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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS THAT SERVE DIVERSE POPULATIONS

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The United States has not yet developed an educational system that ensures all demographic groups of students achieve equitable and excellent learning results. Scholars have noted, however, that many classrooms and schools and some school districts have made impressive strides in this direction. While some studies have explored the instructional leadership practices found in schools that achieve equitable and excellent learning results for diverse populations of students (e.g., Barth et al., 1999; Cotton, 2003; Edmonds, 1979; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Scheurich, 1998; Symonds, 2004), other studies have focused on the role of culturally responsive teaching in classrooms that serve African American, Latina/o, Asian American, and Native American children well (e.g., Ferguson, 2002; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2002, 2009; Saifer & Barton, 2007). Unfortunately, these bodies of literature have not been adequately integrated in studies that examine how, or if, culturally responsive teaching contributes to the accomplishments of schools that achieve equitable and excellent learning results for all of the racial/ethnic groups they serve.

The lack of intentional investigation of the relationship between these two constructs (culturally responsive teaching and high-performing, diverse schools) inhibits our understanding of the role leaders can play in creating schools and districts that lead all students to high levels of academic success. This chapter is not an exhaustive review of either body of literature. Instead, it is an intentional search for synergy. Can the pursuit of culturally responsive classrooms be advanced through an understanding of the best practices of high-performing, diverse schools? Can much larger numbers of diverse schools achieve outstanding academic results for their students by mining the lessons learned from culturally responsive teaching? How can these bodies of knowledge help us move beyond isolated exemplars of excellence toward systems that ensure excellent learning for all students?

We focus this examination through a framework for culturally responsive teaching presented by Gay (2010). While other important frameworks could have been utilized (e.g., Ford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997), this framework

is compelling because it clearly aligns with many prominent findings from studies of high-performing, diverse schools, providing a convenient bridge that brings together these bodies of research and scholarship.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Hess (1969) argued that cultural deficits were a primary cause of low achievement among students of color and students from low-income communities. The concept of cultural deficits or cultural deprivation influenced state and federal education policy and the practices of schools and districts throughout the nation. Several scholars, including Boykin (1984) and Edmonds (1979), rejected the notion of cultural deficits and instead asserted that educational systems and structures were designed to meet the needs of students in the predominant culture and were not sensitive or responsive to the needs of students from other cultures. These scholars emphasized cultural differences rather than cultural deficits. Banks (2006), Ladson-Billings (1995a), Gay (2010), and others began to explore and describe how classrooms worked when teachers operated through a paradigm that was relevant, sensitive, and responsive to the cultural differences of their students.

Banks (1993, 2004) addressed cultural differences through a conceptual framework for multicultural education that addressed content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Banks emphasized that this multicultural education framework was critical for all students and for the well-being of our society. Culturally responsive pedagogy is part of equity pedagogy within this framework.

Gay (2010) provided a framework for understanding culturally responsive teaching that emphasized caring, communication, curricular content, and culturally congruent pedagogy. Both Gay (2010) and Saifer and Barton (2007) emphasized that these elements were equally important in generating improved learning outcomes for diverse populations of students. This section is intended to explore the research that supports each of the four elements of the framework.

Gay (2010) combined a variety of descriptors including “culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized, and responsive” (p. 31) in framing the concept of culturally responsive teaching. She explained that all these constructs are “virtually identical” as they address the importance of making “classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students” (p. 31). Similarly, Irvine (2003) explained that “culturally responsive pedagogy is used interchangeably with several terms such as culturally responsible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally compatible, and culturally relevant to describe a variety of effective teaching approaches in diverse classrooms” (p. 73). In this chapter, we have chosen to use the term *culturally responsive*, unless we are specifically citing an author’s use of another term.

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive pedagogy as that which, “validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (p. 46). In this section, we explore the literature in support of Gay’s framework (caring, communication, content, and pedagogy). Each of these four elements is explored below.

Caring

Gay (2010) explained that caring interpersonal relationships are characterized by “patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants” (p. 49). She emphasized that such caring in culturally responsive classrooms reflected concern for the individual student as a person and concern for the student’s academic success.

Delpit (1995) emphasized that caring for the individual student necessitates understanding the culture in which the student lives. Ladson-Billings (2009) explained this type of caring is intended to “assure each student of his or her individual importance” (p. 72). Caring requires understanding. Culturally responsive teachers get to know their students’ interests, likes and dislikes, and their families. They make students feel personally valued as cherished members of a classroom family. Yet, caring, in this context, extends beyond accepting and valuing.

In his surveys of high school students, Ferguson (2002) found that students (in particular Black and Latina/o students) were more likely to work hard in school when they perceived that their teachers were encouraging them. This finding suggests that caring, in the context of schools, may be more complex than simply being kind or passively accepting. Student effort is influenced when students feel that their teachers actively encourage and support them.

Caring, as defined in culturally responsive teaching, is reflected in expectations for student’s personal, social, and academic success (Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billings (2002) emphasized how caring teachers demand student success. Culturally responsive teachers care enough to insist upon high levels of student effort. They expect excellence for all of their students and they care enough to persist with students until excellence is attained. Here, the power of teacher expectations, as described by Good and Brophy (1994) and Goodlad (1984) are utilized constructively to ensure that all students access challenging curricula and benefit from rigorous instruction.

Several researchers have described this style of caring as “warm demander” (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ross, Bondy, Galligan, & Hambacher, 2008; Ware, 2006). They found that more effective teachers were adept at clearly articulating rigorous expectations, while supporting students as they worked to meet those expectations.

In spite of these rich descriptions of the type of caring that influences learning outcomes, our profession continues to be plagued by narrow, myopic perspectives of caring that neither include knowledge of students nor insistence upon high expectations for their academic success. More research is needed to develop tools that help differentiate the quality of caring described by Delpit, Ferguson, Gay, Irvine, Ladson-Billings, Ross, and others from the “caring” that allows students to stagnate intellectually because we sympathize with the difficulties in their lives. Teacher educators, teacher leaders, and administrators need to learn how to use such tools to elevate the quality of caring throughout their schools.

