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An Introduction to the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM): A Personal and Professional Journey to Reflective and Transformative Pedagogy

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An Introduction to the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM): A Personal and Professional Journey to Reflective and Transformative Pedagogy

Author Biography

Dr. Monica Manns is the first director of Henrico Schools' new Office of Equity and Diversity. The position is part of the school division's core leadership team and reports directly to the superintendent.

Manns has extensive experience in education in Henrico County and in other diverse settings, serving as a principal, teacher, counselor, consultant and administrator.

From 2009-2013, she worked for the Virginia Home for Boys and Girls, serving first as principal of the alternative John G. Wood School, then as the Virginia Home for Boys and Girls' director of education and vice president of educational services.

Manns is familiar with Henrico County Public Schools. From 2004-2007 she was department chair for special education at the Academy at Virginia Randolph. From 2013-2016 – first as a consultant and then a prevention specialist – she helped the school division lay the foundation for remaking student disciplinary policy and support systems. During her time at Henrico Schools, she also helped start a mindfulness program for schools in Henrico, and helped launch a voluntary reading group for African-American male students at Fairfield Middle School. She left Henrico Schools in 2016.

After beginning her career in 1996 as a vocational counselor helping people transition from incarceration to the workforce, she was drawn to education's preventative power. She worked as a special education teacher in Fairfax Schools and at an alternative school run by Lutheran Family Services of Virginia; as a vocational coordinator for high-risk students; and as statewide training coordinator for United Methodist Family Services. She has also worked as a coordinator of individualized education plans for students with various special needs, including gifted education.

Manns grew up in Roanoke and in Silver Spring, MD. She earned a bachelor's degree from Berea College in Kentucky. She has a master's degree in counseling from the University of Kentucky; a master's in education from Virginia Tech; and a certificate in educational administration from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is working on a doctorate in special education administration at the College of William and Mary.

In addition to facilitating the advisory committee, Manns will develop, implement and assess Henrico Schools' short- and long-range cultural diversity plans in pursuit of the division's goals, and coordinate related professional development for staff members. She will collaborate with other HCPS departments on academic programs and curricula; help to recruit and retain a diverse workforce; serve as a contact point for parent and employee concerns about cultural diversity; connect with community organizations; and serve as a coach and trainer for students, families and employees on cultural diversity issues.

Abstract

The Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM) is a framework by which educators can recognize, digest, and implement cultural responsiveness in their classrooms and school communities. Based on the research of James Banks, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Zaretta Hammond, Marva Collins, Bell Hooks, Geneva Gay, James Comer, and Paulo Freire, the CREM serves as a tool, a practitioner's guide to culturally responsive teaching and learning, with specific focus on *content integration* (the curricular and programmatic expansion to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of diverse groups); *knowledge construction* (helping students understand how people create beliefs based on their diverse biographies while validating students' funds of knowledge); *prejudice reduction* (helping students develop more

positive attitudes about people from diverse groups and empowering them to identify and address injustices); *equity pedagogy* (acknowledging diverse learning styles and intentionally identifying strategies that lead to higher achievement for students in diverse groups); and, *empowering school culture* (making choices that curate a culture of belonging within the school community). The CREM centers around the continual practice of *self-reflection* in the promotion of a *culture of belonging*. The author documents her journey to the development of the CREM framework and provides a transparent, enveloping synopsis of her reading, research, and practice as an educator in an effort to transform and support the pedagogical approach of current and future educators for the well-being of students.

Keywords

Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM), pedagogy, framework, continent integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, empowering school culture

