

(Rephrase the Cultural Competency indicators are on page 97-98.)

#### **Sociopolitical Consciousness**

(Rephrase the Sociopolitical Consciousness indicators are on page 120.)

(Add a conclusion paragraph that can transition to your next theme.)

for teachers is to help students choose academic achievement in the face of powerful and competing alternatives.

## Definitions of Achievement

Focusing on academic achievement means certain things for teachers and students. More specifically, in a classroom where the teacher focuses on academic achievement

- The teacher has clear goals for student learning and achievement.
- The majority of the class time is devoted to teaching and learning.
- The teacher (not only a standardized test) assesses student learning.
- The teacher can articulate individual student progress.
- The teacher is knowledgeable and skillful.

## The Hughes Cohort and Academic Achievement

In the next sections I describe the school setting and some instances where novice teachers from the Hughes TFD cohort demonstrate their commitment to the academic achievement of all students.

### The Hughes Setting

The members of the TFD cohort arrived at Langston Hughes Elementary School about a week before school began. They began their year at Hughes by attending the faculty-staff potluck at the principal's home. In a short time, the Hughes cohort

(2001)

Ladson-Billings, *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

began mingling with their new colleagues and mentors; early the next morning they began preparing to become teachers.

Langston Hughes School is located in a working-class community and serves about four hundred students in grades pre-K through 5. Most of the students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. The school has a growing English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program for its Latino and Hmong students. Although the Hughes community contains mostly modest, single-family homes, it also includes a housing project where many of the low-income students and students of color (African American, Latino, and Hmong) live.

A core of teachers at Hughes are committed to child-centered pedagogy. Their classrooms reflect a more "open" approach to teaching where children make lots of decisions about their learning; others teach in a more traditional way. Their teaching is more directive. However, this book is not about evaluating teaching styles. It is about understanding how novice teachers learn to be good teachers in classrooms serving diverse groups of students.

### Cohort Members' Assignments

Vanessa worked in a 3rd grade classroom with a cooperating teacher who had been at the school for several years. Her class of about twenty-three students had white, African American, and Latino students; one East Indian student spoke very little English. The classroom was fairly traditional, focusing on improving students' basic skills—reading, writing, and mathematics.

Tara worked in a 4th and 5th grade classroom with a cooperating teacher who was very interested in science. Each year she entered her students in a citywide science exploration. The cooperating teacher's style was student-centered; she encouraged

the students to create a democratic classroom. The class included African American and white students and was exceptional because only nine girls were in it. From the first day, Tara was faced with an energetic group of students who were ready to challenge her at every turn.

Robin worked in a 2nd and 3rd grade classroom. Her teacher gave her carte blanche in determining how she would work with the students. The cooperating teacher's style was rather open and student-centered. There were white, African American, and Hmong students in her class. Many of her students received special services such as ESL instruction and Chapter I or Title I reading and mathematics support.

Brenda began the year in a 1st grade classroom with about twenty-two students. The skills she had acquired while working with developmentally disabled adults stood her in good stead as she worked with children who were struggling to learn the alphabet and some of the rudiments of reading. After the first semester Brenda switched to working in two classrooms; she was in a kindergarten and 1st grade classroom in the mornings and co-taught with Robin in the afternoons.

Candy also changed classrooms at midyear. She began teaching in a 4th and 5th grade classroom in which eight students identified as "emotionally disturbed" were placed. Along with the cooperating teacher, a special education teacher spent most of her time in the classroom. After some prodding, Candy was convinced to work in a 1st and 2nd grade classroom where she was able to use many of her drama techniques. Both teachers Candy worked with had a more student-centered approach to teaching.

Marcy worked in a 4th and 5th grade classroom with a cooperating teacher who taught in a more traditional, teacher-centered way. However, the teacher worked to cultivate a strong sense of independence in his students. Although she was nervous about starting out with "older kids," Marcy quickly

became comfortable; her class included white, African American, Latino, and Hmong students.

Diana worked in a 2nd and 3rd grade classroom with a Latina cooperating teacher. The class was a mix of student- and teacher-centered instruction. Diana quickly became comfortable in the setting of white, African American, and Latino students.

