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Understanding Mindset

Part
1

The Journey to Responsiveness

Chapter 1



Anticipation Guide

What do you think of when you encounter the term *culturally responsive teaching*? Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the concept?

- _____ Culturally responsive teaching is meant to help with race relations among educators and students.
- _____ All students can achieve highly when given the opportunity to learn.
- _____ Racial identity and cultural identity are synonymous.
- _____ Nonstandard English is a simplified version of Standard English.
- _____ Socioeconomic status is the most critical factor in student success.



Your Journey to Responsiveness

Where are you in your journey to responsiveness? I need you to answer this question by the end of the chapter because where you are in your journey will determine how receptive you are to the rest of the chapters in the book. Cultural responsiveness, no matter how you are viewing it now, begins with you and where you are in your heart and mind. Before we begin what will be, in effect, a reflective process, I want to make sure that you recognize that you are beginning or have been involved in an ongoing progression to better serve all your students in a way that validates and affirms who they are culturally and linguistically. The recognition of your process and knowing where you are in it will keep you centered and focused on the overall goal: better academic outcomes for all students and a deeper understanding of their cultural selves in the context of academia (school culture) and mainstream culture. There is a caution, however. You must be certain, confident, and capable on this journey because there will be hurdles, challenges, pitfalls, and bumps along the way—sometimes in the form of negativity, or what I call *resistance*, and sometimes in the form of struggles, which are expected and can be positive.

What is the journey to responsiveness? It involves two initial phases followed by a landing phase. Phase one is courageously conversing about race when necessary. Note the word *courageously*. This is not the conversation with your neighbor, with your family, or the conversation you had on November 9, 2016, the day after a historic presidential election. The conversation I am referring to is different than those because it requires four parts. Glenn Singleton describes these parts in his concept of *Courageous Conversations* (2015). The four parts are:

1. You had the opportunity to speak your truth. You were able to get things off your mind, off your chest.
2. You listened to someone else with an open mind.

3. The conversation was uncomfortable. You felt a healthy tension, anxiousness.
4. The conversation was real talk, adult language, no minced words; all cards were put on the table.

If you have had ongoing courageous conversations about race, when necessary, that included these four parts, then you are well on your way to responsiveness. Think. When was the last time that you had a courageous conversation about race?

Next, you recognized that there was more to this journey than conversation and consideration about race. While discussing race is inescapable in the context of the United States, there is a glass ceiling with the conversation. At some point, there is no place to go with it. Actions have to be taken, steps have to be made toward justice, fairness, and success for your students. In your journey, you recognized this and began to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. You became a voice for the voiceless or the unheard. You spoke up in a meeting about unfairness. You risked your position by fighting for a policy, procedure, or practice that was to the benefit of those who have not traditionally benefitted from schooling in the United States. The second phase is *advocacy*. Have you been an advocate recently? For whom? In what ways? After advocating, you realized that there is more to this journey.

The *landing phase* of the journey causes you to look up at the sky and wonder about the possibilities. And if it is a clear evening, with stars illuminating the sky, then you will see “Planet Responsiveness,” your landing spot for the journey. It is there—or here, where I am—that you will spend the rest of your time exploring “cultures.” The cultures referred to are not based on race, nor ethnicity alone. The cultures on Planet Responsiveness speak to who we are, wholly related to our identities and how they are manifested in the context of institutions such as schools. If you are on Planet Responsiveness, then you are learning about your students culturally and linguistically every day. You are making efforts to engage them in ways that first validate and affirm, and

What's in a Name? Everything!

Unfortunately, the term *culturally responsive teaching* has become a cliché, buried in the grave of educational terms that are cast about like ghosts in books, state mandates, district initiatives, and conference themes. When a term in education becomes clichéd, it becomes meaningless; it loses its power. Over the years, I have seen a steady increase in educators saying they are culturally responsive or that culturally responsive teaching is a part of their goals. Long ago, I received an email from an educator in the Midwest who said that her superintendent had now branded the district “culturally responsive.” However, she was not sure what that meant and needed to know immediately—before the ubiquitous one-day mandated district professional development program. Throughout my home state of California, many districts want to be culturally responsive, or at least they think they do. In reality, what they are seeking is how to address racial issues under the cover of *culturally responsive teaching*. And why not? The term sounds appropriate and informative, seems to address the sensitive issues of race in a nonthreatening way, and serves a purpose in situations where the achievement gap persists and where negative attitudes about race, culture, and language remain stubbornly in place. But turning the meaning of culturally responsive teaching into a quick fix for race relations, diversity issues, and achievement-gap woes is a fleeting solution. The authenticity and relevance of the term is steeped in transforming instructional practices to make the difference for improving relationships between students and educators and increasing student achievement. This is my point: what you label actions to address sensitive issues must have meaning backed by tangible outcomes. There must be an investment in cultural and linguistic responsiveness like any other program, approach, or initiative.