Since my undergraduate studies in the early 90s, the idea of culturally responsive education has fascinated me. This is mainly because the ideology was distinctly different from my lived educational experience. As a Black child in a predominately minority elementary school, I was never provided with educational instruction that included me; nor were me and my peers allowed to bring our full selves into any classroom discussion or engagement. Instead, we were expected to code-switch into the ascribed scholarship of Whiteness. At that time, I did not have the language to describe this form of oppression, but I instinctively understood that being quiet, helpful, and humble made everyone comfortable. As a rule follower, and a natural shapeshifter, I was not harmed. This was because my lived experiences even at that young age had taught me, inadvertently, how to contort myself to the satisfaction of adults. But not all of the peers in my community had developed those skills. Unable or unwilling to code-switch precisely as dictated, many were unfairly disciplined, marginalized, set aside or left behind. Low expectations are often as deadly as a gun, and, unfortunately, many of my peers chose the latter. As I grew older and more contemplative, bolder and more in tune with myself, I also began to fall out of favor with those teachers who believed that black students could be seen but not heard. Their implicit bias and unconscious beliefs created disparities in the education we received and there is no question that it contributed to the gap in student achievement. Of course there were a few exceptions who did not allow structural racism to infiltrate their classrooms. There were teachers who appreciated that academic success begins with creating a positive relationship with the student - regardless of their race, ethnicity, social economic background or any other type of identifier. It was those teachers who allowed my full self to enter into their classrooms. They allowed me to provide my perspective on the lesson being taught, engaging me in a way that allowed my exceptionality to develop. They created safe spaces that allowed me to uplift my voice. They appreciated what I brought to the table even though it may not have been packaged in the accustomed orthodoxy. They pushed me to greater heights and held me accountable when I did not perform at my highest level. As I think back on it, I did not realize that their stealth approach in ensuring educational equity in their classrooms served as an educational incubator or booster for students like me. Sadly, for me these teachers were few and far between. Later, as an undergraduate college student majoring in education, I wanted to know how to be a different type of educator. I wanted to be an exceptional teacher like those few teachers I had been fortunate enough to have. My problem at the time, was that I still had not formed the critical questions of how to consistently create or accomplish those incubator moments. I also did not have a true destination – meaning I did not know where in the vast domain of the world of education I wanted to begin my journey. I knew that I wanted to be the type of educator who affirmed my students and activated their exceptionality, I just did not know how to get to

that point. Now, as the Chief Equity Diversity and Opportunity Officer for a large county, I have some clear answers and ask that you indulge me as I walk you through the journey that led me to the destination that I believe will not only affirm and activate student exceptionalism but support culturally responsive and equity work being done by your district.

In one of my undergraduate courses, I was required to read an article by educator and theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings. Later, I read her book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* 1st ed (1994). At that time, she detailed the necessity for teaching practices to intentionally engage learners whose realities and cultures had been traditionally excluded from the existing classroom learning experience. Most of her work centered on the African-American student experience. Based on her research, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed three goals for teaching--they must (1) yield academic success; (2) help students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities while simultaneously helping them achieve academically; and (3) support students' ability to engage in critical discourse on social inequities. In the book, Ladson-Billings believes that centering culturally relevant practices empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. These ideas were powerful and started me on my journey, but I still had no clear destination nor next steps. That was until I was introduced to author and educator Bell Hooks in my women's studies course.

Bell Hooks' book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), started a love fest for Hook's literature. She was absolute in her beliefs in Black equality and femininity. She did not believe that one negated the other, and she put to words so much of what I was feeling as a young, Black girl who was torn between who she knew she was and what the world was trying to define her as. In my voracious reading of her work, I came upon her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1994), which not only reminded me that I needed to re-enter the journey that I had started with Ladson-Billings but also gave me a name and fuel for the trip. Hooks (1994) stated that it should be the teacher's role to ensure that racial, sexual, and class boundaries did not hinder students from gaining their freedom. The freedom she spoke about, I believe, was the same as the one Carter G. Woodson spoke about in his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) when he states:

"If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. When you determine what a man shall think, you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do.

If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself.

