Culturally Responsive Teaching

Conceptual Framework for Professional Development

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Teachers possess an enormous amount of power, influence, patience, pride, love and intellect. As a group educators have been tasked with educating, caring for, and influencing large numbers of Americans. Over the course of a teachers thirty year career she stands to directly impact the lives, development, and learning of six hundred human beings. Historically public education has been viewed as the great equalizer or the mode to a better life (Sizer, 2004). Teachers and teacher educators can no longer continue to teach the way they did 30 years ago. Due to dramatic changes that have occurred in American society over the past 10 years it is not possible to even educate students with the same curriculum and tactics that were used then. American society has experienced significant social change for various reasons. Each event has had an impact on American society in very different ways. From the contested 2000 Presidential elections, to the events of 9/11, the change of three Supreme Court justices, identification of the “Axis of Evil”, to the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, the prolonged Wars and American involvement in both, renewed emphasis on immigration reform, shifting of the Congress, to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies, each event either directly or indirectly has served to impact educational practices in the United States.

NCLB Bill was initially signed in January of 2002 by President Bush. The Law represents President Bush’s plan to close the achievement gap, hold teachers, school districts, and states responsible for the performance of all student by using performance standards and high-stakes testing to gauge the closing of the gap (Bush, n.d.). NCLB relies on high stakes testing scores to measure the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) of students across the United States. AYP is measured by yearly high-stakes standardized tests which are administered to provide evidence that the State and school systems are
working to educate all children (The White House, n.d.). In order to achieve “adequate” AYP scores school systems have refined curriculum, standards and outcomes in order to focus on the skills and knowledge necessary for students demonstrate skills necessary to pass the tests. Proponents of NCLB point to the fact that because AYP is broken down by race and ethnicity it ensure that all students are being taught the same curriculum and that the delivery of the standardized curriculum is the same since teachers have been deemed “highly qualified”. Whether a teacher is considered highly qualified is rather ambiguous, the clearest indicator is the teacher’s educational level and training (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Policy makers have come to think that highly qualified automatically means that good, quality, and equal instruction is being delivered. Critics point to this ambitious, wide definition of highly qualified as one of the problems with NCLB (Darling-Hammond, 2004). They also argue that changes in AYP have no bearing on the quality of instruction being delivered, nor does it demonstrate that students of color are benefiting from the high stakes tests or from the changes in curriculum and instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Many advocates for realistic, through and full funding of NCLB think that significant these changes need to be made to the bill in order for it to be reauthorized in late 2007. They point out that not only will the Bill in its current form continue to “…undermine successful schools while failing to fix or re-create those that are truly failing” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p.32) but more importantly stands to “…damage the ability of public education to play its critical and vital role in our society (p. 32)” Even though the majority of teachers agree with the fundamental goals of NCLB, those goals related to narrowing the achievement gap and providing good, equal, and quality instruction, they differ in how to achieve this. The National Education
Association (NEA) administered a survey of practicing teachers in 2002, questioning their thoughts and beliefs around NCLB, they found that most teachers agree with the idea of NCLB but tend not to agree with the delivery or the penalties associated with the law. NEA points out in their report on the survey that “…contrary to conventional wisdom, education reform was already underway in most states and that, in many cases, the No Child Left Behind Act has interfered with those efforts” (NEA, 2004). Instead of relying on prescribed curriculum, performance standards, standardized testing, and discursive practices when a school or school district can not measure up to these artificial standards teachers and teacher educators need to begin to reconnect to their strengths, motivations, practices, and most importantly to their students. Standards will not lead to connections. With standards it is difficult to connect and make learning meaningful for all involved in the process. How do we reconnect with ourselves, practice, profession, curriculum, students, students’ families, and our colleagues?

