During the last three decades of the 20th century, teacher preparation addressed diversity as a critical component in effective teacher interaction with students in an increasingly multicultural population. In 1972 the American Association of Colleges and Teacher Education published “No One Model American,” the aim of which was to “build an effective and humane society through the betterment of teacher education” (“No one model”, 1972). The resulting Commission on Multicultural Education endorsed three premises: (1) Cultural diversity is a valuable resource, (2) multicultural education preserves and extends the resource of culture diversity rather than merely tolerating it or making it “melt away,” and (3) a commitment to cultural pluralism should permeate all aspects of teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith, 2008, p. xv).

This commitment to multiculturalism expanded in 1976, when teacher preparation institutions had to provide evidence that their candidates had received adequate opportunities to interact with issues concerning teaching diverse populations (Gollnick, 1992). However, in spite of the ever-increasing terminology to encompass the changing faces of students in the classroom—multicultural, diverse, culturally responsive, diversity in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic, linguistic, disability— Eurocentric attitudes often persisted. Nonetheless, effective teachers strive to acknowledge the kaleidoscope of background experiences students bring to the classroom and to ensure the materials and methods are representative of this ever-growing diversity. They aim to provide students with opportunities to connect their learning experiences to their own lives.

In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) emphasized that high-quality teachers were essential for student success. However, Ardila-Rey points out that NCLB's “definition of what it means to be a highly qualified teacher ... does not provide any provisions on ... cultural requirements.... Only a handful of states have developed policies or standards for teacher preparation and credentialing that address issues to diverse populations” (Ardila-Rey, 2008, p. 341). This is cause for concern because teacher preparation institutions and other entities involved with ongoing professional development are responsible to “prepare educators who have the competencies and dispositions to work effectively with diverse students” (Anstrom, 2004, p. viii), address issues of theories and practices for effective learning, to include “experiences, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully promote the educational success of all children” (Nevárez-La Torre, Sanford-DeShields, Soundy, Leonard, & Woysh-ner, 2008, p. 270), and include competencies in which teachers “learn, reflect, introspect and incorporate ... new ideas into pre-service and in-service teachers' actions in their classrooms” (p. 277). With these goals in mind, teacher preparation and professional programs are being restructured so that candidates acquire the competencies to meet the challenges of educating a diverse student population (Phuntsog, 1999). However, despite continuing efforts to attract a balanced representation of teachers from various cultures, there is minimal diversity among teachers and the numbers who do exist are dwindling. According to Gay (2003):

It is increasingly a cross-cultural phenomenon, in that teachers are frequently not of the same race, ethnicity, class, and language dominance as their students. This demographic
and cultural divide is becoming even more apparent as the number of individuals in teacher preparation and active classroom teaching dwindle. (p.1)

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Culture has been defined as “The system of values, beliefs, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (Trumbull, 2005, p. 35). Effective teacher preparation addresses the need for teachers to acknowledge students’ diversity and incorporate their pluralistic backgrounds and experiences into the learning experiences and classroom environment. In “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2001), “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000) (and other similar terms) teachers “develop the knowledge, skills, and predispositions to teach children from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social class backgrounds” (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003, p. 270). Kirk-land (2003) commented that “good multicultural teaching honors our diverse cultural and ethnic experiences, contributions and identities” (p. 131) and emphasized that teachers need to “understand the experiences and perspectives [students] bring to educational settings and be responsive to the cultures of different groups in designing curriculum, learning activities, classroom climated, instructional materials and techniques, and assessment procedures” (p. 134).

According to Hackett, teachers need to develop a “strong cultural identity [so as to be] responsible for teaching the whole child by teaching values, skills, knowledge for school success and participation in society, linking classroom teaching to out-of-school personal experiences and community situations” (Hackett, 2003, p. 329). Ambrosio emphasizes the importance of multiculturalism for the teacher:

Teaching is learning—a process of slowly integrating knowledge into practice…. The most important aspect of teaching is developing the mental habit of reflecting on your instructional practice and of altering your practice according to what you discover about how students learn best. Knowledge of multicultural theory and practice will give you the reflective space, the necessary reservoir of cultural insight, to intelligently address pedagogical issues as they arise in your everyday practice. (Ambrosio, 2003, p. 37)

Gay (2006) echoed one recurring response to the need to ensure high-quality teacher preparation:

U.S. society is becoming increasingly diverse, and that diversity is reflected in its classrooms. Creating a respectful, productive classroom environment is always a challenge; this challenge is even greater when students and teachers come from different cultural backgrounds, or when students differ in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation, ableness, and academic aptitude. Unless teachers have the knowledge, skills, and disposition to effectively guide diverse groups of children, they are likely to face classes characterized by disrespect and alienation, name-calling and bullying, disorder and chaos. (pp. 365–366)

Moreover, Gay advised that “teachers must be multicultural themselves before they can effectively and authentically teach students to be multicultural” (Gay, 2003, p. 4) and proposed that “culturally responsive teachers … validate, faciltiate, liberate and empower ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2000, pp. 43–44).