Communication

Just as communication is central to teaching, it is central to the concept of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2010) noted the following:

Whether making assignments, giving directions, explaining events, interpreting words and expressions, proving propositions, justifying decisions and actions,

making promises, dispersing praise and criticism, or assessing capability, teachers must use language. And the quality of the performance of these tasks is a direct reflection of how well they can communicate with their students. (p. 78)

Communication, however, is complex. Language, dialect, and culture influence the ways in which messages are transmitted, processed, and received. August and Hakuta (1998) concluded that the communication of meaning was essential in providing English learners effective instruction, whether instruction was provided in a student's native language or in a second language. Porter and Samovar (1991) found that culture and communication were inextricably related, such that one could not understand communication without understanding culture.

Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges and accepts the language children bring to school. This acknowledgment and acceptance is a rejection of deficit models that emphasize what students have not yet learned. Instead, it represents an effort to teach to and through the linguistic strengths students acquired at home. Nonetheless, this acknowledgment and acceptance of students' language has been a source of confusion and controversy.

The Ebonics or Black English debate peaked when the Oakland Unified School District in California adopted a policy that recognized Ebonics as a distinct language. Delpit (2002) explained that the policy was based upon a pilot Standard English Proficiency Program that had succeeded in improving students' skills in Standard English and their academic proficiency across curricular areas. The policy recommended teacher training in elements of Ebonics and aspects of African American culture. The policy was intended to enable teachers to provide instruction that would allow African American students to excel in learning Standard English and excel in all school subjects. In contrast, reporters, celebrities, and politicians accused the district of teaching slang and disregarding the importance of teaching Standard English.

California's Proposition 227 "English for the Children" and other similar state mandates have reacted aggressively to pedagogies that proposed to value the native language of students and use those native languages to build students' academic proficiency and their proficiency in English. Anderson (2009) described how these adult wars over language policy leave students and teachers as victims.

In contrast, Ladson-Billings (2001) described teachers who allowed students to use the language with which they were comfortable to speak and write in school; however, students were also required to "translate" their statements into Standard English. Students acquired the concepts and skills they were asked to master, they increased their proficiency in Standard English, and they maintained their respect and appreciation for the language used in their homes. Culturally responsive teaching does not seek to supplant Standard English with the language children use at home. Instead, it seeks to use the home language in a manner that strengthens the acquisition of Standard English, while affirming the value of the child and the child's home language.

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges that in addition to differences in language syntax and semantics, there are differences in discourse structures and communication styles associated with race and ethnicity. For example, Kochman (1985) explained that African Americans, Hawaiians, Latina/os, and Native Americans have been observed using participatory-interactive discourse in which speakers expect listeners to engage them actively, as they are speaking, through vocalizations and movements.

This contrasts starkly with the passive-receptive discourse found in conventional American classrooms. Through culturally responsive teaching, educators create opportunities to utilize the forms of discourse that are common to students.

Lee (1995) demonstrated the efficacy of an approach that modeled the acknowledgment and acceptance of students' syntax and semantics, as well their discourse styles in an effort to teach complex literature comprehension skills. By helping African American students relate their use of irony and double entendre in the discourse style called "signifying," the researcher was able to lead students to make complex inferences related to literature. Both quantitative and qualitative measures showed evidence of greater learning gains for the experimental group compared to the control group.

Lee's thorough description of her methodology underscores the importance of the teacher's knowledge base related both to the syntax, semantics, and discourse styles of students and to the nuances of the content objectives educators endeavor to teach. How do schools acquire or develop teachers with these skill sets? What should teacher preparation programs do to enhance these skill sets? What roles should principals and district leaders play? Without systematic attention to the development of these teacher skills, only a small percentage of students are likely to benefit from educators who know how to use students' language as a tool for increasing understanding of challenging academic standards.

Anderson (2009) described the many ways in which arguments regarding the use and teaching of language have become politicized. Perhaps, we have fueled the controversy by failing to differentiate means and ends. Most educators and perhaps most citizens would readily acknowledge the central importance of offering students input they can comprehend as they seek to learn Standard English or as they seek to master other important academic skills such as reading, mathematics, or science. In many states and school districts, policy battles have been lost as critics have convinced the public that efforts to provide comprehensible input were not means, but goals that directed attention away from the primary goals associated with mastery of Standard English and state content standards. As the nation continues to grapple with the need to improve student learning in low-performing schools, perhaps some of these policy issues can be resurrected with a careful focus on providing students the quality of instruction necessary to ensure that they achieve the ends that states have defined.

Curriculum

Ferguson's tripod model (2002) identified three elements central to ensuring the success of diverse populations of students: content, pedagogy, and relationships. Gay (2010) determined that issues of curricular content (what we want students to learn) are central to cultural responsiveness.

Banks (2006), Gay (2010), Kunjufu (2005), Ladson-Billings (1995a), and Sleeter and Grant (1991) argued for broader curricular content that reflected the cultures of the students being taught, as well as other cultures represented in communities and around the world. None of these scholars suggested that traditional academic standards should be supplanted by curricula focused on the cultural heritages of the students served. Instead, they explained that culturally responsive teaching of African American, Latina/o, Asian American, and Native American students "includes information about the histories, cultures, contributions, experiences, perspectives, and issues of their respective ethnic groups" (Gay, 2010, p. 128). Similarly, Delpit (1995) described the importance of

educating students to value and understand both their own culture and the broader array of cultures they will encounter throughout their lives. Banks (1997) argued that, “Students must develop multicultural literacy and cross-cultural competency if they are to become knowledgeable, reflective, and caring citizens in the twenty-first century” (p. 13).

The limited coverage of diverse populations in textbooks frustrates the goal of more inclusive curricula. Gay (2010) contended that textbooks form the basis of 70% to 95% of the content in classrooms, with higher percentages of textbook use in core academic classes and lower percentages in subjects such as music and art. While Gay acknowledged some textbook improvements in recent years, she explained:

Textbooks continue to be flawed with respect to their treatment of ethnic and cultural diversity for several reasons. First, there is an imbalance across ethnic groups of color, with most attention given to African Americans and their experiences.... Second, the content included about ethnic issues is rather bland, conservative, conformist, and “safe.”... Third, gender and social-class disparities prevail within the representations of ethnic groups, with preference given to males, the middle class, and events and experiences that are closely aligned with mainstream European values, beliefs, and standards of behavior. Fourth, textbook discussions about ethnic groups and their concerns are consistent across time, with contemporary issues being overshadowed by historical ones. (2010, p. 130–131)

These observations concerning textbooks underscore another important curricular aspect of culturally responsive teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995b) argued that through culturally relevant pedagogy, students must “develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Similarly, Gay (2010) contended that culturally responsive pedagogy liberates student thinking by encouraging students to challenge conventional explanations and assumptions of truth. Therefore, culturally responsive teachers do not merely present information, they provoke students to think, question, analyze, and debate information so that students become skillful evaluators of truth and meaning. As Banks (1997) explained, “Knowledge is neither neutral nor static: it is culturally based, perspectivistic, dynamic, and changing” (p. 13). Thus, culturally responsive teaching challenges students to consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives and generate their own arguments and conclusions.