Speaking a Common Language

Being culturally and linguistically responsive begins with understanding its meaning and having consensus about how to name it. My term, *culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and*

learning (CLR), speaks to its comprehensiveness and complexity. There is an in-depth focus on culture and language. This focus is a

**Defining
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Gloria Ladson-Billings defines *culturally responsive teaching (CRT)* as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical references to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (1994, 13).

Geneva Gay defines *culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)* as “the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them” (2000, 31).

Sharroky Hollie defines *cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR)* as “the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society” (2012, 23).

Django Paris and H. Samy Alim explain *culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP)* as having “as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to *sustain*—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change. CSP, then, links a focus on sustaining pluralism through education to challenges of social justice and change in ways that previous iterations of asset pedagogies did not” (2014, 14).

benefit to both teachers and learners. The use of the word *responsive* is strategic and purposeful because it forces a thought process beyond such common monikers as relevance, proficiency, or competency. To be responsive, educators must be willing to validate and affirm students through instruction, which leads to the pedagogical skillset (the topic of Chapter 2). Let’s begin by speaking a common language.

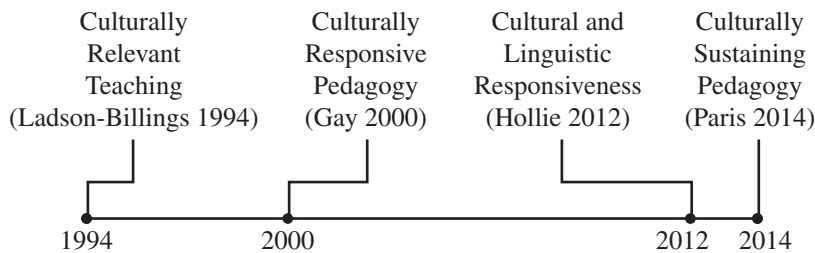
Multiple names and definitions have been given to culturally responsive teaching over the past 50 years. These variations include, among others, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible teaching, culturally relevant teaching, culturally connected teaching, culturally responsive learning, culturally matched teaching, cultural proficiency, cultural competency, and culturally appropriate teaching (Gay 2000). Within the past five years, Paris and Alim have introduced another term, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (2014).

While CSP advances the theory of culturally relevant teaching, the multiple definitions have contributed to its clichéd use that has diluted its meaning. Furthermore, some superficial interpretations have led to obscure attempts at implementation in districts (focused on professional development), schools (focused on curriculum

initiatives), and classrooms (focused on instructional strategies). My proposal is that you explicitly look at cultural relevancy as theory on a continuum and know where you fall philosophically. As a result, you will know better where you stand, which will increase your chances of being culturally responsive. Figure 1.1 provides a continuum to consider. Of course, this consideration requires you to deeply study the various viewpoints of what makes each one different in the progression. Think of the theory as a hamburger and the different names for it as different types of hamburgers. When it comes to hamburgers, think of the types you prefer and the accompaniments of each. In order to be culturally responsive, you need to know what type of burger you are eating. Just don't go for the bun and meat with lettuce and mayo. In others words, know your brand.

The continuum in Figure 1.1 illustrates the evolution of culturally relevant theory through the years 1994–2014.

Fig. 1.1 Continuum of Culturally Relevant Theory



Almost any innovation that has had staying power in education and is still in use today has maintained its terminology and meaningfulness. The term for that innovation will not have changed, although its interpretation may have evolved in a consistent way. An example that comes to mind is *cooperative learning*, a concept put forth in the late 1960s (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1994; Kagan and Kagan 2009). The term *cooperative learning* has remained intact for almost four decades and has furthermore evolved to include the concept of *collaborative learning*. When most educators encounter the term *cooperative learning*, there is

consensus on its meaning. My point is that cooperative learning has had staying power because it has not been subjected to multiple terms and interpretations, as is the case with culturally responsive teaching.

I believe that clarity can sometimes be more important than agreement. Being clear on what is meant by culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is certainly one of those cases. In training over 100,000 educators, observing in over 2,000 classrooms, and speaking to hundreds of audiences across the country, I have found that most teachers and administrators appreciate the focus on clarity as opposed to forcing agreement or buy-in.

