

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Theory and Practice

Initial goals

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Theory and Practice

My practice-led research and scholarly interests are focused on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). CRP is central to equity, diversity and inclusion in K-12 education and in teacher education programs. CRP is a set of beliefs that value racial and cultural diversity in learning, and sees those differences as assets. The pedagogy responds to the learning experiences, cultural values, and heritage of traditionally marginalized communities to create learning experiences that are relevant and effective, and result in academic success. (Gay 2010)

The idea behind my fellowship was to deeply direct my focus on one essential element of pedagogical practice that would greatly enhance the practices of the Art and Design Education Department (ADE) and the experiences of our student teachers in the field. Situated in New York City, students in Pratt Institute's ADE Department have the opportunity to work with a diverse set of learners and must implement the practices of culturally responsive pedagogy to equitably address the learning needs of all students. The demands of the field are such that it is a teaching and learning imperative.

My initial goals for this project were to support the ADE Department in better incorporating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy on multiple and simultaneous levels: Faculty Development, Curriculum (theory), and Curriculum (clinical practice). My project approach was two-pronged – first to learn more about culturally responsive pedagogies myself, and second to provide professional development opportunities for faculty to learn more about these pedagogies and how to apply them in their courses.

Project accomplishments

Becoming a CTL fellow provided the opportunity to broaden my understanding of culturally responsive practices in exciting and unexpected ways. Through the fellowship and a related workshop series organized by AICAD, I was able to immerse myself in various examples of these pedagogies and explore their relevance to the specific settings of both K-12 and post-secondary classrooms. In addition to my own learning, the fellowship allowed me time to organize and provide professional development opportunities for ADE faculty.

Professional development for faculty

CRP Reading Group

To become better familiar with the work currently being implemented in CRP in NYC public schools, I organized a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy reading group. This reading group, consisting of several ADE faculty, read and discussed Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's book,

Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy. *Cultivating Genius* has become one of the fundamental texts informing the professional development of teachers in NYC K-12 public schools. The close examination of this text as a department supported our preparation of ADE students to enter into environments where these practices are part of the curriculum and teaching expectations.

Panel and Film Presentation for students and faculty

Providing opportunities for faculty to deepen their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogies was one the main objectives of my Fellows project. In collaboration with a colleague, Shani Perez-Anthony, ADE Visiting Assistant Professor, and with support from the Pratt Academic Senate, I organized two community events focusing on CRP practice for the entire ADE department (faculty, staff, and students) and the Pratt community as a whole.

The first community event that Perez-Anthony and I organized was a panel discussion addressing the topic of cultivating culturally responsive educators, held on Monday, April 17, 2023. The panel discussion was moderated by Perez-Anthony and included three distinguished guests with expertise in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Paul Forbes, the Former Executive Director within the Office of Equity and Access for the New York City Department of Education; Dr. Nina Lasky, the Borough Arts Director with the Office of Arts and Special Projects at the NYC Department of Education; and Former NYC High School Principal, author, and STEM educator, Dr. Nicole Grimes. The panel covered a variety of topics addressing aspects of CRP pedagogy in various settings. The event was attended by a mix of ADE students and faculty, Pratt faculty from adjacent departments such as Foundation and Social Sciences, and Department of Education partners from outside of Pratt. 15 students from the ADE department were joined by 8 ADE faculty members, 4 Pratt faculty from other departments, and several employees from the NYC Department of Education, for a total of approximately 30 attendees.

The poster is yellow with black and white text. On the left, it says 'PRATT INSTITUTE' and 'SCHOOL OF ART'. The main title is 'Cultivating Culturally Responsive Educators' in large white font. Below it, it says 'FIRESIDE CHAT'. The event details are: 'Monday, April 17, 6:15-7:45PM, Pratt Library, Alumni Reading Room, RSVP on Eventbrite'. A note says 'ALL PRATT COMMUNITY INVITED TO ATTEND! REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED'. A QR code is provided for RSVP. The speakers are listed as: Moderator: Shani Perez-Anthony (Visiting Assistant Professor, ADE Department); Our Speakers: Dr. Nina Lasky (President, The School Art League), Paul Forbes (Founder of Leading with Hearts and Minds), and Dr. Nicole K. Grimes (Educator, Consultant, Speaker). It is sponsored by The Pratt Academic Senate.

Poster from the event *Cultivating Culturally Responsive Educators*, April 17, 2023.

The second event was a film screening of the documentary *Defining US: Children at the Crossroads of Change*. Produced by CWK Network, Inc and directed by Stacy Dewitt, *Defining Us* is the flagship in a series of films telling the untold stories of educators and students at the center of a culture war inside the nation's largest school system. The film connects the power of media and the promise of education to advance social and emotional wellness and create a culture of belonging and inclusion for all youth and highlights the stories of hidden heroes, students, families, educators, and advocates who have been silenced, dismissed, or ignored.

Defining Us was presented to ADE students and faculty on Sept. 20, 2023 along with a robust discussion facilitated by Paul Forbes, the Former Executive Director within the Office of Equity and Access for the New York City Department of Education. The event was attended by approximately 30 students and 10 faculty members.



