

## Culturally Relevant Education

### Background Draft

Much has been written about the importance of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy, or, the broad approaches to teaching, pedagogy, and schooling that reflect both a school-community's and classroom teacher's deep commitment to caring for and meeting the specific needs of marginalized Black, Latinx, and Native youth. Some of this includes investment in sustaining their cultural practices, heritage, and language, and supporting their development of critical competence around the structural inequalities students themselves face<sup>i</sup>. Ladson-Billings<sup>ii</sup> defines the pedagogy embedded in culturally relevant education (hereafter: CRE) according to three tenets of student outcomes:

- 1) Student learning and academic achievement – teachers must engage students in meaningful learning that develops skills and capacities useful in young people's real lives
- 2) Student cultural competence – teachers must support students' deeper understandings of their families, communities, and themselves alongside deeper understanding and analysis of "mainstream" culture.
- 3) Student sociopolitical consciousness— teachers must support students' development of critical capacities to interrogate historical inequalities and inequalities in their present lives by first committing to their own study of inequalities of race, class, gender, ability, etc...

Unfortunately, efforts to engage race and identity in school curricula are often shallowly implemented<sup>iii</sup> iv. What has emerged as a promising implementation of CRE at the classroom and school level are *critical learning* opportunities represented in both Ethnic Studies and project-based civics education (e.g., youth participatory action research or YPAR). Several researchers have identified significant improvements in minority students' academic achievement, standardized test scores, behavioral and attendance outcomes, associated with their involvement in both of these opportunities<sup>v</sup> vi vii. What follows is a brief summary of research that substantiates the importance of critical learning for Black and Latinx students.

### Facts

**1) Newark parents, students, administrators, and teachers see the need for CRE.**

Wells' survey of Newark Public Schools (NPS) parents, students, teachers, school and district leaders, and community members, finds significant demand for CRE <sup>viii</sup>.

Overwhelmingly, respondents describe a lack of consistent, sustained, and systematic efforts to engage cultural relevancy in NPS. Across the board, these stakeholders believe in the need for and merits of CRE, particularly seeing its value in supporting young people's "develop[ment] [of] positive identities, learning to give back, and understanding of where they come from<sup>ix</sup>". They also identified a need for schools to make connections between what students are learning in the classroom and what they are experiencing in their communities. Effective implementation of CRE, in their view, needs to be systemic, requires a unified vision among stakeholders, and good leaders who believe deeply in CRE and are willing to allocate the resources necessary for effective implementation.

**2) Experimental and quasi-experimental research demonstrates that Ethnic Studies and project-based civic learning improve GPA, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and attendance, and reduce behavioral infractions, among other positive school-related outcomes.**

Dee and Penner's study<sup>x</sup> found strong evidence that an ethnic studies course in San Francisco led to:

- **An average student GPA increase of 1.4 points**
- **Attendance increased by 21%**
- **Earned-credits increased by 23 points (or four courses across a year) excluding physical education and social studies.**

The Tucson ethnic studies curriculum in Cabrera and colleague's study<sup>xi</sup> found that **after controlling for race/ethnicity, poverty, ELL status, special education status, number of school transfers, prior academic achievement, and school context, Tucson students who participated in ethnic studies (i.e., Mexican American Studies) had:**

- **a statistically significant higher probability of graduation (9.5%) and**

- a significant increase in their probability of passing reading, writing, and math standardized tests (6.6%) compared to Tucson students not participating in Ethnic Studies.

In a quasi-experimental study, Luter et al.<sup>xii</sup> compared the academic performance outcomes of grades 4-8 students in Buffalo Public Schools participating in a program called *Community as Classroom* (CAC) to non-participating students. This project-based civic learning program's curriculum focused on supporting students in the design of projects that targeted neighborhood improvement. **After controlling for prior academic performance and other mitigating factors, Luter et al. (2017) found that:**

- CAC students' attendance improved by a week's worth of classes (i.e., 5 days) on average compared to their attendance before the program
- Students who attend CAC classes most of the time versus those who only attended 10% or less had, on average, 15 less tardy days a year
- Suspensions of CAC students decreased from an average of 2 to 0 and days suspended decreased from an average of 5 to 0.
- Math and science standardized test scores significantly improved for students in the lowest scoring percentiles, while English Language Arts test scores also improved (though not to a statistically significant degree).

***3) Research demonstrates that teachers (white teachers especially) have lower expectations of Black and Latinx students' educational attainment compared to White and Asian students and that Black and Latinx teacher expectations of Black and Latinx students' educational attainment is higher.***

Fox<sup>xiii</sup> found that “[t]here is a large and significant effect of having a same-race teacher on expectations to complete more than high school for Black students” (p. 11).

- Black teachers were 14.3 percentage points more likely to expect Black students to complete more than high school than a White teacher.
- The same-race effect holds for Black and “Hispanic” teachers' expectations of their same-race Black and Hispanic students to graduate college or more; with respective likelihoods at 13.5 and 11.3 percentage points.

