

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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In the following report, Hanover Research reviews best practices for implementing culturally relevant teaching, with an emphasis on school and teacher practices.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The following report examines culturally responsive and/or culturally relevant pedagogy, with an emphasis on practical implementation at the school and classroom level. The report aims to assist Pinellas County Schools (PCS) in addressing the achievement gap by providing equitable and appropriate instruction and support for all students. The report includes two sections:

- **Section I: Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy** explores the literature related to culturally relevant teaching, with a particular focus on translating theory into practice.
- **Section II: Peer District Profiles** examines the practices of two peer school districts that have begun to implement initiatives related to culturally relevant pedagogy.

KEY FINDINGS

- **While culturally relevant pedagogy is frequently noted as a strategy to improve engagement and academic and nonacademic outcomes for minority students, scholars offer somewhat varying definitions of the term.** Gloria Ladson-Billings, who coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy in the early 1990s, defines the concept as: “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” While researchers of culturally relevant pedagogy often draw from this definition, some focus on teaching in ways that are understandable and interesting for students, while others focus on deeper aspects of teaching and learning related to identity, cultural competence, and social justice. Interviewees from school districts included in this report identify lack of a clear, common definition of culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching as a challenge for implementation.
- **The implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy requires professional development for teachers and leaders to support a shift to a culturally responsive mindset.** Educators must be open to participating in deep reflection about their own cultural identity and biases, and critically consider identity and privilege in the education system and society overall. Teachers should also engage with their students’ communities to fully develop an understanding of their experiences and backgrounds. Many scholars also posit that teachers must reject traditional approaches to education that perpetuate inequity in order to truly adopt a culturally responsive mindset.
- **In practice, culturally responsive pedagogy should include equitable allocation of resources, including curricula and classroom materials that positively reflect students’ cultural backgrounds as well as other world cultures.** Instructional material for the culturally responsive classroom should reflect diversity and portray

different cultures with sensitivity. Culturally responsive curricula should expose students to a variety of cultures and backgrounds, as well as help students to critically examine inequities and sociopolitical realities.

- **Culturally responsive teachers engage in practices such as building authentic relationships with students, differentiating instruction for multiple learning styles, and engaging frequently with families and the community.** In order to succeed in these practices, teachers must make an effort to learn about their students as individuals and about their histories and cultural backgrounds. However, in addition to learning more about students as individuals, teachers must also hold high expectations of all students regardless of background.
- **Additionally, student-centered instructional practices are compatible with culturally responsive pedagogy.** Student-centered instruction is cooperative, collaborative, and community-oriented, and may include strategies such as small learning groups, inquiry-based learning, and interactive dialogue. Student-centered classrooms may limit lecture time in favor of activities that engage student interests and promote active participation.
- **Studies of culturally relevant pedagogy suggest that, when implemented effectively, teaching practices help students of all racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to feel valued, respected, and secure in the classroom, which in turn may improve engagement and academic outcomes.** School districts reviewed for this report (see Section II) report monitoring student academic and nonacademic outcomes in order to determine the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation. Tucson Unified School District reports comparing student academic performance among students whose teachers have participated in professional development and those who have not. Some school districts in Florida, including Hillsborough County Public Schools, include culturally responsive instructional practices within the teacher evaluation system, including criteria related to developing knowledge of students, creating a respectful classroom environment, and engaging with the community and stakeholders.

SECTION I: IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

The following section explores the literature related to culturally relevant pedagogy (sometimes called culturally responsive pedagogy). Where possible, the section highlights practical examples of the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in school districts, with a focus on teacher practices and student outcomes.

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a term first established by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the early 1990s.¹ Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”² As conceived by Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy should focus on three components:³

- **Students must experience academic success** – teachers must ensure that students develop academic skills, including literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills.
- **Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence** – teachers “use students’ culture as a vehicle for learning,” validating the students’ own cultures and helping them to engage with other cultures.
- **Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order** – beyond individual students’ academic and cultural competence, students should also learn to critically analyze society in preparation to be an active citizen.

Building from Ladson-Billings’ initial definition, later scholars offer somewhat divergent definitions and key components of culturally relevant teaching. For instance, Geneva Gay, a professor of education at the University of Washington-Seattle, defines culturally responsive instruction as the use of “the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits” for more effective teaching.⁴ Similarly, Kadir Rajagopal, author of *Create Success: Unlocking the Potential of Urban Students*, posits that culturally relevant instruction “means that teachers make standards-based content and

¹ Ladson-Billings, G. “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.” *Theory into Practice*, 34:3, 1995. http://equity.spps.org/uploads/but_that_s_just_ladson-billings_pdf.pdf

² Coffey, H. “Culturally Relevant Teaching.” UNC School of Education. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4474>

³ Bullets adapted from: Ladson-Billings, G. “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” *Op. cit.*, pp. 160-162.