In spite of the strong arguments for broader, more inclusive curricula, most teachers are likely to feel constrained by pacing charts, standards, and state test objectives that focus more narrowly on Eurocentric priorities and perspectives. If we, as a nation, are to succeed in developing students who have the capacity to thrive in a pluralistic society and an ever-shrinking world, we must embrace standards (and aligned assessments) that better reflect the diverse contributions of all people throughout the world. Current debates around common core standards may provide an opportunity to pursue broader, more inclusive foci for teaching and learning.

Cultural Congruity between Pedagogy and Student Learning

While curricular issues focus primarily on *what* is taught, pedagogical issues focus more on *how* students are taught. Pedagogy was one of the three legs of Ferguson’s tripod

model and it is the fourth and final aspect of Gay's description of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2010) contended that pedagogy is more likely to be effective if it is tailored to the learning strengths, styles, and needs of students. As well, she argued that some student learning strengths, styles, and needs are influenced by culture. Therefore, cultural congruity between pedagogy and student learning occurs when teachers employ instructional strategies and methods that build upon student's prior knowledge and experience, connect to their backgrounds and cultures, and are more likely to accelerate student understanding.

This type of instruction does not require a modification of academic standards or a reduction in levels of rigor. In contrast, teachers employ instructional methods that are more likely to lead culturally diverse groups of students to master the same challenging standards expected of all students (Irvine, 2010; Lee, 1995; Saifer & Barton, 2007). For example, Ladson-Billings (2009) offered examples of teachers helping African American children relate to higher level mathematics skills through the patterns used in hair braiding. Gay (2010) described how the Multicultural Literacy Program required teachers to connect with the real-life situations and cultural heritages of their culturally diverse students in order to teach challenging reading comprehension skills. Similarly (as described earlier), Lee (1995) demonstrated the potential power of culturally responsive pedagogy in teaching high school students complex literature. Au (2009) emphasized that culturally responsive instructional techniques can be useful in educating children from various nonmainstream cultures if teachers take the time to identify and respond to the patterns of learning strengths children exhibit.

Howard (2001) examined the pedagogical practices of four highly effective elementary teachers working with African American students in urban settings. Twenty-one nominators (school district administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and civic leaders) identified teachers whose pedagogical practices were deemed effective in contributing to the academic and social development of African American students. The four teachers consistently used culturally responsive pedagogy, designing lessons that featured instructional strategies that helped students connect the challenging academic content being presented with their backgrounds, cultures, and experiences.

Culturally responsive pedagogy often includes the use of cooperative learning strategies. Gay (2010) emphasized that some students with high levels of affiliation to certain cultures exhibited some common learning styles and strengths. In particular, she emphasized how cooperative learning strategies often proved more powerful than typical instructional strategies for engaging Latina/o, African American, and Native American students. Whereas many standard instructional practices require students to spend large percentages of time listening passively or working on an individual basis, cooperative learning strategies respond to student learning styles that value teamwork, collaboration, discussion, and active engagement. These cooperative learning strategies have proven successful in promoting the achievement of elementary students (Slavin, 1995), secondary students (Swanson, Mehan, & Hubbard, 1995), and college students (Treisman, 1985) from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Irvine (2010) emphasized that culturally relevant pedagogy was not easy. She explained that teachers could not acquire this pedagogical proficiency by simply attending a workshop or learning about diversity. Unfortunately, school administrators and teacher educators give insufficient attention to the challenges associated with helping teachers develop these pedagogical skills. How can professional learning communities,

teacher collaboration meetings, and similar structures become engines for promoting culturally responsive pedagogy? How can school and district leaders use teacher observations, classroom walkthroughs, and other supervisory tools to accelerate the pursuit of culturally responsive pedagogy? If we fail to develop structures and systems that help teachers define, implement, and evaluate, and retry pedagogical techniques that are more culturally responsive, we help ensure that only a few fortunate students benefit from powerful culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, in Summary

Culturally responsive teaching offers a compelling hypothesis for improving educational outcomes for millions of underserved African American, Latina/o, Native American, and Native Hawaiian students. It suggests that these students are more likely to learn and achieve when communication, curricula, and instruction are shaped in ways that acknowledge, honor, and reflect their language, heritage, prior knowledge, and learning styles. As well, it suggests that these students are more likely to excel academically when teachers evidence sincere caring and a strong commitment to ensuring high levels of academic success for each student. Evidence supporting this hypothesis has been found through a vast array of studies focused upon students of different cultural backgrounds and varying age groups.

Nonetheless, culturally responsive teaching is rarely discussed in studies of high-performing schools that serve racially, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse students. Educational leaders need to better understand the promise and the limitations of culturally responsive teaching, as they attempt to improve achievement for the diverse populations of students they serve. Furthermore, research and scholarship need to elevate attention to strategies that will make the pursuit of culturally responsive teaching systemic. Evidence of effectiveness has not generated systemic change. Therefore levers for systemic change need to be identified, pursued, and pushed in ways that will increase access to high quality instruction for many more students. The next section will examine the literature concerning such high-performing schools and districts, in preparation for an analysis of the overlap of these constructs.

HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS FOR DIVERSE STUDENTS

The United States has long endured substantial differences in the academic attainment of different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups of elementary and secondary education students. Coleman et al. (1966) determined that schools had little impact on student achievement after socioeconomic variables were considered. His analysis of achievement data concluded that issues beyond the control of schools (e.g., poverty, race, and ethnicity) had greater influence on learning results than the actions or inactions of educators. In response to Coleman's findings, researchers began identifying and studying elementary, middle, and high schools that were demonstrating substantial impact on student achievement.

Effective Schools Studies

In the 1970s researchers began exploring the differences in academic attainment among schools serving similar demographic populations (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Edmonds, 1979; Lightfoot, 1981; Venezky & Winfield, 1970).

Weber, 1971). These effective school studies contradicted Coleman's findings by asserting that school practices can positively influence the achievement of children of color and children from low-income communities. In particular, these studies emphasized school climate, leadership, teacher expectations, assessments of student progress, and focus on basic skills as correlates of school effectiveness.

