

Reconceptualizing Frameworks for Teaching Diverse Learners in a Post-Covidian World

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Teachers and students are adjusting to an ever-changing world and so the field of teaching must readjust as well. As we prepare teacher candidates for this new landscape, we need to refocus on how to reach the most vulnerable students, which are those with specific and diverse needs. In this exploratory review, we examined the literature around current teaching practices in response to the question: What dimensions of teaching are essential for teaching diverse students in a post-Covidian world? We distilled six dimensions for teaching: rigor, relevance, relationships, responsiveness, reflection, and restoration (6 Rs) that will increase equity in our teaching.

Keywords: teacher preparation, framework for teaching, diverse learners, critical pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In our roles as university supervisors, project evaluators, instructional coaches, and executive coaches, three distinct trends seem to be clear. First, the world around us is changing to incorporate virtual spaces, drastic demographic shifts, socially distanced milieus and the instruction of students who rely on technology more than they have at any other time in our existence. Secondly, there exists a simplistic, yet elegant truth that relationships still matter. And finally, our teaching should bend and transform according to the needs of those that we serve.

In response to the shifting world around us, we have developed a framework for teaching students with diverse needs. This endeavor is especially important given the fact that students with disabilities comprise 14% of the student population nationwide and students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as students without disabilities (Department of Education (ED), 2014, 2016).

Beyond discipline, academic outcomes for students with disabilities have been historically inequitable. For instance, in a recent report, The New Teacher Project analyzed evidence from five school systems and followed almost 4,000 students and found that most children, especially students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners don't have access to four critical resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations (TNTP, 2018). This is deplorable when you take into account that 85 to 90 percent of students with disabilities can perform at grade level when provided with appropriate services and supports (Quenemoen et al., 2019). All students

should be given the same opportunities to access high-quality texts and grade-level content in a safe environment where they are valued as individuals and members of the greater community.

Problem

In a post-Covidian world, we have to reimagine the spaces that we use for education, the way in which materials are delivered, and the connections that we build between students, parents, and teachers. The current Danielson Framework for Teaching that many teacher programs use addresses instructional best practices before COVID-19 became a cataclysmic disrupter to education in the 21st century. However, society is rapidly changing, and teacher training programs have to prepare their candidates for blended learning, distance education, and heavily reimaged face-to-face instruction. How do we then push teachers to maintain best practices, use responsive pedagogies, and reflect as practitioners, all while managing their students' and their own mental and emotional wellbeing? We answer this question using re-envisioned best practices, based on research to meet the needs of students who are struggling to connect. In response to the question, "What dimensions of teaching are essential for educating diverse students in a post-Covidian world?" we have distilled six core elements that encompass holistic, student-centered, restorative teaching practices for educators who serve diverse students. These core elements are rigor, relevance, relationships, responsiveness, reflection, and restoration (the 6 Rs).

Theoretical Framework

Social Justice Lens

Despite the many advancements and accolades that can be attributed to the American educational system, it is clear that there still exists fundamental and longitudinal inequity amongst our nation's children. Not only do public and private educational systems within the U.S. support institutionalized racism through the perpetuation of the school to prison pipeline, they also support ableism, or the discrimination of persons with disabilities, and a Eurocentric focus on curriculum and ways of being. Social justice principles based on the idea of "fairness" for the wider social good presented by John Rawls (1991) emphasize the contextualization of forces around the individual (Winslade, 2018). However, any attempt to analyze the broader forces that impact an individual must take into account the paradigms of power at work and be viewed through the lens of critical theories, in this case, Critical Race Theory and DisCrit, that challenge the notion of teaching as a neutral act and instead acknowledge the political nature of teaching.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds that race is the fundamental hierarchy on which our society is built (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2018). This theory has been translated to the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and can explain racial inequity in school-based disciplinary practices that have manifested into the proverbial school to prison pipeline. CRT considers schools to be institutions that perpetuate racial inequalities in power and privilege through their control of educational access and opportunity (Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007; Lewis, Diamond, & Forman, 2015). This framework is important throughout the 6 dimensions that we have identified in order to counter the racist legacy of damaging societal and cultural stereotyping (Apple, 2012; Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Hashim, Strunk, & Dhaliwal, 2018; Leonardo, 2009; Morris & Perry, 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Pena-Shaff, Bessette-Symons, Tate, & Fingerhut, 2019).