Kyla worked in a 2nd and 3rd grade classroom with a cooperating teacher who had an outstanding reputation for her progressive approach to teaching. The class was made up of white, African American, Latino, and biracial students. Students in this class were expected to (and did) take responsibility for curriculum development and classroom management.

My own student teaching placements couldn't have been more different. The first placement was at a suburban school. The entire school population, the teachers, and administrator were white. The curriculum and teaching was scripted. The cooperating teacher handed me a list of what to teach, when to teach it, and urged me to watch her to see how to teach it. My "creative" ideas were nicely dismissed and everyone was bored to tears.

My second placement was in what would now be called the inner city. The students were lively and energetic. The teacher, Mrs. Reid, was indeed, a master teacher who urged me to use my imagination. "You've got to keep the kids' minds working so their bodies don't start!" It was her way of telling me that early adolescents needed to be intellectually engaged or I was going to have classroom management and discipline problems.

### Tying the Curriculum to Real Life

The Hughes TFD cohort had interesting ideas about how to support the academic achievement of the students in their classrooms. Candy argued that "using drama in the classroom

school. It was my firsthand experience with providing an education that capitalized on those things that students care deeply about. Dancing allowed Dennis to be himself and continue to learn. I wrote out the directions to the dances, and Dennis worked hard to learn to read the directions. It was the first interest he had shown in an academic task.

Helping students become culturally competent is not an easy task. First, it requires that teachers themselves be aware of their own culture and its role in their lives. Typically, white middle-class prospective teachers have little or no understanding of their own culture. Notions of whiteness are taken for granted. They rarely are interrogated.<sup>8</sup> But being white is not merely about biology. It is about choosing a system of privilege and power. The white ethnic students in my first teaching job called themselves Italian or Irish or Polish. Their working-class backgrounds made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to identify with whiteness. In our current society people with ethnic and cultural identities often find themselves choosing whiteness over those identities. Such a choice comes at a cost.

I gave a lecture at a local community college when a young man approached me at the end of the question-and-answer period and said, "You said a lot about Native American history and African American history and Asian American history, but what about white history—what about *my* history?"

I followed up with a question that seemed to startle the young man. "Are you white?" I asked. "Or do you have an ethnic or cultural heritage other than white?" He responded by saying, "I'm Irish." I then began to tell him about some of the aspects of Irish history—how the Irish were the first group the British exploited for slave labor in the Americas.<sup>9</sup> I told him about the intricate clan structure the Irish had developed that allowed them to hold

land in common and prevent exploitation. The young man knew nothing of this. I was not surprised. I suggested that he did not know his history because, somewhere along the line, his family may have chosen whiteness over all else. And when one chooses whiteness as a primary identity, one's ethnic and cultural history disappears. All he has left to signal his existence is something about a potato famine and St. Patrick's Day.

It would be simplistic and wrong to suggest that cultural and ethnic identities are fixed and discrete. Few Americans have a pure heritage or identity. But the customs and traditions we observe, the people with whom we associate, and the ideas we cultivate all shape our identities; in a society that places such priority on *racial* identity, we are naïve if we attempt to ignore race. Indeed, ignoring race may prove to be a dangerous decision for some.

Teachers who are prepared to help students become culturally competent are themselves culturally competent. They do not spend their time trying to be hip and cool and "down" with their students. They know enough about students' cultural and individual life circumstances to be able to communicate well with them. They understand the need to *study the students* because they believe there is something there worth learning. They know that students who have the academic and cultural wherewithal to succeed in school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to others; in a democracy this commitment to the public good is paramount.

### Indicators of Cultural Competence

It is important to provide some specific indicators of cultural competence for teachers—both preservice and inservice—to determine how they might improve their practice.

Cultural competence occurs in classrooms where

- The teacher understands culture and its role in education.
- The teacher takes responsibility for learning about students' culture and community.
- The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning.
- The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture.