## Implementation

School leaders and teachers may be resistant toward students conducting YPAR in school that examines inequalities existing in their schools or they may direct them to conduct superficial, perfunctory action research work<sup>xiv xv</sup>.

Young's<sup>xvi</sup> 3-month long, qualitative case-study identified several barriers in the implementation of CRE in an urban elementary school. These included: lacking a clear understanding of the meaning of culturally relevant education and teacher attitudes, school cultures, and district policies that circumscribe the application of CRE (e.g., thinking that it takes too much effort and will distance from traditional learning, skepticism about its merits, lack of support to implement theories into practice, and district emphasis on resolving achievement gaps through no-excuses mechanisms of teacher accountability).

Identifying common threads of Ethnic Studies implementation that led to the improvement of academic outcomes for low-performing students enrolled in San Francisco and Tucson schools, Cabrera points to the following<sup>xvii</sup>:

- 1) Ethnic Studies should be included as a core course for graduation rather than an elective, otherwise the students who often benefit the most—previously worst performing students—may not be compelled to take it.
- 2) Effective teachers of Ethnic Studies courses must be trained for several years in ethnic studies curricula and pedagogy
- 3) Low performing students should be one target population of these classes but the coursework must *not* be remedial. Locating Ethnic Studies in the “remedial” track carries a stigma that turns students away who may believe courses are for “dumb kids”.
- 4) Programs must focus on “the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to inequality,” rather than limited formulations of “diversity” or multicultural curricula that simply replace “Shakespeare with Maya Angelou.”
- 5) Classes should be structured in a two-semester sequence. Students benefitted from having an uninterrupted year of Ethnic Studies.
- 6) **“Offer classes as early as possible.** The Tucson program offered classes only to juniors and seniors, while San Francisco allowed freshmen to enroll. Observers in both districts agree that earlier is better. Many students

dropped out of Tucson Unified district before they ever had a chance to take the classes. Having earlier access to the program might have prevented some of these students from dropping out.”

## **Sample CRE Recommendations**

### **Broad Recommendations**

- 1) Convene a team of university-based and community-based historians to examine the ramifications of slavery, redlining, indigenous colonization, and other forms of structural racism (like Princeton and Rutgers) in NJ to produce a report that will be made available to every school district.
- 2) Require and fund public Schools of Education to develop pipelines to increase the number of Black, Latinx, and Native American K-12 teachers in NJ schools by 30% over 12 years. Rowan University’s Project Impact is one model.

### **Ethnic Studies and YPAR Recommendations**

- 1) Convene a higher-education task force across NJ Schools of Education to improve pre-service teacher training around CRE.
- 2) Enforce the Amistad Legislation in two ways:
  - Use the Amistad Curriculum and Sleeter’s <sup>xviii</sup>report on CRE for the National Education Association as a basis for creating Ethnic Studies core-course requirement for students in grades 7, 10, and 12
  - Financially support ongoing efforts of NJEA and New Jersey Bar Foundation to create an Ethnic Studies Guidebook and resource toolkit for teachers.
- 3) Create a fund to incentivize training for and implementation of project-based social justice curriculum, modeled after University of California Berkeley’s YPAR Hub, available to grade 3-12 teachers across NJ school districts and content areas. Hold an annual awards ceremony and banquet to showcase YPAR projects throughout the state.

- 4) Require quarterly scholarly research-based professional development in CRE for K-12 teachers, staff, and administrators across NJ school districts to ensure that understandings of what CRE is and how it should be effectively implemented are consistent within and across districts.
- 5) Update and enforce the ‘Content Statements’ and ‘Indicators’ of *NJ State Social Studies Student Learning Standards*, Sections 6.1 and 6.2: *U.S. History: America in the World*, and, *World History/Global Studies* to include the following language in 20<sup>th</sup> century learning objectives for students between grades 9-12:
  - a. 6.1 Content Statement: Racial injustice played a significant role in the formation of the modern welfare state
    - i. Indicator: Analyze the impact of redlining/housing discrimination through G.I. Bill, Federal Housing Administration, and banking industry practices on current racial wealth disparities.
    - ii. Indicator: Explore the historical role of racial exclusion from welfare state programs and labor rights protections and their potential impact on current racial wealth disparities
  - b. 6.2 Content Statement: U.S. covert operations and military actions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South and Central America, Africa, the Middle East, and on U.S. soil, facilitated regime changes favorable to the global expansion of capitalism and the U.S.’s international trade interests, and fostered the destabilization of domestic anti-war and civil rights organizations.
    - i. Indicator: Explore the significance of Western and U.S. covert and military operations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century toward the advancement of global capitalism and the extermination of socialism in African and Central/South American nations
    - ii. Indicator: Compare Western and U.S. covert operations that facilitated regime changes in South/Central America, Africa, and the Middle East to domestic covert operations against minority rights groups and anti-war groups in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
    - iii.