No only does NCLB present a unique set of challenges for teachers and teacher educator but also the changing demographics of America’s future students stands to play a key role in why and how educational practices in the United States need to change. The United States has become the “tossed salad” multicultural, multiethnic analogy of the 1980s. NCLB tries to recognize the realities of being a multicultural society by trying to level the playing field by standardizing teaching, learning, and assessment of that learning, instead of recognizing “The gowning presence of diversity in our public school population [and acknowledging the impact] of [this] diversity in our public schools” (Howard, 2006, p. 3). As statistics and future predictions estimate that by 2025 over half of the student population in public American schools will be students of color, this
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diverse student population will stand in stark contrast to the fact that over 40% of schools across the county do not have any teachers of color on staff (NEA, 2002). The fact that in the not too distant future the majority of students in public education will have at least one parent who is foreign born should also encourage changing the mode of instruction and how teachers think about themselves and their students (Howard, 2006). In light of this future not only must teachers and teacher educators reconsider how, why, and what they teach, but also critically examine who is in the classroom and why. This critical examination supports the journey education must embark on in order to truly insure that ALL students are receiving a quality, equal, appropriate, empowering, and critical education.

An instrumental aspect of the journey is supporting teachers and teacher educators in this process of reflection on self, societal practices, and curriculum with the ultimate goal of creating environments where all students no matter their cultural background, language skills, or ability are able to develop and learn in American public school settings. This journey is not an easy one. For it requires deep analysis of current teaching practices and an authentic commitment to bettering the outcomes for all students (Howard, 2006; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Many theories exist in education have been developed to provide such a framework for transformation of schools, teachers, and teacher education programs. A fundamental cornerstone for such theories work to “Recognize that preservice teachers [and teacher educators] may possess limited awareness and sensitivity of cultures different from their own, teacher educators must provide experiences that will develop the awareness and insights preservice teachers [and practicing teachers] need to respond to the diversity of their students” (Kidd, Sánchez, &
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Skills such as these are developed out of purposeful and meaningful readings, experiences, and modeling that encourage critical reflection. Just as students do not arrive at school all knowing and aware of aspects of their possibilities neither do teachers. Reflection, thought and analysis provide a framework from which to start the process and journey of self and practice discovery. In order to create such culturally responsive educational environments it is necessary that teachers and teacher educators begin to question social daís, racial thoughts and perceptions, and begin to question what they teach and why (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Kidd, Sánchez, & Thorp, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Culturally responsive practices do not develop overnight nor can they be taught overnight. For too long teacher professional development has focused on quick, one-day workshops that are intended to present new curriculum, and practices. It would be ridiculous to present a group of fourth grade students with the concept of the butterfly life cycle once and expect them to know all they need to know about the intricate and complex metamorphosis that occurs when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. For this very reason Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) argue it is necessary to move away from the one-day professional development model, in exchange for encouraging change over time with purpose and intent. Change takes time and is a process therefore any long term, complex professional development should do the same. Gary Howard (2006) points out that school and teaching reform takes time and long term commitment in order to truly effect a change in practice. Therefore this professional development plan will be carried out over two school years during which time teachers, administrators, and facilitators will
journey through the complex metamorphosis that must occur in order to transform into culturally responsive educators.

Research has found that the metamorphosis that is necessary to move to culturally responsive teaching requires critical reflection around key elements: the personal, students and their families, and curriculum. All of these elements come together to provide the structure upon which teachers and teacher educators can build their practice in order to ensure they are teaching all students.