If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told, and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one." (Woodson, 1933)

These words spoke to me and what I heard them say was that a (wo)man could only acquire freedom by acquiring uncurated knowledge--knowledge that is not curated in a manner that vilifies one group in an effort to uplift another. Instead, I believe Woodson is saying that students should be given a full and robust understanding of information, so they see themselves in their fullness. Hooks (1994) asserts that teachers must "teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (pg. 13), but she also calls for teachers to teach in a manner that promotes critical pedagogy. She recognized that in order to do this, teachers need to create a classroom community where there is "respect for individual voices." Woodson (1933) and Hooks (1994) demanded that I not accept the "narrow boundaries" that have traditionally shaped the way knowledge is shared in the classroom--teacher as the giver and student as the receiver. I believe they were showing me, in their words, that teachers should serve as facilitators for critical discourse with the goal of growing students' understanding of self and others because Woodson (1933) and Hooks (1994) believed that education had the power to "transform consciousness". To further grow my understanding of this concept, Bell Hooks provided me with a pit stop. She introduced me to someone who would serve as a gas station on my journey. That person was the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

In the book, Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), filled my tank. At this time, I was student-teaching and trying to connect what I had learned in my African-American studies, Appalachian studies, and Women's studies courses to the instructional experiences for an all-white, Appalachian High School English class. Friere (1970), Gladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b), Woodson (1933), and Hooks (1994) similarly shared beliefs that there is no neutrality in education. Friere (1970) stated "There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom." I, a northern Black female student-teacher, found that my desire to provide my students with a multicultural experience was not well received by my students or by my mentor teacher. It would have been easy to blame it on the fact that they had never had a Black person in their school building, nevertheless a Black student-teacher, but I knew that the issue lived with me, not with them. I came into their space with my agenda and showed no respect for their authentic lived experiences. I believed the information took precedent, and as much as I allowed for what I perceived as critical facilitated discourse, as promoted by Hooks and Woodson, it was designed through my lens with no consideration of my students. As I further reflected on the

reasons that my class was not responsive to my instruction, I began to reflect on Friere's (1970) book in its entirety. His readings held me accountable for respecting students' prior knowledge, experiences, and cultures. He demanded that I engage students in inquiry that provided insight into how their knowledge could coexist with other cultures and other ways of knowing—expelling the belief that single knowledge cannot coexist with multiple values. I took the time to learn from my students and to incorporate their instruction; they were more willing to engage in inquiry that exposed them to new knowledge. After Friere, I began to drive to a more precise destination of student-centered instruction and believed that my journey was almost at the end because I was reaping the rewards of students who expressed excitement about the lessons. Students, who did not look like, nor shared my lived experiences, were excited about attending my class and taking part in my lessons because I had begun to know them and used what they shared in my lessons. During my later research I expanded on Friere's idea when I was introduced to the Funds of Knowledge concept. The Funds of Knowledge (Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N., 2005) further emphasized the expectation that educators needed to collect knowledge about students' cultural practices to include understanding their families' inner culture, work experience, and their daily routine. This knowledge and expertise is then recognized and incorporated, as applicable, into the curriculum. The acknowledgement of the importance of genuinely knowing, respecting and applying student knowledge was an invaluable lesson that enhanced my teaching philosophy.

As my journey continued, I was sidetracked by earning a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and serving as a therapist in southern adult penal facilities. What I soon found in that role was that the information I had gathered up to that point on my journey served me well as a therapist because too often, my clients held little self-worth and needed more empowerment through critical discourse rather than therapy. After a couple of years, seeing too many clients who looked like me, railing against the school, which they perceived had disempowered them, I chose to return to the classroom. I wanted to be part of the solution, so I decided to teach in non-profit alternative education settings. I worked at schools for students whose public education institutions were unable or unwilling to educate them. These students became my teachers and me, their student.

As an educator in this alternative education space, I found that instructional engagement was not a priority. Before I could teach my students, I had to get them to stay in school, not fight one another or me, and care enough to put forward the effort. To do this, I had to grow my capacity to build relationships. I developed my ability, initially with limited scholarly support, to undergird my growth. It was trial and error, love, and commitment. It was showing up, and at times showing out, but mostly it was a lot of listening to their words and paying close attention to their actions. At this time, I returned to school in hopes of finding additional scholarly

