

# Culturally Responsive Teaching

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## Abstract

**Barely three-quarters of all high school students are graduating from high school in the United States. This has summoned a call for culturally responsive teaching! Included in an examination of the development of cultural awareness into state driven curriculums is the look at how leaders in education can foster success for a culture that often goes unnoticed: the culture of the learning disabled! The learning disabled student often goes undetected after years of struggling to learn, including frustration with state adapted curriculum geared for students with average capabilities. Leaders in education MUST understand the process that allows learning disabled students to qualify for special education and develop strategies and techniques to address those students that often drop out of school because of a lack of culturally responsive teaching which incorporates attention to their unique needs!**

Previous research (as cited in Keough, 2005) has focused on various aspects of the process by which a child becomes qualified to receive special education services (Angiulli & Siegel, 2003; Gresham, MacMillan, & Bocian, 1998, Gunderson & Siegel, 2001, Keough, 2003; "Learning Disability Roundtable", 2003; Siegel, 2003, Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001; Tanner, 2001, Titsworth, 1999, Van den Broeck, 2002, Warner, Dede, Garvan, & Conway, 2002; Watkins, Kush, & Schaefer, 2002, Zirkel, 2001).

The necessity of addressing the needs of students at risk, via culturally responsive teaching, comes with a high price to pay unless leaders in education give attention to the alarming statistics that affect almost a quarter of students who do not finish high school (Media, Channel 17, Bakersfield, CA., 4-1-08).

Sixty-two percent are unemployed one year out of school. Sixty percent of adolescents in treatment for substance abuse and 50 percent with diagnosed depression have learning disorders. Thirty-one percent of adolescents with learning disorders will be arrested three to five years out of high school. Half of all "juvenile delinquents" tested were found to have undetected learning disabilities (Karpman, 2002, p. 2).

## National University \*\*\*

At the spring, 2007 graduation, National University graduated more minority students and over 50% of all teachers in California (Green, 2008). National University is "WASC" accredited and has consistently demanded rigor and uniformity regarding course difficulty including a consistent grading system under the leadership of Chancellor Dr. J.C. Lee. The School of Education and Technology serves candidates seeking their mild moderate and/or moderate/severe special education teaching credential and is divided into a Level I and a Level II tiered curriculum. The Level II program consists of advanced coursed leading to a California State Specialization Credential. The State of California supports candidates for said credential by offering a grant that enables candidates to be mentored and supported in a full time special education teaching position after all Level I and Level II coursework have been completed.

In 2007, the author was named Director of the Special Education Internship Program, Los Angeles campus of National University, and has continued to oversee over 90 special education interns in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles Unified School District a major portion of Los Angeles County Office of Education is commonly known as the largest school district in the United States. Special education teachers who use culturally responsive teaching

methods become leaders in their educational field. This can only lead to graduating more students who previously struggled with general curriculum; students who had been diagnosed with learning disabilities and/or those who had been labeled “at risk”.

Since 2007, the State of California has recently instituted the requirement of CLD 627 so that credential candidates will be adequately prepared to teach students whose first language is other than English. National University supports culturally responsive teaching in that all courses in the Level I and Level II (including CLD 627) reflect a component that reflects cultural awareness. Samples of said courses are:

- EXC 602A Seminar and Introduction to Teaching Special Education\*
- EXC 604 Cultural Diversity and the Exceptional Learner\*
- EXC 650 Supporting Parents of Special Needs Students
- EXC 620 Positive Behavior Management
- EXC 637 Action Research (required thesis for Masters in Specialization in Education)
- EXC 655A Seminar and Introduction to Level II Advanced Coursework in Specialized Education
- EXC 657 Transition for Special Needs Students
- EXC 655i Seminar for the Special Education Internship Program

This author has taught all the above courses, both on ground and online, including several encompassing a twelve year period. Course enrollment has grown to over 50% of National University students enrolled in the online courses (Green, 2008). An overwhelming demand for online courses prompted the author to create a power point guide to online teaching (Keough, 2007).

### **International Emphasis**

National University has begun, as recent as 2007, to recruit international students to all programs, including Business and Management, School of Education, School of Letters and Science including Certificates in Instructing Students with Autism and Early Childhood Education.

The Director of International Programs for National University in Los Angeles is Richard Higginbottom and can be reached at 310-662-2151.

### **Supporting Culturally Responsive Teachers as Leaders**

The purpose of the proposal and ensuing presentation is to allow educators to become leaders to advance democracy and equity in today’s schools by taking the responsibility of instituting culturally responsive teaching in their curriculum. Using basic theories of effective leadership will allow them to become change agents toward heightened cultural awareness.

The presentation focuses on increasing participant’s understanding of trust, team building, similarities and differences, and each others’ strengths. The session uses group participation as a strategy for increasing self-awareness, consolidation of previous knowledge, and incorporation of insights and ideas that align with the above objectives and theoretical framework.

The following objectives will be met via the presentation:

- Increase participants’ understanding of trust, team building, similarities and differences, and each others’ strengths.
- Educators/audience will grasp the difference between a leader and a manager (Bennis, 1994).
- An understanding of Gardner’s (1995) key element in effective leadership.
- Exposure to the term, “Synchronicity” in leadership (Jaworski, 1998).
- Design curriculum to incorporate culturally responsive teaching for ALL students (special education and students from diverse cultures, including second language students).
- Participants will gain an increased heightening of cultural diversity and its impact upon classroom educators

## Theoretical Framework Supporting the Proposal

A Trifold method of communication includes parents, teachers, administrators, and/or other school personnel that have a vested interest in the student's well being interact in parent conferences, IEPs and/or consultation meetings. It is also known as the Triadic Model of Communication as described by Thomas (2004). This model makes use of a consultant who is deemed an expert in leadership, teaching, and often school psychology. The consultant acts as a go-between the target (student at risk) and the educator/leader who often brainstorms with the consultant to find the best possible manner to incorporate culturally responsive teaching to address the needs of the student and risk and or with special needs, i.e. a specific learning disability.

Constructivist teaching (Brooks, 1999) that incorporates culturally responsive teaching is a "hands-on" approach that looks at an important instructional strategy that has the acronym: KWL. What does a student already *know* about a topic what does the student *want* to know about the topic and what will or has the student *learned* about the subject?

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1956) is a technique known to most educators and widely used by special educators to scaffold the information so that the content is broken down into small segments. The student can grasp the information so that new learning can be assimilated upon what has already been mastered.

SDAIE (Garcia, 1999) theory of instruction for second language learners is widely used among leaders/educators that use strategies that are specially designed for academic instruction in English. The strategies take into account the use of all instructional strategies: kinesthetic, auditory and visual!

## Presentation Outcomes

The presentation focuses on increasing participant's understanding of trust, team building, similarities and differences, and each others' strengths. The session uses group participation as a strategy for increasing self-awareness, consolidation of previous knowledge, and incorporation of insights and ideas that align with the above objectives and theoretical framework.

The training session focuses on building trust in order to explore cultural similarities and differences and the goal is to enhance participants' present understanding of the role of culture in human interactions.

## Conclusion

Alarming statistics are pointing to the increasing need for culturally responsive teaching whereby cultural diversity is heightened and appreciation for the individual is fostered. Acknowledgement of students at risk and those qualifying for special education under specific learning disability is given for their successes rather than their failures, resulting in more seniors graduating from California state high schools and other public and private secondary schools in the United States. The methods presented in this proposal can only enhance education for ALL students, nationally and internationally!

**Notes:** \*\*\* Full time position

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