A graphic element consisting of a horizontal bar with arrowheads at both ends, containing the text "Pause to Ponder". Below the bar is a rounded rectangular box containing a series of questions.

Pause to Ponder

What is your term for cultural relevancy?
Why did you choose that term? In which situations have you used the term? In those situations, was there consistency in the use of terms and their meanings? Do you think it is necessary for individuals to use the same terms and definitions?

For the purposes of my work and this book in particular, I advocate a singular use of the concept and terminology. If an educator desires to be culturally and linguistically responsive or a school is looking to implement the approach, I recommend that all stakeholders agree upon one term and one meaning—preferably the one used in this book. As a result of the work in which I have been immersed since 2000, I have adopted the term *cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR)* for three reasons:

1. I have found that many so-called followers of culturally responsive teaching are actually most interested in *racially* responsive teaching. There is a tendency to be more focused on racial identity rather than the myriad cultural identities in our collective diversity. My focus on culture, language, gender, class, and religion is anthropologically based, not race based. Conflating culture and race is a common misinterpretation among some individuals who work with diverse groups of students. CLR makes clear the distinction and fosters understanding of the need to avoid such identity confusion.
2. I use CLR in order to emphasize the language aspect of culture. I believe that there is nothing more cultural about us as humans than the use of our home language. Linguistic identity is a crucial aspect of who we are. By itself, the term *culture* subsumes language; consequently, linguistic identity is obscured. By including “linguistic” in the term CLR, the intentionality of the language focus is demonstrated as equal to what we typically consider as culture. In short, we are what we speak, and to a large extent, our language is a representation of our heritage, including family, community, and history.
3. CLR is a pedagogy. Pedagogy is a five-star word frequently thrown around in academic circles with the result that some people consider the term to be jargon. I consider pedagogy to be a powerful term in its meaning and its functionality in CLR. I define *pedagogy* as the “how” and “why” of teaching, the strategic use of methods, and the rationale behind why instructional decisions are made. Pedagogy is usually the most often missed facet of culturally responsive teaching. Without the pedagogy, there is only theory on how to respond to students’ cultural and linguistic needs, and theory alone does not adequately serve teachers and students.

To sum up, what a concept is called matters. In society, how we label something speaks to what it means to us symbolically. *Cultural and linguistic responsiveness* is the concept that is developed in this book.

Defining CLR Technically and Conceptually: VABB

Most proponents of culturally relevant teaching will point to *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1994) groundbreaking book, as the star in the culturally responsive universe. This work has defined what many have come to know about the approach, and her description of six culturally relevant teachers is a must-read for those interested in being culturally responsive. She provides a classic definition of *culturally responsive teaching*: "A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes" (1994, 13). Teachers practicing culturally relevant teaching know how to support student learning by consciously creating social interactions that help them meet the criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In addition to the work of Ladson-Billings, advanced students of culturally responsive teaching will point to the contributions of Ramírez and Castañeda (1974). Many cite this reference as the earliest introduction of culturally responsive teaching, showing that the concept itself goes back many years. While Ramírez and Castañeda may have introduced culturally responsive teaching to the research, Ladson-Billings put it on the national map.

Geneva Gay's text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2000), is by most accounts the second most influential work on culturally responsive teaching. She added pedagogy to the concept and became the leader in the second wave of books and articles that would build upon Ladson-Billings's work. She defines culturally responsive pedagogy as "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters

more relevant to, and effective for, them” (Gay 2000, 31). This pedagogy teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. In addition to the focus on pedagogy, Gay provides positive achievement data supporting the work from districts and schools across the nation. This addition of results data was important to establish the credibility of culturally responsive teaching, which had been an easy target for critics of the approach. Unfortunately, some criticism can still be found today. Goodwin (2011) cites that there is no research that supports culturally responsive teaching correlated to student achievement. But this statement is based on research from the 1970s and does not account for the evolution of the theory since that time, not to mention any recent research. Other researchers who have made important contributions to the literature of culturally responsive teaching include Delpit and Dowdy (2002), Hollins (2008), Irvine (1991), and Villegas and Lucas (2007). These researchers agree on a key element of culturally responsive teaching: it responds to students’ needs by taking into account cultural and linguistic factors in their worlds.