DisCrit

The recently established field of DisCrit Theory (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013), a combination of critical race theory and disability studies in education, can help to explain how race and ableism interact in school systems. This framework is important to emphasize the need for awareness of teachers, administrators, and students of their participation in a racially and dis/ability charged system.

METHODS

In this exploratory review, the research team collected literature pertaining to current teaching practices that were being used to educate teacher candidates. The majority of this literature focused on teaching practices. These practices included culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed teaching, restorative justice practices, neurodiversity mindset, and Response to Intervention (see Appendix A for a complete list). The research team annotated and open coded the list of literature with the focus question in mind: What dimensions of teaching are essential for teaching diverse students in a post-Covidian world? Results were compared and discussed until consensus was reached. Six dimensions emerged (see Appendix A).

RESULTS

The results of this exploratory review suggest six dimensions of teaching that may help to guide the work of university supervisors, district level personnel and teacher candidates themselves. These dimensions are rigor, relevance, relationships, responsiveness, reflection, and restoration. In the newly conceptualized 6 Rs framework, teachers are urged to proactively plan rigorous tasks in multiple delivery mediums that help students to depart from the far corners of the classroom in an effort to not only identify and describe a particular phenomenon but also analyze, evaluate and create with the content in mind. This is done through the foundation of creating and maintaining strong relationships and cultivating teacher responsiveness.

This framework proposes that the development and evaluation of high-quality teaching be based on the premise of the following central ideas:

Rigor

In 1991, under the leadership of Dr. Bill Daggett, the International Center for Leadership in Education developed the Rigor/Relevance Framework, which marries an application model with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. The result is a best practices document intended to serve all students in an effort to promote higher levels of student thinking (rigor) and deeper more meaningful relevant academic tasks that help students to apply their learning to real-world predictable and unpredictable circumstances (Daggett & Jones, 2019).

Relevance

Relevance pertains to students applying the content across subject areas using real life scenarios which are oftentimes unpredictable. It provides students with a "why" for studying the "what". When this occurs, student retention and interest should both increase. Daggett (2008) writes, "Studies have shown that students understand and retain knowledge best when they have applied it in a practical, relevant setting. A teacher who relies on lecturing does not provide students with optimal learning opportunities. Instead, students go to school to watch the teacher work" (p. 2).

Relationships

Daggett & Jones (2019) see relationships as a means of "augmenting intellectual capacity" (p. 4). In other words, healthy and meaningful relationships are built with each student in an effort to produce agents of change who think critically and can apply what they're learning across multiple content areas. They go on to state that, "If every educator in a school is purposefully creating moments that reinforce learning relationships with all students on campus, then a school is pointed towards whole brain learning and whole child development" (p. 5).

Responsiveness

The dimension of responsiveness refers to the educators' feedback to the needs, talents and interests of their students. For example, trauma informed teaching focuses on creating a safe environment, building

relationships and connections, and supporting emotional regulation. This approach asks teachers to know their students and affirm their experiences and backgrounds while building strong relationships. Another example of responsiveness is the application of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). CRT is teaching which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference (Gay, 2018). This dimension is especially important as students are being taught in virtual or blended classrooms where the safety of the school building and the closeness of a caring adult is not guaranteed. Teachers should be given the tools and strategies needed to respond to the needs of their students in face-to-face and/or virtual settings (see Appendix A).

Reflection

The first four Rs of the framework are only efficacious when applied through the lens of a reflective practitioner. Critical reflection is defined by Jack Richards as:

an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. (1990, p. 123)

A critically reflective approach to teaching uses the feedback cycle to inform and change our work. The reflective construct in the 6 Rs framework includes teachers' reflections on their own practices (teacher self-reflection), teachers' reflections on students' practices (teaching reflection), and students' reflections on their practices (student self-reflection). Teachers and students who explore their own experiences through critical reflection engage with implicit biases, attitudes, and awareness which serves as a catalyst for personal and professional growth.

