

The William J. Watkins, Sr. Educational Institute's "Cultivating a Culturally Responsive Practice" Training

One of the core beliefs of The Watkins Institute is that the most important relationship in schools as it relates to student achievement is that between the teacher and the student. When it comes to the main function of schools, teaching and learning, the rubber meets the road in the classroom. The effectiveness of the teaching is greatly affected by how well those who deliver the instruction (teachers) are able to get their audience (students) to receive and accept it. Effective teaching is much more than mere delivery or implementing a lesson plan. To truly be effective the delivery must be good and the more relevant the instruction is to the student the greater the opportunity for them to receive and accept it. There are thousands of well taught lessons delivered to millions of students in American public schools every day. In many of them you will find order, discipline, structure and routine. Students will be taking notes, reading and completing the assigned tasks. But, you will still find in those very same classrooms students that are being left behind. They are being left behind because the lesson is not taught in a manner that is relevant to who they are and how they live. When you go into a classroom and see students actively engaged in their work, collaborating with each other, challenging and questioning you are witnessing young people who are authentically engaged and find intrinsic value and meaningful connections in the learning process. It is in those classrooms where effective teaching and meaningful learning are being conducted. Those teachers have found a way to connect their lesson's content in a meaningful way to their student's culture and identity. The only way this can be done is through developing positive relationships between the teacher and students. In order to do that the teacher has to have knowledge of their students. Not just general knowledge but also be able to cultivate personal understanding that can be used to make their lessons more meaningful to the



students as individuals. That is what instruction looks like in a culturally responsive classroom.

In The Watkins Institute's Cultivating a Culturally Responsive Practice Training educators learn how to make those meaningful connections with their students. The process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher is long and challenging, and it is a process. At the conclusion of this training participants are equipped with the knowledge and tools required to develop their professional practice in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Once the practitioner has the tools, then they must practice using them in order to become effective. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy not only deals with the science of teaching as a methodology but it also deals with the art of teaching, those nuanced instructional moments where the correctly chosen word or gesture will make all the difference in a student's understanding of a major concept in the lesson. In our training practitioners are imbued with the knowledge of how to cultivate a culturally responsive practice but it takes years of classroom practice to develop the skills to be most effective. That is why we follow our trainees both individually and as a cohort throughout the academic year offering assistance, encouragement and support to aid in their development as culturally responsive practitioners.



We conduct our training onsite with your team of teachers. That team of teachers becomes a professional learning community cohort working together throughout the year learning and practicing the skills needed to master the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy methodology. Your team is provided with a Site Facilitator that works with your cohort of teachers throughout the year. The Site Facilitator is responsible for conducting the workshops, leading the quarterly Cohort Meetings and individualized consultations. He works with your team as a facilitator and colleague to provide support and guidance throughout the year. As a true workshop, onsite training lends itself to the use of resources that the teachers work with every day. Also, we use the school environment as a laboratory to demonstrate and develop participants' awareness and skills.

There are two overarching dimensions used in our framework to cultivate a culturally responsive practice. One, the practitioner must develop a *knowledge base and understanding* of culturally responsive concepts and theories. That knowledge and understanding must be combined with the second component in our framework, *the requisite skills, techniques and methods* to develop their practice. Our training focuses on three areas that fit within this framework to cultivate a culturally responsive practice.

- First, we examine *CRP as a methodology*. This area focuses on what it is a teacher needs to know, such as, what is CRP, why is it important, when should it be used, what practitioners need to know about themselves, their students and becoming culturally competent?
- Second, we focus on *the learning environment*. What are the physical features of a culturally relevant practitioner's classroom? What does that classroom look and sound like? What are the icons and routines for learning?
- The third area we focus on in our training is the actual *pedagogy*. How do you create lessons that are culturally responsive to the needs of your students? How do you deliver those lessons? What techniques and strategies are most useful and effective?

Our training is divided into two parts conducted throughout the school year. The first component of training is an in-house workshop conducted over a three day period as follows:

Day One

Morning Session – Debunking the Myths about Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

This session is designed to set the context for the use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as, what we consider to be, the most effective teaching methodology for ALL students. There have been many definitions and descriptions associated with CRP over the years. Some are accurate and others are totally off target. This two hour session focuses on what Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is and is not. In this session we also examine the importance of CRP as a methodology and how it benefits ALL students.