## **Journey for Justice Recommendations w/ Respect to CRE**

- 1) “Require and fund training on culturally responsive discipline practices for staff, parents and students, including full-time Restorative Justice Coordinators in schools”
- 2) “Expand curriculum and materials that schools can purchase with DOE funds, to include more diverse, contemporary, and culturally accurate texts and resources”

## **NJ Amistad Commission Recommendations**

### ***The Amistad Legislation requires NJ schools to teach an unsanitized account of the African American past***

Sections C of C.52:16A-86 state:

*c. It is the policy of the State of New Jersey that the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, the depth of their impact in our society, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to the development of this country is the proper concern of all people, particularly students enrolled in the schools of the State of New Jersey*

Implementations of Amistad thus far have been inconsistent throughout New Jersey school districts and there are challenges with oversight and accountability. Therefore, the commission recommends:

- 1) Creating oversight by statewide testing for social studies
- 2) Amistad compliance on QSAC ‘Instruction and Program’ reviews need to be based on student portfolios
- 3) Professional development to teach teachers the African American history content knowledge
- 4) Mandate training teachers on how to infuse African American history content knowledge into their lesson plans

- 5) Advocating for legislation to shift the language on teacher certifications to require African American history content knowledge
- 6) Immediate remediation for history teacher certification to require courses in African American and Latinx History
- 7) Expand mandate to require teaching the histories of marginalized populations beyond African Americans (e.g., Latinx Americans, LGBTQ Americans)

Kevin Clay, PhD

Rutgers University-Newark, Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies

Special Thanks to Dr. Stephanie James Harris of the New Jersey Amistad Commission

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Aronson, Brittany, and Judson Laughter. "The Theory and Practice of Culturally Relevant Education." *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 1 (2016): 163-206. doi:10.3102/0034654315582066.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995): 465 - 491. doi:10.2307/1163320.
- <sup>iii</sup> Woodson, Ashley N. "'There Ain't No White People Here,'" *Urban Education* 52, no. 3 (2016): 316-42. doi:10.1177/0042085915602543.
- <sup>iv</sup> Castagno, Angelina E. *Educated in Whiteness Good Intentions and Diversity in Schools*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- <sup>v</sup> Luter, Gavin D., Austin M. Mitchell, Henry L. Taylor Jr. "Critical Consciousness and Schooling: The Impact of the Community as a Classroom Program on Academic Indicators," *Education Sciences* 7, no. 25 (February 2017): 3 – 23. doi:10.3390/educsci7010025
- <sup>vi</sup> Cabrera, Nolan L., Jeffrey F. Milem, Ozan Jaquette, and Ronald W. Marx. "Missing the (Student Achievement) Forest for All the (Political) Trees: Empiricism and the Mexican American Studies Controversy in Tucson." *American Educational Research Journal* 51, no. 6 (December 2014): 1084–1118. doi:10.3102/0002831214553705.
- <sup>vii</sup> Dee, Thomas, and Emily Penner. "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1 (2016): 127 – 166, doi:10.3386/w21865.
- <sup>viii</sup> Wells, Lauren. "Culturally Responsive Education on Purpose and By Design," *Creed Strategies* (August 2018): 1 – 7
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid., 5
- <sup>x</sup> Dee, "The Causal Effects," 127 – 166
- <sup>xi</sup> Cabrera, "Missing the," 1084–1118
- <sup>xii</sup> Luter, "Critical Consciousness," 3 – 23.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Fox, Lindsay. "Seeing Potential," *AERA Open* 2, no. 1 (2015): 1-17. doi:10.1177/2332858415623758.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Rubin, Beth C., Jennifer Ayala, and Mayida Zaal. "Authenticity, Aims and Authority: Navigating Youth Participatory Action Research in the Classroom." *Curriculum Inquiry* 47, no. 2 (2017): 175-94. doi:10.1080/03626784.2017.1298967.
- <sup>xv</sup> Lac, Van, and Michelle Fine. "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: An Autoethnographic Journey on Doing Participatory Action Research as a Graduate Student." *Urban Education* 53, no. 4. (2018). 562 – 583. doi: 10.1177/00420859185918762491
- <sup>xvi</sup> Young, Evelyn. "Challenges to Conceptualizing and Actualizing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: How Viable Is the Theory in Classroom Practice?" *Journal of Teacher Education* 61, no. 3 (2010): 248-60. doi:10.1177/0022487109359775.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Cabrera, Nolan L. "How Ethnic Studies Can Reduce Racial Achievement Gaps." Published June 2018 on Scholars Strategy Network. Accessed April 30, 2019. <https://scholars.org/brief/how-ethnic-studies-can-reduce-racial-achievement-gaps>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Sleeter, Christine, E. "An Agenda to Strengthen Culturally Responsive Pedagogy." *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 10, no. 2 (July 2011): 7-23. <http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/files/2011v10n2art1.pdf> pp.