• *The teacher understands culture and its role in education.* Earlier in this chapter I discussed the idea that many teachers do not understand the role of culture in education. Often teachers attribute pseudopsychological explanations to students' school struggles. For example, many teachers are quick to say a student does not do well because she has low self-esteem or lacks motivation when they actually know nothing about determining levels of self-esteem or motivation. Similarly, teachers use *culture* as a generic term to mean *different from them*. Culturally relevant teachers understand that culture is a complex concept that affects every aspect of life. Such teachers are able to recognize their own cultural perspectives and biases.

• *The teacher takes responsibility for learning about students' culture and community.* Students do not come with instruction manuals. Each classroom and each student presents a new set of opportunities and challenges. And there is as much diversity within a group of students in a classroom as there is between them and another group of children from a different racial, cultural, socioeconomic, or language group. However, people living together in a community share certain social rules and conventions. People with shared histories may respond similarly to life's challenges. Language binds people together in special ways.

How are teachers supposed to learn the codes and norms of a community different from their own? Too often teachers rely on the distortions of the larger society to explain a new cultural setting to them. Or teachers rely on the interpretations of more veteran teachers who may have never ventured out into the school community. The teachers' lounge becomes a place of misinformation. In some schools where the faculty is made up of teachers of color and white teachers, the two groups of teachers rarely interact. One group may use the lounge; the other may congregate elsewhere. Much like Tatum's<sup>10</sup> reflections on teenagers who are working toward racial identity development, teachers are also confronted with their racial and cultural identity when they work in communities of color.

Culturally relevant teachers know that it is their job to learn about the students' cultures and their communities. They need to bridge the divide between the school and the students' homes. They do not assume that students have to learn their ways and rules. They understand that the interest they show in students' backgrounds and lives has an important payoff in the classroom.

• *The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning.* In a middle-income, white, English-speaking school community, teachers do use student culture as a basis for learning. It is relatively simple to use middle-class white culture as a basis for learning because the curriculum, interaction styles, speech codes, and school norms are congruent with students' home culture. But when students' home and community cultures deviate from the school norms, what do teachers do?

Culturally relevant teachers understand that learning is facilitated when we capitalize on learners' prior knowledge. Rather than seeing students' culture as an impediment to learning, it becomes the vehicle through which they can acquire the official

knowledge and skills of the school curriculum. However, in order to capitalize on students' cultures, teachers have to know the students' cultures.

- *The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture.* Human beings are complex. Our cultural affiliations are nested and multifaceted, and the cultural categories we use are crude approximations of individuals' cultures. When a teacher uses a cultural event or activity to represent every member of that culture, she may be assuming cultural affiliations that students do not share. For example, a cultural event such as the African American holiday Kwanzaa may be as strange to African American children as it is to non-African American children. Asian American children may feel no affiliation with people and customs from specific Asian nations.

Culturally relevant teachers know enough about the students they are teaching to help students make use of their multiple cultural identities. Those identities may span racial, ethnic, and national boundaries.

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In the next chapter I discuss the ways the Hughes cohort members developed the third aspect of culturally relevant teaching—sociopolitical consciousness—during their fifteen months in the TFD program. I share some of their insights about this aspect of their preparation and ways it affected their thinking about teaching.

## Apathy Is Not an Option

The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.

—James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

Like many new teachers I thought the only thing I had to take responsibility for was ensuring that the students were successful with the curriculum and felt reasonably "good" about themselves. I had a number of political commitments. I was active in the civil rights movement. I attended rallies, read radical texts, and supported the whole gamut of social justice causes. I just kept those things separate from my life as a teacher. I was incensed about the war in Vietnam and even more exercised over the slow progress of the fight for African American liberation. But I thought it was "not my place" to bring my politics into the classroom.

By 1972 the Watergate scandal was in the news, and the Nixon White House was unraveling in full view of the nation and my students. "I knew Nixon was a crook all along," remarked Victor, an Afro-Latino boy in my history class. "I don't know why they're even having a trial. That boy is guilty!" Victor's comments echoed those of many people in communities of color. Sammy Davis Jr. notwithstanding, Nixon was never a favorite among people of color. But

of what a child should be, my interpretation of his "behavior," and what I thought was a "lack" of emotion or assertiveness. . . . Although I felt I was "helping" Kenny to the best of my ability, what was my vision of childhood and learning for him? I remember feeling intense pressure that I was his only hope—that if I didn't "rescue"<sup>14</sup> him, his future was bleak. I gave him no credit for his own success.