Culturally relevant pedagogy aims to ensure that educators acknowledge and honor the diverse viewpoints of their student population and refrain from promoting homogeneous perspectives as universal beliefs. Glanzer (2008) referenced Hunter (2000) in that “the unspoken imperative of all
moral education is to teach only those virtues, principles, and other moral teachings about which there is no disagreement in American society” (p. 525). Glanzer proposed that “schools should show fairness to diverse visions of the good life and not merely replace them with neutered and safe substitutes” (p. 526). Dingus (2003) further emphasized the importance of this perspective: “No student should have to sacrifice cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and social networks in order to obtain an education” (p. 99).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM

For more than five decades, teachers have developed strategies to comply with the responsibility to accommodate diverse students in an inclusive classroom; these challenges are compounded by the increasing diversity among the student population. Although teachers must be competent in the subject area they are assigned to teach (“Highly qualified teachers,” 2006), the main focus in teaching has switched from the “What”—that is, content in the curriculum—to the “Who”:- who is the learner in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for teaching their students and for ensuring they all learn. It is critical that educators use their knowledge of students’ background and incorporate what they know about these learners into quality learning experiences. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating into learning experiences components of what is known about students’ knowledge of their cultures, their prior experiences both in their countries of origin and their current living situations, as well as the learning styles of diverse students, to make learning more appropriate and effective for them (Gay, 2000). “Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures” (“Culturally Responsive Teaching,” 1994).

Ambrosio (2003) referred to Freire’s (1970) premise that “Rather than seeing students as empty vessels, to be filled with the expert knowledge of teachers … students must make their own meanings; they must be producers of knowledge themselves” (p. 31). Moreover, he advised that teachers consider “students as creators rather than consumers of knowledge, as makers of meaning rather than passive recipients of socially sanctioned truths” (p.34). Ambrosio avocated a “pedagogy that uses the personal knowledge and experiences of students to reflect critically on issues presented from a variety of perspectives” (p. 34), advising that teachers should commit themselves to developing classrooms based on a “cultural democracy, to creating learning experiences and opportunities that allow students from diverse cultural groups to see themselves in … curriculum, instructional practices, and classroom climate” (p. 34). Pratt (2008) supported a student-centered curriculum, which “appreciates diverse abilities and interests and adapting teaching to allow for these differences” (p. 517). Students succeed when academic tasks include themes representative of their own culture (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005). Ironically, practices that give students choices about what they learn and how they learn are misaligned with standards-based curriculum and accountability through testing.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a component in the foundation of competencies effective teachers require. Ladson-Billings (Summer, 1995) commented about this concept:

But that's just good teaching! Instead of some “magic bullet” or intricate formula and steps for instruction, some members of my audience are shocked to hear what seems to them like some routine teaching strategies that are a part of good teaching. (p. 159)

These “routine strategies for good teaching” are the criteria for effective teaching and learning. It is with this repertoire of theories, skills, and practices that effective teachers are able to create
environments conducive to achieving the goal of education. That goal is to facilitate the development of intelligent, life-long learners who possess the strategies and metacognitive processes to make meaningful connections with their knowledge basis and transfer their skills to (and beyond) the challenges they encounter in their daily life. Teachers are obligated to “prepare students to become effective and critical participants in the world” (Nieto, 1999, p. 143). Effective educators are cognizant of the components necessary for learning to occur and are able to delve into their “toolbox” of theories and practices, strategies and perceptions, to ensure that all of their students will succeed. This is the more critical as the information and skills students learn will often be outdated by the time they exit the school environment.

Gay (2003) acknowledged, “much is said about the necessity and value of variety in teaching styles or using multiple means to achieve common learning outcomes” (p.2). When teachers plan for successful learning, they make a concerted effort to deliberately plan for classroom experiences in which all learners can be reached at multiple points throughout the learning experiences. Teachers who plan deliberately for an environment conducive to learning for all students ensure differentiation by incorporating various learning styles, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, and “the diversity of learning styles, histories, cultures, and experiences that ethnically different students bring to the classroom” (p. 2).

Ambrosio (2003) emphasized that “multicultural education places a high value on critical thinking, on the personal truth making that enables students to challenge the moral and intellectual authority of the dominant culture” (p. 36).

**Cooperative Learning.** When a classroom incorporates the tenets of Cooperative Learning, the environment promotes maximal learning (Kagan, 2001). Ladson-Billings’ (1994) notion of culturally relevant classrooms provided Craviotto and Heras (1999) with the concept that when a classroom is designed around culturally relevant principles, there is significant interaction between students as well as between students and the teacher. They explained that, “Classroom dialogue is a fundamental aspect of classroom discourse…. [and the] classrooms are framed as an inviting space for exploration, learning, and dialogue among peers, students, and adults” (np). Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) referenced Marzano (2003) to promote classrooms where expectations include actions based on mutual respect. They support their premise with Slavin's (2006) endorsement that an advantage of cooperative learning situations reinforces students' responsibility for their own learning.