research to support my work. There was one scholar who justified what I had learned and guided me to do more - James Comer. James Comer is the foundational scholar behind supporting the "whole child" he designed and studied an intervention project premised on prosocial development and learning by building supportive bonds between children, parents, and school. He believed that a students' social development was as important as their academic ability. Comer famously stated, "No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship". Reading his studies affirmed my efforts to connect with students and their parents personally, and he introduced me to the importance of intentionally teaching students to develop social-emotional skills as one of the many components needed to support academic growth. He explained that it was the duty of educators to ensure that students were intentionally given opportunities to grow their social-emotional skills (Comer 2000; Darling-Hammond, Linda et al., 2019). At this time, I began to use the knowledge I acquired as a therapist to develop my students' social-emotional capacity. With my growth, my students began to grow and receive re-direction which allowed for greater instruction. I taught a high school-aged group of students, and for many of them, this was the first time since elementary that they made an effort to control their emotions and engage in instruction.

During this time, I began to train my colleagues on how to form authentic relationships with students. I had shown myself to have the ability to develop relationships with students, and families, when others were not, and school leadership took notice and asked that I assist with developing the skills of other teachers and our support staff. To explain my efforts, I used an analogy of the "Emotional Bank Account." The premise of this training, at that time, was to deposit a significant amount of capital in the emotional bank account of a student. The amount should be high enough (engage positively with the student) so that the student can live off the interest and make a withdrawal in rare cases. In my training, I identified the deposits, the expectations, and the rules for drawing interest and what it meant to make withdrawals. In addition, I spent time explaining the variances of deposits as determined by the words and actions of a student. Later, I found that Stephen Covey had coined this term in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (1997), where he explains the concept of an emotional bank account is a metaphor for proactively building relationships that build trust by making 'deposits'. Conversely, by reactively doing things that decrease trust, one makes 'withdrawals'. This balance determines how well two people can communicate. My reading of his work allowed me additional insight into the power of withdrawals because until then, I had worked to live off my interest. I found that I had the aptitude for building relationships but was not taking the next demanding steps (withdrawing). He helped me understand that I held significant influence due to the strength of my bank accounts, and I needed to leverage it to ensure that my students would maximize their social-emotional and academic growth. This is the

point when my journey moved from relationship-building to that of a warm demander.

After reading Stephen Covey, I wanted more information on maximizing my influence to support students' academic advancement. In my reading, I came across the term "warm-demander". Judith Kenfield (1975) coined the term "Warm Demander" when describing an approach that a teacher has when they not only show students that they care but refuse to allow them to give up on their achievement. I believed that I personified the term. That was until I was introduced to the Muhammed Ali of education - Marva Collins. I initially heard about her from the parents of friends I visited in Chicago; my friends, parents, and peers spoke about her with reverence. I came to understand this reverence when I saw her movie and read books and articles about the work she had done in Chicago. In every word and in the movie, she personified the actions of a warm demander. She was who I fashioned myself after, all the while incorporating the principles espoused by the legions of scholars I have introduced to you up to this point. As time went on, my skills allowed me to move into school leadership. I was now leading an alternative school where students arrived reading 4 to 5-grade levels below average. Few people believed they would graduate high school. As a school leader, I began to consistently see, for myself, a connection between behaviors and instructional disengagement. This harkened back to my earlier readings from Gladson-Billings; as I reread her old work and read her new work, I found that I needed a tune-up because Gladson-Billings reminded me of the importance of culturally responsive practices. Still, I needed to understand more about the connectivity of this work to academic achievement. To broaden my understanding, I chose Geneva Gay as my mechanic.

In Geneva Gay's book *At the Essence of Learning: Multicultural Education* (1994), she premises that excellent teaching and multicultural teaching are indistinguishable, stating that the child may be the meaning-maker, but the teacher's responsibility is to build structures and to create strategies that help all children gather meaning from their surroundings. Geneva Gay (1994, 2002, 2010, 2013) explained that a culturally responsive pedagogy approach not only promoted the inclusions of students' experiences, realities, identities, and histories in the curriculum but also believed that educators who committed to the use of these practices improved marginalized students' academic achievement—moving me from the theoretical constructs of culturally responsive teaching as a tool for engagement and transformation to one that could enhance academic achievement. Through the reading of Gay's work delved more into the practicality of multicultural education, because as a principal, I now needed to provide tools to my teachers. After my car was tuned I began to think more deeply but at times found it overwhelming to know where to begin with the application of providing culturally responsive teachings within a multicultural education context. My instructional

delivery principles seemingly embodied culturally responsive pedagogy through the readings of Geneva Gay but as a leader I needed additional support with the application of multicultural education practices. I found a road map for these practices in the scholarship of James Banks.