This view of CLR from the research perspective is central to the content of this book as well as to the work I do with educators around the country. Therefore, *technically*, cultural and linguistic responsiveness means the *validation and affirmation* of indigenous (home) culture and language for the purpose of *building and bridging* the students to success in the culture of academia and in mainstream society. *Conceptually*, CLR is going to where the students are culturally and linguistically, for the aim of bringing them where they need to be academically. *Metaphorically*, CLR is the opposite of the sink-or-swim approach to teaching and learning in traditional schools. CLR means that teachers jump into the pool with the learners, guide them with appropriate instruction, scaffold as necessary, and provide for independence when they are ready. Validation, affirmation, building, and bridging is known as *VABB*. I want you *VABBing* your students. I want you to be *VABBulous* in all that you do with your students. Your teaching should be *VABBilicious*. I think that you get the point. *VABB* is CLR.

Validation

Validation is the intentional and purposeful legitimatization of the home culture and language of the student. Such validation has been traditionally delegitimized by historical institutional and structural racism, stereotypes, and generalizations primarily carried forth through mainstream media. In the institution of schools, students are invalidated when they are told over and over that they are rude, insubordinate, defiant, disrespectful, disruptive, unmotivated, and lazy. These labels over time chip away at students' cultural and linguistic value in the context of school. To validate is to provide a counter narrative to students, letting them know in explicit terms that they are not those labels but that they are culturally and linguistically misunderstood.

Affirmation

Affirmation is the intentional and purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes, images, and representations of marginalized cultures and languages promoted by corporate mainstream media, including music, film, and television. The messages are often subtle and play out through the instructional materials, textbooks, and how the Internet is used in schools. To affirm requires intentionally providing images, texts, and narratives that give students alternate perspectives and the tools to critically analyze media and materials as consumers.

Building

Building is understanding and recognizing the cultural and linguistic behaviors of students and using those behaviors to foster rapport and relationships with the students. In other words, you are building stock with your students, making an investment.

Bridging

Bridging is providing the academic and social skills that students will need to have success beyond your classroom. If building is the investment, then bridging is the return. Bridging

is evident when your students demonstrate that they are able to successfully navigate school and mainstream culture.

This definition of CLR is meant to be broad, covering a range of cultural identities and languages. It centers on ethnic identity in the cultural context and on nonstandard languages in the linguistic context because they are the core of who we are in terms of childhoods and upbringing, our families. But in no way is the definition exclusive to any one group. Indeed, CLR is a universal concept. Cultural responsiveness is for everyone. Later in the chapter, I distinguish the different identities that comprise who we are as humans and the cultures that come with those identities. We explore why it is necessary to validate and affirm all that your students are, culturally and linguistically. Before going there, though, I need you to reflect. Given the positive intent of VABBing, why would it be so difficult to do? Given that hardly anyone would argue against the idea of VABBing, why don't our schools VABB on general principle? The next section is the second step in changing your mindset: knowing your biases.

A graphic consisting of a horizontal bar with arrowheads at both ends, containing the text "Pause to Ponder". Below this bar is a rounded rectangular box containing a reflection question.

Pause to Ponder

What could prevent you from VABBing a student or a colleague?

Listening to Your Deficit Monitor

What can block you from VABBing your students, colleagues, or even family and friends are your hidden biases. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) teach us that these hidden biases are bits of knowledge about social groups that, once lodged in our minds, can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence. As humans, we all have “first thoughts” that are based on prejudices, ignorance, misperceptions, or misinterpretations. These first thoughts keep you from VABBing because they ask, *Why would I validate and*

affirm a behavior that I view as negative or bad? In order to VABB, you must be aware of your first thoughts; you have to always listen to your deficit monitor but with the promise that these first thoughts will not be your last thoughts.

Your *deficit monitor* is that internal signal that warns you when you are looking at students' behaviors solely as negative, as lacking, or as liabilities, without consideration that they might be culturally or linguistically based and, therefore, assets. Those who practice responsiveness as a way of being constantly ask reflectively, *What will prevent me from validating and affirming a student culturally and linguistically?* This reflection keeps us honest about our potential for bias, prejudice, misinformation, and ignorance. We have to be omni-aware of our implicit biased thinking so that we can combat it with the cultural lens of validation and affirmation. "Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone but only to his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind" (Banaji and Greenwald 2013, 24). If we stay stuck in the deficit lens, then we are unlikely to validate and affirm. This can affect our instructional practices and the school climate and organizational issues related to equity and institutional racism. Being attuned to your deficit monitor is the key to cultural responsiveness in the classroom. It highlights the path to teaching in a way that validates and affirms.