⁴ Gay, G. “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching.” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53:2, March/April 2002, pp. 106-116. <http://www.sagepub.com/eis/Gay.pdf>

curricula accessible to students and teach in a way that students can understand” by incorporating “relatable aspects of students’ daily lives into the curriculum.”⁵

However, other scholars posit that validating and referring to students’ home cultures is insufficient to implement culturally relevant pedagogy. For instance, M. Schmeichel critiqued some recent recommendations of culturally relevant pedagogy as watering down or simplifying the concept to a set of practices rather than a mindset for educators, writing:

Within practitioner journals in particular, culturally relevant teaching has been promoted not as a critique of inequitable social structures, but as a new source of lesson plans or classroom activities.⁶

Instead, Schmeichel and others assert, teachers who are culturally relevant in their instruction focus on identifying inequity and social injustice, and responding to these elements wherever possible. Essentially, this school of thought holds that culturally relevant teaching cannot take place in the absence of critical reflection on identity and how different identities are privileged over others in society.⁷

Despite some discrepancy related to the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy, the goal of this theoretical framework is generally centered on improving outcomes for diverse learners, reducing the achievement gap, and creating engaged, culturally competent, and academically successful learners. The importance of culturally relevant instruction lies in its transformative potential for student learning. Gay emphasizes that, when situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, academic knowledge and skills prove more interesting, more meaningful, and more easily and thoroughly learned.⁸ Students in today’s classrooms have varying backgrounds, cultures, languages, and abilities, and often arrive at school with “ways of doing and knowing that conflict with and sometimes are even antithetical to the ways in which schools expect them to act and know.”⁹ When implemented effectively, culturally relevant instruction helps teachers to bridge the discontinuity often found between home and school contexts, minimizing students’ feelings of alienation and, in turn, increasing engagement. Many education specialists perceive culturally relevant instruction as the key to closing achievement gaps among different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups.¹⁰

The following sections examine other aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy, including: development and the establishment of teacher mindsets, culturally relevant teaching in

⁵ Rajagopal, K. “Chapter 1. Culturally Responsive Instruction.” *Create Success*, March 2011.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/111022/chapters/Culturally-Responsive-Instruction.aspx>

⁶ Schmeichel, M. “Good Teaching? An Examination of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as an Equity Practice.” *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, March 1, 2012, p. 225. Accessed through: EBSCO.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gay, Op. cit.

⁹ Singh, N.K. “Culturally Appropriate Education: Theoretical and Practical Implications.” *Honoring Our Heritage*, Northern Arizona University. 2011, p. 17. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/HOH/HOH-2.pdf>

¹⁰ Kozleski, E.B. “Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters.” Equity Alliance at Arizona State University, 2009. http://www.equityallianceatasu.org/sites/default/files/Website_files/CulturallyResponsiveTeaching-Matters.pdf

practice, and outcomes and evaluation practices associated with culturally relevant teaching.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER MINDSETS

As previously mentioned, culturally relevant pedagogy requires teachers to undertake both an ideological and instructional shift in order to achieve true implementation.¹¹ In her book *Yes, But How do We do it? Practicing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Ladson-Billings argues that “in terms of teaching students of color, the problem is not ‘what to do’, but rather is ‘how we think.’”¹² In a 2011 case study published in *Urban Review*, Milner confirms that teachers who engage in culturally relevant instruction do so because they believe in the underlying theory and concepts, stating further:

... more than a set of principles, ideas, or predetermined practices, the practice of culturally relevant pedagogy involves a state of being or mindset that permeates teachers’ decision-making and related practices.¹³

Thus, professional development related to cultural responsiveness may take time, and will involve teacher reflection and exploration of his or her own cultural identity, as well as engagement in “open, deeply thoughtful discussions” about race, privilege and the education system. In an article published by *The International Journal of Education Policies*, Blanche Glimps explains further that the first steps of taking on a culturally relevant mindset:

... requires that educators first recognize how public education in the U.S.A. functions to make losers of some students—those who are most frequently students of color and impoverished. Only when white educators recognize and “reject” this long-standing function of public education will they attempt to resist and change it. Moreover, educators must recognize their own role in an education system that perpetuates social inequities through the passive action of merely being “white” and not recognizing the privileges that accompany this status.¹⁴

Studies of the implementation of culturally relevant teaching find that, in addition to challenges related to lack of resources and support for teachers, major obstacles for implementation may include a lack of race consciousness among teachers¹⁵ or reluctance and discomfort among staff in discussing topics related to identity, race, culture, and privilege.¹⁶ Among educator leaders, studies suggest that engaging in conversations about race and culture and “feelings of inadequacy” discussing these topics can be a major obstacle for providing professional development for culturally relevant pedagogy. Thus,

¹¹ [1] Schmeichel, M., Op. cit., p. 224.

[2] Glimps, Blanche. “White Power and Privilege: Barriers to Culturally Responsive Teaching.” *International Journal of Educational Policies*, 4:1, p. 41. <http://ijep.icpres.org/2010/v4n1/Glimps&Ford.pdf>

¹² Schmeichel, M., Op. cit., p. 225.

¹³ Milner, H.R. “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in a Diverse Urban Classroom.” *Urban Review*, 43, March 1, 2011, p. 68. Accessed through: EBSCO

¹⁴ Glimps, B, Op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁵ Schmeichel, M., Op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁶ Glimps, B, Op. cit., pp. 45-46.

administrators and other instructional leaders should also engage in professional development that addresses: establishing a clear concept and definition for culturally relevant pedagogy in the district; increasing comfort with discussions of race and culture; and expanding leader understandings of other cultures.¹⁷

As with many types of teacher professional development, experts in culturally relevant pedagogy recommend that professional learning to promote these practices should be *ongoing, job-embedded, and collaborative*.¹⁸ Equity Alliance at Arizona State University offers six major principles for preparing culturally relevant teachers:¹⁹