For example, Weber (1971) examined four inner-city elementary schools with strong reading results. He found eight characteristics that influenced reading achievement, including: (a) strong leadership, (b) an atmosphere of order, purposefulness, and pleasure in learning, (c) a strong emphasis on reading, (d) high expectations, (e) additional reading personnel, (f) use of phonics in the reading program, (g) individualized instruction, and (h) the careful evaluation of student progress. While Weber's study was among the first to describe inner-city schools that were achieving better than typical results, the study was criticized for not examining comparison schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

In contrast, some effective schools studies specifically endeavored to present comparisons of effective and ineffective schools. For example, Brookover and Lezotte (1979) compared six inner-city elementary schools with consistently improving achievement to two similar schools with consistently declining achievement. Through their analysis of questionnaires and interview responses, they found that principals and teachers in the improving schools had high opinions of their students' academic abilities. In contrast, in the declining schools, they found that principals and teachers had low opinions of their students' academic abilities. These different perceptions of ability seemed to influence expectations for student accomplishment, the quantity of time devoted to reading and mathematics instruction, and the level of deliberate focus on ensuring that students master reading and mathematics objectives.

One of the early critics of Hess's cultural deficits model, Edmonds (1979) synthesized several studies of effective schools and found the following similarities in findings:

1. Effective schools had strong administrative leaders.
2. Teachers and principals promote a climate of high academic expectations.
3. The school's environment is orderly, without being rigid and is conducive to student learning.
4. Effective schools prioritize the acquisition of academic knowledge above all other pursuits.
5. Resources, in effective schools, are managed to support the pursuit of academic learning.
6. Academic progress, in effective schools, is monitored frequently.

While these studies influenced many state and district school improvement efforts, researchers criticized the findings as overly simplistic and thinly supported (Grady, Wayson, & Zirkel, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983). As well, they questioned the rigor of the data used to identify schools as effective and the small number of schools upon which findings were based. These procedural criticisms (or epistemological blind spots) ignored the evidence that some schools that served low-income, children of color achieved substantially better results than many similar schools.

Effective Schools in the Accountability Era

As states began to develop school accountability systems focused on improving achieve-

Johnson & Asera, 1999; Johnson, Lein, & Ragland, 1998; Scheurich, 1999). These studies took advantage of state databases of school achievement results to identify schools that achieved remarkable results for children attending schools in low-income communities. A criticism of the early (1970s) effective school studies was that they frequently failed to disaggregate achievement data in ways that ensured that all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups of students were achieving at high levels (Purkey & Smith, 1983). This new wave of studies benefited from state and federal mandates that required the reporting of disaggregated data. While these studies affirmed many of the earlier effective school correlates, they also deepened understanding of the factors that influenced better learning results for racially, culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse groups of students.

The Texas school accountability system was one of the first to require the disaggregation of achievement results by race (Johnson, 1999). This data rich environment enabled researchers to identify and study schools that achieved strong academic results for African American and Latina/o students, as well as for students who met low-income criteria. Scheurich (1998) and Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) identified Texas schools near the U.S./Mexico border that achieved impressive results for Latina/o students and English learners. Similarly, Johnson et al. (1998) identified Texas schools that served predominantly children from low-income homes and had high percentages of Latina/o, African American, and White students passing the state assessment. These qualitative studies focused primarily on elementary schools that achieved “recognized” or “exemplary” ratings through the Texas accountability system.

In subsequent years, similar studies focused on high-performing schools serving diverse student populations in California (Bell, 2001; Izumi, Coburn, & Cox, 2002; Symonds, 2004), Massachusetts (Minkoff, Reville, & Candon, 2003), Illinois (McGee, 2003), Kentucky (Kannapel & Clements, 2005), Tennessee (Craig et al., 2005), and Arizona (Waits et al., 2006). Additionally, several studies examined high-performing, diverse schools from multiple states (Barth et al., 1999; Casey, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Parrett & Budge, 2009).

It is also important to note that several of the studies written after the year 2000 focused upon high-performing, diverse middle schools (Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Trimble, 2002). Several others examined high-performing, diverse high schools (Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews, 2005; Daggett & McNulty, 2005; Ragland, Clubine, Knight, Schneider, & Smith, 2001; Stevens, Sporte, Stoelinga, & Bolz, 2008).

Scholars have also identified and studied schools that achieved better results for diverse populations of students outside the United States. For example, Sailors, Hoffman, and Mathee (2007) examined schools in South Africa that achieved strong reading results for low-income students. Mulford et al. (2008) identified and studied schools in the Australian state of Tasmania that served very low-income communities and achieved high academic results. Rouse and Florian (1996) conducted case studies of effective schools in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Also, Liu and Teddlie (2009) studied high-performing rural schools that served low-income communities in China.

While the above-mentioned studies focused upon school success for racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse students, other studies focused more specifically on schools that promoted the academic success of students who qualified for additional educational assistance. For example, Texas Education Agency (2000) and Aleman, Johnson, and Perez (2009) focused upon schools that achieved strong academic results for English learners. Ragland, Clubine, Constable, and Smith (2002) and Rouse and Florian

(1996) explored the impact of high-performing schools on students with disabilities. Also, Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) examined high-performing schools for migrant students.

While many researchers endeavored to understand the attributes of high-performing, diverse schools, others began to explore the influence of school districts in creating and sustaining these high-performing schools (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Often these studies examined districts in which multiple schools achieved high levels of academic performance for diverse populations of students.

Across this wide array of studies, covering schools and districts in different geographic and political settings, serving different grade spans, and addressing different constraints and opportunities, findings were remarkably similar. Findings can be grouped in four broad categories, starting with curriculum, pedagogy, and relationships (Ferguson's tripod) and leadership. The following section summarizes the findings associated with each category.

Curriculum in High-Performing, Diverse Schools

In the years subsequent to the articulation of state content standards, almost all studies of effective schools have emphasized how curricula in those schools are aligned to the standards. Leaders at successful schools ensured that they offered students sufficiently rigorous curricula, so students could master state content standards (Aleman et al., 2009; Barth et al., 1999; Bell, 2001; Craig et al., 2005; Elmore, 2006; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Minkoff et al., 2003).

