

Culturally Responsiveness in Community College CTE Programs

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Career and technical education (CTE) can be a gateway to achieving equity, but there are still gaps in opportunity that hinder pursuing this goal nationally and statewide. To support colleges' efforts to address these inequities, the Office of Community College Research and Leadership is conducting an exploratory case study of CTE programs that are making noticeable gains in supporting underrepresented and underserved students and what structures and practices are implemented in order to achieve equity. One of the research questions asks: How are CTE programmatic structures and practices more culturally responsive to underrepresented and underserved students?

As colleges and universities continue to enroll diverse populations of students, they are obligated to ensure that these students are walking into an environment that speaks to their life experiences. Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) emerged as a way in which educational leaders can create curriculum and experiences that speak to diverse students. Community colleges in particular are known for enrolling considerable numbers of nontraditional, low-income, first-generation students, as well as students of color, which means their curriculum, policies, procedures, and services should reflect their student population. Although general research has been done on CRP in community colleges, there has been very little conducted on CRP in the specific realm of CTE. It is therefore important to begin with a discussion of the origin of CRP and a working definition of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Background and Definition

The concept of CRP emerged from Ladson-Billings' (1994) discussion of culturally relevant teaching in regard to Black children. She went on to develop the theory further in her 1995 piece titled *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. Ladson-Billings (1995) details three principles essential to CRP: 1) develop students academically; 2) nurture and support cultural competence; and 3) development of sociopolitical awareness or consciousness. She found that teachers' approaches to and execution of CRP varied, which led her to develop three theoretical underpinnings: 1) their conceptions of self and others; 2) how they structure social relations; and 3) their conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of these underpinnings has requirements that educators must abide by to be culturally relevant.

The literature and practice around CRP has grown to include postsecondary education and educational leadership, prompting Ladson-Billings to revisit her theory in 2014 with the article "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0 a.k.a. the Remix". In this piece, she challenges educators to move toward a theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy that "allows for a fluid understanding of culture, and a teaching practice that explicitly engages questions of equity and justice" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). Similarly, Gay (2002) posits that students' cultural experiences and perspectives serve as channels for teaching them more effectively. In an earlier piece, he writes, "it is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (Gay, 2000, p. 106). This leads to the conclusion of students' improved academic achievement (Gay, 2002).

There are research studies that employ CRP as a tool to improve marginalized students' experiences and outcomes in educational institutions. Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) assert that CRP "recognizes students' differences, validates students' cultures, and asserts that cultural congruence of classroom practices increase students' success in schools" (p. 25). Most colleges and universities were built to serve white, wealthy men (Thelin, 2011), which leaves overt and subtle remnants of racism, discrimination, and white supremacy in the fabric of these institutions. Knowing this,



educators are tasked with undoing their own personal biases, as well as the policies and procedures at their institutions that continue to push certain students to the margins.

Purpose and Implications

There are several case-study examples (Baber et al., 2015; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Valenzuela et al., 2015) of programs serving various populations of students specifically in community colleges that employ a form of culturally responsive pedagogy even if not explicitly stated. These institutions sought to improve their respective group of students' experiences by implementing programs that spoke to their specific cultural needs. In 2011, for example, Parkland College implemented the Together We Achieve (TWA) program, with the goal of improving outcomes for Black men (Baber et al., 2015). To achieve this objective, they connected students with a faculty mentor, an academic adviser, and a tutor. Black men who participated in TWA successfully completed the developmental education curriculum at higher rates than those who were not in the program (57% versus 21%; Baber et al., 2015). Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) found that through explicit use of CRP, the University of British Columbia indigenized an introductory course to improve the academic development and success of Aboriginal Access Students. They write: "Using the framework of CRP, this course attempts to redress the cultural discontinuities between contemporary education and the emergent diversity in school populations at postsecondary institutions" (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017, p. 26). Their results showed that using CRP in their course enhanced students' intellectual, social, emotional, and academic growth.

While general research on CRP in community colleges exists, there is not nearly enough of it when it comes to looking at CRP within CTE programs. Readers might infer that the success stories in other programs within community colleges might be the same for CTE programs as well. Our research study at OCCRL titled CTE as a Gateway to Equity seeks to fill this gap.

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