*Personal Reflection*

Long term change occurs only when an individual stops, thinks, considers their point of view, envisions a different way of thinking or doing, and actively engages in activities which encourage such change (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Teachers and teacher educators need to begin their transformative journey with themselves for in order “To become effective teachers of all students, educators must undergo a profound shift in their beliefs, attitudes and values about difference” (Nieto, 2002, p. 280). Experiences and activities which foster such change can serve to trigger this transformation; each individual will be impacted by any number of events. M. Arthur Garmon (2004) used a small scale qualitative study to try to identify the factors which contribute to pre-service teachers’ ability to work with, experience, and reflect on diversity. He found that even though multicultural teacher preparation courses were important in changing teachers’ perspectives, life experiences appeared to have a more significant impact on their ability to change their attitudes and assumptions about people unlike themselves. This does not mean that if a teacher has not had prior exposure to cultures different than his/her own that change is impossible.
On the contrary the job of exposing and encouraging the development of new knowledge around difference becomes the responsibility of teacher educators and professional development programs. In a large scale analysis of teachers written responses to specific activities in a culturally responsive professional development program McAllister and Irvine (2002) investigated the impact of specific activities, assignments on participants attitudes towards culturally responsive teaching. Personal reflection was encouraged in the format of the program, assignments, readings, and writings. “Teachers discussed their most valuable learning experiences in the professional development course. [Which included]…cross-cultural simulation, cultural immersion trips, and their own experiences as minorities” (p. 1). Even though there is no doubt that such activities and experiences encourage change, there is also the basic need for teachers to reflect on their own social position in contrast to the position of their students.

Teachers and teacher educators have experienced a life much different from the life of their students; this difference has the potential to lead to oppressive educational situations. When teachers and teacher educators are unaware, not purposeful or meaningful in their practices they can not see how people (their own students) perceive them or the information they are presenting in a negative, bias or prejudiced way. As Paulo Freire (2002) points out one must recognize his or her role in any dominating situation in order to change it. Therefore it is imperative that a teacher’s personal journey and metamorphosis into a truly culturally responsive educator start with turning the lens inward. By turning the lens inward teachers and teacher educators are able to see who they are, why they are here, how they arrived at this point in their lives, and what impact
the various truths they prescribe to have on their teaching practice (Howard, 2006). Once
the personal metamorphosis has begun another metamorphosis begins this time around
stereotypes and assumptions held by one about another group different from themselves.
The journey to culturally responsive teaching is not easy and requires patience and understanding for different people will progress at different rates through, some may even go backwards before they move forward (Howard, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). This metamorphosis unlike the butterfly metamorphosis is not linear nor is it straightforward.

Families

Teachers and students are able to enter authentic relationships with each other only after the teacher starts to see him/herself through different lens. The teacher must begin to see the student as already having a source of knowledge in place (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). It is important to start the process of teachers seeing students as already having knowledge by starting with the family. Students are not raised in vacuums; they are raised in rich, diverse settings.

In the current world of high stakes testing and standardized curriculum all students stand to be excluded from participation in the system put in place to education them (Sizer, 2004). Part of the rationale behind NCLB was and continues to be that families but particularly families of children of color are lacking in the necessary skills to raise and educate their own children (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Nieto, 2002). In the post-modern world of culturally responsive education the old worldview of families as deprived, unable and/or unwilling to help their own children is no longer applicable or acceptable. Educators now see learning as happening from the moment the child is born
and within the rich social context of differing family structures (Dahlberg, 1999). Unfortunately many home to school connections are not formed with a sense of respect and value therefore the invitations to be involved in the school culture are superficial. Most invitations to parents to participate in school activities revolve around food or dancing, these representations do not begin to scratch the surface of what knowledge parents offer their children (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989). The use of family visits (a purposeful change in the term ‘home-visits) in practice and in the planning of classroom curriculum stand to form an authentic connection between the two. Family visits demonstrate the development of a connection that can influence curriculum, teacher perceptions of their minority students, and possibly improve students’ engagement and connection to their own education (Moll, González, & Amanti, 2005). For many educators and administrators participation in Parent, Teacher Associations (PTA) and the continued view of parent’s as needing to be taught how to educator their own child must shift (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Bredekamp and Copple (1997) begin the process of outlining how programs and school systems can shift in their thinking from the program/school having all the knowledge, to the family having knowledge. In order for parents to feel valued and respected, they need to be honored not trivialized. “We need to (begin to) operate from a position of hope” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, pp. 164) and value, not from a position of deficit and depravity.