- **Principle 1: Our Professional Learning is focused on improving learning within a diverse, multicultural community.** The outcomes, content, and activities of any professional learning activity must be grounded in the multicultural context that characterizes most contemporary urban communities;
- **Principle 2: Professional Learning engages educators in joint, productive activity through discourse, inquiry, and public professional practice.** Effective professional learning is reached by continuous, collaborative interaction with colleagues through discussion, knowledge development and understanding, and directed inquiry around professional practice;
- **Principle 3: Professional Learning is a facet of daily living, not a compartmentalized activity.** Since professional learning is embedded within practice, it becomes part of daily discourse, shared discussions about student learning and student products, as well as more formalized mentoring and coaching, meetings, study groups, and examination of evidence from inquiry cycles.
- **Principle 4: Professional Learning results in improved learning for students who have been marginalized from the academic and social curricula of the U.S. public school system.** Professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to explore and understand the influence of individual cultural identity and values on individual and systems practices, as well as expand their professional knowledge of sociocultural dimensions of learning, and its impact assessed through student involvement and performance in academic and social curricula.
- **Principle 5: Professional Learning influences decisions about what is taught and why.** Since professional learning is generative, educators' knowledge will expand and become more complex as it develops. It is expected that professional learning will result in the use of cultural perspective in the examination and improvements to the content and process of instruction for all learners.

¹⁷ Griffin, L.B., Watson, D., and Liggett, T. "'I didn't See it as a Cultural Thing' Supervisors of Student Teachers Define and Describe Culturally Responsive Supervision." *Democracy and Education*, January 1, 2016.

¹⁸ King, K., Artiles, A.J., and Kozleski, E.B. "Professional Learning for Culturally Responsive Teaching." Equity Alliance at Arizona State University, June 2009, pp. 4-7.
[http://guide.swiftschools.org/Common/Cms/Documents/Strong%20and%20Positive%20School%20Culture/Professional_Learning_for_Culturally_Responsive_Teaching%20\(1\).pdf](http://guide.swiftschools.org/Common/Cms/Documents/Strong%20and%20Positive%20School%20Culture/Professional_Learning_for_Culturally_Responsive_Teaching%20(1).pdf)

¹⁹ Bullets verbatim from: *Ibid.*, p. 6.

- **Principle 6: Professional Learning focuses on the diffusion of professional knowledge to build sustainable educational communities focused on improving learning outcomes for all students and their families, particularly those students who are members of cultural and linguistic minorities.** As educators gain knowledge, they also have the responsibility for sharing and mentoring others both in the practice of professional learning and in the expanding knowledge that comes from such activity.



District Spotlight: Seminole County Public Schools

Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS) in Sanford, Florida enrolled 64,851 students as of academic year 2013-2014.²⁰ The district operates the Cultural Relevance Project through its Title I Office, which aims to “create cultural awareness and support culturally responsive instruction and pedagogical practices.”²¹

In support of this goal, SCPS offered four “cycles” of professional learning for teachers and staff over two academic years. **Year One focused on exposure and facilitating conversations surrounding culture and culturally relevant teaching, with a major goal “to establish a foundational understanding and collaborative definition of what it means to be culturally relevant.”**²² through two cycles:²³

- **Cycle One – Creating a Growth Mindset** – The first cycle begins with “having a conversation around what is our ‘WHY’ and what it means to be an equitable educator.” The cycle focuses on conceptualizing the achievement gap as a lack of opportunity for student groups, rather than as a “learning gap.” Furthermore, the modules allow teachers “to reflect on relational capacity, what it LOOKS like, SOUNDS like, and most importantly FEELS like to be in a culturally relevant classroom, and building relationships with families and communities.”
- **Cycle Two – Using Culture to Drive Instruction** – The second cycle, beginning in the second semester of the academic year, focuses “on understanding culture to drive our instruction,” asking teachers to reflect on questions such as “How do we take students from various experiences and backgrounds and bring them to a common place of success?” Specifically, these modules address literacy and discourse instruction for students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

During the second year of implementation, professional development focused on “specific strategies to implement in the classroom for empowerment of students.”²⁴ The two cycles offered are described as follows:

- **Cycles 3-4 – Framing Instruction for Student Empowerment** – The two cycles for the second academic year of professional development for cultural responsiveness focus on specific instructional techniques and practices. The cycles are described as follows: “We will reflect on our understanding of culturally responsive instruction and investigate what this looks like in our individual learning communities. We will empower students with lessons that engage them in deep collaborative scholarly discussion using inquiry around a given text.”²⁵ Trainings in these cycles include topics such as having high academic expectations for students and equipping students to self-advocate and have a voice in their education.²⁶

²⁰ National Center for Education Statistics.

²¹ “Cultural Relevance Project.” Seminole County Public Schools.

<http://www.scps.k12.fl.us/title1/SpecialProjects/CulturalRelevance.aspx>

²² “Building a Foundation of Culturally Relevant Educators.” Seminole County Public Schools, May 28, 2015.

<http://www.scps.k12.fl.us/Portals/34/5.28.15.pdf>

²³ “Cultural Relevance Project,” Op. cit.

²⁴ “Framing Instruction for Student Empowerment.” Seminole County Public Schools, February 1, 2016.

<http://www.scps.k12.fl.us/Portals/34/2.1.16.pdf>

²⁵ “Building a Foundation of Culturally Relevant Educators, Op. cit.