James Banks provided me additional context to think through the "how" of this work. Banks (1995) derived multicultural education as an equal educational opportunity for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. He believes that all students benefit by changing the total school environment to reflect the diverse cultures and groups within a society and the nation's classrooms. His work coincides with Ladson-Billings, but his effort adds additional dimensions for consideration and contextual ideas and language. Banks (2005) introduced the concepts of content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1995) to my vocabulary and I began a study of them singularly and collectively. The information that I had gathered up to this point was always at the forefront of my mind. As the instructional leader in my school, and later the Director of Schools, I educated my staff and set expectations that they apply the principles I had learned.

As everyone should, I found that I needed to take a break and retool. I decided to retool and get my Doctoral Degree. The work of my degree, I believed, would reignite my journey as an educator. What I found was that as a full time doctoral student, I missed being in the trenches and doing the work. So, I began to work with the county school district because I wanted to broaden my experiences. At this point, I had worked primarily in alternative education settings, and I wanted to know what I did not know. My next step transitioned me to a district-level position where I had an opportunity to view the needs of students from a birds-eye perspective and found that my journey toward understanding culturally responsive instruction was not over. On the district level, I found that I needed to have a broader understanding of the diverse needs of students because my goal was no longer focused on the few, but now I had to think of the many. Having a more significant impact but more politics, I examined my journey and questioned how I could curate something to support school staff on taking a similar journey as I had.. I can stand, and tell the stories, provide the books and scholarship, impart the effectiveness, but I needed a foundational tool that would serve as a roadmap – I needed to create a framework.

Subsequently, before I designed the framework, I knew something was missing. I needed to discuss it with my counterparts, and an area that consistently came up was concerns about the capacity of educators to embrace culturally responsive teaching practices. As a school- and now district leader, I found that many educators were not vested in the journey toward culturally responsive education, even when they were aware that scholarship showed that such an