Chenoweth (2007) noted that educators at high-performing schools "think deeply about what their students need to learn and how to make sure they learn it" (p. 216). There is deliberate consideration regarding whether or not courses, units, or even individual lessons are likely to lead students to mastery of state standards and beyond. In these schools, attention goes beyond official curriculum documents to the actual curricula offered and learned in classrooms. Teachers and administrators were continuously focused upon the levels of academic demand evidenced in classrooms (Stevens et al., 2008).

It is important to note, however, that educators in many high-performing schools pursue goals that extend beyond state standards. In their study of higher performing Massachusetts high schools, Minkoff et al. (2003) found that educators were focused both on the content students needed to learn in order to pass state exit examinations and graduate, as well as the content required for students to succeed in college. Similarly, Ragland et al. (2001) found that high-performing high schools in Texas were focused upon ensuring that students acquired the concepts and skills necessary for success in college.

Kannapel and Clements (2005) found that high-performing, diverse schools in Kentucky had systemic processes for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing their curricula. While many schools with mediocre levels of achievement might claim to have curricula aligned to state standards, they may not have systems for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing to ensure that rigorous curricula are enacted in every classroom. Minkoff et al. (2003), Barth et al. (1999), and Johnson and Asera (1999) explained how, in the schools they studied, teachers examined work together to determine if students were actually being taught the content they wanted students to learn.

Leaders in these high-performing schools worked to ensure challenging curricula was enacted universally throughout their schools. They also attempted to ensure that all students had access to the challenging curricula. For example, Ragland et al. (2002) and Kannapel and Clements (2005) emphasized that, in high-performing schools, leaders ensured that all students, including students with disabilities, had access to challenging curricula. Aleman et al. (2009) examined high-performing elementary schools in which leaders made certain that English learners had access to challenging curricula.

In addition to reflecting higher levels of academic challenge, curricula in high-performing, diverse schools tend to be integrated across disciplines. For example, Stevens et al. (2008) determined that teachers in successful high schools met across disciplines to plan and collaborate. Similarly, Minkoff et al. (2003) underscored the interdisciplinary nature of curricula in the schools they studied. In particular, they noted how teachers across various disciplines perceived shared responsibility for teaching reading and writing.

While several studies described school efforts to provide additional time for reading and mathematics instruction (Barth et al., 1999; McGee, 2003; Minkoff et al., 2003), it is important to note that these schools still provided rich, balanced curricula. In many cases, extra time for mathematics and reading was created by extending the school day so students could retain access to a breadth of curricular offerings that included subjects such as art, music, and physical education (Johnson & Asera, 1999; Picucci et al., 2002). In some cases, extra time for reading and mathematics was created through the integration of literacy or numeracy instruction into other content areas.

Finally, it is important to note that increased curricular rigor was often accompanied by increased opportunities for support and assistance. For example, Symonds (2004) noted that when a school increased the number of sections of algebra and decreased the number of sections of lower level math, the school also increased the availability of support for students.

These elementary, middle, and high schools taught students challenging academic content in ways that allowed students to discuss, debate, analyze, criticize, deconstruct, explain, and evaluate. Often students developed a depth of understanding that extended beyond the memorization of isolated facts.

Unfortunately, such curricula are not likely to become universally available (especially for students of color or students in low-income communities) because teachers feel compelled to “cover” the breadth of content in their pacing guides or in their textbooks. Even though multiple studies offer contradictory evidence, too many administrators seem convinced that the only way to generate strong test results is to cover every objective, “teach” every chapter, and remain blindly faithful to the district pacing guide. Thus, teachers in many schools are not likely to even attempt the hard work associated with preparing content rich, deep lessons because they perceive that such efforts would be scorned. Scholars must assertively separate fact from mythology and help school and district understand the limitations of pacing guides and the importance of offering students meaningful, engaging curricula.

Instruction in High-Performing, Diverse Schools

In high-performing, diverse schools, educators tailor instruction to lead each student to high levels of academic success. Teachers assume that they should be able to get every student to succeed (Bell, 2001; Johnson et al., 1998; Picucci et al., 2002; Trimble, 2002).

As a result, they critically examine their teaching practices to refine, modify, and adjust in ways that will lead more students to high levels of academic achievement (Elmore, 2006; Johnson et al., 1998).

To increase their chances of leading students to academic success, teachers in high-performing, diverse schools actively engaged students in learning. Stevens et al. (2008) found that teachers created instruction in which students were more involved in conversation and activity related to lesson objectives and were less likely to be expected to sit quietly and listen. Cooperative learning strategies were used extensively (Reyes & Pazey, 1999) and students received frequent feedback (Rutherford, 1999).

To determine how to modify and adjust instruction, teachers assessed students frequently (Craig et al., 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Minkoff et al., 2003; Symonds, 2004). These assessments may have been small or large, they may or may not have involved paper and pencil tasks, they may have included assessments that resembled state standardized tests or they may have involved writing tasks or other performances related to the specific objective being taught. Most importantly, however, in high-performing, diverse schools, teachers carefully examined assessment results and used them to improve the effectiveness of their instruction (Craig et al., 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; McGee, 2003; Waits et al., 2006).

This attention to instructional effectiveness created a climate of instructional innovation and experimentation (Johnson et al., 1998; Scheurich, 1998). In a disciplined, thoughtful manner, teachers creatively sought the instructional strategies that would bring their students deeper understanding. When assessment data suggested that one strategy generated limited success, teachers often supported each other in conceptualizing alternatives or refinements (sometimes based upon research and sometimes based upon their own best practices) that might generate better learning results.

The thirst for innovation was accompanied by a hunger to learn more about teaching. Educators in high-performing, diverse schools assumed that they could always learn more about how to help their students achieve at high levels. Thus, these schools were characterized by rich, sustained professional development efforts. The professional development was tightly connected to the real instructional challenges teachers encountered in their daily work, as evidenced by student assessment results (Barth et al., 1999; Craig et al., 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Minkoff et al., 2003; Picucci et al., 2002; Symonds, 2004). Often, the professional development involved teachers observing each other practice specific pedagogical strategies (Elmore, 2006; Symonds, 2004).

At the same time that teachers in high-performing schools worked to improve the effectiveness of their daily instructional practice, they implemented systems to identify and support students who needed additional assistance. In particular, these schools promptly identified students when they were beginning to fall behind and they provided immediate, focused assistance (Bell, 2001; Minkoff et al., 2003). These support systems were constantly being evaluated and refined so that they were effective in meeting student needs (Picucci et al., 2002).