²⁶ “Framing Instruction for Student Empowerment,” Op. cit.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

While the literature provides some conflicting information about the definition and goals of culturally relevant pedagogy, there are a number of consistent, emerging recommendations about how to implement culturally relevant pedagogy at the school and classroom level. Implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom requires “paradigmatic school reforms in terms of its power structures, interaction between teachers and students, culture, curriculum, extracurricular activities, classroom dynamics, evaluation system, and attitude toward minority languages.”²⁷ Reform must occur in the organization of the school and school policies and procedures to enable culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

For instance, schools implementing a truly culturally relevant approach must consider the equitable allocation of resources and material to support instruction. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) recommends that schools consider where the best teachers are assigned, which students take advanced courses, and for what purposes resources are currently allocated in order to thoughtfully and successfully implement institutional change in line with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity.²⁸

Appropriate instructional material should support the goals and values of a culturally relevant classroom. To the extent possible, teachers should use textbooks and implement classroom activities which represent diversity and are sensitive to their portrayals of different cultures. In cases in which such materials are not provided, teachers should supplement instruction with resources “rich in diversity and sensitive in portrayal of individuals from different backgrounds.”²⁹

Teachers who have shifted to a culturally relevant mindset should establish a classroom that is inclusive and welcoming for students from different backgrounds. The culturally-responsive classroom is meant to be student-centered, and thus may include characteristics such as limited time spent on teacher-centered lecturing. Furthermore, culturally relevant teachers also aim to support students’ development as globally and socially conscious citizens. Teachers can foster a global and social consciousness by having students write letters to politicians and newspaper editors on specific concerns or helping students to participate in food or clothing charity drives.³⁰

Figure 1.1 displays some of the main intended classroom outcomes of culturally responsive teaching, including student empowerment, incorporation and valuing of student culture, and a focus on academic success as well as cultural competence and critical engagement in real-world problems related to identity and equity.

²⁷ Singh, Op. cit., p. 12.

²⁸ Richards, Herlado, Ayanna Brown, and Timothy Forde. “Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.” National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, 2006, p. 5.
http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/FINAL_PRODUCTS/NCCRESt/practitioner_briefs/%95%20TEMPLATE/DRAFTS/AUTHOR%20revisions/annablis%20pracbrief%20templates/Diversity_Brief_highres.pdf

²⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

Figure 1.1: Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Instruction

Empowers students to...	Incorporates student culture in...	Creates classroom contexts that...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine educational content and processes • Create and construct and deconstruct meaning • Succeed academically and socially • See contradictions and inequities in local and larger communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum and teaching • Transcending negative effects of the dominant culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are challenging and innovative • Focus on student learning (and consequently academic achievement) • Build cultural competence • Link curriculum and instruction to sociopolitical realities

Source: *Urban Review*³¹

At the classroom level, culturally relevant teaching requires a teaching style that “recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural referents in all aspects of learning.”³² A number of specific classroom practices are identified throughout the literature as key components of culturally relevant teaching, including:³³

- Building authentic relationships with students, particularly the most “challenging” students in the class;
- Valuing diversity in the classroom by learning about students’ histories and cultures, using the curriculum to expose students to other cultures, acknowledging membership in different social and cultural groups and the existence of multiple world views, and rejecting stereotypes;
- Using a curriculum and instructional materials that connect to students’ culture and daily life;

³¹ Figure created nearly verbatim from: Milner, H.R., Op. cit., p. 70.

³² “Culturally Responsive Teaching.” The Education Alliance, Brown University. <https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>

³³ Bullets created from multiple sources:

[1] Milner, H.R. “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in a Diverse Urban Classroom.” *Urban Review*, 43, March 1, 2011, p. 70. Accessed through: EBSCO

[2] “Culturally Responsive Instruction.” Kentucky Department of Education, March 30, 2016. <http://education.ky.gov/educational/diff/pages/culturallyresponsiveinstruction.aspx>

[3] Ukpokodu, O.N. “How Do I Teach Mathematics in a Culturally Responsive Way?” *Multicultural Education*, 2011. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ955945.pdf>

[4] “Culturally Responsive Instruction,” Op. cit.

[5] Rajagopal, K., Op. cit.

[6] Kozleski, E.B., Op. cit., pp. 4-5.

- Employing multiple instructional strategies (differentiated instruction) to cater to different learning styles, and allowing for multiple assessment and assignment formats;
- Frequent communication with parents and families, in order to affirm that families are a key part of the students' education and further demonstrate the school community values the background and culture of its students;
- Using strategies such as small group collaboration to promote engagement and participation, and to decentralize authority throughout the classroom;
- Using an interactive dialogue to keep students engaged during class time, limiting lectures and ensuring that all students are included and invited to participate;
- Engaging in reflection and encouraging students to critically examine real-world issues, linking curriculum to "sociopolitical realities."

The Education Alliance at Brown University provides a number of strategies for culturally responsive instruction, listed in Figure 1.2 on the following pages. The strategies fall within seven major characteristics of high-quality culturally responsive teaching: positive perspectives on parents and families; communication of high expectations; learning within the context of culture; student-centered instruction; culturally mediated instruction; re-shaping the curriculum; and teacher as facilitator.