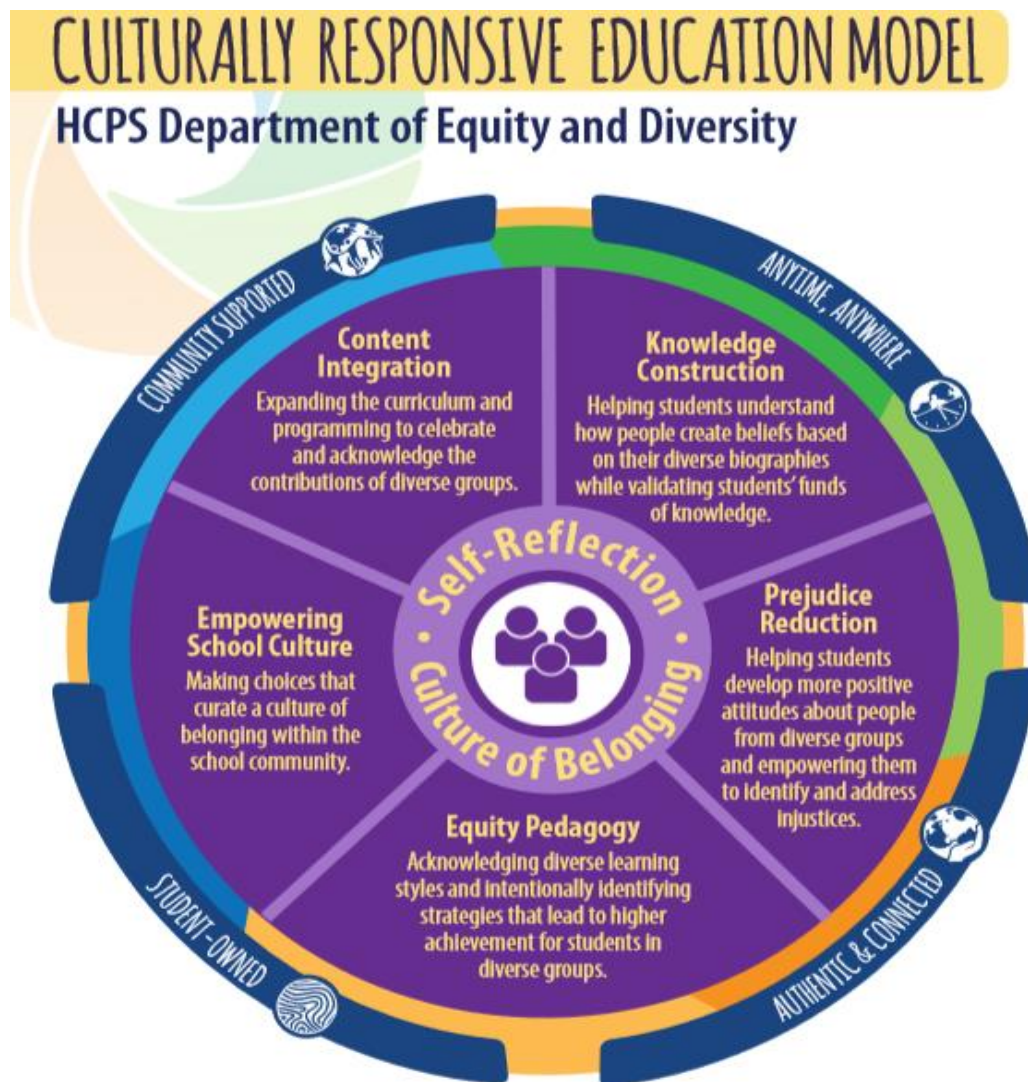
approach successfully promoted a sense of belonging, increased student engagement, and enhanced academic achievement. The inquiry led me to Zaretta Hammond.

Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (2015), makes the case, using neuroscience, that educators' implicit biases and structural racialization create a deficit mindset for teachers. She also explains that educators may not be willing to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices because such an approach asks them to step outside of their lived experiences, which sometimes creates powerful feelings of discomfort. In doing so, it provided additional insight into neuroscience of why building a relationship with students, to include a shout-out to Warm Demanders, increases the success of students by further outlining the connection between emotions, trust, and learning. The emotions and concern (heart work) grant permission to be tough and push (head work) them toward higher achievement. In addition, she provided processes and strategies for operationalizing culturally responsive teaching. This book was extremely helpful. It provided me a wonderful stopping point, not an ending but a point for which I could stop and reflect on, when crafting the framework. When thinking through the framework, I thought through my journey and wrote out key concepts, and supported scholarship. I also thought about what I had learned as a teacher, therapist, alternative school principal, school district leader, but more importantly, I reflected on my lived experience as the child of black colorist parents, child of multi-racial step-parents, child of parents from the segregated south, stepdaughter to an immigrant mother, and parent to adopted children of color who came to this country speaking another language. These lived experiences were significant influencers of this framework.

The CREM framework is not a step-by-step model; rather, it is a lens through which we can engage all areas of education and school leadership. This lens is universal to our effort and requires that we begin to look first at ourselves so that we can truly see others. Each frame serves as a lens by which educators can progress based on their self-reflective capacity and aptitude, but prior to beginning this reflection, we recommend that educators embrace an instructional tool. The Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM) framework is designed like a wheel with 'Self-reflection' and a 'Culture of Belonging' in the center. The CREM framework requires school leaders and teachers to first reflect on their cultural competence, and it expects them to honor their students' funds of knowledge.

The design is circular by intention with self-reflection and belonging in the center as an entry point to our viewing effort. Self-reflection requires people to understand and become aware of their cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and judgments because acknowledging self is central to interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Winkelman (2005) states that "cultural self-

awareness includes recognition of one's own cultural influences upon values, beliefs, and judgments, as well as the influences derived from the professional's work culture" (p. 9). When a person understands self, they can better understand a diversity of people—a person's values and beliefs shape that person's perceptions, defining the way they see the world. With reflection and intentional outreach, we develop an awareness of how others experience similar situations, which should lead us to make decisions and take actions that take into account these differences.