Poster for the film screening, *Defining Us*, held on September 20, 2023.

Broadening my knowledge of the field through Immersion in Culturally Responsive and Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum pedagogies; Turnkeying new knowledge for colleagues

AICAD Workshop Series: Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum

Becoming a 2023 CTL Fellow with a focus on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy prompted me to apply to participate in a seven-session workshop series hosted by AICAD entitled *Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum*. I was very happy to be chosen as one of a few Pratt Institute faculty members selected for this workshop series which ran simultaneously to my fellowship.

As a participant in the AICAD series I was introduced to the work of a number of post-secondary educators in art colleges around the United States who study and apply how to decenter Whiteness in their curricula. These faculty members presented their work in workshops that ranged from creating radical syllabi; to deconstructing the power dynamics of critique practices; working with multilingual learners around language justice; and questioning and disrupting the art canon.

Immersing myself in the practices of decentering Whiteness in the curriculum alongside my study of Culturally Responsive Teaching deepened my understanding of the power of both pedagogies. Both pedagogies aim to challenge educational structures but benefit students in different educational contexts. Examining them in tandem clarified how they overlap, intersect, and differ in their approach.

CRP was developed by Black educators to specifically address the learning experiences of students of color in K-12 educational settings. CRP practitioners focus on seeing assets where others see deficits, and applying relevant instructional practice to create equity for students of color. CRP is consciously viewed as a tool of power that disrupts educational marginalization, addresses academic equity, and centers on elements of care, love, and respect (Gay, 2010). These practices have made CRP an important pedagogy for educators working in public school settings such as those found in NYC.

Unlike CRP, Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum was created to address teaching in the Post-secondary setting. The pedagogy is less about disrupting an historical marginalization of students and more about deconstructing the power structures of education, *with* students. Decentering Whiteness recognizes and names a pervasiveness of Whiteness, and is designed for students in traditionally White Spaces, making it well suited for many college campuses. It starts with the premise that there are unspoken assumptions and values about knowledge and pedagogy embedded in the education structure and seeks to make these transparent. Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum emphasizes changing both content and teaching practices to empower students to be critical of existing power structures and to build agency over their own learning.

The opportunity to simultaneously investigate both Culturally Responsive Teaching and Decentering Whiteness made clear the value both pedagogies have for teaching Art and Design Education students at Pratt. ADE students primarily have not been marginalized in their education. They carry certain assumptions about schooling – both K-12 and post-secondary - that are necessary to challenge in order for them to be successful teachers of students in diverse contexts. The pedagogy of Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum is useful in making transparent the unspoken power structures of schooling both in their own education at Pratt Institute, but also in the values they hold about K-12 schooling from their past experiences, reinforced by larger societal values.

At the same time that ADE students are in a learning context, they also enter into a teaching context. The students are required by the New York State certification process to engage in professional practice in K-12 NYC public schools. In contrast to Pratt Institute, NYC K-12 schools have a high percentage of students who have traditionally been marginalized in their educational setting. To best serve these pupils the ADE program requires its students to become familiar with the practices of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The demands of the field are such that it is a teaching and learning imperative.

In immersing myself in both of these pedagogies it became clear that ADE faculty need to become conversant with both Decentering Whiteness and Culturally Responsive pedagogies to best serve our students. And that the way I could best support the department was to provide opportunities to explore and learn more about Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum in conjunction with learning more about CRP.

Next steps

Based on my participation in the AICAD workshops and the opportunity provided by CTL to reflect, synthesize, and evaluate the work of Decentering Whiteness and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, I will be working with my Chair, Aileen Wilson, to engage ADE faculty in an examination of both Decentering Whiteness and Culturally responsive pedagogies. I will be coordinating presentations by two of the AICAD workshop presenters as part of the ADE Lecture Series *Creating Equitable and Inclusive Pathways to Education*. This lecture series will build on work that I presented in the CTL Fellows Spotlight, and will go into more depth on both multilingualism and language justice and questioning and disrupting the art canon. I hope to be able to share my own research with the department through faculty meetings and small group discussions. Based on the positive response to the sharing of this work in the CTL Spotlight, I am hopeful that the ADE faculty and any other Pratt faculty members who attend the lectures and participate in discussions will benefit from a deeper dive into these topics.

I am additionally excited to figure out how best to apply the practices I was exposed to this year to my own teaching at Pratt. I am looking forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to grapple with, understand, and apply both pedagogies in service of our students.

Reflection

The work that I undertook this year confirmed for me that we are in a new era in education. CRP is becoming an increasingly important aspect of education in K-12 learning environments. Colleges and universities across the country are working to include pedagogies in their curricula that decenter Whiteness, work to decolonize the curriculum, and disrupt and make transparent educational power structures. In pre-service education programs it appears fundamental that a knowledge of both the pedagogies of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Decentering Whiteness are needed to best prepare pre-service educators. There is a recognized need for faculty in pre-service programs to integrate CRP work into their coursework and teaching practices. Combining CRP work in pre-service programs such as Pratt's with Decentering Whiteness in the Curriculum has potential to transform the learning experience of pre-service teaching students.

Citations

Geneva Gay (2010). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Teacher College Press.