Figure 1.2: Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

CHARACTERISTIC	WHAT	WHY	How
<p>Positive Perspectives on Parents and Families</p>	<p>Parents are the child's first teacher and are critically important partners to students and teachers. To help parents become aware of how they can be effective partners in the education process, teachers should engage in dialogue with parents as early as possible about parents' hopes and aspirations for their child, their sense of what the child needs, and suggestions about ways teachers can help. Teachers explain their own limitations and invite parents to participate in their child's education in specific ways.</p> <p>Parent involvement need not be just how parents can participate in school functions. Oftentimes, religious and cultural differences preclude active participation in school activities. However, parental involvement also includes how parents communicate high expectations, pride, and interest in their child's academic life (Nieto, 1996).</p>	<p>Constant communication with parents is an important aspect of a child's educational progress. Involving parents and families in their child's educational process results in better scholastic achievement. When families share their "funds of knowledge" with the school community, teachers get a better idea of their students' background knowledge and abilities, and how they learn best (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seek to understand parents' hopes, concerns and suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conduct needs assessments and surveys (in the parents' first language) of what parents expect of the school community ■ Establish parent-teacher organizations or committees to work collaboratively for the benefit of the students ■ Conduct home visits in which parents are able to speak freely about their expectations and concerns for their children 2. Keep parents apprised of services offered by the school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Send weekly/monthly newsletters (in the home language) informing parents of school activities ■ Conduct monthly meeting at parents' homes or community centers to inform parents of school activities ■ Host family nights at school to introduce parents to concepts and ideas children are learning in their classes and to share interactive journals 3. Gain cross-cultural skills necessary for successful exchange and collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Research the cultural background of students' families ■ Visit local community centers to find out about the cultural activities and beliefs of the students ■ Tour students' neighborhoods to identify local resources and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992)
<p>Communication of High Expectations</p>	<p>All students should receive the consistent message that they are expected to attain high standards in their school work. This message must be delivered by all that are involved in students' academic lives, that is: teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and other school personnel. Teachers should understand students' behavior in light of the norms of the communities in which they have grown. They should respect all students as learners with valuable knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>Effective and consistent communication of high expectation helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1971). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate clear expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be specific in what you expect students to know and be able to do 2. Create an environment in which there is genuine respect for students and a belief in their capability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage students to meet expectations for a particular task ■ Offer praise when standards are met

CHARACTERISTIC	WHAT	WHY	How
<p>Learning Within the Context of Culture</p>	<p>Children from homes in which the language and culture do not closely correspond to that of the school may be at a disadvantage in the learning process. These children often become alienated and feel disengaged from learning. People from different cultures learn in different ways. Their expectations for learning may be different. For example, students from some cultural groups prefer to learn in cooperation with others, while the learning style of others is to work independently. To maximize learning opportunities, teachers should gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms and adapt lessons so that they reflect ways of communicating and learning that are familiar to the students.</p>	<p>Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vary teaching strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use cooperative learning especially for material new to the students ■ Assign independent work after students are familiar with concept ■ Use role-playing strategies ■ Assign students research projects that focus on issues or concepts that apply to their own community or cultural group ■ Provide various options for completing an assignment 2. Bridge cultural differences through effective communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teach and talk to students about differences between individuals ■ Show how differences among the students make for better learning ■ Attend community events of the students and discuss the events with the students
<p>Student-Centered Instruction</p>	<p>Student-centered instruction differs from the traditional teacher-centered instruction. Learning is cooperative, collaborative, and community-oriented. Students are encouraged to direct their own learning and to work with other students on research projects and assignments that are both culturally and socially relevant to them. Students become self-confident, self-directed, and proactive.</p>	<p>Learning is a socially mediated process (Goldstein, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Children develop cognitively by interacting with both adults and more knowledgeable peers. These interactions allow students to hypothesize, experiment with new ideas, and receive feedback (Darling-Hammond, 1997).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote student engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have students generate lists of topics they wish to study and/or research ■ Allow students to select their own reading material 2. Share responsibility of instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initiate cooperative learning groups (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002) ■ Have students lead discussion groups or reteach concepts 3. Create inquiry based/discovery oriented curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create classroom projects that involve the community 4. Encourage a community of learners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Form book clubs or literature circles (Daniels, 2002) for reading discussions ■ Conduct Student-Directed Sharing Time (Brisk & Harrington, 2000) ■ Use cooperative learning strategies such as Jigsaw (Brisk & Harrington, 2000)

CHARACTERISTIC	WHAT	WHY	How
<p>Culturally Mediated Instruction</p>	<p>Instruction is culturally mediated when it incorporates and integrates diverse ways of knowing, understanding, and representing information. Instruction and learning take place in an environment that encourages multicultural viewpoints and allows for inclusion of knowledge that is relevant to the students. Learning happens in culturally appropriate social situations; that is, relationships among students and those between teachers and students are congruent with students' cultures.</p>	<p>Students need to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a statement, event, or action. By being allowed to learn in different ways or to share viewpoints and perspectives in a given situation based on their own cultural and social experiences, students become active participants in their learning (Nieto, 1996). Hollins (1996) believes that culturally mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students. It may help decrease the number of incidences of unacceptable behavior from students who are frustrated with instruction not meeting their needs. Also, students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research students' experiences with learning and teaching styles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask educators who come from the same cultural background as the students about effective ways to teach them ▪ Visit the communities of the students to find out how they interact and learn in that environment ▪ Ask students about their learning style preferences ▪ Interview parents about how and what students learn from them 2. Devise and implement different ways for students to be successful in achieving developmental milestones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure success by setting realistic, yet rigorous, goals for individual students ▪ Allow students to set their own goals for a project ▪ Allow the use of the student's first language to enhance learning 3. Create an environment that encourages and embraces culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employ patterns of management familiar to students ▪ Allow students ample opportunities to share their cultural knowledge ▪ Question and challenge students on their beliefs and actions ▪ Teach students to question and challenge their own beliefs and actions
<p>Reshaping the Curriculum</p>	<p>The curriculum should be integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered. It should include issues and topics related to the students' background and culture. It should challenge the students to develop higher-order knowledge and skills (Villegas, 1991).</p>	<p>Integrating the various disciplines of a curriculum facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge (Hollins, 1996). Students' strengths in one subject area will support new learning in another. Likewise, by using the students' personal experiences to develop new skills and knowledge, teachers make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use resources other than textbooks for study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have students research aspects of a topic within their community ▪ Encourage students to interview members of their community who have knowledge of the topic they are studying ▪ Provide information to the students on alternative viewpoints or beliefs of a topic 2. Develop learning activities that are more reflective of students' backgrounds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include cooperative learning strategies ▪ Allow students the choice of working alone or in groups on certain projects 3. Develop integrated units around universal themes