As a past educator and leader, my tool of choice was, and is, being a "warm demander." Teachers must develop their instructional delivery method where teachers expect great things from their students, convince them of their brilliance,

and help them reach their potential in a disciplined, structured environment. We take this opportunity and this framework to further task school leaders to be warm demanders of their staff. Are you holding staff accountable to the actions identified to center--self-reflection and belonging? The CREM framework promotes our active practice of self-awareness of the actions that influence a student's feeling as if they belong within the context of our schools or classroom communities which promotes academic achievement. These reflective practices are ongoing; therefore, we established core principles for self-reflection using the principles outlined by Zaretta Hammond.

The CREM framework does not allow the work of cultural responsiveness to stop at self-reflection and good intention; it provides a choice of lens for a person to engage--content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, school empowerment. The five spokes are premised on Banks' (1995) scholarship on multicultural education. In truth, the way we envision the spokes is not directly aligned with the context used by Banks; they had to be updated to make sense within the context of the principles and beliefs put forward in the scholarship I had read along this journey. An example is that Banks, to my understanding, viewed his effort as a stepping process where one builds to another; whereas, our framework introduces choice. As instructional leaders in our classrooms or as school leaders in our buildings, we have to have flexible entry points for this work. School Leaders and/or teachers have to learn to assess school culture and/or read their classroom room to identify where they need to focus their efforts. It is the choice of the school leader or teacher to choose to start this work by embedding students' cultural knowledge in their lessons (content knowledge); do you want them to allow for students to explore with their affective domain and reflect on others (knowledge construction); do you believe educators or school leaders must work to identify the most effective learning styles for students (equity pedagogy); do you think your class, or school is at the point where you can begin to embed opportunities for students to engage in socially oriented instruction (prejudice reduction); and are you ready to deep dive into educational equity by ensuring communication, engagement, policy, and procedures are responsive to all students and families (school empowerment).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

CONTENT INTEGRATION



- Are major figures, contributors or historical events from cultures other than the dominant culture celebrated in school programming and lessons?
- Do you see culturally relevant materials as essential to the curriculum, rather than “added to” the curriculum and is this represented within your units of study?
- Are materials (literature, music, art) used within my unit a reflection of students’ diverse lived experiences and contextual intersections?

KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION



- Does my teaching provide time and encourage student reflection on their learning processes (metacognition) and foster an understanding of others’ perspectives and experiences?
- Do I seek to understand my students’ lived experience and context as an asset to the learning environment?
- Do I activate my students’ lived experience and context in my instructional delivery and design of content (funds of knowledge)?

PREJUDICE REDUCTION



- Do I encourage students to examine their own experiences and the experiences of others in order to identify bias/prejudice/inequity and work toward inclusivity?
- Are students given opportunities to identify and examine content and social issues from multiple perspectives, allowing them to engage in daring dialogue and civil discourse?
- Are my lessons designed to empower students to take action to help solve community and societal problems?

EQUITY PEDAGOGY



- Do my instructional practices respond to the diverse learning styles of students and do I encourage students to share how they learn best?
- Do I understand the impact of student culture and lived experiences on their response to instruction, and identify instructional techniques that will be most effective for students, recognizing that differentiation may be necessary?
- Do I take intentional actions to identify and apply strategies known to support students from diverse ethnicities, races and genders, as well as the intersections that exist in order to promote equitable achievement?

EMPOWERING SCHOOL CULTURE



- Do I make choices for relationship-building, structures (processes), engagement, etc. that curate a culture of belonging within the school community?
- Do I recognize and deconstruct institutional barriers (practices and policies) that hinder students’ success, so that students are proportionately represented in all areas of school programming?
- Do I support student exposure to positive experiences that prepare them for post-secondary advancement and real-world navigation?