When an educator begins to see the need for the creation of a respectful community within her classroom she also begins to see, understand and respect the home realities and culture of her students. Family visits demonstrate one possible change in
school practices in order to include all students in the educational process. As Ogbu (1978) points out, the need for school reform is at a critical point in American society due to an ever increasing projection of white middle-class educational values onto students of color. Family visits provide avenues for parent involvement in a very authentic and respectful way. In order to reduce the oppressive and bias conditions in which students of color are taught in the United States a shift in thinking must occur that sees ALL students in a realistic light not in the light of the standards for white middle-class students (Howard, 2006; Freire, 2002; Moll & González, 2004; Ogbu, 1978; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Family visits provide a way for the usually white middle-class teacher to begin to develop an understanding, respect and appreciation for minority family environments (Ogbu, 1974). A continuation of deficit perceptions and distance between teachers and their students of color leads to a dangerous situation which maintains the social limits, oppression and lack of success in students due to the fact that they are unable to succeed in white America. As Ogbu demonstrated in his study in Northern California in the late 1960’s (still painfully relevant today) without a change in teacher perception and an increase in direct contact with families, student’s of color will continue to struggle (Ogbu, 1974). The current “…physical and social distances between teachers and (the community) are great, and this lends itself to stereotyping” (Ogbu, 1974, p. 142), and an inability to work together for the betterment of the students.

Diverse families are in positions within the larger social context to offer the classroom a wealth of knowledge, which can work to encourage a more supportive and socially relevant model of education. Educators must begin to see students as being active participants in their social worlds (Freire, 1973). A world view of these complex,
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rich social worlds provides educators with ways of making it possible for students to see themselves in the curriculum set forth to educate them. Instead of education being about a perpetuation of white middle-class values it becomes possible to integrate varying views into the classroom curriculum, thereby empowering ALL students in their own educational experiences (Howard, 2006; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). As Paulo Freire (2002) points out in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed it is critical for student’s to see themselves in their own learning, without which oppression occurs NOT real education. By viewing education as empowering and recognizing students’ individual social experiences especially those experiences of children of color, educators also provide a space where all students have a voice in the classroom. Bruner (1990) points out in Acts of Meaning learning can only be effective when students are allowed to have voice. This voice comes from mutual respect and appreciation for the very different social realities of students of color. Without voice students are unable to produce personal narrative. Narrative is the being process by which oppressed populations come to recognize and feel empowered to change their social position (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Without narrative human beings are unable to think critically about their own social oppression within a larger social context.

The need to look at education through a more critical and larger social context has lead to research done by Luis Moll and Norma González. Over the course of their twenty year working relationship they have developed a model of teacher involvement that is landmark in the possibilities it offers. Through a Vygoskian view of society as socially constructed they have developed what they coin as the Funds of Knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The mentality set forth by the Funds of Knowledge (2005)
provides a framework for a much more culturally sensitive approach to parent involvement and student empowerment in education.

As Moll & Greenberg (1990) point out in *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of socio-historical psychology*, they “build(t) on the idea that every household is, in a very real sense, an educational setting in which the major function is to transmit knowledge that enhances the survival of its dependents” (p. 320). This attitude alone sheds a very different much more positive and productive light on minority families. In this model of culturally responsive teaching families are not seen as “needing our help”; instead they have knowledge to offer educators. This model turns the table completely around, no longer is the teacher the distributor of knowledge, instead she is an organizer and utilizer of already existing knowledge in the families she works with (Ovando & Collier, 1998). Families have the ability to provide limitless amounts of knowledge to enrich the classroom curriculum, especially since families are not bound by standards, tests and outcomes; they are seen as providing much more “authentic” learning environments then educators (DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994).