In high-performing, diverse schools leaders created environments in which educators were constantly learning how to improve their teaching such that their students (all of their students) would learn. The research literature describes the environments in which teachers planned, taught, assessed, reflected, and then better planned, better taught, better assessed, and better reflected. Unfortunately, the literature has not adequately explained how leaders influenced the creation of these adult learning cultures.

What structures were put in place? How did leaders make adults feel free to step beyond what they knew and try new approaches? How did leaders use professional learning communities, professional development opportunities, observations, and other tools to facilitate the development of these adult learning cultures? These and similar questions must be explored as we attempt to help many more schools achieve outstanding learning results for all populations of learners.

Relationships in High-Performing, Diverse Schools

Perhaps, more than any other finding, researchers reported that high-performing, diverse elementary, middle, and high schools established a climate in which students perceived that adults cared about them and their success. Bell (2001), Cooper et al. (2005), and Johnson et al. (1998) reported that schools created a climate that felt more like family and less like an institution. Minkoff et al. (2003) described a climate in which teachers insisted, "These are our kids" (p. 18).

In explaining the climate she found in high-performing, diverse schools Chenoweth (2007) explained quite simply, "They [school personnel] like kids" (p. 221). Perhaps, more importantly, students at these schools perceived that the adults like them. Scheurich (1998) described high-performing, diverse schools as places where all students were treated with love, care, appreciation, and respect. Stevens et al. (2008) found that teacher-student interactions in these schools were mutually respectful. Teachers frequently praised students and expressed genuine concern when students had difficulty. Minkoff et al. (2003) noted that teachers and administrators knew all of the students at the school. Teachers spent time with students in the cafeteria, in extracurricular activities, and at athletic events. Similarly, Picucci et al. (2002) reported that the schools they studied provided students with opportunities to build meaningful relationships with adults. Teachers articulated a sense of connection and responsibility not only for the students in their classroom, but for all students in the school (Elmore, 2006; Texas Education Agency, 2000).

These positive relationships did not lead school personnel to excuse students from hard work. In fact, school personnel held very high expectations for academics, behavior, and student attendance (Bell, 2001; Casey, 2000; Chenoweth, 2007; Johnson et al., 1998; Minkoff et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2008; Waits et al., 2006). Teachers expected their students to work hard and succeed, but they also expected themselves to work hard to establish learning environments in which students were likely to succeed (Johnson et al., 1998).

It is important to note, however, that high expectations extended beyond academics. Scheurich (1998) noted that teachers were concerned about the holistic welfare of students. Minkoff et al. (2003) described an emphasis on building strength of character in their students. Stevens et al. (2008) found that educators articulated concern about students' lives beyond school.

Just as school personnel made extensive efforts to build relationships with students, they endeavored to build relationships with parents. Johnson and Asera (1999) and Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) found that educators in successful schools made efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents. Through their actions over time, they proved that they cared sincerely about each student and each family. As well, they proved they would work diligently to help each student succeed. Minkoff et al. (2003) and Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (2000) found that educators went to great

lengths to make personal contacts in ways that developed trusting relationships with parents. For example, they identified schools in which educators made frequent, regular phone calls to parents, wrote biweekly reports to parents, or made frequent home visits.

Unlike some schools where educators conceptualize parental involvement as the actions parents take to support teachers, in high-performing, diverse schools, educators also conceptualized parental involvement as the actions they took to support parents. For example, Minkoff et al. (2003) discussed schools where educators offered parents free adult education classes. Scribner et al. (2000) described efforts to create parent centers, promote networking, and address parent concerns. Johnson et al. (1998) described the efforts educators made to communicate with parents in their primary language.

In McGee's (2003) study of high-performing schools in Illinois, he found that high-performing schools had lower rates of student mobility than low-performing schools with similar demographic profiles. He raised the question of whether this finding was a cause or an effect. Does a lower mobility rate influence better achievement or does better service to students and parents influence a lower mobility rate? Additional study is needed; however, it is clear that high-performing schools create a climate that many students and parents would be reluctant to leave.

While multiple studies have addressed the power of relationships in high-performing, diverse schools, there is undoubtedly confusion as educators from struggling schools examine this literature and mistakenly assume that their school has already succeeded in building strong, positive relationships among teachers, students, and parents. This literature needs to be enhanced with tools that help educators more accurately assess the quality of relationships within their school and use the data generated to improve relationships in a systematic and sustained manner.

Leadership in High-Performing, Diverse Schools

While studies of high-performing schools have acknowledged powerful differences in teaching, learning, and climate in classrooms, they have also acknowledged the role of school leaders in influencing those changes (Cotton, 2003; Craig et al., 2005; Johnson & Asera, 1999). Specifically, leaders in high-performing, diverse schools promoted a climate in which educators worked together to improve teaching and learning (Craig et al., 2005; Elmore, 2006; Minkoff et al., 2003; Stevens et al., 2008; Waits et al., 2006).

Elmore (2006) explained that leaders in successful schools that served low-income communities promoted a sense of urgency for improving learning results for students. Leaders communicated in ways that led teachers to internalize responsibility for working together to improve their teaching effectiveness. Symonds (2004) determined that leaders in high-performing schools were more likely than their counterparts in low-performing schools to lead teachers in systemic inquiry into the gaps in achievement in their schools. Leaders talked about issues of race and ethnicity and provided structured opportunities for faculty to engage in discussions about how they might improve learning results for the diverse groups of students they served. Symonds also emphasized that leaders supported teachers in examining, understanding, and responding to data in ways that encouraged constructive action.

To create a sense of urgency, leaders had to minimize the extent to which educators focused upon issues that were beyond their control. Symonds (2004) emphasized the manner in which principals kept educators focused on inside-school factors that influenced achievement. Barth et al. (1999) and Johnson et al. (1998) described how

leaders “took excuses off the table” and helped educators focus on the real improvement opportunities in front of them. Johnson and Asera (1999) explained the way in which leaders often identified, pursued, and attained a reachable, but significant first goal that signaled to educators and to the broader school community that meaningful change was possible.

To enlist educators in the pursuit of challenging school improvement goals, leaders took care to establish working environments in which educators felt valued and appreciated, personally and professionally. Leaders showed that they valued staff input (Picucci et al., 2002). Leaders redirected time and energy that might have been wasted on interpersonal conflicts among educators toward the goal of improving students’ lives (Johnson & Asera, 1999). Kannapel and Clements (2005) noted that educators in high-performing exhibited a strong work ethic and high morale. Similarly, Scheurich (1998) noted that teachers in these high-performing schools were less prone to “burn out.” Principals in these schools were skillful in creating environments in which educators felt sufficiently secure to focus their energies on improving their professional practice, individually and collectively.