**Classroom Management from a Cultural Perspective.** The competencies for effective teaching include creating an environment conducive to learning. Effective classroom techniques are critical for each and every student to receive the learning experiences to which they are entitled (Weinstein et al., 2003). Culturally responsive pedagogy helps teachers achieve the goal of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) when they develop their management plan with an awareness of the diversity in their classrooms. Weinstein and colleagues (2003) outlined three premises by which to achieve the goal of CRCM:

1. *Recognize that we are all cultural beings, with our own beliefs, biases, and assumptions about human behavior.* At the same time, as it is incumbent that the educator incorporate the values “implicit in the western, White, middle-class orientation of U.S. schools, such as the emphasis on individual achievement, independence, and efficiency… By bringing cultural biases to a conscious level, we are less likely to misinterpret the behaviors of our culturally different students and treat them inequitably;

2. *Acknowledge the cultural, racial, ethnic, and class differences that exist among people.* People
must acquire "cultural content knowledge." They must learn, for example, about their students' family backgrounds, their previous educational experiences, their culture's norms for interpersonal relationships, their parents' expectations for discipline, and the ways their cultures treat time and space, and use acquired cultural knowledge as a way of demonstrating an openness and willingness to learn about the aspects of culture that are important to students and their families;

3. **Understand the ways that schools reflect and perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society.** This involves an understanding of how differences in race, social class, gender, language background, and sexual orientation are linked to power (p. 270).

Weinstein and colleagues proposed that, "Culturally responsive classroom managers work to create a sense of community. This means anticipating the cultural conflicts that are likely to arise and promoting positive relationships among students" (p. 273).

Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) emphasized that teachers be trained in techniques of classroom management from a cultural perspective in that "cultural values and beliefs are at the core of all classroom organization and management decisions" (p.xiii). They acknowledged the continuing concern that "School culture is relatively consistent across the United States and reflects the individualistic values of the dominant, European American culture" (p.xiii).

**Cultivating Caring, Respectful Relationships.** The ultimate goal of an effective teacher preparation program is to develop and hone the skills educators require to create learning environments that acknowledge, respect and are representative of the social world of all students (Noddings, 1992). "When teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds, planned efforts to cross social borders and develop caring, respectful relationships are essential" (Weinstein et al., 2003, p. 272). When teachers create an environment which is based on caring and concern, and in which each student is valued, the result is that students become more motivated and learn more (Stipek, 2002).

Pratt (2008) identified "caring" as a central dimension of effective teaching. He advised:

> Sometimes it is important to put aside the research journals, political commentaries, and popular news about the state of education and stop long enough to listen to the voice of a 9-year-old…. You can learn a lot about classrooms just by listening to the kids who inhabit them. (p. 515)

**Teacher Reflection as a Standard of Effective Teaching.** In the standards for effective teaching, reflective practice is a criterion for all teachers—pre-service, novice, and veteran. Teachers’ ability to reflect on student achievement is a critical component in teacher preparation as well as in continuing professional development. Teachers who reflect on their own teaching ensure students are successful in their learning (Hoffman-Kipp, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999). Howard (2003) recommended teacher reflection as a means of incorporating issues of equity and social justice into teaching thinking and practice.

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE TEACHER IN THE CLASSROOM: A THOUGHT FOR EDUCATORS**

Diversity in the classroom encompasses many categories, among them ethnicity, culture, learning needs, and other issues. For all of these, educators have to hone their pedagogical skills to differentiate instructional practices to meet the varying needs of the population in the general classroom. The significant shift in the balance of diverse students—the multicultural panorama of 21st-
century school environment—is no longer an exception to the world outside of the classroom, but a
direct reflection of it. Effective educators incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure that all
students succeed. Sroka (2006) summarized the essential qualities of effective teachers in the criteria
that teachers be nonjudgmental—that students’ opinions are welcomed and respected and that
teachers have a passion for the content they teach.

Ginott (1995) made a powerful statement when he described the overpowering influence the teacher
has in the classroom:

I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is
my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the
weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or
joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor,
hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be
escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized. (p.302)

## A KALEIDOSCOPE EFFECT

Effective teachers are equipped with a repertoire of teaching strategies designed to meet the
educational needs of all students in the classroom. The components of their repertoire can be likened
to a kaleidoscope that contains a multitude of prisms, which are dynamic and ever changing. Just as
the kaleidoscope creates images using the diversity of color, shape, and sizes from the composite of
the prisms, so, too, do successful educators develop an environment for optimal learning for the
diverse student population.

See also: Cultural Bias in Teaching, Cultural Bias in Testing, Cultural Deficit Model, Multicultural
Education

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