Robin ended her paper with a quote from Asa Hilliard<sup>15</sup> that reflects purpose and reward of the community service aspect of the program: "Just as there is a vast untapped potential, yes, genius among the children, there is also a vast untapped potential among the teachers who serve the children. . . . Teachers need their own intellectual and emotional hunger to be fed. They need to experience the joy of collaborative discussion, dialogue, critique, and research."

### Indicators of Sociopolitical Consciousness

Teaching with a sociopolitical consciousness is not easy. It requires teachers to incorporate the required curriculum and associated academic responsibilities with issues of social justice. Unfortunately, many teachers in urban schools are required to teach using scripts that tell them exactly what to teach and how to teach it.<sup>16</sup>

Indicators of teaching that promotes sociopolitical consciousness include the following:

- The teacher knows the larger sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world.
- The teacher has an investment in the public good.
- The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.

- The teacher believes that students' success has consequences for his or her own quality of life.

- *The teacher knows the larger sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world.* It is not unusual to hear reports of how little our teachers know. These reports usually focus on traditional facts, such as knowing the difference between the U.S. Senate and the House or being able to explain the Pythagorean theorem. Certainly we want teachers to be competent in both general knowledge and the specific knowledge they teach. However, culturally relevant teachers must have additional knowledge. They must have knowledge of the social and political realities in which they live. This means that they must expose themselves to a range of ideas beyond what appears in the daily newspaper and commercial television.

- *The teacher has an investment in the public good.* Culturally relevant teachers do what they do because they have a sense of the public good and a desire to participate in the civic culture. Despite the increasing privatization of goods and services, culturally relevant teachers understand that democracy is fragile and requires constant attention. Culturally relevant teachers are people who take the long view. The students in their classrooms are important for who they are *and* for who they can be.

- *The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.* As previously stated, culturally relevant teachers have to meet state and local curriculum requirements just like other teachers. However, because of their commitment to social justice and the public good, they are compelled to integrate their social commitment into the academic skills and knowledge of the curriculum. Even when the curriculum materials are limited, culturally relevant teachers

know how to mine them to stimulate students' thinking and their learning of critical skills.

- *The teacher believes that students' success has consequences for his or her own quality of life.* Part of seeing students both as they are and how they can be involves maintaining a vision of how students' lives are integrally linked with the teacher. Far too often students of color have relayed at least one experience where a teacher has said something like, "It's up to you if you learn, and if you don't it doesn't matter to me. I'm still going to get paid" or "You're just cheating yourself. I've got mine; you've got yours to get." This notion that student learning is unconnected to the teacher is prevalent in classrooms where students are failing. The stance of culturally relevant teachers is that what happens to students ultimately happens to me. If students fail and are unable to be productive in society, then the cause of justice is not served. This means that the quality of life is diminished for everyone. Culturally relevant teachers' stakes in the society require an investment in the students' futures because it is the best way to ensure their own future.

The final chapter of the book points toward the promises and pitfalls of teacher education reform. It examines some of the current reform efforts and proposes some alternate views of preparing teachers to teach in diverse classrooms.

## 6

### A Vision of the Promised Land

We've got some difficult days ahead . . . and I may not get there with you . . . but I've been to the mountain top and I've seen the promised land.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>1</sup>

I stared at the list of requirements for teacher education. It was a dizzying array of professional courses and state requirements. I couldn't figure out how any of them fit with my goal to be a teacher. They were just another set of hurdles to be overcome. As I made my way through the courses it seemed that even on my small, historically black college campus the education professors were not talking to each other. Our assignments went from being remarkably similar to amazingly disparate. Many of the issues raised in the social foundation course were provocative, but we dealt with them solely in the abstract. Often the methods course required us to do an activity, but there was no discussion of the underlying concept or theory. One of my most enduring memories of my final year of school was me sprawled out on the floor trying to finish my "unit" before going out to a party. I was developing this unit for a set of students who did not yet exist for me. Why was I supposed to care what they learned?