Even with improved professional working environments, leading people to commit to improving their practice probably was not easy. Perhaps, one reason leaders in these high-performing schools succeeded was their ability to share leadership with others. Bell (2000), Johnson and Asera (1999), Johnson et al. (1998), Minkoff et al. (2003), and Waits et al. (2006) described ways in which school leaders created collaborative structures that gave others opportunities to assume leadership roles in promoting school improvement. As principals distributed leadership responsibilities they promoted a shared sense of responsibility. As collaborations among educators became more effective, educators felt that they had the support they needed to succeed in improving their instructional practices (Johnson et al., 1998).

Even with strong collaboration and shared leadership, principals might have difficulty generating and maintaining teach commitment to improvement efforts if teachers perceived that they did not have the materials, training, or support they needed to succeed. Bell (2001), Johnson and Asera (1999), and Trimble (2002) found that principals were innovative in obtaining resources to help teachers meet student needs. Barth (1999), Chenoweth (2007), and Johnson and Asera (1999) determined that principals made certain that their teachers had the professional development they needed to improve their instructional practices. Also, they ensured that the professional development provided was tightly connected to classroom practice and emphasized opportunities for teachers to support each other in making instructional improvements.

Principals, themselves, were often important sources of instructional support for teachers. Chenoweth (2007) and Johnson and Asera (1999) found that principals visited classrooms regularly and gave teachers useful feedback about teaching effectiveness. Minkoff et al. (2003) reported that leaders paid close attention to both the quality of teaching and the quality of student work. The frequent presence of leaders in classrooms and their frequent examinations of student work and student learning data made teaching and learning a central focus of the school (Craig et al., 2005).

Even with all of the leadership efforts described, none of the studies examined indicated that improvement processes were simple or problem-free. In contrast, it was essential that school leaders demonstrated the ability to persist and to help others persist in their improvement efforts (Johnson & Asera, 1999; Johnson et al., 1998; Waits et al.,

2006). Leaders chose to react positively to unexpected changes in resources, policies, or personnel. They found and celebrated the “silver linings” in data that most would have considered mediocre. They created and sustained a sense of pride, competence, and purpose among teachers and administrators (Sailors et al., 2007).

HIGH-PERFORMING, DIVERSE SCHOOLS AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Reyes et al. (1999) and Scheurich (1998) explicitly discussed culturally responsive teaching in their studies of high-performing, diverse schools. For the most part, however, studies of high-performing, diverse schools do not mention culturally responsive teaching and studies of culturally responsive teaching do not specifically mention studies of high-performing, diverse schools. In this section, the intersection between these constructs is explored. Using Gay’s (2010) framework for understanding culturally responsive teaching (caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction), this section examines the fit with the research on high-performing schools for diverse students.

Caring

Gay (2010) emphasized that caring in culturally responsive classrooms reflected concern for each individual student and his or her academic success. Scheurich (1998) described this type of caring throughout the high-performing schools he studied. Specifically, he noted that educators created a climate in which educators valued, appreciated, and loved the students they served. Bell (2001), Chenoweth (2007), Cooper et al. (2005), Johnson et al. (1998), Minkoff et al. (2003), Picucci (2002), Ragland et al., (2001), and Stevens et al. (2008) recognized the power of these caring, nurturing environments in the schools they studied. School personnel cared enough to get to know their students, their families, their hopes, and their challenges. Picucci et al. (2002) explained that caring was intentional. Teachers made conscientious decisions to extend themselves in ways that demonstrated to students that they were valued, appreciated, and respected. Educators made students feel valued in ways that influenced student effort and commitment. For example, Minkoff et al. (2003) reported that high school students explained, “We respect and care about our teachers. We’d be embarrassed to come to class unprepared” (p. 20).

Ladson-Billings (2002) explained that culturally responsive teachers care in ways that elevate expectations for the academic, intellectual, and social success of students. Similarly, Bell (2001), Johnson et al. (1998), Minkoff et al. (2003), and Scheurich (1998) found that in high-performing, diverse elementary and secondary schools, educators maintained high expectations for the behavior, attendance, academic, and social success of their students. In these schools, high expectations were underscored by regular attention to data that reported the extent to which students were meeting those expectations. Teachers cared enough to challenge students to exert maximum effort and they cared enough to challenge themselves to exert maximum effort on behalf of their students.

Leaders in high-performing, diverse schools model and promote this culture of caring. Leaders promote a collective sense of responsibility for all students (Elmore, 2006; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Scheurich, 1998). This type of leadership helps ensure that caring extends beyond any one classroom to every classroom and every space within the school.

Communication

Gay (2010) explained that culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the centrality of communication in teaching and values the language children bring to school. Culturally responsive teaching teaches to and through children's language in ways that maximize student understanding of the concepts and skills being taught.

Reyes et al. (1999) and Scheurich (1998) specifically acknowledged the ways in which educators in high-performing schools valued students' first language and their home culture. The Texas Education Agency (2000) found that educators in high-performing schools valued and utilized students' first language. However, these studies all focused upon the education of Latina/o students, many of whom spoke Spanish as a first language. There is little or no attention to language in studies of schools that achieve strong academic results for African American students or other diverse populations. In these schools, do educators accept and value the language children bring to school? Do educators teach to and through the language of the home in order to teach students academic content, as well as to teach Standard English? These are currently unanswered questions.

Another aspect of communication in culturally responsive teaching is related to discourse structures. As stated previously, Kochman (1985) explained that many classrooms employ a passive-receptive discourse structure in which students are expected to listen quietly and passively while the teacher presents information. In contrast, Kochman argued that many African American, Hawaiian, Latina/o, and Native American students may have higher levels of success in a participatory-interactive discourse structure, where teachers expect students to engage actively in lively conversation.

Several studies of high-performing, diverse schools reported teachers making extensive use of participatory-interactive discourse structures (Aleman et al., 2009; Minkoff et al., 2003; Picucci et al., 2002; Reyes & Pazey, 1999; Rutherford, 1999; Stevens et al., 2008). In these schools, teachers used cooperative learning strategies, engaged students in lively interactions, and created opportunities for students to construct, act, model, manipulate, and move in ways that enhanced their learning. There is clearly evidence of this aspect of culturally responsive teaching in many high-performing schools; however, the issue needs to be more explicitly addressed in more studies so that we understand the extent to which this type of discourse is characteristic of all high-performing, diverse schools.