Eliminating the Deficit Perspective

When it comes to consideration of the cultures and languages of underserved students, many educators' beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets are deficit oriented. In essence, this means that the students are blamed for their failures and are seen as the problem. The students are myopically viewed as lacking *something*. The view of an educator with a deficit mindset is reflected in such observations as these:

- If we had better students, then we would have better schools.
- Our scores were good until *they* started coming here.
- Everyone in our school seems to be doing well except for *those* kids.
- What is *wrong* with them?

Culturally and linguistically, underserved students are all too frequently seen as deficient, deviant, defiant, disruptive, and disrespectful. What they bring to the classroom culturally and linguistically is not seen as an asset but as a liability.

The reality is that our biases never completely go away. They simply recede or change, which is why it is important for you to know your biases, to be in control of your thought processes, and to be prepared to go responsive when necessary. I offer these three steps to check in with your biases:

1. **Check Your Filter:** I cannot stress enough the value of knowing where your information comes from, how your knowledge base developed, and how your experiences have shaped what you believe.
2. **Question Your Belief System:** Once you realize that you have received inaccurate information about the cultures and languages of others, you are compelled to then question everything that you believe and seek out accurate information. I often share Gandhi's wise words on this topic: "A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes." Psychology research tells us that most of what we believe is formed between infancy and pre-adolescence, and we spend the rest of our lives debunking or reconfirming what we believe. Know that if you are getting your information from mainstream media—and that includes all the various streaming and online outlets—then you have received tainted, biased, one-sided, and shaded perspectives about the cultures and languages of others.

3. Listen To Your Deficit Monitor: I believe that we all have an internal voice, sound, or feeling that tells us when we are thinking with prejudice, bias, ignorance, or misinformation. This is our internal warning to stop thinking this way. The question is, do we listen to it? For me, it is a voice that tells me that I am thinking with inaccuracy, half the story, or negative thoughts. I listen most of the time to my monitor and stop thinking in deficit terms. And when I do, I pivot and begin the process of validation and affirmation.

Biased thoughts happen as fast as you can blink your eyes (Gladwell 2005). They are otherwise known as snap judgments and occur in fast-thinking mode. Ross (2014) noted that if you are human, then you are biased. Specifically, he says, “Unconscious influences dominate our everyday life. What we react to, are influenced by, see or don’t see, are all determined by reactions that happen deep within our psyche” (10). What we need to do is slow our thinking down by doing the three steps outlined above. But it takes a lot of practice, which is why I suggest you pay attention to your everyday biases when you are grocery shopping, going to the movies, or walking your dog. Since, as a human, you are having first thoughts anyway, why not use the opportunity to check your filter, question your belief system, and listen to your deficit monitor?

I want to put these three steps to the test by using myself as an example. I recognize my many biased thoughts every day. In the winter of 2017, I visited Chicago. As I made my way out of the airport to the rental car shuttle, the cold hit me hard. I knew it would be cold, but I did not expect the freeze to take effect as soon I hit the outside. When I got to the shuttle stop, I noticed a man in shorts and flip-flops. I was shocked! It was 15 degrees. I felt like ice, and this guy looked like he was heading to Santa Monica Beach in California, where I am from. My first thought was, *What the hell is he doing out here like that?* My next thought was, *This is what they do.* “They” for me was white people. And as soon as I had this thought, I began my internal process:

1. I checked my filter: Where did I get my information from about Caucasians and liking the cold? I had to search my mind and experiences. And I realized it was mainly from media and also the geography of where “they” live, as far as I knew. In either case, I was misinformed or not fully informed.
2. I questioned my belief system: What did I believe about Caucasians and the cold? More importantly, what did I believe about this man? The bottom line is I could not draw any conclusions. I had to acknowledge my stereotyping.
3. I listened to my deficit monitor: I stopped thinking with a stereotype and looked at this gentleman anew, comfortable with the fact that I had no idea why he was dressed in shorts and flip-flops in 15-degree weather. In truth, it did not matter.

In order for you to effectively VABB, you are going to have to go through the same process and eventually put it on automation. Again, I suggest you start at home, but eventually it will be about recognizing the biases and ignorance you have about your students. You cannot VABB without recognizing your first thoughts, but remember that they will not be your last thoughts. The key to being willing to recognize when you are thinking with prejudice is to know who you are culturally and linguistically, which is the next step in the changing of your mindset.

Pause to Ponder

Think of the last time you had a biased thought and how you responded. What cultural behaviors are you seeing in a negative way as it applies to your students?