Restoration

The use of restorative justice practices (RJPs) has been found to promote racial equity (Gregory, Huang, Anyon, Greer, & Downing, 2018; Schiff, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018) in disciplinary practices. It also helps to create and maintain strong relationships between the participants and increases classroom cohesion (Cavanagh, Vigil, & Garcia, 2014; Hollweck, Reimer, & Bouchard, 2019; Mansfield, Fowler, & Rainbolt, 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008). The last of the 6 Rs refers to the restoration of the community through RJPs but also the rejuvenation and preservation of mental and emotional wellbeing for students and teachers. This is the element that is most frequently left out or ignored in teacher training. In order to ensure that educators and students are in their best states of learning, we must be proactive in giving them the tools to build healthy minds and emotional resilience for themselves and their students.

CONCLUSIONS

We have built a framework of instruction that seeks to elevate student thinking, and promote the application of concepts, while strengthening the bonds between teachers and the children that they serve. Additionally, the 6 Rs implores teachers to know their students, utilize feedback and attend to the rejuvenation and sustainability of the academic milieu. In our next steps, we will construct reflective questions for each dimension and develop lesson planning tools that can be used in face-to-face, hybrid, and/or distance education. Ultimately, when the 6 Rs of rigor, relevance, relationships, responsiveness, reflection, and restoration are combined, teachers elevate their teaching to meet their students where they are. This results in classrooms where students become critical, passionate, and empathetic thinkers who are armed with the ability to tell their own stories and interact with a constantly changing and diverse world.

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APPENDIX A
DIMENSIONAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE PERTAINING TO TEACHING PRACTICES FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

Title	Author	Date	Rigor	Relevance	Relationships	Responsiveness	Reflection	Restoration
10 Mindframes for Visible Learning: Teaching for Success	<i>Hattie & Zierer</i>	2017	X	X				
Visible Learning: Feedback	<i>Hattie & Clarke</i>	2017	X	X			X	
Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning	<i>Hattie</i>	2017	X	X				
Relationship, Responsibility, Regulation: Trauma Informed Practices	<i>Van Marter Somers & Hall</i>	2017			X	X		
Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Your Guide to Creating Safe, Supportive Learning Environments for All Students	<i>Alexander</i>	2017			X	X		
Your Students, My Students, Our Students: Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms	<i>Jung, Frey, Fisher, & Kroener</i>	2017			X	X		X
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning: Classroom Practices for Student Success	<i>Hollie</i>	2017	X	X	X	X		
Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students	<i>Hammond</i>	2014	X	X	X	X		
Moving Beyond Quadrant A: Developing Rigor, Relevance and Learner Engagement in Your Classroom	<i>Lambert</i>	2016	X	X	X			
Undoing Ableism: Teaching About Disability in K-12 Classrooms	<i>Baglieri & Lafvani</i>	2019			X	X	X	X
The Growth Mindset Playbook: A Teacher's Guide to Promoting Student Success	<i>Brock & Handley</i>	2017			X	X	X	X
IEPs for ELs: And Other Diverse Learners	<i>Hoover & Patton</i>	2017					X	
Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners	<i>Hamayan, Marler, & Damico</i>	2013	X	X	X	X	X	
How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms	<i>Tomlinson</i>	2017	X	X	X	X	X	
For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education	<i>Emdin</i>	2017			X	X	X	X
Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?	<i>Daniel Tatum</i>	2017			X	X	X	X
The New Art and Science of Teaching	<i>Marzano</i>	2017	X	X	X	X	X	
Overcoming the Achievement Gap Trap: Liberating Mindset to Effect Change	<i>Muhammad</i>	2015				X	X	
Poor Students, Rich Teaching: Seven High-Impact Mindsets for Students from Poverty	<i>Jensen</i>	2019			X	X	X	X
The Big Book of Restorative Justice	<i>Zehr, MacRae, & Pranis</i>	2015			X	X	X	X