Curriculum

Banks (1993), Gay (2010), Ladson-Billings (1995a), and Sleeter and Grant (1991) argued for broader curricular content that reflected the cultures of the students being taught, as well as other cultures represented in communities and around the world. They insisted that students continue to have opportunities to learn the academic standards all students are expected to master; however, they argued that (a) academic standards should be broadened to reflect the contributions of various cultures, especially the cultures of the students served in schools; (b) the materials used to teach standards should better reflect the contributions of various cultures; and (c) curricula should emphasize the goal of helping students evaluate multiple perspectives and generate their own conclusions about issues and events.

There is little explicit discussion of these curricular issues in reports on high-performing, diverse schools. There is no evidence to affirm or refute the presence of this

aspect of culturally responsive teaching in high-performing, diverse schools. Researchers have not given adequate attention to the extent to which content is broadened to reflect the contributions of various cultures or the extent to which students are being asked to evaluate various sources of information and generate their own understanding of the truth related to issues and events.

Cultural Congruity between Pedagogy and Student Learning

Gay (2010) contended that pedagogy is more likely to be effective if it is tailored to the learning strengths, styles, and needs of students. As well, she argued that some student learning strengths, styles, and needs are influenced by culture. Therefore, cultural congruity between pedagogy and student learning occurs when teachers employ instructional strategies and methods that build upon student's prior knowledge and experience, connect to their backgrounds and cultures, and are more likely to accelerate student understanding.

Chenoweth (2007), Reyes et al. (1999), Reyes and Pazey (1999), Scheurich (1998), and Stevens (2008) all reported evidence that teachers in high-performing, diverse schools tailored lessons in ways that connected to the backgrounds, cultures, prior knowledge, and experiences of the students they served. Similarly, Picucci et al. (2002) and Ragland et al. (2001) found that teachers designed instruction in ways that built upon the individual learning styles and strengths of students. We do not know, however, if this type of instruction is typical in all high-performing, diverse schools.

As described in the communication section, there is evidence that, in many high-performing, diverse schools, teachers used cooperative learning and other strategies to actively engage their students in learning academic content (Aleman et al., 2009; Minkoff et al., 2003; Picucci et al., 2002; Reyes & Pazey, 1999; Rutherford, 1999; Stevens et al., 2008). These strategies responded both to ways in which many students communicate, but also to ways in which many students learn.

Scheurich (1998) and Johnson et al. (1998) characterized high-performing schools as innovative. Teachers were less likely to use traditional textbooks or workbooks. They were more inclined to work together to generate lessons that would effectively teach their students. This type of collaboration was also described by Barth (1999), Johnson and Asera (1999), and Minkoff et al. (2003). It is not clear, however, whether or not collaboration typically led to innovation that was likely to align with the learning styles and strengths of students.

Most studies of high-performing, diverse schools do not provide substantive descriptions of the nature of instruction. Instead, they describe the ways in which student assessment data influences instruction (Barth et al., 1999; Craig et al., 2005; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; McGee, 2003; Picucci et al., 2002; Symonds, 2004). We know that in most high-performing, diverse schools, data "drive" instruction. As well, we know the destination for that drive seems to be more effective learning; however, we know little about the journey: What does instruction look like in these schools? To what extent is instruction culturally responsive? Through the use of data, does instructive become more culturally responsive?

There is clearly reason to believe that instruction in some high-performing schools is consistent with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. On the other hand, we are left wondering about the extent to which these constructs are linked. To create high-performing schools for diverse learners, must teachers adopt culturally responsive teaching

practices. Are schools more likely to achieve excellent and equitable learning results for all students if culturally responsive teaching becomes the norm? Are all aspects of culturally responsive teaching equally important in influencing school success for diverse learners? If not, which aspects are more important than others?

IMPLICATIONS

Edmonds (1979) discussed the importance of instructional leadership in ways that changed the vernacular of schools, districts, states, and the federal government. Few argue the importance of instructional leadership, especially in schools that serve diverse populations of students. School and district leaders are led to believe that, through their instructional leadership, their diverse populations of students will achieve better learning results and ideally equitable and excellent learning results. The latest wave of effective school studies reinforces our belief in the power of instructional leadership.

Unfortunately, however, research has not adequately described the instructional change leaders should be pursuing. If principals lead teachers in examining student learning data, do the types of instructional changes that result matter? Should leaders have a destination in mind as they lead instructional change? Culturally responsive teaching offers a set of plausible hypotheses about instructional changes that might accelerate movement toward equitable and excellent learning results. Research on high-performing, diverse schools offers some evidence in support of those hypotheses, but more evidence is needed.

We know that one element of culturally responsive teaching (caring) is widely identified in high-performing, diverse schools. School and district leaders should take notice that instructional leadership efforts that fail to promote a caring environment (as articulated in the culturally responsive pedagogy literature) may fail to generate desired improvements. In contrast, we have less knowledge about the presence of the other three aspects of culturally responsive teaching (communication, curriculum, and cultural congruity between pedagogy and student learning) in high-performing, diverse schools. In each case, there is enough evidence to keep asking questions. Would we have a better understanding of why some schools achieve excellent and equitable results if we knew more about the presence of these three aspects of culturally responsive teaching in high-performing schools?

There is exciting room to expand our knowledge of what works to create schools that achieve excellent and equitable learning results for all the students they serve. Study is needed that can help leaders more clearly define the changes that should be the focus of their instructional leadership. In particular, we need to expand our knowledge of the potential of culturally responsive teaching to promote high-performing, diverse schools. As well, school leaders need better access to information about the best practices of high-performing, diverse schools.

While we can look forward to expanding our knowledge base, it is also important to underscore, appreciate, and utilize what we know. Clearly, these two bodies of literature reinforce the importance of establishing caring, nurturing environments that promote high expectations for the academic, behavioral, and social success of students. Also, we know that there are classrooms and schools that substantially better learning results (across a wide array of measures) than is typically found in schools that serve similar populations. Finally, we know that there are millions of students who do not have access

to such classrooms and schools. The presence of effective culturally responsive classrooms and outstanding high-performing, diverse schools should ignite in all of us a cognitive dissonance that demands our attention to the knowledge that needs to be generated to spur systemic change that makes excellent teaching the norm for all students.

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