CHARACTERISTIC	WHAT	WHY	How
<p>Teacher as Facilitator</p>	<p>Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences.</p>	<p>Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that a key criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn about students' cultures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have students share artifacts from home that reflect their culture ▪ Have students write about traditions shared by their families ▪ Have students research different aspects of their culture 2. Vary teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and language proficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiate cooperative learning groups (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have students participate in book clubs or literature circles (Daniels, 2002) ▪ Use student-directed discussion groups (Brisk & Harrington, 2000) ▪ Speak in ways that meet the comprehension and language development needs of ELLs (Yedlin, 2004) 3. Utilize various resources in the students' communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have members of the community speak to students on various subjects ▪ Ask members of the community to teach a lesson or give a demonstration (in their field of expertise) to the students ▪ Invite parents to the classroom to show students alternative ways of approaching a problem (e.g., in math: various ways of dividing numbers, naming decimals, etc.)

Source: The Education Alliance, Brown University³⁴

³⁴ Figure created verbatim from: "Culturally Responsive Teaching," Op. cit.

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

Many educational researchers feel that culturally relevant instruction is key to supporting the learning of minority students and, therefore, to closing the achievement gap. However, it is nearly impossible to verifiably link student achievement with the implementation of a classroom protocol or teaching strategy. Therefore, studies which claim to prove that culturally relevant instruction is responsible for improved student achievement bear close scrutiny.

That is not to say that there are no verifiable positive impacts of the pedagogical strategy. Proponents of culturally responsive teaching attribute a host of positive outcomes to culturally relevant pedagogy, with many of the conclusions stemming from research on child psychology which shows that when students feel valued, secure, and that their culture, language, and social status are treated with sensitivity, they learn better. For example, Geneva Gay cites a study from Howard University that finds that “when instructional strategies reflect the cultural values, traits, and socialization of African-American students, their attention spans, quality of academic efforts, and achievement outcomes increase significantly.” She goes on to state that culturally responsive pedagogy will be effective for all students, regardless of ethnicity.³⁵

In one study of culturally relevant teaching for native Hawaiian students, researchers collected data from students, teachers, and parents between 2006 and 2007 and studied the kinds of teaching strategies being used in classrooms. The study found there to be “significant relationships” between teachers’ implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical strategies and students’ socioemotional development. These students are more likely to feel connected to Hawaiian culture and teachers are more strongly engaged with the community. Additionally, the study found that students were more likely to form trusting relationships with teachers under culturally relevant instruction.³⁶

School districts may assess the success of a cultural responsiveness initiative in a variety of ways. For instance, Lorenzo Lopez, the Director of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Instruction at Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) reports that TUSD tracks both academic and nonacademic outcomes to determine the impact of the program. According to Lopez, the district considers factors such as parental involvement and student attendance, as well as academic performance of students who are learning from the “cultural development curriculum” and whose teachers have received support to implement culturally relevant pedagogy compared to non-participating students. Further evidence about implementation and school climate are gathered through student and teacher surveys.³⁷ A more detailed

³⁵ Gay, Geneva. “Culturally Responsive Teaching in Special Education for Ethnically Diverse Students.” *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15:6, 2002, p. 626.

³⁶ Kana’iaupuni, S., B. Ledward, and U. Jensen. “Culture-Based Education and Its Relationship to Student Outcomes.” Kamehameha Schools Research and Evaluation, September 2010, p. 13.
http://www.ksbe.edu/_assets/spi/pdfs/CBE_relationship_to_student_outcomes.pdf

³⁷ Lopez, L. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy & Instruction Director, Tucson Unified School District. Telephone interview, June 8, 2016.

profile of the culturally relevant initiative at TUSD and a second anonymous school district can be found in Section II of this report.