A four part course to support the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM) framework is in development. The course will provide teachers with foundational knowledge and skills to become more equitable educators by situating their instructional style within a culturally responsive teaching pedagogical framework and instituting supporting pedagogical principles of multicultural

education within their lessons. As of now we have only instituted the initial module which is focused on *self-reflection* and crafting a *culture of belonging*. This initial module provides educators with knowledge and expertise about culturally responsive vocabulary and cultural awareness. Throughout the entire course, teachers will become more critically aware of the social and contextual factors that influence their role as educators and the broad mainstream schooling experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In addition, they will learn how to foster constructive partnerships with students to guide them toward independent learning and how to cultivate safe classroom environments amenable to rigorous academic work. Our hope is that this foundational course will broaden the cultural lens of teachers in an effort to facilitate greater student belonging, engagement, and achievement.

If you are interested in beginning your journey, I recommend you acquire some provisions (understandings). The most critical provision needed for this journey is a willingness to grow your capacity for self-awareness and self-knowledge. We all are a part of some culture, and we also have individual identities, and we need to spend some time getting to know our cultural and societal identities. You must acknowledge your assumptions, beliefs, and values and establish how they have influenced how you engage, or inadvertently disengage, with your students and their families. I recommend that you complete a self-reflection cultural journal for a month. This journal should include questions that will lead you to write about your cultural and societal identities and ask yourself how you arrived at these identities; engage in a valuing of these beliefs systems; reflect on the similarities and differences your worldview is with your students etc. This journal does not need to be shared, but it could be helpful to find a trusted partner interested in taking a similar journey and individually or collectively reflect on your journal responses. Seek to understand your cultural self before you begin to try and understand someone else's.

The second provision is an acceptance that this journey is never-ending. An authentic, culturally responsive teacher understands the assignment – cultural humility. The assignment does not have a singular ending; subsequently, make sure you enjoy the journey. Too often, we seek out the pain of a culture instead of embracing their joy. I recommend that you spend time first learning about what makes your students joyous. Often their happiness is contagious. As you learn about their joy, do it in the space of appreciation, not judgment, their happiness is not yours to assign value. Once you determine your students' joy, seek out additional knowledge about your students' lived experiences. Your questions should allow you to accumulate knowledge about the ways they express joy (celebrate), experience emotional pain (sadness), engage & communicate (see & hear), receive and share knowledge (learning styles). Ask questions – do not make assumptions. This form of questioning is a form of ethnographic interviewing. None of your questions

should directly ask them about their culture; instead, you should be focused on establishing their ways of being. As you collect information, you will begin to develop community cultural patterns and classroom cultural patterns. It may be helpful if you compiled your information in written form or place it in a database. As you begin to derive community cultural patterns, you must speak with community cultural scholars (students, parents), read scholarship, watch a Tedtalk or similar platforms to determine the authenticity of the patterns. Collecting information in this manner is known as a cultural constructivist approach because you are constructing, not assigning, characteristics of a culture. This approach allows you to understand your students as individuals and as part of a cultural group. Once you validate the information, it is to be used to derive a culturally responsive classroom communication plan, craft culturally responsive lesson plans (delivery & content), establish culturally responsive classroom management expectations, etc.

There are many other provisions that I could recommend, but this last one is the most important. Do not travel alone. Initially, take this journey with your family, professional peers, and friends. You want someone by your side to engage in conversation, reflection, debate, celebrations, etc. As you grow in the work and have more cultural knowledge, intentionally seek out people who outwardly represent a cultural worldview different from your own. This person is not to validate your new cultural understandings or serve as a cultural navigator; instead, seek to establish a friendship with this person. This is not to say that you do not need individuals of different cultures to validate and navigate, but you need someone only to be a friend. No book, podcast, or video can educate you about a cultural worldview, the same as experiencing the world with that person. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "We hate each other because we fear each other. And we fear each other because we do not know each other. And we do not know each other because we are separated from each other." If we are truly seeking to become culturally responsive practitioners, we must challenge ourselves to not only teach using the principles but we must embody them in our daily actions.

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