Afternoon Session – Becoming a Culturally Competent Teacher

This two hour session examines the concept of culture. We explore how our views of our own culture impacts our instruction and the relationships we develop with our students. The participants are challenged to examine their

own cultural biases and to understand the “other.” We engage in open and honest discussions about race, ethnicity, power and politics designed to enhance the participants cultural competence and self-awareness.

Day Two

Morning Session – Creating the “Right Environment”

In this 90 minute session teachers reassess the way they look at the physical environment of their classroom. Through classroom visits and observation we examine the icons and cues used to set the stage for and reinforce instruction. Participants learn new and creative ways to bring the students lived experiences into the classroom and connect those experiences with their instruction.

Afternoon Session – Implementation and Collaboration

In this session teachers are shown a model of how to adapt the written curriculum to make their lessons more culturally relevant to their students lived experiences. They learn how to revise the way they implement the curriculum to meet high academic standards while simultaneously creating more engaging and relevant lessons. Participants will then work in collaboration to develop their own culturally responsive lessons.

Day Three

Morning Session – Presentations

Participants will present their culturally responsive lessons for discussion and comment.

Afternoon Session – Assessment

In this session participants learn how to assess their lessons and instructional practices through the CRP lens. They are provided with several assessment tools to analyze the quality of teacher student interaction, lesson planning and student engagement. These and other tools will be used to gauge the teacher’s growth as a culturally relevant pedagogy practitioner.

The workshop concludes with an evaluation and farewell.

Follow-up Consultations

The second component of the training consists of individualized and cohort consultations conducted throughout the school year. One of the key tenets of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is that collaboration is essential. The collective knowledge of the group is more valuable than the individual knowledge of any

one person. Our cohort sessions are held quarterly as a means to share the progress and development of the participants' growth as culturally responsive educators. In our cohort sessions participants share their successes and challenges. They receive feedback from one another as well as the facilitator. They serve as a point of renewal and reenergizing to continue the difficult work of developing a culturally responsive practice.

We also provide each participant with individualized consultation throughout the academic year. The site facilitator visits each participant's classroom once a quarter to answer questions, provide support, and to give feedback on how their growth as a culturally responsive practitioner is developing. During our initial visit we observe the teacher facilitating a CRP lesson and observe the learning environment to set a baseline for growth. On subsequent visits we answer questions, provide additional resources based on our observations and requests from the teacher. At the conclusion of the visitation, consultation and cohort



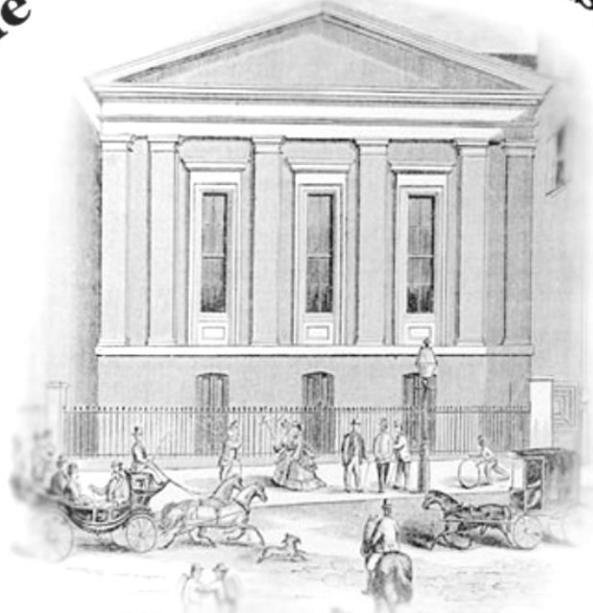
meetings the teachers will have fully implemented a culturally responsive practice in their classroom and will be well on their way to developing mastery of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

The mission of The William J. Watkins, Sr. Educational Institute is to ensure that ALL children receive the best education possible. We believe that those who teach the teachers, teach the children and that Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is the most effective methodology to maximize student achievement. Our Creating a Culturally Responsive Practice training empowers teachers with the knowledge and skills to get the most from their students. Consequently, their students learn the knowledge and skills they need to reach their highest potential.

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"Education is the sine qua non of the Negro."

William J. Watkins, Sr., 1838

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