Teachers need to be encouraged to develop such relationships with parents in order to help students make connections to the learning (DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994; Freire, 1973; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Of course the development of such close and personal relationships between teachers and parents presents many perceived concerns, especially from the side of educators. As Vélez-Ibáñez cautions the relationship must be formed out of genuine interest and desire to learn from the family and ultimately to improve one’s teaching (Moll, 1990).
The main research project conducted in the southwest United States demonstrated the first time that direct interactions with families was the main mode of teacher change. Due to the shift in thinking from the traditional home visits model to the more reciprocal model of knowledge exchange in the concept of family visits, the *Funds of Knowledge* (2005) was able to demonstrate how change can happen between educators and families. Of course the project required training, support and a well rounded knowledge of the particular school systems standards, outcomes and program of studies. The drastic shift in thinking required not only by teachers but also the school districts administration adds complexity to the *Funds of Knowledge* (2005) project. All of the educators involved in the project discussed in the 1993 article were bi-lingual with careers and educational credentials that suggest they had some understanding of culturally sensitive pedagogies (González, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, et. al, 1993).

Of course due to time constrains the number of students the educator engages in family visits with is limited in the *Funds of Knowledge* (2005) project to two children per class. The educator is encouraged to visit the home three times over the course of the school year. Some of the teachers in the study became very involved with the families she studied, yet that was not an expectation of the researchers (González, Moll, Floyd-Tenity, et. al, 1993).

*Students*

Due to the interactions with families and an increased ability to think critically about the information she presents to her students she becomes a multicultural educator. Multicultural educators see their students as with the understanding that “…human diversity is an omnipresent phenomenon that has existed since the birth of the human
race” (Sinagatullin, 2003, p. 185). With this new found role the educator demonstrates a new attitude toward her students. Discourse within the classroom walls are more excepting and respectful, no longer does the student need to be concerned with the teacher’s preconceived notions of the student’s ethnic group clouding her understanding of him/her. As Ovando and Collier (1998) throughout their book, when students are actively engaged in co-creating the learning environment achievement is higher. All students, especially students of color, excel in this type of environment due to the fact that they can create and strengthen connections to their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Dialogue within the classroom is no longer the top-down model. Instead dialogue is created by all members of the community (the classroom) the teacher demonstrates a willingness and understanding of the various social and cultural realities of the students (McCaleb, 1997). This type of dialogue is outlined in Barrera and Corso’s (2003) work with educators, families and their young children, in Skilled Dialogue realistic and practical models are provided to support and encourage this type of honest and respectful dialogue. It is believed that the family visits provide the teacher with a very clear understanding that the student already possesses a knowledge base, established by the family (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Now the teacher sees his/her role as scaffolding that knowledge base and building on it. The teacher is no longer concerned with cramming knowledge into her students; instead she is concerned with building on already existing knowledge.

Curriculum

Many of the first conversations with families discussed in the Funds of Knowledge (2005) revolved around labor histories, family mapping and identifying inter-
group support systems. From the information learned during these family visits the educator was armed with a set of knowledge the student had already been exposed to due to the family history. At this point the educator becomes a weaver. She weaves these various family experiences into the preexisting curriculum, standards and programs of study. By integrating the student’s life experience into the classroom community she is creating an environment of meaning and connectedness for the student (McCaleb, 1997).

The impact of the study was profound not only in that it was the first time educators were encouraged to go out of the classroom to investigate different ways of knowing but because it provided educators with support, avenues for reflecting and engaging in dialogue with peers around issues of the social worlds and concerns of their students’ (Moll & Gonzláez, 2004). Just as ideas of narrative are important for students of color, the narrative and the ability to understand and look critically at student’s life is extremely important for educators (Bruner, 1990; Howard, 2006; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). For without the ability to look critically at the life circumstances of students’ of color educators deny the disparity between themselves and their minority/oppressed students.