District Spotlight: Hillsborough County Public Schools



Many school districts in Florida have incorporated aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy into teacher evaluation criteria. For instance, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS)—which enrolls approximately 203,439 students as of academic year 2013-2014³⁸—uses a teacher evaluation system that was originally implemented in 2011. The system uses a Classroom Teacher Evaluation Instrument to gather and assess teacher performance related to four domains: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; and professional responsibilities.³⁹

Within the instrument, several indicators focus directly on teacher practices that align with culturally relevant teaching. For instance, the following list presents indicators that focus on cultural responsiveness and the criteria for “exemplary” teacher performance for each indicator:⁴⁰

- **Demonstrating Knowledge of Students** (Domain 1)
 - The teacher actively seeks knowledge of students’ backgrounds, cultures, skills, learning levels/styles, language proficiencies, interests, and special needs from a variety of sources, and attains this knowledge of individual students.
- **Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport** (Domain 2)
 - Classroom interactions among the teacher and individual students are respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and caring and sensitivity to students’ cultures and levels of development. Students themselves ensure high levels of civility among members of the class.
- **Communicating with Stakeholders** (Domain 4)
 - The teacher’s communication with stakeholders is frequent and sensitive to cultural traditions; students participate in the communication. The teacher successfully engages families in the instructional program as appropriate.

Including specific performance criteria related to culturally relevant teaching practices helps to support successful implementation among teachers.

Some organizations offer standards for what culturally relevant instruction should look like in practice, which can be used to develop district-level goals for implementation and evaluation criteria. For instance, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network provides Cultural Standards for multi-cultural education, including specific standards for students, educators, curricula, schools, and communities (see Appendix A for a full description of the standards).⁴¹

³⁸ National Center for Education Statistics.

³⁹ “Classroom Teacher Evaluation Instrument.” Hillsborough County Public Schools.
<http://communication.sdhc.k12.fl.us/empoweringteachers/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Classroom-Teacher-Rubric.pdf>

⁴⁰ Bullets adapted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁴¹ Singh, N.K., Op. cit., pp. 40-41.

SECTION II: PEER DISTRICT PROFILES

The following section provides two detailed profiles of culturally relevant teaching initiatives at peer school districts. Each profile is supported by in-depth interviews with district administrators. Wherever possible, each profile focuses on:

- The district definition of cultural responsiveness or relevance;
- Main components of the culturally relevant teaching initiative or program and professional development;
- Implementation process and major challenges; and
- Evaluation practices and/or student outcomes.

TUCSON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) in Arizona enrolls approximately 49,308 students as of academic year 2013-2014.⁴² In order to learn more about the district’s culturally relevant teaching practices, Hanover Research interviewed Lorenzo Lopez, the Director of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Instruction at TUSD.⁴³

CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

According to Lopez, TUSD uses a student-centered model for “the development and application of professional development” for district staff, including professional development related to culturally relevant teaching. The model aims to address students’ social, emotional, and educational needs as well as identity development. The model was developed internally, with consultation from “a national panel of experts.”⁴⁴

“One of our main challenges is the ‘newness,’ the lack of simple definition of what cultural responsiveness is.”

- Lorenzo Lopez, TUSD

However, Lopez notes that the absence of a clear consensus on the definition of cultural responsiveness is one of the major challenges of the district’s culturally relevant teaching efforts. “One of our main challenges is the ‘newness,’ the lack of simple definition of what cultural responsive is,” he explained. “Different scholars define it differently.... As we see it, [cultural responsiveness] is a very distinct curriculum approach.”⁴⁵

⁴² National Center for Education Statistics.

⁴³ Lopez, L. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy & Instruction Director, Tucson Unified School District, Op. cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

According to Lopez, implementing culturally relevant among the district staff requires a shift in teacher mindsets. “Cultural responsiveness... requires a shift from the traditional approach to education. It’s not been exactly easy,” Lopez explains. “Things take time, and it’s incremental. It’s in a constant state of process or development.”⁴⁶

He also notes that teacher resistance to the new mindset can present a challenge. “Unfortunately, it’s very difficult for some reason to implement a truly culturally responsive approach when [teachers] are spontaneously holding or maintaining an authoritative education approach or hierarchical educational approach,” he explains.⁴⁷ To combat this resistance, Lopez indicates that the district considers potential teachers who already hold a similar mindset or educational approach, in order to ensure that new teachers are a good fit for the approach. However, he also notes that experienced teachers who may not initially operate from a culturally responsive mindset or approach can be reached through “an appropriate teacher education process.”⁴⁸

In order to introduce the concept of culturally relevant instruction to teachers, Lopez indicates that the first step of implementation is to communicate to teachers why they should adopt a new educational approach. “At that point, there’s an introduction. This is not something that can be taught or learned in a certain amount of time,” he explains, adding: “We are in the process of disclosing to the faculty... and leadership of the district... first off, the positive impact that this type of educational approach has.” This initial phase includes defining, exploring, and “digesting” major concepts.⁴⁹

After the initial introductory phase, Lopez explains that the district leaders:

... move to practices, educational practices, instructional practices. What does this actually look like? How can this be implemented in the classroom? Then the analysis of existing policies including student discipline, PBIS, systems of accountability, student accountability.... **It’s a process and I’m not sure anybody in the country is any further than we are at this point.**⁵⁰

At TUSD, selected teachers are designated as “cultural development teachers.” These teachers are expected to be early implementers of culturally relevant instruction, and are “trained on a monthly basis on different elements” of the approach, including such topics as cultural capital, cultural deficit models, and understanding cultural biases.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

According to Lopez, the district aims to use culturally relevant teaching in part to address the achievement gap, and will monitor success based on student achievement. However, as mentioned in Section I of this report, the district will also consider non-academic outcomes such as student attendance, participation in the PTA, and other “more qualitative aspects of the education.” Further evidence about the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy will be collected through student and teacher surveys.⁵²

SCHOOL DISTRICT A

In addition to TUSD, Hanover conducted an in-depth interview with a second peer district. The primary contact prefers to remain anonymous; thus, the profile below provides information about culturally relevant pedagogy concept and practices, implementation, and outcomes and evaluation practices at the anonymous district, referred to as School District A (SDA).

CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

SDA has implemented culturally relevant pedagogy as one component of a larger movement toward educational equity. The district’s Equity Framework aims to support the success of all students by creating inclusive environments and reducing achievement gaps based on social or cultural characteristics of students.⁵³ According to the contact, the Framework

“We’re really trying to infuse this in all aspects of our system, so that we’re viewing all of the things we do... always through an equity lens.”

- Anonymous Contact, SDA

supports the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and other equity-minded strategies as a cohesive movement, rather than as a separate initiative. “We’re really trying to infuse this in all aspects of our system, so that we’re viewing all of the things that we do, whether it’s at the classroom level, the school level, or even at the district level... always through an equity lens,” the contact explained.⁵⁴

The Equity Framework was designed in-house by district staff and “takes a look at all of the operations that happen within a school and school system.” Guidance for teachers and administrators is centered across four quadrants: equity leadership; learner-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment; inclusive learning environments; and family and community integration.⁵⁵ Each quadrant of the Framework includes guiding questions designed to encourage critical thought among staff members and ensure that issues are considered through an equity lens. The Framework is used to guide decision-making at the district and school levels within each category.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Equity Framework documents provided by anonymous district.

⁵⁴ Anonymous participant, anonymous district. Telephone interview, June 8, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

The implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy—as a component of the larger equity initiative—educators at SDA engaged in frank discussions of race and culture in the school system. The contact explains:

We were looking at organizational effectiveness and efficiency.... Taking a look at what's involved in culturally response pedagogy. Taking a look at, just in general, racial identity [and] what role race and whiteness plays across our system. There was a vast research space that we were drawing from in order to come up with that.⁵⁶

Implementation of the framework began at the district level, with the superintendent and central office staff. District staff then conducted site visits at each school site to introduce the Framework and provide initial exposure.

Part of the rollout of the Equity Framework is providing professional development about identity, race, and culture. Currently, teachers are required to participate in professional development related to the districts' personalized learning initiative. However, additional professional development is offered specifically related to identity and race consciousness. This professional development “is meant for people to take a deep dive into their own cultural identity, racial identity, and awareness.”⁵⁷ This professional development draws from multiple sources, including Zarretta Hammond’s book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*.

According to the district contact, feedback gathered from district staff thus far indicates some rising challenges. For instance, some teachers are unprepared or resistant to initial conversations related to culturally relevant teaching and the Equity Framework. However, the contact notes that these initial challenges can help improve and inform future professional development offerings, stating:

We have teachers who aren't ready to have conversations about predictable behavior data. In our presentations to the staff, we then would break into small groups and have each group just look at the guiding questions at one of the quadrants and just talk about what does this mean to you, what does this look like in your classroom, where might this be helpful to be thinking about this and what situations. Then we had some reactions where well, [teachers ask] what do you mean predictable behavior data? **Because they just are people who aren't even ready to talk about that yet. But it was good for us to know because that will help inform our professional development.**⁵⁸

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

Because the Framework is relatively recent, the contact reports that it is too early to examine the impact of implementation. However, the contact confirms that SDA actively

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

monitors progress by gathering monthly data on student outcomes. Furthermore, the district administered a staff survey after the initial rollout of the Framework to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement and additional staff support.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

APPENDIX A: CULTURAL STANDARDS

Figure A.1: Cultural Standards, Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Culturally Knowledgeable Students...
1. Are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community
2. Are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local cultural community as a foundation from which to achieve personal and academic success throughout life
3. Are able to actively participate in various cultural environments
4. Are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning
5. Demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in the world around them
Culturally-responsive educators...
1. Incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work
2. Use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students
3. Participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way
4. Work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school
Recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential
A culturally-responsive curriculum...
1. Reinforces the integrity of the cultural knowledge that students bring with them
2. Recognizes cultural knowledge as part of a living and constantly adapting system that is grounded in the past, but continues growing through the present and into the future
3. Uses the local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum
4. Fosters a complementary relationship across knowledge derived from diverse knowledge systems
5. Situates local knowledge and actions in a global context
A culturally-responsive school...
1. Fosters the ongoing participation of Elders in all aspects of the schooling process
2. Provides multiple avenues for students to access the learning that is offered, as well as multiple forms of assessment for students to demonstrate what they have learned
3. Provides opportunities for students to learn in and/or about their heritage language
4. Has a high level of involvement of professional staff who are of the same cultural background as the students with whom they are working
5. Consists of facilities that are compatible with the community environment in which they are situated
6. Fosters extensive on-going participation, communication, and interaction between school and community personnel
A culturally supportive community...
1. Incorporates the practice of local cultural traditions in its everyday affairs
2. Nurtures the use of the local heritage language
3. Take an active role in the education of all its members
4. Nurtures family responsibility, sense of belonging, and cultural identity
5. Assists teachers in learning and utilizing local cultural traditions and practices
6. Contributes to all aspects of curriculum design and implementation in the local school

Source: Alaska Native Knowledge Network via *Honoring Our Heritage: Culturally Appropriate Approaches for Teaching Indigenous Students*⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Figure created verbatim from: Singh, N.K., Op. cit., pp. 40-41.

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

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