“(The teacher) must also learn about the brilliance the students bring with them ‘in their blood’. Until [teachers] appreciate the wonders of the cultures represented before them they cannot appreciate the potential of those who sit before them, nor can they being to link their students’ histories and worlds to the subject matter they present in the classroom (Delpit, 1993, p. 182).” In order for learning to occur connections must be made to students’ social, cultural and historical worlds without which students continue to be outsiders to their own learning. Family visits furnish teachers with the knowledge
they need to make the connections to the curriculum and standards developed by the districts they teach in. For example, a teacher is preparing to teach patterns. From her family visits of one of her student’s she remembers the father was a tile layer. The teacher learned that not only did the father do this for a living but the 4th grade son, frequently accompanied him on his weekend jobs. The father discussed the fact that the boy often helped him lay the tile design out before affixing it to the floor. He was very proud of his son’s ability to understand the dimensions of the room and think about where the design would need to be to be centered in the room. With this knowledge of the student the teacher would plan a unit around tile design in order to address the objectives of learning about patterns. The scope of the unit is immense. Even though this provides the teacher with extremely useful information it also allows for the student to be an “expert” on a form of knowledge. Not only is the student drawn into the learning but he is also empowered, because his way of knowing is validated and respected. A teacher engaged in culturally responsive teaching through the use of family visits, would not pass up such an opportunity, instead of teaching the pattern unit as prescribed in her districts program of study; she takes the initiative to create her own unit. Of course, still accomplishing all of the necessary benchmarks and standards but in a much more responsive and developmentally appropriate way (Faltis, 1997). In reality the teacher may find that since the students are interested, engaged and connected to the learning the unit may expand beyond that one specific unit on patterns (Katz & Chard, 2000). This unit may lead her to geometry, history, geography etc. Once students are engaged the learning is limitless. All the while the teacher is still accomplishing all the necessary standards, outcomes and benchmarks she must complete to show learning.
The above example illustrates that learning can not occur in a cookie-cutter fashion. All students need to be engaged in learning but especially students of color who are all too frequently alienated from their own learning and knowledge. As Freire (2002) points out the objective of education should not be solely the teacher depositing information into the empty student, a model which NCLB prescribes to. For this type of “banking model” of education does not serve to liberate people from the constraints that society has placed on them due to race, gender, language or ability. Instead it is vital that teachers through culturally responsive teaching and professional development work can begin the process of seeing themselves as partners with their students in learning and development (Freire, 2002). Once a teacher moves towards this liberating model of culturally responsive teaching it is possible for her/him to envision the need, usefulness, and possibilities afforded the students, the classroom and her/him in this new way of teaching (Freire, 2002; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006). The changing demographics and criticisms of NCLB and the standardization movement have lead this type of culturally responsive teaching, more specifically family visits and gaining knowledge about the family’s strengths as research considered to be at the forefront of multicultural education. They question and provide possibilities to address the growing concern about education dictating students learning and access to knowledge.

Conclusion

A move to culturally responsive teaching is a journey full of love, acknowledgment of human difference, appreciation for the human experience, and a deep knowledge of one’s self as an educator. Just as the metamorphosis for a caterpillar to a butterfly is an amazing experience to witness and can be a truly awe inspiring for young
children, so to can the metamorphosis that occurs as a teacher moves to culturally responsive teaching. Experiences in culturally responsive teaching can have an enormous impact on how, what, and why a teacher teaches. This framework provides the research and theoretical reasons for focusing on this particular aspect of personal development, knowledge of families and students, and investigates new and exciting ways to transform curriculum. Teachers must begin to see why a shift in pedagogy is necessary as well as envision their practice and how to change it. Having vision is not enough, for they must practice changing, realize that change will take time but to have hope and faith that it will have a positive impact on their students. Finally they must understand how and why connecting families to their children’s learning can foster an authentic and fruitful home-school partnership. Culturally responsive teaching fosters learning communities in which all students, families, teachers and administrators have the potential to significantly impact learning. Hopefully this type of professional development will begin to move educators towards a more authentic and holistic approach to their practices in order to support, develop, empower and learn in conjunction with ALL of the students in their classes.
References


